

HE FORESAW THE FUTURE

Aurobindo warned Nehru about China's aggressive designs more than a decade before it invaded India in 1962. Sadly, he chose to ignore him, says Claude Arpi

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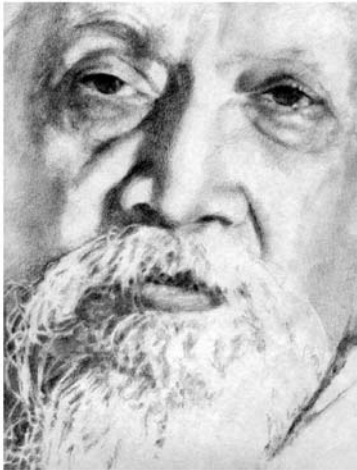
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It is difficult to resist starting the review of Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader, edited by Prof Sachidananda Mohanty, from the epilogue, which reveals the contemporary vision of Sri Aurobindo.

Mohanty tells us that in 1963, Sudhir Ghose, an emissary of Jawaharlal Nehru, showed US President JF Kennedy the 'last letter' written by Sri Aurobindo on November 11, 1950, less than a month before his death. It was about China's invasion of Tibet in October that year.

The recluse of Pondicherry wrote: "The basic significance of Mao's

Tibetan adventure is to advance China's frontiers right down to India and stand poised there to strike at the right moment and with right strategy, unless India precipitately declares itself on the side of the Communist bloc. But to go over to Mao and Stalin in order to arrest their wrath is not in any sense a saving gesture. It is a gesture spelling the utmost ruin to all our ideals and aspirations."

Kennedy could not believe that this letter was written 13 years earlier by a man living a secluded life in south India. The sage had not stepped out of his room, on the first floor of his ashram, for the past 24 years. How could he analyse with such lucidity the political situation facing India? Sri Aurobindo believed that India should take the support of the US to prevent, what he had called in another letter, the "Bolshevik menace".

The US Government was certainly no saint, and Sri Aurobindo knew it. But Mao's regime (like Hitler's 10 years earlier) meant the ruin of India's destiny. On August 15, 1947, India became independent and Sri Aurobindo, who was the first Indian to be asked for Purna Swaraj in the early years of the 20th century, celebrated his 75th birthday. On that day, in a memorable message, he spoke about his dream of a new "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".

The person that Karan Singh has called the "Prophet of Indian Nationalism" could already see beyond India's freedom.

Bharat had a larger role to play for the future of humanity. Mao's 'perfect' society was dictatorship of a few; diversity of thought and belief was not part of the Great Helmsman's scheme. For Sri Aurobindo, it was one of the reasons why India had to stand up to Mao's Army in the Himalayas.

In his life and writings, however, Sri Aurobindo stood for integration.

Mohanty says, "In him, binaries and conflicts are harmonised: The West and the East, English and the Indian languages, the city and the region, merit and social justice, religion and secularism, pacifism and militancy, conservation and development, nationalism and internationalism, et al."

Though acclaimed by many - he was hailed by Aldous Huxley as one of the greatest nationalists, visionaries and poetphilosophers of the 20th century - Sri Aurobindo is completely misunderstood.

How could he be a yogi and yet follow politics?

Sri Aurobindo's 'last' letter is a sad reminder that his vision is far from having



percolated to our 'contemporary' leaders in the South Block, more addicted to the Bolshevik (now called Marxist) diktats than to national interests.

What Sri Aurobindo wrote 58 years ago is still valid today: "Militarily, China is almost 10-times as strong as we are (this has recently been admitted by Defence Minister AK Antony)... the primary motive of Mao's attack on Tibet is to threaten India as soon as possible."

Though the recent intrusions in Tawang or the planned diversion of Brahmaputra are signs that the danger looms large over India, who realises the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's words? Will India have to go through another traumatic experience? Let us hope not.

Having been in touch with Sri Aurobindo's thought for nearly 40 years, I have always felt that one of the greatest tragedies of modern India is that politicians, intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, social workers or historians have not been able - or are unwilling - to grasp the visionary thought of the Master. That is why we should be grateful to Prof Mohanty, whose book with a simple and easy introduction, including a brief life-sketch of Sri Aurobindo, is an excellent first approach.

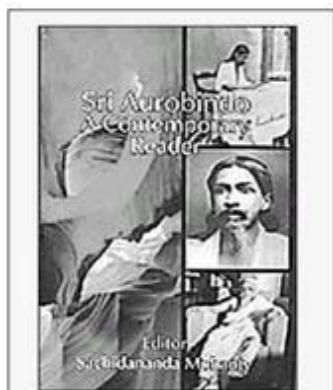
Mohanty has divided his compilation into five parts in which he studies the main works of Sri Aurobindo - The Ideal of Human Unity, The Human Cycle, War and Selfdetermination, The Foundations of Indian Culture and, finally, Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest. Each of the parts has an introduction which goes a long way in making the judiciously chosen extracts extremely readable even to a lay reader.

The editor explains his objective: "The basic purpose of this book is to underline some of the futuristic ideas of Sri Aurobindo and to look at him in the context of the crisis of contemporary culture that confronts us today. I shall suggest that many of the issues that we are currently struggling with, such as one's relations to the state, language, ethnicity, selfdetermination, identity politics and multiculturalism are ideas that Sri Aurobindo was greatly concerned with."

Mohanty has restricted himself to the political and social work of Sri Aurobindo and does not touch upon his yogic approach, developed in The Synthesis of Yoga, The Life Divine and Savitri: A Legend & A Symbol.

One wishes that Mohanty's book is read by all the students graduating from Indian universities, IIMs, IITs and other centres of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader Sachidananda Mohanty (ed) Routledge, Rs 275



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