



UGC Approved Journal

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065

Impact Factor : 5.7



Editor-in-Chief

**Volume V, Issue X
October 2017
www.ijellh.com**

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SRI AUROBINDO, THE MOTHER AND RAMANA MAHARISHI – THEIR VISION OF INDIA

Abstract

Sri Aurobindo is the Vedic rishi of our times who did tapasya at Pondicherry in South India for 40 years endeavoring to bring the Supramental consciousness to the earth. He is also the shining star of Indian nationalism. The Rishis of the Rig Veda envisioned a nation-unit ranging from the Himalayas to the Southern Indian Ocean. The ideal of Samarat, Chakravarthy Raja and the military and political use of *ashwamedha* and *rajsurya* sacrifice testify to a strong idea of a nation-state. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* describe *dharmarajya* and *Ramrajya*. The goal of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, was to create a synthesis of the best of ancient India and modern, scientific thought. He wrote that great effort must be made for the recovery of the old spiritual knowledge. Secondly, this spirituality should flow into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and criticism. The third aim should be to deal with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit. The Mother was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo and continued his task of Supramentalising humanity after 1950. The Mother was of the firm opinion that India has the answers to the problems of humanity. She spoke highly about the spiritual richness of the country. The Mother stated that India is the guru of the world. Ramana Maharishi is the greatest

mind slayer in the history of mankind. His *brahmastra* was the question, “Who am I?”. Mind is made up of thoughts. The root of all is the “I” thought. When we seek this source, it disappears and only the Self remains. The self is the only reality.

Key words- Sanatana Dharma, India, Swaraj, Upanishads, Janaka, Self

Bharatha Varsha has produced a successive line of sages for centuries, holding aloft the flag of Sanatana Dharma. Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Ramana Maharishi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and host of others belong to this parampara. We should profit by studying their teaching and practicing them.

SRI AUROBINDO (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo is the Vedic rishi of our times who did tapasya at Pondicherry in South India for 40 years endeavoring to bring the Supramental consciousness to the earth. He is also the shining star of Indian nationalism. For two years (1906-08) through the pages of *Bande Mataram*, he formulated the true aim of Indian nationalism and fixed it in the national consciousness. Kireeth Joshi terms it as ‘unparalleled achievement in the entire world history of nationalism’. (71) He created a new spirit in the country.

Sri Aurobindo believed that every nationality has been formed in spite of diversity of race or religion or language. He gives us the experiences of England and Switzerland where different races have mingled and formed a single nation. He also observes that though the Roman Empire had a common language, a common religion and life and did its best to crush out racial diversities under the weight of its uniform system, it failed to become a great nation. In *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo gave us a manifesto of the philosophy of Swaraj. Swaraj meant the spiritual, social and political freedom. He advocated a social order beyond the narrow confines of caste, and class. He was sure that political freedom can never be achieved in the land of slaves. He states, “If the mass of men around us is miserable, fallen, degraded how can the seeker after God be indifferent to the condition of his brothers”. He further states, “Compassion to all creatures is the condition of sainthood, and the perfect yogi is he who is *Sarvabhutatute ratah*, whose mind is full of the will to do good to all creatures. When a man shuts his heart to the cries of sufferings around him, when he is content

that his fellowmen should be sorrowful, oppressed, sacrificed to the greed of others, he is making his own way to salvation full of difficulties and stumbling blocks... God has set apart India as the eternal fountainhead of holy spirituality, and He will never suffer that fountain to run dry. Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom. Once more in the land of saints and sages will burn up the fire of the ancient yoga and the hearts of her people will be lifted up into the neighbourhood of the eternal". (*Bande Mataram*, CWA 700-1).

Sri Aurobindo in *Bande Mataram* envisioned a great role for India in the world: India is the guru of the nations, the physician of the human soul in its profounder maladies, she is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit. But Swaraj is the necessary condition of her work and before she can do the work, she must fulfil the conditions. (*Bande Mataram*, CWA, 731).

Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo favoured boycott of British goods as a weapon to aid Swadeshi. They wanted India to acquire national self-sufficiency in important industries. Sri Aurobindo advocated a movement of national education. He felt that the British System of Education was doing harm to India. He called for the establishment of national schools and colleges. His books *National System of Education* and *National Value of Art* envisaged swadeshi ways of thought. Swaraj, he felt, should be all-embracing and integral. In his concept of a national system of education, Sri Aurobindo felt that the study of the heritage of India should be part of the education. At the same time, it must incorporate latest trends in science and technology. Kireeth Joshi states, "The aim and principle of a true philosophy of national education, according to Sri Aurobindo, should not ignore modern truth and knowledge, but to take our foundation on our own being, our own mind and our own spirit" (59).

Sri Aurobindo added that at a time when the west is looking towards India for inspiration, India should not ignore her spiritual heritage. India, he said, has to discover

her soul. The value-oriented education should include inculcating patriotism, and universal brotherhood.

The Rishis of the Rig Veda envisioned a nation-unit ranging from the Himalayas to the Southern Indian Ocean. The ideal of Samarat, Chakravarthy Raja and the military and political use of *ashwamedha* and *rajsurya* sacrifice testify to a strong idea of a nation-state. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* describe *dharmarajya* and *Ramrajya*. The goal of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, was to create a synthesis of the best of ancient India and modern, scientific thought. He wrote that great effort must be made for the recovery of the old spiritual knowledge. Secondly, this spirituality should flow into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and criticism. The third aim should be to deal with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit. In *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, he states:

India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word, she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicized oriental people, docile pupil of the west and doomed to repeat the cycle of accident's success and failure, but still the amount memorable Shakti recovering her deepest self lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma (*Foundations of Indian Culture*, pp.380-381).

If we study Indian history properly, we shall find that her first period was luminous with the discovery of the spirit, her second completed the discovery of Dharma, her third period elaborated into detail the first simpler formulation of the Shastra. None was exclusive. The three elements were always present. The fourth was the age of bhakti. Sri Aurobindo states that spirituality is the keynote to Indian culture. Spirituality transcends religion. India understood that we have to transcend the body, mind complex in order to understand the ultimate reality. Through the process called yoga, our consciousness is transformed. The Vedic Rishis made discoveries which went beyond the knowledge of the physical universe. The Upanishads deal with the quest for Brahman, which is our real identity. The Upanishads are the fountainhead of

Indian spirituality. The Vedic and the Upanishads quest was that of immortality and eternal truth.

Sri Aurobindo considered India to be a mighty Shakti. He wrote “For what is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti... The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shakti of three hundred million people.” (*A call to the Youth of India*, P11).

Sri Aurobindo in *Bande Mataram* asked Indians to, “Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan Character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga.” (*A Call to the Youth of India*. P 75)

From 1914 to 1921, Sri Aurobindo single handedly worked on the journal *Arya*. The word “Arya” has no reference to “race”. It indicates certain qualities to be obtained by the spiritual aspirant. It was in *Arya* that Sri Aurobindo’s masterpiece *The Life Divine* was published. *The Synthesis of Yoga* is an excellent exposition of classical yoga and Integral Yoga. *The Secret of the Veda* is a mystic interpretation of the Vedas unlike Sanyana’s 14th century ritualistic commentary. His social works, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle* also appeared in *Arya*. *Foundation of Indian Culture* was also serialized in this. A brilliant exposition *Essays on the Gita*, appeared in 1916. Commentaries on the *Isha* and *Kena* Upanishads were also published.

Sri Aurobindo’s *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *The Renaissance in India* inform us about the glorious heritage of India and its relation to the present. He asks, “This question of Indian Civilization, once it has raised this greater issue, shifts from its narrow meaning and disappears of humanity lie in a culture founded solely upon reason and science? Or is it not the truth of our being rather that of a soul embodied in Nature who is seeking to know itself, to find itself, to enlarge its consciousness, to arrive at a greater way of existence, to progress in the spirit and grow into the full of

self-knowledge and some divine inner perfection? (Collected Works, Vol.14, pp.44-45).

India, he believed, must ensure its great interrupted endeavour and her highest spirit and knowledge must be executed in the individual and in the society. He gives a detailed exposition of the Vedas, Upanishads, the Epics, Tantra and the Puranas. India has witnessed an uninterrupted succession of the “messengers of the spirit” – Nammalwar, Andal, Tukaram, Kabir, Mira, Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Nanak. As K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar notes, “... these seers, Rishis, Alwars, Acharyas, Prahladas, although many notes make the marvelous symphony of Indian religious aspiration and realization, still there is the great bass too, the Sruti, the ethnic ambience supporting the multitudinous play. The three stringed harmony of the affirmation of the one, the manifoldness of approach to Him and the secret of the soul’s sanctuary, in the Divine was best invoked and realized theme.” (p.497). There is no aspect of Indian culture that he does not touch in this book. On art, he states, “... Hindu art tends to combine the Purusha and Prakiti in one image... This is the motive of the Nataraja, the Dancing Shiva... the self-absorbed concentration, the motionless peace and joy are within, outside is the whole mad bliss of the cosmic movement” (pp.281,282). The Veda, for him, “is a remarkable, a sublime and powerful poetic creation” by Rishis, “touching” the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry”. (pp.266,267). As K.R.Srinivas Iyengar observes, “The constant feeling of the presence of the infinite, the sixth sense to see and render this presence through multifoliate imagery drawn from the psychic plane, and the leap of intuition that repeatedly achieves the transcendence of the terrestrial into vaster spiritual realms these three distinguishing marks of the best Vedic Poetry provide also the inspiration for, all the best Indian poetry to come. (504). Regarding the Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo states:

The scenes of the old world live before us in a few pages, the sages sitting in their grooves ready to test and teach the corner, princes and learned Brahmins and great landed nobles going about in search of knowledge, the King’s son in his chariot and the illegitimate son of the servant girl, seeking any man who might carry in himself the thought of light and the word of revelation,

the typical figures and personalities, Janaka and the subtle mind of Ajatashatru, Raikwa of the cart, Yajnavalkya militant for truth, calm and ironic, taking to himself with both hands without attachment, worldly possessions and spiritual riches and casting at last all his wealth behind to wonder forth as a houseless ascetic, Krishna son of Dewaki who heard a single word of the Rishi Ghora and knew at once the Eternal, the Ashramas, the courts of Kings who were also spiritual discoverers and thinkers, the great sacrificial assemblies where the sages met and compared their knowledge. And we see how the soul of India was born and how arose this great birth song in which it sourced from this earth into the supreme empyrean of the spirit. The Vedas and Upanishads are not only the sufficient fountain-head of Indian philosophy and religion, but of all Indian art, poetry and literature. (Complete Works, Vol.14, p.280).

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother exhorted man- through their teaching of Integral Yoga- to go beyond mind and ego consciousness to the level of Supramental consciousness in which there is no conflict but eternal peace and harmony. Their goal was the attainment of a divine life in a divine body.

Of the poetry of the Radha-Krishna cult Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The desire of the soul for God is there thrown into symbolic figure in the lyrical love cycle of Radha and Krishna, the Nature soul in man seeking for the Divine soul through love, seized and mastered by his beauty, affronted by his magical flute, abandoning human cares and duties for this one overpowering passion and in its cadence of its phases passing through first desire to bliss of union, the pangs of separation, the eternal longing and reunion, the Lila of the love of the human spirit for God. (317).

For more than three thousand years Indian had been in the vanguard of human civilization. It is, as Sri Aurobindo observed, “One of the oldest races and greatest civilization on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness,

the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality.” Indian culture raised the animal life of desire and self-interest to the high aims of the Dharma. India is the land of Rishis. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother considered India as the spiritual guru of the world.

It is pertinent here to quote the Uttarpara speech of Sri Aurobindo here- “Well, the protection of the religion, the protection and upraising before the world of the Hindu religion, that is the work before us, But what is the Hindu religion? What is this religion which we call Sanatan, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in the sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages ... when therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists... I say that it is the Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatana Dharma with it moves and with it grows. When the Sanatana Dharma declines, then the nation declines...” (CWA Vol 2, P2)

THE MOTHER (1878-1973)

The Mother was born Mirra Alfassa in Paris on 21 February 1878. She surrendered totally to Sri Aurobindo in 1914 and established the Ashram at Pondicherry in 1926. She was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo and continued his task of Supramentalising humanity after 1950. The Mother was of the firm opinion that India has the answers to the problems of humanity. She spoke highly about the spiritual richness of the country. The Mother stated that India is the guru of the world. She said:

India is not the earth, rivers and mountains of this land neither is it a collective name for the inhabitants of this country. India is a living being, as much living as, say, Shiva. India is a goddess as Shiva is a God. If she likes, she can manifest in human form. (*India and her Destiny*- p1)

She felt that India is a divinely chosen country. India must be saved for the good of the world and it can lead the world to peace and a new world order. India must also show to the world that true spirituality is not to renounce life, but to make life perfect with the Divine perfection.

In 1951, the Mother said:

Let the splendour of Bharat's past be reborn in the realization of her imminent future with the help and blessings of her living soul. (6-7)

In a broadcast by All India Radio, Pondicherry on its inauguration day, she stated:

O India, land of light and spiritual wake up to your true mission knowledge' in the world, show the way to union and harmony. (7)

She felt that India shall take her true place in the world only when she will become integrally the messenger of the Divine Life. In a message to the government of India in February 1954 she stated:

The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world. The Government of India ought to recognize the significance of India in this sphere and plan their action accordingly. (17)

The Mother felt that India has the knowledge of the spirit and the west was knowledge of matter. An integral education should contain both. She observed, "I would like the Government to recognize yoga as education, not so much for ourselves, but it will be good for the country. Matter will be transformed, that will be a solid base. Life will be divinized. Let India take the lead". (19)

The Mother exhorted Indians to overgrow their small egoistic personalities and become worthy children of Mother India. India's true destiny is to be the Guru of the world. It is India's role to teach the world that matter is false and impotent unless it becomes the manifestation of the spirit. She criticized the almost exclusive importance

given to success, career and money. The Mother spoke extensively on the importance of the *Gita*. She said:

Sri Aurobindo considers the message of the *Gita* to be the basis of the great spiritual movement which has led and will lead humanity more and more to its liberation, that is to say, to its escape from falsehood and ignorance towards the truth. From the time of its first appearance, the *Gita* has had its immense spiritual action, but with the new interpretation that Sri Aurobindo has given to it, its influence has increased considerably and has become decisive.

The Mother noted in 1951 that from the spiritual point of view, India is the foremost country in the world. Her mission is to set the example of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo, she said, came on earth to teach this to the world. She further remarked that a simple and ignorant peasant here is, in heart, closer to the Divine than the intellectuals of Europe. (36). In 1954 she said that the Divine Power alone can help India. She wanted Indians to build faith and cohesion in the country. She had the firm conviction that the future of India is luminous in spite of its present gloom. (38).

Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950)

Ramana Maharishi belongs to a lineage of rishis in Bharatha Varsha starting from the Upanishadic masters and include Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa. K Swaminathan quotes Professor D.S.Sharma as stating: “We may say that historically there has been no such emphasis on Jnana since Sankara”. The spot which Ramana Maharishi reached on 1st September 1896 and stayed for fifty four years was Arunachala or Tiruvannamalai about which there is an ancient belief that a thought of it was enough to bring liberation. Ramana said that while Siva resides at Kailasa, Arunachala was Siva Himself. The places connected with the Maharishi’s life are sacred spots in the Indian geography. Tiruchuzhi, where he was born, is sacred to Siva and has been praised by the bhakti saints Sundaramurti and Manikkavasakar. Madurai where Ramana realized the Self is the seat of Tamil learning Arunachala is one of the most sacred spots of Sanatana Dharma. The Paramacharya of Kanchi, Sri

Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal, said that religions are spread by men of outstanding goodness in life and conduct, filled with compassion and tranquility. (K Swaminathan, 46) The sage, Ramana Maharishi, spread his doctrine by living it, by embodying it in every word and deed of his. Paul Brunton quotes the Maharishi as telling him:

All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow... The instinct is a true one... but they love their own selves most ... man's real nature is happiness. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self if you could mentally follow the "I" thread until it leads you back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so is if the last to disappear. The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature what are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself".(K Swaminathan,47)

Ramana Maharishi is the greatest mind slayer in the history of mankind. His *brahmastra* was the question, "Who am I?" Mind is made up of thoughts. The root of all is the "I" thought. When we seek this source, it disappears and only the Self remains. The self is the only reality. The world viewed as something apart from Brahman (awareness) is *asat*, unreal. But viewed as a manifestation of Brahman along with Jiva and Isvara, it is real enough. Awareness is the substance and the world are forms. Ramana Maharishi's teaching of self-enquiry – who am I? – is as old as the Upanishads.

In one of the verses that he wrote, Ramana Maharishi quotes the instruction given to Sri Rama by his preceptor, the sage Vasishtha, on the spiritual heart beyond time and space, and on the theme of awareness and heroic action: "Holding firmly at heart to the truth of your being, play like a hero your part on the world-stage, inwardly calm and detached, but assuming zeal and joy, stirrings and aversions, initiative and effort, and performing outward actions appropriate to your particular role in various situations". In short, the quest for self-realization for the *mumukshu* (spiritual seeker) goes hand in hand with bold, heroic action. Though this is addressed to Sri Rama, it is actually meant for us. In outward action or the practice of dharma, there is no difference between the seeker and the realized person. (K.Swaminathan, 86)

One has to visit Ramanasramam at Thiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu to experience the peace of the place. People flock from all parts of the world to this town in search of inner bliss which is the goal of Vedanta. There is a Veda Parayana at the ashram every morning and as the seeker of Truth listens to the Vedic hymns, his individual “I” is bound to disappear and the Self would be discovered as his/her true identity.

The rishis of modern India- Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Ramana Maharishi, Vallalar, Narayana Guru, Anandamayi Ma, Parahansa Yogananda, Swami Rama, Swami Rama Thirtha and a galaxy of others – gave the supreme Upanishadic message to humanity that we are the Self, we are Brahman. Man is divine. We are immortal. We are eternal. We are not this limited body-mind complex and we should be mislead by the senses. They wanted to awaken Indians in particular to this sacred message since they felt that it was India – the land of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita- which has to save humanity during the modern, doubt-ridden and violent times.

The Mother wrote this to stress on the importance of India:

There is only one country in the world that knows that there is only one Truth to which everything should be turned, and that is India. Other countries have forgotten this, but in India it is ingrained in the people, and one day it will come out...I know the conditions of the country. Even if one person could put himself faithfully at the disposal of the Truth, he could change the country and the world.
(184)

The final word should be given to Sri Aurobindo: Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a power, a Godhead...(CWA Vol1 P 482)

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