

# *New Race*

*A Journal of Integral & Future Studies*



**Special Issue**

**Sri Aurobindo: An Inspiration**

**Institute of Human Study  
Hyderabad**

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**A tribute to Sri Aurobindo on his 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary  
(1972-2022)**

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*New Race*

*blessings*



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## ***“To thee our infinite gratitude...”***

India is celebrating her 75<sup>th</sup> year of independence while the world over devotees are commemorating Sri Aurobindo’s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Oblivious to the world the gods are rejoicing his eternal birth!

Sri Aurobindo’s was the force behind the freedom of India for he had re-energised the nation with his power of knowledge and redeemed its destiny. He had inspired the poet and the politician – Rabindranath Tagore and Subhash Chandra Bose – to lead India to its freedom and honour.

He is a living guide and force to those aspiring to come out of the quicksand of ignorant life. His writings are a perennial source of hope which explain in clear and unmistakable language the Divine intention of this creation and its evolution. As he puts it in one of his poems:

Mortals, your end is beatitude, rapture eternal his meaning:

Joy, which he most now denies, is his purpose... (CWSA 2: 485)

It is because of his compassion for mankind that he has attracted all types of people – simple at heart and geniuses – in talent to his vision and work. Here, in this issue, are some of the samples of how different persons have been touched and inspired by his life and works. So, in their gratitude to him on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, they have written an article or painted an image inspired by *Savitri*; some have looked at Nature’s beauty inspired by the symbolism in *Savitri*. We call this issue “Sri Aurobindo: An Inspiration”.

This is a humble offering to Sri Aurobindo from the Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad and all the contributors for his 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary. We express our gratitude and love for the one who lived and suffered for the evolution of humanity. We hope that this issue will be an enriching experience for all our readers and bring us closer to Him.

*Editors*





*\*Spiritual Map of India*

SECTION – I  
INDIA: OUR MOTHERLAND

## Sri Aurobindo's Message

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. ... the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go, — it is to be hoped 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. (CWSA 36: 476)

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India, shut into a separate existence by the Himalayas and the ocean, has always been the home of a peculiar people with characteristics of its own recognisably distinct from all others, with its own distinct civilisation, way of life, way of the spirit, a separate culture, arts, building of society. It has absorbed all that has entered into it, put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements into its fundamental unity. But it has also been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, republics also, diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, developing different brands or forms of civilisation and culture, many schools of art and architecture which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilisation and culture. India's history throughout has been marked by a tendency, a constant effort to unite all this diversity of elements into a single political whole under a central imperial rule so that India might be politically as well as culturally one. Even after a rift had been created by the irruption of the Mohammedan peoples with their very different religion and social structure, there continued a constant effort of political unification and there was a tendency towards a mingling of cultures and their mutual influence on each other; even some heroic attempts were made to discover or create a common religion built out of these two apparently irreconcilable faiths and here too there were mutual influences. (Ibid: 499)

# Sri Aurobindo's India

Charan Singh

Mystic and Mahayogi, poet and prophet, rebel and revolutionary and, above all, an evolutionary Avatar of our times, Sri Aurobindo is an abiding inspiration for all ages and climes. One wonders about his life and its multifaceted influence and aspects, a life so perfectly, majestically lived and yet according to him not “on the surface”. It will be fine, to begin with the basics. Dr. Krishna Dhun Ghose, his father was among the first and most fortunate generation of Indians to have a totally westernized education and, naturally, he wanted his children too to have the same education, social status and intellectual acumen. Not only this, like other highly anglicized Indians of his times, Dr. Ghose had an aversion to his subjugated motherland and everything associated with India. In 1879 he took his three sons to England and handed over them to Rev. William H. Drewett, a cousin of Dr. Ghose's friend and magistrate of Rangpur Mr. Glazier. Before leaving England Dr Ghose sternly requested Rev.Drewett that his children “should be kept away from any influence of India, Indians and Indian culture”! When we look at this fatherly advice today, we can see a clear and loud irony: his sons and particularly the apple of his eye, Auro, the childhood name for Sri Aurobindo, not only learned profoundly about his motherland India and her culture but rose to heights of a modern Rishi and Mahayogi, an avatar and a *kavi* on the ancient line of Indian poets like Vyasa, Valmiki and Kalidasa and penned the most mighty and prophetic poem, a mahakavya hailed by many as *pancham Veda or the fifth Veda!* He not only steeped himself very deeply to the cultural and literary traditions of India but redefined Bharat, her nature and character and her divinely ordained role in shaping the destiny of the world. This author loves to call Sri Aurobindo a student of western logic and eastern meditation. He is a rare blend of both knowledge and wisdom, a *cosmic man* in the true sense of the word. Celebrated as one of the most fragrant flowers produced ever by Cambridge University, Sri Aurobindo passed I.C.S. but didn't show much interest to serve the British Empire in India. Rather he chose to serve the Maharaja of Baroda, one of the most progressive kings of his times and a connoisseur of human nature.

## Sri Aurobindo touches the soil of Ma Bharati

On February 6, 1893 Sri Aurobindo touched the sacred soil of India after passing his whole boyhood and adolescent age in a foreign country. What a relief it was for the young man, ready to take on the world! He didn't first visit Bengal but Baroda and joined the service of the Maharaja on February 8, 1893. The first thought that the thoughtful Aurobindo had in Baroda was about India and her pathetic destiny and the causes of her morose fate. He also observed and studied the role and modus operandi of the then leader of our people, the Indian National Congress. At the request of his Cambridge friend K.G. Deshpande, he anonymously wrote a series of seven articles named “New Lamps for Old” in the latter's paper *Induprakash* and vehemently attacked the congress party for its policy of prayer, petition and protest. Sri Aurobindo ripped this “mendicancy” apart and opined that this is not the way a nation demands its freedom. Having stayed in England for a long time, he was far more aware of the nature and character of the Britishers. He knew their strength as well as weaknesses and the perfect roadmap to take on them head-on. Not only this, he knew that they fleeced his own countrymen for their innate weaknesses, lack of national unity, their petty selfishness and their “thought phobia”. Mark the following reference selected from a letter he wrote to his revolutionary younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghose in 1920:



I am fully persuaded that the origin of the weakness of India is neither political servitude nor material poverty, still less the dearth of spirituality: we have degenerated *because of the wanting of our capacity to think and concentrate*. Except for a few solitary giants everywhere you meet the average man who has no strength and who does not want to think nor can. The result: ignorance reigns today in this our land of knowledge! (*Sri Aurobindo Came to Me: 8-9*)

The power of thought is one of the greatest powers of the world. In the same letter Sri Aurobindo goes on to explain that how by tapping this power the West has scaled greatest heights in art and aesthetics, science and technology. On the other hand, India fell into the dark and dolorous abyss of oblivion, bound of servitude and subjugation by alien masters. He clearly advocated a strong need for national awakening and reassertion of our Indianness. More than Bhakti and divine surrender, India needs Shakti, the strength formidable to take on the barbaric, the mallechcha.

### **India needs strength**

Around 1905 while secretly preparing the armed revolution against the British, Sri Aurobindo penned a highly pithy and powerful piece of writing in the form of a pamphlet named "Bhawani Mandir". It is here that Sri Aurobindo defines India and her real nature because not to know the actual Swarupa of the motherland is one of the worst blemishes a people can be ashamed of. Defining India, he wrote,

...what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. (*Bhawani Mandir*)

It is still a fashion in India to blame "exterior forces" for our own foibles and failures; it was also a favourite game in Sri Aurobindo's times! He was perhaps the first national hero who underscored our own "crying weaknesses" and boldly exclaimed in the vapid ears of effete compatriots that "No man or nation need to be weak unless he chooses, no man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction". (*Bhawani Mandir*)

India had become, and largely still is, a nation of bhakti, of devotion. But Sri Aurobindo could see that without Shakti, Bhakti cannot sustain long because, "Bhakti is the leaping flame, Shakti is the fuel". How can a machine or a lamp, however efficient, run without fuel? He boldly declared that India can safely keep aside the torrents of bhakti for the time being and focus absolutely on the widespread accumulation of Shakti, the only way to regain the lost glory and national pride and privilege. No outside force shall muster courage to look at a strong and ebullient nation, embellished with fire and force to squander enemies. India had fallen into a dark age of complacency and lassitude after the unsuccessful mutiny of 1857 and there was hardly any noticeable rebellion against – barring Sanyasi mutiny and tribal rebellions – the British empire. Sri Aurobindo was the first leader in 20th century to restore the faith of India in herself and her destiny. He called upon the youth, the masses, the patriots, poets, politicians, craftsmen to come forward and give impetus to moribund national spirit of freedom. Ages of servitude had made us weak and meek, desolate and depressed. The entire nation was suffering from the slumber of collective amnesia; they had forgotten who they were and how they could become again what they were in their proudest days. In much dark hours, like a lighthouse rose Sri Aurobindo's voice:

The deeper we look, the more we shall be convinced that the one thing wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength – strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others. (*Bhawani Mandir*)

### What is India for?

In the darkest of her times when most of his contemporary leaders could not even dream of a strong and free India, Sri Aurobindo was sure about not only her imminent and inevitable freedom, but also about her role as a Guru and Guide, solicitous mother and sagacious mentor for the world! Such was his divine vision, his trikal drishti! In his revolutionary pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir* Sri Aurobindo not only defined the nature and form of India but also specified the grand purpose of God and destiny he had chosen for India. He wrote,

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the *future religion of the entire world*, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and *make mankind one soul...* it is her mission to purge barbarism (Mlechchaahood) out of humanity and to Aryanise the world. In order to do this, she must first re-Aryanise herself. (*Bhawani Mandir*)

When his contemporary leaders were not sure about India's freedom and future, Sri Aurobindo was laying down a roadmap for the future of free India, her role in the world which has always been extremely divided into the confines of caste and creeds, clans and classes! Barbarism has been a bane to humankind and is single-handedly responsible for all her deepest problems. It is highly pertinent here to discuss the basic features of barbarism and its impact on humanity. In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo defines barbarism as “a state of society in which man is almost entirely preoccupied with his life and body, his economic and physical existence.” (pp.86-87). Here also he gives us new lights to assimilate the true meaning of barbarism. Generally, extreme of physical cruelty and inhuman apathy is labelled as barbarity, but Sri Aurobindo has given the term a totally new understanding. Man's over emphasis on his body and her nourishment and sense gratification has made him a horrid and ghastly beast. Rampant materialism, bloodshed, terrorism, greed, lust, anger, excessive exploitation of nature and natural resources are some of the signs of widespread barbarism. World wars, racial feuds, communal bigotry, colonialism, religious acrimony and unspeakable atrocities against weaker sections of society like children and women are sure signs of this barbarism. As a civilized world, we need to fix all these blemishes if we want to be truly called humans or humankind. The word “kind” seems a misnomer behind such an unkind race! How can a race be called the kind which has committed crimes against humanity in concentration camps and is still committing in today's “re-education centres of China”? No, she has not yet earned the regard to be called “human-kind.”

It is to alleviate this saga of imperfect and barbaric human nature that Sri Aurobindo wanted to fundamentally transform and to see India playing a pivotal role in this universal yajna or yoga. He has spoken profoundly about it in all his major books, *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* included and in his soul-warming speeches and addresses. He emphasized that Sanatana Dharma is not only for India but for the whole world and every human being on earth is within the ambit of this dharma whose principal purpose is “salvation of mankind”. That is why India is a “*chosen country*”, and not like any ordinary one with ordinary life

purposes. He said that there is a clear divine will behind the freedom of India and this freedom and re-emergence of India is inevitable. In his famous Uttarpara Speech, delivered on May 30, 1909, he spoke,

She [i. e. India] does not rise as other countries do, for self and when she is strong, to trample on the weak. *She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world.* India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.

During the darkest of times in recent memories of pandemics, when India was sending Covid 19 vaccines as a gesture of goodwill to countries everywhere in the world, I quickly remembered the aforesaid words of Sri Aurobindo! How beautifully India played the role of a caring custodian of the ailing humanity! I believe that the coming days are our days and India is fast gaining new and mighty footholds on every essential forum and expressing herself boldly and vehemently. We hold the keys to peaceful and harmonious world order.

Work that she may prosper.  
Suffer that she may rejoice!

Who is “she” in the aforesaid line? She is Bhawani Bharati, Bharat Mata and Bharat Shakti — all names of India given in difficult times by Sri Aurobindo. The above line is actually a quote from Sri Aurobindo's famous “advice” to the young and promising students of Bengal National College in August 1907. Today's India is tasting the mellow fruits of our great freedom fighters. Under the name of democratic rights and free speech, any kind of flatulence is being spread in social discourse. Moreover, there are forces – external as well as internal – which are bound to harm and humiliate our dear motherland. The youth is busy in fun, food, fashion and calming down raging passions or “thrills of the flashes” as Sri Aurobindo calls it in *Savitri*. For them, nation is just a medium to fulfill their dreams, desires and destinations. For them they are not for the nation but the nation is for them! And the moment they grab greener pastures across the fence, they readily jump and dismiss their motherland as poor and filthy, an inhospitable third-rate country! Some oblige by returning once in a decade while others never look back on the country that nourished and nursed them.

In this fad of pizza and porn, let our youth listen to these remarkable words of Sri Aurobindo and rethink their idea and opinion of the motherland:

When I come back I wish to see some of you becoming rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother with your riches. I wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in the days of yore when the world looked up to her for light. (*Speeches* p.6)

How relevant are these prophetic words of the Mahayogi in today's India when partisan and sectarian divisions have become sharp and acute, nearly unbridgeable! This holy doctrine of ‘nation first and nation all’ alone can save our country now. This is the fundamental mantra and spiritual panacea to deal with the national problem of corruption and scams. Reestablishing the Mother-Son relationship with the motherland alone can relieve India of many maladies choking her growth. Not much can be expected from politicians but spiritual organisations can surely play a decisive role here. A cultural renaissance is much needed in India, a renaissance that will awaken the slumbering souls of our youth and prepare them for action and askesis.

### Be original thinkers!

In a rather jovial tone in one of his aphorisms, Sri Aurobindo writes: "Rather hang thyself than belong to the horde of successful imitators!" (*Essays Divine and Human*: 467) We Indians are matchless imitators! Our art, literature, cinema, crafts and even science and technology is often accused of imitation and forgery. Till date our contribution to science and technology, ideas and innovation is unnoticeable. We have thousands of colleges and hundreds of universities but not a single institute could stand at par with institutes like Harvard and Stanford, Oxford and Cambridge! Our research is poor and good for nothing. Our cinema often steals themes and stories from Hollywood. Our academia lacks originality of thoughts and fire for deeper critical investigation.

As is said early in the article Sri Aurobindo believed that India suffers from "thought phobia" and people in India do not indulge in deeper pursuits of critical thinking. He cited the example of the west and the great progress that science made there. He appreciated Oxford and Cambridge for the great and glorious tradition of thought and critical scientific research. He knew how dogma, bigotry, sophism and petty sectarian feelings block the natural growth of a people and a nation. Therefore, he made "the question of original thinking" as an existential question for India and Indians and exhorted the Indian youth that they should come out of the dilemma and work and think for India. They should stop thinking that Europe or America will think for them! Only they can think for themselves, their country and their people. Sri Aurobindo believes that thinking should be the very question of survival for India:

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think, – to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. (*Essays Divine and Human*: 40)

There is great light and inspiration in the above lines. Voltaire, the great French philosopher, says "When once a nation begins to think, it is impossible to stop it" (*The Story of Philosophy*: 261). Herein lies the significance of Sri Aurobindo's appeal for thinking. Only sublime thoughts are shaped into sublime deeds and sublime deeds are the reasons behind sublime destinies of a nation and people. Mediocrity will lead us nowhere and mendicancy is never appreciated. America has become an ideal of material progress for the nations of the earth, but without spirituality material affluence is like a garden without efflorescence! India, by the blessings of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual prowess, should be a leader of thought and innovation as well as a treasure trove of all spiritual quest of humanity. Yes, we can do that because no dream is too big and India is known for setting new standards and breaking old ones. The fragrance of Sri Aurobindo's words is our succor and sheet anchor. Even after 150 years of earthly existence, he remains an abiding inspiration for India.

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# Sri Aurobindo: A Critic of Culture

Beloo Mehra

...amid all the mist of confusion there is still the possibility of a new twilight, not of an evening but a morning Yuga-sandhya. India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the Occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma. (CWSA 20: 444)

I clearly remember the first time I read these sentences. These are the last 2 sentences from Sri Aurobindo's last essay on Indian Polity which is the last chapter of Vol. 20 of his Complete Works – *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*.

The moment when I read these lines and then gently closed the book and kept it close to my heart while reclining on that grey-coloured cushion on the sofa-cum-bed in my living room is right there in front of my eyes. It was one of those moments when a deep silence that you never knew you had in you overwhelms you when a kind of love and reverence that you never could imagine earlier becomes so real. All you can do is sigh!

The book had made me fall in love with India – once again. Or maybe it was truly the first time that I truly, deeply, consciously and madly fell in love with India, my India. I fell in love with Sri Aurobindo for showing me this love I perhaps always had in me but just didn't know.

It was in 2004. I was living in the US at that time. Perhaps there may be a quick assumption on the part of some readers that all Non-resident Indians are desperately nostalgic about their 'mother country' and therefore what I experienced was a reflection of a yearning for 'home' – the land and people that I left behind to make a new home in a foreign land.

But that's not what it was. Not even close. I am not denying that after one has lived abroad for a few years, one begins to look more lovingly and longingly at everything which one has left behind. Sri Aurobindo's essays in this volume on the progression of Indian civilisation's inner march and the different representations and forms in which her timeless cultural spirit expresses itself are not merely meant to evoke a sense of pride and awareness; they are not even meant to make the reader only 'know' India's past, present and future.

Though the volume does all these things, yet there is a lot more there. It makes one almost 'see' the truth of India. Or compels one to cultivate in oneself a 'vision' which can see the truth hiding behind the outer veils. Each and every sentence is so perfectly and richly evocative of a deep truth that comes reverberating only to a Rishi's *drishti* and *shruti*. The super perfect flow of the argument – from one sentence to the next, from one paragraph to the next, one part in the series to the next – is such that is possible only for an intelligence that is beyond the highest ranges of mind, that opens up only for a few rare yogis.

This was my first full volume of Sri Aurobindo that I had read cover to cover. Before that

I had read a few compilations of his and the Mother on education, yoga, sadhana, and also a few other compilations of his revolutionary speeches and writings, which included some quotes and passages from his writings on Indian culture.

But this was something else. Reading full essays and following the super smooth flow of his developing argument as I transitioned from the first essay to the next was a deeply moving experience. It was a journey deep within the mystery and wonder that is India – India that was, India that is waiting to be. India that is eternal and simultaneously and progressively being reborn and renewed. India that is my motherland, that is my mother.

It must be noted that there are many other volumes in which we find profound writings of Sri Aurobindo on various aspects of Indian culture – volumes 1, 6, 7, 8, 14-18, 28-31, 35-36, and of course a few more. But I am presently focusing only on Volume 20.

Four parts from the essay series ‘The Renaissance in India’, three parts from ‘Is India Civilised?’, six parts of ‘The Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture’, five from ‘Indian Spirituality and Life’, four from the series on ‘Indian Art’, five from ‘India Literature’ and four more from ‘Indian Polity’ – along with an additional essay titled ‘Indian Culture and External Influence’ – the magnificent and mesmerising profundity in the 450+ pages takes one on a pilgrimage in the right sense of the word. It removes the cobwebs of ignorance and superficiality, indifference and pretension.

And it fills your entire being – if you are open – with the purity of the truth about your cultural roots, about your glorious heritage and most importantly infuses in you a renewed optimism and hope for an even glorious future. At the same time, you begin to see very clearly that culture in its highest, deepest and truest sense is not something external but an internal process of gradually arriving at a greater harmony in life, a greater meaning and purpose in life, a wider and more comprehensive self-knowledge and world-knowledge.

How does Sri Aurobindo, the yogi-connoisseur – for whom ‘all life is yoga’ and all ‘culture is an expression of the consciousness of life’ and the cultural critic *par excellence* – in whom the Brightest and Best of the West and the Grandest and Highest of the East were perfectly integrated – do that in these essays?

Let me illustrate with just one example. My objective is to demonstrate how Sri Aurobindo helps me understand the totality of the point – to whatever extent I can do that with my limited intellectual and other capabilities. My mind says it is because of the power and force of his words – the sheer beauty of his prose which not only enlightens and inspires but also opens a new way of knowing somewhere deep inside. My heart says that it is the deep compassion and love of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which blesses their children with certain comprehension capabilities. But deep inside something knows with an unexplainable certitude that it is all because of Their Grace that I am even able to come close to Their Consciousness through Their Words.

In this volume, Sri Aurobindo gives us an absolutely remarkable definition of culture (in his other works we find a few more definitions and descriptions).

The culture of a people may be roughly described as the expression of a consciousness of life which formulates itself in three aspects. There is a side of thought, of ideal, of

upward will and the soul's aspiration; there is a side of creative self-expression and appreciative aesthesis, intelligence and imagination; and there is a side of practical and outward formulation. A people's philosophy and higher thinking give us its mind's purest, largest and most general formulation of its consciousness of life and its dynamic view of existence. Its religion formulates the most intense form of its upward will and the soul's aspirations towards the fulfilment of its highest ideal and impulse. Its art, poetry, literature provide for us the creative expression and impression of its intuition, imagination, vital turn and creative intelligence. Its society and politics provide in their forms an outward frame in which the more external life works out what it can of its inspiring ideal and of its special character and nature under the difficulties of the environment. We can see how much it has taken of the crude material of living, what it has done with it, how it has shaped as much of it as possible into some reflection of its guiding consciousness and deeper spirit. None of them express the whole secret spirit behind, but they derive from it their main ideas and their cultural character. Together they make up its soul, mind and body. (Ibid: 106-107)

One of the first things we recognise here is that culture is about collective life. Yet it is also about individual life. He has explained to us in a previous essay that as per the Indian view, society or any collective group is essentially same as an individual. And that an individual is first and foremost a part of the Divinity, a Self, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the Universal Self and spirit. This individual Self (often referred to as soul in ordinary parlance) is enwrapped in mind and body.

India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *dharma*. (Ibid: 56)

Mind and body in this Indian conception are important *not* because of themselves, but *because* they are the outer coverings and instruments of the true being inside, the Self. In a way, this spiritual view of reality assigns much greater importance to the upkeep of mind and body, but the reason assigned for this upkeep and care is different from a materialistic view which altogether denies the existence of anything invisible like the Self. He has explained all of this in previous essays.

This self or soul is not simply one's deeper emotions, deeper thoughts, or a very high intellectualism or emotionalism. The soul, simply put, is essentially a spark of the Divine, the Ultimate Reality, manifesting itself in and through the physical, emotional and mental selves which are in turn always becoming who they are. Similarly, according to the Indian view, a society too has a group-soul which manifests or expresses itself through its outer formulations of group-mind and group-body.

Sri Aurobindo reminds us emphatically that when we want to understand a culture, including our own Indian culture, we should look at all its three aspects and the harmony among them. We should first aim to grasp how the soul of a people, their highest aspiration and thought are expressed through the best efforts and accomplishments of their collective

minds and imagination, and through the outer forms, societal systems, practices, customs, organisations, institutions and structures of society. Furthermore, a criticism of some of the outer tear of the present Indian social-cultural fabric should not be used to undermine the core of her civilisational and cultural capital.

This understanding has tremendously helped me make sense of India of our times. In India for the last several centuries the outer ‘Body’ has suffered many serious damages and blows. Some of these blows had been so severe that they have left a strong impact on the ‘Mind’ too. We are still suffering from those, many of whom are today clubbed under the term ‘colonized mind.’ But there is something deep inside the ‘Soul’ of Indian culture which has time and again found a way to exert its influence and revive the almost-hidden spirit of India.

This revival has not been fully, or in some cases even partially, expressed in the outer body or even the collective mind of India. But to say that no change is seen in the outer form would also not be true. India’s way, however, has always been—inner first, outer next. Only when the inner spirit is truly newly and harmoniously organised, the outer forms will begin to change and organise themselves. Only when the inner shines forth, the outer will renew itself.

It is an essential spirit of a culture which guides a people’s deeper view of individual and collective life, as well as the aim of life. There is also an outer system which is put in place to help the individual and society gradually move towards that aim of individual and collective life. A system however is never a perfect translation of the essential spirit into workable action. As Sri Aurobindo explains elsewhere in the same volume:

A system is in its very nature at once an effectuation and a limitation of the spirit; and yet we must have a science and art of life, a system of living. All that is needed is that the lines laid down should be large and noble, capable of evolution so that the spirit may more and more express itself in life, flexible even in its firmness so that it may absorb and harmonise new material and enlarge its variety and richness without losing its unity. The system of Indian culture was all these things in its principle and up to a certain point and a certain period in its practice. That a decline came upon it in the end and a kind of arrest of growth, not absolute, but still very serious and dangerous to its life and future, is perfectly true, and we shall have to ask whether that was due to the inherent character of the culture, to a deformation or to a temporary exhaustion of the force of living, and, if the last, how that exhaustion came. (Ibid: 232)

India’s inner history – as revealed through Sri Aurobindo’s essays in this volume (particularly ‘Indian Spirituality and Life’, and on Indian Art, Literature and Polity) – suggests that the deeper, truer Indian view of life which values the outer life *because* of it being the support, the base, the *ādhār* of the inner, truer life, suffered a serious setback when a certain spiritual truth of “Illusionism” (*Māyavāda*) took hold of the Indian psyche.

While the oversimplified understanding, namely—all world is an illusion, so why bother with it—may not have been the intended or correct interpretation of the actual idea, the



result is that such a view presented spiritual pursuit as something which is life-denying in character. Over time, this attitude led to much neglect of the outer life and became a critical factor for the decline of Indian civilisation. The outer historical events of frequent invasions and conquests which happened concurrently or subsequently added much to the ongoing decline, resulting in a severe damage to the Indian body and mind.

Meditating further on the wide-ranging implications of Sri Aurobindo's definition of culture and my own experience of having lived outside India for a decade and a half, I recognise that in some other parts of the world we see examples of a much more organised outer life. We also find there highly efficient systems in place which work almost automatically and make the day-to-day lives of citizens easy and convenient. This could be because of various historical reasons. This could also be because the cultural view of life in these societies has perhaps put greater emphasis on the outer life of individuals and groups. Outer organisation has outweighed the inner organisation of life in these societies.

This is merely to point out a difference, not to place any value judgment. In a way, and as Sri Aurobindo helps us understand in the essay titled 'Indian Culture and External Influence' in the same volume, this diversity of views of life is what makes the larger life of humanity richer and allows for a wider and multi-faceted manifestation of that One Eternal Life that is behind all life. And he further explains that the truly Indian way would be to learn these best practices from elsewhere on how to organise outer life, and to make the best possible use of them to revive the Indian outer body. But this must not be done at the cost of enslaving Indian mind and psyche to such 'borrowed' forms. Instead, the outer forms must be adapted to the inner truth of Indian mind and spirit. That would be a true Indian renaissance.

Another important dimension which the book opens up for the reader is concerning what is today known as cross-cultural studies. Sri Aurobindo, the cultural critic *par excellence* gives us a most perfect criteria on how one should study a culture other than one's own. He points out that seeing one's culture through the eyes of an outsider can be a great help in enhancing and deepening our understanding of our own. And he speaks of three ways of appreciating and studying a culture: a) with an "eye of sympathy and intuition and a close appreciative self-identification" revealing the soul of a people; or b) with an "eye of the discerning and dispassionate critic who tries to see the thing as it is in its intention and actuality," and c) with an "eye of the hostile critic, convinced of the inferiority of the culture in question. (Ibid: 97-98)

This is a deeply insightful perspective that Sri Aurobindo, the cultural critic, has given to all those interested in the disciplines related to cultural studies. There are many, many more gems from each and every page of this remarkable book on which I can go on writing but it is time to close this piece here with a humble request to all those who will ever read it – please read the full volume, essay after essay. Finish it. And then read it again. And again. Yes, and again. You will discover more and more and more every single time.



# Sri Aurobindo's Uttarpara Speech: An Inspiration

*Anmol Jain*

From his breathtaking sadhana to his depths and width of erudition, his sublime poetry, his spell-binding prose, his infinite love for all existence, his unprecedented capacity for giving up a peak for a yet higher peak, his self-sacrifice for the nation and humanity (didn't the Mother say that he "renounced the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realization" (CWM 13:9), his never-ending labour for ever-more perfection, his prophetic declaration of the earth's glorious future and all his victories for us, evident or occult, while in the body or after leaving it, everything about Sri Aurobindo is so inspirational that to confine oneself to write on an aspect of his inspirational side is a challenge. And yet if one can be true to one's soul and share what has inspired oneself the most it may inspire the reader to read Sri Aurobindo himself or at least give him some joy.

One of his texts that have inspired me the most is his famous "Uttarpara Speech". For someone who can relate to the Aurobindo Ghose returning from England, since most of us Indians educated in the English medium are fairly anglicized, I correlated with the parts in the speech, where he confesses to having had the atheist in him, the agnostic in him. And when the image of Sri Krishna literally taking the microphone from Sri Aurobindo "The thing I had in my mind He has thrown from it and what I speak is under an impulse and a compulsion" (CWSA 8:5) and giving the speech himself is impressed on the mind of the reader, one is left with an indelible stamp of certainty as to the fact that Sri Krishna is a "real, living and active being." (CWM 10:61) Or when he is made to say, "I am Vasudeva, I am Narayana, and what I will, shall be, not what others will. What I choose to bring about, no human power can stay" (CWSA 8:8) or "I am working in everybody and whatever men may think or do they can do nothing but help in my purpose." (Ibid:11) and one prostrates in surrender inwardly before the image of the Master of our being and the entire existence. Or when Sri Aurobindo states, "He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion" (Ibid:9), one's own skeptic mind gets a strong staff to walk by and feels inspired to realise "the central truth of the Hindu religion" (Ibid:6), no matter how long it takes. Or when one looks back at one's life and some situations where one was not able to liberate oneself from some self-chosen bondage, and one hears the cry of the Lord of all existence in the ether of our heart: "The bonds you had not the strength to break, I have broken for you". (Ibid:5)

For only the unborn spirit's timeless power

Can lift the yoke imposed by birth in Time. (CWSA 33:12)

Or when he observes, "This is the dharma that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this peninsula from of old. ... in this peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas" (CWSA 8: 6,11), and one realises the spiritual significance of the geographical location of India. Or when he opines, "It is this religion that ... I have perfected and developed through the rishis, saints and avatars" (Ibid:10), and one feels duty-bound to offer not only this life but as many lives as necessary for the furtherance and improvement of this culture based on this eternal religion. Or what can be

more inspiring for an atheist or agnostic mind than to be shown the presence of the Divine not only in human beings (friend or foe) but even in trees and let alone trees, even in the bars of the prison cell through that peak of that speech where he speaks of his vision of Sri Krishna everywhere:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Srikrishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. (Ibid:6)

Or the divine sense of humour coupled with the *Abhayadana*, which one sees in the courtroom scene:

Look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel." I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Srikrishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. "Now do you fear?" (Ibid:7)

And one is reminded of the countless idols in our temples with the deity's hands in the *abhaya mudra* and that most indescribable of smiles on its lips!

Or when he says, "even those who are opposing me are working for me, men can do nothing but help in my purpose" (Ibid:11), the certainty which one feels of the active presence of the Divine in the affairs of the world and the faith that one gets which can be summarized in one line of Savitri: "Only for good the secret Will can work." (CWSA 34:424)

Or the certitude about the uniqueness of the Sanatana Dharma and its answer to what things are that is sealed when one reads this well-known truth through as impeccable an authority as Sri Aurobindo: "It is the one religion which shows the world what the world is, that it is the lila of Vasudeva" (CWSA 8:12), and one feels re-energised to play with the Lord in his game.

Or when one realises the spiritual significance of India's freedom:

She does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great... I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. (CWSA 6:10)

As the spiritual dimension of India's freedom movement is not taught at all in the academic curriculum and by the nation at large only through the portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi as a saint, one comes to understand so much more deeply as to what India's freedom really means and why, as Indians, it is our bounden duty to keep her political freedom

and strive to attain that other real freedom, which will only be when India, free from the lingering but receding slaveries to colonisation, boldly, unapologetically, makes real in her life and body Sri Aurobindo's statement: "Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it." (CWSA 20:6)

Or when he says in conclusion "the sanatana dharma that is nationalism" (CWSA 8:12) and feels the echo of this prophetic utterance sounding and re-sounding in one's depths and leaves one wondering how much is it that we have yet to fathom in these six simple words.

The fact that more than hundred years after "Uttara Para Speech" was delivered, that is 30 May 1909, the date is especially remembered and celebrated every year in various ways by Sri Aurobindo's admirers stands testimony to the impact that the speech had and to the extent to which Sri Krishna continues to sway the hearts and minds of people as he did Sri Aurobindo's on that memorable day.

"From the time of its first appearance" (CWM 10:63) "Uttara Para Speech" has electrified the hearts and minds of all lovers of Mother India, and it will continue to do so as long as nationalism has not fulfilled its purpose and the Sanatana Dharma has not become the Universal Dharma of the entire Earth.

May all current and future generations derive inspiration from the life and works of Sri Aurobindo and be ever guided by his permanent presence in the earth's atmosphere (to be crowned by his return "in the first supramental body built in the supramental way" (CWM 13:9), for didn't the Mother confirm: "In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed" (CWM 13:6) to scale ever-new heights of self-perfection in the progressive manifestation of the Sachchidananda, for as Sri Aurobindo himself tells us:

There is no end to the world's stupendous march,  
There is no rest for the embodied soul. (CWSA 33:339)

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# Evoking the Inner Goddess

*Shraddha Mohanti*

Sri Aurobindo is an inspiration for resilient Indian youth. His life is an example of strength and courage required for building a strong foundation of a nation. Sri Aurobindo chose Pondicherry as a laboratory for his further work. In a letter to Dr. Haridas Chaudhury, dated November 22, 1950, Dr. Frederic Spiegelberg of Stanford University has remarked: “Sri Aurobindo is the guiding spirit of our earth and the prophet of our age.” (<https://cutt.ly/OZEegUU>: p. 359)

After coming to India Sri Aurobindo was studied Upanishads and also the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. Later he read Vedas and Bhagavad Gita. He also translated Isha Upanishad. Sri Aurobindo, during his yogic practice saw God in all, and oneself acting through different natures and all energies. He set an example of the equality of the mind & heart, purity and calm strength.

It is important for everyone to find the law of one's own nature, one's dharma. This should be taught to all children because it provides them an essence of their existence. The actions of each individual are governed by their nature and their vocation should also be inspired by this inner nature. Along with this it is also imperative to reject all those moments of lower nature that come in the way of one's progress. Strong determination and willpower are required to keep a firm stand over one's nature which also affects the destiny of the surroundings of an individual. This strong willpower should be maintained in rejecting those elements of lower nature which do not align with the ideal version of oneself. To maintain this willpower and inner energy an individual should be taught to connect with the highest ideal of oneself and to invoke the inner energies, the inner goddess within.

To establish a connection with the inner self, good reading helps a lot, though it is important to assimilate the idea behind the tales. Reading stories and epics helps to analyze oneself. All tales carry an idea to struggle between two opposing forces, human and inhuman, divine and anti-divine. The characters in the story represent the ideal state of one's nature which is in consonance with the times one is living in. Still, old stories do not lose their relevance because they carry the essence, the truth. Sri Aurobindo also expresses his views on this matter. In fact, he declares this 'svadhyaya' as his mission.

I may say briefly that I have been given a religious & philosophical mission, to re-explain the Veda & Vedanta (Upanishads) in the ancient sense which I have recovered by actual experience in Yoga and to popularise the new system of Yoga (new in arrangement & object) which has been revealed to me & which, as I progress, I am imparting to the young men staying with me & to others in Pondicherry; I have also to spread certain ideas about God & life by literary work, speech & practice, to try & bring about certain social changes &, finally, to do a certain work for my country, in particular, as soon as the

means are put in my hands. All this to be done by God's help only & not to be begun till things & myself are ready." (Page 174, letter to Anandrao June 1912).

<https://incarnateword.in/cwsa/36/to-anandrao>

The unconscious and its presence is a metaphysical aspect that has been studied by various philosophers. The study of unconscious and subconscious helps in the study of human behavior. Sri Aurobindo himself said in his magnum opus *The Life Divine*, "We are not only what we know of ourselves but an immense more which we do not know: our momentary personality is only a bubble on the ocean of our existence." (SABCL 18: 555). Thus he has assigned us a life time task and his inspiration goes beyond human ages. To study and introspect oneself should become the primary responsibility of each and every individual because knowing oneself will open doors to new understanding of one's Dharma or the divine aim.

Sri Aurobindo establishes in one of his letters, the aim of his life and his mission of birth.

1. To re explain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new standpoint. This work is already beginning, & three parts of it are being clearly worked out. Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas, not only so but he has shown me a new Science of Philology showing the process & origins of human speech so that a new Nirukta can be formed & the new interpretation of the Veda based upon it. He has also shown me the meaning of all in the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to re explain the whole Vedanta & Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises out of it & is one everywhere. In this way it will be proved that India is the centre of the religious life of the world & its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma.
2. On the basis of Vedic knowledge to establish a Yogic sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity & help in the restoration of the Satyayuga. That work has to begin now but will not be complete till the end of the Kali.
3. India being the centre, to work for her restoration to her proper place in the world; but this restoration must be effected as a part of the above work and by means of Yoga applied to human means & instruments, not otherwise.
4. A perfect humanity being intended society will have to be remodelled so as to be fit to contain that perfection.

<https://incarnateword.in/cwsa/36/to-motilal-roy#p5>

Sri Aurobindo has set the example for the youngsters. The youth of India need to pave this path to self-progress leading to the progress of the nation. Prem Tyagi talks about the patriotism of Sri Aurobindo, "The patriotism which fired his being since boyhood was not

a mere love of the country of his birth and a yearning for its freedom and greatness. It was worship of India as the living embodiment of the highest spiritual knowledge and repository of the sublimest spiritual achievements of the human race.” (*Sri Aurobindo: His Poetry and Poetic Theory*, Prem Tyagi: 15-16).

Prem Tyagi further says that Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy can be assimilated through his writings: “Sri Aurobindo has given us a new philosophy and yoga, anew and lasting basis for political action, a new poetry and criticism and a new vision of integral life that embraces both spirit and matter.”( Ibid: 31).

The poems of Sri Aurobindo symbolize the evolution of consciousness. His poetic career was of sixty years (1890-1950). He also gave uninterrupted prose works throughout his life. Sri Aurobindo in the simplest way has expressed the value of labor and generosity through his poem “A God’s Labour”, where he talks about the tests which a bringer of heaven has to go through.

He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay  
And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way. (*Collected Poems*, CWSA 2:99)

There is a dire need in the world to approach education on new lines and to do changes in this field which are suitable for the spirit of the country. The foundations of the education can be rebuild based on the philosophy given by Sri Aurobindo. This new mindset and approach towards gaining knowledge will help in bridging the gap between the old and the new. Sri Aurobindo talks about it, “In the future education we need not bind ourselves either by the ancient or the modern system, but select only the most perfect and rapid means of mastering knowledge.”

It is the need of the hour that society should be remodeled and training must take a new form. To sum up, Sri Aurobindo doesn’t inspire like other personalities and ‘vibhuti’s’, rather to quote the words of Nolini Kanta Gupta would explain his mission in the best possible way. “ And, properly speaking, it is not at all a school.....that is growing round Sri Aurobindo. It is rather the nucleus of a new life that is to come.”

<https://cutt.ly/0ZTVpvE>





*Photo by: Debaleena Bhattacharjee and Debashish Mukherjee*

**Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues  
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hour...  
All grew a consecration and a rite.  
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;  
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind  
Arose and failed upon altar hills;  
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky**  
– *Savitri*: Book I, Canto I

**[Description: Sunrise overlooking Indo-Bhutan border.  
Location: Dalgaon, West-Bangal; Year: 2018]**

## **SECTION – II**

# **INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY**



## The Mantra of Transformation

V. Ananda Reddy

Way back in the times of the Upanishads it was said that “All this is Brahman” – that Annam is Brahman, that Prana is Brahman, that Mind is Brahman. But ultimately they said that Silence is Brahman. So, the highest transcendental form of Brahman is Silence. Therefore, we consider Silence to be the unmanifest Brahman and speech to be the manifest Brahman. That is the difference between Silence and speech. Silence is something that is deep, that is nameless and formless, whereas speech is something on the surface and it is the executrix. Silence is the creatrix whereas speech is the executrix. So they are complementary. There is a distinct equation between Silence and speech.

Before we come to understand Silence, it is better to figure out what we mean by speech. Normally, we think we know what speech is. We speak in English, we speak in Telugu, we speak this and that language. What is so mystic about speech? Basically, how did it all start? Sri Aurobindo, in one of his essays at the end of the book called *The Secret of Veda*, explains that when humans began to speak there were just the gurgles of speech. The best example could be a child. In the beginning, whatever he utters is just a gurgle, then it is an incoherent something and yet we see that when he mutters something particular on seeing an object - on seeing water, on seeing his parents etc. – we understand that this particular sound that he has made implies ‘father’, and the other one means ‘water’.

So also, with humans. There was the first expression of sound when he saw an object and these sounds were repeated and they slowly came to mean an idea. For example, let us take the word ‘fire’. When a particular sound was repeated many times on seeing ‘fire’ everyone came to understand that that particular sound meant ‘fire’. So language first gives us the image, a mental image of the object; then in the second instance, it gives us ideas related to that object. This is what we say is common human speech.

The Vedas and the Upanishads tell us that in this world every form has got basically a nucleus. What does it mean? Take the example of a man. Can man have just a form without the Atman or the soul within? It is not possible. Every human being has got the nucleus called the soul and around it is the body, mind and vital. Similarly, everything in this universe has a nucleus, a focus, and the spirit within. The Vedic theory says that even behind the word, the spoken word, there is a nucleus. A word is just not an empty sound, there is the consciousness of the person speaking. Behind every word, every form, behind each object there is a nucleus. What is that nucleus? It is The Tantrics who told us that every object has the nucleus of vibration; but in the parlance of Sri Aurobindo, every word that I speak is an expressive vehicle of my own consciousness. When I utter a word, we know that from the scientific angle sound waves created by my words go on the vibrations of air. Behind these vibrations of air what is more important, according to our Indian theory of Dhvani and Sabda, is that there is the vehicle of consciousness. When I speak to you, and you are listening to me, it is not just the sound waves that you are listening to, it is not just that my sound waves are hitting your ear drums and you are responding. The words that we utter carry my consciousness to you and your consciousness responds and receives them. So these words are vehicles of actually a transmission of consciousness. That is why the great

yogis often do not use words. When we say yogis can converse, and communicate in silence, this is the meaning. They can directly extend their consciousness to you and your inner consciousness responds.

That used to be the case when we went to the Mother as children. We didn't have to tell her about all our problems but our consciousness within – when we sat in front of her - went directly to her, without our even knowing it perhaps. Sometimes, when I wanted to tell something to her, I would go prepared and think that I will go to the Mother and tell her my particular problem. The Mother would understand something else, she would even reply something else and I would think, “I asked her a particular question; she has answered me something different, how is it so?” That is because in our mental consciousness we have a particular question, but the consciousness of the inner being has other problems. We could communicate with the Mother on the level of consciousness itself. That is what is the importance of inner communion through consciousness.

Often we complain that we do not understand the writings of Sri Aurobindo. We normally think that it is the inadequacy of language. It is not so, for Sri Aurobindo, once in answer to one such complaint, wrote that if he had written in the same language about politics, we would have all understood him very clearly because we can all attune ourselves to it. So here the language barrier does not come in - it is the tuning of oneself to the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo that is the barrier. So, when we read *The Life Divine*, more than the language what we do not understand is what is beyond the thought content, Sri Aurobindo's consciousness. Oftentimes, I have heard people saying, “Oh, *The Life Divine*? I have understood it; I have read it five times – no problem”. It's not mental understanding – there are different layers and layers of understanding and the best understanding can come only when one identifies oneself with the author's consciousness.

However, never have any hesitation or apprehension that you will not understand Sri Aurobindo. We can all understand - if we can sincerely pray to him to help us because all understanding is verily given to us by the Divine. Understanding a great scripture, a great spiritual master's writing has to come through the grace of the spiritual master himself. Once when somebody complained, “Mother I cannot understand *The Life Divine*”, she gave the simplest of answers saying that he should place it on the samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and ask Him to reveal it.

I shall now tell you something about the mantra from the point of view of Tantra. The Tantrics have given us an extraordinary analysis of a mantra. They say that there are as many sounds as there are forms in this world. That is very clear: if you see a mountain you say there is 'a mountain', and similarly, a 'tree', a 'building', or a 'bird'. Every object has got a phonetic sound. What I call in English 'water', I call it in Telugu '*neeru*', in Hindi '*pani*'. The words have changed and yet the object remains the same. So how can we say that every object has got the same sound? Each object can have ten different names depending on the language, but each object has got a central vibration which is eternally the same and it is these vibrations which they call the Bija Mantras. So, every object, the blackboard, the mike, the building or the fan – every object in this world has got a seed vibration, it is the Bija Mantra. The discovery of this inner truth is the greatest contribution of the Tantrics to the philosophy of language.

When this vibration, this Bija Mantra is there, somebody in Africa may see the same object and give it a different name but it does not matter.

The Tantrics said that Omkara is the primeval sound which is the manifestation of Parama Shiva. They called it the manifestation of Supreme Consciousness, the Supreme Sonic Consciousness. It is AUM, the Mantra, that has come to us since the beginning of the awakening of human consciousness. The Vedas and the Upanishads and the Tantrics have all recognized that Omkara is the unified form of all sounds upon this earth. If an American or a Japanese may not agree with this idea and ask, “How is it at all possible that AUM is the unified form of all sounds?” Swami Vivekananda explained very clearly and very simply how AUM is the telescoped sound of all human sound- formations. Swamiji asks us to analyze our own speech: how do we speak? What is the process? There is breath in our lungs and when we push it out it goes first through the larynx with the vocal cords, then through the mouth, then through the lips. So, all our sounds are formed with the specific play of the larynx, the mouth and the lips. The beginning of the sound is in the larynx and the end of the sound is in the lips. Let us utter the word “AUM”. We take a deep breath and slowly release the sound A-kara, then as we come up U-kara comes into the mouth. In the last part the U-kara of AUM, we utter with almost closed lips and yet it is not the end. We do not say OM, we say AUM. You see, at a point, the sound vibration that we hear externally becomes a sound-reverberation in our mind. If you are sitting in meditation, and if you are quiet in your room, try to utter this word quietly and you hear the *dhwani*, the reverberation of the ‘M’ continue beyond your mind and you can almost feel the encircling waves of the sound-waves around you and then quietly and slowly the ‘M’ vanishes into silence. That is the beauty, that is the secret of this sound-wave AUM. It starts with the audible, it ends in the inaudible; it starts with the word, and it ends in silence. Thus, AUM is the beginning of all sound because all sound begins at the larynx and it is that sound which ends with ‘M’. You may ask, “How is it possible?” For example, we say “clang” or “dang” or “being” or “daub” - these words don’t come into AUM – then how do you explain it? Even if we say ‘sa’, the sound ‘sa’ is nowhere in AUM. So how do we say that this is the telescoped sound of all sounds?

Well, one example that I can think of is when you take up different colours -black and blue and red and green and white and violet, and mix them all together — you are supposed to get the white. So AUM is that kind of harmonization of all sound waves. It is not a synthesis of every sound. In Western orchestras there are different instruments, but from far you hear a harmonized synthesis of music. That is what is AUM - when all these sounds have harmonized in a perfect way, we get that sound wave called AUM. So this is the explanation given to us by Swamiji himself.

The Tantrics also found out another great secret, that all these vibrations that are there at the base of each form, they have also got a color. They have given us the colour of each center. It is ultimately nothing but a wave. It can be measured in wavelength; so colour also is found at the center of each thing and by its colour they described the kind of our wavelengths. Some occultists who can say that a particular gentleman has got a red aura around him, would imply that a person is a violent person. When somebody is possessed with passion or desire, there is an aura of red colour around the person; when a person is in

a deep depression or sadness there is an aura of dark deep colors. So colours are also there which correspond to our form and sound. This way the Tantrics gave us one of the greatest secrets about the vibrations of the objects.

I shall now take up the discussion on the Mantra from the angle of the Vedic interpretation. In the Vedas they said word is the beginning of all creation; they called AUM as the Sabda Brahman. They said AUM is that creative word. How do we understand that? - We have all heard this from our childhood - that AUM is the beginning of all creation. What happens when I speak, or when you speak - when anyone speaks? We create in front of our mind a mental image. When I utter the word 'tree', immediately all of you bring to your mind the image of a tree. It can be a mango tree or a tamarind tree or a papaya tree or any tree, but you will not imagine a mountain! In front of your mind there is only the image of a tree. So common human language has this capacity of raising before our eyes the image of an object.

If this is the capacity of human speech, the Vedic Rishis said, that Brahman too, when he utters a sound-vibration called AUM, it can raise in front of us not just the image of a tree, but manifest a real tree. So this is the comparison: human speech only gives the image of an object, but Brahman's word has the power to manifest. This is the only difference. If I can really put in front of you a beautiful picture of an object by describing it skillfully, Brahman, with his ultimate absolute consciousness, has the capacity to manifest the object named. Therefore, when He says AUM, that is the sound wave which goes and manifests itself in different forms. In my speech when I say the word 'tree', 'mountain', 'fountain', with each word I am giving you a new image. So too the single sound vibration AUM manifests in the multiform of this universe. Remember, the word is "manifests", it is not a concoction in the air, it is not an image, it is a physical reality.

Human speech can never ever manifest the way AUM can do. However, there is a good possibility that in moments of a heightened consciousness - in moments when we are touched by the inner divinity, in moments when there is a great revelation, human beings can still catch a Mantra that could bring us close to the Brahmic consciousness. Because this world is a manifestation of Brahman, a Mantra can give us contact with the Brahman in this world as well as in worlds beyond. That is why perhaps the Vedic Rishis uttered always that Mantra AUM.

How is it that a Mantra has this capacity to manifest an object or a state of consciousness? We must first know how a Mantra takes birth. Here I cannot do better than quote Sri Aurobindo: "The theory of Mantra is that it is a word of power born out of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental, framed in the heart and not constructed by the intellect, held in the mind again concentrated on by the wakening mental consciousness and then thrown out silently or vocally. The silent word is perhaps held to be more potent than the spoken precisely for the work of creation" (*Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA 18:30). So this is how a Mantra is born, that there is an intense vibration from the supreme heights that drops into our soul, the Atman consciousness. It drops into it unknowingly; we don't even know when that moment comes in our meditation -or when we are deep in bhakti something enters within us - that seed vibration starts working. Just as a pearl begins to make itself when there drops in a grain of sand into the shell - until the grain of sand comes into the shell no pearl formation takes

place. So that sand-formation is the seed vibration that enters our own inner consciousness and for a long time we can continue to meditate, we can have bhakti, but that seed vibration circles within our consciousness and slowly it comes into the mental consciousness.

That is what Sri Aurobindo says here: there is brooding on the inner level and when it comes into the mental consciousness, it acquires a word - it acquires the form of a sentence or a word - and then we say, 'Oh, I have got a Mantra!' When a great Rishi gave us the mantra '*asatoma sadgamaya*', it is not the formation of a verse, it is not even a prayer, it is one of those revelations which plunges deep within and it is reborn. When I can say the mantra, first that vibration penetrates within and then it is reborn in our consciousness. Well, you can ask the question, "Are we all Vishamitras to create such mantras"? Surely, we are not, but each one of us, depending upon our sadhana, our aspiration to the Divine, can get a Mantra because the inner being of ours and Vishvamitra's is the same. It is the same Atman that was there in Vishvamitra, Yajnavalkya, or Swami Vivekananda. Then where lies the difference? It is in that brooding consciousness. When it comes back into the mental consciousness there is the difference between Vishvamitra and us. It is the consciousness which is the background in which the Mantra gets formulated. You cannot just take a sentence from anywhere and say 'this is my mantra'. And each one of us may get a different mantra altogether, because it comes to us depending on our own need. A mantra that is useful for me may not be useful for you. Although it has got the immense potential to revive a great consciousness, it also has to be according to the need of our spiritual growth.

To return to the mantra, AUM, the Upanishads tell us that AUM has got three sounds A, U and M. 'A' represents the *jagrat* state, the waking state. What is that state? It is a state in which our mental being is awake. The 'U' *kara* represents the *swapna* state, it is the dream state when our mind gets into an intermediary stage. In the waking state, our mind is fully alert - we hear, we respond, we take in sensations but in the *swapna* state we start getting into a dream state and that is the intermediary stage when the mind become dull. Then there is the third stage of the 'M' which is the *sushupti* stage where the mind is completely suspended; it is called the dreamless state. It is not a state in which we have dreams because they belong always to the *swapna* state, the intermediary level between waking and *sushupti* levels. Once we go into the *sushupti* level, our mind is completely absent and then there is the awakening of the inner being and we are charged with a great energy.

You see, often times you might have noted, that you sleep only one hour at night, or maybe ten minutes in the afternoon, those who have the habit of an afternoon nap, and yet you feel fresh. Sometimes you may sleep eight hours - you don't feel fresh. For example, people take to drinking and they drink heavily and sleep eight hours, ten hours, and when they wake up there is a carryover of the drink and they are still not fresh enough. It's not just the drink, not the medical thing that the doctors say, namely the effect of drinking that's on the blood or on the mind. It is the effect on the consciousness; a tamasic consciousness can never get into the *sushupti* level. It descends into the inconscience. So a person who is drunk, a person who is not in his normal quiet consciousness can never get into the *sushupti* level and therefore is never recharged when he wakes up in the morning. The Mother has told us that before going to sleep we ought to be very quiet. In fact, she would say take out some time to recollect the day's activities. It is not the timetable of the day that you recollect;

what she says is to recollect those moments which you have offered to the Divine. How many moments have I thought of the Divine during the day? If today I am conscious of recollecting three times: “Yes, Lord, when I was praying in my school I thought of the Divine; when I went to my examinations I thought of the Divine; when I went into the interview I thought of the Divine etc.” It happens many times that when we are in trouble we immediately think of the Divine and when the trouble is over, we don’t even thank the Divine for the help he has rendered. We are very ungrateful creatures. How many times have we really gone to the temple to pray and when the thing is granted, have we immediately given our gratitude to the Divine? Analyze it. I have done it, and I know how many times I have shamelessly forgotten to thank the Divine, but that shamelessness itself has made me more aware that next time anything happens, the moment I call the Mother for help, I must be aware and conscious to thank her. It’s not the verbal “thanks”; it’s a deep sense of inner gratitude to the Divine because only in gratitude that there can be a purity of relationship with the Divine.

Then we have another interesting level - the cosmological description of AUM. To give you a brief idea: ‘A’ on the cosmological level is called the Virat Brahman. ‘U’ is the level of the Hiranyagarbha and ‘M’ is the level of Iswara; that is we have the Individual, the Universal and the Causal. From the Pauranaic angle, ‘A’ represents Brahma who represents creation, and creativity, and that is why when we say ‘A’ the sound that comes from, or begins from, is our stomach. The region below the lungs is the level of creativity in the human form. So Brahma, they say, is the level below the navel; and ‘U’ they say is the level of the chest. It is the level of preservation - we have here the lungs and the heart the energizing agents in the body. This is the level of preservation, and the lower is that of creation. So we have Vishnu on this level, the second level.

Then the third level is Shiva? Shiva, normally we think him to be the power of destruction. On the contrary, Shiva is the power of reconstruction after destruction. Destroying all that is not needed, he recreates. So, Shiva is the level of mind, the mental energy, the tapas. So you see we have ‘A’, ‘U’, ‘M’ - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Well, I come last to Sri Aurobindo’s own interpretation. In one of the essays he writes, while giving a Divine plan of this creation, that the highest level is the Absolute which is termed in Sanskrit as Tat. It is the Vedic word, meaning That. He says Tat or That is the unmanifest level, that means on that level of Tat, creation has not yet begun, the universes have not yet begun. That is the first, highest level of Tat of which we have heard in the Vedas. The second level is the level of Sachchidananda where the universe or the word is to be created. The creation has begun, and it is on this level that there is the fourfold AUM. That is what is extremely interesting - he says the first level is Tat, the second level is Sachchidananda, the third level is Aditi or the Mother, and AUM, in its fourfold aspect, belongs to the Sachchidananda level itself. That implies that AUM in its undivided form is co-eval with Sachchidananda. So that is the Aurobindonian interpretation of AUM. Why do we say fourfold AUM? Fourfold means A,U, and M has taken individually and then all these combined in a single syllable is AUM.

The Bhagavad Gita, in one of its last chapters, gives us a secret mantra, ‘Om Tat Sat’. We all utter this mantra perhaps not knowing why we do so. But now we know that Tat is the

highest unmanifest Brahman and Sat is the manifest Sachchidananda. But why do we say 'OM? In fact, OM we say in our normal day-to-day pujas also, "OM Namō Ganeshaya", or we say OM Namō Bhagavate etc. But why do we say OM? Whenever we utter the word OM, we have to have in our background these triple states of Brahman. In fact, the Gita defines OM as the triple Brahman. That means each time when we say OM namō Bhagvate we have to remember that we are thinking of that Supreme Brahman in all its triple form - the Individual, the Universal and the Causal; the Jagrat, the Virat and the Hiranyagarbha and the Jagrat, Swapna and Sushupti. So you can see the richness of meaning on the psychological level, on the cosmic level, on the Pauranic level, on the individual level, and on the Tantric level. This is the depth and width of the significance of AUM.

Therefore, instead of invoking different names of the Gods, even if you utter AUM, it has got that tremendous mantric shakti to manifest all the three levels of Brahman or Sachchidananda Himself. Therefore in India, we have been given this secret that every time we utter anything auspicious or *shubham*, we utter it in the name of AUM. Psychologically, the Gita explains, that when we utter OM and start a puja, even a morning prayer or even an action we have to think that 'I am not the person who is praying, it is the person seated within me who is praying to the Lord above.' So the sense of non-attachment to fruit has to come in. If we say OM for our own desires then our uttering of OM has not much value. OM must be uttered for all acts of desirelessness. AUM, when you utter, remember you must try to be without the ego itself. It should be better uttered for the beneficence of the world at large. There must be this consciousness of selflessness.

Lastly, coming to the Mother, I think she has given one of the most beautiful definitions of AUM. She said that "AUM is the signature of the Lord". Therefore, we understand now why she uses the word 'signature'. 'Signature' represents, stands for some particular person. When I sign somewhere the person who sees it knows that this is the signature of this person and therefore he may release my cheque, he may value my document etc. So if AUM is the signature of the Lord, everything that manifests in this world carries within it the word AUM. So you don't have to break open the table to see if there is AUM within the table. The scientists need not look into the atom to see if there is an AUM written there, or even the symbol of AUM. It is not to be seen that way; signature means representation and hence everything in this world is manifest by Brahman himself. It is in that sense that AUM is the signature of the Lord, that we can find the Lord everywhere. So do not go in search of the letters 'A', 'U', 'M'; it only means that this world is a reality of the Supreme Brahman.

Now coming to Integral Yoga, what is the place of AUM in it? Sri Aurobindo categorically says that we have no fixed mantra in Integral Yoga. If it helps someone, in his or her personal growth, he or she may take to it, but let us not feel guilty that because we are not chanting the word AUM, we are not doing Sri Aurobindo's yoga. It is not essential. What is essential for Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is the aspiration, to aspire to reach the Divine, to aspire to surrender oneself to the Divine and in this process of surrendering, Sri Aurobindo gives us a simple clue that japa would be of great importance. You can take up any word, any mantra and do nama japa. But what do we do? Which name, which word, which Japa, which mantra should we take up? Shall we take up AUM and do the Nama Japa of AUM? Not necessary.

Sri Aurobindo says that any Nama Japa with his name or the Mother's name should be taken, because, you see, there is one major difference -it is not that Sri Aurobindo is wanting to be the 'Guru' and that you therefore must take his or the Mother's names only. The reason is this: when we utter the word AUM and we are in our meditations, what experience do we have? It is one of ascending into great heights of consciousness, and we may bring down some of that higher consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is not just ascending to high levels of consciousness. It is not even trying to have a liberation or mukti or salvation or realization of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is essentially transformation of our own nature, and for such a transformation, the best suited mantra is MA or Mother. If we take the Nama Japa of MA, this word, this mantic word creates vibrations of change in our outer nature. If we want to have liberation and mukti alone, we could go ahead with AUM; but, if we want to change our nature, our circumstances, our lower nature, the most powerful word is MA itself. AUM acts on the mental and beyond mental levels whereas MA acts on the psychic and psychological levels. Because, remember, whenever we utter the word MA we are not thinking of a great philosophy or Brahman - Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. We are thinking of a beautiful Being in front of us, with all her smiles and sweetness and grace. So, automatically, the word MA brings forth out of us a tremendous sense of devotion and surrender. Ultimately, Gita too says: 'Surrender to Me alone.' The Mother and Sri Aurobindo too say the same thing. That the best way to change our own nature is to surrender ourselves to the Divine, and that aspect of surrender comes most beautifully with the word MA. So the secret of our day to day existence is to repeat the word MA itself. It is not just a word; in our homes - I call my mother, amma, in Hindi, a person may say ma or mataji. It is not these words of Ma, but this word MA and Mother have been infused with Sri Aurobindo's supramental consciousness. Have I not told you that the mantra comes forth carrying the person's own consciousness? So is it with the mantra - 'MA' or 'Mother' - it carries the supramental force brought down by Sri Aurobindo himself.

It was in 1926 or around that time that Sri Aurobindo for the first time called Mirra Alfassa 'Mother'. That was the moment when he incarnated - when the word itself was given this tremendous power of the supramental consciousness itself. So the word MA is not just the Mother - not just the English word or the Sanskrit word or the Telugu word - it has become for the Yogis of Sri Aurobindo's integral sadhana, a word full of the supramental transformative consciousness. Therefore, if we can utter that word every minute of our lives - when we are traveling in the bus, or when we are in the class or in the train or at home — if we can constantly utter this word MA, it helps in our surrender, it helps in our rejection, it helps in our aspiration. That is the essence of Sri Aurobindo's yoga; what more do you want? Just repeat consciously and constantly the Mantra 'MA' and all will be done for you by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.





# Beyond Utopia: A Divine Life on Earth

Sachidananda Mohanty

## The Human Predicament

The world abounds with utopias, and yet pain and suffering seem to mark our constant fate in life. There are essentially two views of the human tragedy as they come to us from the West primarily: There is, firstly the Job pattern of inexplicable suffering, and secondly, the Promethean pattern of tragic choice.

## Human Tragedy: The Judeo-Christian World View

In the Bible and the Old Testament, we see the outcry of the protagonist, Job to the heavens: 'Why am I ordained to have such pitiless suffering'? The text offers no answers, aside from signalling perhaps that it was the Will of God. Stoicism and endurance, in the face of God's Wrath, are the only options available to Man in the Judaic view of life. Anger and retribution are the logical corollaries in this worldview.

The non-answer of the Old Testament seems to have been reversed in the New Testament which chronicles the coming of the new Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus defies the Hebraic view of the cosmos and heralds the power of Love and Compassion against the mighty Roman legions. His sacrifice at the Cross acts as an everlasting emblem of the progress in human consciousness.

In the case of Prometheus, the hero of Shelley's iconic poem becomes the symbol of a supreme act of courage and defiance; Prometheus defies the Gods in order to bring Fire to Man, and by extension to the human Civilization. Prometheus exercises his tragic choice and pays the price by being chained to the rocks and left to be devoured by the birds of prey.

Much of Western Literature, like the Western worldview, it may be said, has oscillated between the two extremes. In the case of Sophocles' Prince Oedipus in the play by the same name, *Oedipus Rex*, there seems to be no real choice as the protagonist goes through the inevitable tragedy of life, while the celebrated characters of Ibsen are redeemed by the [limited] choices they make in their tragic situations in life.

## New Hellenism in Mid-Victorian England

Hellenic culture was recuperated during Mid-Victorian England by Matthew Arnold as 'sweetness and light'. In his iconic 19<sup>th</sup> Century British text called *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold offered his musings aligned to the teachings of Christ, as an answer to the mid-Victorian crisis in England that would have a resonance in colonial India as well. Christian meliorism, charity and philanthropy were offered as an antidote to the growing inequities thanks to the rise of mercantile capitalism. The measures would have limited success, however, to alleviate widespread pain and suffering of the masses both at home and in the colonies.

Arnold's analysis would be followed by the advocacy of Marx, Freud and Darwin culminating in the crisis of the Western Enlightenment and Modernity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, through various facets, of what came to be known as Postmodernism. Despite the progress made, the answer to the human tragedy still eludes Man. If anything, conflict and violence continue to rule the world and have engendered a crisis of monumental proportions at the planetary level.

### **Limits of the Imagination: West and East**

In our reading of this Abrahamic morality play, we may see the progress and dead-end of the Western literary and cultural imagination. Sri Aurobindo shows us, in his writings, his understanding of the Indic view of life, the latter, typified by the Buddha and Sankara in dealing with the human condition; the conclusion here is unmistakable: suffering and tragedy are inescapable, one must realize the vanity of life, and flight from the world of suffering is the only way out.

In his reading of both the West and the Eastern narratives, Sri Aurobindo shows us that we must inexorably come to similar conclusions. There is effectively no way out from tragedy and suffering in the phenomenal world. He begins where the East and the West end. That is why the opening chapter of *The Life Divine* is called 'The Human Aspiration'. It is important thus to contextualize Sri Aurobindo in the intellectual history of the world.

### **Meditation on the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary**

We may thus begin our meditation by paying homage to the Avatar of our times, Sri Aurobindo's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary is a reminder to us to remember our unique role in this evolutionary juncture. It is true that very few can penetrate through the veils of dogmas and doctrines, systems of thought and belief, creeds and cults that are powerful and far-reaching in the East and the West to grasp the real Truth offered by the Master.

### **Beyond the Average Mind**

Sri Aurobindo's vision and mission upon earth do not make for easy reading and easier appeal. Grounded in the best traditions of the East and the West and integrated in a synthetic manner, his philosophy of evolution that treats Man as a transitional being goes beyond the grasp of the common mind and the average intellect; anchored to received wisdom. To go beyond the achievements of the present civilization, anchored to the supremacy of Reason and Rationality; requires a radical leap in consciousness, somewhat analogous to surpassing the boundaries between the Ape and the human consciousness that he outlines in *The Life Divine*.

### **Evolution: Essential Nature of Human Collaboration**

The transition between the Ape and the human Consciousness in the evolutionary ladder is clearly not a difference in degree but a difference in kind that defies human comprehension. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo suggests that the human species could have been an emergent category from below, or an implant from above as a response to the evolutionary need. While the collaboration of the apes was not a factor in the march of evolution, Sri Aurobindo argues in *The Life Divine* that in the laboratory of Man is latent the secret of his self-exceeding. To become increasingly conscious of his being, to discover his inmost self and to govern his life in the light of this Truth remains the challenge before Man today. [Emphasis mine]

In his *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the last chapters of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo offers a testament to this vision, a powerful antidote to a climate of pessimism and gloom that characterizes the spirit of the century civilization. Indeed, a lack of normlessness and the absence of direction seems to be the fate of humankind today. Sri Aurobindo's diagnosis of the evolutionary crisis, as recorded at the time of 1949 and during the Cold War before he

passed away in 1950, remains as valid and relevant today, as it was in the middle of the last century.

### **New Barbarism on the World Stage**

While the World has physically shrunk, the minds and hearts of men have become smaller, and societies have become more embattled. The world today is in the midst of atavistic, primordial forces that threaten an order based on the claims of Science, Reason and Rationality. The promise of an orderly world, latent in the Age of Enlightenment and modernity, has hopelessly eluded mankind. Viewed in this context, the vision of Sri Aurobindo seems to put off the realization of an ideal world, marked by progress, perfection and harmony to a far-off age, an impossibly distant Utopia. Conscious of his charge, Sri Aurobindo tells us emphatically in *The Human Cycle* that if this is not the answer there may not be any answer. Indeed, evolution can bypass resistant mankind and work towards the coming of a new race, based on a higher faculty, the Supermind. As he writes decisively:

This is a solution to which it may be objected that it puts off of the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date in the future evolution of the race. For it means that no machinery invented by the reason can perfect either the individual or the collective man; an inner change is needed in human nature, a change too difficult to be ever effectuated except by the few. This is not certain, but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind. Then the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal and a greater race must come that will be capable of the spiritual change, a form of life must be born that is nearer to the divine. After all, there is no logical necessity that the change cannot begin at all because its perfection is not immediately possible. (*Sri Aurobindo; A Contemporary Reader: 124-125*)

## II

### **Sri Aurobindo: the Avatar of Our Times**

Despite the challenges facing mankind today, Sri Aurobindo remains for us a perfect example and an inspiration. There are many reasons as to why we need not lose our hearts and sink into the despair of the modern world. He offers a manifesto for steady progress and templates for self-discovery and realizations.

First of all, Sri Aurobindo's view of life avoids the twin extremes of unmitigated sorrow of the Buddhist kind, or a facile optimism of life of Matter and hedonistic pleasure, typical of late capitalism. Basing himself on the deeper truths and tenets of the Vedic and Upanishadic wisdom, he explains the nature of the five-fold constitution of the human self and the way progressive unfolding and manifestation of latent possibilities can take place in the earthy existence. Neither a life-denying spirituality nor spirit-denying materialism, he suggests, can be a viable answer. Only integration and harmony can show us the way. This is best achieved through the scientific process of Integral Yoga, the gift of India to the world.

The most remarkable aspect of Sri Aurobindo's theory and practice of Yoga is that it goes beyond the traditional boundaries and binaries of the rational mind. It eschews all forms of exclusiveness and assures optimism freedom and plasticity to all. It discards all preferences and predictions based on egoism. Rather, Sri Aurobindo attempts to bring all under an all-

encompassing fabric that recognizes the strength and limitations of each and embraces all for a common goal where each finds fulfilment and their unique destiny. [Emphasis mine]

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo goes through his life, through a process of disbelief, scepticism and atheism to a progressive awareness of the truths of the inner world. Thus, he becomes a guide and pathfinder, rather than a preacher who proclaims and does not show us the way. When we go through the entire corpus of the Master's writings, including, and especially the Synthesis of Yoga or the letters he wrote to the disciples and followers, there is little doubt in our mind that his entire emphasis was on praxis rather than theory. Arguments in him are systematically advanced; he pays close attention to contrary views and positions before arriving at nuanced positions that are always open to correction and modifications. His approach uniformly is one of suggestions and demonstrations rather than mandated edicts and sermons. He is realistic enough to consider each and every aspect of our being, and carefully considers the chances and possibilities of failures, lapses and setbacks in human endeavour.

### **Role of the Avatar in the Divine Life**

Thus, the Avatar becomes one of us, his labour is God's labour. The divine life that he outlines, is not far-fetched; it remains a distinct possibility under certain circumstances. As one goes through his arguments in *The Life Divine*, one cannot but be profoundly impressed by the strength of his arguments that do not leave out the smallest factors from consideration. As he wrote convincingly:

At first this insistence on a radical change of nature might seem to put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future, for the transcended of our normal human nature, a transcendence of our mental, vital and physical being has the appearance of an endeavor too high and difficult and at present, for man as he is, impossible. Even if it were so, it would still remain the sole possibility for the transmutation of life, for to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition; it is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle...For what is demanded by this change is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible; for whatever has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it. (*The Life Divine*: 1098) [Emphasis mine].

Thus, evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, entails gradations and simultaneity of the many rather than an easy replacement or discarding of one set of species by another. Each human and each species can grow and evolve at their own characteristic pace, and there need not be a common approach, typical of the Mind and the Reason. It is in this sense that Sri Aurobindo, the harbinger of *The Life Divine* becomes both a prophet and an inspiration for our troubled times.

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# A Different Denouement of Immortality

Soumitra Basu

The mystic tradition of India unveils an experiential realization of an endless procession of creative cycles that undergo manifestation and dissolution *ad infinitum*.

A detailed exploration into these creative realms reveals that there are meta-phases that comprise several cycles. It has been described that the present meta-phase has completed six cycles of creation-preservation-dissolution and has entered the seventh cycle. Each of the six preceding cycles underwent a *Pralaya* –a dissolution to return to the Origin. The Mother corroborates this realization and adds, “But it has been said that the seventh creation would be a progressive creation, that is, after the starting-point of the creation, instead of its being simply followed by a preservation, it would be followed by a progressive manifestation which would express the Divine more and more completely, so that no disintegration and return to the Origin would be necessary...And this is what Sri Aurobindo says. He speaks of a constant unfolding, that is, the Divine manifests more and more completely; more and more perfectly, in a progressive creation”. (CWSA 33: 1)

The question is does every time the creation starts anew from a blank or a zero or a vacuum? If Freudians believe that individual experiences sink into the personal unconscious and Jungians believe that collective experiences are historically preserved in the collective unconscious (of course, both Freud and Jung were concerned with the current cycle of creation), it could also be said as an extension of the same logic that all meaningful experiences of a particular creative cycle do not disappear after the dissolution of that cycle but sink into the Great Void that holds the unconscious or Inconscience of the multiverses. And it could well be that these experiences of bygone creative cycles act as memory templates from where a new cycle of creation would begin. Of course, this phenomenon by itself would not suffice for every new creative cycle has a new and unique orientation and is not a mere repetition of the past. Therefore each new creative cycle would start not only by activation of the memory templates of bygone cycles but would have to be aided and initiated by a New Light, a New Dawn or a New Consciousness projected by the Superconscience.

The opening scene of the first Canto of Book One of Sri Aurobindo’s epic, Savitri, seems to lend some credence to this view. Each time a particular cycle of creation dissolves, its memory-traces are left behind in the Cosmic Inconscience. Every creation seems to be preceded by a Nothingness and dissolve in a Nothingness but the Inconscience of the multiverses holds the seed-memories and seed-powers of the dormant Cosmic Self in deep slumber. That is why, even in the bosom of Nothingness, “A power of fallen boundless self” exists, “awake”! (CWSA 15:347) Sri Aurobindo uses the term *awake* to indicate that a totipotent power exists, even in a state of dormancy in the great Void. In other words, the “boundless self” in cosmic drowse has an unborn element that is awake and therefore can be activated.

One finds a resemblance in the symbol of the reclining muse of Vishnu. If Brahma creates and Shiva dissolves, Vishnu preserves. Vishnu not only preserves an ongoing creative cycle but preserves too the memory-traces left behind after dissolution of that cycle. That is why Vishnu is in *Anantasajjya* –the poise of timelessness. In other words, Vishnu in the poise of eternity preserves the essence from which the thread of continuity can always be traced. No wonder, Vishnu is regarded as an “All-pervading” Vedic Godhead. (CWSA 33:2)

However, Reality is not only represented by the poise of the Inconscience for there is too

“*the other side of boundlessness*” (CWSA 15:347-348) –the Superconscious poise of endless Light, Creative Will and effulgent Bliss from where the Dawn of God-Light emerges to pierce the resistance of darkness to convey the fiat for renewal of creative activity. Each such new Dawn is a harbinger of a new creation unfolding hitherto unmanifest potentialities.

### **Vishnu’s strides**

Once the creation manifests, it is sustained by Vishnu till Pralaya occurs. But Sri Aurobindo is in favour of the continuation of the present cycle of creation without being dissolved. Vishnu, therefore, has not only to sustain the creation but help in an endless progression of the present creative cycle.

The Vedic tradition speaks of three strides of Vishnu which span three cardinal worlds of consciousness. The first world is the “Earth of the physical consciousness” or the physical plane of consciousness. The second world is the “heaven of mind” or mental plane of consciousness. In between the physical and the mental worlds is the *Antariksha* or intervening habitation of the vital world which makes it possible for the mind to manifest in earthly consciousness. (Ibid: 348)

Mind is however not the last term in evolution. The whole of Indian spiritual tradition revolves around the concept that there is a Reality beyond Mind, often experientially perceived as Sachchidananda (a triune of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). This plane of Sachchidananda is the world of Bliss encompassed by the third stride of Vishnu. There is also an intervening habitation known as *Maharloka* between the worlds of mind and bliss –it is the “world of superconscious Truth of things”. (CWM 7: 209)

### **Sri Aurobindo’s contribution**

The world of Bliss was always acknowledged to be encompassed by the third stride of Vishnu. This world of Bliss had been experientially realized and conceived but it could never be made to manifest in earthly existence. It is as if the technology to manifest the absolute Bliss in earthly terms was missing. And it was because of this missing element in the preceding six cycles of the current creative metaphase that creation could not be sustained and dissolution or Pralaya had to occur.

Sri Aurobindo was concerned with reinstating the missing element so that the present creation could be progressive and not dissolved. This could only be ensured by a progressive evolution of consciousness till it reaches the Supramental plane which could then be activated in earthly existence. The manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness would ensure the activation of the Bliss principle in physical reality. The Mother describes that this would signal “a force higher than all those which have so far manifested and which will give the body a plasticity that will allow it to progress constantly, that is, to follow the divine movement in its unfolding”. (CWM 07: 206)

The sadhana of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was directed to a progressive unfolding of consciousness ensuring the persistence of this creative cycle for which they had to activate and manifest the Supramental Consciousness which now waits to be generalized. The denouement of immortality shifts from merely an elongated life-span to a perpetuation and constant progression of this present creative cycle.

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## The *Sthithaprajna* Aspect of Sri Aurobindo

Lakshmiyoti C.

Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna to become a *Sthithaprajna* and fight the righteous battle of Kurukshetra. But Arjuna, still befuddled, yet to grapple with the sublime concepts of Sankhya and Vedanta, pleads in despair for some outward discernible sign to recognize a *Sthithaprajna* – how does he talk, eat or sit? “No such signs can be given, nor does the Teacher attempt to supply them; for the only possible test of its possession is inward and that there are plenty of hostile psychological forces to apply. Equality is the great stamp of the liberated soul and of that equality even the most discernible signs are still subjective” (CWSA 19: 102) says Sri Aurobindo.

However, as we pore over the biographies of Sri Aurobindo, one striking characteristic that stands out from his earlier days is his Himalayan equanimity, calm demeanour and sweet temperament. Dinendra Kumar Roy who lived with Sri Aurobindo in Baroda writes about him, “His laughter was simple as a child’s and as liquid and soft. Though an inflexible will showed at the corners of his lips, there was not the slightest trace in his heart of worldly ambition or of selfishness. There was the longing rare even among the gods, of sacrificing himself for the relief of human suffering... Aurobindo was always indifferent to pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, praise or blame. He bore all hardships with an unruffled mind”. (*Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*: 34)

Sri Krishna explains that a *Sthithaprajna* is “A man with mind untroubled by sorrows, who has done with desire for pleasures, for whom liking and wrath and fear have passed away, such is the sage whose understanding has become founded in stability” (CWSA 19: 102). To feel the highest truth consciousness which not only bestows the knowledge of the situation and the right course of action but also the required force to execute the action, one has to silence the three instruments of body, life and mind, go beyond the three gunas and attain absolute Samadhi. “It is this calm, desireless, griefless fixity of the buddhi in self-poise and self-knowledge to which the Gita gives the name of Samadhi”(Ibid: 101). This exalted inner state is reflected in every activity of Sri Aurobindo through his earlier life.

Sri Aurobindo has stated that no one knows anything at all about his life and it has not been on the surface for men to see. But, in his own words, “...my whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardship and semi-starvation in England through the fierce difficulties and perils of revolutionary leadership and organisation and activity in India to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, internal and external”(CWSA 35: 44).

As a young boy in England Sri Aurobindo had to face starvation and lack of a warm hearth but never did he complain about his father who could not send remittances or the impoverished conditions. On the contrary, he always kept his good humour and excelled exceedingly in his academics. Yoga is skill in works. While Sri Aurobindo was not consciously into yoga at that age, he exemplified utter detachment to surroundings and focused on his

capabilities even as a little boy growing away from all parental love. The much coveted ICS position would have brought him all the wealth and prestige in the society that he and his brothers direly lacked. But, he gave it up despite getting a very high rank as he did not want to serve the colonisers, the British.

RN Patkar, another colleague of Sri Aurobindo, says “Another thing I noticed was his total absence of attachment for money. Whatever monthly salary he received he used to place in an open tray and keep no account. One day I asked him why he didn’t keep his money safe somewhere. He answered: “Well, it shows we are living among honest and good people” “But how will you know this unless you keep an account?” He replied quietly, “God keeps my account. Why should I worry when he is taking care of me?” (*Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*: 33)

Elsewhere, in a letter to his wife, Mrinalini, Sri Aurobindo writes that all his accomplishments, education and earnings belong to his Motherland and he considers himself a thief if he spent them too much on his own comforts. This love for Motherland and longing to free her and uplift her was his sole concern around which were woven all his thoughts and activities.

Dinendra Kumar Roy further says about him,

He was not in the habit of dressing up. I never saw him change his ordinary clothes even while going to the Maharaja’s court...Like his dress, his bed was also ordinary and simple...Baroda being near a desert, both summer and winter were severe there; but even in the cold of January I never saw him use a quilt – a cheap ordinary rug did duty for it. He always appeared to me nothing but a self-denying brahmachari, austere in self-discipline and acutely sensitive to the suffering of others. Acquisition of knowledge seemed to be the sole mission of his life. And for the fulfilment of that mission, he practised rigorous self-culture even amidst the din and bustle of an active worldly life. I never saw him lose his temper. No passion was ever seen getting the better of him. It is not possible to have such control without the highest self-discipline. (Ibid)

However, as is evident from his writings and letters to his disciples in later days, he was by no means aloof and indifferent but interested in life and the people around him. Yet the overall impression is one of inwardness, quiet poise and easy good humour. For an ordinary soul it is hard labour that takes several births to attain this self-knowledge and absolute self-mastery that quietens the senses even while living amidst the objects of desire.

It isn’t like Sri Aurobindo was born with all these qualities. In his own words, “It is perfectly possible to change one’s nature. I have proved that in my own case, for I have made myself exactly the opposite in character to what I was when I started life. I have seen it done in many and I have helped myself to do it in many”(CWSA 35: 44).

*Sthithaprajna* is not a goal but a condition. It is the first condition, a preparation to proceed to the higher levels of consciousness. This irrevocable calm and detachment can



only be obtained by turning towards the divine, *matparaha* says Sri Krishna, consecrate your all to me.

Sri Aurobindo's preparation was thorough, the purity of his aspiration was spotless, his will for the absolute was indomitable. It is little wonder that he attained Brahman Consciousness in just five days. Ever since then he only followed the Adesha, the command of the divine within. All his speeches since then were from the levels beyond the mind. While writing for Karmayogin, at times, the words came directly to his pen with no involvement of his mind or the effort of intellectualization. His surrender to the inner call was absolute. There was no doubt in the mind, no clamour for name or fame in the vital. The body just obeyed. He was in the midst of intense political activity – the partition of Bengal – which was like the modern-day Kurukshetra. He was a political leader who steered the Renaissance of the nation. It is the inner realization that took precedence over the external course of events. To give an example, sitting in the Karmayogin office, he had the inner Adesha to leave for Chandernagore. He just rose from his seat and walked to the Ganges to catch the boat. There was no planning or packing needed.

His arrest by the British did shake him up but as a result of it he was even more indrawn and concentrated until, towards the end of the trial, he only saw the Omnipresent Narayana in everyone and in all things. He later wrote, “The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God” (*Tales of Prison Life: 2*).

It is indeed amusing that a yogin like him should be called “the most dangerous man” by the Empire. His last days in Bengal were under the sword of Damocles with the impending arrest warrant from the British hounding him like a bruised animal agitated that his prior arrest was of no avail. The suspenseful course of events before he boarded the cruise to Pondicherry racked the nerves of his young colleagues. But, as one witness said, “The one for whom we were anxious was altogether calm like someone absorbed in the trance of Samadhi”. (*Sri Aurobindo for all Ages:120*)

Samata is the primary requisite to embark on the adventure of consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and one cannot ask for a better illustration than Sri Aurobindo's earlier life which was throbbing with outward activity and activism while he was fully inwardly detached and focused.

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*Painting by: Deepshikha Reddy*

**She finds again the Presence in the form  
And in the light that wakes with him recovers  
*Savitri* 22: 182**

**SECTION – III  
INTEGRAL YOGA**

# Aspiration and Purpose

Martha Orton

## Introduction

In the wonderful first chapter of *The Life Divine*, “Human Aspiration”, Sri Aurobindo essentially lays out the foundation for all that follows. Here Sri Aurobindo establishes the basis for everything that flows outward and constitutes the content of the chapters that make up the substance of his masterwork—in which he details the human purpose and goal and also how we may fulfill these, rising to higher levels of consciousness, and ultimately unite with the Divine.

## Human Contradictions

Early in the first chapter, Sri Aurobindo states: “The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.” Who has not been inspired by this wonderful statement, this sublime language! This brief statement encapsulates the entirety of human aspiration. We feel entranced by these possibilities. We want to realize them and have them in our lives and experience. They powerfully embody some of the opposites of our ordinary lives. In the outer life and experience, we can feel distanced from the Divine, we can feel the shadow of the darkness of the lower nature; we can also feel bound by its ties and the influence it exerts on our lives and consequently feels far from free; we also feel keenly aware of our mortality, the limitations of the human body. Yet, in spite of all this, we aspire for more.

Sri Aurobindo proceeds to explain this contradiction between our ideals and our usual experience of life in the first chapter and, more extensively, in succeeding chapters. In doing so he also confirms our higher experience by pointing out that humanity does indeed have higher spiritual experiences and has aspirations to fulfill these, while also being aware of the weight of the usual earthly existence. He asserts that through evolution, we can ultimately attain our ideals and realize the fulfillment of our human purpose.

While acknowledging that the ideals we aspire to and the ideal life implied in his description of the potential for this can seem improbable to us, living in the ordinary mind, Sri Aurobindo asserts that this ideal life is actually affirmed by the workings of Nature. He states: “For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony,” (CWSA, 21-22: 4) and also states that “all Nature seeks a harmony.” (CWSA, 21-22:4) The disharmony that we experience in life—the discordance and contradiction between our aspiration and the reality of human life and experience constitutes a motivating factor which drives us to resolve these contradictions. It is motivation to evolve in consciousness— to progress. Consequently, we have the potential within us to resolve the contradictions, the disharmonies which we experience in life. Sri Aurobindo explains that we are able to do so in an ascending progression. This is because of Spirit being involved in Matter. As he writes, “apparent Nature is secret God.” (CWSA, 21-22: 6) Sri Aurobindo will explain the involution of the Divine in matter more fully in subsequent chapters.

Sri Aurobindo describes the potential to have a divine life in an animal body, an immortal aspiration in a mortal frame—noting the contradictions and stress which humanity experiences with this, describing in the process all the human limitations—ego, mortality, the limitations of the mind—very limited consciousness. There is a hunger within us for something more—higher, greater, deeper, more universal. This is our inner aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo points out that the evolutionary journey is indeed difficult and full of severe challenges. While acknowledging the difficulty and challenges for our small humanity, he also asserts that we need to accept this evolutionary push as a cosmic necessity. Explaining that we need not fear the progression of which we are capable, for which we have the inherent potential, he asserts that many have already received indications of this in their lives. Sri Aurobindo concludes the first chapter of *The Life Divine* with the understanding that mind merely veils the levels of consciousness beyond and that the evolutionary progression will continue.

### **Basis in the Reality of Brahman and Sachchidananda**

Sri Aurobindo's view of the nature of reality is especially relevant as the foundation for understanding his yoga and his writings on the psychology of yoga, as well as his works on social and political themes. Moreover, it constitutes the basis from which Sri Aurobindo develops his conceptualization of the evolution of consciousness. *The Life Divine*, is the primary source for gaining an understanding of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, including his perspective on reality. and his evolutionary conceptualization, and is especially inspiring for these reasons.

An understanding of the meaning Sri Aurobindo gives to Brahman is essential to grasping his philosophy. Brahman is the term used to refer to the Absolute, the Supreme Being. Brahman is also considered to be everything, the All, and it is believed that there is nothing which is not Brahman. In the scriptures, it is referred to frequently as "The One without a second," meaning that Brahman is all there is and that there is nothing else. Sri Aurobindo endorses this understanding of Brahman and it forms the foundation of all that follows in his philosophy. Brahman is inseparably linked with Sachchidananda, the Divine Being comprised of a trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The three are not only intertwined, but merge and are One. There is differentiation, but not difference.

Therefore we have a view of reality in which: (1) There is nothing but the Divine. The Divine is All, the Divine is in All, and All is the Divine. (2) The Divine is Sachchidananda. The All is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. From this we can only conclude that, there is nothing but existence, consciousness, and bliss and nothing else exists or is real. This is completely inspiring and offers much hope to humanity. Throughout his writings, Sri Aurobindo affirms this inspiring perspective. From these two conjoined and inseparable concepts, widely ranging implications follow. For Sri Aurobindo, the reality of Brahman is unequivocal, as is the reality of Sachchidananda. He considers even matter to be Divine. The reality of Brahman is complete, absolute, pervasive. He describes this beautifully and in detail in *The Life Divine*.

Weighing the perspectives of the materialist and the ascetic in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo carefully considers the merits and problems of each. He considers the materialist perspective, in which only the material world is viewed as real, as having benefited humanity by helping to dispel superstition and encouraging rational thought and inquiry. This has led to significant scientific advances, for example, which have been of great help to humanity and to life in the world, increasing our knowledge of material phenomena and our ability to cope with the material world. To the extent that the ascetic perspective, the mystic view which considers only the spirit to be real, regards the world as unreal, as an illusion, Sri Aurobindo describes this as resulting in neglect of the physical world and life within it, consequently leading to degradation of life on the material plane. He also explains how the mystic or spiritual seeker who has experience of the Absolute can become

so absorbed in this realization that he or she comes to consider only this to be real. High spiritual experience alone can result in all lesser consciousness and the things associated with it appearing to be unreal and completely inconsequential. Yet, most importantly, the ascetic perspective acknowledges the truth of the Divine. Consequently each of these two apparently opposite perspectives has both merits and disadvantages, and each contains elements of truth. Sri Aurobindo creates a new synthesis of the two perspectives, an integral perspective which incorporates the strengths of both. In Sri Aurobindo's view both matter and spirit are real. Also both are divine. This conclusion derives directly from a complete, wide and comprehensive perspective on Brahman.

### **The Involution of the Divine in Matter**

Considering the manner in which the divinity of matter relates to its creation and to the creation of the universe and our world, we discover the great significance which is implied. While we can refer to *The Life Divine* for a more complete and subtle explanation, a simpler one is given here. Sri Aurobindo describes Reality in a series of levels or expressions. It is not a hierarchy as such, since the Divine is indivisible, yet when we come to the manifested physical world, we necessarily regard this as a lower order, since it is not the pure Divine. Essentially there is the Absolute, the Transcendent—the vast Silent One which is and always has been. The Absolute is vast, eternal, and limitless in every sense imaginable. Its power is Sachchidananda. By this dynamic power, the Absolute extends Itself to create and sustain the universe. In this original extension into the creation, matter was formed. Before the creation of matter, there was only the one unmanifest Divine. In Its extension creating the manifest universe, the Divine used its unlimited power to limit itself and create from part of Itself the world of forms. Consequently matter is necessarily, inherently, Divine since it derives from the One. The Divine is all that is. Matter is Its creation. The universe and our world are expressions of It. Therefore the Divine is within matter, as well as having created it, and supports its continuance through Its omnipotence. This literal involvement, of the Divine in matter is what Sri Aurobindo calls the involution of the Divine in the creation. For Sri Aurobindo, the completely pervasive reality of Brahman underlies the conceptualization of his philosophy and his yoga.

### **Purpose of the Manifest World**

As sentient beings, it is natural and expected to ask oneself at some point about the purpose of one's life. In fact, a central question of human thought is "Why are we here?" The Vedas tell us that the Divine created the world and all its creatures for His delight. This is also spoken of as the Divine play or Lila, in Sanskrit. Sri Aurobindo describes this view in *The Life Divine*:

Again if we look at World-Existence rather in its relation to the self-delight of eternally existent being, we may regard, describe and realise it as Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanician's joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation, —Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground. (CWSA 21-22: 111)

Because the Divine is infinite and has limitless capacities for expression, one of the forms this took was to create our universe, our world, and all the forms of life and matter within it. However, the creation was not made only for His amusement, though that in itself could be sufficient, but has a profoundly meaningful purpose. Sri Aurobindo asserts the view that the human purpose is spiritual development and realization with the goal being to discover and

unite with the Divine. However, he takes this significantly further than previous spiritual thought has envisioned. Based on his comprehensive view of Brahman, Sri Aurobindo sees the involution of the Divine in matter as impelling a comprehensive evolution of mind, life and matter. Calling this the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo envisions a complete transformation of mind, life and matter from their original expression in the creation to the realization of their full divine potential. This is a gradual evolutionary process in which consciousness and matter reveal their inner divinity. The involution of the Divine in the manifestation both enables and actually makes inevitable, its ultimate evolution. The fulfillment of this process is the union of the individual being with the Divine. Sri Aurobindo does not see the goal as the absorption of the individual consciousness back into the Absolute from which it once came. Instead he envisions the divinized individual being transformed into its divine expression and continuing to live in the world and, by its influence, facilitating the continued evolution. The result is not only an individual process, but also a generalized one in which, ultimately, life on earth can become completely transformed.

### **The Veil of Imperfection**

As we reflect on daily life and also on human history, it is obvious that life on earth is imperfect and fraught with problems. We might then ask how this can be if human beings and, in fact, matter itself, contain an element of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo describes a process of separation as occurring with the creation of the manifested world. According to this description, the perception of separate forms, as separate objects and beings, cloaks our ability to perceive the actual oneness which, nevertheless, pertains. The perception of separateness is necessary to enable interplay and interaction, without which there could be no growth and development, no evolution. Therefore individuation, both of objects and of human consciousness into the form of individuals, is essential for the divine play of life on earth, to enable the interaction which provides the field and opportunity for growth of consciousness and evolution in general. In the perception of separateness, then, we move away from a complete sense of union with the Divine, even having this completely concealed or masked from our view. Sri Aurobindo describes this process as moving into the ignorance, with ignorance being described as separation from the truth of oneness and union with the Divine. With human beings, this separation, and hence ignorance, becomes complete with the development of the ego.

Quite appropriately, there is much denigration in Eastern spiritual thought of the role played by the ego. It is seen as the primary obstacle between the individual and his or her soul, that which obstructs the spiritual vision and realization in the individual. Sri Aurobindo also regards the ego as an obstacle to spiritual development for much the same reasons. However, he also recognizes that it has an essential role to play in the process of individuation and the consequent growth of the individual. It is necessary for the full development of the individual, as one builds one's personality and individual competencies in life and also one's initial identity or sense of self in the formation of the outer being. However, once an individual has developed at the mental level, the time comes when the ego needs to be dissolved or transcended for further growth and development to take place, for the potential for spiritual growth to be realized.

There is an innate drive for growth and progress within human beings. Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine* of the dissatisfaction inherent in humanity, describing it as a restlessness and disquiet in the face of imperfection and disharmony. He explains that Nature seeks harmony in all things and so human beings, driven as creatures of Nature, also

seek harmony in their lives. Moreover, because human beings have a spark of the Divine within them, they are driven to seek perfection, to seek to liberate their inner divinity, to release their divine potential into life and action. It is in this way that we then come to understand how there is so much imperfection in beings, while the world is imbued with the Divine. The imperfection is the ignorance, the sense of separation from oneness, from divinity, and cloaks the inner Divine and its potential for realization and fulfillment. The impulsion for perfection is there. It is the light and power of the innate divinity within the manifestation. It is this that drives the evolution of consciousness, revealing the inner divinity eternally present.

### **The Psychic Being**

Sri Aurobindo offers a specific term for the presence of the Divine in the individual being, calling this the psychic being. Having been a distinguished classical scholar while studying at Kings College, Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo uses the term “psychic” based on its original Greek meaning, where “psyche” means “soul.” He identifies the psychic being as “the soul developing in the evolution.” (CWSA, 28:82) It is a tiny element, “the spark of the Divine” (CWSA, 28:104) within the being. It is the presence of the psychic being which enables and, in fact, drives the evolution of the individual. It is this presence of the Divine in the individual which impels the quest for self-perfection, leads the individual to be dissatisfied with the lower aspects of his or her nature, and drives the individual toward the ultimate goal of union with the Divine. Where the human individual is concerned, the psychic being is the direct and clear evidence of the involution of the Divine in the creation. It is this involvement which enables the evolution of consciousness, and also impels and makes it inevitable.

### **Our Inspiration and Purpose**

Sri Aurobindo regards the Divine Creator as literally involved in Its creation, present there even at the level of matter itself. We can next explore what this means in terms of the role and presence of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo explains the Divine in terms of the silent, or passive, and active Brahman. The Divine, as the Absolute, the Transcendent, simply IS. This is a great state of being, infinite and vast beyond human conception. As such, It is also called the Unknowable, meaning that It is beyond the range of human knowledge. However, it should also be noted that Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Unknowable can be known. By this he means that human beings have the inner potential to attain spiritual knowledge, the true knowledge which consists of spiritual realization and is unrelated to intellectual accomplishment or capacity.

Quite wonderfully, the active power of Sachchidananda, the great trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, is the foundation of the universe. This power is the means through which the Absolute expresses Itself. Sri Aurobindo, through his extensive research in the Vedas and his own exceptional spiritual realization, discovered a great power and consciousness which he called the Supermind. This is the extension which Sachchidananda puts forth to enable the creation. In Supermind, there is oneness, though Supermind enables differentiation, hence creating the multiplicity of forms for life in the world. Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that though there is differentiation at the level of Supermind, there is no division. All remains as Oneness. Division enters at the level of what he terms the Overmind, below which are several levels of consciousness (Intuition, Illumined Mind, Higher Mind) descending to what we usually consider to be mind. Sri Aurobindo explains that these levels of consciousness are actually levels of being. He also explains that the Divine extended Itself

through the power of Sachchidananda, through the dynamic creative action of Supermind, and involved Itself in successive levels of expression down to the level of mind as we usually think of it (the active intellect), and life and matter. Also, Brahman is Brahman regardless of where and how it is expressed, conceals or reveals Itself—whether active or passive. All these levels are Brahman, though Brahman is concealed further and further as the descent into matter progresses.

Brahman is One, eternal, undivided. However, It exists in two aspects—passive and active. The vast silent immutable Brahman, the passive aspect, is the support of the creation. It maintains and sustains the universe. Through Its active role, Brahman contains and extends Itself into the manifestation, dynamically asserting its influence. In Its expression and involvement in the life of the world, Brahman also sends forth emanations of Itself. These are the avatars who have come through the ages to offer the direct intervention of the Divine in the life of the world, doing so by their concrete physical presence, taking on crucial roles in the development of human consciousness and growth by their action and example. When we consider these aspects of the divine Reality, we see that it ranges from the Absolute, the Transcendent, completely and pervasively down through all levels of being to Its actual presence in matter, with the Divine being involved actively and comprehensively throughout, wonderfully taking a direct interest and involvement in life on earth.

### Conclusion

Writing extensively of the nature of Brahman and Its relation to the universe and to the individual, Sri Aurobindo has given us profound insights and understanding and also has inspired humanity, offering an awakening to our divine purpose. Sri Aurobindo has written extensively of the nature of Brahman and Its relation to the universe and to the individual. In conclusion, let us reflect on the following inspiring passage which comprises a brief summary:

In relation to the universe the Supreme is Brahman, the one Reality which is not only the spiritual, material and conscious substance of all the ideas and forces and forms of the universe, but their origin, support and possessor, the cosmic and supracosmic Spirit. ...Our supreme Self and the supreme Existence which has become the universe are one spirit, one self and one existence. The individual is in nature one expression of the universal Being, in spirit an emanation of the Transcendence. For if he finds his self, he finds too that his own true self is not this natural personality, this created individuality, but is a universal being in its relations with others and with Nature and in its upward term a portion or the living front of a supreme transcendent Spirit. (CWSA, 23-24: 296)

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# Inspiration and Intuition

Larry Seidlitz

Inspiration is a term that expresses a fairly common experience of an idea seeming to come into our mind from some source of greater wisdom or creativity. This common experience is a confirmation of sorts of certain basic tenets of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy, because it suggests first that there exists a greater wisdom and source of knowledge beyond our everyday mind, and secondly that this higher wisdom is in relation and contact with us and we can open to and receive from its store of knowledge. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the source of all knowledge is indeed beyond the mind, in what he terms the Supermind, but that in its transmission to our mind it passes through various layers of consciousness which limit and distort the original purity, truth and power of the knowledge. The degree of this limitation and distortion can be large or small, and it is this degree that determines the truth and power of the inspiration that we receive and express. Sri Aurobindo has examined and elucidated this phenomenon and process in detail, and by considering this issue we open a window onto Sri Aurobindo's broader philosophy and our own everyday existence.

One of the most common experiences of inspiration is in the writing of poetry, and it is in this field that we most commonly hear the term. I can relate to a personal experience of getting inspiration to illustrate something of its nature. It occurred in writing a short 16 line poem about love for the Divine that was titled "Love for Thee". It was a rhymed poem in four, four-line stanzas, with a rhyming scheme of a, a, b, b. In other words, the first two lines rhymed and the second two lines rhyme in each of the four stanzas. The first line set up the question of the poem, "In what does love for thee consist?" and the rest of the poem expressed various possible experiences of love for the Divine. I felt that there was working of inspiration because while writing the earlier lines of each stanza, the following lines or even their ideas were unknown to me, but the earlier lines nevertheless anticipated the lines that would follow. In other words, it seemed to me that the knowledge of the whole already existed in the inspiration for the earlier lines, though it was unknown to my receiving mind until I concentrated on writing the latter. This seemed to me especially evident in the last stanza which completely surprised me and went as follows:

Shall love with wisdom's light be wed,  
On oneness' breast, delight be fed?  
Then all would be shrine of thee,  
All life our love's felicity.

Of course, the stanza suggests that the wisdom referred to here is based on the experience of the oneness underlying all existences, and that by wedding this experience of oneness with love, we can experience the joy of love in each and every being and thing, which would then become as if shrines of our divine Beloved.

In Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry, he explains that inspirations may come from different levels and domains of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has explained that above the ordinary intellect there are several basic planes of consciousness, the higher mind, the illumined mind, Intuition, Overmind, and above that the Supermind, a radically different type of consciousness. Inspirations and intuitions can potentially come from all these planes of consciousness. But besides these higher levels, there are also inner domains of consciousness, the inner mind, the inner vital, inner subtle physical, and the inmost psychic consciousness. Again, inspirations and intuitions can come from these domains.

Sri Aurobindo has described the nature of the inspirations coming from each of these various levels and domains of consciousness and has given examples of poetry inspired by each. He explains that the highest source of inspiration up until now has been the Overmind. He says,

The *mantra* as I have tried to describe it in *The Future Poetry* is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. Its characteristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater. The passages you mention from the Upanishad and the Gita have certainly the Overmind accent. But ordinarily, the Overmind inspiration does not come out pure in human poetry – it has to come down to an inferior consciousness and touch it or else to lift it by a seizure and surprise from above into some infinite largeness. There is always a mixture of the two elements, not an absolute transformation though the higher may sometimes dominate. You must remember that the Overmind is a superhuman consciousness and to be able to write always or purely from an overmind inspiration would mean the elevation of at least a part of the nature beyond the human level. (CWSA 27: 27)

When we examine Sri Aurobindo's view of inspiration, we find that it is one of several related powers of the Supermind, a term which we might characterise by the more suggestive term "divine knowledge and power". Sri Aurobindo describes Supermind with such characteristics as "omniscient," "omnipotent", and "knowledge by identity". He also says it is "the eternal knowledge and will of the Ishwara" (CWSA 24: 792), with the term Ishwara defined in his various writings as the Lord, Master, the Divine, or God. Whereas the ultimate source of inspiration is in the Supermind, in the more accessible levels of the spiritual consciousness open to mankind, it also operates in what he calls the Intuition, and also what he calls in his writings the intuitive mind. He says, The Intuition "proceeds wholly by four powers that shape the form of the truth, an intuition that suggests its idea, an intuition that discriminates, an inspiration that brings in its word and something of its greater substance and a revelation that shapes to the sight its very face and body of reality" (ibid.: 813). We see then that inspiration pertains especially to an intuitive knowledge as expressed in a form of word and substance. Sri Aurobindo says "The inspiration is of the nature of truth hearing: it is an immediate reception of the very voice of the truth, it readily brings the word that perfectly embodies it and it carries something more than the light of the idea; there is seized some stream of its inner reality and vivid arriving movement of its substance" (ibid.: 815). Sri Aurobindo explains that these four powers also operate at a higher level in the Supermind itself, though there they operate with a "fullness of body not modified by the mental stuff of the intelligence" (ibid.: 820). Operating in the Supermind, Sri Aurobindo describes the power of inspiration as "a spiritual hearing and touch of the truth, – of its essence and through that of its significance, – that is to say, there is a seizing of its movement, vibration, rhythm and a seizing of its close presence and contact and substance" (ibid.: 834).

In some of Sri Aurobindo's correspondence with his disciples, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between the true Intuition and the intuitive mind, and mentions additional types of intuition.

These distinctions would also apply to inspirations, one of the powers of Intuition. He says in one letter, "Intuition proper is true in itself (when not interpreted or altered by mind), although fragmentary – intuitive mind is mixed with mind and therefore not infallible because the truth intuition gives may be mixed or imperfectly put by mind (CWSA 28: 161). He also says, "There is the Intuition and below it there is the intuitive mind which may have several degrees or layers. Also there is a partial power of intuition in ordinary mind itself, in the vital, in the physical consciousness, in the material itself" (ibid.: 161). And we may add this clarifying quote: "The intuitive mind is a level of consciousness which is touched by the light of higher truths and receives them vividly and conveys them to the consciousness below" (ibid.: 162). Regarding this intuitive mind, he explains "Mental intuitive knowledge catches directly some aspect of a truth but without any completeness or certitude and the intuition is easily mixed with ordinary mental stuff that may be erroneous; in application it may easily be a half truth or be so misinterpreted and misapplied as to become an error. Also, the mind easily imitates the intuition in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between a true or a false intuition" (ibid.: 163). One of the four powers of intuition mentioned earlier was discrimination; one of its important functions is to discriminate between true intuitions and mental imitations or distortions. Distinguishing true intuitions from mental mixtures or imitations is a delicate task requiring careful and extended self-training and experience, but a distinguishing feature of true intuitions is that they come directly without mental labor and carry with them a sense of certitude.

In Sri Aurobindo's interpretations of the Vedas, we get another perspective on inspiration as it was viewed by the ancient rishis. Here we find an emphasis on its power to lead us to the truth of the Supermind. This significance comes out in Sri Aurobindo's translation and interpretation of the third hymn of the first mandala of the Rig Veda, in which the goddess Saraswati, which Sri Aurobindo associates with the power of intuition, is first mentioned in the culminating final three verses. He explains:

She is dhiyavasuh, stored or rich with understanding, she is the impelling power of truths, she is the awakener of or to right thoughts. She awakens something or brings it forward into consciousness (pra-chetayati) by the perceptive intelligence and she governs or shines through all the movements of the fixing & discerning mind...

Therefore she is not merely or not essentially a goddess of mental force, but of enlightenment; for enlightenment is the mental force that purifies. And she is dhiyavasuh, richly stored with understanding, buddhi, the discerning intellect, which holds firmly in their place, fixes, establishes all mental conceptions. First, therefore she has the purifying power of enlightenment, secondly, she has plenty of mental material, the great wealth of mental being; thirdly, she is powerful in intellect, in that which holds, discerns, places...

But by what power of Saraswati's are falsehood & error excluded and the mind and discerning reason held to truth & right-thinking? This, if I mistake not, is what the Rishi Madhuchchanda, the drashta of Veda has seen for us in his last and culminating verse... I translate therefore "Saraswati awakens by the perceptive intelligence the ocean (or, flowing expanse) of Mahas and governs diversely all the movements (or, all the faculties) of the understanding."

What is Mah or Mahas? The word means great, embracing, full, comprehensive....

Turning to the Purana we find the term mahat applied to some comprehensive principle which is supposed itself to be near to the unmanifest, avyaktam but to supply the material of all that is manifest and always to surround, embrace and uphold it... We find it explicitly declared in the Vishnu Purana that all things here are manifestations of vijñana, pure ideal knowledge, sarvani vijñanavijñimbhitani—ideal knowledge vibrating out into intensity of various phenomenal existences each with its subjective reason for existence and objective case & form of existence... [Sri Aurobindo calls this the Supermind]

We see therefore that Mahas is still vijñanam and we can no longer hesitate to identify our subjective principle of mahas, source of truth & right thinking awakened by Saraswati through the perceptive intelligence, with the Vedantic principle of vijñana or pure buddhi, instrument of pure Truth & ideal knowledge.

We can now understand the intention of the Rishi in his last verse and the greatness of the climax to which he has been leading us. Saraswati is able to give impulsion to Truth and awaken to right thinking because she has access to the Maho Arnas, the great ocean. On that level of consciousness, we are usually it must be remembered asleep, sushupta. The chetana or waking consciousness has no access; it lies behind our active consciousness, is, as we might say, superconscious, for us, asleep. Saraswati brings it forward into active consciousness by means of the ketu or perceptive intelligence, that essential movement of mind which accepts & realises whatever is presented to it. To focus this ketu, this essential perception on the higher truth by drawing it away from the haphazard disorder of sensory data is the great aim of Yogic meditation. Saraswati by fixing essential perception on the satyam ritam brihat above makes ideal knowledge active and is able to inform it with all those plentiful movements of mind which she, “dhiyavasū, vajebhir vajinivati”, has prepared for the service of the Master of the sacrifice. She is able to govern all the movements of understanding without exception in their thousand diverse movements & give them the single impression of truth and right thinking — visva dhiyo virajati. A governed & ordered activity of soul and mind, led by the Truth-illuminated intellect, is the aim of the sacrifice which Madhuchchhanda son of Viswamitra is offering to the Gods. (CWSA 14: 38-47)

Sri Aurobindo’s commentary on these verses of the Rig Veda suggest that the true inspiration flows down from the supramental consciousness bringing enlightenment to all the movements of the mind and soul.

To establish this connection with the Supermind, to set this inspiration flowing, requires a great deal of preliminary purification and preparation of the nature. Sri Aurobindo lays out a discipline that can achieve this in his Integral Yoga, but it requires a long and concentrated work on oneself of which the essence is a sincere self-giving and surrender to the Divine Mother, the Divine Force which alone can effect this great aim for us. The Integral Yoga is a many-sided endeavor that is beyond the scope of this presentation, but several basic principles can be outlined, with a focus on those especially pertinent to the development of the intuitive mind and its power of inspiration.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, in the part of the Yoga called “the Yoga of Self-Perfection”, Sri Aurobindo highlights the importance of the purification of the mind to receive intuitions undistorted. He explains that “To rid the prana of desire and incidentally to reverse the

ordinary poise of our nature and turn the vital being from a troublesomely dominant power into the obedient instrument of a free and unattached mind, is then the first step in purification” (CWSA 24: 659). He adds that once this dominance of the vital desires over the mind is corrected, then the purification of the mind from the intrusion of mental errors and distortions can more easily follow.

One of the principal means for the purification of both the mind and vital nature is the development of equality, the spiritual equivalent of what is called in ordinary contexts “equanimity”. There are several chapters devoted to this important condition of the consciousness in the section “the Yoga of Self-Perfection”, but here a brief description of it must suffice. Sri Aurobindo has summed up its essence for us in an extraordinary sentence in his *Letters on Yoga*:

Equality means a quiet and unmoved mind and vital; it means not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to you but to look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements, anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest, not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit. (CWSA 29: 130)

Sri Aurobindo adds that whereas it is difficult to achieve this kind of equality in its fullness, we “should always try more and more to make it the basis of one’s inner state and outer movements” (ibid.). Its importance for the development of intuition and inspiration is that the consciousness must be pure and limpid, free from potentially distorting influences, so that the higher knowledge descending from above may be received in its native truth and power.

Sri Aurobindo discusses three different approaches towards achieving equality: endurance, indifference and submission. He says, “The principle of endurance relies on the strength of the spirit within us to bear all the contacts, impacts, suggestions of this phenomenal Nature that besieges us on every side without being overborne by them... Instead of seeking to protect itself from or to shun and escape the unpleasant impacts it may confront them and teach itself to suffer and to bear them with perseverance, with fortitude, an increasing equanimity or an austere or calm acceptance” (CWSA 24: 709, 711). Regarding the way of indifference, Sri Aurobindo says, “It is an attitude which regards these passions of the mind as things born of the illusion of the outward mentality or inferior movements unworthy of the calm truth of the single and equal spirit or a vital and emotional disturbance to be rejected by the tranquil observing will and dispassionate intelligence of the sage” (ibid.: 712). The third way of submission, he says “may be the Christian resignation founded on submission to the will of God, or an unegoistic acceptance of things and happenings as a manifestation of the universal Will in time, or a complete surrender of the person to the Divine, to the supreme Purusha” (ibid.: 713). He explains that all three approaches lead to an “inhibition of the normal reactions of the mind to the touches of outward things” and secondly, to a “separation of the self or spirit from the outward action of Nature.” (ibid.: 714). Sri Aurobindo describes each of these approaches in some detail and goes on to explain

other ways of developing equality, but for the present purposes, this gives a sense of some of the preliminary work necessary to develop the intuitive mind and inspiration.

Sri Aurobindo describes four lines of progress towards developing the Intuition and replacing by its action the normal mentality, which he explains, the Divine Shakti utilises for this development in us. The first method is “to silence the mind altogether, to silence the intellect, the mental and personal will, the desire mind and the mind of emotions and sensation, and to allow in that perfect silence the Self, the Spirit, the Divine to disclose himself and leave him to illuminate the being by the Supramental light and power and Ananda” (CWSA 24: 802-803). In his *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo has described three different but related methods for doing this (see CWSA 29: 301-302). One is to stand back from the thoughts and observe them and the nature of the mind, but give no sanction to the thoughts, and allow them to run down until they stop. The second method is to stand back from the thoughts as a disinterested witness as if they are not one’s own and in which one takes no interest. He says that then the mind gradually divides into two parts, a calm, witness part of the mind and a part of the mind in which the thoughts cross or wander. From this poise, he explains, one can proceed to silence the active part of the mind also. The third method is to see the thoughts as if they were coming from outside the head, as it were, and then, before they enter, to throw them away.

The second approach towards developing the intuition that Sri Aurobindo describes is to reject the normal action of the intellect and its action and instead “to listen for the voice, wait for the impulsion or the command, the *ādeśa*, obey only the idea and will and power of the Lord within them, the divine Self and Purusha in the heart of the creature” (CWSA 24: 804). He explains that this leads to the experience of the Purusha in the heart and is the way most natural to those who have an emphasis on Bhakti. This Purusha in the heart is also intuitive and spiritual in its nature and is a great help in quieting the mind and vital nature and their disturbances, but by itself it cannot open to the highest intuitions and inspirations coming from the Supermind.

The third approach is to refer all our thought and action to “the veiled truth of the Divinity above the mind and to receive all by a sort of descent from above, a descent of which we become not only spiritually but physically conscious” (ibid.: 805). Sri Aurobindo explains that for this to reach completeness, it is necessary that we “lift the centre of thought and conscious action above the physical brain and feel it going on in the subtle body” (ibid.). He explains that the lower activity of the mind will still come, but from this poise it is easier to achieve the intuitive discrimination that distinguishes the true intuitions from the lower mental mixtures.

The fourth approach is “to develop our intellect instead of eliminating it, but with the will not to cherish its limitations, but to heighten its capacity, light, intensity, degree and force of activity until it borders on the thing that transcends it and can easily be taken up and transformed into that higher conscious action” (CWSA 24: 806). Sri Aurobindo explains that this approach is in line with the aspect of the yoga of self-perfection in which all the instruments of the nature – the body, the life energies, the emotions, and the mind are all raised to their highest possibilities and natural possible perfection and then transformed by the action of supramental consciousness into their supramental equivalents. This possibility is based on the basic truth that in the course of evolution this lower nature is not meant to be discarded but to be perfected, transformed and divinised. Sri Aurobindo explains that the

Divine Shakti would typically utilize all these various methods “freely and flexibly according to the needs of its work and the demands of the nature” leading to the development of intuition and the higher levels of consciousness.

I would like to conclude this discussion concerning the development of intuition and inspiration by noting an interesting conversation of the Mother on the topic. In that discussion in which she discusses different types of intuition and methods for developing them, she mentions this important suggestion:

In the ordinary functioning of the brain, intuition is something which suddenly falls like a drop of light. If one has the faculty, the beginning of a faculty of mental vision, it gives the impression of something coming from outside or above, like a little impact of a drop of light in the brain, absolutely independent of all reasoning... Active thought must be stopped as far as possible and the entire mental faculty must form—at the top of the head and a little further above if possible—a kind of mirror, very quiet, very still, turned upwards, in silent, very concentrated attention. If you succeed, you can—perhaps not immediately—but you can have the perception of the drops of light falling upon the mirror from a still unknown region and expressing themselves as a conscious thought which has no connection with all the rest of your thought since you have been able to keep it silent. That is the real beginning of the intellectual intuition. (CWM 9: 358-359)

Finally, it should be mentioned that Sri Aurobindo encouraged some of his disciples who had a turn towards it to write poetry as a means for developing inspiration and the intuitive consciousness. By turning the consciousness within with the aspiration to receive inspirations from the higher levels of consciousness for the writing of poetry strengthens the passage to the higher consciousness and facilitates both the ascent of consciousness to these levels and the descent of their light and power and Ananda into the mind and lower consciousness.

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# “Living Within”

Deepshikha Reddy

*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma* was the first maxim that inspired me as a child in school, even without understanding its real input. The charm that remained as an essence was that God is in everything; God is all. If that were so, “Then why don’t we see him?” was my question. In response, I was told that one has to grow older and realise the mantra given by Sri Aurobindo, which was to “live within.” My God! Only these two words could take me to God. That is amazing!

That is how Sri Aurobindo inspired me to live a life of search in the inner corridors to meet the Ultimate. Two words, “live within”, may sound soft, easy and unassuming but their power is striking. They have the power of Mantra uttered by a Rishi. This whole world is on one side and this mantric phrase on the other, opening the gates to another world of unknown wonders, unknown knowledge and experiences that hold the golden key to all the unanswered riddles of this world.

How does a young mind look at all these inner dictums? They look with amazement at all those who serve humanity by sacrificing their money, energy, time, relations – everything with goodwill to do good for others, by making hospitals, libraries, schools, homes for the have-nots and so many such activities. Yet if seen from a deeper angle, we feel sad to see that suffering remains palpable despite all efforts to alleviate it.

Why does this scenario never change for centuries? Great kings, great leaders, great reformers have come and gone – great Avatars and Vibhuties have come too – yet why are we the same as ever? Helpless and incapacitated, weak and miserable dreamers who never reach their dreams – thinks the young mind.

Beating around the bush has become a part of a human character who loses sight of the central point, the central issue that can effect a change. How long will these yellow glasses veil our true vision? How long will we live mesmerised by the illusory velvet sheen of materialism that has kept us enmeshed in deep ignorance and falsehood – the young mind wonders.

According to Sri Aurobindo unless one is established within the soul one cannot gain any true knowledge. Now true knowledge can be a subject of later on but what is important to understand is why materialism is something illusive leading us to a no man’s land! In the rush and bustle of constant activities, their results and outputs, the energy and time spent in them, the tension and stress absorbed through these daily duties or the so-called responsibilities as a deliverer do not leave us with any time, a quiet relaxed time when we can look within ourselves. The whole of our life we live outside of ourselves, we communicate outside of ourselves, and we spend all our time turning out of ourselves.

We do not care to know that just like this outer dynamic world, there can possibly be an inner world too. What about trying to find that out?

Living within requires a quest like that-- a quest that questions the purpose of our existence, the meaning of life, what is beyond all this constant running about for two meals a day or for a little recognition or name or fame that is but temporary! Even for such a quest to rise within us, we need to be quiet or be relaxed within ourselves at least for some moments in the day. These moments have to be snatched from the clutches of the outer sensorial living that grip us ever so tightly.

Sitting quietly with an inner aspiration to know the true meaning of life itself is the first key to opening the treasure trove of the inner worlds and our inner living. In this pursuit, once one experiences the joy of a deeper contact that soothes one’s being – an unknown joy



or peace or love or knowledge or a touch of divinity or a higher power of incredible beauty, great nobility or generosity...it may be anything visiting the being in those moments works wonders in one's life.

One feels the invasion of wonderful unknown joy in the being and he tries to look for more such quiet moments with himself in his busy outer life occupations.

To experience this in the being one has to call for peace in and around us. The Mother says –

...you must try and must persevere, continue trying... You sit quietly, to begin with; and then, instead of thinking of fifty things, you begin saying to yourself, "Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace, calm, peace!" You imagine peace and calm. You aspire, ask that it may come: "Peace, peace, calm." And then, when something comes and touches you and acts, say quietly, like this, "Peace, peace, peace" ...

So you try this for a few minutes and then do what you have to do; and then, another time, you begin again; sit down again and then try. Do this on getting up in the morning, do this in the evening when going to bed. You can do this... look, if you want to digest your food properly, you can do this for a few minutes before eating... and everything becomes calm.... and there comes a time when you no longer need to sit down.... it is always "Peace, peace, peace". (CWM 6: 313-314)

After this, to be able to perceive the glory of constant action as an illusion is in itself a great discovery. The Mother says,

Men have a feeling that if they are not all the time running about and bursting into fits of feverish activity, they are doing nothing. It is an illusion to think that... (CWM 3: 66-67)

Further, she says that because of this mentality we become the tools of forces that make us dance for their amusements. Therefore, she urges us to sit quietly and quieten the whole being so that the inner reality, the inner voice of Truth or the soul can be heard by us. That eternal Truth wants to manifest itself but the deafening noise of the world doesn't give it one single chance.

Given the fact that living within is not easy as these regions are invisible, subtle and fragile too, isn't it worth a try to reach the heavens? But for this, the first ever contact comes in silence and tranquility. Once that is achieved the other layers start revealing themselves. This is the world of spontaneous knowledge and experiences when the touchstone – the soul comes into sight. It is yet far but one can see it and feel its warmth and love when it tries to help the being to purify itself, to sanctify and free itself of all the rigid elements within us. Living within becomes palpable at this stage when the loud murmurs of the ever-noisy surroundings do not matter anymore. The whole being gets its guidance from within. His reference point or his axis changes from the active outer mind to the inner mind and its higher associates. He then can see light in the invisible, he can feel His touch in vacant spaces.

It is then that the soul comes out of its cave and spreads its light and love in all the outer activities of his outer life to make it harmonious and perfect. This is what Sri Aurobindo meant by being established in the soul and working in the world.

These two words could change the contour of the world and the quality of our existence if only we could sincerely follow their import.

# Mission and Meaning in Life

Falguni Jani

Sri Aurobindo has been a guiding light in my life since my early teens. Initially, there was a curiosity to understand the mystery of the universe and to know the purpose of birth. The questions that propped up in the mind were, why are we born? What is the purpose of creation? Why is the life on earth subjected to pain, suffering, limitation, and death? If there is an existence of a superpower, a God, then I must know Him/Her and understand the mystery. I read books by Swamy Vivekananda, Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa, teachings of Lord Buddha, Shri Krishnamurti, as well the major Upanishads with commentary by Swami Chinmayananda that helped to broaden and deepen my knowledge. Still, something was lacking that I could not fathom. There was an intense aspiration to know, learn and experience the truths stated in the spiritual texts. When I started reading the books, *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *Essays on the Gita*, I found the answers to these questions. The writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother fulfilled that gap. As the readings continued the insights into the human dilemma and the purpose of creation was revealed. I have continued through many decades, to refer to these books again and again to have more insights into the existence of a conscious power governing the world, a purpose behind the apparent chaos of life on earth, the complex human personality, the way towards light and truth and the method of following Integral Yoga.

We understand that this world is not created just by a combination of chemicals, a random design of atoms and molecules. Science speaks about the big bang theory but does not explain why this complex creation emerged. Sri Aurobindo says the Divine Himself has entered the creation by a process of involution and is emerging slowly again from matter. Hence it is not just the evolution of form, but there is gradual emergence of higher and higher consciousness. First, we see inert matter, but nothing is without consciousness-force in nature. The stone is only apparently dead, there is a hidden movement going on in the atom, which emerges as life, in the form of vegetal kingdom. Life again brings out the hidden Mind which manifests in the animals and later complex human beings. At present the human being is the epitome of growth of consciousness at the mental level. It seems that for thousands of years the evolution of consciousness has stopped. Sri Aurobindo says that it is not so. There are ranges higher than the mind which are waiting to evolve. Mother Nature has within her the presence of the Divine Sachchidananda that continuously pushes her to create new and higher forms. Her purpose is to manifest the divine on earth. We already witness the higher ranges of Mind in some individuals or yogis. The Vedas, Upanishads and other texts were written by inspiration from still higher levels of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo calls these levels of consciousness starting from Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, Overmind and Supermind.

The significant point is that human beings can by their conscious collaboration with the divine presence in them aspire for the higher levels. They can hasten the process of evolution. Since the creation of the world is the play of the consciousness-force and Ananda, the purpose is to know, manifest and experience that in life. We know that the seed that is embedded in the soil slowly grows leaves, branches, flowers, and fruits. When the fruit ripens it bursts and reveals the seed. In other words, the seed has completed its journey by becoming the seed again. Similarly, life on earth starts with matter, life, mind and waits

for the divine presence that descended by the process of involution to emerge again by the reverse movement upward of the evolution of consciousness. We need not become impatient by the slow progress of humanity to reach the level of Divine consciousness. Nature is doing her Yoga and pushing the collectivity to move forward. Her ways may not be understood by our limited knowledge. Each circumstance, event or happening whether it is good, bad, favorable, or unfavorable lead the collective and the individual towards the destined road of the manifestation of the Divine consciousness. We must have the faith that,

A blind god is not destiny's architect;  
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,  
There is a meaning in each curve and line. (CWSA: 33:4)

It is only by knowing ourselves integrally that we can understand the meaning behind the creation of the world. Sri Aurobindo says that at present we are only aware of our surface self, the ego personality that helps us in communicating with the outside world. Through our sense organs and the mind, we feel and interpret all that happens, but this vision is very limited. Our mind is not an instrument of knowledge, it is just like a transmitter that conveys thoughts to us. There are levels of consciousness below, above and behind this surface personality which is yet unknown to us. Therefore, we must understand the various planes and parts of our consciousness. It is only by knowing ourselves integrally that we can control and navigate all the movements of our mind, vital and body towards the light of truth.

The true self, atman or the psychic being resides in our inmost self. Sri Aurobindo says that it is the psychic, the presence of the divine in us that must become the leader in life. At the present stage of evolution of consciousness, human beings are guided by the ego personality. Due to the ego consciousness, we experience ourselves as different from other human beings. This dividing consciousness was necessary in the journey of evolution. The animals do not have this individualizing consciousness. They share a group mind, that does not give them an individuality. Hence ego was necessary to have a separate individuality. The difficulty becomes greater when the ego consciousness becomes the only guiding force in the individual. It does not allow individuals to experience oneness of the divine presence. The root cause of all pain, suffering and limitation is due to the narrowness and rigidities of the mind, the desires, and ambitions of the vital being and the inertia of the body. Besides, Sri Aurobindo says that if there is ignorance, suffering is inevitable. The whole process of Integral Yoga is to come out of ignorance to experience, peace, harmony, joy, and strength in the whole being.

We know that the atman or the spirit within is the master of existence, but at present the outer ego personality is guiding our life. That is why the practice of yoga insists on going within. The process involves observing, and analyzing the inner movement of the mind, vital and the physical. To become more and more conscious of the thoughts and emotions that affect our behavior. Since human beings have, in general, no knowledge of the presence within, a regular practice of observing silence and self-introspection helps in correcting the wrong movements that create unhappiness and pain. Gradually one can go deeper and feel the presence of the psychic being. To do so one of the most essential books that every seeker of truth must read and follow in the path of integral yoga is *The Mother*. Sri Aurobindo maps out the triple way of aspiration, rejection and surrender to the Divine Shakti. It is only by an intense and one pointed aspiration for union with the divine that one can begin the

yoga. At the same time the parallel movement of rejection of all desires, vanity, ambition, rigidities and obscurity of the mind, vital and physical being must be done. The last and most important aspect is a detailed surrender of the whole being. This yoga cannot be done by one's own effort only. It is done by a complete surrender to the Divine Mother, but only after the sadhak has rejected ego and falsehood. By going beyond the boundaries of ego one can enjoy life. This yoga reveals the path of attaining liberation in earthly life. This can be done by a progressive transformation of the ego personality into an enlightened instrument of the Divine. In *The Synthesis of yoga* we find a detailed explanation, method and process of transforming the Prakriti or nature from the clutches of the three gunas, satwa, rajas and tamas.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga does not speak of liberation after death. This world and life on earth is not an illusion or a false dream from which we must awaken. Sri Aurobindo rejects the withdrawal of the ascetic who shuns the world, who by an exclusive concentration, meditation on the Brahman attains the solitary liberation. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is for the world and aims at collective liberation, not individual salvation. Every aspect of life is seen as a play of the Divine, each happening is experienced with illimitable calm and bliss. Therefore, we need not leave the world, but fulfill God's purpose in this life. Every aspect of life is seen as a play of the Divine, each happening is experienced with illimitable calm and bliss. Therefore, we need not leave the world, but fulfill God's purpose in this life. The purpose is to know and manifest the divine. Rebirth is for a progressive growth of consciousness towards the divine. The tiny spark or flame of God, the psychic being is the representative of the divine. By becoming aware of the psychic being, we must let it govern our life. The awareness of the psychic being will lead to lesser and lesser control of the ego and finally it will have minimum role in the workings of nature.

In conclusion, I would say that the mantric words of Sri Aurobindo have always guided me in the journey of life. I look forward to each day as it brings new things to know and practice.

Hence the following lines sum up for me the meaning and mission of life.

This transfiguration is earth's due to heaven:  
A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:  
His nature we must put on as he put ours;  
We are sons of God and must be even as he:  
His human portion, we must grow divine.  
Our life is a paradox with God for key. (CWSA 33: 67)

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*Photo by: Debaleena Bhattacharjee and Debashish Mukherjee*

**In some faint dawn,  
In some dim eve,  
Like a gesture of Light,  
Like a dream of delight  
Thou com'st nearer and nearer to me.  
– Sri Aurobindo ('In some faint dawn')**

**[Description: Overlooking the Dehing River in Namdapha.  
Location: Arunachal Pradesh; Year: 2019]**

## **SECTION – IV SRI AUROBINDO: AN INSPIRATION**

# Inspiration and the Human Crisis

Madhumita Dutta

Inspiration's 'incertitudes' is a fact Sri Aurobindo has pointed out many a time, but so well-garbed in his many valorised definitions and explanations of this high faculty, that we tend to miss or ignore the fact that inspiration is a very uncertain thing. It is a great power no doubt, but it has to be made so, either by regularising this faculty or sustaining the level of high inspiration by great labour. For, inspiration surely is not a steady or certain thing and does not come to all. Only some poets can command inspiration at will, others have to invoke the higher powers when they need to create. This we witness in the invocation all the poets make whenever they venture to create anything great and grand and sublime – the epic adventure especially advocates the need of the higher inspiration so eloquently. And every true artist works out in his own way the uncertainties of inspiration. Sri Aurobindo himself worked in this way, or he would not have written about 'insufficient' or 'adequate' or 'higher' inspiration. Inspiration is certainly not a power which comes like a heavy downpour all at once, delivers and then recedes forever. Inspiration is more like intermittent spells. And this is the power as handled by the creative energy of the poet that makes the difference between a 'great poet' and a 'merely good verse-writer'. The inspired state is certainly different from the ordinary state of mind and thus any composition with inspiration at work is bound to be different in tone and rhythm and quality from that done with the ordinary mind. What characterises inspiration—that 'unconscious factor in creation'—is its suddenness and impersonality, so that the final inspired work seems to have been written or done 'through' someone.

Sri Aurobindo in his various writings, at different times has defined and explained the term 'inspiration', and mentioned also the sources and levels of inspiration. He says that sometimes the impetus to create comes from above the ordinary mind, from a superconscient source, and then the brain-mind might not impose at all. Works produced from this source are 'inspired works', and here there is no semblance even of the fabrication of the brain-mind. This is something akin to the divine *enthusiasmos* that Plato had talked about. It is supernatural, a possession of the Divine creative spirit. According to Plato, the Dionysiac rites in fact helped to cure the ill and the suffering. That is one way of defining inspiration. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo says about inspiration that it is of the very nature of 'truth hearing'. By this he means that the poet/creator receives directly the voice of the Truth, of course by the inner ear, and also receives the very word(s) which embodies the sense of that Truth. And he explains further the phenomenon of inspiration in these words, '... there's seized some stream of its inner reality and vivid arriving movement of its substance'. It may be a kind of transcription. About one of his poems called *Transformation*, Sri Aurobindo had written: "I simply remained silent and allowed the lines to come down shaped or shaping themselves on the way. ... I don't know that I know anything else about it." (*On Himself*, 296)

Here are some lines from the poem:

My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,  
My body is God's happy living tool,  
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light. (Coll. Poems)

In early thought, inspiration was associated with the Muses or even the Holy Spirit of Christianity. The Greek Muses were held to be Goddesses who were sources of higher

knowledge and so were invoked for help. And as inspirational power, a Muse could directly create or sing through the poet. It is almost the same theory as Sri Aurobindo's when he says that for a poet composing under a higher inspiration, the brain-mind does not get in the way. Epic invocations to the Muse to help reveal the Truth and aid in the grand adventure of poetic creation are popular illustrations of this:

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,  
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth  
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion Hill  
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd  
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song. (*Paradise Lost*, bk.1.)

In the same way the Holy Spirit is taken to be the spirit of Truth, in fact, a form of God Almighty Himself. It is symbolic of an animating power, a reviving breath which can kindle or rejuvenate a dead or a dying and atrophied mind. As a life-saving drug brings back life, or the soul gives life to lifeless matter, inspiration too is like that *sanjeevani* for the poet's mind which gets revived with creative energy. It is not just that inspiration – the life-breath of creation – comes only to poets. Inspired moments declare themselves vocally and visibly in great works of the poet, artist, painter, sculptor, singer, writer, scientist, mathematician. There was a signboard I had seen advertising a brand of ethnic Indian-wear, and it declared so eloquently, 'Poetry in a saree'. Perhaps the intricate, exquisite handiwork, the sheer beauty of the artistic product must have inspired the advertiser to spell out the tag line of his advertisement! Many instances can be had from the world of art and science to prove the working of the higher power of inspiration. One of the best examples is Sri Aurobindo's poetry itself, especially his epic *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*. The important role of inspiration, the intermittent comings and goings, the lower and the higher varieties, the uncertainty and the receptivity – all are displayed in *Savitri* in individual lines and passages, in various measures. Sri Aurobindo has thus written about 'insufficient' inspiration and 'higher' inspiration in *Savitri* and says that the minor and major changes that were made were as inspiration pointed out to him. *Savitri*, we know, has been recast in many ways and at various times, and those lines and passages were altered which the poet felt were written under inadequate and inferior inspiration. And when the inspiration was sufficient and high, according to Sri Aurobindo's own admittance, he did not give any importance to details, so that the word, the image, the rhythm came unhampered, uninterfered. In fact, when one works under the command of the highest inspiration, technique becomes superfluous as the 'perfect line with the perfect rhythm' is produced naturally. Sri Aurobindo has given instances of inspired lines of poetry in literature:

"... a mind..

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone", from Wordsworth, or,

"Those thoughts that wander through eternity", from Milton. Here we get the Overmind rhythm belonging to the 'eternal planes'. In a letter discussing inspiration, Sri Aurobindo had written that there is spontaneous flow of words when the source of inspiration is in the heart or the psychic. This kind of lyrical inspiration often 'flows in a jet'. Whereas, there is greater chance of the interference of the outer intellect when inspiration comes from the higher mind. Our habitual 'thought-production engine', the outer intellect, arrests the flow

of inspiration. And Sri Aurobindo further wrote that if ‘substance, rhythm, form and words’ come down ready formed from the plane of poetic creation, then that must be taken to be the perfect inspiration. Here are some inspired lines of poetry from *Savitri*:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance  
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies  
Inspired and ruled from Truth’s revealing vault  
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,  
A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
Inhabited with rich creative beats  
A body like a parable of dawn  
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
Or golden temple-door to things beyond. (B1, C2:15)

The best and highest is of course, the Overmind inspiration, and this is also the rarest. Sri Aurobindo says, this inspiration brings the ‘intrinsic word, the spiritual Mantra’. Here is a line from *Savitri*, which perhaps came in the ‘very act of inspiration’:

“The lines that tear the veil from Deity’s face,” (B11:677)

The Vedas and Upanishads are inspired utterances – they give us Mantras of deliverance. But it’s not that everyone can command inspiration at will. So, the inspired words which have been uttered by great poets inspire us in turn. Common men may benefit from the inspiration of the spiritually great, can make it a springboard to leap into the higher consciousness. We can seize upon the inspiring Mantra and work our way to our salvation. In fact, the true purpose of poetry is to ‘see’ and reveal the truth. Sri Aurobindo wrote much under the spell of the highest inspiration and has left us many messages, many Mantras with the help of which we may tide over the existential crisis. Sometimes even a simple, bare utterance can inspire us like a Mantra, as the opening passage of *The Life Divine*:

“The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last---  
God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.” (1)

It recalls to mind the eternal universal prayer of the ancient Upanishadic sage:

From falsehood lead me to truth,  
From darkness lead me to light,  
From death lead me to immortality. (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.3.28)

Like the scriptural Mantras, Sri Aurobindo’s words too have the power to penetrate deep within and burst our outer shell. When we look within us we see that at the core is seated the big error, the cause of life’s malady, of evil. And all evil is due to some disharmony, something left out of balance — whether physical, mental, psychological. Consider our own times which witnessed the surge of an epidemic taking monstrous proportions and making of us its victims one way or the other. Immeasurable destruction at all levels of human existence, the physical, mental, social, economic, was crafted out by the subtle evil forces. What is the present crisis that we have to deal with? It is a life-threatening, world-destroying evil that has gripped man. A most gloomy, most disheartening array of world-wide crisis confronts us. At the individual level, we have made sorrow and suffering and anxiety a sort of default setting in our lives and are unaware of how this is sabotaging our human ability to confront and tackle the menace of the uncertain world, a world that is rapidly changing so that we seem to be left with no definition of the ‘normal’. We are driven along the flux, forgetting the eternal and the permanent. The damage is collateral and global and in subtle ways we are partaking of it and participating in its construction. Turning away from tragedies and sufferings is not



the solution — this only covers the wounds temporarily and perpetuates cycles of suffering. Likewise, mere acceptance of suffering is also perpetuation of violence and evil. Yet, this evil taking the forms of disease, conflicts, climate collapse, will recede, being a temporary rule of disorder, and perhaps it is already saying a reluctant farewell. But more than the deadly virus is the subtler evil of ignorance, egoism, separativeness, imperfection, and this we need to confront and combat on a daily basis. This form of evil persists, and is even permanent at this stage of evolution. Evil has an eternally mutating form, it does not belong to a past or dying world. We live in it, we live with it, and when we fail completely to tackle and subdue it, we succumb to its power. Even though we experience the permanent establishment of evil, with its forms of death and disease, in ourselves, in the earthly plane, yet, it is not inevitable. We allow it, nurture and shelter it when we lose sight of the essential harmony of things—whether in the human body and mind, or generally all around. And in this departure from the truth of our being, we re-experience the ‘Fall’. And because of it, or in spite of it, amidst the curse and chaos, we seek a different order, we seek redemption. Our aspiration, whether we are conscious of it or not, leads us in another direction—towards God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. This finds expression in hymns and prayers and in the various narratives of redemption. Thus it is that we have our eternal cycles of Romance, the various Creation and Fertility myths, proving the power of the human mind to construct, even if imaginatively, a universe shaped according to its desire. But beneath that layer of desire is the basic need of the human psyche which unconsciously prompts the human mind to create another earth of established order and unified vision. And Sri Aurobindo is one great poet who has successfully given us this vision of a unified, transformed world:

Misery shall pass abolished from the earth;  
The world shall be freed from the anger of the Beast,  
From the cruelty of the Titan and his pain.  
There shall be peace and joy for ever more. (*Savitri*, 7.4.507-8)

But then, Sri Aurobindo’s vision goes beyond any Romanticism. His prophetic words embody his vision of a radical transformation of Man and Earth. At this evolutionary juncture, however, we are bound by Time and Fate. Sri Aurobindo’s inspired creative works spell out another vision for us, show us how to transcend these limits and open to another Space and Time, as the two Yogis Aswapati and Savitri did. We have gone through Hell and Purgatory, but only the redemptive wisdom of the seer will help us to reach Paradise. Sri Aurobindo gives us intimations of another mode of existence which will be brought into shape when we rise up leaving behind and below the base of ignorance and egoism. It is not, cannot be, a mere repetition of the old formula, but a new transformed beginning, a new foundation for life. Look at our post-Pandemic world, rising in triumph from illness and fever, to a neo-normal. The human spirit cannot be permanently defeated, however deadly the wounds may be. But there has to be paid a price for everything, there has to be a sacrifice. So let the victim of sacrifice be the evil, the *asura* within us. We need to exterminate the deep-seated evil of falsehood, ignorance, sense of separativeness and exclusiveness from our individual and social systems. We must revive, re-create. We need to be inspired by the thought of a happy, blissful, universe untouched by death and disease; we need the help and guidance of the higher powers. If we cannot be sufficiently creative and inspired ourselves, we can turn to the Master poets and draw from them. When death surrounds and we are submerged in a pall of darkness, when we seem to be losing hope and assurance, with no sense of orientation, the healing touch comes:

Who thinkst that one man dead all joy must cease?  
Hope not to be unhappy till the end:  
For grief dies soon in the tired human heart; (*Savitri*, 10.3.637)

Of course, this is valid in the context of man's present evolutionary status. Sri Aurobindo further reassures us:

Suffering some secret rapture's tragic mask  
And death an instrument of perpetual life.

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Night is not our beginning nor our end;

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By Light we live and to the Light we go. (*Savitri*, 10.1.600-1)

We may intuit Sri Aurobindo's inspiring words for our new way of life, words which have the power to heal, to transform, to create. How reassuring are these words:

Yet for joy and not for sorrow earth was made  
And not as a dream in endless suffering Time.

---

A hidden Bliss is at the root of things.

A mute Delight regards Time's countless works:

To house God's joy in things Space gave wide room,

To house God's joy in self our souls were born. (*Savitri*, B10, C3:629-30)

Mantra is a highly effective technique for healing our wrenching pains. And what is Mantra? An inspired utterance. And when the sense and sound of the Mantra-like utterance reaches our inner being, shall we not be inspired and strive to recreate and transform both our inner and outer universe in a concrete way, live with greater resilience, something which we have been doing in dream and fantasy till now? And that is how we may relate the existential issues with inspiration. Our source of inspiration may have run dry and parched, but we are blessed to have high 'inspiration' at our disposal. The inspired words of Sri Aurobindo become the saving paradigm against our ills and evils, just like the innovation and invention of the scientist has been for material life. Here the tool of knowledge is spiritual, the power is of the spirit. Besides, this concept of salvation through invocation to God is not new, but an ancient practice. Yet, there may not be many serious believers here, but if we can catch the vibrations of the higher spheres and the rhythm of the Mantra, we may hope for the transformation that Sri Aurobindo had envisioned. Inspiration, like the Holy Spirit, shall then cast out the Demon, and its elevating force be the *sanjeevani* for us:

Even now hints of a luminous Truth like stars  
Arise in the mind-mooned splendour of Ignorance;  
Even now the deathless Lover's touch we feel:  
If the chamber's door is even a little ajar,  
What then can hinder God from stealing in  
Or who forbid his kiss on the sleeping soul?  
Already God is near, the Truth is close: (*Savitri*, B10, C4: 649)

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## Eric: Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Inspiration

*Oeendrila Guha*

The sheer volume and dimension of Sri Aurobindo's literary output is breathtaking, to say the least, and he inspired many to take to writing. His inspiration is from the very fountain of the "Illimitable, beyond form or name". (CWSA 34: 657) To make use of John Donne's famous conceit of "the fixed foot" and "th' other foot, obliquely run" of a compass in the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", "the fixed foot" symbolises Sri Aurobindo's fountain of spiritual inspiration: "A living centre of the Illimitable". (CWSA 33: 79) "Th' other foot, obliquely run" signifies Sri Aurobindo's genius to express "the Illimitable" in all aspects of life: yoga, scriptural texts and studies, literature, politics, philosophy, sociology, and many others. "The fixed foot" implies his "inner centre" that "oceans out" as "tones of the Infinite" (Ibid: 323), which can be interpreted as his polymathic nature. And as a literary wizard, the other foot "obliquely" ran a lap of literature, thereby, manifesting one of the "tones of the Infinite". Such a complete personality inspires not only an age but the aeonic game of existence.

He experimented with every category of literature other than the novel. He was not "a creator" of the novel. (CWSA 27: 547) A simple explanation to this voluntary exclusion is: "Novels deal with the vital life of men, so necessarily they bring that atmosphere." (Ibid: 549) He elaborates, "The difficulty is that the subject matter of a novel belongs mostly to the outer consciousness so that a lowering or externalising can easily come." (Ibid: 725) It can be assumed that the genre of the novel is neither philosophically nor psychologically deep even though it does address a relevant theme that deals with life and human experience. If "novels deal with the vital life of men" or "the outer consciousness", then it is not necessarily "done from the psychic or the spiritual consciousness", thus bearing the stamp of its heightening or internalising source. The end result is "going out of the inner state of experience and stimulating the rest of the nature." (Ibid: 725) This is a definite clarification as to why he noted:

If novels touch the lower vital or raise it, they ought not to be read by the sadhak. One can read them only if one can look at them from the literary point of view as a picture of human life and nature which one can observe, as the Yogi looks at life itself, without being involved in it or having any reaction. (Ibid: 730)

But since Sri Aurobindo tried his hand at very specific genres, it can be presumed that it was because he found these genres appropriate to do justice to his heightened and internalised inspiration and realisation. The fact that he wrote plays denotes that he found the dramatic genre a suitable medium to give voice to his spiritual inflatus.

Most of his plays deal with love, but it is not a vital love but a love that helps the giver and the recipient prepare for divine love. It is imperative to love a human being before loving the Divine. This means that human love has to be experienced, furthered and purified to love the Divine. In this sense, human love must progressively manifest as divine love. As M. P. Pandit notes, "Do not look down upon human love. Use human love to arrive at the divine Love. Deepen your love by more and more self-giving. You will land in the lap of divine Love." (48) Such a prospect of love is dealt with in Sri Aurobindo's plays. His plays are cathartic as they

absolve the reader of the age-old concepts of negation and cessation of Life as the vortex of endless desires. Thus, the very structure of his plays promises a unity of action: human love progressively manifesting as divine love. And *Eric* for one delves into the rubrics of love, hatred and revenge to show us that there is a fine line between them. And this fine line can be erased if one responds to a higher call or duty or if one opens oneself to a greater power that can validate binary. The answer of the greater power is in the form of “song”.

The employment of ‘song’, which Aristotle considered as one of the six tenets to mastering the art of writing a perfect tragedy, is common to the classical Greek tragedies and *Eric*. The Aristotelian ‘song’ creates a certain mood, comments on a certain human and moral issue, and narrates events of the past, present, and future. For instance, in *Antigone*, the chorus or Coryphaeus creates a happy mood as the sun rises on Thebes. It mentions mythical characters who have suffered wrongful imprisonment like Antigone, thus elevating her to the status of some of the legendary figures of heroism. sings of love and victory, and humanity’s limitations in the forms of death and impiety, resulting in punishment. It also advises against excess and evil, etc. Moral lessons are imparted:

Happy are they who know not the taste of evil. (Sophocles, 142)  
Roving ambition helps many a man to good,  
And many it falsely lures to light desires,  
Till failure trips them unawares, and they fall  
On the fire that consumes them. (Ibid,143)  
For mortals greatly to live is greatly to suffer. (Ibid)  
An act of homage is good in itself...;  
But authority cannot afford to connive at disobedience. (Ibid, 149)

*Eric* is not a tragedy, imparting moral lessons; nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo applied ‘song’ to tackle questions far beyond the grasp of the human intellect, and its sense of right and wrong in this play.

Tragedy, as a dramatic genre, is the brainchild of the Greeks. But in the Indian context, tragedy was not a genre per se. Rather, it was a mode of analysing issues pertaining to theology and philosophy. Such a mode was explored in Sanskrit literature by Kalidasa. Sri Aurobindo elevated the Aristotelian ‘song’ by contending with issues that had no moral angle. For example, scene 1 of Act I of *Eric* opens with a monologue delivered by King Eric, who seeks enlightenment from Thor and Odin on how to gather strength in order to unite Norway. He says:

... O Thor  
And Odin, masters of the northern world,  
Wisdom and force I have; some strength is hidden  
I have not; I would find it out. Help me,  
Whatever power thou art who mov'st the world,  
To Eric unrevealed. Some sign I ask. (CWSA 3: 533)

The king is a mere mortal, and he prays to Odin and Freya for a hidden strength to contain rebel forces to bring peace and unity to Norway. He aspires to be a unifying force rather than a destructive one. Eric prays to be a nation builder. And Aslaug’s song is a worded reply or “sign” that Eric asked for:

Love is the hoop of the gods  
Hearts to combine.  
Iron is broken, the sword  
Sleeps in the grave of its lord.  
Love is divine.  
Love is the hoop of the gods  
Hearts to combine. (Ibid: 533-534)

Her words flow like a song celebrating love. In *Twelfth Night*, Orsino, Duke of Illyria says, "If music be the food of love, play on". (*Shakespeare*, 349) Similarly, Aslaug's song acts as "the food of love" because it fills Eric with hope and energy. It is as if the gods speak through Aslaug, feeding his entire being with a certitude that he will succeed in uniting Norway, but it is not by brandishing the sword but by desiring love. Aslaug describes love as a "hoop" because a "hoop" or a circle has no beginning or end, reminding us that it connects hearts. This divine "hoop" unites Eric and Aslaug, in extension Norway and the rebel dynasty of Sigvaldson, headed by the crown prince Swegn. The strength that Eric prays for to unite Norway and the rebel dynasty manifests in the figure of Aslaug, who thus embodies love. She is Eric's nemesis as she is sent to kill him; instead, she ends up falling in love with him. The strength that Eric seeks from Thor and Odin to unite Norway is not born of tyranny but of love, kindness and compassion:

For unity is sweet substance of the heart  
And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold,  
Nor any helpless thought the reason knows. (Ibid: 534)

He is aware that coveting kingdoms at the point of the sword serves no purpose. He looks to snare his enemy like a lover wooing the one he loves. Eric's love for her compels Aslaug to give up on seeking vengeance. Ergo, Eric does not vanquish Aslaug by wielding his sword but captivates her and her people with his love. He realises:

From thy bosom my strength  
Comes out to me. Mighty indeed is love,  
Thou sangst of, Aslaug, once, the golden hoop  
Mightier, swifter than the warrior's sword. (Ibid: 616)

Thus, Sri Aurobindo makes perfect use of 'song' to predict the union of two individuals and their people. He also divulges a maxim, that of love being a divine and transformative Force. Eric's love for Aslaug's enriches him: he understands Swegn's anger, wisely pardons Swegn and shares with him his bounty, such as Trondhjem, the palace in Yara and makes him the head of the Norwegian army. Eric's love for Aslaug gives life to Swegn, whose love for his wife and sister trumps his hatred of Eric. The lesson that *Eric* imparts is love forgives: it embraces and includes. After all, doesn't Juliet famously say:

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,  
The more I have, for both are infinite. (*Shakespeare*: 913)

In this manner, Sri Aurobindo elevated the Aristotelian 'song' by superseding moral issues that were of the greatest importance to the Greek dramatists, who invariably used a chorus to comment on the moral nature of the hero's thoughts, actions and feelings with 'song'. The Greek dramatists advocated one needed to fall from moral grace to be delivered

by *deus ex machina*. Sri Aurobindo suggested opening oneself to a higher Force, becoming and remaining a medium of Its expression. The Divine is no avenging entity that comes to humanity's succour only when it falls from moral grace. Manifestation is not a contrived plot that has to be rescued by a miraculous entity, that waits till the very last moment to save a life that has failed morally!

In *Collected Plays and Stories* (CWSA, vols. 3 & 4), in the "Note on the Texts", where it is mentioned:

Sri Aurobindo began work on this play in 1910, shortly after his arrival in Pondicherry, and continued intermittently over a period of several years. No complete fair copy of the play survives... *Eric* was first published in 1960 in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* and as a separate book... No specific source of the plot of *Eric* is known. Sri Aurobindo seems to have made free use of names and events from the history of Norway in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, a period that was the subject of much mediaeval Scandinavian literature. (CWSA 3: 1003)

It is recorded in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* that in the last three years at St. Paul's School London, Sri Aurobindo "simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe." (28) It is small wonder that he was well-versed in mediaeval Scandinavian literature and could compose a play by stringing together Norse gods, goddesses and human beings in the like of the classical Greek plays but with the soulful deliberation on issues pertaining to theology and philosophy that supersede right and wrong.

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# Sri Aurobindo's Invitation

*Shruti Bidwaikar*

“Heaven's call is rare and rarer the heart that heeds,” said Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. What is this call? The call is to rise in consciousness, to undergo intense askesis and be courageous to take the arduous journey of the inner terrains. Why “rarer the heart that heeds”? There are few people who respond to the call of the flute because not everyone is courageous to sport with misadventure and travel through the hell of pain and suffering. Despite knowing this, Sri Aurobindo “invites” us to take up this journey. In his poem “Invitation” written during his solitary imprisonment in Alipore jail during 1908-1909, the poet dares us to follow him.

It is very easy to relate almost all the terms used in this poem with Sri Aurobindo's stay in England and the geographic location of his time spent on the hills and amidst the snow. However, we have to bear in mind that by 1908 he had travelled much in India. He knew the difficult terrains of Sahyadri Mountains and even the Kashmir valley. But this poem is not about what Sri Aurobindo had seen in England or in India. What he refers to in the poem is an inner landscape and the difficulties and ordeals are all inner and nothing on the outside. It is surely not a poem like the one written by William Wordsworth after seeing “ten-thousand” Daffodils at a glance. It is not a recollection. Instead, Sri Aurobindo has used the outer imagery to convey his inner status and the difficulties of the journey to which he has invited us all.

With wind and the weather beating round me  
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.  
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?  
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow? (CWSA 2: 201)

Since this poem was written in jail, we can relate it to the experiences Sri Aurobindo had in solitary confinement and what he underwent there. He mentions in the speech given at Uttarpara after he was released that when he was taken to the prison he was quite upset. He was in the midst of a political storm and suddenly was taken to jail, where he revolted and called the lord. In his own words

When I was arrested and hurried to the Lal Bazar hajat I was shaken in faith for a while, for I could not look into the heart of His intention. Therefore I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to Him, “What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?” A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, “Wait and see.” (CWSA 8: 5)

This was perhaps an inner storm that he faced! Now, then came the answer from within:

It seemed to me that He spoke to me again and said, “The bonds you had not strength to break, I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue. I have another thing for you to do and it is for that I have

brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.”

Sri Aurobindo was brought to the jail by the Divine for ‘training’ as he says. We all know the training period in any field is extremely arduous, difficult and at times fraught with dangers. So was Sri Aurobindo training, perhaps worse than a military training as we know of. The Lord placed the Gita in Sri Aurobindo’s hands and the latter was required to realise it like Arjuna. Sri Aurobindo confirms: “I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Srikrishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work...” (Ibid). If we could even understand the meaning of realising the Gita, we would know that it takes lives to go over desires, ego, bring *samata* and be a faithful instrument of the divine. It was a very big task that was set before Sri Aurobindo. And now the wind and weather that were seemingly outside were to be faced within, all alone, with no friend and companion. This is the time perhaps when Sri Aurobindo starts scaling the levels of consciousness. The reference to “climb” the “snow” covered mountains may refer to this upward march of his consciousness.

Not in the petty circle of cities  
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;  
Over me God is blue in the welkin,  
Against me the wind and the storm rebel. (CWSA 2: 201)

The poet speaks about his freedom, which he attained by being in the jail, through sadhana.

To be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. (CWSA 8: 6)

Sri Aurobindo was “free” from his lower nature. For did he not mention in his “Tales of Prison Life” that he had overcome pain and suffering, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, praise and humiliation, love and repulsion! Obviously, the reference to cities may also be related to desires, ego, material needs and attachments, which he had overcome and surpassed. That is why he is not confined to our “petty circle of cities”. “Over me God is blue in the welkin” perhaps refers to his realisation of Vasudeva in all the animate and inanimate objects around him in the jail. Although in his letters Sri Aurobindo says that “blue” colour in general refers to a spiritual plane, but here the term “God” brings in a persona of Sri Krishna before our eyes. Clearly, the poet had come to a stage where he had Vasudeva darshan after completing the Gita Yoga. But he also mentions the “wind” and the “storm”, because perhaps the resistance from undivine forces also had increased for him.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,  
Of misadventure have made me a friend.  
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?  
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend. (CWSA 2: 201)



Although Sri Aurobindo was in solitary confinement, but here this reference to “solitude in my regions” is not his outer state, but about the journey he had undertaken all alone. It is like a lonely mountaineer trekking up the mountain. He has no friend, no witness, no one to know what joy, pain, suffering and ordeals one goes through. No wonder Sri Aurobindo calls it a “sport”. It certainly has joys, pains and rewards. The reward is that one attains width of consciousness and freedom from the lower nature. This however, is not an adventure sport, but a “misadventure” where there could be many meanderings and risks. But sportsperson is ready and willing to take risks. Sri Aurobindo took this risk for he had Sri Krishna as his guide and friend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,  
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.  
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger  
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side. (Ibid)

Here is the final invitation and caution. All through Sri Aurobindo described the dangers and yet invited us to try this sport fraught with misadventures. This may lead one to master the Nature. We know, all this while he mentioned wind as rebellious, but now, he has mastered even the tempest. He has climbed that state of consciousness where he is the Lord of the “mountain” (meaning to overcome ego) and realised the Spirit. However, this journey requires tremendous courage, patience and perseverance. One who wants to follow Sri Aurobindo, has to be a “kinsman to danger” with utter faith in the Divine. Only then can he attain the kingdom that Sri Aurobindo had attained and become a perfect instrument of the Divine. The proof that Sri Aurobindo had become one is his Uttarpara speech when he had surrendered completely and became a perfect transmitter of the higher consciousness.

Such then is the invitation from Sri Aurobindo, who having gone through the ordeals of Gita Yoga, invites us to travel the path. On this journey, he would be with us for, does he not call: “Who will come with me?” The beauty of this “heaven’s call” is that the Lord is there with us as “Friend” and “Lover” as he was with Sri Aurobindo. Now, do we have the courage to respond to this invitation? If we do, we would be blessed because Sri Aurobindo himself would handhold us and take us through the misadventures of life and we attain the “freedom”.

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# Sri Aurobindo: An Inspiration for Today's World

*Indresh Chauhan*

In celebrating Sri Aurobindo's sesquicentennial (150 years) birth anniversary, we must also pause to remember that it has been more than 70 years since his passing. Seventy years is a long time for the ink on the pages of modern world history to become faint and forgotten. While the writings and works of Sri Aurobindo may have become somewhat hard to recollect by the vast majority of today's inhabitants of Planet Earth, his words, prose, and philosophical ideas, teachings, and thoughts never fail to deliver a powerful punch to one's spiritual and intellectual "stomach" irrespective of religious or philosophical beliefs or lack thereof.

In a world where strife is considered a part and parcel of modern living accompanied with a sense of dejected forbearance, Sri Aurobindo provides a clear explanation regarding how and why the One Divine in each of us is constantly yearning for experiences that are often diverse, divergent, and distinct, that can outwardly result in disagreements, conflicts, and friction. At its root, he states, this is not merely because of differences and disagreements on the superficial surface of rational and emotional human consciousness, rather, it is the result of the omniscient Divine manifesting as a personal, individual, and separate self to savor, partake, and taste the delights of soulful experiences in as many infinitely myriad forms as possible.

These experiences are not random in nature and accidents of time and space but represent the unfathomable ways that lead to an ever-evolving spiral of an all-encompassing evolutionary growth – both individual and collective; human and animal; matter and non-matter, for, everything is a manifestation of the One Divine. "Oneness" and the constant process of evolution through involution and evolution of consciousness form the bedrock of Sri Aurobindo's core ideas and teachings.

Sri Aurobindo has the magical super ability to clearly see evolutionary history in its essence and not get lost in the minutiae of events, dates, theories, and personalities. He has the unique metaphysical foresight to distill the guiding principles that are not just rooted in rationality and logic but are also reconciled with the ancient wisdom ingrained in religions and spiritual philosophies and traditions across the globe since times immemorial.

If there is one unique aspect of Sri Aurobindo that truly stands out, it is that he is always ruthlessly practical in his utterances and writings. Sri Aurobindo speaks and writes from lived experiences that span the entire gamut of human consciousness development from the material to emotional; from emotional to mental; and from mental to spiritual. When he writes about traveling the treacherous valleys beyond the ego, he has indeed transversed his own. When he talks about the nature and powers of the higher, illumined, and intuitive minds, he has himself experienced these mentalized states. When he describes the indescribable qualities of the supermind and supramental consciousness, he has indeed tasted the Divine nectar while traversing the excruciating journey from the lower levels of consciousness to the highest peaks.

In today's world where rationality, reason, analysis, and technology rule the roost, despite all advancements, moral, ethical, relational, and societal gulfs have emerged that have

caused people to look with despondence to the receding shores of purpose, life-meaning, and tranquility. Most people struggle to comprehend and make sense of the multitude of pathways, personalities, and philosophies that are supposedly available for emotional, psychological, mental, and spiritual advancement. As a result, confusion, frustration, and disillusionment abound leading to the ultimate negation of spirituality and consciousness and their place in the grand scheme of human evolution and fulfillment.

Sri Aurobindo solves this conundrum for today's humanity by clearly categorizing the human development of thought, literature, philosophies, and practices into the four "paths" towards evolutionary spiritual growth. These paths are namely, religion, occultism, spiritual philosophy, and spiritual experience. Sri Aurobindo unambiguously describes what these paths are and their objectives and methods. He doesn't negate or belittle any of these paths; in fact, he puts into proper perspective the need, the process, and payoffs of each and how, when indulged in sequential and synchronized manner, these paths are the surest ways for individual and collective deliverance from ignorance – the primal and original "sin" – not the biblical version that calls for damnation and occasional visits to the purgatory.

Sri Aurobindo deftly places the need for religions, beliefs, creeds, philosophies, occult practices, and spiritual teachings into their proper hierarchies so that the common man can see through the cacophony and appreciate the rainbow of diverse value systems and practices without passing preconceived judgements that often cause division and violence in the "civilized" world of today. It is indeed an irony that more people have died fighting for the advancement of peace-espousing religions than for the lands and riches of the world.

Sri Aurobindo's ability to clearly and satisfactorily explain the mechanics and purpose of surface divisions of the human race serves to light the candle of understanding and acceptance, if not complete peace. Sri Aurobindo does not negate division and differences, rather, he identifies the need for these as necessary preconditions for growth and evolution of consciousness that aligns to individual and collective dispositions and evolutionary natures at any given moments in time, geography, and history. For at its root, the crisis of humanity throughout evolutionary history has been the crisis of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy diverges from most other schools of thought with its focus on the practical, actionable, and justifiably reasonable practice of Integral Yoga whose ultimate objective is union with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo does not espouse escapist tendencies from the troubles of the world to gain some form of "moksha" and relief as demonstrated by some ascetic traditions around the world. On the contrary, his Integral Yoga emphasizes the reconciliation of the inner and outer growth for the development and evolution of the Complete Man. Inner growth as it relates to an inward silence and quietening of the incessant monkey-mind beyond the fragile ego. And outer growth as it relates to one's place in the affairs of the world – one's worldly duties, responsibilities, and works. The guiding principles that backdrop Integral Yoga are based on the two crucial but interlinked qualities of "Equality" and "Surrender".

Equality, in its essence, has at its core, the principle of acceptance of everything, every condition, every happenstance, as a Divine gift to be partaken with equal happiness and delight – not so much as an outwardly show of emotions and reactions but an inwardly happiness, bliss, peace, calm that is rooted in the firm knowledge of the truth of one's Divine

manifestation and Divine purpose that is forever culminating into the evolution of Nature towards perfection even if that perfection appears to be “work-in-progress”. This evolution, Sri Aurobindo also calls “Integral Evolution” – the evolution of the inner being and the outer being, the individual and the collective. Integral Evolution and Integral Yoga do not mean non-action or paralysis or inertia, but rather, the “right” action that is guided by the Divine “will” at any given moment in time and space.

Surrender, a co-joined twin of Equality, is the consistent and constant letting go of the “I”, the ego, in every task, every activity, every thought, until everything becomes a consecration to the Divine. In the mindset of surrender, personal preferences, opinions, points of view, expectations, desires, give way to the Divine will and guidance. Like Equality, Surrender does not mean non-action or the process of giving up, but rather, it signifies openly and willingly embracing the Divine guidance in every facet of life by letting go of the crystalized and inflexible mindsets, beliefs, and value systems.

One can imagine the scale and speed of humanity’s transformation even if a small number of early adopters were to apply Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Integral Yoga and Integral Evolution in daily life. The multiplier effect (sometimes called the hundredth monkey effect) shall take care of the rest in due course. The demonstrable impact of balance, harmony, and higher knowledge in every area of human life shall serve as fitting examples for others to follow. Conflicts, disagreements, and falsehoods shall still remain, but their overwhelmingly pincer-like grip on humanity shall start to loosen, slowly at first, but rapidly and steadily with time.

Despite being one of the most mentally and spiritually brilliant sons of Mother Earth, Sri Aurobindo does not wish to be worshipped, blindly obeyed, or prophesized into a prophet. The kernel of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings is based on incessant enquiry, reflection, and questioning so much so that he often times assumes the role of his own prosecutor. For every argument he professes, Sri Aurobindo throws a relentless barrage of sharp arrows of questions, doubts, and conjectures. He then proceeds to answer each with examples, logic, and deep insights. In the end, the reader-observer-witness is left open-mouthed and open-minded, forever changed by the encounter. Indeed, in some ways, if that is not individual mental and spiritual evolution, then what is?

In a sense, Sri Aurobindo’s teachings are the “bridge” between where humanity is today and where it needs to go. Through the process and discipline of awareness, contemplation, reflection, research, enquiry, understanding, proof-seeking, and calibration, Sri Aurobindo teaches the individual and the collective global society to build the spiritual muscle-memory that will ultimately drive the upward spiral of mental, spiritual and consciousness evolution, turn after turn, onto its onward spiral journey towards the Supramental Absolute Reality. Through the study of Sri Aurobindo, one realizes that the trials and travails of today are absolutely necessary preconditions for future and foregone growth of mental and spiritual human evolution. That realization leads to hope and inspiration for humanity of today and future generations to come. That is the real essence, message, revelation, and gift of Sri Aurobindo.



## In Pursuit of Beauty

*Debaleena Bhattacharjee and Debashish Mukherjee*

Photography is considered by many to be a skill that can be developed and honed with practice and understanding of one's apparatus. Yet, no amount of practice and technical knowledge can shape a photographer. The adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words", becomes true when the photographer develops an eye of an artist.

Therefore, the artist within looks through the view finder and recognises the art of nature and the photographer captures the moments. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"Skill is not art, talent is not art. Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence".

Here is a humble attempt to express the beauty of nature through a series of photographs covering the Himalayan foot hills, north-eastern landscapes to the southern deccan plateaus of India as their inspiration stemmed from certain lines written by Sri Aurobindo. These pictures were taken in the span of three years from 2018 to 2021.



**Beauty is his footprint showing us where he has passed,  
(Savitri, Book II, Canto II)  
[Description: Peacock Tail. Location: Tamil Nadu; Year: 2018]**



**All like a lily from her leaves escaped  
The golden summer kissed her close and wrapped  
In soft revealing sunshine  
– Sri Aurobindo ('Khaled of the Sea')**  
[Description: A water-lily. Location: Tamil Nadu; Year 2020]



**Hidden nature is secret God  
– Sri Aurobindo**  
[Description: A forest landscape of Gorumara National Park.  
Location: West Bengal; Year: 2018 ]



**...the work-room of the bee.**

**– Sri Aurobindo ('Songs to Myrtilla')**

**[Description: A stingless-bee collecting pollen from the heart of a lily.**

**Location: Puducherry; Year: 2018]**



**... flowers and trees are the poetry of Nature**

**– Sri Aurobindo**

**[Description: Buds of Cannonball tree ('Couroupita guianensis').**

**Location: Tamil Nadu; Year 2020]**



**In the pattern and bloom of the flowers He is woven,  
– Sri Aurobindo ('Who')**

**[Description: Two Cateleya orchids. Location: Tamil Nadu; Year: 2020]**



**...like a butterfly escaped from the chrysalis and disporting itself in the air  
on its light and coloured wings.**

**– Sri Aurobindo**

**[Description: An upper-wing view of a Blue Pansy Butterfly ('Junonia orithya').  
Location: Tamil Nadu; Year: 2021]**



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Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty, Ph.D., was formerly Professor and Head, Department of English, University of Hyderabad, [an Institution of Eminence], Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Odisha and Governing Board Member of Auroville Foundation, administered by the, MHRD, Government of India. He was a Member of India's Commission of Education to the UNESCO, Consultant to the Ford Foundation, and Senior Academic Associate at the American Studies Research Centre, [ASRC], Hyderabad.

Winner of many national and international awards, such as the Katha, British Council, Fulbright, Charles Wallace, and the Salzburg, he has published extensively in the fields of British, American, Gender, translation and post-colonial Studies. His books have appeared in Oxford, Sage, Routledge and Orient Longman, among other notable Publishing Houses. His essays have appeared, among others, in India International Centre Quarterly, South Asia Review, Seminar Magazine, Economic and Political Quarterly and Frontline Magazine.

### **Dr. Soumitra Basu**

Dr. Soumitra Basu, MD, DPM is a Consultant Psychiatrist, dividing his professional time between Kolkata and Pondicherry. He has been working to develop consciousness paradigms in health and psychology from Sri Aurobindo's perspective. He is one of the editors of the Journal of Integral Health, NAMAHA ([www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)), one of the Founder-Directors of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Integral Health and Research, Pondicherry, Director of the Institute of Integral Yoga Psychology, Auroshakti Foundation and Honorary Secretary of Mirravision Trust (a public charitable Trust dedicated to Sri Aurobindo's vision). He has been serially presenting chapter-wise discourses on the Life Divine ([www.iiyp.net](http://www.iiyp.net)) and the Ideal of Human Unity ([www.motsac.org](http://www.motsac.org)) from the psychological perspective.

### **Dr. Charan Singh**

Dr. Charan Singh Kedarkhandi is a poet, thinker and an avid seeker of Sri Aurobindo's path and is closely associated with the works of Sri Aurobindo Society in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In 2013, he earned his PhD on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri. He regularly contributes articles and papers on different aspects of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At present he is working as assistant professor in English at a govt college in Joshimath, Uttarakhand.

### **Dr. Beloo Mehra**

Dr. Beloo Mehra felt a divine love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sometime in the summer of 2004. On the intellectual side it was primarily the cultural, social and educational thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which first drew her in. It was the love of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that brought Beloo back to India in 2007 after having studied, lived and worked for more than 14 years in the US. She writes regularly for several journals and magazines and also for her blogs.

**Mr. Anmol Jain**

IT engineer by training, quit corporate world to pursue Yoga, engaged in the study of Sri Aurobindo and other spiritual literature.

**Dr. Shraddha Mohanty**

A doctorate in English Literature, Shraddha is a teacher in English for more than ten years. She has been teaching and inspiring students of Higher School and conducting workshops for their personality development. She has deep interest in Sri Aurobindo's works and has been writing research papers for various journals on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She is trying to implement Integral education pedagogy in her workplace.

**Ms. Lakshmi Jyothi C**

Ms Lakshmi Jyothi is the founder of the portal auroindian.co.in, which promotes spiritual tourism in India. She aspires to apply her understanding of the vision of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, to the changing times of the contemporary world. On her academic and professional front, Ms Lakshmi Jyothi is from the 1st batch of Masters in Tourism Administration in the country, graduating from Pondicherry University. She has held senior positions in a wide spectrum of tourism segments straddling both public and private sectors. These include working with Ramoji films and the secretariat of Andhra Pradesh.

**Dr. Martha Orton**

Dr. Martha Orton is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association's Editorial Advisory Board. Dr. Martha Orton has studied the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years. She is a psychotherapist and values incorporating spiritual perspectives into her work. Martha is a writer and scholar with a PhD in Sri Aurobindo Studies. Her previous publications include poetry and journal articles on aspects on the Integral Yoga. At present, she is on the faculty of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research.

**Dr. Larry Seidlitz**

Larry Seidlitz, Ph.D., is a devotee and scholar of Sri Aurobindo's yoga who has been on SACAR's team since 2004. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on the yoga, and edits books for other scholars on the yoga. He was formerly a research psychologist in the USA.

**Ms. Deepshikha Reddy**

Ms. Deepshikha Reddy is from the faculty of SACAR. She has spent her life in the field of education right from the level of school to that of a university. Apart from being a speaker, she is also well known as a singer of hymns and bhajans at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville.

**Dr. Falguni Jani**

Dr. Falguni Jani is a counselor in Integral Psychotherapy. She worked in Surat for 20 years as school counselor for students, teachers and parents. Worked with Psychiatrist to help patients Suffering from various mental illnesses. She shifted to Pondicherry in 2016 and is working at SACAR as facilitator for online courses on Integral Psychotherapy and Integral health.

**Dr. Madhumita Dutta**

Dr Madhumita is an Associate Professor in English with Vidyasagar College for Women, Kolkata. She has done her Ph.D on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, from

Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. She has published five books and has presented many papers in conferences in India and abroad.

**Ms. Oeendriila Guha**

Oeendriila Guha is an alumna of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (S.A.I.C.E) and Pondicherry University. Her interest lies in literature. She is now in to content writing.

**Dr. Shruti Bidwaikar**

Shruti Bidwaikar is an aspiring devotee and learner of Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision. Her doctorate thesis was on Sri Aurobindo's Poetics and Aesthetics. From being a student of SACAR from 2007, she joined work at SACAR as Assistant Director in 2014 to serve here and grow closer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Shruti is also the Assistant Editor of the journal *New Race* which was blessed by the Mother in 1964. She has published several papers in various journals and continues to research on Aesthetics, Indian Culture and *Savitri*.

**Ms. Debaleena Bhattacharjee**

Debaleena Bhattacharjee has been trained in Kathak under the guidance of her Guru, Shrimati Ila Devi Poddar, for the past sixteen years as she began to explore the Jaipur Gharana style. A performing artist, a choreographer and a composer, she has performed in Kathak Recitals and Dance Dramas, before select audience in temple courtyards, dance festivals as well as in theatres across the country. She spent her formative years in the unique environment of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (S.A.I.C.E). At present, she continues to learn under the guidance of her Guru and take forward the ancient Guru-Shishya Parampara of imparting the knowledge learned from a Guru to others.

**Mr. Indresh Chauhan**

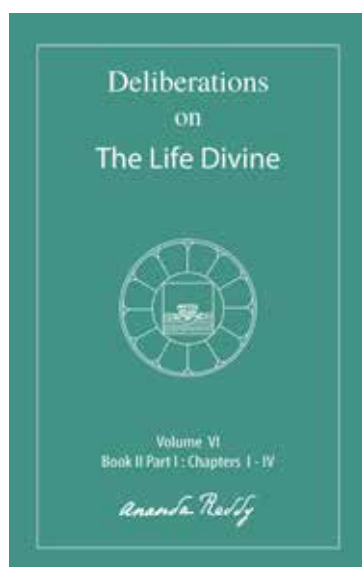
Indresh has over 2 decades of experience in digital learning having worked with global customers in various domains. It was a natural providence that Indresh gravitated towards the learning industry having come from a multi-generational family of educationists. Being a life-long learner, in his own life, his focus is introspection, self-improvement, & spiritual evolution by understanding & implementing Sri Aurobindo & Mother's principles in every facet of life.

**Mr. Debashish Mukherjee**

Debashish Mukherjee is from Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry. Born in Kolkata, West Bengal, he had moved to Pondicherry at the tender age of two, ever since continues to reside there. He has received his schooling from kindergarten till graduation in the unique environment of S.A.I.C.E. Then went on to pursue an BCom degree from P.U. Currently, he works in S.A.A and pursues his love for photography which he developed thanks to the multifaceted education system of S.A.I.C.E.



## Our Publications in 2022



### **Deliberations on *The Life Divine*. Volumes 6,7,8,9**

Author: Dr. V. Ananda Reddy

Published by: SACAR Trust

These volumes cover the explanations of all the chapters of Book II Part I of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. The Author has taken the key ideas from each chapter, explained and expanded it in simple words. Since these are edited transcripts of the talks delivered over many years, the text maintains an oral style.

The books are available at SACAR and Sabda.

### **Sri Aurobindo: The Grand Synthesis**

Author: Dr. V. Ananda Reddy

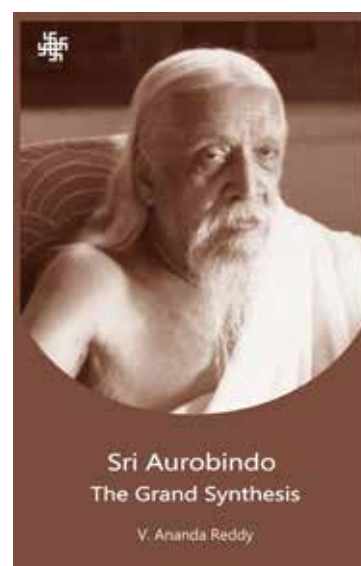
Published by: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi

A book authored by Dr. V. Ananda Reddy, published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo.

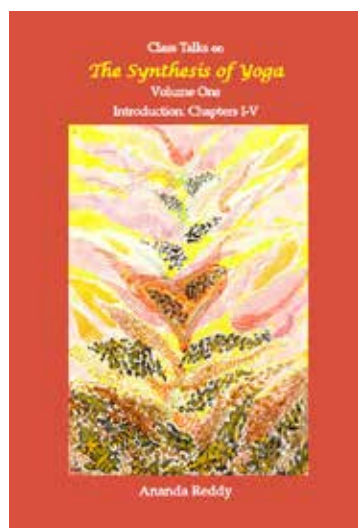
As a mark of tribute, the author has given highlights of each of the major volumes of Sri Aurobindo.

This book will serve as a reference guide to University students who find Sri Aurobindo's original writings difficult to understand.

The book is available at IGNCA, Puducherry and SACAR Trust.



### **Upcoming Books**



1. Talks on *The Synthesis of Yoga* 4 volumes
2. Elucidation on *Essays on the Gita* 5 volumes
3. *Savitri*: A Guide to Integral Yoga 5 volumes
4. Sri Aurobindo: The Eternity's Delegate
5. The Magnificent *Savitri*
6. Deliberations on *The Life Divine* volumes 10,11,12

As might a soul on Nature's background limned  
Stand out for a moment in a house of dream  
Created by the ardent breath of life,  
So he appeared against the forest verge  
Inset twixt green relief and golden ray.  
As if a weapon of the living Light,  
Erect and lofty like a spear of God  
His figure led the splendour of the morn.  
Noble and clear as the broad peaceful heavens  
A tablet of young wisdom was his brow;  
Freedom's imperious beauty curved his limbs,  
The joy of life was on his open face.  
His look was a wide daybreak of the gods,  
His head was a youthful Rishi's touched with light,  
His body was a lover's and a king's.  
In the magnificent dawning of his force  
Built like a moving statue of delight  
He illumined the border of the forest page.

– Sri Aurobindo

*Savitri*, CWSA 34: 393