Sri Aurobindo and India

How to bring about the much needed cohesion and faith in the country?

By following Sri Aurobindo's teachings. His Independence Day Message issued on August 15th, 1947 needs to be read and re-read and its significance explained to millions of his compatriots. India needs the conviction and faith of Sri Aurobindo.

The Mother
Sri Aurobindo's Work for Indian Independence

"Long after this controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India, but across distant seas and lands ..." 

These are the words used by eminent Bengali lawyer Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, while concluding his arguments in defence of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case in 1909. 

Sri Aurobindo's direct participation in the Indian freedom movement lasted only from 1903 to 1910. But in these few years he was able to change the entire political outlook of the country, and the goal of complete independence was planted firmly, for the first time, in the national consciousness. 

On January 5, 1920 he wrote:

"I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone: to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it, in place of the futile ambling methods till then in vogue. That is now done ... there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that the will to self-determination is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what is India going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines it is going to determine its future."

Sri Aurobindo did not leave the political field in 1910 out of disgust for politics, or because he felt he could do nothing more there, but in order to pursue his spiritual work and because he received a very distinct inner command to do so.

"There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great" he wrote in 1920. And in 1932 he explained: "I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence."

The charisma that his name still held, three years after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry, is made clear by one of the leaders who carried on the freedom struggle in later years, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose:

"In my undergraduate days Aurobindo Ghose was easily the most popular leader of Bengal despite his voluntary exile and absence since 1910. His was a name to conjure with. He had sacrificed a lucrative career in order to devote himself to politics. On the Congress platform, he had stood up as a champion of left wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders would talk only of colonial government. He had undergone incarceration"
with perfect equanimity.

When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth.

His letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, specially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody would read the letter aloud and the rest of us would enthuse over it. We felt convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary for effective national service."

As early as 1907, Rabindranath Tagore addressed this poem to Sri Aurobindo, who was then only thirty-five and just entering the public eye:

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O \text{ Aurobindo,} \\
\text{Rabindranath bows to thee!} \\
\text{When I behold thy face, mid bondage, pain and wrong} \\
\text{And black indignities, I hear the soul's great song} \\
\text{Of rapture unconfined. ... The spirit of Bharat-land,} \\
\text{O poet, hath placed upon thy face her eyes afire} \\
\text{With love, and struck vast chords upon her vibrant lyre.}
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Twenty-one years later, Rabindranath saw Sri Aurobindo again, but now at Pondicherry in his "cave of tapasya", and recorded the following impression of his visit:

"At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine, which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life.

I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishis spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him: "You have the word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world."

Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and sang to him, "Aurobindo, accept the salutations from Rabindranath." Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence, "Aurobindo, accept the salutations from Rabindranath!"

Sri Aurobindo's work was not confined to fighting for India's Independence. This was only a necessary first step for India to arise, find herself, to fulfil her destiny and take her rightful place among the nations of the world, to become capable of providing a solution to the apparently insoluble problems which beset humanity, bringing about a new synthesis of spiritual and material life.
Sri Aurobindo and the Future of the Earth

Message broadcast on All India Radio for Sri Aurobindo’s Centenary Year

Satprem

Sometimes a great wandering Thought sees the ages still unaccomplished, seizes the Force in its eternal flow, and precipitates upon earth the powerful vision which is like a power to make real what it sees. The world is a vision growing real, its past and its present are not really the result of an obscure push from the womb of time, a slow accumulation of sediments that fashion us little by little — and stifle us and imprison us — but the the powerful golden attraction of the Future pulling us in spite of ourselves, as the sun pulls the lotus out of the mud, and forcing us to a glory greater than either our mud or our efforts or present triumphs could have foreseen or created.

Sri Aurobindo is this vision and this power to precipitate the Future into the present. In a moment he saw, and what he saw the ages will accomplish; unknowingly millions of men will set out in quest of the new imperceptible tremor that has swept into the earth’s atmosphere. Thus, from age to age, great beings come among us to hew a great opening of Truth in the sepulchre of the past. And indeed, those beings are the great destroyers of the past: they come with the sword of Knowledge to shatter our fragile empires.

This year, we will be celebrating Sri Aurobindo’s Birth Centenary. He is known to barely a handful of men, yet his name will resound long after our great men of today or yesterday are buried under their own debris. His work is discussed by philosophers, praised by poets, his sociological vision and his yoga are commented on — but Sri Aurobindo is a living ACTION, a Word becoming real, and every day in the thousand circumstances that seem to rend the earth and topple its structures, we can witness the first ebbing of the Force he set in motion.

At the beginning of this century, when India was still fighting British domination, Sri Aurobindo declared: “It is not a revolt against the British Government [that is needed].... It is in fact a revolt against the whole universal Nature.”

For the problem is fundamental. It is not a question of bringing a new philosophy to the world, or new ideas, or illuminations. It is not a question of making our Prison more livable, or of endowing man with ever more fantastic powers — armed with his microscopes and telescopes, the human gnome remains a gnome, pain-ridden and helpless. We send rockets to the moon, but we do not know our own hearts. It is a question, says Sri Aurobindo, “of creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the Supramental being in a new evolution.” For, indeed, he adds, “the imperfection of Man is not the last word of Nature, but his perfection too is not the last peak of the Spirit.” Beyond the mental man we are, there opens the possibility of another being, who will take the lead of evolution as man one day took the lead of evolution among the apes. “If,” says Sri Aurobindo, “the animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man, man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god.” Sri Aurobindo has come to tell us how to create this other being, this supramental being — and not only to tell us, but to do it, to open the path of the future, to precipitate upon earth the rhythm of evolution, the new vibration that will
replace the mental vibration — as a thought one day came and disturbed the slow routine of the beasts — and will give us the power to shatter the walls of our human prison.

But this prison is already crumbling. “The end of a stage of evolution,” announced Sri Aurobindo, “is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution.” Everywhere about us, we can see this paroxysmal shattering of all the old forms: our borders, our Churches, our laws, our morals are collapsing on every side. They are not collapsing because we are bad, immoral, irreligious, or because we are not sufficiently rational, scientific or human, but because we have done with being human! Because we have done with the old machinery — because we are in transition to SOMETHING ELSE. The earth is not going through a moral crisis, but through an “evolutionary crisis.” We are not moving towards a better world — or a worse one — we are in the middle of a MUTATION toward a radically different world, as different as man’s world was from that of the ape world of the Tertiary. We are entering a new era, a supramental Quinary. We leave our countries, roam the world in search of drugs or adventure, we go on strike here, enact reforms there, rise in one more revolution — but all this is a mere appearance. Unknown to ourselves, we are in search of the new being; we are right in the middle of a human revolution.

And Sri Aurobindo gives us the key. The sense of our own revolution eludes us possibly because we are trying to prolong what is, to refine it, improve it, sublime it. But the ape might have made the same mistake in the midst of the simian revolution that produced man; it might have sought to become a superape, more skilful at climbing trees, at hunting and running, a more agile and mischievous ape. With Nietzsche, we too sought a “superman” who was nothing more than a colossalization of man, or with the spiritualists a supersaint more richly endowed with virtue and wisdom. But we have no use for human virtue and wisdom! Even carried to their highest heights, it is the same old poverties gilded over, the glorious reverse of our tenacious misery. “Supermanhood,” says Sri Aurobindo, “is not man climbed to his own natural zenith, not a superior degree of human greatness, knowledge, power, intelligence, will, genius, saintliness, love, purity or perfection.” It is SOMETHING ELSE, another vibration of being, another consciousness.

But if this new consciousness is not to be found on the peaks of the human, where then, shall we find it? Perhaps quite simply in that which we have most neglected since we entered the mental cycle — in the body. This body is our base, our evolutionary foundation, the old stock to which we always return, and which painfully compels our attention by making us suffer, age and die. “In that imperfection,” Sri Aurobindo assures us, “is the urge towards a higher and more many-sided perfection. It contains the last finite which yet yearns to the Supreme Infinite.... God is pent in the mire ... but the very fact imposes a necessity to break through that prison.” There lies the old, never cured malady, the never-changed root, the dark matrix of our misery, hardly different today from what it was in the time of the lemurs. It is this physical substance that we must transform, otherwise it will pull down, one after another, all the human or superhuman devices we try to graft on it. This body, this physical, cellular substance contains “almighty powers,” a dumb consciousness that holds all lights and all infinitudes no less than mental and spiritual immensities do. For, in truth, all is Divine, and if the Lord of all universes does not reside in a single little cell, he resides nowhere. It is this dark primeval cellular Prison that we must break open; and until we have broken this one Prison, we will continue to run vainly in the golden or iron circles of our mental prison. “These laws of Nature” says Sri Aurobindo, “that you call absolute ... merely mean an equilibrium estab-
lished by Nature.... It is merely a groove in which Nature is accustomed to work in order to produce certain results. But if you change the consciousness, then the groove also is bound to change."

Such is the new adventure to which Sri Aurobindo invites us, an adventure into man's unknown. Whether we like it or not, the whole earth is moving into a new groove.— but why should we not like it? Why should we not collaborate in this never attempted adventure, in our own evolution, instead of endlessly repeating the same old story, instead of chasing artificial paradieses which will never quench our thirst or otherwordly paradieses that leave the earth to rot along with our bodies? "Why begin at all if it's to get out it?" exclaims the Mother, the continuer of Sri Aurobindo's work. "What's the use of having struggle so much, suffered so much, of having created something which, in its outer appearance at least, is so tragic and dramatic, if it is only to learn how to get out of it? — It would have been better not to start at all!... Evolution is not a tortuous path that brings us back, somewhat battered, to the starting point. Quite the contrary, it is meant”, says the Mother, "to teach the whole creation the joy of being, the beauty of being, the grandeur of being, the majesty of a sublime life, and the perpetual development, perpetually progressive, of this joy, this beauty, this grandeur — then, everything has a meaning."

This body, this obscure beast of burden we inhabit, is the experimental field of Sri Aurobindo's yoga — which is a yoga of the whole earth, for, understandably, if a single being amidst our millions of sufferings succeeds in taking the evolutionary leap, in working out the mutation of the next age, the face of the earth will be radically altered and all the so-called powers we glory in today will look like childish games before the radiance of this almighty spirit in a body. Sri Aurobindo tells us that it can be done — not only that it can be done, but that it will be done. And perhaps everything depends not so much on a sublime effort of humanity to transcend its limitations — for that is still using our own human strength to free ourselves from human strength — as on a call, a conscious cry of the earth to this new being which she already carries in herself. All is already there, within our hearts, the supreme Source which is the supreme Power — only we must call it into our jungle of concrete, we must understand our own sense; the amplified cry of the earth, of its millions of men and women who have had enough of their prison, who can no longer bear it, must open a crack through which the new vibration will burst in. Then all the apparently ineluctable laws that bind us in their hereditary and scientific groove will crumble before the Joy of the "sun-eyed children". "Expect nothing from death," says Mother, "life is your salvation. It is in life that you must transform yourself. It is on earth that you progress and on earth that you realize. It is in the body that you win the Victory."

"Nor let wordly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear,” says Sri Aurobindo, "for it is the hour of the unexpected."