

SRI AUROBINDO

OR THE **ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

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CONSCIOUSNESS

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A WORD ABOUT
AUROBINDO



A LIFE SKETCH

(from Volume 30, SABCL, p.1-6.)

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August, 1872. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St. Paul's School in London in 1884 and in 1890 went from it with a senior classical scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where he studied for two years. In 1890 he passed also the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but at the end of two years of probation failed to present himself at the riding examination and was disqualified for the Service. At this time the Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Sri Aurobindo saw him, obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service and left England for India, arriving there in February, 1893.

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariate work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity—for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time—and

of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East.¹ At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of Non-cooperation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the "Subjects Committee". Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit,

though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organisation of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts, and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram*, of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande Mataram*, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Sri Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipore Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipore Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its lead-

ers scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since his twelve months' detention in the Alipore Jail, which had been spent entirely in practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.²

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 onward he remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his sadhana.

In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Isha Upanishad*, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit

and significance of Indian civilisation and culture (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*), the true meaning of the Vedas (*The Secret of the Veda*), the progress of human society (*The Human Cycle*), the nature and evolution of poetry (*The Future Poetry*), the possibility of the unification of the human race (*The Ideal of Human Unity*). At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance. Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five disciples. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of sadhaks had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left everything behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1904. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvana, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-Consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and

forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo left his body on December 5, 1950. The Mother carried on his work until November 17, 1973. Their work continues.

1. It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself German and Italian sufficiently to study Goethe and Dante in the original tongues. (He passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first class and obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service.)

2. For a more complete statement about Sri Aurobindo's political life see SABCL Volume 26, On Himself, pp. 21-41.

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIMSELF

(The following quotes are from Volume 26, SABCL, "On Himself")

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography—is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see.

p.378

I had no urge toward spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. 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. You all seem to

think it a great compliment to me to say that what I have done has no meaning for anybody except myself—it is the most damaging criticism on my work that could be made. I also did not do it by myself, if you mean by myself the Aurobindo that was. He did it by the help of Krishna and the Divine Shakti. I had help from human sources also.

p.148-9 (13-2-1935)

Q: How did your intellect become so powerful even before you started Yoga?

A: It was not any such thing before I started the Yoga. I started the Yoga in 1904 and all my work except some poetry was done afterwards. Moreover, my intelligence was inborn and so far as it grew before the Yoga, it was not by training but by a wide haphazard activity developing ideas from all things read, seen or experienced. That is not training, it is natural growth.

p.222 (13-11-1936)

But what strange ideas again!—that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardships, starvation in England and constant and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal. My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle: the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But, of course, as we have not been shouting about these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or Nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!

p.153-4

You think then that in me (I don't bring in the Mother) there was never any doubt or despair, no attacks of that kind. I have borne every attack which human beings have borne, otherwise I would be unable to assure anybody "This too can be conquered." At least I would have no right to say so. Your psychology is terribly rigid. I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If

he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence even if greater in degree, that there is behind others—and it is to awaken that that he is here.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way—men need not be extraordinary beings to follow it. That is the mistake you are making—to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.

p.154 (8-3-1935)

Q: We have been wondering why you should have to write and rewrite your poetry—for instance, “Savitri” ten or twelve times—when you have all the inspiration at your command and do not have to receive it with the difficulty that faces budding Yogis like us.

A: That is very simple. I used Savitri as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact Savitri has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. I did not rewrite *Rose of God* or the sonnets except for two or three verbal alterations made at the moment.

p.239

Q: The Overmind seems so distant from us, and your Himalayan austerity and grandeur takes my breath away, making my heart palpitate!

A: O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! 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? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality. Common sense by the way is not logic (which is the least common-sense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation—not imagining wild imaginations—or for that matter despairing “I know not why” despairs.

p.354-5 (23-2-1935)

You say that this way is too difficult for you or the likes of you and it is only “Avatars” like myself or the Mother that can do it. That is a strange misconception; for it is, on the contrary, the easiest and simplest and most direct way and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet, even those who have a tenth of your capacity can do it. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of Tapasya. As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer—a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path. But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others—if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others, “Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time,—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.”

p.463 (5-5-1932)

The Mother’s consciousness is the divine Consciousness and the Light that comes from it is the light of the divine Truth, the Force that she brings down is the force of the divine Truth. One who receives and accepts and lives in the Mother’s light, will begin to see the truth on all the planes, the mental, the vital, the physical. He will reject all that is undivine,—the undivine is the falsehood, the ignorance, the error of the dark forces; the undivine is all that is obscure and unwilling to accept the divine Truth and its light and force. The undivine, therefore, is all that is unwilling to accept the light and force of the Mother.

That is why I am always telling you to keep yourself in contact with the Mother and with her light and Force, because it is only so that you can come out of this confusion and obscurity and receive the Truth that comes from above.

When we speak of the Mother's Light or my Light in a special sense, we are speaking of a special occult action—we are speaking of certain lights that come from the Supermind. In this action the Mother's is the White Light that purifies, illumines, brings down the whole essence and power of the Truth and makes the transformation possible. But in fact all light that comes from above, from the highest divine Truth is the Mother's.

There is no difference between the Mother's path and mine; we have and have always had the same path, the path that leads to the supramental change and the divine realisation; not only at the end, but from the beginning they have been the same.

The attempt to set up a division and opposition, putting the Mother on one side and myself on another and opposite or quite different side, has always been a trick of the forces of the Falsehood when they want to prevent a Sadhak from reaching the Truth. Dismiss all such falsehoods from your mind.

Know that the Mother's light and force are the light and force of the Truth; remain always in contact with the Mother's light and force, then only can you grow into the divine Truth.

p.455 (10-9-1931)

THE MOTHER ON SRI AUROBINDO

(All quotes are from the Collected Works of the Mother.)

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.

*from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35
(14 February 1961)*

Sri Aurobindo has come on earth not to bring a teaching or a creed in competition with previous creeds or teachings, but to show the way to overpass the past and to open concretely the route towards an imminent and inevitable future.

*from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35
(22 February 1967)*

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it.

from Volume 12, On Education, p.116

(24 July 1951)

But to have this precise perception...listen, as I had when I came from Japan : I was on the boat, at sea, not expecting anything (I was of course busy with the inner life, but I was living physically on the boat), when all of a sudden, abruptly, about two nautical miles from Pondicherry, the quality, I may even say the physical quality of the atmosphere, of the air, changed so much that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo. It was a physical experience and I guarantee that whoever has a sufficiently awakened consciousness can feel the same thing.

from Volume 4, Questions and Answers 1950-51, p. 223

(17 March 1951)

I incidentally could tell you that in all kinds of so-called spiritual literature I had always read marvellous things about this state of trance or samadhi, and it so happened that I had never experienced it. So I did not know whether this was a sign of inferiority. And when I came here, one of my first questions to Sri Aurobindo was: "What do you think of samadhi, that state of trance one does not remember? One enters into a condition which seems blissful, but when one comes out of it, one does not know at all what has happened." Then he looked at me, saw what I meant and told me, "It is unconsciousness." I asked him for an explanation, I said, "What?" He told me, "Yes, you enter into what is called samadhi when you go out of your conscious being and enter a part of your being which is completely unconscious, or rather a domain where you have no corresponding consciousness—you go beyond the field of your consciousness and enter a region where you are no longer conscious. You are in

the impersonal state, that is to say, a state in which you are unconscious; and that is why, naturally, you remember nothing, because you were not conscious of anything.” So he reassured me and I said, “Well, this has never happened to me.” He replied, “Nor to me!”

from Volume 8, Questions and Answers 1956, p.275-6
(22 August 1956)

I am going to give you two examples to make you understand what true spontaneity is. One—you all know about it undoubtedly—is of the time Sri Aurobindo began writing the Arya, in 1914. It was neither a mental knowledge nor even a mental creation which he transcribed: he silenced his mind and sat at the typewriter, and from above, from the higher planes, all that had to be written came down, all ready, and he had only to move his fingers on the typewriter and it was transcribed. It was in this state of mental silence which allows the knowledge—and even the expression—from above to pass through that he wrote the whole Arya, with its sixty-four printed pages a month. This is why, besides, he could do it, for if it had been a mental work of construction it would have been quite impossible.

from Volume 8, Questions and Answers 1956, p.282
(29 August 1956)

You remember the night of the great cyclone, when there was a tremendous noise and splash of rain all about the place. I thought I would go to Sri Aurobindo’s room and help him shut the windows. I just opened his door and found him sitting quietly at his desk, writing. There was such a solid peace in the room that nobody would have dreamed that a cyclone was raging outside. All the windows were wide open, not a drop of rain was coming inside.

from Volume 3, Questions and Answers, p.155
(1930-31)

On the other hand, there was someone (I shall tell you who afterwards) who had in his room hundreds of books, countless sheets of paper, notebooks and all sorts of things, and so you entered the room and saw books and papers everywhere—a whole pile, it was quite full. But if you were unfortunate enough

to shift a single little bit of paper from its place, he knew it immediately and asked you, “Who has touched my things?” You, when you come in, see so many things that you feel quite lost. And yet each thing had its place. And it was so consciously done, I tell you, that if one paper was displaced—for instance, a paper with notes on it or a letter or something else which was taken away from one place and placed in another with the idea of putting things in order—he used to say “You have touched my things; you have displaced them and created a disorder in my things.” That of course was Sri Aurobindo!

from Volume 6, Questions and Answers 1954, p. 14

(3 February 1954)

The other story is of the days Sri Aurobindo had the habit of walking up and down in his rooms. He used to walk for several hours like that, it was his way of meditating. Only, he wanted to know the time, so a clock had been put in each room to enable him to see the time at any moment. There were three such clocks. One was in the room where I worked; it was, so to say, his starting-point. One day he came and asked, “What time is it?” He looked and the clock had stopped. He went into the next room, saying, “I shall see the time there”—the clock had stopped. And it had stopped at the same minute as the other, you understand, with the difference of a few seconds. He went to the third room...the clock had stopped. He continued walking three times like that—all the clocks had stopped! Then he returned to my room and said, “But this is impossible! This is surely a bad joke!” and all the clocks, one after the other, started working again. I saw it myself, you know, it was a charming incident.

from Volume 4, Questions and Answers 1950-51, p.275-6

I have seen Sri Aurobindo doing this in somebody’s head, somebody who used to complain of being troubled by thoughts. It was as if his hand reached out and took hold of the little black dancing point and then did this (gesture with the finger-tips), as when one picks up an insect, and he threw it far away. And that was all. All still, quiet, luminous...

from Volume 9, Questions and Answers 1957-58, p.254

(8 January 1958)

I had asked myself a question about Sri Aurobindo. I wanted to know at what point he had arrived when he passed away — at what point of transformation. What difference in the work, for example, is there between what you are doing now and what he was doing at that time?

He had gathered in his body a great amount of supramental force and as soon as he left... You see, he was lying on his bed, I stood by his side, and in a way altogether concrete — concrete with such a strong sensation as to make one think that it could be seen — all this supramental force which was in him passed from his body into mine. And I felt the friction of the passage. It was extraordinary — extraordinary.

from Volume 11, Notes on the Way, p. 328

(20 December 1972)

Today is the first day of Sri Aurobindo's centenary year. Though he has left his body he is still with us, alive and active.

Sri Aurobindo belongs to the future; he is the messenger of the future. He still shows us the way to follow in order to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will.

All those who want to collaborate for the progress of humanity and for India's luminous destiny must unite in a clairvoyant aspiration and in an illumined work.

from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35

(15 August 1971)

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to announce the manifestation of the supramental world and not merely did he announce this manifestation but embodied also in part the supramental force and showed by example what one must do to prepare oneself for manifesting it. The best thing we can do is to study all that he has told us and endeavour to follow his example and prepare ourselves for the new manifestation.

This gives life its real sense and will help us to overcome all obstacles.

Let us live for the new creation and we shall grow stronger and stronger by remaining young and progressive.

from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35

(30 January 1972)

When in your heart and thought you make no difference between Sri Aurobindo and me, when to think of Sri Aurobindo will be to think of me and to think of me will mean to think of Sri Aurobindo inevitably, when to see one will mean inevitably to see the other, like one and the same Person, — then you will know that you begin to be open to the supramental force and consciousness.

from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35

(4 March 1958)

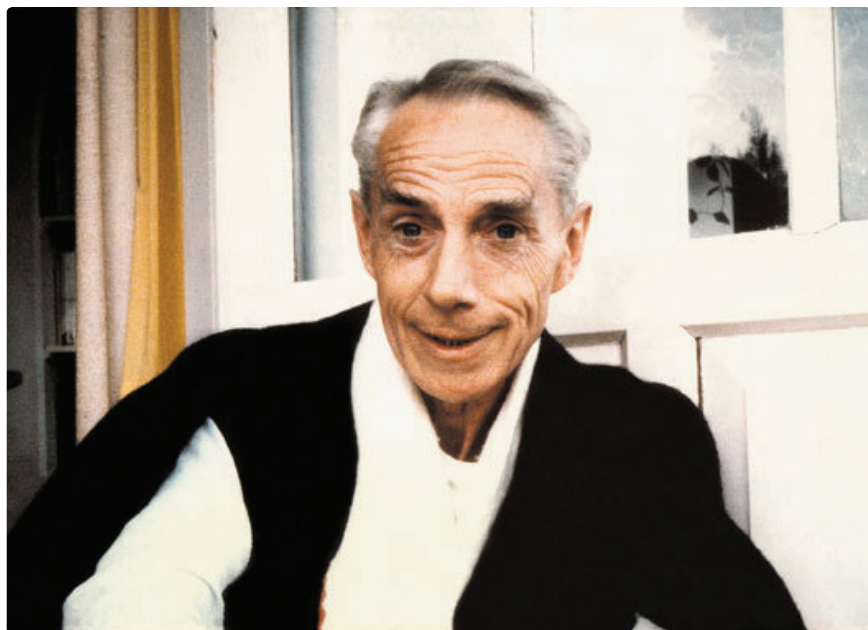
Sri Aurobindo is constantly in the subtle physical, very active there. I see him almost daily, and last night I spent many hours with him.

If you become conscious in the subtle physical you will surely meet him...

from Volume 13, Words of the Mother, pp.1-35

(21 December 1969)

A WORD ABOUT
SATPREM



SATPREM (BORN BERNARD ENGINGER) passed away on April 9th, 2007 at the age of 84. Through his books, and particularly through his role in the publication of the 13 volumes of Mother's Agenda, Satprem played a key role not only in introducing many people to the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but also in explaining the scope and significance of the great endeavour They had undertaken. His writings have inspired, and will continue to inspire, people worldwide with their incandescent call to take up the great work of physical transformation begun by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, a work which he and his spiritual collaborator, Sujata, attempted to continue after Mother's passing.

He was also a figure of considerable influence in Auroville during the early years and during the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society, a struggle which he saw as crucial for Auroville's integrity and for the furtherance of Mother's work. Satprem was a charismatic figure who, in his uncompromising stances, attracted great loyalty from some and criticism from others. A survivor of the concentration camps, he stood against all forms of tyranny. Yet some blamed him for his fierce criticism of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and for his attacks upon those who did not follow the path which he favoured.

The following is a slightly edited version of a brief biography of Satprem in

Georges van Vrekhem's book, "Beyond Man".

Satprem (...) is a Frenchman who was born in Paris in 1923, but who always nostalgically remembered his youth on the coast of Brittany . In the Second World War he became a member of the Resistance. He had just turned twenty when the Gestapo arrested him; he spent one and a half years in German concentration camps. After the war, and deeply branded by those experiences, he became an exponent of the problematics and the life-view of Existentialism, although not Sartre and Camus but Gide and Malraux were the main sources of his inspiration.

In 1946, he wrote in a letter to André Gide: "I loved you, and certain passages from your books have helped me to survive in the concentration camps. From you I got the force to break away from a bourgeois and material comfort. Together with you, I have been seeking 'not so much for possession as for love.' I have made a clean sweep to stand completely new before the new law. I have made myself free ... Finally, I have broken away from you, but I have found no new masters and life keeps suffocating me. The terrible absurdity of the likes of Sartre and Camus has solved nothing and only opens the gates to suicide."

Satprem worked briefly as a functionary in the colonial administration of Pondicherry , but he felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled everywhere and went in search of adventure in French Guyana, Brazil and Africa .

However, when in Pondicherry he had had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and he carried The Life Divine with him even in the rain forests of the Amazon. In 1953, after those wanderings, he returned to Pondicherry to meet The Mother and settle in the Ashram against his individualistic and rebellious nature. "[I was] a good rebellious Westerner and all ways of changing the world looked a priori excellent," he writes. He was at times teaching in the Ashram school, and with his remarkable literary talent he looked after the French copy for the Bulletin of the Department of Physical Education which, in fact, was The Mother's publication. This periodical was (and still is) a quarterly and has all texts printed in English and in French.

Satprem's first years in the Ashram were a period of dissatisfaction, restlessness, doubts, and sometimes loudly voiced revolt. He has included part of his correspondence with The Mother in the first volume of the Agenda; these letters present us with a moving picture of the patience, understanding and love with which The Mother treated her rebellious children. She has never accepted somebody for the Yoga without a reason, and when she accepted somebody, it was unconditionally and for ever. Time and again Satprem imagined he had

to find his inner fulfilment in adventure. There is not an exotic place on Earth he did not feel impelled to go to; the Congo, Brazil (again), Afghanistan, the Himalayas, New Zealand, the Gobi desert, a journey around the globe in a sailing boat, all that and more is dreamt of in his letters. But The Mother knew what was really prompting him and she let him become, in 1959, the disciple of a very able tantric yogi who was also the head priest of the big temple in Rameshwaram. Then, guided by another yogi, Satprem wandered during six months as a sanyasi (mendicant monk) through India and received the initiation of the sanyasis. His novel *Par le Corps de la Terre, ou Le Sanyassin* (By the Body of the Earth, or The Sanyasi) is based on these experiences.

But “the bird always returned to the nest”, to the Ashram in Pondicherry, to The Mother. She started inviting him from time to time to her room, at first apparently for some literary chores in connection with the Bulletin. He became more and more spellbound by her. He asked questions (or she instilled the questions into him) and she answered. “At first, she had me called, and there was that big chair in which she was sitting, and I sat down on the carpet on the floor and listened to her. Truly, she knew so much. It was wonderful to listen to her. But most important, little by little she began telling her experience.”

However violently Satprem might express himself emotionally, he was a cultured man and possessed a very keen intellect, widely varied interests, and as a writer a passionate, colourful style. We have already seen that The Mother complained about the lack of intellectual eagerness and cultural as well as general interest in the people around her. She had so much to communicate, to share, her knowledge and experience were so broad in all essential domains where the human being is confronted with “the great questions”, but so little was asked of her. “I am a little bell that is not sounded”, she said. Here now was a man with an analytical mind, a poignant life-experience and a thirst for knowledge—the ideal instrument to communicate to others a glimpse of her unbelievable adventure. At the same time she worked on him, in him; she did his yoga as she did the yoga of all those she had accepted and taken into herself.

Satprem started realizing the importance of those conversations with The Mother and took a tape-recorder to her room. Thus the Agenda came about. One part of it concerned the literary work he was doing for The Mother; another part concerned his own yogic evolution, his yogic education; and the third part of the conversations was intended by The Mother as the registration, in broad outlines, of the process of her transformation. Everything The Mother said was interesting, everything was informative and instructive, though she

herself most probably would never have allowed some confidential passages about persons in her entourage to be published.

After the passing of The Mother, a gap has come about between the Ashram and Satprem, with regrettable consequences. Under The Mother's direction he had written *Sri Aurobindo, ou l'Aventure de la Conscience* (Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness), a book that has led so many to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

He had also read out to her *La Genèse du Surhomme* (The Genesis of Superman), an essay highly lauded by her. Then after her departure, he wrote the trilogy *Mère* (Mother), in which for the first time he analyses and comments upon the invaluable material of the Agenda of which he was the only possessor at that time. *Le Mental des Cellules* (The Mind of the Cells) is a kind of crystallization of the trilogy, and in *Gringo and recently in Evolution II* [and *Notebooks of an Apocalypse*] he reports about his own evolution (...). In a letter from 1983 one reads: "I had to take the decision to withdraw because I was no longer progressing in my [inner] work, I kept turning around in a circle. There must be at least one human being to prove, to show to the world that the way of the new species is practicable for humans. Otherwise, what is the use of what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done for humankind?"

The Great Sense

This is the time of the Great Sense.

We look to the right or to the left, we build theories, reform our Churches, invent super-machines and we go out in the streets to break the Machine that stifles us—we struggle in the small sense. When the terrestrial ship is sinking, does it matter whether the passengers drown to the right or left, under a flag black or red, or one of celestial blue? Our Churches have already sunk: they are reforming their own dust. Our patriotisms are crushing us, our machines are crushing us, our schools are crushing us, and we build more machines to break out of the Machine. We go to the moon, but we do not know our own heart or our terrestrial destiny. And we want to improve what is—but the time for improvements is past: can one improve rot?—This is the time for SOMETHING ELSE, which is not the same thing with improvements.

But how shall we proceed?

They preach violence to us, or non-violence. But these are two faces of the same Falsehood, the yes and the no of the same impotence: the little saints have gone bankrupt with the rest, and others want to seize power — what power? That of the statesmen? Are we going to fight over the prison keys? Or to build another prison? Or do we really want to get out of it? Power does not spring from the barrel of a gun, neither does freedom flow from the belly of the dead — for thirty million years now we have been building on corpses, on wars, on revolutions. And the drama is enacted over and over again. Perhaps the time has come to build on something else and find the key to true Power?

So let us look at the great Sense.

Here is what the Great Sense tells us:

It tells us that we were born so many million years ago — a molecule, a gene, a bit of quivering bit of plasma — and we have produced a dinosaur, a crab, an ape. Had our eyes stopped half-way along the road, we could have said with good reason (!), that the Baboon was the summit of the creation, and nothing better could be done, except perhaps to improve our simian capacities and create a United Kingdom of Apes... And we may be committing the same error today in our jungle of concrete. We have invented enormous means at the service of microscopic consciousnesses, splendid devices at the service of mediocrity, and still more devices to be cured of the Device. But is man truly the goal of all these millions of years of striving? — The secondary school for all and the washing machine?

The Great Sense, the True Sense, tells us that man is not the end. It is not the triumph of man that we want, not an improved version of the intelligent dwarf — it is another man on the earth, another race in our midst.

'Man is a transitional being' Sri Aurobindo said. We are right in the middle of this transition, it is bursting forth on every side: in Biafra, in Israel, in China, on the Boul'Mich. Man is uncomfortable in his skin.

And the Great Sense, the True Sense, tells us that the only thing we can do is to set to work to prepare that other being and collaborate in our own evolution instead of going round in circles in the old dead-end humanhood and grabbing false powers to rule over a false life.

But where is the lever of this Transmutation?

It is within.

There is a Consciousness within, there is a Power within, the very power that strained and strove in the dinosaur, in the crab, in the ape, in man — it strives still, presses farther on, clothes itself in a more and more perfected form as its instrument grows, and creates its own form. If we grasp the lever of that Power,

it will create its own form, for it is itself the lever of the Transmutation. Instead of letting evolution unfold through millennia of fruitless, painful attempts and useless deaths and fake revolutions that revolutionize nothing, we can shorten the time, we can make a concentrated evolution—we can be the conscious creators of the New Being.

In truth, it is the time of the Great Adventure. The world is closed, there are no more adventures to be had outside: only robots go to the moon and our frontiers are guarded everywhere—in Rome or in Rangoon, the same functionaries of the great Machine are watching us, punching our cards, checking our faces and searching our pockets—there is no more adventure outside! The Adventure is within—Freedom is within, Space is within, and the transformation of our world by the power of the Spirit. Because, in truth, that Power was always there, supreme, all-powerful, prodding evolution on: it was the hidden Spirit growing to become the Spirit manifest upon earth, and if we have trust, if we want that supreme Power, if we have the courage to descend into our hearts, everything is possible, because God is in us.

Courtesy of “Auroville Today” magazine

SRI AUROBINDO
OR THE ADVENTURE OF
CONSCIOUSNESS

Preface

The age of adventures is over. Even if we reach the seventh galaxy, we will go there helmeted and mechanized, and it will not change a thing for us; we will find ourselves exactly as we are now: helpless children in the face of death, living beings who are not too sure how they live, why they are alive, or where they are going. On the earth, as we know, the times of Cortez and Pizarro are over; one and the same pervasive Mechanism stifles us: the trap is closing inexorably. But, as always, it turns out that our bleakest adversities are also our most promising opportunities, and that the dark passage is only a passage leading to a greater light. Hence, with our backs against the wall, we are facing the last territory left for us to explore, the ultimate adventure: ourselves.

Indeed, there are plenty of simple and obvious signs. This decade's [the 60's] most important phenomenon is not the trip to the moon, but the "trips" on drugs, the student restlessness throughout the world, and the great hippie migration. But where could they possibly go? There is no more room on the teeming beaches, no more room on the crowded roads, no more room in the ever-expanding anthills of our cities. We have to find a way out *elsewhere*.

But there are many kinds of "elsewheres." Those of drugs are uncertain and fraught with danger, and above all they *depend* upon an outer agent; an experience ought to be possible at will, anywhere, at the grocery store as well as in the solitude of one's room—otherwise it is not an experience but an anomaly or an enslavement. Those of psychoanalysis are limited, for the moment, to the dimly lit caves of the "unconscious," and most importantly, they lack the agency of consciousness, through which a person can be in full control, instead of being an impotent witness or a sickly patient. Those of religion may be more enlightened, but they too depend upon a god or a dogma; for the most part they confine us in *one* type of experience, for it is just as possible to be a prisoner of other worlds as it is of this one—in fact, even more so. Finally, the value of an experience is measured by its capacity to transform life; otherwise, it is simply an empty dream or an hallucination.

Sri Aurobindo leads us to a twofold discovery, which we so urgently need if we want to find an intelligible meaning to the suffocating chaos we live in, as well as a key for transforming our world. By following him step by step in

his prodigious exploration, we are led to the most important discovery of all times, to the threshold of the Great Secret that is to change the face of this world, namely, that *consciousness is power*. Hypnotized as we are by the “in-escapable” scientific conditions of the present world, we have come to believe that our hope lies in an ever greater proliferation of machines, which will see better than we do, hear better than we do, calculate better than we do, heal better than we do—and finally, perhaps, live better than we do. Indeed, we must first realize that we can do better than our machines, and that the enormous Mechanism that is suffocating us is liable to collapse as quickly as it came into being, provided we are willing to seize on the true power and go down into our own hearts, as methodical, rigorous, and clearheaded explorers.

Then we may discover that our splendid twentieth century is still the Stone Age of psychology, that, in spite of all our science, we have not yet entered the true science of living, the real mastery of the world and of ourselves, and that there lie before us horizons of perfection, harmony and beauty, compared to which our most superb scientific discoveries are like the roughcasts of an apprentice.

Satprem

Pondicherry, January 27, 1970

*I become what I see in myself. All that
thought suggests to me, I can do; all that
thought reveals in me, I can become.
This should be man's unshakable faith
in himself, because God dwells in him.¹*



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SRI AUROBINDO OR THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS



In this century, so hurried, incoherent, full of riches which dominate us more than they serve, we have need of a true mastery and of the joy that comes of it. But our psychology knows yet only the surfaces of being, and our imported orientalism illumines some obscure depths which may perhaps be adequate for the cross-legged sage, but not for the beleaguered men we are.

This now classic introduction to Sri Aurobindo not only tells us the story of his life—in itself a remarkable adventure—but Satprem also takes us along in a methodical exploration of Sri Aurobindo's *integral yoga*, showing how it leads to a *divine rehabilitation of Matter* and gives our painful evolution its meaning and hope. Now the time may have come at last to unveil the Mysteries and to recover the complete truth of the two poles within a third position, which is neither that of the materialists nor that of the spiritualists.

Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness has been written from a Western point of view and for those who yearn for a truth of Life and not only a truth with eyes closed. It presents just one aspect of Sri Aurobindo, the most practical one. We only hope it will lead the reader to explore for himself Sri Aurobindo, and perhaps, with him, find the perfect harmony of East and West, of inner freedom and outer mastery.



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