

Recent Publications

S a b d a

From 1920 to 1926 a small group of disciples who lived around Sri Aurobindo gathered regularly for evening sittings, where free and frank discussions on a miscellany of subjects took place. Regular visitors also joined whenever they came to Pondicherry.

These “evening talks”, as they later came to be called, began in 1920 while Sri Aurobindo was living at the Guest House and then continued at the Library House when he and the Mother moved there in the latter half of 1922. They were held on the first floor verandah pictured here. Just to the right, partially obscured by the Transformation tree, was Sri Aurobindo’s room.



The Library House in the 1920s. On its first-floor verandah Sri Aurobindo met with disciples for “evening talks.”

Our lead article describes the setting and general tenor of the sittings, often filled with jokes and even hilarity, but sometimes with long periods of deep silence. All depended on Sri Aurobindo’s inclination, as he shared with this intimate circle the remarkable horizons of his experience, knowledge, and insights. A selection from the records of these talks and a photo gallery of those who attended them add a special flavour to the account.

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An Intimate Circle: Evening Talks 1920–1926

George Santayana, the renowned Spanish poet, philosopher, and novelist, is believed to have said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” In the annals of history, the veracity of this adage has indeed been proven on many an occasion. Perhaps the most cited example is Hitler’s invasion of Russia in winter, repeating what Napoleon had done well over a century before, with an end result equally disastrous. But what if this Sutra works in other ways too? What if we forget some of the more interesting phases in human history? Would we still be “condemned” to repeat them? If that were so, wouldn’t it be an open invitation to wilfully forget these periods only to gleefully relive them again?

For some of us here at the Ashram, one such period may well lie between 1920 and 1926, when members of this fledgling spiritual community had, to a large measure, direct access to Sri Aurobindo on a day-to-day basis. The camaraderie of these years did not quite survive in the same way (except for a few) post the descent of the Overmind on 24 November 1926, when Sri Aurobindo virtually withdrew from all social engagements. Juxtaposed between two great epochs in the history of the Ashram, it was a period of momentous change. It left in its wake the bohemian lifestyle and revolutionary flavour¹ of the early days in Pondicherry, and the heroic age of the *Arya*² with its serialised review of high philosophical thought, and moved into an era embracing organically the settled life of a nascent spiritual community steered by the Mother’s active guidance and the living principles of a higher light.

Remarkable was the members’ privileged proximity to a man they admired and respected as a figure in the Indian freedom movement and revered as a philosopher and a seer, yet whose personal side was little known beyond a tight circle of associates; he was a recluse for the better part of his adult life. Fame and recognition did little to change his essentially democratic, almost proletarian outlook. The renowned author of *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* treated everyone around him as his compeer and participated in the miniscule community’s general work, when he even “cooked fish for the cats.”³ Some of the practised form of his egalitarianism may be considered a little extreme by today’s standard. He and his colleagues shared almost everything they had, including a single soggy towel that he used to dry himself with—after everyone else had finished their daily bath.⁴

Had it not been for the records of the conversations held during the evening gatherings (and later his correspondence with Nirodbaran Talukdar in the 1930s), one might have difficulty recognising a jovial side to Sri Aurobindo’s nature. If a reader were to judge him merely by his major writings, Sri Aurobindo might come across as serious and impersonal for the most part, his gaze fixed ever on the stars. Only the reminiscences of disciples about these early years and some of his later letters to disciples show his humorous side. “Sri Aurobindo freely cracked jokes with a hearty laugh” and often “was jubilant when he chatted with persons round him,” remembers T. Kodandarama Rao, a participant in

1 A number of political exiles and revolutionaries were among Sri Aurobindo’s early friends in Pondicherry, notably Subramania Bharathi, Mandayam Srinivasachariar, and V. V. S. Aiyar. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1985), 391.

2 The publication of the *Arya* commenced in August 1914 and ended in January 1921.

3 A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2013), 241.

4 *Ibid.* 182.

the evening talks.⁵ Looking at the various reminiscences collectively, besides his wit and humour, we learn a great deal about the theoretical and practical aspects behind the practice of his yoga and gain in good measure from his percipient insights into the real and the occult. But what comes out with unadorned lucidity as we progress through the texts is the deep humility of his person and his innate tendency for self-effacement.

The relationship between Sri Aurobindo and the other participants was largely informal, verging on the familiar; though they looked up to him and revered him, and some even considered themselves to be his disciples, in their behaviour and inmost thought he was still somewhere their peer. “In those days,” recalls T. Kodandarama Rao, “the disciples did not observe the formality of saluting the Master (Sri Aurobindo) or making pranams to him.... They sat in the chairs before the Master and even smoked.”⁶ It was indeed an unusual, postmodern example of the venerated institution of the Guru-Shishya Parampara until the Mother gradually changed it all, both by her personal example and the deference shown to him at all times, and by the way she arranged and organised the community’s day-to-day life around him.



The informal evening talks first began at 41 Rue François Martin (or the Guest House) sometime during 1920⁷ and continued with the same zeal and vigour when, in the second half of 1922, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to 9 Rue de la Marine⁸ (known as the Library House, this is the front portion of the present Ashram Main Building). The stamp of informality remained, and the timings as well as the number of people attending the discussion were fluid.

The corridor in front of Sri Aurobindo’s room at the Guest House, where he lived from September 1913 to October 1922. The evening talks with disciples took place here from 1920 to 1922.

Describing the setting at the Library House, A. B. Purani recounts that the household mem-

bers and the visitors would gather every day at a fixed time on the small verandah upstairs, and with a sense of expectancy would start chatting in low voices. The session really got under way only when Sri Aurobindo appeared on the scene wearing a dhoti, as was his custom, a portion of which covered his upper body.

The liveliness of these evening sittings, the exchanges and repartee, depended much on him. There were periods when three-fourths of the time went by in complete silence while Sri Aurobindo gazed at the sky through a small opening at the top of the curtain or resorted to a monosyllabic “yes” or “no” to all efforts to draw him out. But more often it was the opposite. During such sittings “general

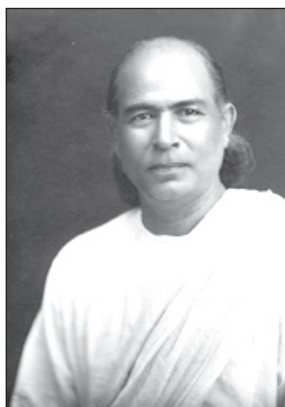
5 T. Kodandarama Rao, *At the Feet of the Master: Reminiscences* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2007), 18–19.

6 Ibid.

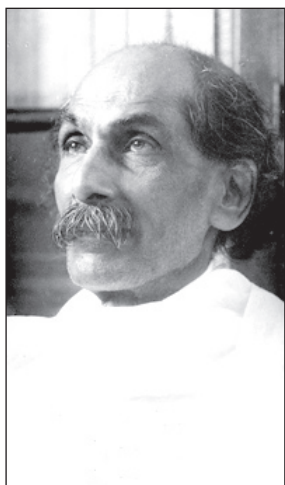
7 Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 203.

8 The door numbers have since changed.

Photo Gallery



A. B. Purani



Nolini Kanta Gupta

talk took place without any formality, on some public event, an article in the paper or a point concerning sadhana. At times humorous and light topics also came up. Some evenings were full of a natural silence verging on meditation.”⁹

Besides A. B. Purani, who recorded the voluminous *Evening Talks* from 1923 onwards, there were several other figures to whom we owe a deep indebtedness for the reminiscences of that time—namely, T. Kodandarama Rao (*At the Feet of the Master*), V. Chidanandam (“Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talks: Some Notes” serialised in *Mother India*), Pavitra (*Conversations with Sri Aurobindo*), and Nolini Kanta Gupta (*Reminiscences*). Reading through the course of these untethered, free-ranging evening conversations, we cannot help but relive those exciting times. It is not just a nostalgia that grips us. Instead we feel the thrust of an irresistible *utsaaha* that ignites the living *agni* within our hearts, goading us to cross the line, to transgress our petty diurnal concerns, impelling us to seek a deeper wisdom founded on principles that are eternal and infinite.

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that these reminiscences and the “talks” were reconstructed and noted down from memory later. They were neither seen nor revised by Sri Aurobindo, but in spite of this obvious “shortcoming”, the texts still communicate a freshness and a *rasa* that is striking. From the outlook of today’s WhatsApp-obsessive culture, some portion of these dialogues, almost a century old, may appear to our neutered sensibilities a little too surreal, almost phantasmagoric. But on closer scrutiny and with a little patience, as we shall see from the excerpts of their accounts below, these dialogues give us a peek into the real possibilities and the future evolution of human consciousness, whetting our appetite for the perilous but exciting journey deep within.

Some indicative excerpts taken from various records of the evening talks are provided below under editorial headings.

ON YOGA

Sattwic illusion

One of the most powerful sattwic illusions is that Yoga is for humanity. It has a very great hold on people. The question is not whether we can do anything for humanity: the question is whether anything can be done. Not that there has been no evolution till now.... I do not say that nothing at all can be done for humanity. What I say is: there is nothing radically altered, no fundamental change in humanity. Often something comes down. But you soon find humanity the same as ever.

⁹ Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 203.

To give to the truth that descends a form suited to all capacities, to adapt it to humanity in general, is to make it false. Even Buddha and Christ could not succeed there.... As humanity means the mental level, the working of our Yoga is not for humanity, not for serving the level of mind: it is for something which is more than human. Of course, the change is to come in humanity and from humanity, it is not to appear out of nothing, dropping from heaven in a void, but the agency is not mental and the goal is not the human level.¹⁰

Perfect balance

This Yoga requires perfect balance. It opens a possibility for the higher consciousness to work as well as for the powers of the vital plane to come in and take possession. If a man is ill-balanced, these powers take possession easily.... For this Yoga one must have a sane mind. "Sane" does not mean matter-of-fact or dull; and, when I speak of want of balance, I do not mean that people may be insane. I mean that their development is not proportionate but lopsided or there is a twist somewhere in their nature which prevents the harmonious development of all the parts. It was balance that saved me all through. I believed at first that nothing was impossible and at the same time I could question everything that came. If I had believed in everything that came I would have been like some erratic yogis dancing in the street. A perfect Yogi can have a strong imagination and an equally strong reason.¹¹

"How can one man do sadhana for another?"

Whatever may be the idea in other yogas, in our Yoga, at any rate, to leave the burden to the Guru would defeat its own aim. Each must work out his way by himself. What the Guru can do at the most is that he can put the Power. But the rejection and the transformation are to be done by the sadhak himself. He can get the help when he needs. And when the Guru can put the Power one may not be able to hold it, or one may even spend it away uselessly. Everyone has to work out his way.¹²

Sri Aurobindo's way of sadhana and the Mother's

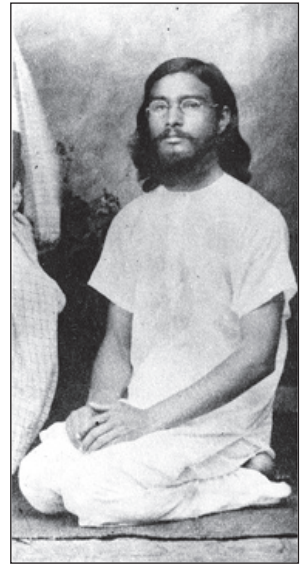
My sadhana works by a concentrated process gradually preparing and organising a physical mould for the inner experience. In Mira's case a certain preparation goes on behind the surface and at once the thing is put forth from behind, and once it is brought to the surface it is there for good, it is permanent and imperative. This is the "involved process", nothing visible on the surface but suddenly everything comes up.¹³

10 V. Chidanandam, "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talks: Some Notes", *Mother India* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department) December 1969, 684-85.

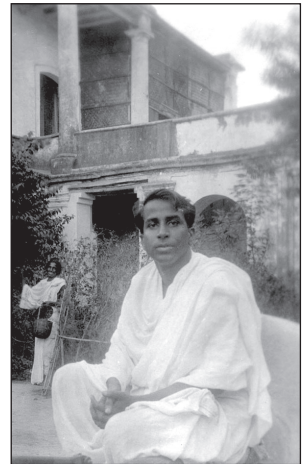
11 Ibid.

12 A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2007), 327.

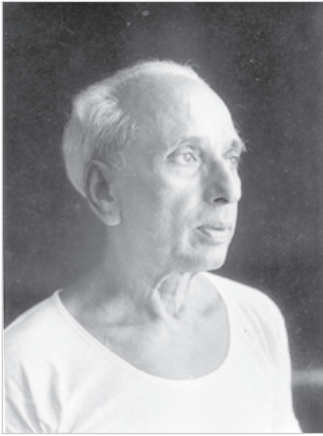
13 Chidanandam, September 1969, 548.



Champaklal



T. Kodandarama Rao



Amrita

“No Guru in this Yoga”

...What do you mean by the Guru? If you mean myself, I may, for the sake of convenience, consent to be called the Guru, but there is no Guru in this Yoga as people ordinarily understand the term. It is the Higher Force that is coming down. Generally, whenever any such Higher Force comes down it prepares an instrument who discovers the Truth—but really speaking, to whom it is revealed, and it manifests itself in him in proportion to his power of receptivity; there, too, the power is given to him. When the Power that is coming down prepares one such instrument it becomes easy for it to come down into others who want to manifest it, who do not want to go their own way but want to have and live the Truth. Then there is chance of success.¹⁴

Consent of the individual required for spiritual change

No, it cannot be done without his consent. Even God himself cannot and does not do like that, and He is much more powerful than I am. Nothing can be done without the consent of the individual.

... But I think some kind of consent somewhere in the being, veiled or unveiled, is absolutely necessary for the working of the power of the Guru. But the exterior does not matter. The real thing required is the central sincerity.¹⁵



K. Rajangam

The Central Being

The psychic being is behind the mental, vital, etc., while what I call the “Central Being” is generally something above the whole being which presses on the nature and gets the thing done. It is that which drives the man to Yoga.... In my own case I started with the idea of freeing India and when I entered deep into Yoga, I found that something already had arisen and I went straight and all right; otherwise I would have deviated from the path.¹⁶

Visions

There are all sorts of visions. Some visions are only images. Some are forms taken by our vital desires. Some are mental thought-images. They don't correspond to any Truth; often they are our creations. True visions are rare and they cannot be completely understood unless one has the right discernment and great purity in the being. Visions in themselves are of no use; what is needed is a change of consciousness. If one cannot distinguish between what comes from above and what comes from below, his mind will get disorganised. If any part of you wants visions,



Purushottam Patel

14 Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 328-29.

15 *Ibid.* 330-31

16 *Ibid.*

they may come. You then have to reject them, reject the mental insistence and false ideas about visions.¹⁷

Change of lower movements

Movements like anger are of the lower vital plane. Jealousy is one of the most ugly lower vital forces. What we have to do is not to repress or control or merely replace anger by gentleness—that does not carry us beyond humanity. It is a mental and moral limitation; the true work is to bring down the Divine Strength and replace the lower movements by the divine counterparts of which they are distortions—anger by Divine Strength, jealousy by a following of one's superiors... Self-control is not true freedom. We must not put down the vital world, but bring the Divine into it.

Restraint does not change the nature, the lower impulses are put down, the life becomes dry, the man harsh, and the vital being becomes tame (the nerves get dried up).¹⁸

Thought, habit, and association

Only by habit thought calls up desire or emotion. It is a case of action and reaction and association. The association calls up the desire; thus, one can bring an illness into the body by means of thought and cast away an illness by the same means....

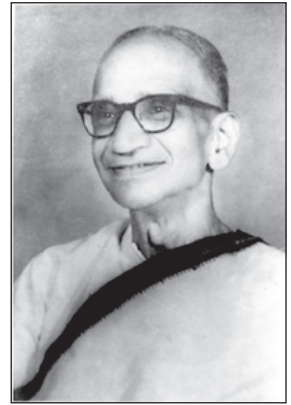
Also, thought does not generally modify emotions, it simply weaves some ideas around them. Our emotions – love, the herd-instinct, patriotism – are of the same substance as in animals. Poets spin fictions out of love, patriots out of patriotism. Such ideas can lift man for a time above the ordinary self, but the substance of the emotions remains the same....

The first step towards truth is to keep a dissolvent critical attitude, to see things as they are, actually; to dismiss all egoistic nonsense. Things like love and patriotism are vital instincts and it is false to camouflage them as divine emotions.... To attain Truth we must look from above, and see what is good and useful in the lower movements and cast off the falsehood and egoism.¹⁹

NATIONHOOD, GOVERNANCE, AND POLITICS

Every nation has its own principle of life

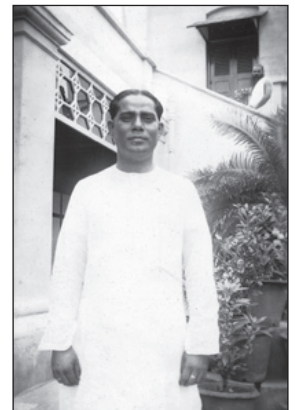
The source of India's life is spirituality. A spiritual movement is always behind a great national awakening in India. The Indian finds his full force when the central being in him is awakened. It is always a Sannyasi



V. Chidanandam



Bejoy Kumar Nag



Rajani Palit

17 Chidanandam, February 1970, 24.

18 Ibid. April 1972, 168.

19 Ibid. February 1971, 22.



Moni (Suresh Chakravarty)



Barindra Kumar Ghose



S. Doraiswami Iyer

or Yogi who inspires the leaders of a creative movement. There is the instance of Ramdas at the back of the Mahratta power, Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind behind the Sikh upsurgence. In modern India too there is the example of Bengal. In 1905 all the great leaders were moved by spiritual forces. Now the Swadeshi movement is in a state of putrefaction, for it sticks to some old formula, does not see the new conditions; there is no spiritual force behind it.²⁰

Countries, like all living things, grow of themselves

No one can make a greater India, no one in the past made it. The India of the past grew of herself. The powers are there above, and they manifest themselves in fit instruments, organise themselves in them and in life. The thoughts and actions of the individual are but part of the movement. They do not make a greater country. It is the Truth that creates, it manifests itself in a certain form. That one can make a country as one can bake a loaf of bread is a crude mechanic idea. No individual ever made a country. France, England, India—it is all a creation of Truth or self-manifestation of the powers. The individuals are but instruments.²¹

Politics and Yoga

Present-day political activity is intensely rajasic (vitalistic) and to reconcile it with Yoga is not easy. All who took to this Yoga had to give up political activity. In our time we did not go into politics in the rajasic way. We left everything to the higher Shakti. If in this Yoga the truth which we want to achieve is attained, and if India accepts it, then it will give quite a new turn to Indian politics, different from that of European politics. It would be very deep.²²

The parliamentary system

India may not copy the parliamentary institutions of Europe. It is the European idea that there must be always opposition between the government and the popular party. In India the king could not infringe the rights of the communes; if their rights were interfered with, the people at once made themselves felt. I don't understand why everything should be centralized in the parliamentary form. We must have numerous different centres of culture and power, full of national life, spread over the country and they must have political freedom to develop themselves. The parliamentary form does not suit India. Our people won't able to take it. It has succeeded only in England. In France and America it has not succeeded. In Italy and Japan, merely the form is there. We may not have the old forms but we can take the true line of evolution and follow the bent of the genius of the race. In India, freedom of the communi-

20 Chidanandam, February 1971, 23–4.

21 Ibid. March 1971, 95.

22 Ibid. October 1969, 614.

ties was developed and individual liberty was not there so much. The communities had great powers and the state had no autocratic powers. The state was a kind of general supervising agency of all communities. Workers must go to every state, province and village, settle down and do solid work. The idea of making each commune self-sufficient is a Utopian idea.²³

Difference between national unity in India and European political unity

India has a more defined collective personality than Europe. For example, England and France have their defined personalities, but not so Europe as a whole. Mazzini saw Europe as a personality, but the several countries of Europe have now to create that super-personality. The case is different in India, the super-personality of India is there already and it is taking form or manifesting itself. The several provinces in India are like Wales and Scotland in Britain. Because there is such a personality in India and it is not a making of today as it has to be in Europe, there is every chance of the political unity of India. But not so with Asia, Asia is like Europe in its relation to its constituent countries. To try to achieve the political unity of Asia therefore would be a grievous mistake.²⁴

THE ARYA

Some "eminent" men say that the Arya is non-understandable.

They can't understand independent thinking. Mine is not absolutely new. I work out in the light of my experience the ancient thought and then I put it in mental terms. Because this is not the present way of thinking, many Indians cannot understand. To the foreigners the subject is entirely foreign: that is why they do not understand. But I wrote the *Arya* for myself and if nobody reads and understands, it does not matter...

Had I been writing the *Arya* up to now, I would not have made the progress I have made in Yoga. Now, only in my leisure hours I put my new consciousness in writing.²⁵

MATERIAL SCIENCE AND OCCULT KNOWLEDGE

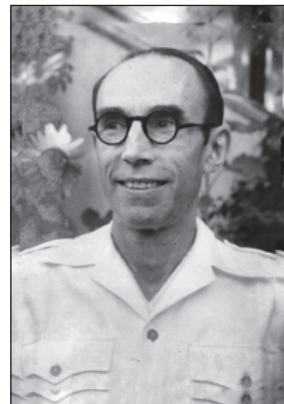
Occult knowledge and the physical plane

The scope of [material] science is very narrow; it touches only the most exterior part of the physical plane. And even there, what does science know really?...

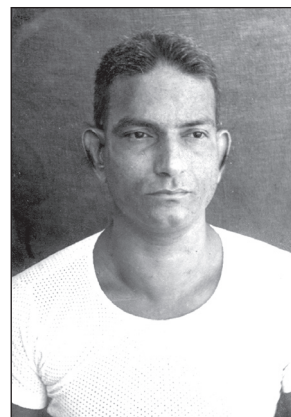
23 Ibid. March 1970, 89.

24 Ibid. August 1971, 450.

25 Ibid. August 1972, 484.



Pavitra



Kanai Ganguly



Naren Das Gupta

There are two statements of modern science that would stir up deeper ranges for an occultist:

First, atoms are whirling systems like the solar system.

Second, the atoms of all the elements are made out of the same constituents. Different arrangement is the only cause of their different properties.

If these statements were considered under their true aspect, they could lead science to new discoveries, of which there is no idea at present and in comparison with which the present knowledge is poor.

[Sri Aurobindo then elaborates on the five different elements that constitute matter – Prithivi, Apas, Agni (Tejas), Vayu, and Akasha) – and their different forms and properties.]

But these five elements constitute only the grossest part of the physical plane. Immediately behind it is the physical-vital, the element of life buried in matter.... Beyond that is the mind in matter. This mind has a much different form than the human mind; still, it is a manifestation of the same principle of organisation. And deep below, there are two more hidden layers.

That is the occult knowledge concerning the physical plane only. Science is far behind this knowledge.

The Hindu Yogis who realised these truths did not elaborate them and turn them into scientific knowledge. Other fields of action and knowledge having been opened to before them, they neglected what for them was the most exterior aspect of the manifestation.

There is a difference between the scientific mind and the cast of mind of an occultist. There is little doubt that someone who could unite these two groups of faculties would lead science towards great progress.²⁶

In Ancient Egypt

The Egyptians had a great deal of occult knowledge. The vital double in the physical body after a man's death was protected, so that no harm may come to the vital body.... There was not much spirituality in the Egyptians' religion but there was no dogma in it as in Christianity and Mohammedanism. The knowledge of the Ancients was direct. There were not many forms of science, but the knowledge was vast and deep.²⁷

A GENERAL UPHEAVAL IN THE WORLD

Now there seems to be general awakening in the world, an upheaval, an opening up: the old things are called in question, there is a demand for higher things. Such an awakening is a sign that the higher powers are seeking to manifest themselves in the world. The manifestation depends on the conditions here, on the opening up, and the opening up begins when the higher things seek to manifest: both go together. When Christianity first came, there was such an awakening, but the Christians compromised with vital forces, set about converting people to their religion and the result was failure. At the present time, the vital forces are more rampant in the world, they are abroad everywhere and unless we are sufficiently pure we cannot be fit instruments for the manifestation of the higher powers. Unless now we bring down the higher powers here in India, the chance may go to some other country.

26 Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire), *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2007), 140–41.

27 Chidanandam, March 1971, 95.

There must be sufficient preparation and purification. If people merely go on with their vital aims – e.g. patriotism, political work – Truth will not simply follow them into the legislative councils.²⁸

IN CONCLUSION

Soon after 24 November 1926, this dream episode in the history of the Ashram came to a close. With Sri Aurobindo's progressive withdrawal "the sittings began to get later and later, till the limit of one o'clock at night was reached. Then the curtain fell. [He] retired completely after December 1926".²⁹ In February 1927, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to the Meditation House, and there he remained ensconced in his room until 1950. But this "retirement", which he undertook to concentrate more intensely on his work, was neither a retreat into a zone of spiritual silence nor was it a divorce from external life. Four volumes of replies (well over 2000 printed pages) to questions posed by his many disciples stand as mute witness. And even the most mundane details of the Ashram's day-to-day life were referred to him. Undeniably, there was a near total curtailment of direct contact with Sri Aurobindo, but the Mother stepped in, took over the community's administrative responsibilities, and directed the spiritual growth of an ever increasing number of disciples.

It would have perhaps remained that way had it not been for an unfortuitous "accident" in November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo fractured his leg. Attending to him while he was forced to rest in bed "at the rigorous command of the doctors"³⁰ were half a dozen disciples who formed the entourage for a second series of "Evening Talks" that lasted till 1943. In the second series also, "There was not a subject that was not touched upon", not a mystery that was not illumined, "not a phenomenon that passed unnoticed, humorous or serious, superficial or profound, mundane or mystic".³¹ This second series of talks involved a much smaller group of participants and the discussions often centred on the independence movement in India and on the Second World War, also known as the "Mother's War". But that's quite another story.

Not unlike the exchanges between Krishna and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, the records of the evening talks with Sri Aurobindo will remain an inspiring signpost for ages to come. For it is an eternal colloquy between Man and God; of mortality seeking a deepening intimacy with the Supreme; the Supreme on His part, from the unperturbed raptures of His infinitudes, leans to respond to the human aspiration with an enveloping nearness—re-enacting the saga and the mystery of Divine Love through the never-ending cycles of Time.

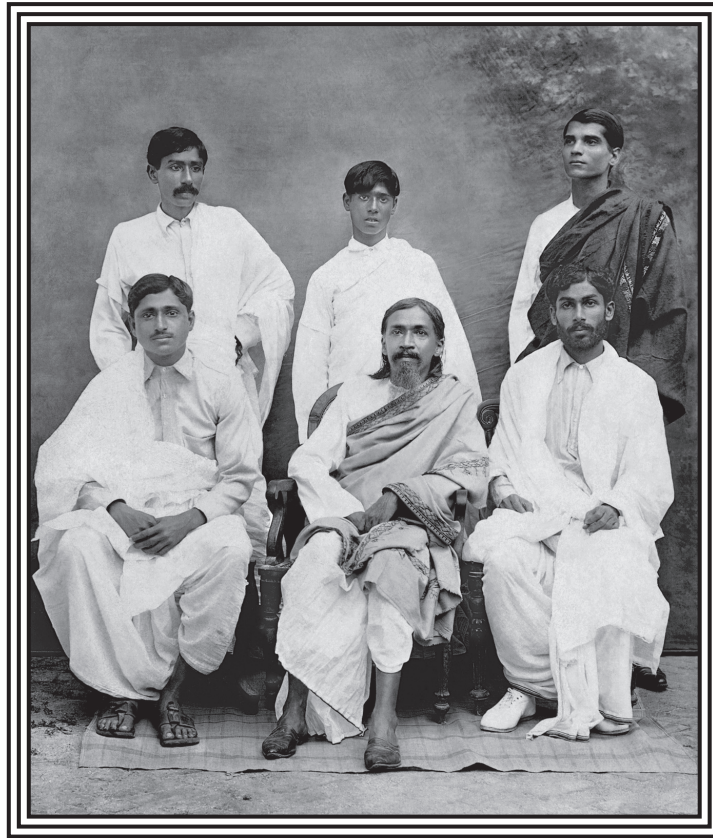


28 Ibid. 96.

29 Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 12.

30 Nirodbaran Talukdar, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo: Vol I* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2001), Preface.

31 Ibid.



Sri Aurobindo on his birthday c. 1915–18

It was customary during the years of the evening talks for Sri Aurobindo to give some remarks on his birthday. In *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, A. B. Purani has recorded the substance of several of these talks. Here are portions from Sri Aurobindo's remarks on 15 August 1926:

We have attached a special importance to this day and it is justified if we live in the Light of the Truth it symbolises. For this day we can fix a mark in the stage of the individual and general progress. It is a day which ought to be a day of consecration, of self-examination and a preparation for future advance, if possible, for the reception of a special Power which would carry on the work of advance. This can only be done in each individually if he takes up the true attitude and lives on that day under the right conditions....

There must be a consecration from beforehand, and a looking inward on the past to see how far we have reached, what in us is ready, what in us has not yet changed and has yet to be changed, what stands behind waiting for a complete transformation; what still resists and what is still obscure. There must be the aspiration, a calling down of the Power to effect the change which we see to be necessary....

If you listen to me now and if it is merely something that touches your mental interest and satisfies a mental interest I would rather remain silent. But if it touches somewhere the inner being, the soul, then only has this day a utility or a purpose.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Mother of the Gods

49 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-387-0, Rs 30
Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Divine Smile

48 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-390-0, Rs 30
Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The Path of Agni: Yoga of the Vedic Rishis

50 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-386-3, Rs 30
Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Other Authors

Four Aspects of Savitri

—Ananda Reddy
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry
204 pp, ISBN: 978-93-85391-06-4, Rs 360
Binding: Soft Cover
Size: 14 x 22 cm

Based on talks given in 2006, this book is organised around two written notes. First, it takes a deeper look into the symbolism expressed in the “Author’s Note” by Sri Aurobindo which precedes the beginning of the epic *Savitri*. Then there are a series of chapters examining the significance of a note written by the Mother to a disciple listing the four important aspects which form the essence of the epic—that it is the daily record of the spiritual experiences of Sri Aurobindo, a complete system of yoga that can be used as a guide to sadhana, the yoga of the Earth in its ascension towards the Divine, and the experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated.

See review on page 16

Sri Aurobindo: A Legend

— Madhumita Dutta
Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan
263 pp, ISBN: 978-93-80736-23-5, Rs 300
Binding: Soft Cover
Size: 14 x 21 cm

The author of this biography terms it a study of Sri Aurobindo’s life and his transformation of consciousness told through the lens of his writings. Examined in tandem, his life and his writings become an integral study in literature, history, psychology, philosophy, and yoga. Combining historical context and with liberal quotations from Sri Aurobindo’s writings, she focuses on some important aspects of his political and spiritual life and the social and cultural background in which he lived and worked.

See review on page 19

Alipore Bomb Trial 1908–1910

A Compilation of Unpublished Documents

—Compiled, edited, and with an introduction by
Amiya K. Samanta
Publisher: Frontpage, Kolkata
830 pp, ISBN: 978-93-81043-23-3, Rs 2195
Size: 15x23 cm
Binding: Hard Cover

A project of the Indian Council of Historical Research, this is the first of two volumes bringing to light all the unpublished documents related to the Alipore Bomb Trial. The long introduction looks at the motivating spirit of patriotism, nationalism, self-sacrifice, and strong aspiration for freedom from colonial rule that set the context for the events leading up to the Alipore Bomb Trial. Highlighting Sri Aurobindo’s leadership role in the freedom struggle, the editor outlines the emergence of secret societies in Bengal, the political conflict of moderate versus extremist, the ideological clash between passive resistance and violence, the persecution of the press, and the developing events at the Maniktala Garden leading to the search, seizure, and arrest of the accused. By discussing how witness statements, confessions, and expert evidence play a role in a criminal trial, how law and procedure operate in the courtroom, and how truth is determined

in a judicial trial, he prepares the reader to evaluate the unpublished documents relating to the Alipore Bomb Trial that follow in the next four chapters.

See review on page 21

Real Utopias

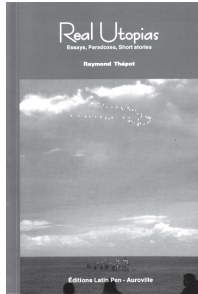
Essays, Paradoxes, Short Stories

—Raymond Thépôt

Publisher: Editions Latin Pen, Auroville
61 pp, ISBN 978-81-87582-03-8, Rs 125
Size: 14x21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

A collection of essays, symbolic tales, inner dialogues, and short stories, this book by a longtime resident of Auroville was published originally in French in 1989.

The work focuses on the author's experiences of and observations on the process of inner change, and exhibit subtle humour, hard-won insights, and a nuanced, almost poetic diction. Auroville is the subject of the symbolic tale "Windowville", which describes some of the ordeals faced by those who choose to settle there.



Spirituality at Work

—Devdas Menon

Publisher: Yogi Impressions Books Pvt. Ltd.,
Mumbai
303 pp, ISBN: 978-93-82742-52-4, Rs 499
Size: 14x22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Based on the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita and drawing inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*, this book has emerged from the lecture notes prepared by the author for a course on Integral Karmayoga offered at IIT Madras in 2014. Aimed at rediscovering the inspiring message of the Gita, the book focuses on finding fulfillment in life through the application of conscious will—through karmayoga, but also incorporating the ways of knowledge and devotion. Its purpose is to help the next generation face the challenges of a competitive work environment by applying the wisdom of the Gita to their daily lives.

See review on page 24

ASSAMESE

Sri Aurobinder Bani: 15 August 1947— Sri Aurobindo, sc Rs 10

GUJARATI

Savitri Shabdarnut - 6— Shraddhavan, sc Rs 150

HINDI

Vedic Yug: Sri Aravind ke Alok main— Chandra Prakash Khetan, ISBN: 978-81-931830-8-3, hc Rs 475

Purna Swasthata— Sri Mataji aur Sri Aravind ke Lekhon se sankalit, ISBN: 978-93-5210-108-5, sc Rs 175

Bharatavarsh ki Chintan-Shakti— Sri Aravind, ISBN: 978-93-5210-113-9, sc Rs 28

MARATHI

Bhavani-Bharati—Sri Aurobindo, sc Rs 120

ORIYA

Purnanga Niramayata— Sri Aurobindo O Srimanka Lekharu Sangruhita, ISBN: 978-93-5210-117-7, sc Rs 285

TAMIL

Annaiye Thaangal Ivvaru Koorinirgal ...— Thoguthu Vadivamaithavar: Huta, ISBN: 978-81-87372-36-3, sc Rs 200

TELUGU

Savitri (Swechchhanuvadam: D. Satyavani)
— Sri Aravindulu, hc Rs 600

BENGALI

Sri Aurobindo Darshan: Purnadwaitobader ek bhumika— Dr Dilip Kumar Roy, Rs 250

FRENCH

Poésie

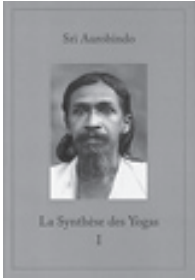
—Sri Aurobindo
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry
266 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-082-8, Rs 325
Size: 18x22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

Traduction révisée et complétée des poèmes courts de Sri Aurobindo.

La Synthèse des Yogas

(Nouvelle édition en 2 volumes)

—Sri Aurobindo
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry
1078 pp, ISBN: 978-93-5210-040-8, Rs 975
Size: 18x25 cm
Binding: Soft Cover



La Synthèse des Yogas est sans doute, avec *La Vie Divine*, l'œuvre "philosophique" majeure de Sri Aurobindo. Il y expose l'essentiel des trois voies principales du yoga (le yoga des œuvres ou de l'action, Karma Yoga ; le yoga de la connaissance, Jnana Yoga ; le yoga de l'amour et de la dévotion, Bhakti Yoga), et propose une synthèse

de ces voies dans un yoga intégral, le yoga de la perfection de soi. Ces chapitres ont tout d'abord paru dans la revue *Arya*, de 1914 à 1921, puis sous forme de livre une vingtaine d'années plus tard. Sri Aurobindo les a remaniés à diverses reprises, notamment celui intitulé "Conscience cosmique", et ils ont été publiés récemment en anglais dans la nouvelle édition de ses œuvres complètes. La présente traduction, revue et augmentée, en a tenu compte.

L'Aurore d'une vie nouvelle

L'Aventure de Sri Aurobindo et de Mère

— Racontée par Cristof

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

293 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-047-7, Rs 275

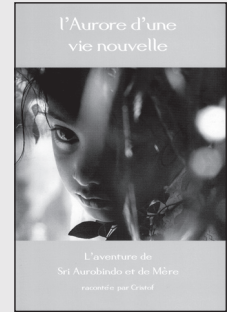
Size: 16x24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Dans ce livre, l'auteur a voulu raconter la vie de Sri Aurobindo et celle de Mère non comme deux histoires séparées, deux biographies, mais comme une seule, car leurs vies sont depuis le début, et depuis toujours en fait, reliées au cœur d'une même aventure, l'aventure de la conscience. Tous deux ont traversé le vingtième siècle en pleine conscience; ils ont connu la beauté et la grandeur de son héritage culturel et spirituel, mais aussi la misère et les drames: la guerre en Europe, la révolution en Inde. Et pourtant, dans la nuit qui tombait sur le monde ils ont vu pointer la lumière, et ils ont apporté à l'humanité un message d'espoir, la vision d'une grande Possibilité qui nous est offerte: celle de transformer cette vie humaine en une vie divine. De l'Angleterre et de la France jusqu'en Inde en passant par le Japon, nous suivons cette merveilleuse histoire qui nous conduit vers un avenir lumineux: l'aurore d'une vie nouvelle sur la Terre.

See review on this page

L'Aurore d'une vie nouvelle

Dès l'entrée, le livre de Cristof nous accueille par un formidable défi: comment rassembler en quelques trois cents pages l'immensité du chemin parcouru par Sri Aurobindo et Mère au cours de leur vie commune sur terre? Et peut-être un plus grand défi encore: comment rendre sensible aux lecteurs pressés, avides de formules efficaces que nous sommes, le bouleversement de conscience qu'ils ont semé au cours de quatre ou cinq trop courtes décennies?



Cristof relève ces défis à l'aide d'une connaissance approfondie des textes, mais aussi grâce à un toucher d'écriture particulier dont il semble avoir le secret: la poésie. Sans jamais perdre le fil intérieur, il parsème son récit d'une moisson de judicieuses citations qui nous transportent au cœur de la Révolution de Sri Aurobindo et Mère. Depuis la synchronicité de leur naissance sur deux continents différents, puis le "hasard" de leur rencontre en Inde et l'offrande de leur vie afin d'incarner l'avenir évolutif de l'homme, la narration ne se perd jamais dans les sables mouvants du dithyrambe ou de l'ennui.

Il suffit de se laisser glisser dans cette atmosphère très douce où les mots ont perdu leur aspérité et ne sont là que pour servir de support à cet autre climat qui emplit—"autre chose", un rythme qui contient son propre sens. Peut-être un avant-goût du « miracle » de Mère et Sri Aurobindo?

—Luc Venet

BOOK REVIEWS

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Four Aspects of *Savitri*

—Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for
Advanced Research, Pondicherry
204pp, ISBN: 978-93-85391-06-4, Rs 360
Binding: Soft Cover
Size: 14 x 22 cm

Ananda Reddy's new book, *Four Aspects of Savitri*, is a commendable study of Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, the epic poem *Savitri*. Originally presented as a series of talks, they have been revised with certain portions "rewritten to bring greater clarity," but purposely retain a tone "kept simple and colloquial." The studies presented, which examine the poem from different angles, are replete with important quotes from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother pertaining to the poem and to various issues addressed in the poem, as well as crucial excerpts from the poem itself. In general, one finds solid, well-researched and documented perspectives on the poem, many original insights, and occasional personal reflections and anecdotes.

The book consists of six chapters, one for each of the four aspects of *Savitri* noted by the title, and two introductory chapters: the first discussing the nature of the poem and its originating consciousness and intent, and the second discussing Sri Aurobindo's prefatory Author's Note about the poem, which describes the main symbols underlying the poem's theme and its primary characters. The four perspectives on *Savitri* addressed in chapters 3–6 examine it from the viewpoints of the four aspects of the poem that the Mother herself identified:

1. The daily record of the spiritual experiences of the individual who has written.
2. A complete system of yoga which can serve as a guide for those who want to follow the integral sadhana.
3. The yoga of the Earth in its ascension towards the Divine.

4. The experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated.

The four chapters elaborate on these four aspects, and draw insights and parallels from various sources such as *Record of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Collected Works of the Mother*, the Mother's *Agenda*, and numerous other primary and secondary sources.

The first chapter discusses the deep spiritual context and mantric nature of the poem. In the opening pages, the author makes clear the stupendous character of the poem: a revelation of the truths underlying existence and human life on earth, as well as the destiny of earth and man. Even more than a revelation, the author asserts the transformative power of the poem. He cites the well-known quotation from the Mother, "*Savitri* is a mantra for the transformation of the world," and while noting how the poem depicts the "truth from the Superconscious to the Inconscious and all the levels that lie in between," he explains that "[w]ith Sri Aurobindo, to describe a level of consciousness is to lend the words the power to manifest." Expanding on this idea and relating it to the central theme of the poem, the author suggests the enormous power and significance of *Savitri*: "a penetration of the Divine Grace and Love coupled with the Supramental force could alone transform Death, and give earth the possibility of coming out of its inconscience, untruth, death and suffering once and for all." Quoting various passages from the poem, the first chapter introduces the reader to some of the fundamental characteristics of the overmind consciousness and aesthesis which are woven together in *Savitri* to create an unparalleled marvel of truth, power, beauty, and delight.

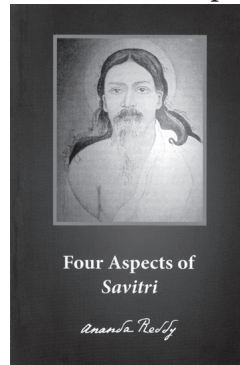
The second chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Author's Note that appears before the beginning of the poem. Here Sri Aurobindo describes the tale of *Savitri* as "one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle," and goes on to elaborate a few of its most significant symbols. Without reiterating the symbolism behind the

main theme and characters in the poem described by Sri Aurobindo in this note, we may simply comment that the analysis presented does help to clarify the deep symbolism of the poem, while also providing a context for understanding the story. Reddy draws on various passages in the poem to elaborate the symbolic significances, as well as on other writings of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and other authors.

Chapter Three discusses several examples of *siddhis*, yogic powers, that Sri Aurobindo had developed during the early years of his sadhana in Pondicherry and recorded in his personal diary, later published in two volumes as *Record of Yoga*, and how these powers have been incorporated into *Savitri*. The three main *siddhis* discussed are *aishwarya*, "effectiveness of Will;" *trikaladrishti*, knowledge of the past,

present, and future; and *dasya*, the highest form of surrender in which one becomes a "slave of God." The nature of these powers and their development as noted in the *Record* are discussed in this chapter, and we are shown various passages in which they are described in the poem.

While these several examples of passages and extraordinary experiences described in *Savitri*, deriving from personal experiences discussed in the *Record*, are revealing, it would seem that there was much more that could have been written about this interesting aspect of this poem. While the author acknowledges that "all of *Savitri* is undoubtedly the direct poetic expression of Sri Aurobindo's experiences," and that "one can go on endlessly describing the multiple experiences of Sri Aurobindo which have been crystallised into jewel-images or inspiring phrases," the chapter presents to us only a few of these jewels that have been documented in the *Record*. Except for the introductory first chapter, this particular chapter is the shortest in the book, but its subject matter could alone probably fill a complete volume.



Chapter Four examines *Savitri* from the standpoint of it laying out a complete system of yoga, which again is based on the Mother's statement. This chapter, the longest in the book, is nicely developed. Here the author first takes us through some of the primary aspects of the Integral Yoga, including the basic requisites of sadhana, the meaning and need of transformation, the three types of transformation—psychic, spiritual and supramental, the various layers of the consciousness, ego and egolessness, desire and desirelessness, and equality. Following this introduction to the yoga, based in part on excerpts from various texts by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the author takes us through landmarks of Savitri's yoga as described in the poem, focusing on the finding of her soul but also discussing the spiritual and supramental transformations. He then compares her yoga with Aswapati's and notes some of their similarities and differences:

Between the two of them Savitri and Aswapathy complement and complete integral yoga: one goes through the opening of the heart centre and the other through the opening of the mind centres—the two most important ways of the sadhana of integral yoga. (p. 98)

This analysis is followed by a series of questions and answers between the author and his audience covering a wide range of subjects related to sadhana and Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teaching.

Chapter Five is titled "The Yoga of the Earth", and is primarily philosophical in that it describes the spiritual evolution taking place on earth and the role of the Avatar in that evolution, both through the symbolism of Savitri and Satyavan, and through the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It thus deals with the broader, universal, and terrestrial significance of the poem, especially its protagonists Savitri and Satyavan, and with the destiny of the world and the process of its transformation. It begins with a consideration of the earth as a symbolic centre of the evolution of consciousness, of the unfolding objectivisation of the Supreme. The process of evolution is traced out from matter to mind to supermind. Then the goal and destiny of earth's

evolution, a divine life, is described.

But by what process or miracle can the present earth life arrive at this luminous goal? Here we are introduced to the deeper significance of Satyavan and Savitri, and their parallels in our time, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And by what power shall they transform this earth? Love! The author quotes the Mother: "[O]f all powers Love is obviously the mightiest, the most integral... Love is like a flame changing the hard into the malleable, then sublimating even the malleable into a kind of purified vapour. It doesn't destroy, it transforms." (p. 150) And then he explains the secret of this transformation in another quote from the Mother:

[I]t corresponds to a state where you are so perfectly identified with all that is, that you concretely become all that is anti-divine, and so you can offer it up, it can be offered up and really transformed through this offering. (p. 151)

Chapter Six deals with the Mother's statement that *Savitri* depicts "the experiences of the Divine Mother in the effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and to the falsity and ignorance of the earth upon which she has incarnated." It focuses much more on the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram than on Savitri, but nevertheless a number of relevant themes and passages from the epic are discussed; in particular, the ordeals that the Avatar takes upon himself or herself when taking a physical body, together with the purpose of that undertaking. But the chapter focuses much more intently on the Mother's work of transforming her body, and the often excruciating process that that entailed. There is extensive discussion of the period in 1961 when the Mother was seriously ill as she fought a fierce inner battle—"It was as if Death was staring at me." Here relevant passages in *Savitri* are cited corresponding to this experience. There is discussion of her work in transforming the cells and organs of her body. Of course, all this is directly relevant to the issue of Savitri facing and overcoming Death. The chapter and book concludes with some more questions and answers, bringing back a lighter, more personal tone, and help us relate the high and difficult work of the Mother to our own everyday

Sri Aurobindo: A Legend

—Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan

263 pp, ISBN 978-93-80736-23-5, Rs 300

Binding: Soft Cover, Size: 14 x 21 cm

Sri Aurobindo has quite a few biographers. From the classic *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar to Nirodbaran's *SriAurobindayan* for children, his life has been a subject for authors from very different backgrounds, approaching the subject from their particular corners. When *Sri Aurobindo: A Legend* by Dr Madhumita Dutta came to me I was curious to know what this latest entrant's take might be. In the Preface and Acknowledgement she states:

My work is more in the nature of a research in what we may term 'psycho-history', where we take into account not only the major political and social upheavals of the times which influenced the outer activities of the man, but also how the yogic actions of Sri Aurobindo shaped the destiny of the world around him. It is mainly a research into the 'transformation' that his consciousness underwent, reaching successively higher and higher levels, till he reached the Supramental. What I seek to explore is the 'extraordinary' life beneath the 'surface' of a seemingly ordinary life and to trace the journey, or more appropriately the 'spiritual journey' of Sri Aurobindo from his childhood days in England to his last years in Pondicherry.

This is quite a tall order. Her statement of purpose in the Introduction is, however, a study in contrast:

I do not wish to add my name to any list of renowned biographers; this labour of mine is virtually to satisfy a long-held desire to write about and present to the world Sri Aurobindo as I have understood him. We need something to live by, a belief in something, a belief so strong that it becomes a passion, a source of sustenance. For me it is the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and their thoughts as expressed in human language. The more I came into contact with this Force, the more I felt the need of a keener analysis, a deeper association, to know more from him and about him whom I have called my Master.

Apart from this general goal, she mentions two objectives she would like to achieve through the biography: to "remove some misunderstandings

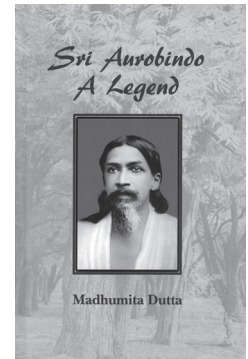
concerning Sri Aurobindo" and "to comprehend a little more of his philosophy which I feel will be a great help in confronting the problems of modern life". The "misunderstandings" relate to his disqualification for the I.C.S. horse-riding test during his student days in England, his sudden departure for Pondicherry in 1910, and his support of the British in World War II.

The first has been cleared up by Sri Aurobindo, here writing about himself in the third person: "He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do." [CWSA, xxxvi, 31] Dr Dutta's approach in proving that Sri Aurobindo deliberately disqualified himself is to show the consistent dislike of administrative work displayed by him throughout his life:

That he had no interest in administrative work is proved by the fact he did not remain in the Baroda services for long, gave up his Principalship of two colleges, and even in Pondicherry gave the management of the Ashram entirely to the Mother (though of course, this was for a different purpose).

Here Dutta manages to ignore facts in order to be able to fit Sri Aurobindo into her theory. He left the principalship of Baroda College to actively join politics in Bengal and to take on the much more onerous responsibility of being the principal of the National College at Calcutta. He gave up the principalship of the National College because he stood accused of sedition. About his giving up the management of the Ashram to the Mother, Dutta's parenthetical qualification is quite enough to demolish her argument.

The second misunderstanding surrounds Sri Aurobindo's sudden departure for Pondicherry in 1910. Here the author does a good job, showing the two points which are most germane. First, that Sri Aurobindo's turning to yoga had nothing sudden in it but was a gradual process which began in 1905, when he began the regular practice of *pranayama* in Khaserao Jadhav's house in Baroda.



Second, that Sri Aurobindo's going to Pondicherry did not mean he had given up being concerned about and involved in India's welfare: "His love for his own country is as evident in his staunch defence of Indian culture, art, science, history as found in his books of the *Arya* period as in the *Bande Mataram* writings. He was never an apologist, but always a stern and passionate defender of India and all that she stood for."

The third misunderstanding concerns Sri Aurobindo's support of the British during the Second World War. He announced his support for the Allies in September 1940, when many in India were for the Axis powers. In a letter published in *The Hindu* on the day he contributed to the War Fund, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen. [CWSA, xxxvi, 453]

As he told his disciples: "All my life I have wanted the downfall of the British Empire, but the way it is being done is beyond all expectations and makes me wish for British victory. And if I want England to win, it is not for the Empire's own sake but because the world under Hitler will be much worse." [Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, ii, 767] The author sums up her argument:

In the beginning of the War, Sri Aurobindo had announced his support for Britain and France. This was for two reasons mainly. First of all he viewed the war as a fight between good and evil forces. Also, he could foresee that the defeat of Britain by Germany and Japan would bring India to harsher conditions of servitude.

In helping the reader to understand Sri Aurobindo's philosophy Dr Dutta's approach is threefold. First, she tries to use his own words as far as possible to explain his decisions at various points in his life. This is done throughout the book, making us feel a direct connection with Sri Aurobindo. Often she also adds comments he made much later, thus enriching our perspective. Secondly, she acquaints us with his books, opening her study of these through the *Arya*, the journal in which most of his major works first appeared. We are introduced to *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The*

Secret of the Veda, *Isha Upanishad*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *Essays on the Gita*. For each she gives the context and background, describes the work, and includes a few quotes to give us a feel of the text. And finally, she lays stress throughout her book on a point that is important in understanding the manifold complexity of Sri Aurobindo: his integrality. When speaking of him as a politician, for example, she is particular to show us how his stance was progressively yogic. When depicting him as a yogi, she is careful to insist that he never lost interest in the affairs of India and the world. After his acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case, with Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Burma and both Bepin Pal and Lajpat Rai away from India, it fell to Sri Aurobindo alone to lead the Nationalists. He took up journalistic work, held meetings, gave speeches. Yet in the midst of this hectic activity, he wrote poems like "Who", "Epiphany", "Rebirth", "Life and Death", and "Parabrahman". He also translated some of the Upanishads. In reference to *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which originally appeared as articles in the *Arya* between 1915 and 1918 and carry his views on contemporary art, religion, society, and international politics, she comments:

That Sri Aurobindo had not lost interest in politics is evident from the essays in this book, which he revised in the 1930s, before the Second World War and finally in 1949.

The articles reflect his continued interest in political affairs....

The Ideal of Human Unity is a political treatise dealing with important modern and post-modern issues like nation, citizenship, nationalism, internationalism, even unilateralism and multilateralism.

By consistently emphasising this integral perspective Dr Dutta steers the reader away from concentrating exclusively on any one aspect of Sri Aurobindo. Her attempt is to view him in his entirety and share him with us as such. She succeeds in communicating her enthusiasm for him as well as her sense of his relevance for the present and the future.

—Sunam Mukherjee

Sunam reads proof at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.

Alipore Bomb Trial 1908–1910

A Compilation of Unpublished Documents

—Compiled, edited, and with an introduction by
Amiya K. Samanta

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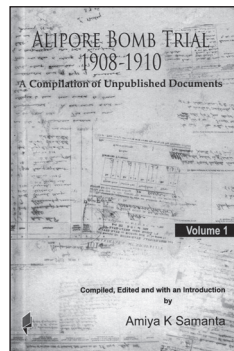
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Amiya K. Samanta combines the dexterity of a sleuth and the acumen of a researcher in his exhaustive compilation of unpublished documents from one of the most sensational trials during the struggle for independence, when the rule of the colonial bureaucracy undermined the eulogized British ideals of law and justice. This is Volume One of the work; it lists the statements of 206 witnesses along with 1575 documents and materials placed before the court during the Alipore Bomb Trial, or the Maniktala Conspiracy Case. To the author's credit, this book is not a mere logbook of trial proceedings but an exploration of the psyche and the turbulence of that time, which contrasts with Gandhi's Satyagraha of a later date.

The book serves four major interests. Firstly, it presents the falsehood and hypocrisy of the colonial administration that extolled the glories of British justice to the world at large while at the same time denigrating Indians and surreptitiously amending criminal and press laws. The offence in the Alipore Bomb Trial was as serious as 'waging of war, attempting to wage war or abetment to wage war against the King-Emperor', yet was dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the newly introduced criminal law and procedure. The author shows how in the case of Khudiram, who was sentenced to death, the punishment was meted out not on the basis of evidence placed before the judge, but on the assumption that the accused was guilty. The colonial mindset is illustrated best in the case where, after recording a judicial confession, Magistrate Birley asks Upendra Nath Banerjee in an intimate tone whether the Indians were really capable of ruling India. Upendra's reply that India had been ruled by Indians from the dawn of history until the British arrived led to a red-faced Birley instructing court officials not to carry the conversation outside the courtroom.

Secondly, the author's painstaking research corrects several historical inaccuracies that have prevailed to date. These inaccuracies are of two types: factual errors and metaphysical misinterpretations. Thus Sri Aurobindo's uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra's contention that the eminent lawyer, Byomkesh Chakraborty, never appeared in the case is not corroborated by court records. In fact, a key legal lacuna in the case was clinched by Chakraborty and was later utilized by C. R. Das. This pertained to the inadmissibility of the approver Naren Gossain's confession on the ground that he was not allowed to be cross-examined by the prosecution (This was indeed a slap in the face to an overzealous Birley who had disallowed cross-examination just because his administrator-self prevailed over his judicial role). Also, Krishna Kumar Mitra seems to have wrongly recorded that he had appointed C. R. Das as a lawyer on 8 December 1908, as the author unearthed court records to show that Das had cross-examined Richard Cregan, Superintendent of Police, on 26 November 1908 and hence must have been appointed prior to that date. As for metaphysical misinterpretations, the author takes pains to point out how an eminent historian like Amalesh Tripathi makes sweeping and unfounded generalizations about Sri Aurobindo's purported use of the Gita and Vedanta to justify extremism and violence.



Thirdly, the voluminous statements of the accused and the witnesses, as well as those of police personnel, together with the list of seizures give a veritable insight into the psyche of the inspired youngsters branded as criminals for their nationalistic fervour. Their knowledge of explosives was quite up to date, their commitment to the cause was unquestionable, and although at times their confessions bordered on the naive, their actions were bold and fearless, leading two of them to commit the daring act of killing their co-accused approver within the jail premises. Major Frank Smallwood, the Chief Inspector of Explosives, gave a detailed description of the explosives and manuals seized from the accused. These included "kerosene powder", a new explosive, an Orsini bomb with protruding detonators, and Safronski's manual for preparing explosives. Despite their antagonism to British rule, the revolutionaries had quite a catholic and humane worldview and, unlike contemporary reactionaries, would never have used women and children as

human shields. As Aswini Coomar Banerji, a barrister and Swadeshi leader, explains apropos a question put forward by Eardley Norton, the Chief Prosecution Counsel, that suffering was preferred over anarchy: 'I do not advocate the view that the bodies of our children are to be sacrificed literally, for consummation of a political view....Aurobindo has never advocated such views.'

Fourthly, the book gives a glimpse into Sri Aurobindo's personality and bearing during those tumultuous years. He kept his poise of silence and detachment amidst the hullabaloo of conferences and meetings, in the horse carriage pulled by enthusiastic students at Nagpur and Nasik, in the confusion during his arrest, in the harshness of imprisonment and amidst the falsehoods perpetrated in the courtroom. His silence baffled later historians like Tripathi as they were at a loss to gauge the complexity of his revolutionary connections. Yet he was unequivocally the inspiration behind the quest for freedom. The author makes a short but meaningful appraisal of the attitudes of Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi towards passive and active resistance.

The book also contains a valuable chapter on judgments in sedition trials and documents relevant to the Case. The judgments against newspapers like Jugantar, Bande Mataram, Sandhya and Navashakti have enormous heuristic value. Of special interest are the statements of Barindra and Bibhuti in the Narayangarh Train Wrecking Case that exposed how innocent villagers were convicted on the basis of false confessions. There is, in addition, an account of Sri Aurobindo's full involvement in the National College, provided by Satish Chandar Mukherji, its first Superintendent.

While the approver Naren Gossain was shot inside the jail hospital, other Indians who served the Crown against the interests of the Case were also killed during the trial. Nandalal Banerji was killed for trying to arrest Khudiram's accomplice, Prafulla Chaki. Asutosh Biswas was assassinated for acting as a prosecutor in the case, though he was initially approached to defend the revolutionaries. Moulavi Shamsul Alam was murdered for fabricating evidence against the accused while Madhu-

sudan Bhattacharya was killed for tracing the Maniktala Garden as the centre of conspiracy. What is significant is that the voluminous materials presented in this book, the confessions of the accused as well as the reports of the police officers, do not give any idea of how these killings were organized or, for that matter, on whom the mantle of leadership fell after most of the group were arrested. Who took such well-planned decisions to eliminate selected Indians branded as traitors? Was the matter hushed up as no Europeans had been killed?



Marble tablet placed inside the courtroom where Sri Aurobindo was tried

The author gives interesting snippets of the times, making this collection of documents and court records more absorbing. The dreaded Chief Prosecution Counsel, Eardley Norton, was the son of the pro-Indian John Bruce Norton, who was a delegate to the 1888 session of the Indian National Congress and accompanied W. C. Banerjee, A. W. Hume, Surendranath Banerjee and R. N. Mudholkar to England. Eardley Norton, with C. R. Das as his junior, later de-

fended an Indian revolutionary, Nirmal Kanta Ray, who shot a police official in January 1914, leading to the acquittal of the accused in a jury trial. Readers also come to know of one of Sri Aurobindo's favourite expressions during that period—"for me thou art not", a phrase that came up during the trial proceedings as well as being used in a telegram sent to Benares to inform Subodh Mullick of Sri Aurobindo's arrest. The manner in which Hemchandra, who had gone to Europe for training in bomb-making, rebuffed the British expert on explosives provides a lighter moment to the reader.

The author seems inclined to make his work a source material for a comparison with Gandhi's leadership of the movement in later years. The Time-Spirit acts differently in different eras and comparisons may or may not have relevance. Yet it was the absence of Gandhi's picture above the judge's chair in the courtroom at the Alipore Judges' Court and the presence of a very old, large painting of Sri Aurobindo instead that led the late Justice Krishna Kumar Mitra, during the early 1950s, to stumble on the fact that this was the very

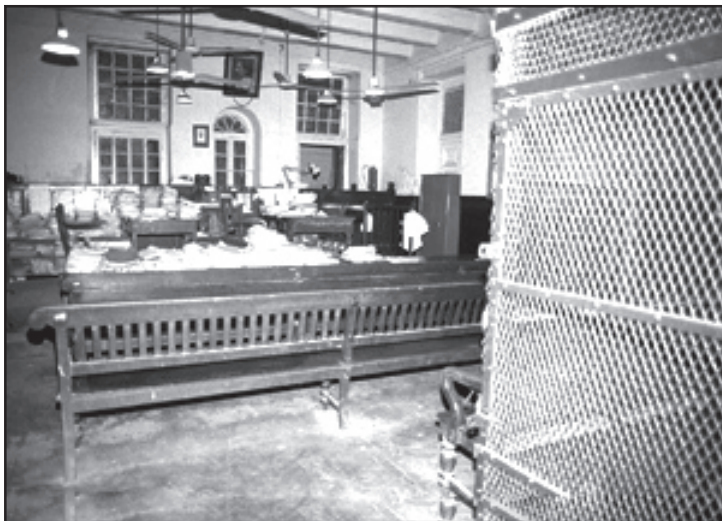
room in which C. P. Beachcroft presided over the famous trial. Justice Mitra narrated this fascinating story to me shortly before he died in 1989. He said he was surprised to discover all the furniture, the judge's chair, the cage where the prisoners were lodged—all had remained unchanged. The lockers in the courtroom contained invaluable records of the trial, mostly handwritten, including a massive stack of judgment papers.

Around 1952–53 a marble plaque commemorating the trial was installed inside the courtroom. At the same time, another marble plaque carrying the sentences awarded to the accused in the trial was placed on the outer wall of the building housing the courtroom. Close to forty-five years later, on 15 August 1998, a museum housing important documents pertaining to the events that led to the trial as well as some trial papers was set up in the courtroom and some adjacent rooms.

We offer our gratitude to Justice Mitra, who unearthed the fact that the room where he had been transferred as District Judge was the very one where the trial took place, and to Amiya K. Samanta for his assiduous research and compilation of unpublished documents in this important book.

—Dr Soumitra Basu

Dr Basu is a psychiatrist exploring the consciousness paradigm of health, psychology, and psychotherapy from the integral perspective of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



The Alipore Sessions courtroom with Sri Aurobindo's portrait hung high on the far wall and the enclosure for the prisoners in the foreground

A general view of the Alipore Sessions Judge's courtroom where Sri Aurobindo was tried



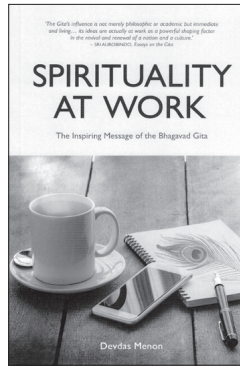
Spirituality at Work

—Devdas Menon

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303 pp, ISBN: 978-93-82742-52-4, Rs 499

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



outer world in the form of an increasingly better quality of material life, which is not only efficient, productive and prosperous, but also suffused with aesthetic refinement, moral strength and mental vigour. In his book, Devdas Menon describes how to achieve this synthesis in our individual consciousness and life through the path of Integral Karmayoga, put into living practice in our daily life, in our work, actions and relationships.

When I received this book for review, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that a free elective course on Integral Karmayoga had been introduced in the curriculum at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, in 2014, and that this book has emerged from the lecture notes prepared for the course. It is heartening to see that one of the most prestigious institutions of technology in India had the good sense to incorporate spirituality in its curriculum.

Spirituality at Work is based on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, which the author refers to as Integral Karmayoga. He defines it as “the integrated practice of spirituality through work (karma), knowledge (jnana) and devotion (bhakti)”. The author, Devdas Menon, is a professor of Civil Engineering at IIT Madras and is inspired by the teachings of the Gita and of Sri Aurobindo. According to the blurb on the back cover, “[t]his book is based on the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita. It also draws inspiration from the renowned sage Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita*.” The book contains innumerable quotes from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, from the cover page right through to the last chapter.

In the Preface, Devdas Menon says “The message of Integral Karmayoga in the Gita is meant for immediate practice, while working and living in the world, and not something to be dabbled with, post-retirement!” The path of Karmayoga in the Gita holds the key to a life-transforming spirituality which can integrate inner growth, well-being and fulfilment with the outer efficiency, productivity and innovation sought after by the modern corporate world. This integration has to be achieved over a spiritual foundation with an emphasis on inner progress, which means a progressive inner perfection, flowing out into the

The author encompasses the Gita’s teachings in a comprehensive manner, discussing all the main concepts and practices of the Gita in eighteen chapters. In some chapters, he tries to place the Gita’s message in a modern context. A more conscious and focussed attempt in this direction, bringing out the relevance and application of the Gita’s teaching to an integral fulfilment of modern man – addressing the problems, concerns, and needs of someone living in a digitally connected “global village” and working in a fiercely competitive culture – could have made the book more contemporary.

Before the text begins there are a few pages under the rubric “Early Acclaim”. In one of the testimonials, a young PhD scholar at IIT Madras, Ganesh Bapat, says: “I have truly learned a great deal about myself after taking the Integral Karmayoga course at IIT, Madras. A big shift in my attitude has also happened. Now, whenever my routine is disturbed or I am stuck in unhealthy habits, I am able to come out of that ignorance quickly. I am not easily let down by external challenges and feel more focussed and efficient at work.” I wish and pray that *Spirituality at Work* may have this kind of positive impact on many young minds in India.

—M. S. Srinivasan

M. S. Srinivasan is a research associate at Sri Aurobindo Society and serves on the editorial board of Fourth Dimension Inc., the e-journal of the Sri Aurobindo Foundation of Integral Management. His major areas of interest are management and Indian culture.