

= Sri Aurobindo =

Sri Aurobindo (Bengali : [Sri Ôrobindo]) (born Aurobindo Ghose ; 15 August 1872 ? 5 December 1950) was an Indian nationalist , hindu philosopher , yogi , guru and poet . He joined the Indian movement for independence from British rule , for a while was one of its influential leaders and then became a spiritual reformer , introducing his visions on human progress and spiritual evolution .

Aurobindo studied for the Indian Civil Service at King 's College , Cambridge , England . After returning to India he took up various civil service works under the maharaja of the princely state of Baroda and began to involve himself in politics . He was imprisoned by the British for writing articles against British rule in India . He was released when no evidence was provided . During his stay in the jail he had mystical and spiritual experiences , after which he moved to Pondicherry , leaving politics for spiritual work .

During his stay in Pondicherry , Aurobindo developed a method of spiritual practice he called Integral Yoga . The central theme of his vision was the evolution of human life into a life divine . He believed in a spiritual realisation that not only liberated man but transformed his nature , enabling a divine life on earth . In 1926 , with the help of his spiritual collaborator , Mirra Alfassa (referred to as " The Mother ") , he founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram . He died on 5 December 1950 in Pondicherry .

His main literary works are The Life Divine , which deals with theoretical aspects of Integral Yoga ; Synthesis of Yoga , which deals with practical guidance to Integral Yoga ; and Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol , an epic poem . His works also include philosophy , poetry , translations and commentaries on the Vedas , Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita . He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1943 and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Aurobindo Ghose was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) , Bengal Presidency , India on 15 August 1872 . His father , Krishna Dhun Ghose , was then Assistant Surgeon of Rangapur in Bengal , and a former member of the Brahmo Samaj religious reform movement who had become enamoured with the then @-@ new idea of evolution while pursuing medical studies in Britain . His mother was Swarnalotta Devi , whose father was Shri Rajnarayan Bose , a leading figure in the Samaj . She had been sent to the more salubrious surroundings of Calcutta for Aurobindo 's birth . Aurobindo had two elder siblings , Benoybhusan and Manmohan , and both a younger sister , Sarojini , and a younger brother , Barindrakumar (also referred to as Barin , born Emmanuel Matthew) .

Young Aurobindo was brought up speaking English but used Hindustani to communicate with servants . Although his family were Bengali , his father believed British culture to be superior to that of his countrymen . He and his two elder siblings were sent to the English @-@ speaking Loreto House boarding school in Darjeeling , in part to improve their language skills and in part to distance them from their mother , who had developed a mental illness soon after the birth of her first child . Darjeeling was a centre of British life in India and the school was run by Irish nuns , through which the boys would have been exposed to Christian religious teachings and symbolism .

= = = England (1879 ? 1893) = = =

Krishna Dhun Ghose wanted his sons to enter the Indian Civil Service (ICS) , an elite organisation comprising around 1000 people . To achieve this it was necessary that they study in England and so it was there that the entire family moved in 1879 . The three brothers were placed in the care of the Reverend W. H. Drewett in Manchester . Drewett was a minister of the Congregational Church whom Krishna Dhun Ghose knew through his British friends at Rangapur .

The boys were taught Latin by Drewett and his wife . This was a prerequisite for admission to good

English schools and , after two years , in 1881 , the elder two siblings were enrolled at Manchester Grammar School . Aurobindo was considered too young for enrolment and he continued his studies with the Drewetts , learning history , Latin , French , geography and arithmetic . Although the Drewetts were told not to teach religion , the boys inevitably were exposed to Christian teachings and events , which generally bored Aurobindo and sometimes repulsed him . There was little contact with his father , who wrote only a few letters to his sons while they were in England , but what communication there was indicated that he was becoming less endeared to the British in India than he had been , on one occasion describing the British Raj as a " heartless government " .

Drewett emigrated to Australia in 1884 , causing the boys to be uprooted as they went to live with Drewett 's mother in London . In September of that year , Aurobindo and Manmohan joined St Paul 's School there . He learned Greek and spent the last three years reading literature and English poetry . He also acquired some familiarity with the German and Italian languages and , exposed to the evangelical strictures of Drewett 's mother , a distaste for religion . He considered himself at one point to be an atheist but later determined that he was agnostic . A blue plaque unveiled in 2007 commemorates Aurobindo 's residence at 49 St Stephen 's Avenue in Shepherd 's Bush , London , from 1884 to 1887 . The three brothers began living in spartan circumstances at the Liberal Club in South Kensington during 1887 , their father having experienced some financial difficulties . The Club 's secretary was James Cotton , brother of their father 's friend in the Bengal ICS , Henry Cotton .

By 1889 , Manmohan had determined to pursue a literary career and Benoybhusan had proved himself unequal to the standards necessary for ICS entrance . This meant that only Aurobindo might fulfil his father 's aspirations but to do so when his father lacked money required that he studied hard for a scholarship . To become an ICS official , students were required to pass the competitive examination , as well as to study at an English university for two years under probation . Aurobindo secured a scholarship at King 's College , Cambridge , under recommendation of Oscar Browning . He passed the written ICS examination after a few months , being ranked 11th out of 250 competitors . He spent the next two years at King 's College . Sri Aurobindo had no interest in the ICS and came late to the horse @-@ riding practical exam purposefully to get himself disqualified for the service .

At this time , the Maharaja of Baroda , Sayajirao Gaekwad III , was travelling in England . Cotton secured for him a place in Baroda State Service and arranged for him to meet the prince . He left England for India , arriving there in February 1893 . In India , Krishna Dhun Ghose , who was waiting to receive his son , was misinformed by his agents from Bombay (now Mumbai) that the ship on which Aurobindo had been travelling had sunk off the coast of Portugal . His father died upon hearing this news .

= = = Baroda and Calcutta (1893 ? 1910) = = =

In Baroda , Aurobindo joined the state service in 1893 , working first in the Survey and Settlements department , later moving to the Department of Revenue and then to the Secretariat , and much miscellaneous work like teaching grammar and assisting in writing speeches for the Maharaja of Gaekwad until 1897 . In 1897 during his work in Baroda he started working as a part @-@ time French teacher at Baroda College (now Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda) . He was later promoted to the post of vice @-@ principal . At Baroda , Sri Aurobindo self @-@ studied Sanskrit and Bengali .

During his stay at Baroda he contributed to many articles to Indu Prakash and spoke as a chairman of the Baroda college board . He started taking an active interest in the politics of India 's independence struggle against British rule , working behind the scenes as his position in the Baroda state administration barred him from overt political activity . He linked up with resistance groups in Bengal and Madhya Pradesh , while traveling to these states . He established contact with Lokmanya Tilak and Sister Nivedita . He arranged the military training of Jatindra Nath Banerjee (Niralamba Swami) in the Baroda army and then dispatched him to organise the resistance groups in Bengal .

Aurobindo often traveled between Baroda and Bengal , at first in a bid to re @-@ establish links

with his parent 's families and other Bengali relatives , including his cousin Sarojini and brother Barin , and later increasingly to establish resistance groups across the Presidency . He formally moved to Calcutta in 1906 after the announcement of the Partition of Bengal . Age 28 , he had married 14 @-@ year @-@ old Mrinalini , daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose , a senior official in government service , when he visited Calcutta in 1901 . Mrinalini died in December 1918 during the influenza pandemic .

Aurobindo was influenced by studies on rebellion and revolutions against England in medieval France and the revolts in America and Italy . In his public activities he favoured non @-@ co @-@ operation and passive resistance ; in private he took up secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt , in case that the passive revolt failed .

In Bengal , with Barin 's help , he established contacts with revolutionaries , inspiring radicals such as Bagha Jatin , Jatin Banerjee and Surendranath Tagore . He helped establish a series of youth clubs , including the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta in 1902 .

Aurobindo attended the 1906 Congress meeting headed by Dadabhai Naoroji and participated as a councillor in forming the fourfold objectives of " Swaraj , Swadesh , Boycott and national education " . In 1907 at the Surat session of Congress where moderates and extremists had a major showdown , he led with extremists along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak . The Congress split after this session . In 1907 ? 1908 Aurobindo traveled extensively to Pune , Bombay and Baroda to firm up support for the nationalist cause , giving speeches and meeting with groups . He was arrested again in May 1908 in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case . He was acquitted in the ensuing trial and released after a year of isolated incarceration .

Once out of the prison he started two new publications , Karmayogin in English and Dharma in Bengali . He also delivered the Uttarpara Speech hinting at the transformation of his focus to spiritual matters . The British persecution continued because of his writings in his new journals and in April 1910 Aurobindo moved to Pondicherry , where Britain 's secret police monitored his activities .

= = = Conversion from politics to spirituality = = =

In July 1905 then Viceroy of India , Lord Curzon , partitioned Bengal . This sparked an outburst of public anger against the British , leading to civil unrest and a nationalist campaign by groups of revolutionaries , who included Aurobindo . In 1908 , Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki attempted to kill Magistrate Kingsford , a judge known for handing down particularly severe sentences against nationalists . However , the bomb thrown at his horse carriage missed its target and instead landed in another carriage and killed two British women , the wife and daughter of barrister Pringle Kennedy . Aurobindo was also arrested on charges of planning and overseeing the attack and imprisoned in solitary confinement in Alipore Jail . The trial of the Alipore Bomb Case lasted for a year , but eventually he was acquitted on May 6 , 1909 . His defence counsel was Chittaranjan Das .

During this period in the Jail , his view of life was radically changed due to spiritual experiences and realizations . Consequently , his aim went far beyond the service and liberation of the country .

Aurobindo said he was " visited " by Vivekananda in the Alipore Jail : " It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence . "

In his autobiographical notes , Aurobindo said he felt a vast sense of calmness when he first came back to India . He could not explain this and continued to have various such experiences from time to time . He knew nothing of yoga at that time and started his practise of it without a teacher , except for some rules that he learned from Ganganath , a friend who was a disciple of Brahmananda . In 1907 , Barin introduced Aurobindo to Vishnu Bhaskar Lele , a Maharashtrian yogi . Aurobindo was influenced by the guidance he got from the yogi , who had instructed Aurobindo to depend on an inner guide and any kind of external guru or guidance would not be required .

In 1910 Aurobindo withdrew himself from all political activities and went into hiding at Chandannagar while the British were trying to prosecute him for sedition on the basis of a signed article titled ' To My Countrymen ' , published in Karmayogin . As Aurobindo disappeared from view ,

the warrant was held back and the prosecution postponed . Aurobindo manoeuvred the police into open action and a warrant was issued on 4 April 1910 , but the warrant could not be executed because on that date he had reached Pondicherry , then a French colony . The warrant against Aurobindo was withdrawn .

= = = Pondicherry (1910 ? 1950) = = =

In Pondicherry , Aurobindo dedicated himself to his spiritual and philosophical pursuits . In 1914 , after four years of secluded yoga , he started a monthly philosophical magazine called Arya . This ceased publication in 1921 . Many years later , he revised some of these works before they were published in book form . Some of the book series derived out of this publication were The Life Divine , The Synthesis of Yoga , Essays on The Gita , The Secret of The Veda , Hymns to the Mystic Fire , The Upanishads , The Renaissance in India , War and Self @-@ determination , The Human Cycle , The Ideal of Human Unity and The Future Poetry were published in this magazine .

At the beginning of his stay at Pondicherry , there were few followers , but with time their numbers grew , resulting in the formation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926 . From 1926 he started to sign himself as Sri Aurobindo , Sri (meaning holy in Sanskrit) being commonly used as an honorific .

For some time afterwards , his main literary output was his voluminous correspondence with his disciples . His letters , most of which were written in the 1930s , numbered in the several thousands . Many were brief comments made in the margins of his disciple 's notebooks in answer to their questions and reports of their spiritual practice ? others extended to several pages of carefully composed explanations of practical aspects of his teachings . These were later collected and published in book form in three volumes of Letters on Yoga . In the late 1930s , he resumed work on a poem he had started earlier ? he continued to expand and revise this poem for the rest of his life . It became perhaps his greatest literary achievement , Savitri , an epic spiritual poem in blank verse of approximately 24 @,@ 000 lines .

Aurobindo died on 5 December 1950 . Around 60 @,@ 000 people attended his funeral . Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru , and President Rajendra Prasad praised him for his contribution to Yogic philosophy and the independence struggle . National and international newspapers commemorated his death .

= = = Mirra Richard and the development of the Ashram = = =

Aurobindo 's close spiritual collaborator , Mirra Richard (b . Alfassa) , came to be known as The Mother . She was a French national , born in Paris on 21 February 1878 . In her 20s she studied occultism with Max Theon . Along with her husband , Paul Richard , she went to Pondicherry on 29 March 1914 , and finally settled there in 1920 . Aurobindo considered her his spiritual equal and collaborator . After 24 November 1926 , when Aurobindo retired into seclusion , he left it to her to plan , build and run the ashram , the community of disciples which had gathered around them . Some time later , when families with children joined the ashram , she established and supervised the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education with its experiments in the field of education . When he died in 1950 , she continued their spiritual work , directed the ashram , and guided their disciples .

= = Philosophy and spiritual vision = =

Aurobindo 's concept of the Integral Yoga system is described in his books , The Synthesis of Yoga and The Life Divine . The Life Divine is a compilation of essays published serially in Arya .

Aurobindo argues that divine Brahman manifests as empirical reality through l!l? , or divine play . Instead of positing that the world we experience is an illusion (m?y?) , Aurobindo argues that life itself is Divine .

Aurobindo believed that Darwinism merely describes a phenomenon of the evolution of matter into life , but does not explain the reason behind it , while he finds life to be already present in matter ,

because all of existence is a manifestation of Brahman . He argues that nature (which he interpreted as divine) has evolved life out of matter and then mind out of life . All of existence , he argues , is attempting to manifest to the level of the supermind - that evolution had a purpose . He stated that he found the task of understanding the nature of reality arduous and difficult to justify by immediate tangible results .

= = Legacy = =

Aurobindo was an Indian nationalist but is best known for his philosophy on human evolution and Integral Yoga .

= = = Influence = = =

His influence has been wide @-@ ranging . In India , S. K. Maitra , Anilbaran Roy and D. P. Chattopadhyaya commented on Aurobindo 's work . Writers on esotericism and traditional wisdom , such as Mircea Eliade , Paul Brunton , and Rene Guenon , all saw him as an authentic representative of the Indian spiritual tradition .

Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg were among those who were inspired by Aurobindo , who worked on the newly formed American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco . Soon after , Chaudhuri and his wife Bina established the Cultural Integration Fellowship , from which later emerged the California Institute of Integral Studies .

Karlheinz Stockhausen was heavily inspired by Satprem 's writings about Aurobindo during a week in May 1968 , a time at which the composer was undergoing a personal crisis and had found Aurobindo 's philosophies were relevant to his feelings . After this experience , Stockhausen 's music took a completely different turn , focusing on mysticism , that was to continue until the end of his career .

William Irwin Thompson traveled to Auroville in 1972 , where he met " The Mother " . Thompson has called Aurobindo 's teaching on spirituality a " radical anarchism " and a " post @-@ religious approach " and regards their work as having " ... reached back into the Goddess culture of prehistory , and , in Marshall McLuhan 's terms , ' culturally retrieved ' the archetypes of the shaman and la sage femme ... " Thompson also writes that he experienced Shakti , or psychic power coming from The Mother on the night of her death in 1973 .

Aurobindo 's ideas about the further evolution of human capabilities influenced the thinking of Michael Murphy ? and indirectly , the human potential movement , through Murphy 's writings .

The American philosopher Ken Wilber has called Aurobindo " India 's greatest modern philosopher sage " and has integrated some of his ideas into his philosophical vision . Wilber 's interpretation of Aurobindo has been criticised by Rod Hemsell . New Age writer Andrew Harvey also looks to Aurobindo as a major inspiration .

= = = Followers = = =

The following authors , disciples and organisations trace their intellectual heritage back to , or have in some measure been influenced by , Aurobindo and The Mother .

Margaret Woodrow Wilson (Nistha) (1886 @-@ 1944) , daughter of US President Woodrow Wilson , she came to the ashram in 1940 and stayed there until her death .

Nolini Kanta Gupta (1889 ? 1983) was one of Aurobindo 's senior disciples , and wrote extensively on philosophy , mysticism , and spiritual evolution based on the teaching of Aurobindo and " The Mother " .

Pavitra (1894 ? 1969) was one of their early disciples . Born as Philippe Barbier Saint @-@ Hilaire in Paris . Pavitra left some very interesting memoirs of his conversations with them in 1925 and 1926 , which were published as Conversations avec Pavitra .

Indra Sen (1903 ? 1994) was another disciple of Aurobindo who , although little @-@ known in the West , was the first to articulate integral psychology and integral philosophy , in the 1940s and

1950s . A compilation of his papers came out under the title , Integral Psychology in 1986 .

Nirodbaran (1903 ? 2006) . A doctor who obtained his medical degree from Edinburgh , his long and voluminous correspondence with Aurobindo elaborate on many aspects of Integral Yoga and fastidious record of conversations bring out Aurobindo 's thought on numerous subjects .

M. P. Pandit (1918 ? 1993) . Secretary to " The Mother " and the ashram , his copious writings and lectures cover Yoga , the Vedas , Tantra , Aurobindo 's epic " Savitri " and others .

Chinmoy (1931 ? 2007) joined the ashram in 1944 . Later , he wrote the play about Aurobindo 's life ? Sri Aurobindo : Descent of the Blue ? and a book , Infinite : Sri Aurobindo . An author , composer , artist and athlete , he was perhaps best known for holding public events on the theme of inner peace and world harmony (such as concerts , meditations , and races) .

Satprem (1923 ? 2007) was a French author and an important disciple of " The Mother " who published Mother 's Agenda (1982) , Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness (2000) , On the Way to Superhumanity (2002) and more .

= = = Critics = = =

N. R. Malkani finds Aurobindo 's theory of creation to be false , as the theory talks about experiences and visions which are beyond normal human experiences . He says the theory is an intellectual response to a difficult problem and that Aurobindo uses the trait of unpredictability in theorising and discussing things not based upon truth of existence . Malkani says that awareness is already a reality and suggests there would be no need to examine the creative activity subjected to awareness .

Wilber 's interpretation of Aurobindo 's philosophy rejects the notion of dividing reality as a different level of matter , life , mind , overmind , supermind proposed by Aurobindo in The Life Divine , and terms them as higher- or lower @-@ nested holons and states that there is only a fourfold reality (a system of reality created by himself) .

Adi Da finds that Aurobindo 's contributions were merely literary and cultural and had extended his political motivation into spirituality and human evolution

Rajneesh (Osho) says that Aurobindo was a great scholar but was never realised ; that his personal ego had made him indirectly claim that he went beyond Buddha ; and that he is said to have believed himself to be enlightened due to increasing number of followers .

= = Literary works = =