PREFACE

To common eye, the multifaceted great sage and thinker Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950) is only a secluded yogi and spiritual person. While reading him with great respect and profound awe for the past fourteen years I found the polyglot and polymath of Pondicherry as one of the tallest creative authors and social thinkers of India. His theories, observations and vision cut across social boundaries and national borders and lays the foundation for creating nations without borders in the progress of humanity. Even today, his thoughts and observations are most relevant for progress and social evolution of mankind. His ideas for world unity based on the evolution of human consciousness and the creation of race of gnostic human beings is unique.

Restricting such a person only to narrow realms of spirituality and yoga is a direct affront to his supreme intellect and visionary qualities. While living in Pondicherry for forty years he engaged in most social and political events across the country and the world and left a huge corpus of literature, letters and observations.
It is not that they went unnoticed. But unfortunately most got embedded in the crowd of spiritual and yogic literature. His devotees and disciples felt comfortable in painting him as a yogi and avatar (god incarnate) looking out for supernatural grace.

After reading the huge corpus of socio-political and ethico-spiritual observations that Sri Aurobindo left I found great relief as it could be used today to understand, society, politics, individual and community in non-conventional and better ways. While studying him in detail I have but reconciled to the fact that Sri Aurobindo is the key founder of the human potential movement in the Indian way, a great contributor to humanity. He is the only thinker who gave India a political dimension at a time when a vague concept of nation was floating around. None before him could even have conceived of it. He was the first nationalist to give the call for political independence, a programme taken up by the Congress party almost twenty years after he had gone into recluse. Fourteen years ago, as a working journalist, I conceived of the project and wrote a post-editorial article titled `Divya Jiban o Rajneeti: Aurobinder Sesh Chollish Bochor' (Life Divine and Politics: Aurobindo's last forty years) in Ananda Bazar Patrika (ABP) on 19 August 2003.
The write-up in ABP sent ripples across the country, especially within Sri Aurobindo’s followers and disciples. They sent rejoinders raising some factual errors and missing my point.

Among all criticisms I felt it could be one green area that had remained untouched to understand the greatness of the genius. Therefore I decided to embark on a concrete reading of Sri Aurobindo’s political and social observations in Pondicherry and work out a complete doctoral project.

I felt an ind-depth study would help future students of political and social science and scholars pursuing intellectual and cultural history to understand Sri Aurobindo’s unique thoughts in a better way.

During the Alipore Bomb trial in 1908 – 1909, Chittaranjan Das, Sri Aurobindo’s defense counsel, pointed out that Sri Aurobindo was the ‘‘poet of patriotism, prophet of nationalism and lover of humanity’’. His voice will continue to echo and re-echo not only in India but across seas and distant lands. Like most, I totally agree with Das.
I remain thankful to my Supervisor, Professor Dr Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay for inspiring me in completing the project and also my wife Dr Mrs Jayanti Mukherjee who kept criticizing me as I engaged in haphazard and wayward readings and not doing a systematic study of Sri Aurobindo’s works. In fact, she punctured my ego and proved me wrong on my false and imaginary notion on intellectual issues.

I also remain grateful to Mr Manoj Dasgupta, Managing Trustee, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, Mr Bob Zweicker, Chief Archivist, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry, Mrs Suzanne, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives (Cold Storage) and Mr. Peter Heehs, historian and eminent Sri Aurobindo scholar for pointing out my deficiencies. Mrs Gopa Basu, Librarian, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Library, Kolkata and Mr Biswajit Ganguly were also of great help among many others.

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