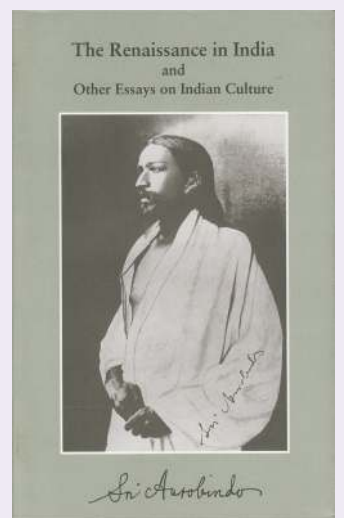
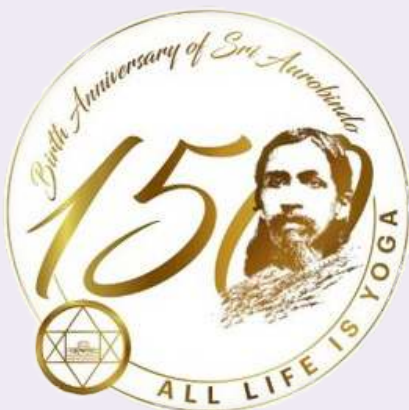




# The Call Beyond





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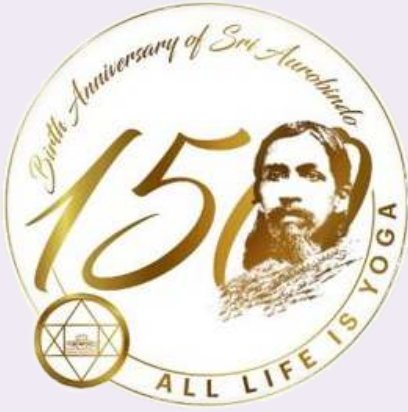
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## Celebrating 150 Years of Sri Aurobindo (1872-2022)



Who was Sri Aurobindo? A freedom fighter, who shook the British Empire within five years? A poet, who could give poetic expression to whispers from the heavens? A writer, who would have honoured the Nobel Prize for Literature, if it had been conferred on him? A linguist, who raised the level of the English language to that of Sanskrit, and deciphered the symbolism of

the Veda? A yogi, who gave the world Integral Yoga, a powerful synthesis that incorporated the major traditional systems of yoga, and went beyond all of them? A rishi (a seer) and a muni (a thinker) rolled in one? Or, a spiritual master, radical, rational and revolutionary, far ahead of his times, who is today the Guru to millions in the world?

Sri Aurobindo was all this, and more. Due to our limitations, *The Call Beyond*, however, will concentrate on Sri Aurobindo, the writer. In the category of spiritual literature rooted in the Indian tradition, the original of which was written in the English language, Sri Aurobindo's works belong to a class apart, both in quantity and quality. In his works, Sri Aurobindo has given nothing short of a prescription for sculpting humanity into a new shape that would be beyond recognition. Even through the works that have their origin in the *Arya*, which were written over a period of just six years (1914-1920), he has created enough homework for the world to stay busy with for several centuries.

The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA) run into 36 volumes. The humble offering of *The Call Beyond*, however, would be limited to bringing you every month just the glimpses of one of the works of Sri Aurobindo.



## Project Consciousness

*The conditions under which men live upon earth are the result of the state of their consciousness.*

*The Mother*

In his address to the Nation on August 15 this year, which was both the Seventy-fifth anniversary of Free India and the One hundred and fiftieth Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, made a very significant point when he enumerated two national evils, and expressed the determination to root them out of the country. The two evils are corruption (*bhrashtachar*) and nepotism (*bhai-bhatijavad*). Let us examine them both one by one.

### Corruption

Corruption is the expectation of money for doing a job which is actually a part of one's duty, for doing which the person is already getting a salary. To harass someone who wants to get a legitimate job done so that eventually he would pay something is extortion. There is also another type of corruption. There may be a person who expects to make a profit if only an officer agrees to bypass some rules. This person may offer the officer a bribe for bending or breaking the rules. The bribe offered is only a small fraction of the profit that the person is looking at. This type of corruption is the result of collusion between at least two individuals. Whether it is extortion or collusion, in both cases, somebody makes money by means that are both illegal and immoral. Any such action involves ignoring the inner voice emanating from the deepest Self, the psychic being. Normally, ignoring that voice should lead to guilt and recurrent uneasiness. But so tempting can the end become that the means eventually do not seem to matter. The psychic being goes to sleep, and the person is left free to do as he likes. Only a person with a low level of consciousness will let that happen, and what he continues to do because his psychic being is asleep will pull his consciousness further down. In plain words,



the person is driven by his ego to get what he wants by whatever means, even if it means harassing somebody, or cornering more than one's share. Since ego is a separative principle, it translates into 'me-first, others be damned'.

## **Nepotism**

Nepotism, commonly called *bhai-bhatijavad* (literally, the brother-nephew doctrine) in Hindi, means misuse of one's position to procure unfair benefits for one's kith and kin. This practice is the result of a collective ego. All those who are related to me, or related to those related to me, are my own people; the rest are the 'others'. Instead of me versus all the rest, it is 'me and mine' versus all the rest. The result is that the relatives of those who are in positions of influence and power have it easy. They can get into the better schools and colleges, and corner the better jobs. In collectivistic family-centred cultures like the Indian culture, getting one's close relatives suitably placed is considered a duty, a responsibility. But this is a narrow and unfair outlook. How about those who are not related to anyone rich, famous or powerful? Does their ability and capacity to work hard mean nothing? Since nepotism depends on feeling related to someone only if the relationship is by blood or marriage, it ignores the deeper relationship that all of us share as manifestations of the one and the same Divine. Ignoring the deeper intangible relationship, and considering a visible surface relationship as all, are manifestations of a lower level of consciousness. Collective ego may appear more dignified than the individual ego, but is ego all the same. It separates us from 'others', whereas spiritually speaking, there are no others.

## **Two symptoms, one malady**

Thus, corruption and nepotism are both symptoms of the same underlying cause, a low level of consciousness. In fact, all problems of human existence are due to the average level of human consciousness that is essentially ego-driven. Yoga expands the consciousness, makes us see oneness with others,



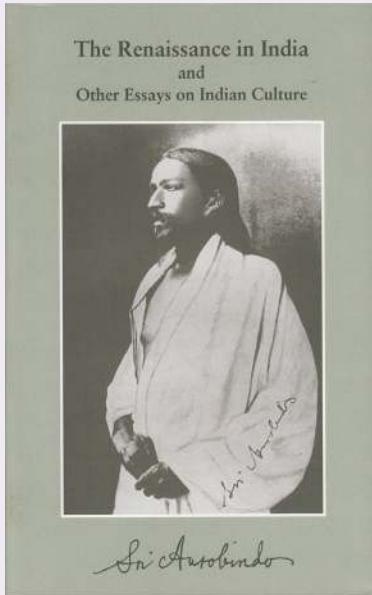
and thereby tends to make us love-driven. Ego divides, whereas love unites. The inner transformation that leads to rise in consciousness gets reflected in outer life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have assured that a perceptible upward shift in the average level of human consciousness is round the corner. This is a change to which we can all contribute by raising our own consciousness. One way to do it would be to say 'no' to corruption and nepotism, even if we or our kith and kin stand to benefit from it. Doing so may make us lose money or miss a tangible benefit, but the intangible gain of rising in consciousness would give us the true joy and mental peace that we are all looking for. Thus, rejecting social evils is not just to help 'others', it also pays rich dividends in terms of our well-being.

*The world is preparing  
for a big change.*

*Will you help?*



## The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture



Starting December 2018, Sri Aurobindo started writing in the *Arya*, month after month, a series of essays on the Indian culture. The trigger for the series was a book titled *India and the Future* published in 1918 by William Archer, a British journalist well known as a drama critic. While straying into a field “in which his chief claim to speak was a sublime and confident ignorance,” he had not bargained for a rebuttal of the type that Sri Aurobindo came up with. A rebuke William Archer had already received from

his countryman, Sir John Woodroffe, in the form of a book titled *Is India Civilised?* This book had defended the Indian civilization and asserted “its preservation to be of immense importance to mankind.” But Sri Aurobindo’s response in the *Arya* was something else. Sri Aurobindo laid out clearly how an ancient culture should be evaluated, and how it should not be. He went to the heart of the Indian culture; its expression in Indian religion, philosophy, literature, arts and polity; and above all, how the culture continues to influence everyday life in the country. The essays published in the *Arya* were first published under the title *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. In the latest version, the book has been expanded and its title revised to *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*, which forms Volume 20 of the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA).

Not only was William Archer ignorant of the subject on which he had written, he was clearly biased, visibly nasty, and his single rather thinly-veiled aim was to denounce Indian culture. Why then did Sri Aurobindo respond to his book at all? That he did because William Archer represented the average Englishman.





Average citizens are often ignorant about alien cultures, but that does not prevent them from a biased evaluation of these cultures. Further, based on the biased evaluation they build up stereotypic images, which are highly erroneous. Most such people do not write books, but William Archer had; and that is what made him 'dangerous'. He had provided in print ample fodder for strengthening the stereotypic image of India that an average person in the West already had. It was to repair the damage that William Archer had done to the image of India that Sri Aurobindo felt the need to write the series on Indian culture in the *Arya*. William Archer ended up doing a service by stimulating Sri Aurobindo to write the series, and thereby giving the world an unparalleled classic on the Indian culture. Prof. Mangesh Nadkarni, one of the most reputed scholars among the devotees of Sri Aurobindo, had once remarked that *The Foundations of Indian Culture* should be compulsory reading for any Indian who wanted to enter public life.

### What is Culture?

Culture consists of the cherished values, typical opinions held about life, and typical responses to circumstances, that characterize a set of people because of their long shared past. This fundamental orientation of these people finds expression in their language, art, architecture, music, dance and drama. It is these outer expressions that are often considered 'culture', but these actually have the form that they do because of the strongly held ideas, ideals and beliefs of the people. **The core value, the very heart of the Indian culture, is spirituality. That, in turn, finds innumerable outer expressions, with the result that spirituality permeates every aspect of life in India.**

One fundamental reason why William Archer went wrong in his criticism of the Indian culture was that he saw it through the lens of the Western culture, the core value of which has been rationality since the beginning of the European Renaissance about 500 years ago. While placing reason on a high pedestal,



the West rejected religion and whatever spirituality went with it, as outdated, dispensable and embarrassing remnants of the past. **Spirituality does not reject rationality but incorporates it, and goes beyond it.** William Archer failed to see the breadth and depth of spirituality, and on top of that, he was prejudiced against India and his very mission was to tear the Indian culture apart, which he did ruthlessly even at the expense of rationality, which he claimed to cherish.

### **Expressions of Indian Culture**

Sri Aurobindo starts with **religion** as one of the various expressions of the Indian culture. The spiritual core of the culture has given birth to a religion which has an extreme degree of flexibility that takes into account the age and temperament of the person. Further, there is a multiplicity of scriptures, to which more can be added even today, and yet the highest scripture is within the individual. The emphasis is on spirituality permeating life rather than on highly visible religious dogmas and practices. All this can be very puzzling to the Western mind, which is accustomed to religions with a clear founder, a single authoritative scripture, and practices which are mandatory for all adherents to the religion, the failure to comply with which carries the threat of dire consequences. "The highest spirituality indeed moves in a free and wide air far above the lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma ...," says Sri Aurobindo.

Indian **art**, rooted in spirituality, has an intuitive character, which the rational western mind finds difficult to appreciate, just as the Indian mind cannot easily grasp the western tendency to adhere to objective principles while creating a piece of art. As in other expressions of Indian culture, in art too the spirit overrides form. In Indian art, "it is the spirit that carries the form, while in most western art it is the form that carries whatever there may be of spirit." This applies to all forms of art, be it painting, sculpture or architecture, and Sri Aurobindo



has gone into all of these, weaving an impressive body of facts with his deeply perceptive interpretation.

After art, Sri Aurobindo turns his attention to **literature**. Literature, which has been created by the best minds of a people, should not only have depth and breadth of thought, but also have beauty of language and, above all, an uplifting character. Indian literature, on all these counts, would count as among the best products of the human mind anywhere, at any time. The vehicle of the literature, the Sanskrit language, combines two apparent contraries: precision and beauty. Further, the flexibility, majesty, and vibrancy of the language make it a joy to read and recite, even if the content is not fully understood. Then Sri Aurobindo, in the English language, which he raised to that of Sanskrit, develops his wide-ranging description of the Indian literature, not only on the basis of the Veda, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, but also the plays of Kalidasa, and the poetic outpourings of great devotees such as Chaitanya, Surdas and Guru Nanak.

Last but not least, Sri Aurobindo turns to the Indian **Polity** as an expression of the Indian culture. It would be naïve to dismiss the relationship between politics and culture. Further, history shows that the strength, political will and ideology of the government have a remarkable influence on both the quantity and the quality of the other cultural expressions such as art, architecture, music, theatre and literature. Moreover, in 'polity', Sri Aurobindo includes not only the political framework but also the economic and social structure, which are all cultural expressions in the everyday outer life of a society. As in other cultural expressions, spirituality permeates every aspect of everyday life in India. The king in India was a constitutional monarch, but higher than his authority was that of Dharma, a well-formulated system of right and wrong. The Rishi was respected, approached for guidance, and listened to even by the king. Within this broad framework, Sri Aurobindo has looked at the milestones through which the



political and social history of India has passed. It is amazing that he had as thorough a mastery over the history of India and the world as over their scriptures, art and architecture; he used his phenomenal intellectual capacity to look critically at what he knew, and worked out a synthesis that not only satisfies curiosity but can also guide India and the rest of the world towards a better future.

### **Why the Indian Culture Matters**

The calculated attack on the Indian system of education over the last one thousand years has left us with poor knowledge and appreciation of our own culture. Going deeper into our ancient wisdom are looked upon more as a patriotic duty than as something that can add meaning to our lives. While there is nothing wrong with considering it a patriotic duty, there is something of unique value in the Indian culture because of which the world has repeatedly turned to it. The unprecedented material progress that the West has made in the last two hundred years, and yet its failure to wipe out the problems of human existence in spite of using a variety of rational tools such as democracy, communism and humanism, has once again made it look at ancient Indian wisdom as the solution to misery and suffering, or to put it more positively, as the key to happiness. It is because of the perennial relevance of the Indian culture that it continues to survive and thrive in spite of its antiquity, in spite of the attacks it has been subjected to, particularly during the last one thousand years.



*A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 2)*



## Selections from 'The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture'\*

### URGE TOWARDS THE SPIRITUAL AND THE ETERNAL

A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here in cased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, dharma. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter develops its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct



value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 56-57)*

### INDIAN VS EUROPEAN MIND

Two things especially distinguish the normal European mind,—for we must leave aside some great souls and some great thinkers or some moments or epochs of abnormal religiosity and look at the dominant strain. Its two significant characters are the cult of the inquiring, defining, effective, practical reason and the cult of life. The great high tides of European civilisation, Greek culture, the Roman world before Constantine, the Renaissance, the modern age with its two colossal idols, Industrialism and physical Science, have come to the West on the strong ascending urge of this double force. Whenever the tide of these powers has ebbed, the European mind has entered into much confusion, darkness and weakness. Christianity failed to spiritualise Europe, whatever it may have done towards humanising it in certain ethical directions, because it ran counter to these two master instincts; it denied the supremacy of the reason and put its anathema on a satisfied or strenuous fullness of life. But in Asia there has been neither this predominance of reason and the life-cult nor any incompatibility of these two powers with the religious spirit. The great ages of Asia, the strong culminations of her civilisation and culture,—in India the high Vedic beginning, the grand spiritual stir of the Upanishads, the wide flood of Buddhism, Vedanta, Sankhya, the Puranic and Tantric religions, the flowering of Vaishnavism and Shaivism in the southern kingdoms—have come in on a surge of spiritual light and a massive or intense climbing of the religious or the religio-philosophic mind to its own heights, its noblest realities, its largest riches of vision and experience. It was in such periods that intellect, thought, poetry, the arts, the material life flowered into splendour. The ebbing of spirituality brought in always, on



the contrary, the weakness of these other powers, periods of fossilisation or at least depression of the power of life, tracts of decline, even beginnings of decay.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 137-138)*

### AIM OF HINDUISM

The rites, ceremonies, system of cult and worship of Hinduism can only be understood if we remember its fundamental character. It is in the first place a non-dogmatic inclusive religion and would have taken even Islam and Christianity into itself, if they had tolerated the process. All that it has met on its way it has taken into itself, content if it could put its forms into some valid relation with the truth of the supraphysical worlds and the truth of the Infinite. Again it has always known in its heart that religion, if it is to be a reality for the mass of men and not only for a few saints and thinkers, must address its appeal to the whole of our being, not only to the suprarational and the rational parts, but to all the others. The imagination, the emotions, the aesthetic sense, even the very instincts of the half-subconscient parts must be taken into the influence. **Religion must lead man towards the suprarational, the spiritual truth and it must take the aid of the illumined reason on the way, but it cannot afford to neglect to call God towards the rest of our complex nature.** And it must take too each man where he stands and spiritualise him through what he can feel and not at once force on him something which he cannot yet grasp as a true and living power. That is the sense and aim of all those parts of Hinduism which are specially stigmatised as irrational or antirational by the positivist intelligence. But the European mind has failed to understand this plain necessity or has despised it. It insists on “purifying” religion, by the reason and not by the spirit, on “reforming” it, by the reason and not by the spirit. And we have seen what were the results of this kind of purification and reformation in Europe. The infallible outcome of that ignorant doctoring has been first to impoverish



and then slowly to kill religion; the patient has fallen a victim to the treatment, while he might well have survived the disease!

-Sri Aurobindo (*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 147-148)

### EVOLUTION OF MAN

Man in the Indian idea is a spirit veiled in the works of energy, moving to self-discovery, capable of Godhead. He is a soul that is growing through Nature to conscious self-hood; he is a divinity and an eternal existence; he is an ever-flowing wave of the God-ocean, an inextinguishable spark of the supreme Fire. Even, he is in his uttermost reality identical with the ineffable Transcendence from which he came and greater than the godheads whom he worships. The natural half-animal creature that for a while he seems to be is not at all his whole being and is not in any way his real being. His inmost reality is the divine Self or at least one dynamic eternal portion of it, and to find that and exceed his outward, apparent, natural self is the greatness of which he alone of terrestrial beings is capable. He has the spiritual capacity to pass to a supreme and extraordinary pitch of manhood and that is the first aim which is proposed to him by Indian culture. Living no more in the first crude type of an undeveloped humanity to which most men still belong, *na yathaa prakrito janah*, he can even become a free perfected semi-divine man, *mukta, siddha*. But he can do more; released into the cosmic consciousness, his spirit can become one with God, one self with the Spirit of the universe or rise into a Light and Vastness that transcends the universe; his nature can become one dynamic power with universal Nature or one Light with a transcendental Gnosis. To be shut up forever in his ego is not his ultimate perfection; he can become a universal soul, one with the supreme Unity, one with others, one with all beings. This is the high sense and power concealed in his humanity that he can aspire to this perfection and transcendence. And he can arrive at it through any or all of his natural powers if they will accept release, through his mind and reason and thought and





their illuminations, through his heart and its unlimited power of love and sympathy, through his will and its dynamic drive towards mastery and right action, through his ethical nature and its hunger for the universal Good, through his aesthetic sense and its seekings after delight and beauty or through his inner soul and its power of absolute spiritual calm, wideness, joy and peace.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 156-157)*

### THE FOURS ASHRAMAS

The student life was framed to lay the groundwork of what the man had to know, do and be. It gave a thorough training in the necessary arts, sciences, branches of knowledge, but it was still more insistent on the discipline of the ethical nature and in earlier days contained as an indispensable factor grounding in the Vedic formula of spiritual knowledge. In these earlier days this training was given in suitable surroundings far away from the life of cities and the teacher was one who had himself passed through the round of this circle of living and, very usually, even, one who had arrived at some remarkable realisation of spiritual knowledge. But subsequently education became more intellectual and mundane; it was imparted in cities and universities and aimed less at an inner preparation of character and knowledge and more at instruction and the training of the intelligence. But in the beginning the Aryan man was really prepared in some degree for the four great objects of his life, artha, kama, dharma, moksha. Entering into the householder stage to live out his knowledge, he was able to serve there the three first human objects; he satisfied his natural being and its interests and desire to take the joy of life, he paid his debt to the society and its demands and by the way he discharged his life functions he prepared himself for the last greatest purpose of his existence. In the third stage he retired to the forest and worked out in a certain seclusion the truth of his spirit. He lived in a broad freedom from the stricter social bonds; but if he so willed, gathering the young



around him or receiving the inquirer and seeker, he could leave his knowledge to the new rising generation as an educator or a spiritual teacher. In the last stage of life he was free to throw off every remaining tie and to wander over the world in an extreme spiritual detachment from all the forms of social life, satisfying only the barest necessities, communing with the universal spirit, making his soul ready for eternity.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 174-175)*

### THE ESSENCE OF INDIAN ART

ARCHITECTURE, sculpture and painting, because they are the three great arts which appeal to the spirit through the eye, are those too in which the sensible and the invisible meet with the strongest emphasis on themselves and yet the greatest necessity of each other. The form with its insistent masses, proportions, lines, colours, can here only justify them by their service for the something intangible it has to express; the spirit needs all the possible help of the material body to interpret itself to itself through the eye, yet asks of it that it shall be as transparent a veil as possible of its own greater significance. The art of the East and the art of the West—each in its characteristic or mean, for there are always exceptions, —deal with the problem of these two interlocking powers in a quite different way. The Western mind is arrested and attracted by the form, lingers on it and cannot get away from its charm, loves it for its own beauty, rests on the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic suggestions that arise directly from its most visible language, confines the soul in the body; it might almost be said that for this mind form creates the spirit, the spirit depends for its existence and for everything it has to say on the form. The Indian attitude to the matter is at the opposite pole to this view. For the Indian mind form does not exist except as a creation of the spirit and draws all its meaning and value from the spirit. Every line, arrangement of mass, colour, shape, posture, every physical suggestion, however many, crowded, opulent they may be, is first and last a suggestion, a hint, very often a symbol



which is in its main function a support for a spiritual emotion, idea, image that again goes beyond itself to the less definable, but more powerfully sensible reality of the spirit which has excited these movements in the aesthetic mind and passed through them into significant shapes.

-Sri Aurobindo (*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA Vol. 20, p 270)

### THE GREAT INDIAN EPICS

The Mahabharata and Ramayana are *Itihasas* of this kind on a large scale and with a massive purpose. The poets who wrote and those who added to these great bodies of poetic writing did not intend merely to tell an ancient tale in a beautiful or noble manner or even to fashion a poem pregnant with much richness of interest and meaning, though they did both these things with a high success; they wrote with a sense of their function as architects and sculptors of life, creative exponents, fashioners of significant forms of the national thought and religion and ethics and culture. A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea runs through these poems and the whole ancient culture of India is embodied in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation. The Mahabharata has been spoken of as a fifth Veda, it has been said of both these poems that they are not only great poems but Dharmashastras, the body of a large religious and ethical and social and political teaching, and their effect and hold on the mind and life of the people have been so great that they have been described as the bible of the Indian people. That is not quite an accurate analogy, for the bible of the Indian people contains also the Veda and Upanishads, the Purana and Tantras and the Dharmashastras, not to speak of a large bulk of the religious poetry in the regional languages. The work of these epics was to popularise high philosophic and ethical idea and cultural practice; it was to throw out prominently and with a seizing relief and effect in a frame of great poetry and on a



background of poetic story and around significant personalities that became to the people abiding national memories and representative figures all that was best in the soul and thought or true to the life or real to the creative imagination and ideal mind or characteristic and illuminative of the social, ethical, political and religious culture of India.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 345-346)*

### A FREQUENT BUT FLAWED VIEW OF THE PAST

The greatness of the ideals of the past is a promise of greater ideals for the future. A continual expansion of what stood behind past endeavour and capacity is the one abiding justification of a living culture. But it follows that civilisation and barbarism are words of a quite relative significance. For from the view of the evolutionary future European and Indian civilisation at their best have only been half achievements, infant dawns pointing to the mature sunlight that is to come. Neither Europe nor India nor any race, country or continent of mankind has ever been fully civilised from this point of view; none has grasped the whole secret of a true and perfect human living, none has applied with an entire insight or a perfectly vigilant sincerity even the little they were able to achieve. If we define civilisation as a harmony of spirit, mind and body, where has that harmony been entire or altogether real? Where have there not been glaring deficiencies and painful discords? Where has the whole secret of the harmony been altogether grasped in all its parts or the complete music of life evolved into the triumphant ease of a satisfying, durable and steadily mounting concord? Not only are there everywhere positive, ugly, even "hideous" blots on the life of man, but much that we now accept with equanimity, much in which we take pride, may well be regarded by a future humanity as barbarism or at least as semi-barbarous and immature. The achievements that we regard as ideal, will be condemned as a self-satisfied imperfection blind to its own errors; the ideas that we vaunt



as enlightenment will appear as a demi-light or a darkness. Not only will many forms of our life that claim to be ancient or even eternal, as if that could be said of any form of things, fail and disappear; the subjective shapes given to our best principles and ideals will perhaps claim from the future at best an understanding indulgence. There is little that will not have to undergo expansion and mutation, change perhaps beyond recognition or accept to be modified in a new synthesis.

*-Sri Aurobindo (The Renaissance in India, CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 85-86)*

*\*Titles given by the Editor*



*India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great-grandmother of tradition.*

*Mark Twain*

*We owe a lot to the Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made.*

*Albert Einstein*

*If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India.*

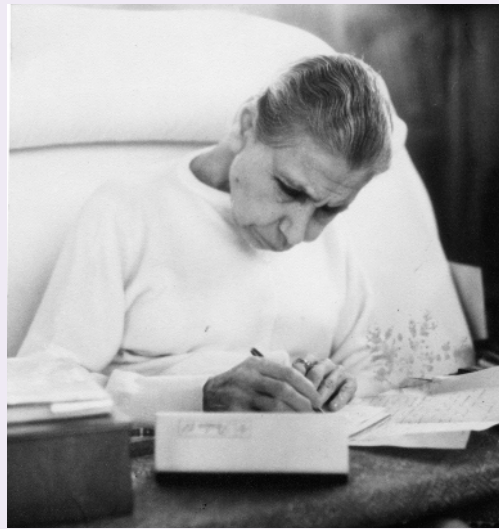
*Max Mueller*

*If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.*

*Romain Rolland*



## Work in the World



I have seen persons who had no pretensions of doing yoga, who were simply filled with enthusiasm by the idea of terrestrial transformation and of the descent of the Divine into the world and who did their little bit of work with that enthusiasm in the heart, giving themselves wholly, without reserve, without any selfish idea of a personal salvation; these I have seen making magnificent progress, truly magnificent. And sometimes they are wonderful. I have seen sannyasis, I have seen people who live in monasteries, I have seen people who professed to be yogis, well, I would not exchange one of the others for a dozen such people.... It is not by running away from the world that you will change it. It is by working there, modestly, humbly but with a fire in the heart, something that burns like an offering.

*The Mother ('The Great Adventure', p. 49)*

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*All the pages of The Mother's work, 'The Great Adventure', in Tara Didi's voice, have been uploaded on the YouTube channel of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. The link to the channel is: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcmF6JzAOsBMdqJjZbnmyng>*

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## What is Culture?

*Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

The culture of a people is the product of the past that these people have shared for a long time. Because of their long shared past, these people come to have a defining mental ideal. This ideal expresses itself through their art and literature, and their outer actions and behaviour. The defining mental ideal of the Indian culture is spirituality. That is why spirituality permeates India's art and literature, and is also reflected in the way Indians, in general, behave and respond to circumstances.

The word culture is reserved for a level of expression several notches higher than civilization. A civilized society is an organized society with some evidence of mental activity. A cultured society gives evidence of a higher order mental activity, not just any mental activity. The hallmark of a civilized man is that he uses appliances. Wealth can precede a high level of mental development, and is enough to acquire appliances. That may make a person civilized, but not cultured. Those who have acquired wealth recently (the neo-rich) know it, and therefore, having acquired appliances, they hasten to acquire education. They decorate their houses with books, start reading newspapers and popular magazines, and learn to express, parrot-fashion, the fashionable opinion on current affairs. But all this only makes the person look cultured – for such a person, the proper term is 'philistine'. Getting cultured is a much slower process than getting civilized. The hallmark of a cultured man is independent, original and critical intellectual activity with no aim other than the pleasure of the activity itself. Thus, culture expresses itself through mental activity which may not have any immediate utility. Such activity at the emotional level leads to fine arts, at the rational level it leads to philosophy and science, and at the supra-rational level it leads to spirituality.



In spite of these defining characteristics of the mental activity that leads to the birth and growth of a culture, the directions in which a culture may grow can be quite diverse. As an example, one may compare the ancient Graeco-Roman culture, the ancient Indian culture, and the relatively modern European culture. The Graeco-Roman culture was a predominantly intellectual culture, which gave us penetrating philosophies, great art and literature, remarkable science and technology, and enduring principles of politics, law and administration. Its central feature was harmony and balance. It tried to achieve a fine balance of the physical, emotional and mental life of man. However, it had one weakness – inadequate attention to the spiritual needs of man. The ancient Indian culture did not neglect the spiritual side of life, and it is to spirituality that the credit for the survival of the Indian culture should go. The modern European culture is a predominantly materialistic culture. It is not only deficient in the spiritual element; it also lacks the depth and refinement of the Greek culture. That is why, in spite of the enormous wealth, material progress, and military power that it has generated in a record time, it is showing signs of decline, and is turning to ancient Indian wisdom for solving the problems that it has created.

The purpose of culture is to lift man up from his animal existence, make him good, knowledgeable, and capable of appreciating beauty. The Indian culture does all this, and one thing more: it also gives man an aim that requires life-long work – the aim of growing spiritually. Not that other cultures neglect spirituality completely, but it is only the Indian culture in which spirituality permeates life, in which spirituality is the pivot around which all other activities revolve. During its glorious period, India produced great religion, great philosophies, great literature, art and poetry, great science and medicine, and was also great in its organization, politics, trade and commerce. But all these activities stretched beyond the mental level, and





were coloured by the vital contact that the Indian mind has always had with the Spirit. This has often been misunderstood, and our 'other-worldliness' has been blamed for many of the problems that we have today. The hallmark of the Indian culture is that it has not placed worldly life and spirituality in two neat compartments, but has sought to spiritualize worldly activities. The ideal of Indian culture has been a balanced pursuit of *kama* (desire), *artha* (the means to fulfill desire), *dharma* (right conduct, within the framework of which *kama* and *artha* have to be pursued) and *moksha* (liberation), which is the ultimate aim of life, for which worldly life is a vehicle and an aid. It was also acknowledged that the emphasis on different aspects of this quartet would vary at different stages of life. This was embodied in the concept of the four ashramas, which divided life into four consecutive periods of about 25 years each. The first phase, *brahmcharya* ashrama, was meant to serve as a preparation for life. The principal activity during this phase was learning, and life was kept deliberately simple and austere. The next phase, *grihastha*, was that of family life. *Kama* and *artha* were concentrated during this phase, but had to stay within the boundaries of *dharma*. The next phase, *vanaprastha*, was that of progressive detachment from worldly activities and the bondage of relationships. The last phase, *sanyasa*, was that of total inner renunciation; the degree of outer renunciation varied considerably. The flexibility of social institutions was embodied in the concepts of *swabhava*, *swadharma* and *yugadharma*. *Swabhava* means the natural inclinations and aptitude of a person. If a person is engaged in activities in keeping with his *swabhava*, he enjoys it, does a good job, and the society also benefits from his unique strengths. *Swadharma* consists of the requirements and obligations peculiar to the activities or position of a person. Thus, killing is generally-speaking bad, but to a soldier in the battle field, killing is a part of his *swadharma*. *Yugadharma* refers to the requirements of an era. Thus, a code of conduct framed in one era may become



irrelevant under the altered circumstances of another era. Thus, each era (*yuga*) can have its own code of conduct or ethics (*dharma*). Thus, the Indian culture was the creation of a mind-set at once ideal and practical, rational and emotional, worldly and spiritual, and had the genius to synthesize and harmonize these apparently opposing tendencies into a blend that worked, a blend that gave a prosperous and vibrant society.

The Indian culture has been the subject of lavish praise as well as hostile criticism. Replying to the criticism, Sri Aurobindo has emphasized that a culture cannot be judged from its outer appearance during its most decadent phase. The Indian culture has some intrinsic strengths, which have contributed to its survival in spite of repeated onslaughts. The crucial question Sri Aurobindo asks is “whether Indian culture has a sufficient power for the fortifying and ennobling of our normal human existence,” and answering it in a strong affirmative, he says, “the essential intention of Indian culture was extraordinarily high, ambitious and noble, the highest indeed that the human spirit can conceive.”

When India came under the British rule, India was going through one of its most decadent phases. The British rule made this sleepy nation collide with a wide awake, vigorous and dynamic civilization. The result was transplantation of many aspects of the western civilization, and loss of confidence of the people of India in the value, vitality and validity of their own culture. The process has not stopped with political independence, and has in fact been accelerated in some ways because of the television and internet promoting a sort of superficial but glamorous global culture. What is remarkable is that Indian culture, although battered and bruised, has survived the collision, and is re-emerging as a ray of hope for a sick and tired nation. The credit for this should go in a large measure to Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and many other great men whom India was very fortunate to have in quick succession. These great men, through their life and works, recast the Indian culture



in modern terms. According to Sri Aurobindo, our attitude to other cultures should be that of critical assimilation. We should accept from the West what is valuable in it and also compatible with the central principles of our own culture, and assimilate it into a larger whole. Worth assimilating from the West are curiosity, rationality, discipline, and a commitment to justice, liberty and equality. Noble and valuable as these ideas are at the mental level, it is only India's spiritual culture that can give full meaning and practical form to these ideas. For example, take the trinity of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity. When an effort is made to translate these ideas into action on the basis of a mental construct, "a society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty," says Sri Aurobindo. And, the history of democratic and communist regimes respectively has proven him right. The reason is that ego drives the actions at the mental level – it may be a controlled, regulated and modified ego, it may be a collective rather than an individual ego, but it is ego all the same. As to fraternity, it is antagonistic to the very idea of the ego, and that is why what we achieve while working from the ego is only an amicable working relationship. On the other hand, fraternity based on the fundamental unity of individual souls is true brotherhood. From this brotherhood, both liberty and equality flow automatically. I will spontaneously and happily treat my brother (or sister) as an equal, and I cannot make this equality conditional on my brother surrendering his liberty to me.

Each of the great cultures of the world has made a significant contribution to humanity as it stands today. Greece developed the faculty of logic and the sense of beauty; Rome developed organization, law and order; post-renaissance Europe has given us modern science and technology, efficiency, industry, and now the information age; India has given the world the insight that perfecting and satisfying the needs of the body and the mind



is necessary but not sufficient for fulfillment. Fulfillment comes only when the instrument that the body-mind complex is, works in light of the soul. It is this unique feature of the Indian culture that has made the world look repeatedly at it when extreme degrees of development of the parts of the being other than the spirit have left it with a feeling of something still missing. India has always supplied that missing element to the world.

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*For more than 250 short essays such as this one, you may see the book, 'Spiritual Wisdom in Small Doses', which is available for free download on <https://yesspirituality.wordpress.com/books/>*

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## What is Civilization?

*ivilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

There is an apocryphal story of a reformer who spent some time with a tribal population who ate rats. After returning from there he was one day bragging about his success with civilizing them. He was told that the population continues to eat rats. He replied that he knew it, but now they at least ate it with knives and forks. Using more appliances, more sophisticated appliances, and even unnecessary appliances is often equated with civilization. According to Sri Aurobindo, besides the use of appliances, the other features normally associated with a civilization are organization, government, policing, and education. By these criteria, many ancient societies may be considered civilized, but we do not think so because their organization was too simple and their appliances too crude by our standards. He says that it is also customary for the dominant and most successful society of any era to consider other contemporary societies to be uncivilized, or at least semi-civilized. In general, there is a



tendency to consider older societies, and societies different from us, to be less civilized than ourselves. Thus, our usual criteria of civilization are relative. There is, however, also an absolute criterion of civilization, says Sri Aurobindo. The absolute criterion is that besides social and economic organization, the society should also have substantial mental activity. Even if during certain phases of its history, the society neglects its physical and economic existence, it should be considered civilized if it continues to be intellectually active.

An intellectually active society can also be at different stages of evolution. Sri Aurobindo has observed that societies typically go through a cyclic process. Starting with a symbolic age, they enter an age of convention. Symbolism needs mental activity, and may be rational, but it is not the highest faculty of the human intellect. For example, the similarity between the surface of the walnut and that of the brain was the origin of the belief that walnut is good for mental activity. This type of logic does not appeal to the best in the human mind. With the passage of time, however, what happens is that the original significance of the symbol is lost somewhere, and the society enters the age of convention. The old practices continue although the basis of the symbolism is forgotten. Now these practices are supported by convention. Conventions tend to be rigid, and moreover, many of the conventions gradually become inappropriate because of the inevitable changes associated with the passage of time. Starting with individual revolts against conventions, the society then enters the age of rationality. The age of reason is marked by remarkable developments in science and technology. It brings great satisfaction to the physical, emotional and mental life of man. But experience has shown that that is not enough. The culmination of the age of reason is enormous multiplication of our needs and desires. The society becomes a victim of the problems that civilization creates, and finally exhausts itself. As Sri Aurobindo says, "... a healthy body, a strong vitality



and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress". Self-finding consists of the discovery that man is more than his body, mind and intellect; he also has a soul. The satisfying aim is spiritual growth, which needs living a life based on love and trust, a life consisting of giving, sharing and caring. The West, now tired of its material development based on rationality, is now looking for development of the spirit. The guidance for development of the spirit is available in ancient Indian wisdom. That is what the West is today looking up to India for. Let us hope that we do not go to the same extreme devotion to material progress that the West did before it realized the limitations of such progress. History does not have to repeat itself exactly. Being the repository of the infallible prescriptions for the ultimate in self-fulfillment and lasting mental peace, India is uniquely placed to help itself as well as the world.

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*For more than 250 short essays such as this one, you may see the book, 'Spiritual Wisdom in Small Doses', which is available for free download on <https://yepirituality.wordpress.com/books/>*

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*... ... form is the rhythm of the spirit. It follows that to break up the form is to injure the spirit's self-expression or at least to put it into grave peril.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 6)*

*... ... it is the will in the being that gives to circumstances their value, and often an unexpected value; the hue of apparent actuality is a misleading indicator.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 31)*



## From the Archives

Surendranath Jauhar  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Delhi Branch



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Sri Aurobindo Marg  
New Delhi - 16

1.8.72

Gracious Mother,

From this morning we have started Sri Aurobindo Janma Shatabdi Yajna. In the morning we performed Hawan and then we had two hours celebrations in the School Hall. The Mayor of Delhi Shri Kedarnath Sahani inaugurated the function. The students of the Mother's International School recited from Sri Aurobindo's works and after that the life of Sri Aurobindo was narrated.

Mother, we will be having morning and evening functions to celebrate the Yajna till 31st August 1972.

Praying for Thy Grace and Blessings.

Your child,

*Surendranath*

The Mother,  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram,  
Pondicherry 2.

*Blessings*

*A letter sent to the Mother by the Founder of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch when we were approaching the Hundredth Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo.*



## A Portrait of My Best Friend

I have a number of friends. I could get a new best friend any day if I wanted to but I don't. I'm quite content with my lot. Anyways, this is a portrait of my best friend.

She is of medium height with somewhat wild and unruly hair that frames her heart-shaped face. Her ears fit into her oddly shaped skull. She is almost a teenager. Maybe this explains her odd moods and the weird things she writes.

She has slightly pouting Cupid-bow lips, ready to curve into a smile. She has what is known as a 'pug nose'. At least, that is what her sister calls it. Jealousy? Perhaps. I prefer to call it a well-defined aristocratic nose. Maybe I'm right, or wrong. Her eyes are large and slightly slanted at the ends. They are dark brown; she likes to think them mysterious. They are set under heavy black eyebrows; she says they enhance her character.

Put separately, like if they are being auctioned, these features may not seem appealing. Assemble them together into a face, they complement each other. Add a mischievous twinkle to the eyes, put the lips into a droll yet humorous grin that discloses a row of uneven teeth and you have a face that is, if not pretty, at least pleasantly interesting.

Mentally, my friend likes to think she does well enough. She enjoys asking questions that confound grown-ups. She knows she is a little irresponsible when it comes to work. As she said one day, "It is kind of hard to sit inside and work when you know that the dogs are outside, waiting to be played with, there are still trees to be climbed, fruits to be picked and sister to be annoyed."

She thinks she can act rather well, and she does. It's difficult to smile and talk to someone amiable when all you want to do is throw a book at their face, stamp on their feet and scream at them for two minutes flat. Yet she thinks that in this world almost everything is pretence, a facade. Every day you have to





live or associate with people who make you sick with their insincerity. You must live and become an actor. Then, of course, there are the sincere people, people who are really trying to make a difference. She tries to keep her integrity intact, but sometimes she feels it slipping slowly away.

Yes, this is a portrait of my best friend. At least, that is what I intend it to be. I may have left out a few little details, like how big her feet are, what her likes and dislikes are, what her favourite colour is. But don't bother. I think I have managed to portray the general character of the person, a person struggling in this pretentious world, a person, who is really trying. I hope so. No one understands my best friend like I do. She always does what she thinks is, if not right, at least best at that time. I never get into quarrels with my best friend; we always share exactly the same opinion. You see, this essay is a self-portrait, that is to say, I am my best friend.

I wonder, if I were a person out of myself, would I be my best friend?

Vishala Amita Parmasad

*Former Student, The Mother's International School*

*(1st prize winning entry, Royal Commonwealth Essay Competition)*

*Reproduced from The Call Beyond, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1997, p. 50*



*... .. the life of mankind is still nine-tenths of barbarism to one-tenth of culture.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 37)*

*In Indian civilisation philosophy and religion, philosophy made dynamic by religion, religion enlightened by philosophy have led, the rest follow as best they can.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 52)*



## Feedback and Encouraging Words

### Feedback on the Japanese Translation of 'A Small Ramayana for Big Boys and Girls'



Dear Dr. Ramesh Bijlani ji,

About “A Small RAMAYANA for Big Boys and Girls”, I have received several beautiful comments on the translation of it and I couldn't help sharing with you. The comments are written in Japanese, so I am listing it in English below:

The children listened to me with sparkling eyes. As I read the story to them, I was able to ask them questions such as, “What did the three take?” We felt as if we were in the story and I enjoyed reading the story to them.

It is a great book. I like the easy to understand evil and righteous subjects. And the ending is great.



Thank you for translating this book into Japanese. And since it has “furigana”, I think it is good not only for little children but also for those who are studying Japanese. The Ramayana is a very famous Indian story that I hope many people will know. I think it is wonderful that there are quizzes to review the contents of the story, and other ways to help people learn more about it. I hope it will catch the eyes of as many people as possible...

These comments opened my eyes, and it leads to the second theme I would like to talk to and ask you about, which is about translating other children’s books you wrote. I would like to sincerely ask you if you could allow me to translate your children’s books, such as “One Book, Two Stories”.

I hear the news about Covid in India through medias and always concern about you and all in the ashram. I always wish you all the best, happiness, and total health.

With much gratitude and love,

*Midori Imamura*

*(in an email dated 1 August 2022)*



*The belief in a gradual soul evolution with a final perfection or divine transcendence and human life as its first direct means and often repeated opportunity, is the pivot of the Indian conception of existence.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 101)*

*What greater aims can be for the life of man than to grow by an inner and outer experience till he can live in God, realise his spirit, become divine in knowledge, in will and in the joy of his highest existence? And that is the whole sense of the striving of Indian culture.*

*Sri Aurobindo ('Foundations of Indian Culture', p. 172)*



## Contact us

Our quarterly magazine in Hindi, '**Sri Aravind Karmadhara**', is also available on-line now, and may be viewed on our website [www.sriarobindoashram.net](http://www.sriarobindoashram.net).

For a free subscription to '**Sri Aravind Karmadhara**', please send an e-mail to [sakarmdhara@gmail.com](mailto:sakarmdhara@gmail.com)

To get '**The Call Beyond**' online regularly, month after month, please send an e-mail to: [callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in](mailto:callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in)

To learn about the recent and forthcoming activities through the Ashram's e-magazine, '**Realization**', send an email to: [callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in](mailto:callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in)

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If you subscribe either to '**Realization**', or to '**The Call Beyond**', you will start receiving, month after month, both the magazines.

For information about Auro-Mira Service Society and the Kechla project, please visit the website [www.auromira.in](http://www.auromira.in)



## Note

*In view of the Hundred and Fiftieth Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo on 15 August 2022, the Ashram is expanding its mailing list to reach out to more and more who may benefit from the teachings of the Master and the Mother. To get included in the Mailing List, please go to <http://erp.saaonline.net.in/addcontacts.cfm> to fill in a form, which will take you only a few minutes.*



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## Feedback

Please send your feedback to  
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