

The Call Beyond



Volume 49 No.8

15 Aug 2024



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Cover picture: Umesh Mathew



An Online Publication of
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM - DELHI BRANCH

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The Island Ego Joined Its Continent

Aditi Kaul

*In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day
A gap was rent in the all-concealing vault;
The conscious ends of being went rolling back:
The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent.*

Sri Aurobindo ('Savitri', Book 1, Canto 3, CWSA Vols. 33-34, p. 25)

“The Island Ego Joined Its Continent”: this single line encapsulates the essence of Integral Yoga and distinctly articulates the aim for *sadhakas* (practitioners) of Integral Yoga. It clears the misconception that yoga emphasizes renouncing the world and merging with the Divine. Instead, this line from ‘Savitri’ suggests that our mission is not to merge but to join. This implies that our effort is required at the surface level to build an individuality. The entire process of refining our nature, which itself is the work of many lifetimes, prepares us to express the universal through the individual. This is where the key to transformation lies.

This work at the individual level demands not only our effort but also immense faith in the power that guides us through this purification process. This can also be seen as preparation on the path. By opening ourselves more and more to the Divine in the true spirit of surrender, we enable our outer instrument to realign itself and harmonize with the guiding force within our being. Once we decide—once we will—to change and offer ourselves to the path, things begin to unfold, and we are guided towards the light by navigating through our surface nature.

Externally, the path of Integral Yoga may appear very different for each individual. There is no fixed formula to be followed. For some, sitting in meditation for hours works wonders and helps establish the connection, whereas for others, working

in a meditative poise is what helps them stay connected. For some, the vital is the doorway to delight, while for others, mental widening comes naturally. **From a narrow perspective, we might judge and think, “This person is ‘doing’ yoga and this person is ‘not doing’ yoga.”** However, as we broaden our understanding, we begin to grasp the profoundness of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. He is a master who acknowledges the temperament of each of the *sadhakas*, guiding them according to their current personality makeup and life situation. He provides opportunities in mundane life for cultivating a yogic attitude and building a conscious bridge to the Divine. Since this yoga is about returning to the world where the change happens, building this golden bridge becomes a crucial element of progress.

The slow and steady construction of this bridge ultimately helps the ego recognize the Divinity within and allows that Divinity to use the individual as an instrument for its work in the world. Our task is to become a fit instrument for the Divine, facilitating this inner-outer union in full awareness. Conscious living is a full-time job, and our constant aspiration should be to become a willing servitor of the Divine.

Our tasks are given, we are but instruments;

Nothing is all our own that we create:

The Power that acts in us is not our force.

Sri Aurobindo (‘Savitri’, Book 1, Canto 3, CWSA Vols. 33-34, p. 542)



... self-pity is among the most ignoble and un-Aryan of moods.

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 54)

The Celebrations Over, The Work Continues

Athak Pathik

On 15 August 2022 was the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, which sparked global interest, enthusiasm, celebrations, and happily, also plenty of action. While it is natural for the fervour generated during the last three years to wane with time, the momentum generated during this period needs to be guarded and nurtured because Sri Aurobindo stood more for a vision than a set of teachings. His vision was nothing short of a radical change in the so-called typical human nature so that in the very near future the world would become a much better place to live in. His vision was not wishful thinking; it was based on his mystic vision which could see past, present and future in one sweep and perceive an inevitable evolutionary thrust pressing for the next leap in evolution.

As he revealed in the Uttarpara speech delivered shortly after his release from Alipore Jail, Sri Aurobindo's mission was to speak 'the word'. And, he did speak the word, most visibly in the *Arya*, from 1914-1920. 'The word' was a flood of words, a tsunami that swept into the pages of the *Arya* Vedantic wisdom, as seen by one who had seen the Truth, could rationalize what was beyond reason, express in words what was beyond words, and put into poetic English prose ideas for which the right words did not exist in the English language. Born with an amazing intellect and tremendous spiritual capacity, the master had been schooled for fourteen years in the West, had taught himself Indian wisdom for fourteen years in Baroda, and had combined the East-West synthesis with years of intense personal sadhana. With this preparation and several yogic siddhis to top, Sri Aurobindo was an unprecedented personification of all that it takes to give the world 'the word' that it needed.

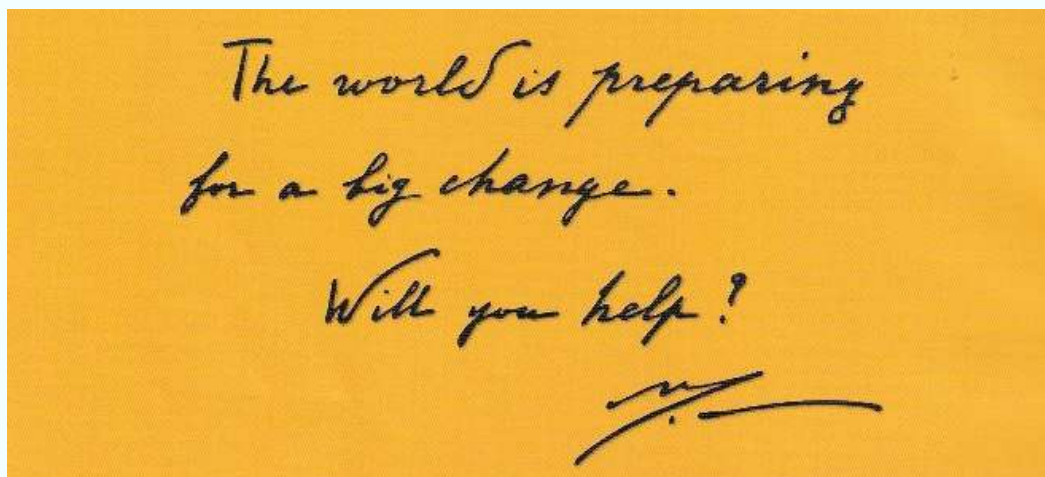
'The word' that Sri Aurobindo gave the world is difficult to encapsulate in one paragraph. It was nothing short of a prescription for 'the remaking of man', to borrow an expression

from Alexis Carrel's *Man, the Unknown*. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo worked out a powerful synthesis of all the major traditional schools of yoga, retaining the core of each without the rigidities or superfluities of any. In the *Essays on the Gita*, he saw the Gita in one sweep, the way few others have. Instead of analyzing the Gita verse by verse, Sri Aurobindo synthesized the three paths of the Gita into one, and demonstrated how it is impossible not to walk all the three after walking on any one of the three long enough and sincerely enough. In *The Life Divine*, he solved the riddle of existence. Although based on Vedanta, his approach was universal and non-denominational. Although based on his personal experience of the Divine, he has spoken almost entirely in the third person. Although he has brought out the limitation of reason, he has used incisive reasoning to do so! Being an impartial and sympathetic explorer of all aspects of truth, he has looked at the Truth from all angles. He has discussed even points of view different from his own at length, and justified them better than the proponents of those points of view could have themselves done, before demolishing them systematically. The result is that he does not leave any question unanswered, or any doubt unresolved. Reading *The Life Divine* is a humbling experience, a transforming influence. In *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo uncovers the symbolism of the Vedas. Using scholarly analysis of the etymology of words, profound logic, and his exceptional spiritual capacity, he brings out the deeper meanings of the apparently meaningless Vedic expressions and rituals. In *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, he establishes the justification for India's role as the spiritual guru to the world. He does not deny the backwardness of the country at the time of writing (the early twentieth century), but makes the important point that a culture cannot be judged on the basis of its most decadent phase. Whether it is discussion of art, literature, social life, or religion of India, the thread that runs all through is that the Indian culture emphasizes a rich life, a full life, a multi-faceted life, a balanced and harmonious

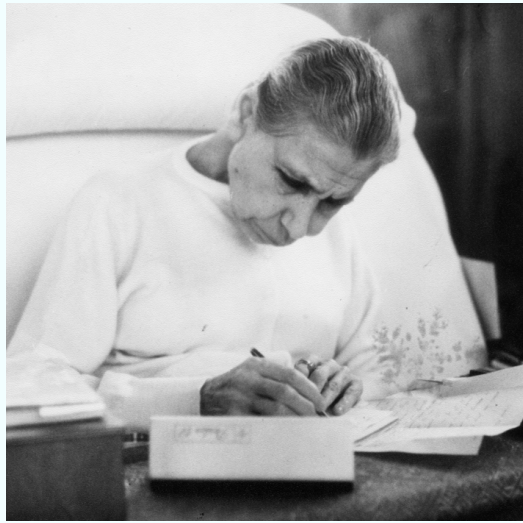
life, but every aspect of life here has a spiritual orientation, and is linked to the ultimate goal of life, which is spiritual growth. Thus, Indian spirituality is not an otherworldly spirituality; it does not place spirituality in a compartment clearly demarcated from worldly life. In India, spirituality has an all-pervasive overriding presence in everyday life. In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo has traced the psychological basis of the cyclic process through which societies pass. We can see clearly today that the world is passing through a transition from the age of reason towards a subjective age striving to overcome the limitations of reason, as predicted by Sri Aurobindo a hundred years ago. In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he went into the history of formation of large aggregates such as the nation state and empires, and the reasons for their repeated collapse. He has also discussed the future possibility of a world union, the obstacles that will be encountered in the realization of the possibility, and the unsuccessful experiments that are likely to be made before we realize that the only durable basis for such a union is a psychological unity based on the spiritual oneness of mankind. Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy that runs through all his works forms the basis of a complete and ideal system of psychology and a system of education. Integral education seeks not only the clichéd all-round development of the individual but also includes the development of that inner monitor in-built in each one of us that enables us to make the choices in life that make life fulfilling and meaningful. Ignoring the inner monitor (called the psychic being by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother) leads to uneasiness, and listening to it gives us immense joy and lasting mental peace. The citizens of tomorrow appreciating the value of this joy in life, in contrast with the so-called happiness dependent on external circumstances, is the surest basis of a sane society. That integral education can be translated into practice was shown by the Mother in the school that she started in the Ashram at Puducherry, and the experiment has been repeated since in several integral schools.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy is couched in terms of evolution. He had visualized a hundred years ago that we are on the threshold of an evolutionary leap. In the next evolutionary leap, mental man must rise above his limited and limiting mind – a necessity, potentiality and inevitability that many other noted thinkers have also lately hinted at.

Such then is a glimpse of the word that the Master spoke to the world. There is hardly any subject under the sun that he did not touch, and he gave everything he touched a unique timeless spiritual orientation. Following the publication of the *Arya* were decades of sadhana by the Master and the Mother aimed at the establishment of the supramental on earth. The call was answered on 29 February 1956. However, for the manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness to be visible and significant, we have to be ready. Our getting ready means that we examine everything we do in terms of the effect it will have on the level of our consciousness. Raising the level of consciousness is no longer just an individual pursuit for individual fulfillment. It has implications for the level of consciousness of the human race, the consciousness of our planet. It needs a critical mass of people to be at a very high level of consciousness for the Supramental principle to have a perceptible impact on human affairs. Making our contribution to this critical mass is our homework. It is for this homework that the Mother asked mankind: "Will you help?"



Refuse the Lower Movements



Sweet Mother, how can we empty the consciousness of its mixed contents?

By aspiration, the rejection of the lower movements, a call to the higher force. If you do not accept certain movements, then naturally, when they find that they cannot manifest, gradually they diminish in force and stop occurring. If you refuse to express everything that is of lower kind, little by little the very thing disappears, and the consciousness is emptied of lower things. It is by refusing to give expression – I mean not only in action but also in thought, in feeling. When impulses, thoughts, emotions come, if you refuse to express them, if you push them aside and remain in a state of inner aspiration and calm, then gradually they lose their force and stop coming. So the consciousness is emptied of its lower movements.

For instance, when undesirable thoughts come, if you look at them, observe them, if you take pleasure in following them in their movements, they will never stop coming. It is the same thing when you have undesirable feelings or sensations: if you pay attention to them, concentrate on them or even look at them with a certain indulgence, they will never stop. But if you absolutely refuse to... receive and express them, after some time they stop. You must be patient and very persistent.

In a great aspiration, if you can put yourself into contact with something higher, some influence of your psychic being or some light from above, and if you can manage to put this in touch with these lower movements, naturally they stop more. But before even being able to stop these things by aspiration, you can already stop those movements from finding expression in you by a very persistent and patient refusal. When thoughts which you do not like come, if you just brush them and do not pay them any attention, after some time they will not come...

The Mother ('The Great Adventure', p. 78-79)

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 playlist is: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbJ59iL6vu-UXeufBeKQlUTwGf3GhZ9LJ>



The unconscious or half-conscious wresting of fact and word and idea to suit a preconceived notion or the doctrine or principle of one's preference is recognised by Indian logicians as one of the most fruitful sources of fallacy; and it is perhaps the one which it is most difficult for even the most conscientious thinker to avoid.

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 26)

Where sacrifice is not willingly given, Nature exacts it by force, she satisfies the law of her living.

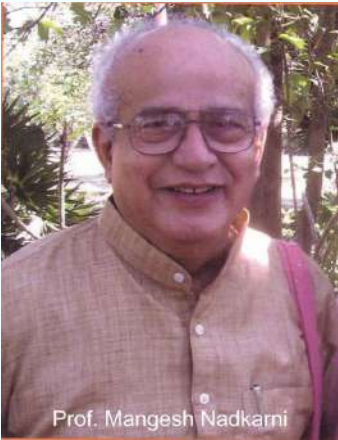
Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 119)

Yogic Techniques Are Not Devices to Get a Desired Result

I don't think you understood very well what Mother was trying to tell you. First of all she did not say that prayers or meditation either were no good—how could she when both count for so much in Yoga? What she said was that the prayer must well up from the heart on a crest of emotion or aspiration, the Japa or meditation come in a live push carrying the joy or the light of the thing in it. **If done mechanically and merely as a thing that ought to be done (stern grim duty!), it must tend towards want of interest and dryness and so be ineffective.** It was what I meant when I said I thought you were doing Japa too much as a means for bringing about a result—I meant too much as a device, a process laid down for getting the thing done. That again was why I wanted the psychological conditions in you to develop, the psychic, the mental—for when the psychic is forward, there is no lack of life and joy in the prayer, the aspiration, the seeking, no difficulty in having the constant stream of bhakti and when the mind is quiet and intuned and upturned there is no difficulty or want of interest in meditation. Meditation by the way is a process leading towards knowledge and through knowledge, it is a thing of the head and not of the heart; so if you want dhyana, you can't have an aversion to knowledge. Concentration in the heart is not meditation, it is a call on the Divine, on the Beloved. **This Yoga too is not a Yoga of knowledge alone—knowledge is one of its means, but its base being self-offering, surrender, bhakti, it is based on the heart and nothing can be eventually done without this base.** There are plenty of people here who do or have done Japa and base themselves on bhakti, very few comparatively who have done the “head” meditation; love and bhakti and works are usually the base—how many can proceed by knowledge? Only the few.

Sri Aurobindo: ‘Letters on Yoga-II’, CWSA Vol. 29, pp. 226-227.

Some Thoughts on Taking Sri Aurobindo To the Youth



Prof. Mangesh Nadkarni

Sri Aurobindo's teaching is a living truth and the most effective way of disseminating a truth is to live it, to incarnate it through one's own life. There are, however, institutions which have been set up to disseminate Sri Aurobindo's message and teachings through the spoken and the written word, and individuals too who are engaged in this enterprise. This work, while it cannot be an

end in itself, is also valuable, particularly in preparing the communal mind to be hospitable to the coming of the new spiritual age. **In 'The Human Cycle', Sri Aurobindo speaks of two conditions which have to be satisfied before a new spiritual age can come:**

"Therefore, if the spiritual age of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must at the same time be a mass, a society, a communal mind or at least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating; ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made."

All attempts to disseminate Sri Aurobindo's thought and message either through the written or the spoken medium, if done sincerely and well, can be a help in this task of preparing the communal mind. ...

Rabindranath Tagore declared a long time ago that Sri Aurobindo had the Word that India would speak through his voice to the world. **Yet it must be conceded that as of now Sri Aurobindo's word has not been heard even by his own countrymen; he is not as widely known in our country as he deserves to be.** The name of Swami Vivekananda is better known but he too is known primarily as a national hero who did us proud at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. Even his status is rather like that of an Olympic Gold Medalist; I do not think that in today's India many people know enough about what he stood for, or feel that his ideals and vision have an important role in shaping the future of this country.

The reasons why Sri Aurobindo has remained comparatively unknown are many. To mention some of them briefly: his aversion to any kind of propaganda in spiritual work, the widespread misunderstanding about his stay in what looked like retirement in Pondicherry for forty years, the revolutionary nature of his contribution to Indian spiritual evolution and the idea of the higher mental planes and of the supramental Truth-Consciousness and his aim of trying to bring down that consciousness as the means of the complete transformation of earthly life. **In many ways Sri Aurobindo was so much ahead of the age in which we live that more often than not he is either misunderstood or ill-understood.**

Besides, ever since the rational nationalism of the Nehruvian kind gained ascendancy in the country, particularly among the intelligentsia, it has become intellectually fashionable to dismiss all talk of spirituality as obscurantism, and as an attempt to foist the Hindu ideology on the unsuspecting masses. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand how a person like Sri Aurobindo with such a prodigious talent in so many diverse fields of human intellectual endeavour, and whose writings bring the much-needed corrective to the exaggerations

of some of the most seminal thinkers of this century, such as Darwin, Freud and Marx, has received such scant attention from our intelligentsia. Finally, it must also be admitted that one of the reasons why Sri Aurobindo has not yet captured the imagination of many people is that those of us who talk or write about him do not seem to have given much thought as to how exactly to project him. **Generally we tend to present him as a mystical figure, whose books and views are to be revered and worshipped rather than read and discussed.** A certain mistiness and vagueness often goes about in the name of mysticism. Or, we present him as a cult figure, as one of those men of God, who has his own patented pathway to God. We often tend to overlook the sheer brilliance and grandeur of Sri Aurobindo as a thinker.

It is indeed rather strange that the Indian renaissance or modern Indian nationalism which was born out of a great spiritual tidal wave represented first by Sri Ramakrishna and then focussed directly on the country and its problems by Sri Aurobindo during his political days, has been today metamorphosed into something which has a deep distrust if not positive hostility towards anything spiritual. A perceptive analysis of this phenomenon may be seen in K.D. Sethna's article on "Indian Nationalism at its Truest" (included in his book: 'India and the World Scene') in which he shows how the original inspiration as it descended through Tilak, then Gandhi and finally Jawaharlal Nehru in successive stages gradually lost the original spiritual impulse and became in effect anti-spiritual.

2

There certainly was a time when the idealistic youth of India were all ears to Sri Aurobindo. His articles in the 'Bande Mataram', the 'Karmayogin' and the 'Yugantar' were avidly read by the young people in India who were galvanised

by these powerful articles. Bipin Chandra Pal, one of Sri Aurobindo's contemporaries had this to say about him:

“The youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India, but in endowment, education and character, perhaps superior to them all – Aravinda seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his contemporaries... The Nationalist School was without a daily English organ. A new paper was started. Aravinda was invited to join its staff... This paper, ‘Bande Mataram’, at once secured for itself a recognised position in Indian journalism. The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian... **Morning after morning not only in Calcutta, but the educational community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day...** It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however, much they might fear or hate it, and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal.”

Acharya J.B. Kripalani (President, Indian National Congress, 1946-48) in a radio broadcast he made on Sri Aurobindo's 76 birthday (1948) paid tributes to him in these words:

“As a young man, just leaving college, I was familiar with his writings through the ‘Bande Mataram’ and later through the ‘Karmayogin’. In the columns of the former, Sri Aurobindo, then the youngest of the politicians and fresh in the field, poured forth daily his thoughts and comments on the current events. He gave them a significance that was original and illuminating and he brought to bear on them the light of the most mature political wisdom... He wanted nothing less than the absolute and unfettered freedom of this ancient

and once glorious land... a land that had made the highest spiritual, cultural and material contribution to the advance of the human race and which, given the opportunity, could, even today, make still greater contribution to the advance of human knowledge, experience and happiness. In Sri Aurobindo, patriotism rose from being a sentiment of group selfishness to the heights of passionate love that prostrates in adoration before the Motherland whom he simply called 'the Mother'... All this may appear to the so-called realist of today as mere romanticism and sentimentalism. But for those who then felt the uplifting influence of the new idea, it had the effect of strengthening their moral fibre and moulding their character so that they forgot their narrow personal ego and merged it in that of the country and the race. **This enlargement of the ego had its invigorating effect upon national life.** It created a new movement in art and literature and produced new patterns of thought, action and experience. It made us familiar with the idea of suffering and sacrifice as a joyful offering at the sacred altar of the Mother. Therefore, when after some years Gandhiji appeared on the Indian horizon, he did not find the field fallow. There was something to build upon and most of those who joined him... were those who had been inspired by the new passion created in them chiefly by the writings of Sri Aurobindo."

In the following passage, Subhash Chandra Bose, the great national leader and the founder of the I.N.A., talks about the inspiration he drew from Sri Aurobindo during his younger days:

"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.**

[Aurobindo's] letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, specially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody 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."

Why should the youth of today not have for Sri Aurobindo the enthusiasm which Acharya Kripalani or B.C. Pal or Subhash Chandra Bose had for him in their youth?

3

It is obvious that the youth of today is living in a world so different from that in which their counterparts did in the early decades of this century. Frankly speaking, young people today are not particularly interested in most of the things that go on in the name of religion or spirituality. **This does not of course imply that they are intrinsically less spiritual than the youth of Acharya Kripalani's generation.** It only means that they are living in an age in which religion and activities centred around it have lost the appeal that they had to an earlier generation. But this is not a phenomenon restricted only to India; this is the case everywhere in the world except probably in some of the Islamic countries. To the superficial view at least, modern-day youth seem to be interested mainly in sports and games, and in films and the TV, and in what may be called party-politics. On the whole it is the fast-expanding entertainment world that seems to hold them captive. Things have changed even during my lifetime. **When I was a college student in the mid-fifties, a debate or a lecture by some writer or some eminent figure meant an audience large enough to fill at least the central hall of the college. This is no more the case, except when the speaker is a personality from the film or TV world or from the sports field, or is a politician.** But does this mean that the youth of this generation is devoid of interest in serious matters or that it is bereft of any ideals?

The youngsters of this generation in our country are much more street-smart than the youth of a couple of generations ago, and worldly-wise, or that is at least what they think of themselves as we did in our time with reference to the generation of our parents. It may even be true that cynicism seems to come to them more easily; they have a distrust of fine words and idealistic posturing. But there may be a valid reason for this stance of our youth. The years of our freedom struggle was a period of fervent idealism, of heroes who appeared larger than life. Those were the days when the young people were inspired by the hope that the coming of independence would usher in a modern, prosperous democratic India, where there will be no economic disparities, no social injustice, no political hooliganism, no religious bigotry and regional chauvinism. **But this India of our dreams has not materialised, and many of our former heroes have fallen like so many gods that have failed.** We see so much corruption and criminality in public life, such shameless exploitation of the ignorance of the electorate for petty party and personal gains and such growing economic inequality in our society, that our young people feel betrayed and lose their innocence much earlier in their lives than our generation did. This makes them cynical early in life. Scoffing at everything around one has become quite fashionable.

... The young people of my generation thronged to listen to lectures during our college days mainly because there was hardly any other kind of entertainment available. **The youth of each generation have interests that are different from the interests of their elders.** With time everything changes. All generations have their own preferences and foibles. The younger generation is always blamed for not living up to the expectations of their elders, and this of course is attributable to the generation gap syndrome. This only implies the obvious: that the youth of this generation are different from the youth of an earlier generation. **They too have their idealists and**

their pragmatists. Not all of them are indifferent to the larger, or the more serious issues of life.

4

During the entire period of our freedom struggle, Swami Vivekananda was one of the major forces of inspiration for the youth of India but this is no more the case. Even the recent celebrations commemorating the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's great success at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 had a ritualistic flavour about them. The usual noises were made by the usual people, but the youth of the country in general ignored the occasion. **Why has Swami Vivekananda, whose spiritual life and writings have a greater popular flavour about them than Sri Aurobindo's, too suffered this neglect?**

Could it be because Swami Vivekananda, like Sri Aurobindo, always spoke of the crucial importance of the spiritual ideal for this country, and spirituality is out of fashion today, that is, it is either a misunderstood or an ill-understood concept today?

Since we are speaking of spirituality here, and since it happens to be a term which is so egregiously misunderstood in current intellectual discourse, it may be useful to explain here briefly what exactly Sri Aurobindo meant by it. In 'The Life Divine' Sri Aurobindo points out that spirituality is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things. These things are of considerable value to mind and life; they are movements which discipline, purify and prepare us for the spiritual life, but they still belong to the mental evolution. "Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and

pervading this universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, a tuning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.”

Sri Aurobindo always insisted on the primacy of the spiritual ideal for this country as can be seen from the following brief excerpts:

“Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies. India is the Bharata Shakti, the living energy of a great spiritual conception, and fidelity to it is the very principle of her existence.”

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

It would appear then that the primacy accorded by Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda to spirituality in life as well as in nation-building does not seem to appeal to our youth today. But this cannot really be true because spirituality is a perennial need of the human nature in all societies at all times and the present generation cannot be an exception to it. **We have seen that like all earlier generations, the present generation of youth too is not bereft of idealism. But for them conventional spirituality means retreat from life, impoverishment or negation of life on the one hand, and superstitious beliefs, a benign indifference to the social and economic inequalities around them and a blind worship of tradition, on the other.** Spirituality offered in religious terms does not appeal to them because most of them are not enthusiastic about religion any more. They are impatient of far-off seekings and eager to get down to doing things. But the idealists among them are as spiritual as their counterparts in earlier generations, that is to say that they too have non-materialistic concerns, concerns other than those of money, career, and comforts of life. **But,**

in general, these spiritual concerns manifest themselves as concerns of a different kind... as concerns about social and economic justice for the deprived and the underprivileged, as concerns about ecology, and for equality of gender. Neither the philosophic idealism of our Acharyas nor the devotionism of our saint-poets has much appeal to them, the best of them are imbued with a practical idealism which is ethical, social, pragmatic, altruistic and humanitarian. Now all these things are good, and especially needed at the present day, are part of the divine Will or they would not gain such prominence in humanity. **The highest ideals of an age without any exception arise out of its spiritual impulses.** The yugadharmas of our age demands practical, ethical, social, pragmatic, altruistic and humanitarian engagement with the society in which we live. And spirituality therefore will have to be presented to this generation in these forms.

In fact, this is what actually happened during the youth of Acharya Kripalani and Subhash Chandra Bose as well; spirituality was presented to them in terms of the 'yugadharmas' (the characteristic sense of right and wrong appropriate to an era) of that age. Those were the days of Indian renaissance and resurgence. The freedom struggle was taking shape and many a starry-eyed youngster readily responded to the stirring call made to him or her by our national leaders. **Pride in the Indian tradition, a determination to liberate the country from the humiliating imperial stranglehold, and then to rebuild the country economically and industrially, and to wipe out the social evils such as untouchability and suppression of women, the caste system, etc. which had debilitated the country...these were the issues that greatly concerned the then rising generation.** These are the issues with which the younger generation of that age found it easy to identify itself. They saw spirituality which leaders like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo often dwelt on in their writings as something of a resource supporting this programme

of national reconstruction. I do not think that the youth of that generation were any more spiritually inclined than the youth of our time. But during those days, spirituality sounded positive because it came in to support issues like national independence, social equality, national pride etc. which most people understood. **In our generation, spirituality is hardly ever presented as a resource for national reconstruction.**

To sum up this part of our discussion: The youth of our generation is more Europeanised than the generation of Acharya Kripalani and Subhash Chandra Bose to whom the philosophic idealism or a certain simplistic devotionism came more naturally than it does to the youth today. **In their place the modern mind at its best is imbued with a certain practical idealism which is devoted to social, economic, altruistic, ecological and political and humanitarian issues. And therefore, if we wish to engage the modern mind, we must begin by placing these issues in the centre, and then if spirituality is brought in as a resource supporting these issues, it will be received by the modern youth too with the enthusiasm characteristic of the young in all ages.**

And this too is something Sri Aurobindo had clearly recognised as early as in 1920. For in a message he gave to 'The Standard Bearer' in that year, he said:

"A spiritual ideal has always been the characteristic idea and aspiration of India. But the progress of Time and the need of humanity demand a new orientation and another form of that ideal. The old forms and methods are no longer sufficient for the purpose of the Time-Spirit. **India can no longer fulfil herself on lines that are too narrow for the great steps she has to take in the future.** Nor is ours the spirituality of a life that is aged and world-weary and burdened with the sense of the illusion and miserable inutility [lack of utility] of all God's mighty creation. **Our ideal is not the spirituality that withdraws from life but the conquest of**

life by the power of the spirit. It is to accept the world as an effort of manifestation of the Divine, but also to transform humanity by a greater effort of manifestation than has yet been accomplished, one in which the veil between man and God shall be removed, the divine manhood of which we are capable shall come to birth and our life shall be remoulded in the truth and light and power of the spirit..."

Mark here not only Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on the need for new methods and new forms but also the importance he gives to a reformulation of the old spiritual ideal to suit the changed Time-Spirit. Rightly or wrongly, and particularly in the West, Indian spirituality has come to be associated with a sense of world-weariness, with the sense of illusion and miserable purposelessness of this creation. While this is at best a characterization of one strand of the Indian spiritual tradition, the negative effects of this strand have been all-pervasive in the country for nearly a millennium now. **In spiritual life, individual liberation came to be regarded as the only ideal, and the renunciation of the world the only way.** The best spirits turned their back on the country and the material life drowsed itself in conservatism and inertia. This has sapped the vitality of the country and the refusal of the ascetic has led to the bankruptcy of life.

Sri Aurobindo brings to us a different kind of spirituality. For him this unfolding creation itself is a becoming of the Divine, a progressive manifestation of the Divine. Since the world is a manifestation of God, devotion to God implies, according to Sri Aurobindo, acknowledgement of the world and respect for it. **Spurning the world is as bad as remaining enmeshed in it.** Therefore, our aim in existence must be to incarnate in ourselves and in the world in which we live more and more the perfection of the Divine at all levels. **The aim of the spirituality that he advocates is the most revolutionary, since it aims at conquering the world for God, at conquering**

all the imperfections of the individual life at the physical, vital and mental levels as well as the problems of collective life. Sri Aurobindo was not overly concerned either with the heavens or with Moksha. He said in a letter he wrote to the Mother a long time ago: "Heaven we have always possessed, but not the earth, but the fullness of the Yoga is to make, in the formula of the Vedas, Heaven and Earth equal and one."

5

In this section, I wish to present briefly the broad spectrum of issues with which Sri Aurobindo was concerned throughout his life and we will see that there is much here that should fire the mind, heart and imagination of modern youth. The main task to which Sri Aurobindo devoted almost the entire post-political phase of his life revolved around issues such as the evolutionary crisis humanity is facing today and the way to resolve it. **Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary ideas about the new step in evolution that humanity is poised to take has brought enthusiastic response from the youth in many parts of the world, particularly from the western hemisphere.** For many young people living in countries behind what was once known as the Iron Curtain, and where communism has effectively shaken the domination of the traditional religions, and where people are therefore ready to rise beyond religions to the spiritual core which is at the heart of all religions, Sri Aurobindo is being seen as the new Messiah. And yet he was also very sensitive to the demands of the age in which he lived.

Some of the most influential intellectual paradigms of our age have been the liberal conception of man enshrined in the Western democracies, the Marxist concept of an ideal society, and the religious ideal of a transcendent fulfilment of life. Sri Aurobindo presents a complete synthesis of the highest that these ideals offer to us. **His illuminating writings enable us to understand the strengths and exaggerations of the most seminal thinkers who have influenced our age, namely**

Darwin, Freud and Marx. To give just one example of what I mean, consider what he said in his 'Thoughts and Aphorisms' about communism soon after communism was established in Soviet Russia:

1. The communistic principle of society is intrinsically as superior to the individualistic as brotherhood to jealousy and mutual slaughter, but all the practical schemes of Socialism invented in Europe are a yoke, a tyranny and a prison.
2. If communism ever establishes itself successfully upon earth, it must be on a foundation of soul's brotherhood and the death of egoism. A forced association and a mechanical comradeship would end in a world-wide fiasco.

He did recognise that communism was a great truth but he also saw that in the attempts so far made to implement it there was insufficient recognition of its spiritual foundation. He felt that like democracy, communism too had the spiritual impulse at its heart and to ignore it is to pervert it.

The idea of a divine life on earth is perhaps as old as humanity. But most thinkers ultimately abandoned this ideal because they found that the inertness of Matter, its inconscience, and the blind mechanical laws that govern it make the realisation of this dream impossible. And therefore, the voices of all religious thinkers have joined in declaring that the kingdom of God can be realized only in the realms of the beyond, not on this earth. Sri Aurobindo's great contribution to human thought is that he has put this entire problem within the framework of an evolutionary perspective and has explained the precise nature of the resources of the Spirit that would be needed to eliminate the problems so far regarded intractable and to establish a divine life upon earth. In addition, he has also discovered a way of establishing a new power on earth which will make the new spiritual resources accessible to human beings on earth. **The path that he has discovered involves an unprecedented**

adventure of consciousness only the bravest of us can hope to undertake. Here is a wonderful opportunity for the youth to respond to the call of new age that is ready to be born if only it could find enough people to incarnate its truths.

The kingdom of God on earth would mean the conquest of suffering, the elimination of the imperfections of mind, life and body and the establishment of a law of harmony and inner unity where now strife and discord prevail. So far, spirituality has meant primarily aiming at the freedom of our soul from the guiles of our lower nature, and in doing so, we have thrown away the baby with the bathwater. In other words, we have sought to escape from our Nature or leave it to its imperfections. But Sri Aurobindo has shown that this is an incomplete victory. Here on earth, we are not merely souls, we are beings embodied in Nature, and this embodiment, our body, life energies and mind, also deserve to participate in this adventure and seek perfection at their own levels. The answer to the stranglehold of the three 'gunas' (modes of nature) of the lower nature, namely, *tamas* (ignorance and inertia), *rajas* (activity and ambition) and *sattva* (truth and harmony) is not a flight from them but a transformation of them into a divine calm, divine power and divine light respectively. Sri Aurobindo's spirituality aims at the perfection of the human body, of vital energies and also of the human mind as well as of the inner being.

And finally, Sri Aurobindo does not set much store by the idea of personal salvation. **For him salvation must be cosmic and embrace the collective existence as well.** ... I have said enough here to show that Sri Aurobindo's ideal of spirituality is a very revolutionary one, and is not, as some people mistakenly hold, merely an old wine in a new bottle.

This then is the ideal that Sri Aurobindo puts before the youth of our age. But is this all just a set of beliefs, or merely a philosophy to be read and discussed? What about the translating of these ideals and dreams into a reality? **The youth always wants action.**

They are impatient of mere theorising. Sri Aurobindo has not only placed before the youth the most challenging ideal ever conceived possible for man but he has also given the outlines of a practical programme of realising this ideal. So long as ideals are merely worshipped and adored, they tend to end up as sects and cults, and Sri Aurobindo was against all such cultism. So, he lays down also broad guidelines for the practice of this ideal.

“Our *first object* shall be to declare this ideal: insist on the spiritual change as the first necessity and group together all who accept it and are ready to strive sincerely to fulfil it; our *second object* shall be to build up not only an individual but a communal life on this principle. An outer activity as well as an inner change is needed and it must be at once a spiritual, cultural, educational, social and economic action. Its scope too will be at once individual and communal, regional and national and eventually a work not only for the nation but for the whole human people. The immediate [result] of this action will be a new creation, a spiritual education and culture, an enlarged social spirit founded not in division but on unity, on the perfect growth and freedom of the individual, but also on his unity with others and his dedication to a larger self in the people and in humanity, and the beginning of an endeavour towards the solution of the economic problem founded not on any western model but on the communal principle native to India.

“Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world, ... not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India’s future ideal, not those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They will need to consecrate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future...”
(Message to ‘The Standard Bearer’ in 1920)

The first step is to aim at a spiritual change as the foremost necessity and then to bring together all those who accept the spiritual ideal and are ready to offer their lives as experimental fields for the incarnation of the spiritual ideal. Such people should be brought together to live as a community, and attempts should be made to organise the collective life as well on the spiritual principle. Our enterprise should embrace the whole gamut of man's outer activities-his social and economic life as well as his educational and cultural life. ... We must realise that there is no escape for us from collective yoga. Sri Aurobindo has very clearly told us in 'The Life Divine' that a perfected individual or a collection of perfected individuals is not enough. **We have to have separate communities exclusively devoted to this purpose. Only such communities sharing the same ideals, the same consciousness, having perfect unity and understanding, can make a dent in the existing world of ignorance.** "Our present community life is based on a money economy, our religion has the fervour of a dogmatic creed, our family relationships are based on an unabashed authoritarianism and ego-centred or shallow inter-personal relationships, – the relationship between parents and children, husband and wife, etc. Our political systems are either a sham of democracy or a totalitarianism, and then there are ignorant attachments and loyalties based on family, caste, creed, race, sex and nationality." **That is why we need to develop new spiritual communities which will be the experimental fields for the manifestation of a new consciousness, a consciousness which would simply be incapable of exploiting the weak, of ugliness and disharmony of any kind.** Such communities, Sri Aurobindo cautions us, are not easy to form and run. As soon as such communities dedicated to spiritual purpose and committed to a change of consciousness come up, all the difficulties of collective human nature come up with concentrated force. **As long as you are willing to function with your imperfections in an imperfect world, you are left alone. But when you press for a change,**

all the hidden difficulties of human nature rise to the surface and begin to torment you, because you cannot ignore them any longer. But he also has told us that the time to face up to these difficulties has come.

Who can take up all these challenges if not the youth of today and the young of the coming generations whom Sri Aurobindo has described thus:

*The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of immortality. ...
High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
And justify the light on Nature's face.*

(‘Savitri’, Book 3, Canto 4, pp. 343-44)

Reproduced from The Call Beyond, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 32-34; No. 4, pp. 18-23, 1999

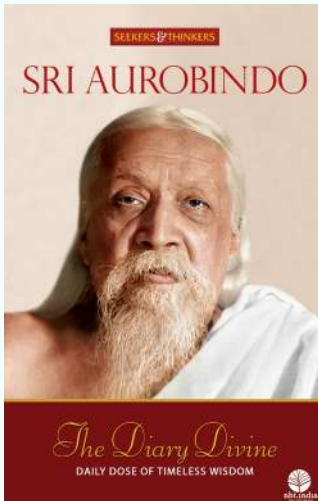


An untameable elemental force is needed to overcome more than partially the denials of the environment.

Sri Aurobindo (Essays Divine and Human’, p. 404)

The Diary Divine

'The Diary Divine: Daily Dose of Timeless Wisdom' by Sri Aurobindo. Compiled by Ramesh Bijlani. Published by National Book Trust, India, 2024. 379 + x pages, Rs. 460. ISBN 978-93-5743-474-4.



Sri Aurobindo holds a special attraction for the seekers of spiritual knowledge. He is an intellectual genius with exceptional capacity for reasoning; a polymath who has written on subjects ranging from science and mathematics to philology, sociology and philosophy; and a mystic with direct experience of the unmanifest Divine as well as the Divine in Its universal manifestation. His deep scholarship and his poetic language make him a magnet that draws the seekers of spiritual knowledge; that is also what frustrates many of them because they find him too difficult to understand.

Sri Aurobindo can be difficult to understand for reasons more than one. First, he wrote in English, as it was written by the best of writers a hundred years ago. Secondly, he achieves exceptional clarity while writing on complex subjects such as the consequences of karma or the possibility of rebirth by looking at the issue from all possible angles and by using arguments that an average reader needs time to digest. Finally, he writes from a level of consciousness that is ordinarily beyond the reach of the mind. The result is that many are those who struggle with the first few pages of books such as 'The Life Divine' and 'Savitri', get frustrated and give up. But the few who are blessed to get close to the spirit of Sri Aurobindo's works find themselves at the doorway to a new world of love, beauty and harmony. **'The Diary Divine' seeks to give a taste of this delicious experience to those who have the curiosity and consciousness to approach the works of Sri Aurobindo, but do not have the luxury of time and patience at their disposal.**

Compilations may be considered more approachable than the entire works, and there is no dearth of compilations from the inexhaustible works of Sri Aurobindo, but this one is the first of its type. It has 366 passages, each just one page, from a variety of works of Sri Aurobindo. But why exactly 366 passages? The idea is that if one reads one page a day, the book would be over in a year.

Each of the 366 passages in the book is a stand-alone passage. The passages have been carefully selected so that the collection would reflect, as far as possible, the wide range of subjects such as Indian culture, nationalism, politics, education, history, science, psychology, yoga and spirituality on which Sri Aurobindo has written. **A conscious effort has been made to select material that the readers would find relatively easy, interesting and valuable.** Further, passages on similar topics have been organised into clusters. The book includes the reference to the source of each passage, and a Subject Index. While launching the book at Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch, Dr. Kiran Bedi called the book a “very, very, lovely, and rare compilation” and said that it was “an amazing treasure.”



Dr. Kiran Bedi with Tara Didi, after launching the book

Reading one page a day is not the only way ‘The Diary Divine’ may be read. Another way would be to open any page at random, and read it as and when the spirit moves. Yet another way would be to turn to the book when one is looking for knowledge or clarity on a specific topic. One may turn to the index and look up the relevant pages. This might lead to a discovery that leads to picking up the book even when one is not searching for anything in particular. No matter how the book is read, it would provide the reader the thrill of learning something precious, something out of the ordinary. It may also

provide the necessary nudge for moving from knowledge to practice, and from practice to experience.

The book is a diary in the sense that one may read just one page of the book every day, and finish the book in exactly one year. Thus, the dose is one page, and there are enough doses to last a year, after which one may return to the first dose with profit, because each reading would reveal something new to the seeker. Knowledge is not the only way to approach the Divine. But to the spiritual seekers to whom it comes very naturally to use knowledge as the gateway to Truth, Sri Aurobindo offers a goldmine. This book provides a small sample of the gold. The sample might motivate the reader to dig deeper, and discover more. Knowledge often leads to devotion, and action cannot be far behind.



The enlightened man does not mourn either for the living or the dead, for he knows that suffering and death are merely incidents in the history of the soul.

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 56)

Finite bodies have an end, but that which possesses and uses the body is infinite, illimitable, eternal, indestructible. It casts away old and takes up new bodies as a man changes worn-out raiment for new; and what is there in this to grieve at and recoil and shrink?

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 57)

The Legend of Indra's battle with Vritra

Amit Gujral



Source: Painting by Ramanarayanadatta Sastri -Story of Vritra.jpg, Public Domain,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=94831269>

*There is a tale of valour in Man's hoary past,
 Narrated by ancient mystics who could see beyond,
 When, from the cavernous depths of Ignorance,
 Guarded by the monstrous demon, Vritra,
 The devourer of all that is noble in Man,
 Indra the mighty king of all the gods,
 Aided by the valorous Angirasa seers,
 Slayed him, and wrested from the darkness
 The Light of Knowledge, that he'd held captive.
 Freed, it led Mankind to conquer mighty peaks
 Marching onwards to their destined perfection
 In the blissful Vasts above Hell's tortuous abode.*

*Depression and anxiety were the arms of Vritra
 That stood between me and my inner Light.
 Called to recover It from the depths of Despair,
 Indra lord of the gods, who is my rational mind,
 Harnessed the help of a host of valiant warriors:
 Aspiration, Receptivity, Perseverance, Humility,*

*Gratitude, Equality, Sincerity, Courage they were.
 Unequal to the might of this valorous horde,
 Vritra the demon did meet his inglorious end!
 From the lifeless arms of depression and anxiety,
 Indra and his hordes my inner Light did wrest
 And enthroned again my Self over its rightful realm.*

Editor's note: In a story from the Rigveda, also found in the Bhagavat Purana, Indra entered into a series of battles with Vritra, a demon who had imprisoned all the rivers. Vritra is therefore considered the harbinger of drought. Finally, Indra killed Vritra with a thunderbolt made from the bones of the sage Dadhich. The gods rejoiced, but Indra's troubles were far from over. In the same way, overcoming our weaknesses once is not the end. It is an ongoing process, which needs constant inner work and vigilance.



Renunciation is indispensable, but the true renunciation is the inner rejection of desire and egoism ; without that the outer physical abandoning of works is a thing unreal and ineffective, with it it ceases even to be necessary, although it is not forbidden.

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 80)

A strong one-sided truth, when set forth as the whole truth, creates a strong light but also a strong confusion ; for the very strength of its element of truth increases the strength of its element of error.

Sri Aurobindo (In: Essays on the Gita, SABCL edition, p. 135)

Feedback and Encouraging Words

Feedback on the National Integration Camp, 11-18 August 2024

Tara Didi,

It was almost quarter of a century ago that we had our last National Integration Camp at Nainital. I thought how could such an antiquated, lifeless program be revived. But I am extremely happy to admit that I was wrong. The Sunday, 18th August presentation of the patriotic songs in seven languages proved to be a unique, thrilling, unforgettable experience, not only for me, but I am sure, for everybody present in the Meditation Hall. Hats off to Anjan and Hemant, great teachers, and their highly inspired team of singers.

So, thank you again and again, Didi, for offering this divine treat to us all.

With regards and gratitude,

Nalin (Dholakia)

In an e-mail dated 20 August 2024



Contact us

Our bimonthly magazine in Hindi, 'Sri Aravind Karmadhara', is also available on-line now, and may be viewed on our website www.sriaurobindoashram.net.

For a free subscription to 'Sri Aravind Karmadhara', please send an e-mail to sakarndhara@gmail.com

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For information about Auro-Mira Service Society and the Kechla project, please visit the website 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

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