

Recent Publications

S a b d a

ESSAYS ON THE GITA

COLLECTED PLAYS AND STORIES

BANDE MATARAM

The Future Poetry

Letters on Yoga

Collected Poems



THE LIFE DIVINE

Savitri

The Synthesis of Yoga

Karmayogin

The Secret of the Veda

Autobiographical Notes

Sri Aurobindo's writings run to more than 20,000 pages and cover an impressive variety of subjects and ideas, from yoga and philosophy to poetry and plays, from writings on politics, culture, and social psychology to commentaries on Sanskrit texts. Our lead article in this issue provides a brief survey of Sri Aurobindo's works, grouping them by content and setting a historical and chronological context for their publication, which may interest new readers as well as those already familiar with Sri Aurobindo's body of work.

CONTENTS

A Brief Survey of Sri Aurobindo's Writings

Recent Publications

Ordering Information

Reviews

Savitri: The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire

2

5

8

9

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis – III

Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo and the Cripps Mission

From the Near to the Far

Smriti Tirtha

11

13

14

17

19

A BRIEF SURVEY OF SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITINGS

Introduction

SRI AUROBINDO was a prolific writer: his *Complete Works* consists of thirty-seven volumes, more than 20,000 pages in all. Though his writings on yoga and philosophy are the most widely known, his oeuvre also includes original work on politics, social development, psychology, culture, art, literature, poetics and linguistics. In his early years, he wrote a number of plays; poetry he wrote throughout his life. Most of his prose writings came during well-defined periods, each with a distinct content and style. Between 1906 and 1910, he produced short political and cultural articles that came out in several Calcutta-based newspapers. From 1910 to 1914, he wrote mainly for himself—extensive research notes on yoga and linguistics, as well as draft translations and commentaries on a number of Sanskrit texts. In 1914, he began publishing again, and in the following six years he serialised, in monthly instalments, the chapters of all his major prose writings. He did so in the *Arya*, a philosophical review he brought out from Pondicherry. In the late 1920s and early to mid 1930s, he wrote more than 5000 letters, most in response to questions by his disciples. Between 1920 and 1940, Sri Aurobindo revised several of his *Arya* writings and published most of them in book form: *Essays on the Gita*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *The Life Divine*, *The Future Poetry*, and three socio-political works. His *Collected Plays and Poems*, a few small booklets and three volumes of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* were also brought out during his lifetime. In 1948, he published the extensively revised Part I of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. His other writings, comprising more than half of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, were published in book form only after 1950.

In terms of content, his writings can be grouped under five headings, each of which will be elaborated below:

1. Poetry, plays and literary criticism
2. Writings on politics, culture and social psychology
3. Translations of and commentaries on Sanskrit texts
4. Writings on yoga and philosophy
5. Autobiographical writings and writings on the Mother and the Ashram

Poetry, plays and literary criticism

Sri Aurobindo considered himself first and foremost a poet. He wrote his first poems during his student days and he continued to write poetry throughout his life. His poems deal with a wide range of topics and reveal his stunning insight into human nature and the depth of his love for this divine manifestation in all its complexity and beauty. The most remarkable poems are perhaps those in which he expressed his spiritual experiences. He wrote a number of sonnets of this type, as well as the 24,000-line epic, *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo used *Savitri*, in his own words, as “a ladder of ascension”, and one finds in it descriptions of his own *sadhana* as well as the Mother's. Shortly before his passing in 1950, he still dictated some of the most beautiful and touching lines of *Savitri*, the passage in which Narad explains how Savitri is destined to stand alone facing Death, and how her response will decide not only her own fate, but the future of the world. One cannot but feel that Sri Aurobindo foresaw here the Mother's role in the continuation and fulfilment of his work.

Sri Aurobindo wrote a number of essays and many letters on English literature and poetics. They are presently available as *The Future Poetry* and *Letters on Poetry and Art*.

In his younger years, Sri Aurobindo wrote a number of plays, the first while he was still in Baroda and the last during his early years in Pondicherry. The plays are probably the most neglected and undervalued part of his oeuvre. Their plots are dramatic in the best sense of the word, and the characters have that peculiar mix of the archetypal and the unique that makes stage-personalities memorable: once you have watched, or even just read these plays, their main characters have a good chance of staying with you for life.

Writings on politics, culture and social psychology

At the beginning of his stay in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of political articles for a local newspaper, but their publication was stopped when it became clear they were too radical for the times: they advocated complete political independence from Britain as the primary objective of Indian politics. A decade later, he took up the same idea again in a flood of short and fiery articles, which were published in nationalist newspapers brought out from Calcutta, the capital at the time of British India. Many of these articles were political in nature, others dealt with culture, education and social issues. The political writings from this period appear in three volumes of the Complete Works: *Bande Mataram (I and II)*, and *Karmayogin*. The *Bande Mataram* volumes contain articles written between 1890 and 1908; most of them were originally published in the nationalist newspaper of the same name between 1906 and 1908. *Karmayogin* has articles published in 1909 and 1910, most from the newspaper *Karmayogin*. His writings from this period have a markedly different style from his later works: short, sharp and witty, they dissect the antics of India's colonial rulers with uncanny precision. The British Police Commissioner in Calcutta found them sufficiently unbearable as to describe Sri Aurobindo as the most dangerous man in the British Empire. The articles he wrote on culture, mostly between 1890 and 1910, have been collected in a fourth volume, *Early Cultural Writings*.

Sri Aurobindo remained interested in social and political affairs throughout his life, but after moving from Calcutta to Pondicherry his perspective changed. In the *Arya*, the philosophical review he published between August 1914 and January 1921, he brought out a series of essays on Indian culture, which are now published as *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*. Another series of essays, titled *The Psychology of Social Development* (later retitled *The Human Cycle*), deals with the long-term evolution of society. In them Sri Aurobindo argues that we are presently in a transitional period between a rational-individualistic period and a subjective-spiritual period of human history. His political ideas of the time centre round *The Ideal of Human Unity*, the still unresolved question of how to ensure political and economic unity while preserving social and cultural diversity. A third series, later published under the title *War and Self-Determination*, discusses the emerging spirit of nationalism. These three series of articles have since been published together, and they are now available in one volume that carries the three titles. Although extensively illustrated with events from the period in which they were written, Sri Aurobindo's socio-political writings contain a treasure of insights on social and political development that are still relevant today.

Translations of and commentaries on Sanskrit texts

Sri Aurobindo attached great importance to India's Sanskrit heritage, and once wrote that he considered a proper understanding of the Rig Veda a "practical necessity for the future of the human race". He looked at the verses of the Rig Veda as the expression of a profound, consciousness-centred understanding of reality, and in *The Secret of the Veda* he explains how a spiritual and psychological reading of these ancient texts leads to a more consistent translation of the Sanskrit terminology than do the prevalent ritualistic and

naturalistic interpretations. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* contains Sri Aurobindo's translations of Rig Veda verses that are addressed to Agni. His little-known research notes on Vedic Sanskrit will soon come out as a volume of the Complete Works titled *Vedic and Philological Studies*.

Sri Aurobindo published in the *Arya* two series of commentaries on the Gita. They are now available under the title *Essays on the Gita*. Though Sri Aurobindo translated a considerable part of the Gita, the *Essays* themselves do not contain a line-for-line translation of the original text, but follow their own storyline. Several of Sri Aurobindo's disciples have attempted to reconstitute a linear translation using Sri Aurobindo's translations wherever available followed by the relevant passages from the *Essays*. The most significant is perhaps Anilbaran Roy's *The Message of the Gita*, which he compiled with Sri Aurobindo's approval in 1938.

Sri Aurobindo's translations of the Upanishads have been gathered together in two volumes. The first volume, titled *Isha Upanishad*, contains, besides several translations and shorter commentaries, also two book-length texts that started as commentaries on the *Isha Upanishad*, but over time grew into early drafts of *The Life Divine*. The second volume, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, has translations and commentaries on the *Kena*, *Katha*, *Mundaka* and other Upanishads. Both volumes contain both published and hitherto unpublished material.

Writings on yoga and philosophy

With his writings on yoga and philosophy, we have reached the core of Sri Aurobindo's work. In his main philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo expounds his vision of an ongoing evolution of consciousness. For those interested in yoga rather than philosophy, the last four chapters of *The Life Divine* are of special interest. The first of them, "The Triple Transformation", gives a magnificent description of how his Integral Yoga extends beyond the more traditional paths of yoga. The next two chapters deal with the transformation required for the individual to attain what Sri Aurobindo calls the supramental consciousness. The final chapter deals with the changes Sri Aurobindo envisages in our collective life.

The Synthesis of Yoga consists of four parts and an introduction. In the introduction, he explains why a synthesis of the Indian yoga traditions is required, and why this synthesis has to be psychological in nature. It offers an excellent introduction into what Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is about, and it explains how the Integral Yoga differs from more traditional approaches. The first three parts of the book deal with the three traditional paths of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti Yoga. The last part deals with his own Yoga of Self-Perfection. It may be noted that only Part I, "The Yoga of Divine Works", was entirely revised and published as a book during his lifetime. Part II, "The Yoga of Integral Knowledge", he revised only partially, and Parts III and IV did not receive any revision. As a consequence, the terminology used in these last two parts of *The Synthesis* differs slightly from the one used in *The Life Divine* and *Letters on Yoga*.

The next major work dealing with yoga consists of his *Letters on Yoga*. The collection of letters on yoga that was part of the SABCL edition constituted three volumes. The extensively enlarged collection of letters that is coming out as part of the Complete Works will have four volumes. Only the first of these four volumes is presently available, as part of the set.

Besides these three major publications, there are two volumes with short essays on yoga and philosophy. The first, *Essays on Philosophy and Yoga*, contains material published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, mostly in the *Arya*. The next, *Essays Divine and Human*, consists of material published after 1950.

Autobiographical writings and writings on the Mother and the Ashram

Sri Aurobindo had once said that his life was not on the surface for others to see, but still there is an impressive amount of biographical material available. The Complete Works includes two such volumes: *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, dealing mainly with his early years in England, Baroda and Calcutta, and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. It also contains one volume about the Mother titled *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*.

Besides these three, there are the two volumes of the *Record of Yoga*, the diary Sri Aurobindo kept of his spiritual endeavour during the early years in Pondicherry. These contain the “laboratory notes” he maintained between 1909 and 1927 about his own yogic development. The *Record of Yoga* is a unique text, in that no one with a similar level of attainment has left such a detailed record of his own inner experiments. Though the *Record* throws light on his *sadhana* and his methods of inner enquiry, it was not written for others, and at places it is extremely difficult to understand. For most of us, it will be more fruitful to concentrate on the conclusions he drew from these experiments, and on what he published in his writings on yoga and philosophy, especially *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, and the *Letters on Yoga*. Regarding his own inner life, the most beautiful and vivid descriptions can probably be found in his poetry, especially in his sonnets and in *Savitri*.

— Matthijs Cornelissen

Dr Cornelissen is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library and teaches Psychological Aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Work at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother *Other Authors*

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

Basic Elements of Sadhana

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-328-3, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Dhyana: Meditation and Contemplation

57 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-321-4, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Discovery of Our True Self

46 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-322-1, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

What is True Hinduism

Indian Culture and Religion

42 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-327-6, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The Whole Secret of Karmayoga

49 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-332-0, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Sri Aurobindo, The Avatar

Gems from the Experiences of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Jail

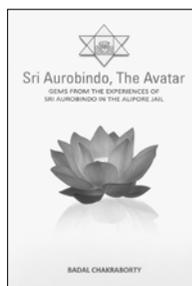
— Badal Chakraborty

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Bharat Ashram, Dogachia

32 pp, Rs 50

Size: 14x21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This booklet examines a few of the spiritual experiences that Sri Aurobindo had during his year in the Alipore Jail, as described by him in his speech at Uttarpara shortly after his release. The author uses portions



of the speech as a springboard to provide an overview of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and to call for a renewed dedication to their vision of a divinised life on earth.

Homage to the Service Tree

Recollections, Poems, Paintings and Photographs in Homage to the Service Tree beside the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

— Essays by various authors

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

73 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-987-7, Rs 525

Size: 31x22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



A reverent tribute to the Service tree that stands beside the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, this book chronicles the history of how the tree was planted in 1930, its

luxuriant growth under the care of the Mother and various Ashram gardeners, and how it weathered several severe storms. Photographs, paintings, personal reminiscences, and poems create for the reader an atmosphere of devotion and service, for which the tree stands as a constant symbol and remembrance.

Parables from the Upanishads

— Nolini Kanta Gupta

Publisher: Srinwantu Spiritual Trust, Kolkata

48 pp, Rs 20

Size: 13x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In this short work seven parables from the Upanishads are retold with commentaries that probe the profound teachings that lie behind the simple stories. The familiar tales of Yama and Nachiketa, Satyakama and Upakoshala, Narada and Sanatkumara, and the stories of Rishi Yajnavalkya and Ushasti Chakrayana are among the parables that illustrate the traditional lines of ancient Indian education, reveal to the contemporary mind the significance of age-old rites and customs, and interpret the stages in the quest for self-knowledge and spiritual realisation.

Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

— Aparna Banerjee

Publisher: Decent Books, New Delhi, in association with Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata

152 pp, ISBN 978-81-86921-57-9, Rs 300

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This collection of scholarly essays seeks to interpret and elucidate several aspects of Sri Aurobindo's socio-

political philosophy, particularly in regard to nationalism, the ideal of human relations, the concept of a stateless society, and an achievable human unity. Other subjects include the relationship between yoga and knowledge – scientific knowledge versus the inner knowledge by identity of consciousness – and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education, specifically within the context of some debates about the aim of education. The unifying thread in these studies is the integral nature of Sri Aurobindo's thought and his emphasis on the evolution of consciousness as central to understanding man's quest for freedom and unity.

See review on page 13

Smriti Tirtha

Places that Echo the Stormy Days of Sri Aurobindo's Brief Stay in Bengal

— Anshu Banerjee

Publisher: Dipak Kumar Gupta, Pondicherry

168 pp, Rs 125

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Through chapters based on the locales in Bengal where the dramatic events in Sri Aurobindo's life played out, this book draws the reader back to the years 1906 to 1910, when Sri Aurobindo was at the centre of the freedom movement. Using multiple sources and first-hand accounts, the story is rich with details of the life and activities at such locations as 12 Wellington Square, Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary headquarters, the National College at Boubazar Street where Sri Aurobindo acted as principal, the office of *Bande Mataram* in Creek Row, the house on Grey Street from where he was arrested in April 1908, Alipore Jail, the Sessions Court where he was acquitted, and Chandernagore, his place of seclusion before he departed for Pondicherry.

See review on page 19

Sri Aurobindo and the Cripps Mission

— Essays and articles by various authors

Publisher: First Feature Ltd., London, UK

166 pp, ISBN 978-0-9562923-2-2, Rs 225

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Several strands of narrative documentation are woven into this account of the Cripps Proposal, a significant attempt at intervention by the British Government during the Second World War that offered dominion status in exchange for India's cooperation and collaboration in

the Allied war effort. Quotes from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and passages from the writings of several of their disciples reveal the steps Sri Aurobindo took – and the reasons he took them – to convince the Indian leaders of the day to accept the proposal. Extracts from official documents and from personal letters and diaries highlight first the viewpoints of the Indian leaders and then of the British, helping the reader to understand why the proposal was not accepted.

See review on page 14

On Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

(Part Two: Collected Comments)

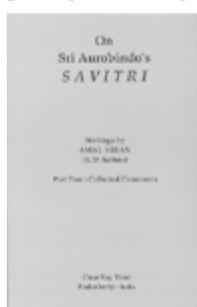
— Writings by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

Publisher: Clear Ray Trust, Pondicherry
335 pp, ISBN 978-81-87916-11-6, Rs 380

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This is the second volume of a two-part compilation of Amal's Kiran's writings on *Savitri* and consists of passages relating to Sri Aurobindo's epic poem that have



been extracted from books, articles, or letters by Amal. Arranged thematically, the contents include passages on how to read *Savitri*, brief discussions on particular passages, lines, or words of the poem, extracts from talks and letters on poetry, and miscellaneous musings and letters in which a few lines from *Savitri*

serve to illustrate or emphasise the author's meaning. Whether writing of his own relation with the poem, which goes back to the days when Sri Aurobindo sent him selected lines and passages from the unpublished work, or discussing *Savitri*'s place vis-à-vis the pantheon of English poetry, Amal's collected comments reflect his very personal and lifelong preoccupation with Sri Aurobindo's epic masterpiece.

Savitri: The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire

An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's epic

— Mangesh V. Nadkarni

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
601 pp, ISBN 978-81-903346-8-6, Rs 350

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Almost all of these essays on *Savitri* were first published as monthly instalments in the e-journal *Next Future*. Dr Nadkarni's approach has been to acclimatise the reader to the experience of reading *Savitri* by

introducing, canto by canto through each book, selected passages that mark important milestones in the poem. His presentation combines an appreciation of the beauty and mantric power of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, a discourse that highlights the departures made by Sri Aurobindo from the tale recounted by Vyasa in the Mahabharata in order to emphasise the story's deeper symbolic meaning, and an exploration of some of the themes running through the poem that are central to Sri Aurobindo's vision and teachings. The last two essays are transcripts of talks that summarise Books XI and XII and give a succinct overview of the entire poem.

See review on page 9

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis – III

On Love

— Miranda Vannucci

Publisher: Miranda Vannucci, Italy

151 pp, Rs 600

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The third book in a series suggesting possible points of contact between the disciplines of psychotherapy and the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, this volume addresses, from a psychological point of view, certain aspects of love. Chapters cover such subjects as the acceptance of the self, the confusion between sexuality and the sentiments of love, maternal love and unconditional love, the awareness and purification of the vital, the union of two beings, forms of love such as friendship, fraternity, and solidarity, and love as one of the universal forces. Numerous extracts from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are used to elaborate the author's premise.

See review on page 11

Pictures of Sri Aurobindo's Poems (Set of 2 DVDs)

— Paintings by Huta; Texts read by Huta; Music by Sunil
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry

Rs 300

In March 1967 Huta began the work of expressing some of Sri Aurobindo's poems through paintings. Under the Mother's inspiration and guidance she selected certain passages from the poems and completed fifty-four paintings, which were all shown to the Mother in September of that year. This DVD set (based on Huta's book of the same title) presents these paintings along with the lines which inspired them from Sri Aurobindo's poems, such as "Invitation", "Who", "Thought the Paraclete", and "A God's Labour".

OTHER LANGUAGES

FRENCH

Le Yoga de la Bhagavad Gita

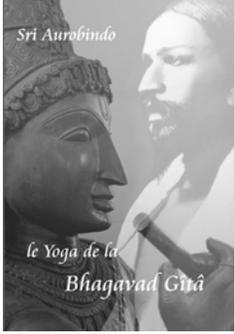
Traduction commentée

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department,
Pondicherry

386 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-846-7, Rs 375

Size: 17x24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



Le Yoga de la Bhagavad Gîtâ,
présenté par Philippe B. Saint-
Hilaire (Pavitra), avec, en
introduction, des extraits des
premiers chapitres des *Essais sur
la Gîtâ* de Sri Aurobindo, est un
livre important pour tous ceux
qui veulent découvrir ou
redécouvrir, non seulement l'un
des textes les plus riches et les
plus beaux de la littérature

spirituelle de l'Inde, mais aussi ce qui constitue les
fondements du Yoga intégral de Sri Aurobindo.

ASSAMESE

Param Avishkar — The Mother Rs 8
Maar Poharor Nijara — M. P. Pandit Rs 30

BENGALI

Mriter Kathopakathan— Nolini Kanta Gupta Rs 25
Sri Mayer Dibya Sannidhye — Shobha Mitra Rs 100
ISBN 978-81-86413-56-2
Sri Aurobinder Sadhanaye Samata
— Debabrata Majumdar Rs 15
ISBN 978-81-7060-323-8
Alaksher Teerbhumi : Sri Aurobindo-Srimar Bhabana o
Srishtir Kichhu Anusanga — Saurendranath Basu
hc Rs 250
Sri Aurobinder Pondicherry Yatra — Trija Roy Rs 35

GUJARATI

Savitri Gunjan — A. B. Purani Rs 150
Savitri Shabdarnut — Shraddhavan Rs 70

HINDI

Ishopanishad — Sri Aurobindo Rs 75
ISBN 978-81-7058-873-3
Pahale ki Baten — Sri Mataji Rs 195
ISBN 978-81-7058-969-3

Veda aur Bharatiya Sanskriti — Kireet Joshi hc Rs 350
ISBN 978-81-87471-67-7

Atma-Chintan — Sukhvir Arya Rs 30
Atma Saurabh — Sukhvir Arya Rs 40
Jeene ki Kala : Bhag 1 (Yoga) — Shyam Kumari Rs 150
ISBN 978-93-81377-14-7

MARATHI

Prarthana: Antarmanachi Hak — Jyoti Thanki Rs 40
ISBN 978-81-89839-47-5

ORIYA

Shikhya Prasanga : Matrirachanabali Bhag 12
— The Mother Rs 240
ISBN 978-81-7058-888-7
Phula O Semanankara Adhyatmika Mahatwa — Compiled
from the works of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and other
sources Rs 100
ISBN 978-81-7060-325-2

TELUGU

Pantulugari Smrityanjali — Compiled from the works of
Sri Aurobindo Rs 75

ORDERING INFORMATION FOR BOOKS

Our complete catalogue of books, with cover images and
description of content, can be viewed at our website.
Submit your order through the website's shopping cart
facility which will instantly generate an online quote
including postage and forwarding. You may then proceed
to pay by credit card online, or by other indicated options.

In India: Place your order through our website as indicated
above. Alternatively, to calculate the order value manually,
add on 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs 30
towards postage and forwarding. Payment can be made
by bank draft favouring SABDA payable at Pondicherry,
money order, or credit card online via our website, on
receipt of which the books will be sent by registered post/
courier.

Overseas: Place your order through our website as
indicated above. Those without internet access may
contact us to receive quotes for the various available
mailing options.

**SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry 605 002, India**

Tel. +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656

Fax +91 413 222 3328

Email mail@sabda.in

Web <http://www.sabda.in>

BOOK REVIEWS

Savitri: The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire *An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's epic*

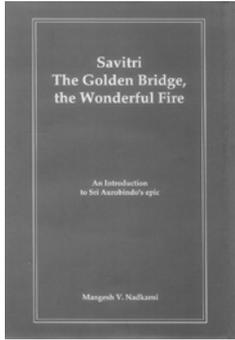
— Mangesh V. Nadkarni

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

601 pp, ISBN 978-81-903346-8-6, Rs 350

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover



M. V. Nadkarni was one of the most eminent voices on *Savitri*. He left behind him a plethora of writings, talks and articles on this magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo. Indeed, he seems to have meditated on *Savitri* all his life. That is something the Mother wanted her children to do—read *Savitri* aloud and meditate upon it. Dr. Nadkarni,

who was a professor of Linguistics, knew the intricacies and the techniques of reading poetry. For him, *Savitri* was “inexhaustible as a source of spiritual delight, power, illumination and inspiration”. When he dealt with *Savitri*, it was with this background of knowledge and devotion that he read it to his listeners. He was involved in all activities related to *Savitri*: giving talks, writing articles and holding discussions. This book is a series of forty-nine articles, taking us step by step along Savitri’s journey of becoming the “The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire”.

Shraddhavan, who is herself a singer of *Savitri*, has taken pains to give appropriate references in the text and has edited some chapter titles so that readers may more easily connect to the content. This effort of hers is a tribute from one lover of *Savitri* to another.

“An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s Epic” is the apt subtitle to this book. We are led into a thematic understanding of the poem and are made aware of its mantric qualities. Dr. Nadkarni has focused entirely on Savitri’s life and journey. He believed that Ashwapati’s yoga required an entirely different set of articles and that dealing with both Ashwapati and Savitri in one series would do no justice to either. He chose to summarize Ashwapati’s yoga in a single article and devoted the rest of the series to Savitri. There also he selected specific Books and dealt with them in more detail—Books VII, IX, X and XII. For these Books he

has taken up specific cantos and attempted a stanza-wise study of the lines, while he briefly summarizes the other Books.

We see a pattern in these articles that is fascinating for readers. Dr. Nadkarni introduces the ancient legend of Savitri and Satyavan as it has been narrated in the Mahabharata. He has taken pains to show how many verses are devoted to each event and theme in the ancient legend and then moved on to the modern epic; significantly, showing how this legend turns into a symbol. For Sri Aurobindo fills each instance with significance and gives a magnanimous dimension to this simple legend. For example, the intricacies of Savitri’s yoga are not dwelt upon much in the legend, but characterized as a *triratna* vow that Savitri takes to save her husband, finally reclaiming Satyavan’s life. The psychological or spiritual changes she goes through while she follows her austerities are not described. As Sri Aurobindo used the Savitri legend to show how integral transformation shall be the future of man on earth, the personality of Savitri also assumed a completely new stature. The magnanimity of Savitri has been brought out by Dr. Nadkarni with great conviction and understanding. He highlights the fact that Sri Aurobindo took pains to detail all that Savitri goes through. There are many such dimensions that the author has taken note of with care and precision.

One appreciates that these departures from the Mahabharata story and the additions made by Sri Aurobindo have been adequately emphasized by Dr. Nadkarni. This not only generates interest in the readers, but gives them a fair idea about how the legend has been transformed into a symbol.

Significantly, the book focuses on establishing Savitri as “The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire”. From the very beginning of the book the author highlights different passages in which Savitri has been described as a daughter, a bride and as a luminous being, leading us to understand how Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri was an Avatar and not an ordinary mortal being. Savitri as seen by her father—“This breathing Scripture of the Eternal’s joy, | This net of sweetness woven of aureate fire.” Then as seen by Narad—“Who is this that comes, the bride, | The flame-born”. And then there is Savitri described as the World Mother. Time and again the author reminds us that Savitri is not just a mortal being

as she appeared in the ancient legend. She is an Avatar and has taken birth on this earth to uplift it and to bring heaven on earth; to deliver humanity out of suffering and pain and death.

Before explaining Savitri's battle with the God of Death, the author introduces a chapter on some aspects of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's perspective on death. Death is, after all, one of the main protagonists in the story. This is an important chapter because it gives us an understanding of how the victory over death can be understood within the Integral Yoga, and we can then better relate to Savitri's confrontation with the God of Death in the poem. In other parts of the book, the author has drawn parallels between the Mother and Savitri and has cited examples from the Mother's life to support his point.

Whenever it was required, Dr. Nadkarni compares Sri Aurobindo's standpoint on a particular concept vis-à-vis that of traditional systems. The concept of Nirvana, as we commonly understand it, stands for leaving this world of misery and getting out of the cycle of birth and death. However, Sri Aurobindo's definition of Nirvana is that it is only a state achieved along the way, and this achievement too has to be surrendered in order to proceed further. Similarly, in the poem love has been described by Death as "a conscious yearning of thy flesh", but Savitri replies to the God of Death that this indeed is love, but it is only a small portion of what love truly is. She says, "My love is not a hunger of the heart | My love is not a craving of the flesh; | It came to me from God, to God returns." The author has beautifully highlighted these differences throughout the book.

Other important aspects of the book are the chapters describing the psychic being and spiritual evolution. Dr. Nadkarni has quoted the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to support his understanding of these concepts. In this series of articles, he has followed a logical rhythm—from psychicization to spiritualization to the complete supramental transformation.

It may be noticed that there is a change in the tone and rhythm of the last two chapters of the book, as they have been appended here from talks given at Savitri Bhavan and are not articles in the same series. Whereas most of the book seems more poetical, summarizing and paraphrasing words and phrases from the epic, the

last two chapters assume a more prosaic structure. It is indeed to the benefit of readers that Shradhdhavan has added them, as the book now stands complete with the description of all twelve Books of *Savitri*.

A slow and concentrated reading of this book would certainly reveal how Savitri the person and *Savitri* the poem are indeed "The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire": the avatar, the Divine Mother incarnate on earth, and the work done by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for humanity, for our future. This book, which often feels like a meditation and chanting of *Savitri*, will certainly attract readers to delve deeper into the poem to find more such pearls.

— Kalpana Bidwaikar

Dr. Kalpana Bidwaikar is an Assistant Professor of English in a Government Post Graduate College at Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh. She was awarded a PhD for her work on Savitri and has authored the recently published book Transformation of Consciousness in "Savitri". She has also lectured on the vision and works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at various places in the state and in New Delhi.

Excerpt from the first chapter, "The Wonder that is Savitri—How to read Savitri":

There is a teacher present in every line of *Savitri*—the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo himself. And once you establish contact with it, you need no other teacher. *Savitri* will then directly begin to speak to you and open for you all the spiritual treasures it contains. With its help alone, as the Mother has assured us, you will be able to climb to the highest step of the ladder of yoga.

Savitri cannot be understood by the mind alone, no matter how well-equipped it is. It is too refined and subtle for that. There must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate the new kind of poetry which *Savitri* is. *Savitri* is essentially the poetry of tomorrow, what Sri Aurobindo called "future poetry". It is in meditation that *Savitri* can be best received.

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis – III ***On Love***

— Miranda Vannucci

Publisher: Miranda Vannucci, Italy

151 pp, Rs 600

Size: 12x18 cm

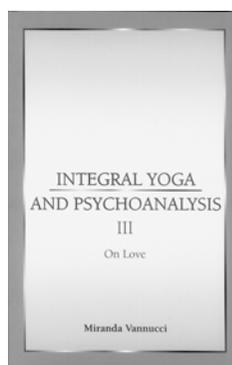
Binding: Soft Cover

There is a certain kind of readership that would admit only that much of a new trend of thought as it finds clothed in terms and symbols that are familiar to it. Whatever we may say, psychoanalytic thought did make an impact in the Western world in the early and middle part of the last century. Though its influence is largely fading now, it still has a sizeable number of followers, if not strict adherents to its tenets. Yet this section of humanity is now looking for fresh insights into human nature, insights that can liberate its soul and free its inner gaze, insights that can open doors to a deeper possibility. Someone needs to speak in their language, the language they know and are familiar with and provide new answers. This book comes to serve this need in that section of humanity which has grown up on a regimen of psychoanalysis.

Whatever be the nature of the clientele that the book may be addressing, one does admire the sincerity of the effort that has gone into the study of the principles of the Integral Yoga. The author draws from many sources and discusses a number of issues related to the subject of love. In the first two chapters she deals with developmental issues in children with reference to the views of psychoanalysis and those of the Integral Yoga. Psychoanalysis tries to probe the past to discover the roots of emotional issues that we face as adults. When the normal course of a child's development is thwarted due to an over-caring parent or an under-caring one, then the nature of emotional relationships that the child experiences later in life becomes warped, leading to unhealthy expressions of love. In the Integral Yoga, on the other hand, the stress is on the emergence of the psychic being, the spiritual principle embedded deep in nature. As this secret soul develops into its full possibilities, the nature of love undergoes a change. Chapters Three and Four quite naturally then focus on the education of the soul, its development, and how parents can collaborate in this process right from conception onwards. The next two chapters deal with the nature of maternal love and the role of family and tradition in the child's development towards a mature and healthy adult with an integral growth. Chapters

Seven and Eight address the important but much misunderstood issue of gender differences and the struggle that ensues with the emergence of the masculine and the feminine principles.

Chapters Nine and Ten touch upon the most difficult of all subjects related to love: the union between two beings at different levels, including the physical and sexual. This is a sensitive issue and an important one to both the Integral Yoga as well as psychoanalysis. Both deal with this aspect of human nature very differently. The writer has been careful to bring out



the various dimensions of this issue which occupies so much psychological space in the human understanding of the phenomenon of love. Taking us to sublime levels of understanding through some thoughtfully chosen words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the writer reveals to us the real nature of this union, its possibilities and its difficulties,

even dangers. Without a doubt, the author has dealt with this rather slippery domain very well and from all possible angles. In Chapters Eleven and Twelve the writer touches upon various other possibilities of human relations, such as friendship between two human beings. Finally, we are led towards the higher possibilities in the manifestation of love, climbing from human levels to the Divine Love, and the consequent creation of a gnostic being and a gnostic collectivity, where relationships between its members will be very different. The emotional being as well as the vital seat of passions and desires, which are the source of so many of our troubles, would have undergone a spiritual transformation and, instead of presenting obstacles, would help in the creation of a divine life upon earth, which is the goal of the Integral Yoga. The book aptly ends with a powerful statement of the Mother regarding the omnipotence of Divine Love and how it will transform humanity through the unfolding of centuries and millenniums.

To the author's credit, the book is largely conversational in nature, thereby appealing to diverse strata of humanity. A table of contents is replaced by a well-thought-out index with an eye on practical rather than metaphysical issues. It is this deeply practical and

psychological approach that makes the book a very interesting read. The inclusion of a glossary of important Sanskrit terms contributes an added bonus. In fact, if one were to take out the portions on psychoanalysis and read simply the parts comprised of the writings from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it would make a wonderful collection. The comparison with psychoanalysis that runs as a faint thread through the text seems many a time almost forced.

Comparisons between two systems are often not helpful, especially when the systems take their stand on very different premises, draw their data from different sources and look at things from very different vantage points. Similarity of words does not necessarily indicate similarity of the meaning put into them, especially when these words relate to the inner subjective side of our existence. As human beings, we have yet to explore the vast inner territories that lie concealed within our subjective being. And even if we have glimpsed a landscape or two, we have hardly seen it in all its vivid colours and seasons, its varied contours and diverse geography. Psychologists are often in the position of having to surmise what lies within by looking only at some surface patterns of behaviour. Yoga takes its stand upon another premise. It bases itself on centuries of accumulated experience that show it is possible for human beings to plunge deeper within themselves. By the process of a progressive purification of a confused and error-prone mentality, through a constant widening, deepening, heightening of possibilities and an enlarging of capacities, man can arrive at newer understandings of the same phenomenon.

Except for some brief passages that serve as a kind of backdrop, the book is largely a compilation from the

writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The term psychoanalysis comes in perhaps to prime the reader in some ways that the book concerns themes common to psychoanalysis and also found in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings. The disadvantage, however, is that an uninformed reader may get the impression that psychoanalysis and the Integral Yoga are simply two different ways of tackling the morbid side of human nature. But as we have seen above, the aims and world views of yoga, and more so the Integral Yoga, are very different from those of psychoanalysis, or for that matter any healing or psychotherapeutic system. Yoga is not a means to find a perfect cure for diseases and pathologies. It is a way of finding God, and through this finding man fulfils himself, enlarges himself, changes himself into the image of the Godhead that he discovers or rather uncovers. It is not about regaining human normalcy from a state of abnormalcy, but rather a way to exceed our present normalcy to a "supernormalcy", to move beyond our limited ignorant nature into a gnostic super-nature that is the breath of the Illimitable and the Infinite. Psychoanalysis does not entertain this possibility; if anything, it denies it. But apart from this very important rider, the book may serve as a bridge to those who need help, and the only help they are familiar with is a psychoanalytic-oriented counselling. At the same time, it will also provide useful information to those interested in the Integral Yoga regarding the views of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on human love and its many aspects and facets.

— Alok Pandey

Dr Pandey, psychiatrist and philosopher, is a seeker on the path of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. He writes and lectures extensively on varied issues of life and yoga.

Affection, love, tenderness are in their nature psychic,—the vital has them because the psychic is trying to express itself through the vital. It is through the emotional being that the psychic most easily expresses, for it stands just behind it in the heart centre. But it wants these things to be pure. Not that it rejects the outward expression through the vital and the physical, but as the psychic being is the form of the soul, it naturally feels the attraction of soul to soul, the union of soul with soul as the things that are to it most abiding and concrete. Mind, vital, body are means of expression and very precious means of expression, but the inner life is for the soul the first thing, the deepest reality, and these have to be subordinated to it and conditioned by it,—its expression, its instruments and channel.

Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, pp. 807-8

Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

— Aparna Banerjee

Publisher: Decent Books, New Delhi, in association with Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata

152 pp, ISBN 978-81-86921-57-9, Rs 300

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

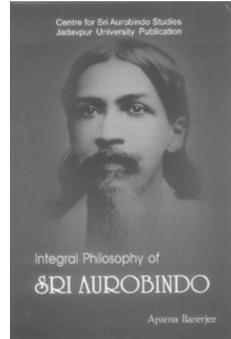
This collection of eight scholarly essays on Sri Aurobindo's social and political thought, his moral philosophy, his epistemology and his views on education is a treat to those who have been used to a fare of books on his philosophy penned mostly by non-academic writers. Though scholarly, the essays are eminently accessible to the general reader.

Dr. Aparna Banerjee succeeds in clearly situating Sri Aurobindo's thought in the context of modern mainstream intellectual traditions. She then defends the Aurobindonian position against conflicting ones with her own arguments as well as with those of other thinkers whose views are concordant with Sri Aurobindo's.

The author shows that Sri Aurobindo, even during his early years as a nationalist, espoused a non-hegemonic brand of nationalism, noting that his concerns were with national collectivities, whose function was to conspire to an eventual human unity.

The focus of the volume is his social and political thought. Dr. Banerjee forcefully argues for the thesis that Sri Aurobindo fundamentally stood for an individual transformation as the basis of the transformation of the national collectivity and of humanity as well. The global transformation aimed at is a cohesive human unity that does not compromise the liberty of each individual to grow to his or her maximum spiritual potential. The author cogently defends Sri Aurobindo's view that this should fundamentally depend on the organization of the immediate collectivity in a way to facilitate the spiritual transformation of the individual. Not only does she

rely on primary material in showing this, but augments this with arguments of other philosophers and thinkers, as well as with her own.



She shows that Sri Aurobindo, even during his early years as a nationalist, espoused a non-hegemonic brand of nationalism, noting that his concerns were with national collectivities, whose function was to conspire to an eventual human unity. The author argues that the scope of his nationalism was far-reaching, even from

the start, and that he cannot fairly be accused of retiring from active politics to pursue yoga just at the time when he was most needed in the field of national action. In other essays in which she deals with his social and political thought, the author joins debate with those who claim that Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is not a transcendence that reaches beyond narrow conceptions of 'nation', juxtaposes Sri Aurobindo's answer to the imperialistic challenge with Tilak's and Gokhale's, reflects on the Aurobindonian model of a stateless society and describes his global perspective.

Dr. Banerjee clearly brings out the fact that for Sri Aurobindo individual transformation is not only the true basis of a genuine unity at the national and global levels, but that it is also the basis of a spiritual flowering that colors life in general. She rightly draws from his writings that it is this primacy of the individual transformation that colors his epistemology, morality and views as an educationist.

In the essay "Some Central Ideas in Sri Aurobindo's Moral Philosophy", the author shows how Aurobindonian morality relates to his idea of the spiritual evolution of the individual. She shows that for Sri Aurobindo morality is not a final stage in man's development but a necessary step towards his self-fulfillment. Her presentation of Sri Aurobindo's moral views follows his "scaffold theory", viz., that as the individual progresses in his spiritual development, his morality also progresses, making otiose his old schemes of morality. A time eventually comes when his morality flowers from within and is governed by the dictum that he should be free to pursue his own self-development in any and every way he thinks fit so

long as he is conscious of every other individual's right to a similar self-development.

“Sri Aurobindo and his Philosophy of Education” explores his views on that subject. Dr. Banerjee's thesis in this essay is that Sri Aurobindo's integral education neatly sidesteps the problems posed by a sectarian education as opposed to a universal education. Educationists commonly fall on one or the other side of sectarian or universal views on education: either they advocate an education that will impart skills to the learner that will be of use to society, or they emphasize knowledge and skills that will enrich the learner whether he turns out to be a ‘useful’ citizen or not. Sri Aurobindo's view that education should be *integral*, or that it should emphasize a happy harmony in self-development as well as in one's relations to others in the collectivity, ensures that learners grow inwardly and are simultaneously useful in their unique ways to the society to which they belong.

The last essay in this book, “Yoga and Knowledge”, briefly explores Sri Aurobindo's epistemology. For him, while reason has its place in the search for truth, it is not its final arbiter. The author explores Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on reason versus intuition in the search for truth, leaning towards his synthesis of the roles of reason and intuition in the debate between those who would enthrone reason and those who reject it altogether for intuition.

Dr. Banerjee successfully weaves all the essays in her book with Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on integrality—be it integrality in individual, collective or human development; integrality in the approach to education; integrality of individual and collective morality with spiritual evolution in mind; integrality of the different modes of knowing as so many ways of grasping the ultimate Truth.

—Sivakumar Elambooran

Sivakumar was an academic philosopher who has now turned to writing. After living abroad for some years, he is now settled in his native Pondicherry, where he is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo and the Cripps Mission

— Essays and articles by various authors

Publisher: First Feature Ltd., London, UK

166 pp, ISBN 978-0-9562923-2-2, Rs 225

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, a senior left-wing politician and a member of the War Cabinet of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, arrived in India. His mission represented an attempt by the British to secure active Indian participation in the Second World War, which was then entering a critical phase. The Japanese, who had begun their campaign with the successful invasion of China a few years before, had by then shocked Great Britain by routing British-led Allied forces and successfully invading Hong Kong, French Indochina, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and finally Burma. The Japanese had in view the total collapse of the British Empire in Asia, and the invasion of India was envisaged as the principal means towards that end.

As Japan lay poised to enter India through its northeast frontier, the British turned desperate and appealed to the Indian leaders for more support for the war effort. In return, they promised greater self-government to India once the war was over.

After three weeks of intense activity amongst leaders of diverse parties and factions, political and religious, and just when it appeared that acceptance was feasible, the Indian National Congress turned down the Cripps Proposal, and the Mission was deemed a failure. Britain would now have to defend its Indian empire without further political or military support from the country's political leaders. Even worse for the British, the Congress decided to intensify its anti-British movement. It was a time of great peril for India and for the civilized world as a whole.

These events surrounding the Cripps Mission, occurring just a few years before India's independence in 1947, are generally dealt with in a cursory manner in Indian history textbooks. However, for those associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Cripps Proposal bears

a very special significance: Sri Aurobindo, who had ceased political activity in 1910 and withdrawn from the public eye from 1926 onwards, came out publicly in support of the Proposal. On the very next day after Cripps' broadcast on All India Radio, Sri Aurobindo sent a telegram to Cripps expressing his "hope that it will be accepted" by Indian leaders. Upon seeing that negotiations were proving difficult, Sri Aurobindo intervened once again and sent a message through an intermediary to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru urging that Cripps' offer should be accepted unconditionally. He also sent telegrams along the same lines to C. Rajagopalachari, the senior Congress leader, and Dr. B. S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha. Finally, he sent the devotee-advocate Duraiswamy Iyer to meet senior political leaders and impress upon them the need to accept the Proposal for the sake of the greater good of the nation. But these significant steps, remarkable as they were coming from Sri Aurobindo himself, were of no avail in the end.

When asked why he took all the trouble when he knew the Mission would be a failure, Sri Aurobindo is said to have replied, "For a bit of *nishkama karma*".

This entire episode, of particular interest to students of Sri

Aurobindo and Indian history, has been substantially covered in a new book titled *Sri Aurobindo and the Cripps Mission*, edited by Sunayana Panda. The editor has compiled various documents and essays of historical importance pertaining to the Cripps Proposal; she has also penned three articles that help the reader to better understand the actions of some of the principal personalities in this episode.

The book is neatly divided into four parts. The Introduction offers the reader a brief but fascinating account of the life of Sir Stafford Cripps. We also have the full text of his broadcast, as well as the text of the telegram sent to him by Sri Aurobindo. The second section, "The Point of View of the Ashram", presents the views of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and some Ashram writers. This is followed by the "The Point of View of the Indian Leaders", such as Gandhi and Nehru.

In the final part, we come to know of "The Point of View of the British", especially Winston Churchill and Stafford Cripps. In each section, historical documents relevant to the theme are presented. The reader will find it most interesting to read seldom cited but important texts pertaining to the Proposal, such as the full Cripps broadcast, the resolution of the Congress Working Committee, Churchill's statement in the House of Commons, and comments in the London press, among others. The reader will also find interesting some of the communications exchanged regarding the Cripps Mission between President Roosevelt of the United States and Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain.

The tone of this work is informative in nature and is written for the lay reader, in particular for the devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who would like a more complete understanding of this episode. Thus,

no background in the subject is necessary to appreciate the contents of the book. Particularly praiseworthy is the editor's general approach towards the subject as expressed in the Preface. A certain broadmindedness is evident in the effort to look at the issue from various points of view. She writes, "Certain episodes of history have come down to us, retold by successive generations, as seen from one particular point of view.

The passage of time allows us to have a look at the bigger picture and see the facts from another point of view, as well as to see facts that were not revealed earlier."

It is now widely believed that an acceptance of the Cripps Proposal would have mitigated the unfortunate circumstances in which India achieved her independence, and could have even prevented the partition of India. Sri Aurobindo seems to partially hint as much in his telegrams to various leaders. Senior Congress leader K. M. Munshi remarked years later in 1951 that had the Cripps Proposal been accepted, the partition could have been avoided, as also the Kashmir quandary. However, it is also important to remember the circumstances in which the offer made by Cripps was rejected, and to understand that, from an ordinary, superficial standpoint, rejecting the Proposal appeared

to be a sensible thing to do. It is in this context that the serious student will note and appreciate the editor's willing acceptance of the complexity that must exist in any genuine historical narrative. She writes,

It is easy to blame the Indian leaders of the time for the horrors of partition. It is time we looked at their own words and tried to understand why they took those decisions. They weighed the arguments for and against and finally chose, in good faith, the option that seemed to them to be the right one....Perhaps through these essays the reader will come to be less judgemental and more compassionate towards those who had the fate of millions in their hands.

Though perhaps beyond the scope of the editor's immediate purpose, some more detail on the grounds for the rejection of the Cripps Proposal would have been welcome. These included the deep mistrust caused by Britain's failure to live up to promises made in the past, anger over the Viceroy's 1939 declaration (made without the knowledge or approval of the country's political leaders and provincial representatives) which announced India's participation in Allied war effort, and the fears that the acceptance of certain clauses in the Cripps Proposal would further legitimize the potentially disruptive demands of the Muslim League and the 600-odd princely states. Documents released decades later support the contention that both the Viceroy (Lord Linlithgow) and the Secretary of State (L. S. S. Amery) were out to sabotage the mission. Messages exchanged between them expose the fact that both opposed the Cripps Mission and that they deliberately undercut Cripps. Even as the British government showcased the Cripps Mission – largely under pressure from the United States – as evidence of its new liberal policy towards its colonies, personal and private correspondence between its senior officials in India reveals their contempt for the Mission and their private elation over its subsequent failure.

A presentation of these contemporaneous issues can serve not only to temper our judgement of those who chose to reject the Proposal, but much more to highlight that Sri Aurobindo's view in this matter expectedly stemmed from a perspective that was vastly superior to any possessed by the individuals concerned, and that his vision and knowledge were far removed from their relatively ignorant and short-sighted human fears, calculations, and mistrusts. A. B. Purani reports that Sri Aurobindo, in answer to a question, remarked about

his efforts to convince Indian leaders to accept the Proposal:

even if I had known for a certainty that it would fail, still it had to be done. It is a question of the play of forces and the important thing is that the other force should not be there. We cannot explain these things – this play of forces – to people who ask for a rational explanation, because it is so 'irrational'!

The book would serve as an excellent primer on the subject and does so in a language and format that is easily accessible. It is certainly recommended reading for anyone interested in more fully understanding the Cripps Proposal and the role Sri Aurobindo played in advocating its acceptance. It is hoped that more such interesting and illuminating books are published that can highlight the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's participation in the shaping of world events.

— Devdip Ganguli

Devdip resides in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He is a history teacher in the Higher Secondary section of SAICE and also offers courses in the Higher Course section on the social and political thought of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo held that by accepting the Cripps offer India would be able to take part in the administration of the country as also in the war effort as a co-partner with Britain and the solution of Cripps could be turned into a means of India's independence....

As always, so in the present instance, Sri Aurobindo was for dynamic action in the political field. His idea was that the acceptance of the proposals, though short of the mark, would lead at once to India's industrial and economic improvement and to an efficiently up-to-date military training for her youth—the objectives for which the Congress had been fighting for years. Another important consideration was that it was to the Congress, the largest representative body of the land, that the offer was made. Therefore there could arise no two-nation theory, no division of the country with its deadly and disastrous consequences.

From "*Brahma Drishti and Brahma Tej*"

by Sisir Kumar Mitra

p. 73 of *Sri Aurobindo and the Cripps Mission*

From the Near to the Far
Essays in Response to some Aurobindonian
Concepts and Creative Modes

— Dr Saurendranath Basu

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Education Centre, Habra

194 pp, Rs 250

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This slender volume, *From the Near to the Far* by Dr. Saurendranath Basu, contains several essays that bring together various aspects of modern thought, or perhaps not so modern, when we consider the current trend of thought and its orientation.



For example, the concept of humanism, of bringing the world together, of one humanity, or even human unity—all these ideas have taken on distinct hues and now seem to mean something quite new and different. Thus, while going through these essays, one is reminded of the deeper understanding and significance

of these age-old ideals. These essays encompass many subjects and cover a wide area of interest: from *Savitri* to humanism to the comparative study of poetry and more. In the process, they bring together thinkers and seers of a past era. Such minds and such vision—a vision that looked at life and mankind in its entirety, a perspective that seems to be missing in the world of modern thought, which tends to compartmentalise and is therefore often superficial. The ideas and beliefs held by these personalities came from a higher region and carried a visionary truth which they expressed with deep conviction, giving life an upward swing. Life became worth living because it was given a direction and an orientation—an ideal for which man had to exert himself, stretch out and up. Looked at from this point of view, this volume serves as a reminder that life can be lived with a deeper intent.

A major part of the book is devoted to poetry. It opens with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. The author has a novel way of appreciating this most wonderful epic, which continually overwhelms and bewilders us. He has taken this bewilderment as the subject of the chapter "An Uninitiated Reader's Response to *Savitri*". This is a

rarely explored area, namely the magical poetic beauty of *Savitri* that casts a spell on the reader even when he does not always understand its content. For the lover of poetry is attracted by its "beauty and strength", "he is overawed by the grandeur of the animated spirituality". Any time spent with *Savitri* thus becomes a special moment in his life. Later in the book we find another kind of appreciation of the epic in the chapter on K. D. Sethna as a "crusader of aesthetic yoga". There the author calls *Savitri* the "Odyssey of Integral Yoga" where yoga and poetry come together. He also appreciates the "sensitive analysis of stylistic effect" by Sethna, who uses wonderful quotations from *Savitri* as examples of adequate style, effective style, illumined style, etc.

Other chapters are comparisons – perhaps a bringing together would be a more correct description – of the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo and the songs of Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath's unique characteristic is his abiding love of nature and his ability to see beyond the obvious, to feel the existence of a spirit or a force pervading the entire creation. His songs often take flight, and this upward movement is communicated to the listener, leaving him yearning for the Infinite. This, the author says, is the prerogative of the poet. To realise the vastness of his own being in the freedom of the Spirit's silence is the prerogative of the yogi. But, to put it in the author's own words, "to be able to seize the whole situation of the spirit in terms of poetic idiom and to make it spiritually creative and creative spiritually as well, is the prerogative of a poet who has an equal command in both spheres, Yoga and poetry". The similarity between these two poets is found in their perception of nature, which they see as pervaded by the presence of the Creator. The author has quoted extensively from the poets to compare them, but I am left still with a lingering doubt—can they be at all compared?

"Rabindranath, Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda: Towards Divine Humanity and Human Divinity" features three great personalities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their concepts of humanism. Rabindranath was convinced that "the emergence of the Spiritual Man within a man's own self is an imperative". He often defines this as a poet's religion because he feels a poet's experience is derived from a creative truth not bound by any dogma. The author quotes Rabindranath: "To give perfect expression to

From the chapter in the book titled “An Uninitiated Reader’s Response to Savitri”:

In Sri Aurobindo’s world poetry and philosophy live as good neighbours who meet always with a smile and courteous nod acknowledging their virtues and integrity of character. But when the poem [Savitri] reaches an area like,

Near to earth’s wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm,
Overflow the ways of Thought to unborn things.

the reader enters into a domain where the good neighbours have pulled down their boundary walls to enjoy a creative fecundity common to both.

the One, the Infinite, through the harmony of the many; to the One, the Love, through the sacrifice of the self, is the object of our individual and our society.”

For Swami Vivekananda, the emancipation of man will remain a dream unless the divinity of man becomes an unshakeable faith. The author calls Vivekananda’s concept one of “Divinised Materialism” and quotes from one of his letters: “My ideal...is to preach unto mankind their divinity; and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.” Vivekananda says that man has to become more and more aware of this intrinsic divinity; only then can society be emancipated.

The author notes that Sri Aurobindo’s concept of human emancipation might be termed a “Materialised Divinity”. Sri Aurobindo, as we know, stops at no half-measures: total transformation is the only way to spiritualise human life. The huge contribution of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna to the process of India fulfilling her divine destiny is significant. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, believes that the Divine is our destiny, not only “the supracosmic but the cosmic and the individual”, to quote the Master. The goal is not *nirvana*, to lose oneself, but to include the entire life and all in it. It is a path never yet followed, an aim never before attempted. Sri Aurobindo would say that to know and to identify with the Divine is just the beginning; the human consciousness must be taken up by the spiritual beyond the mental and transformed—only then can any lasting change in society be effected.

On the subject of education, they also differ substantially. For Swami Vivekananda, one must throw away egoistic attachment and material ties and devote oneself to the selfless service of the poor. For it is

through serving the poor that man finds oneness with the world. In Sri Aurobindo’s view, education should help the growth of man’s consciousness from an early age so as to prepare the ground for the descent of the power of the Spirit. As the Mother explains, everything we have now is given to us here in this life – language, habit, custom – and, therefore, the starting point is to seek something in us that is independent of all this.

The chapter on poetry and poets is a delightful read, a charming subject delightfully arranged. It contains some extracts from A. B. Purani’s *Evening Talks* and Nirodbaran’s *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. The lover of poetry will find it immensely instructive to see how the Lord looked at the well-known and well-loved poets of English literature. This is a totally engaging chapter. Another appealing chapter, towards the end of the book, discusses Nolini Kanta Gupta’s critical essays on Rabindranath. These essays show an unusual depth of understanding and are perhaps the best that have been written about the poet. One feels grateful that the author has included this chapter in his collection.

Many subjects have been dealt with in this volume. Perhaps the chapters could have been arranged in a more orderly manner, grouping them by similar subjects. Overall, one can say this book provides a reconsideration of a past age, which arouses a rethinking of the old masters—a reminder. Going through the volume was a pleasant experience.

— Nandita Chatterjee

Nandita Chatterjee has been a teacher at SAICE since 1956. She teaches English at School Level and Bengali at Higher Course and School Level. She also serves as a librarian in the teachers’ library.

Smriti Tirtha

Places that Echo the Stormy Days of Sri Aurobindo's Brief Stay in Bengal

— Anshu Banerjee

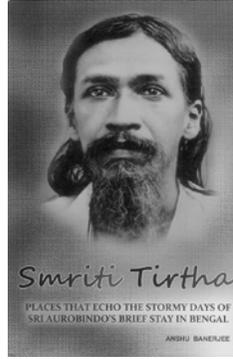
Publisher: Dipak Kumar Gupta, Pondicherry

168 pp, Rs 125

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Biographical sketches of Sri Aurobindo have become available aplenty in recent times. But the subject of the book under review is something that has never been discussed at length under one cover. The content is clearly indicated in the extended title of the book and the introduction by the author corroborates it further. It deals with the places and dwellings in Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, where Sri Aurobindo lived during his brief stay in the state.



The original Bengali version of this book was published in August 2003, and the English version has been rendered by the author after almost nine years. The idea of documenting information about the places where Sri Aurobindo had stayed sparked in his mind when the late Smt. Jaya Mitter, the then Secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture at Regent Park, Kolkata, took the bold initiative to install plaques at the places which were associated with Sri Aurobindo's stay in the city. This Herculean task was carried out by her with the help of many other enthusiasts and admirers of Sri Aurobindo. Out of the thirteen places where the plaques were to be installed, several of the houses no longer existed or had totally changed their forms, and many hurdles had to be crossed before they could be identified and marked. Anshu Banerjee has done a remarkable work by writing on them in detail. As he unfolds the history of these places, not only Sri Aurobindo, who is obviously the central character, but other people and incidents related to the locales come to the fore.

The book is arranged chronologically starting right from Sri Aurobindo's birth in Calcutta and his schooldays in Darjeeling, which is also in Bengal. This is followed by 12 Wellington Square, the house of Raja Subodh Mullick, where perhaps Sri Aurobindo

spent the longest part of his stay in Calcutta. We learn about Subodh Mullick's household and lifestyle, and how he stood by Sri Aurobindo and contributed to the Nationalist Movement to free India from the clutches of the British rulers.

The detailed account of the National College and School enlightens us about some little-known facts which nevertheless are interesting and worth reading. The ideals of the institution, the teachers, the courses that were carefully chalked out and taught there, and the inspiration it evoked among the students, details which very few people are aware of, are recorded in this chapter with utmost sincerity.

The operational details of the *Bande Mataram* newspaper and the incidents that took place around it come naturally in the context of its office situated on Creek Row, which also belonged to Raja Subodh Mullick. The full history of the journal from its beginning to its end is meticulously written out.

Some scenes from Sri Aurobindo's personal life – his marriage to Mrinalini Devi in a house in Baithak Khana Road, or descriptions from his in-laws' place in Serpentine Lane – are deftly woven into the texture of his political life and work. The poem written on the occasion of his wedding, following the common practice in those days, is a delightful bonus for the reader. We also come to know that Sri Aurobindo was a gourmet of Bengali food and cooking, that he could eat a sumptuous quantity, and that he enjoyed the company of his in-laws.

Another little-known temporary shelter on Choku Khansama Lane, where he lived with his family, is also extremely interesting. 23 Scott's Lane similarly gives us an intimate picture of Sri Aurobindo, courtesy of his close associate Abinash Bhattacharya. There is a long description of the Maharashtrian yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, who stayed here for a few weeks at a stretch and gave Sri Aurobindo lessons in yoga. Sri Aurobindo's short stays with Mrinalini Devi serve to provide invaluable insight into their relationship. How faithfully Mrinalini followed her husband's advice is clear from her learning yoga too from Lele Maharaj. Also, when Sri Aurobindo was down with a serious illness, Mrinalini's undaunted nursing and care for Sri Aurobindo easily melt one's heart.

The Muraripukur garden house occupies the next chapter, followed by the arrest of the firebrand group of revolutionaries, an event which is more or less known to all who have read a biography of Sri Aurobindo. Details of the life at the *bagan*, as it was popularly known, and the daily routine of the boys who lived there, complete with their oath-taking ceremonies, are carefully recorded. Barin Ghose's activities and organizational abilities are also described here.

The next chapter deals with Sri Aurobindo's arrest, the Alipore bomb case trial and his subsequent release from the Alipore jail, and his short stint at 6 College Square, his uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra's house. Here, Sri Aurobindo's birthday was celebrated by his young admirers and associates, a fact which may not be known to many. There appears to be some confusion regarding that birth anniversary which is quoted in the police report as his 39th, but in the year 1909 Sri Aurobindo would have completed 37 years of age.

The final chapters describe his leaving Calcutta from the *Karmayogin* office at 4 Shyampukur Lane for his last destination in Bengal—Chandernagore. This phase is also well known and oft repeated in biographies of Sri Aurobindo, but nonetheless it never loses its importance and the thrill it provides to the reader. Here the author tells about Sri Aurobindo's close contact

with one of his associates, Motilal Roy, in whose house he lived in secret seclusion and who later kept contact and helped him during his initial days in Pondicherry.

An excellent book to read about the lesser-known aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life in Bengal and about the places which people are sadly unaware of, *Smriti Tirtha* throws light on this phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. It may not be unfair to mention here that the lucidity of the language in the Bengali original has not been carried over to the English version, which sometimes appears to be a literal rendering. Apart from a few misspellings, the get-up of the book, the photographs, and the attractive cover are all up to the mark.

Anshu Banerjee did intensive research and put in his sincere effort to make the book not only a readable and informative one, but also a historical documentation of a so far uncharted area. It was truly his labour of love. The only regret is that Anshu Banerjee did not live to see this English version in print as he passed away just before its publication.

— Gopa Basu

Gopa Basu is the Librarian of the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan Library in Kolkata. She has translated a number of books by Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and their disciples. She also contributes articles to journals on topics related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

A description by Abinash Bhattacharya of his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo:

On the floor of the room a mat was spread on which Aurobindo Babu and Jatin Babu sat and were chatting with each other when we arrived there. I did pranam to both and as soon as I sat down in front of them, Barin said, 'Sejda, his name is Abinash Bhattacharya, the first worker of Bengal.' I said, 'No, I am not the first, Jatin Babu is first, you are second and I am third.' Barin replied, 'No, Jatin Babu and I came after getting initiation in Baroda. In Bengal we have got you who, having left everything behind, jumped into our work. That is why you are Bengal's first worker.'

With his eyes fixed on my eyes Aurobindo Babu gazed at me for a long time. I almost had lost my balance—it seemed perhaps he was wringing out the depth of my heart....Then he examined my forehead, pressed it a number of times, then the eyelids, later turned the eyelids to examine. Swiftly he turned my head down and started examining it by tapping. Then he said, 'Your first selection is good—firm in determination, faithful and a silent worker.'

Smriti Tirtha, pp. 59-60