

The Sunlit Path



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His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality.
A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;
His human self like a translucent cloak
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world.
Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time
And paying here God's debt to earth and man
A greater sonship was his divine right.

Savitri

Sri Aurobindo

En lui l'esprit consentit à descendre de plus larges sphères
 Dans notre province de vision éphémère,
 Lui le colon venu de l'immortalité.
 Rayon pointé sur les routes incertaines de la terre,
 Sa naissance arborait un symbole et un signe ;
 Son moi humain, tel un vêtement translucide,
 Couvrait Celui dont la toute-sagesse conduit le monde aveugle.
 Parent de l'Espace et du Temps cosmiques,
 Payant ici la dette de Dieu à la terre et à l'homme,
 Lui le plus noble de Ses fils de par un droit divin.

Savitri

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo: A Life Sketch

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

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity—for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time—and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

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

and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organisation of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram*, of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande Mataram*, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though

vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training

must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since his twelve months' detention in the Alipur Jail, which had been spent entirely in the practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 to the present moment⁴ he has remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his sadhana.

In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the Isha Upanishad, the Essays on the Gita, and others not yet published, the Life Divine, the Synthesis of Yoga, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race. At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance.

Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five disciples. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his

spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of sadhaks had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left everything behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Asram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1905. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvana, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material Inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this

possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. (1) **This "Life Sketch" was written in 1930 and published in 1937. Sri Aurobindo's retirement lasted until his passing in December 1950.*

Sri Aurobindo's Message

Fifteenth of August 1947

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the

nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such

developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India. (2)



वन्दे मातरम्

सुजलां सुफलां मलयजशीतलाम्
शस्यशामलां मातरम् ।

शुभ्रज्योत्स्नापुलकितयामिनीं
फुल्लकुसुमितद्रुमदलशोभिनीं
सुहासिनीं सुमधुर भाषिणीं

सुखदां वरदां मातरम् ॥ १ ॥ वन्दे मातरम् ।

कोटि-कोटि-कण्ठ-कल-कल-निनाद-कराले

कोटि-कोटि-भुजैर्धृत-खरकरवाले,

अबला केन मा एत बले ।

बहुबलधारिणीं नमामि तारिणीं

रिपुदलवारिणीं मातरम् ॥ २ ॥ वन्दे मातरम् ।

तुमि विद्या, तुमि धर्म

तुमि हृदि, तुमि मर्म

त्वं हि प्राणाः शरीरे

बाहुते तुमि मा शक्ति,

हृदये तुमि मा भक्ति,

तोमारई प्रतिमा गडि

मन्दिरे-मन्दिरे मातरम् ॥ ३ ॥ वन्दे मातरम् ।

त्वं हि दुर्गा दशप्रहरणधारिणी

कमला कमलदलविहारिणी

वाणी विद्यादायिनी, नमामि त्वाम्

नमामि कमलां अमलां अतुलां

सुजलां सुफलां मातरम् ॥ ४ ॥ वन्दे मातरम् ।

श्यामलां सरलां सुस्मितां भूषितां

धरणीं भरणीं मातरम् ॥ ५ ॥ वन्दे मातरम् ॥

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1. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, CWSA,36;5-10
2. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 36, 478-80
3. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, CWSA Vol. 23, p 91-2

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