

Mystical Experience

Sri Aurobindo at Alipore Jail

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Abstract

In this essay, I comment on the mystical experiences of Sri Aurobindo at Alipore jail which may be best summarized by his own words: “*Spiritual life finds its better expression in the common life with the force from Yoga [; b]y connecting internal and external life to harmonize them, will allow humanity to become powerful and divine.*”

Keywords: mystical experience, Sri Aurobindo, Yoga, spiritual life, God, instrument.

An electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world. Sri Aurobindo

On August 15, 1947, India reaches its liberty, and, by a radio-message addressed to the Nation, Master Aurobindo (1872–1950) expressed his joy for the culmination of the long and difficult Independence process during which himself performed a very important and fundamental participation [1]. Besides, Sri Aurobindo was very pleased that such an important date happened to be his own birthday! Aurobindo was one of the few persons in the modern age capable to see, beyond the horizon of political freedom, some ideal of human perfection.

Due his political activities for a free India, British authorities put him in prison for one year at Alipore jail, Kolkata [1]. In prison he had spiritual experiences which made him determined to abandon politics and dedicate himself completely to his spiritual realization, converting himself in one of the Great Masters on the XX century.

His efforts were to put in the candidate hands all the means that could drive them to find their own Higher Self, to reach the most important thing for a human being, the Meeting with his own spirit. Aurobindo said that “[n]o one can write my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see” [1], that is, a person may think that he can write with total certainty about the inner life of a Yogi. But in fact the person may be only able to identify the external events - acts, words, and written thoughts – carried out by the Master as means to have a glimmer of his spiritual riches. In this context, it is clear that Alipore, more that being a jail, was an ashram for Sri Aurobindo.

When Aurobindo completed his study in England, he returned to India in 1893, feeling a profound interest to get the independence of his country. In April 1901, he got married with Mrinalini Bose who died in 1918 of flu [1]. Being in Cachemira in May 1903, Aurobindo

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experienced the vacant Infinite in a very tangible way and the experience left a deep impression upon his mind. On December 1907, he met Yogi Vishnu Bhasker Lele who had the intuition that he would initiate a Great Soul [1].

Aurobindo manifested that any man with a sincere desire can to connect with the Supreme. During a political meeting, Aurobindo expressed the following words under the effect of his spiritual experiences with Yogi Lele [1]:

Do not fear. What can all the world powers do against THAT you are caring in? That immortal, unperishable, which the sword cannot wound and fire cannot burn.

Aurobindo was an instrument of God. He affirmed that his human body functioned automatically under Brahman's control, so he said: "I write in mental silence, and whatever I write comes from a higher power expression". He had total surrender to the Supreme, desireless, a man of few words, balanced in his diet, self-controlled and always given to study. One felt when he spoke as if somebody else was speaking through him.

On May 2, 1908, Aurobindo was secluded at Lal Bazar prison, Kolkata, by British authorities and confined in a lonely cell which allowed the necessary privacy for his spiritual practices [1]. Aurobindo never felt himself as a prisoner because he knew that being a prisoner consists in the identification of the physical body with the performance being actuated during a determined incarnation. Aurobindo at Alipore stated that:

Being in my cell I used to study the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. I tried to see God in every man moving before me, even in every tree, wall, bird, ..., the jail ceased to be prison to me.

While at Alipore, he practiced Yoga which allowed Aurobindo to get contact with Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda to receive their spiritual guidance - He even had a levitation experience [1]. Indeed, during the time he was in the prison at Alipore Aurobindo realized the Omnipresent Narayana as evidenced by his statement that [1]:

One feels perpetual calm, perpetual strength, is aware of Infinity, lives in Eternity. Everything becomes a manifestation of the Brahman –it is not thinking, it is a concrete experience. I see you not as X but as a divine being in the Divine. It is a wonderful experience.

This realization led Aurobindo to the conviction that Absolute Reality in its essence is non-dual, non-conceptual and logically indefinable. Sarojini, Aurobindo's sister, carried out a drive trying to gather funds for the Alipore process. C. R. Das, who died in 1925, was Aurobindo's lawyer during the one year legal process. Aurobindo used to be seated and meditating in front of the Jury, leaving everything in God's hands, where he had the following remarkable experience:

Lord Krishna said to me, 'look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel'. I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw, it was Sri Krishna who sat there and smiled. 'Now do your fear?' He said, 'I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words.

Aurobindo was absolved and acquitted on May 16, 1909. Eight days later he published in the 'Bengalee' newspaper a letter thanking all those who supported him during the legal process [1]. While at Alipore, Sri Aurobindo never mentioned his spiritual experiences, he did it only after his liberation and during his Uttarpara speech which is a description of his inner realizations while in jail. Before Alipore, Aurobindo fought for India's freedom but after the jail his field of action became a worldwide work influencing intimately the future of humanity. In his words:

Spiritual life finds its better expression in the common life with the force from Yoga. By connecting internal and external life to harmonize them, will allow humanity to become powerful and divine.

Aurobindo suffered from uremia at the end of his life. He left the physical body the 5th of December 1950 at 1:26 a.m. His Samadhi Mandir is at Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, South India.

References

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