



Renaissance

Sri Aurobindo Society
INDIA FROM PAST DAWNS TO FUTURE NOONS



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Theme:
Sri Aurobindo
The Avatar of the Future

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“It is not by books that Sri Aurobindo ought to be studied but by subjects—what he has said on the Divine, on Unity, on religion, on evolution, on education, on self-perfection, on supermind, etc., etc.”

– The Mother (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 206)

Guided by this advice from the Mother, *Renaissance* aims to bring to the readers thoughtfully curated pearls of deep wisdom from the oceanic writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as other sadhaks and devotees, on a variety of themes. Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, *Renaissance* is a monthly online journal with special focus on India's Rebirth through Integral Yoga.



Sri Aurobindo Society

BHĀRATSHAKTI

INDIA – FROM PAST DAWNS TO FUTURE NOONS



Sri Aurobindo's Avataric Work

The Mother

Editor's Note: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are ONE consciousness. This was affirmed repeatedly by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through various correspondences and talks. They worked together as One consciousness to bring down the Supramental Consciousness on the Earth. So, when it comes to speaking about the true significance of this Avataric Work, only the Mother can speak about it with perfect certitude and clarity. We highlight two passages from the Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 3, pp. 173-174.

FROM OVERMIND TO SUPERMIND

Sri Aurobindo's work is a unique earth-transformation.

Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the Truth. But in between is what he has distinguished as the Overmind, the world of the cosmic Gods.

Now it is this Overmind that has up to the present governed our world: it is the highest that man has been able to attain in illumined consciousness. It has been taken for the Supreme Divine and all those who have reached it have never for a moment doubted that they have touched the true Spirit. For, its splendours are so great to the ordinary human consciousness that it is absolutely dazzled into believing that here at last is the crowning reality.

And yet the fact is that the Overmind is far below the true Divine. It is not the authentic home of the Truth. It is only the domain of the *formateurs*, all those creative powers and deities to whom men have bowed down since the beginning of history.

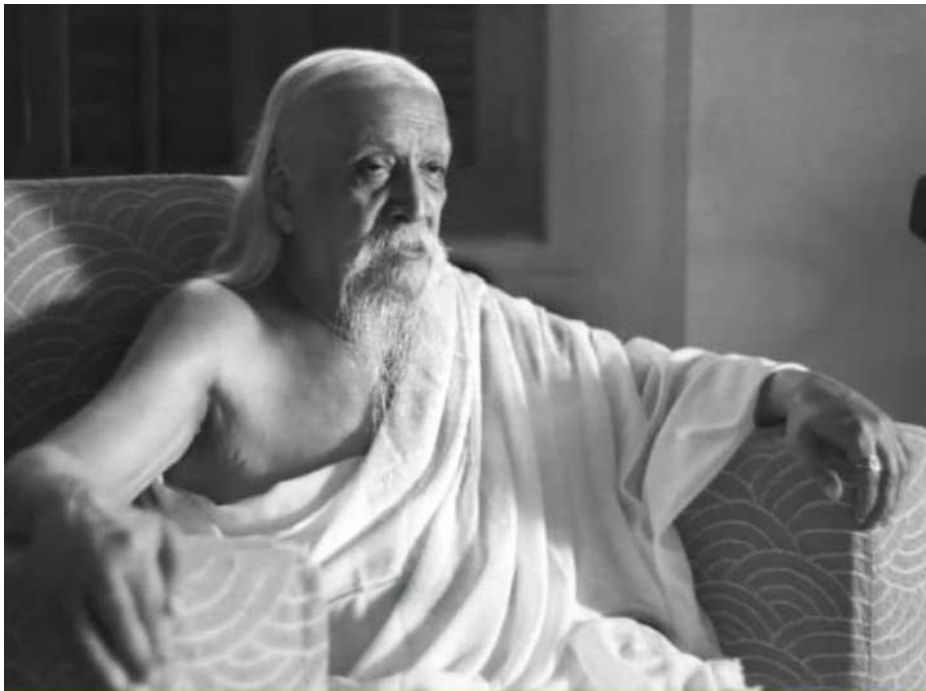
And the reason why the true Divine has not manifested and transformed the earth-nature is precisely that the Overmind has been mistaken for the Supermind. The cosmic Gods do not wholly live in the Truth-Consciousness: they are only in touch with it and represent, each of them, an aspect of its glories.

No doubt, the Supermind has also acted in the history of the world but always through the Overmind. **It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit.** For, in the Overmind there is already the play of possibilities which marks the beginning of this lower triple world of Mind, Life and Matter in which we have our existence.

And whenever there is this play and not the spontaneous and infallible working of the innate Truth of the Spirit, there is the seed of distortion and ignorance. Not that the Overmind is a field of ignorance; but it is the border-line between the

Higher and the Lower, for, the play of possibilities, of separate even if not yet divided choice, is likely to lead to deviation from the Truth of things.

The Overmind, therefore, does not and cannot possess the power to transform humanity into divine nature. For that, the Supramental is the sole effective agent. And what exactly differentiates our Yoga from attempts in the past to spiritualise life is that we know that the splendours of the Overmind are not the highest reality but only an intermediate step between the mind and the true Divine.



Sri Aurobindo's
work is a unique
earth-transformation.



The Mother
CWM, 3: 173

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It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit.



The Mother
CWM, 3: 173

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THE WORK OF THE AVATAR FOR A NEW CREATION

The consciousness is like a ladder: at each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness; but then one does not retain the ladder, whereas the great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more step to the ladder without losing contact with the material, the capacity to reach the Highest and at the same time connect the top with the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes.

To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realisation, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step to the ladder there is a new creation upon earth....

The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supramental; as a result of it, the consciousness will be able to enter the supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation and then come down to establish here a new creation.

Certainly this is not the last, for there are farther ranges of being; but now we are at work to bring down the supramental, to effect a reorganisation of the world, **to bring the world back to the true divine order. It is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place; and the chief spirit or force, the Shakti active at present is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organisation.**

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being.

He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.



What Sri Aurobindo Means to Me

Amal Kiran

Editor's note: This writing by K. D. Sethna (named Amal Kiran by Sri Aurobindo). highlights the vast, integral being of Sri Aurobindo, a Rishi and an Avatar, as well as the greatly endearing personality of Sri Aurobindo, a modern Guru. We also get a glimpse of life in the early years of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

This memoir was published in *Mother India*, 1972 (Vol. XXIV, no. 10-11, November-December issue, pp. 750-754). Amal Kiran actually wrote this first for a special volume brought out by Sahitya Akademi to commemorate Sri Aurobindo's centenary, titled *Indian Literature, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) Birth Centenary Number* (pp. 90-94).

I was at college when I first heard of Sri Aurobindo.

I read somewhere that he was a master of English as well as familiar with several other languages both ancient and modern. I also learnt that he was a great Yogi who had the power to appear in many places at the same time!

What impressed my young mind was not so much this alleged power as his multi-linguism. I took it for granted that a great Yogi should be able to flout the common laws of space and time. **But I was struck by the fact that this spiritual figure should be at home in such a number of languages and therefore of literatures.** Here was somebody who possessed a Light from beyond our earth and yet saw meaning in earthly endeavour and expression.

Such a seer could not but have some meaning for me. However, I was engrossed in my own pursuits and they were not always such as might lead one to the spiritual path. The analytic intellect had grown rather strong in me and I came to carry like a challenging flame the modern temper of doubt and denial.

During a short period, I professed downright materialism and atheism. There was for me no Soul, there was for me no God. An idealistic vein in my nature loved great poetry and kindled up to great art: their "immortal longings" struck a responsive chord in my heart, but the modern temper held sway on the whole and the name of Sri Aurobindo receded into the background.

A series of unexpected events jolted my intellectual self-sufficiency and sent my emotional part looking for a permanence behind transient things, a support of some love which would be eternal and all-understanding. The all-understanding-ness was an important desideratum. For I was quite a bit of a complexity, my mind and character having a great many sides which sometimes drew me in different directions.

I now started searching for a Guru. A number of Sadhus and Yogis I caught hold of, asking them for some satisfying revelation. **It was in this period of a vague Godward turn that I came across a Theosophist who was also an art critic. When he saw that I was on a spiritual quest he said: "Nobody except Sri Aurobindo will satisfy you."**

This was strange, coming from a Theosophist whose world is chockful of occult Masters forming a coterie among themselves and leaving no room for any outsider like Sri Aurobindo. **My friend added: "Sri Aurobindo has the Cosmic Consciousness."**

The Theosophist's testimony in general and this phrase in particular joined up with the memorable impression made by the statement that Sri Aurobindo was a multi-linguist. But I still did not realise the exact nature of the spiritual life which he represented. The basic meaning of his Yoga had not yet gone home to me.

Then a most amazing coincidence happened.

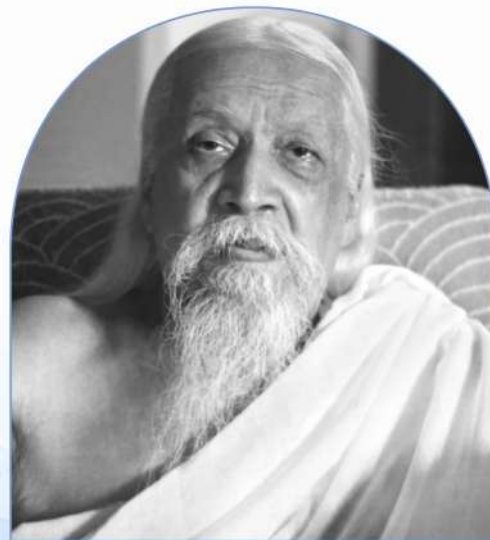
I went to Bombay's well-known Crawford Market to buy a pair of shoes. I took my purchase away in a box wrapped by the shopkeeper in a sheet of newspaper. On uncovering the box the news-sheet fell back disclosing a big headline: "A Visit to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo."

Immediately I devoured the article. It gave a broad idea of the earth-accepting and life-transforming Yoga practised in the Pondicherry Ashram. All kinds of work, all activities of thought, all movements of literature and art were sought to be taken up into the spiritual life and given their fullest value. I felt nothing in me would be suppressed and discarded, everything would be fulfilled in the light of the Eternal and the Infinite.

I wrote to the Ashram, seeking permission to come and live there. The reply was encouraging. So I made my pilgrimage to Pondicherry in the shoes that had brought me that eye-opener of an article.

I was twenty-three at the time. **Yoga is not easy on any account – and for a young man it was bound to be pretty difficult at first. For, however life-accepting, no Yoga would be worth its name if the old turns of life were not rectified and dedicated to the Divine.** Asceticism was never imposed in the Ashram, but to 'take everything with an inner detachment and equanimity' was the constant call. And every minute was meant to be a gesture of remembering the Divine and offering oneself to Him.

A subtle discipline in the midst of a wide freedom lay at the basis of this "Integral Yoga". Yes, it was not a smooth canter all the way. But the returns were great. There were intense inner experiences.



The most divine being that I could ever hope to meet, Sri Aurobindo was also the most human person I have ever met.

~ Amal Kiran



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The discovery of an inmost self whose very nature is bliss, the sense of being free from the shackles of the body, the enlightening influx of a force from above the brain-mind — these were no small rewards. And the rewards were all the more rich because of the source from which they flowed: the grand personality of Sri Aurobindo, the beautiful presence of his co-worker, the Mother.

And the Master and the Mother came close to us with their gracious abundance of love and light in a thousand ways.

The Mother met us again and again each day, a guide and helper in every problem. The Master, who a year before I joined the Ashram had withdrawn from public contacts in order to concentrate on the momentous work in hand and bring about its consummation sooner, was very far indeed from being a world-shunning recluse.

He kept in touch with us all the time by writing profusely to us in answer to our questions on every imaginable topic. His interest in our literary activities was immense. He carried on his own literary creation too. Up to the end of his life he kept up his correspondence with me.

Not only did he want my self-critical faculty to be on the alert, but also asked me to comment on the epic he had been writing for years, *Savitri*. Its 23,814 lines of superb blank verse are at once a legend and a symbol and a philosophy, charged everywhere with what the ancient Rishis called the Mantra. *Savitri* itself sums it up in a Mantric utterance:

*Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's
great deeps.*

~ CWSA, 34: 383

Patiently he considered all that my well-meaning impudence felt to be occasional shortcomings or oversights in the colossal poem. Mostly he demonstrated to me my errors of judgment. But now and again he gladly acted on my suggestions.

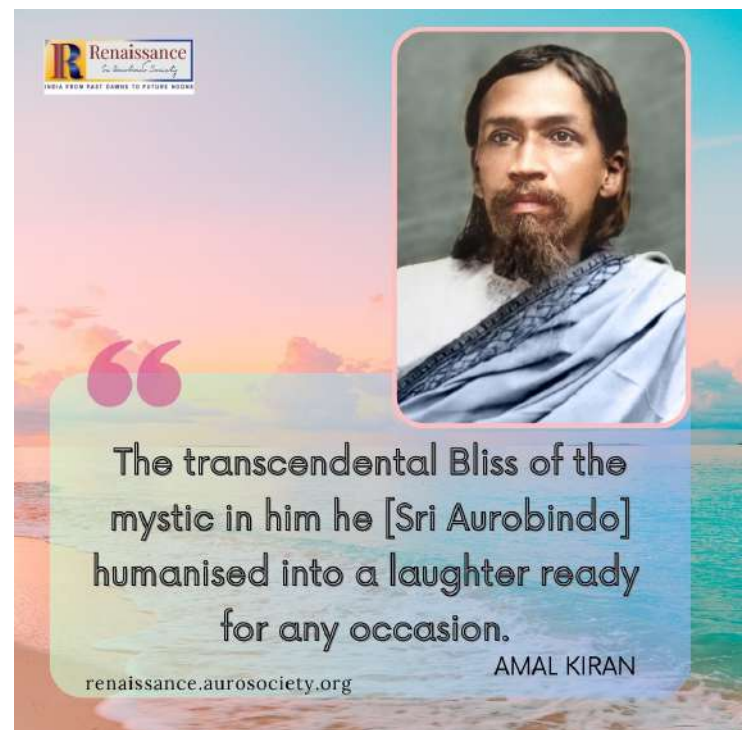
Here was a Guru who never sat on a deliberate pedestal. But he built for himself a throne of thrones in our hearts and minds by his intimacy and naturalness and that rare humility which stands always in front of the inexhaustible Infinite whose touch lends "a Yonder to all ends".

The most divine being that I could ever hope to meet, Sri Aurobindo was also the most human person I have ever met. Nor was his humanness definable only in terms of his affectionate fatherly attitude which led us onward and upward by the very splendour of spirit he brought so close to us. Its definition has also a deep evolutionary meaning.

Sri Aurobindo represented at the same time descending Godhead and ascending Manhood. The whole passion of man's history, the whole arduousness of man's aeonic adventure lived in him. He was no sudden isolated wonder, not merely a haloed visitor from another and brighter world come down on earth to set our air ablaze for a while and make us eager to go soaring into his empyrean.

He stood as a gatherer-up of all our problems and difficulties into himself, making them part of his own flesh and blood so as to know them from the inside and find their final solution. Repeatedly has he said that unless he had passed through every difficulty to which his disciples were subject and unless he had discovered and exemplified on his own pulses the conquest of them he could never assure us that they could be overcome by us.

All through his own ordeals — the trials of a spiritual pioneer, the first invoker and realiser of the hitherto unmanifest "Supermind" which holds the original truth, the perfect model of every term of the cosmic evolutionary travail, **all through the challenges of his Yoga he had the liveliest sense of humour.**



The transcendental Bliss of the mystic in him he humanised into a laughter ready for any occasion. He has even joked unreservedly about himself. And his divine levity has often shot with sunshine the clouds in which so many of his disciples got wrapped time and again. When my friend Nirodbaran, whom he had dubbed “Man of Sorrows”, wrote to him after a Darshan: “Your Himalayan austerity and grandeur take my breath away, making my heart palpitate”, he replied: “O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stem! every blasted thing I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all you people?”

Our age is one in which old pomp and ceremony are laughed to scorn. **Sri Aurobindo’s laughter has never been derisive, but he has made light of conventions and creeds that have outlived their use.** The period in which he was educated in England from his seventh to his twenty-first year was, as he put it, “the heyday of materialism”. The mind of materialism has been simultaneously a liberator from age-long superstitions that curb the scientific drive of rationality, and a confiner within a new dogmatism of physical experiment and mathematical formula.

Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary Avatar, could not but allow the representative currents of modern thought to run through his being and come forth transfigured. In his early life he passed through a genuine phase of agnosticism. So he knew intimately

how to deal with a mentality such as mine had once been. He has spoken of gigantic doubts through which he had to cut his way to spiritual certitude. **He has even said, incredible as it may seem from the lips of the greatest contemporary Yogi: “I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality.”** And he has followed up with the words:

“I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting—I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake—a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence.”

~ CWSA, 35: 412

Here, in the universal significance, the lesson of aspiring will-power for the whole world, with which he, who bore within himself the supreme status that has need of nothing, filled the labour of his incarnate days — here is what Sri Aurobindo pre-eminently means to me.



Sri Aurobindo, the Future Advancing Towards its Realisation

Beloo Mehra

Speaking of Sri Aurobindo's advent as a "decisive action direct from the Supreme", the Mother reveals that Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world of "the beauty of the future that must be realised" (CWM, 13: 15). Each action of this "eternity's delegate" and a "colonist from immortality" would leave the "footprints of a god." (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, 33: 23)

The stupendous work of Sri Aurobindo is to open the way for the future of the earth. It is meant for the creation of a new world built on Truth. In a letter to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo once wrote:

"The traditions of the past are very great in their own place,— in the past; but I do not see why we should merely repeat them and not go farther. In the spiritual development of the consciousness upon earth the great past ought to be followed by a greater future."

~ CWSA, 29: 480

This is part of a very long letter. Here Sri Aurobindo describes what is radically different about his Supramental Yoga, especially from the Yogas of Sri Ramakrishna, Chaitanya and others. He writes that what he was seeking — "the solution, the reconciliation" could not be found in these past Vaishnava-Tantric traditions.

Elaborating further he says, "the union [*with the Mother*] has indeed to be realised in the inner psycho-spiritual experience first, because without that nothing sound or lasting can be done; but also there must be a realisation of the Divine in the outer consciousness and life, in the vital and physical planes on their own essential lines." (ibid., pp. 477-478). And for this, what is absolutely necessary is a vital and physical transformation.

Sri Aurobindo then gives a detailed explanation of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual realisation. And describes how that too falls short of the sublimest and highest reconciliation Sri Aurobindo was seeking. This was the reconciliation between the world of spirit and the world of matter, between heaven and earth. Or as he says in the same letter, "a successful meeting of the Divine and the sadhak on the physical plane." Revealing further, he writes,

"Krishna did great things and was very clearly a manifestation of the Divine. But I remember a passage of the Mahabharata in which he complains of the unquiet life his followers and adorers gave him, their constant demands, reproaches, their throwing of their unregenerate vital nature upon him. And in the Gita he speaks of this human world as a transient and sorrowful affair and, in spite of his gospel of divine action, seems almost to admit that to leave it is after all the last solution!"

~ ibid., p. 480, emphasis added

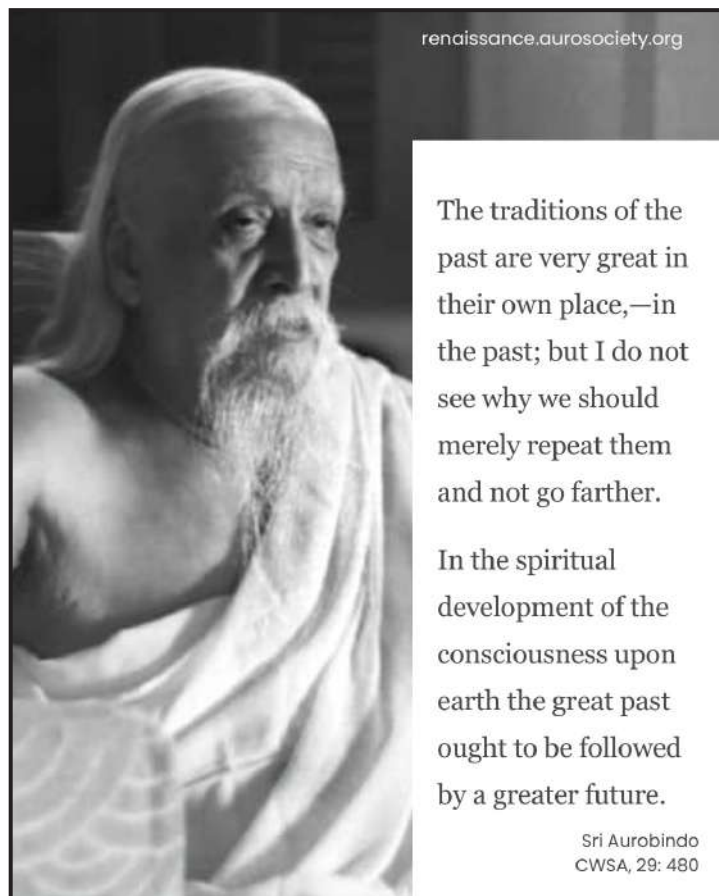
Sri Aurobindo would have none of this 'leaving the world' as the last solution. The world had already suffered tremendously at the hands of movements such as Colonialism, Fascism, Nazism, World Wars, Communism, economic barbarism – all signs of declining dharma and harmony. But Sri Aurobindo spoke of the coming of the New Age, an inner, spiritual unity of the world, a New Creation. His radical solution to end the suffering and usher in a new dharma is to bring the divine life on the earth.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of making the world itself a heaven! This is the work of an Avatar, the one who shows the humanity a path to a new dharma based on a new

consciousness. But first, the next mighty step – the param padam – that Sri Aurobindo takes himself is to ascend to and then bring down in matter the next plane of consciousness – the Supermind.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the Supermind as an eternal reality of the divine Being and the divine Nature. He explains that it is in its very essence “a truth-consciousness”. It is a “consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe” (CWSA, 13: 558).

Only this Supramental Truth-consciousness is capable of creating a new world.



Sri Aurobindo also emphasises that this Supramental is NOT a new version of the Vedantic featureless and incommunicable Parabrahman.

“The supramental is not grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence.”

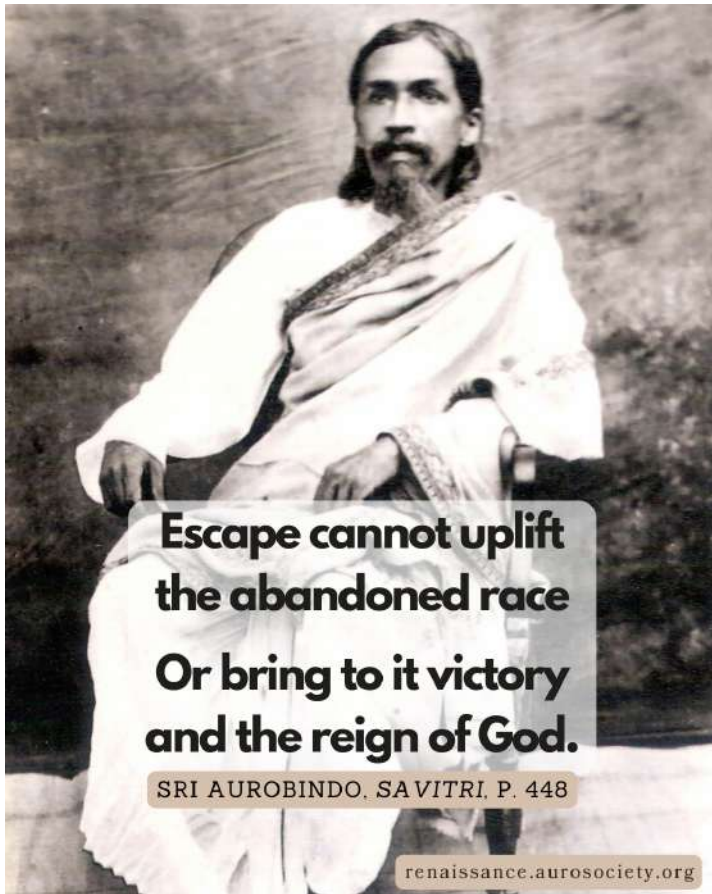
~ CWSA, 29: 482

Why was Sri Aurobindo following after the Supramental? For what purpose did he persevere so intensely, suffered so much, fully aware of “the difficulties of the physical embodiment and the divine realisation on the physical plane” (ibid., p. 480)? He himself replies,

“I am concerned with the earth and not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits.”

~ CWSA, 29: 482

For the ultimate terrestrial realisation, that of transformation of earthly life into the divine life, Sri Aurobindo came down on earth. But as Amal Kiran describes so beautifully, Sri Aurobindo represented at the same time descending Godhead and ascending Manhood. He was a spiritual pioneer, the first invoker and realiser of the Supermind which holds the original Truth, the perfect model of every term of the cosmic evolutionary travail. His Avataric Yoga was the means for the bringing forth of the New Consciousness, assuring a New Age.



Sri Aurobindo and the Mother explain that the principle of Supermind was already involved deep in the cavern of the Inconscience. But it needed the Mighty Yogic Push for it to spring forth into the universal play. The descent of the Supramental or Truth Consciousness would ensure the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter.

“In fact, a supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable.

“It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being:

it is that that will bring to us a completely realised divinity or the divine life.”

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 13: 560

THE WORLD AS PROGRESSIVE MANIFESTATION OF THE TRUTH

A colossal work such as this — to ensure the descent of the Supermind so as to liberate and activate the concealed principle — is possible only when the Avatar first reveals that this World, this Life is neither an illusion or a passing phase. Rather, it is created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation of the Truth, of the Divine Will. The world is essentially Divine-in-becoming, because at the center of it is the Divine. The Mother explains,

Sri Aurobindo says that if the Divine were not at the centre of everything, He could never manifest in the world; it is the same thing when he says that essentially, in its origin and deepest structure, the creation is divine, the world is divine; and that is why this divinity will be able to manifest one day, become tangible, express itself fully in place of all that veils and deforms it at present.

Up to now, all that has manifested of this divinity is the world as we know it; but the manifestation is boundless, and after this mental world as we know it, of which the apex and prototype is man, another reality will manifest, which Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind, for it is in fact the next step after the mind; so, seen from the world as it is, it will naturally be “supramental”, that is, something above the mind.

And he also says that it will truly be the changing of one world into another, for so far the whole creation belonged to what he calls “the lower hemisphere” as we know it, which is governed by Ignorance and based upon the Inconscient, whereas the other one will be

a complete reversal, the sudden appearance of something which will belong to quite a different world, and which instead of being based on Ignorance will be based upon Truth. That is why it will truly be a new world.

~ *CWM, 9: 157-158*

Sri Aurobindo has brought to us the assurance of the New World. This is why the Mother speaks of him as the “Future advancing towards its realisation” (CWM, 13: 5). He is the Avatar of the Future who boldly declares that in the spiritual development of the consciousness upon earth “the great past ought to be followed by a greater future”. Not only that, he has also given world the assurance of a divine future.

This work of bringing down the Supermind and launching a new creation based on Truth was truly the work of Twin Avatars – the Two who are One, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In one of the “Evening Talks” Sri Aurobindo spoke of the inner, truer nature of the collaboration that was necessary in order for

their Supramental Yoga which has transformation, and not escape from the world and life, as its object. He said,

“The function of the Shakti is something special. In my own case it was a necessary condition for the work that I had to do. If I had had to do my own transformation only or give a new yoga or a new ideal to a select few people who came into personal contact with me I could have done that without having any Shakti.

“But, for the work that I had to do, it was necessary that the two sides must come together. By the coming together of [the Mother] and me certain conditions are created which make it easy for you to do the transformation.”

~ published in *Mother India*, April 1970



Sri Aurobindo and India of the Future

Sachidananda Mohanty

Editor's note: “The poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity” – these were the famous words used by C. R. Das, Sri Aurobindo's advocate, friend and follower who stood for him before the bar of History for his cause, and not merely before a British Court of Justice. To these three, another epithet has been added to further complete the description of Sri Aurobindo – bringer of the Life Divine.

Though there are many more ways left to speak of the integral personality of Sri Aurobindo, the Mahayogi of modern age, this article highlights the visionary aspect of this Rishi of our times who saw and spoke clearly of the immense inner and outer work India and world must do if a divine life on earth has to become a reality.

Sri Aurobindo once wrote that man approaches nearer his perfection when he combines in himself the idealist and the pragmatist, the originaive soul and the executive power. But what humanity needs most in its onward march is the seer who is able to execute his vision. Such a seer, a rishi takes his stand in the *Purusha*, the Knower who controls executive force, and he possesses the power that he uses. He draws nearer to the type of the divine Seer-Will that has created and that governs the universe.

This article reminds us of both the seer-vision and the divine force with which Sri Aurobindo has shown the path for the future march of India and the world. It is based on a talk given by the author at Sri Aurobindo Society on July 24, 2023.

The term ‘future’ occupies a pivotal place in Sri Aurobindo's life and work, his philosophy and world-view, right from the ‘*Bande Mataram*’ period to his 1947 Independence Day message. He famously said, “we do not belong to past dawns, but to the noons of the future.” (CWSA, 19: 10)

We long for the past with a sense of nostalgia; the past is often glorified and idealized as an antidote to the ills and predicament of the present. However, Sri Aurobindo declared that achievements of the past, important as they are, must lead to a greater future. Indeed, an obsession with the past and the desire to recover the ‘lost glory’ of nations/civilisations, has led to catastrophic consequences in the modern world, as mankind has learnt the hard way especially during World War II.

Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle* makes a vital distinction between “true” and “false” subjectivism, namely and group souls and group egos. Blurring of the two categories has led to devastating conflicts among warring nations.



We do not belong to
the past dawns,
but to the NOONS OF
THE FUTURE.

Critics have made a distinction between Baroda, Bengal, and Pondicherry phases in Sri Aurobindo's life: He spent thirteen years in Baroda, four years in Bengal and the last forty at Pondicherry. He had four years of active political life, but did not give up the 'political' in the widest sense after leaving Bengal. **If by 'politics' we understand the power and ability to transform the world; Sri Aurobindo evinced a keen interest in the 'political,' throughout his career.**

There appear to be breaks between the three periods in terms of his realisations, and yet there is an underlying continuity as well. From seeking the meaning of India and Hinduism, his journey takes him to seeking the redemption of mankind in the *Life Divine* and *Savitri*. We see this in his socio-political and international vision as well.

As a mystic and visionary thinker, he saw possibilities for India and mankind – opportunities that could be used if we were to cooperate with the Time Spirit, heed her warnings and collaborate with the larger forces for change. There is a freedom to grow and freedom to lapse back into ignorance in human affairs. Mankind must make the choice. As the Mother said: "The world is preparing for a big change, will you help?"

(CWM, 15: 175)

In a sense, the achievements of the 20th century seem to have been defeated, in large measure, in the first part of the 21st century. Ethnic rivalry, divisive, polarized thinking, armed conflicts, widespread violence, malnutrition, disease and hunger, political and military expansionism punctuate the national and international landscape today.

For Sri Aurobindo, the future of India, its unity and integrity go hand in hand with the future of the world. As he advances in yoga and spiritual realisations,

his views on politics, society, the nation-state, and humanity undergo corresponding changes, radical in nature. He is guided by an inner call and inner voice. His experience in the Alipore Jail, journey to Chandernagore and Pondicherry, refusal to leave for safe heavens like Algeria are evidence of the fact. His messages to Joseph Baptista and B.S. Moonje regarding their invitation to lead the Congress Party in 1920, and his refusal to do so, are to be seen in the same light.

Sri Aurobindo's stand regarding the Quit India Movement in 1942, support for the Allied Forces in World War II, the Cripps Proposal and the Cabinet Mission Proposals went against the dominant popular trends of his times. He was convinced, however, that the measures he supported and spearheaded were essential for the future progress of India, and in turn, for the world at large. Therefore, he did not flinch from his stand even when it went against the popular opinion of the day.

Sri Aurobindo was convinced that India's freedom was divinely ordained. He told A.B. Purani that freedom was as certain as the 'rising of tomorrow's sun.' But he was deeply concerned about the future of India, the directions it would take after independence. His reply to a question posed to him on 16 September 1935 is telling in this regard.

Disciple: In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India? You have stated that for the spreading of spirituality in the world India must be free. I suppose you must be working for it! You are the only one who can do something really effective by the use of your spiritual Force.

Sri Aurobindo: That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her independence? The above kind of affair? Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous.

~ CWSA, 35: 207

In the context we may see his message to Andhra University delivered in December 1948. He wrote that he did not wish to see India play a domineering and hegemonic role on the world stage, in the domain of international power politics. **“The nation has to awaken,” he declared, “to many more very considerable problems, to vast possibilities before her but also to dangers and difficulties that may, if not wisely dealt with, become formidable”** (CWSA, 36: 503). He was alluding to the serious world situation in the aftermath of the devastating World War II. Turning to India, he said prophetically,

There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul.

Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. . .

It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.

~ CWSA, 36: 503-504

The strength and resilience of Indian nation today also reveal its deeper faultlines: the war within coin-



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Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 36: 504

cides with the war without, the conflicts within the nation-state coincide with the conflicts in the outer world. A surface view and reading may fill us with despair and pessimism about the state of the nation and the world.

However, we would do well to recall the five dreams he declared on 15 August 1947: ‘the freedom of India,’ ‘the resurgence and liberation of the people of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization,’ the dream of ‘the world union,’ ‘the spiritual gift of India to the world,’ and finally, ‘a step in human evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness.’

Today India’s ‘moon moment’ coincides with ethnic conflicts of monumental proportions on India’s border states. Outward material and economic progress have gone hand in hand with a balkanized society and polity. We must recall, in this context, the words of Sri Aurobindo whose cautionary advice seems to have been lost on the rulers and ruling classes of the day.

The answers to the problems of India's present and future are to be found in Sri Aurobindo's socio-political writings and in his numerous letters. In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he speaks of the three stages in social evolution. He draws our attention to the historical conflict between religious nationalism and secular modernity. He tells us that religion of the past, based on creeds, cults and dogma has had its day. Secular modernity has taken its place in the western world. It has denied the truth of religions. Secular modernity too has its blind spots and will evolve over a period.

It is a dynamic and futuristic spirituality, synthetic and integral in character, that India must exemplify and show to the world. What this spirituality is, Sri Aurobindo explains in the *Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, aside from his other writings. It is this emerging spirit that could harmonize the dominant polarities and binaries that divide the nations and the world today.

To return to the opening of this article, we may conclude that India's future, in Sri Aurobindo's terms, can be realized by decolonizing our mind. **We must embark on a new Renaissance, based on original thinking through the rediscovery of our ancient truths that are polyphonic in character. These truths are to be unpacked, reinterpreted, and applied to modern times in a creative manner that will stand the test of time.**

Today, as India approaches her 'moon moment,' as a historic event — and there are exciting possibil-

ities in joining hands with NASA's Artemis program that aim at human settlements on the moon, leading to the explorations of the outer space — we must remember the words of Oppenheimer whose biography, *The American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy* of Robert Oppenheimer, has captured public attention today by Christopher Nolan's widely-viewed film, 'Oppenheimer.'

Oppenheimer, the nuclear physicist, made the atom bomb in the deserts of New Mexico in 1945 under the firm belief that the Nazis had to be defeated in World War II. While he applauded the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and became a national hero, he was appalled by the second dropping on Nagasaki and realized the horror of his acts.

When he met American President Harry Truman in the White House in 1948, he said: 'Mr. President, I have blood on my hands?' He was a completely changed man. He realized the horror he had created. For his outspokenness to the American political and military establishment, he was ostracized and disgraced, but he remained steadfast in his opposition to nuclear proliferation and armed conflicts with the use of nuclear weapons.

In his article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled 'International Control of Atomic Energy' published on January 1948, Oppenheimer invoked modern science's power to do good and the power to do evil. As we ponder over the cautionary advice of Sri Aurobindo regarding the future of India, we need to recall the wise words of Oppenheimer so that collectively we act for the good of our nation and use the opportunities sensibly for India's future. For the opportunities once lost can seldom be regained.