

Recent Publications

S a b d a

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO the Mother sailed to Japan on the *Kamo Maru*, docking at Yokohama on 18 May 1916. During her four-year stay there, she lived as the Japanese did, all the while observing, absorbing, and delighting in the beauty of Japan. And as an artist, she observed that “[t]rue art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life. Art was like that in Japan in its best moments.”

ON THE OCCASION of this anniversary, our lead article explores Japan’s artistic sensibility, the influences of Japanese aesthetic principles on the art she studied in Paris in the late nineteenth century, and how these relate to the Mother’s own experiences.



A woodblock print acquired by the Mother in Japan

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The Mother and the Artistic Sensibility of Japan

The Mother's engagement with the artistic sensibility of Japan could be traced back to her decision, as a girl, to train as an artist. In her preteen years, she was taught privately by an art teacher, Marie Bricka, and later, in her teen years, joined a studio of the Académie Julian in Paris. In an essay titled "The Mother as an Artist" we learn that "[o]n the technical side, there was an emphasis on drawing and a resistance to new trends which revelled in pure colour and pattern. The Mother's paintings and drawings certainly attest to her having received the kind of thorough classical training offered by the Académie Julian, though she soon went beyond the formulas of the French 'academic' style."¹ The "new trends which revelled in pure colour and pattern" referred to here were part of the revolution in art inaugurated by the Impressionists that had become normalized in France by the 1890s, when the Mother was in art school, leading to what has been called "Academic Impressionism." It is interesting to note that the premier Japanese artist of the time in the movement known as *yōga* (Western-style painting), Kuroda Seiki (1866–1924), trained in such a style in Paris from 1886–93.

The Mother herself refers to her interest in these "new trends" in contrast to the "classical" style when she talks about the milieu of her young days as an artist: "[T]here was an entire very beautiful period (I don't say this because I myself was painting) but all the artists I knew at that time were truly artists, they were serious and did admirable things which have remained admirable. It was the period of the Impressionists; it was the period of Manet, it was a beautiful period, they did beautiful things."² She also details the technique of "broken colour" which many of them followed: "The technique is to apply the colours by dots and short lines very close to one another but not to mix; it gives a much more living effect than the mixing and expresses well the play of colours and of light...you can make in that way all possible shades."³ In the Mother's paintings done in Paris and Algeria, before her visit to Japan, we already see the use of this technique in several paintings.

The revolution in painting inaugurated by the Impressionists from the third quarter of the nineteenth century owed much to Japan. It is generally supposed that this was due to exposure to woodcut prints (*ukiyo-e*), but the optical and ontological stagnation represented by "classical" art that these artists sought to overcome was achieved through a variety of new ways of seeing and execution derived from Japan. One may identify three principal features of this adaptation: (1) an emphasis on direct brushed strokes over line drawing; (2) an eye to the placement of objects relative to each other and to the whole, that is, composition and design; and (3) a flattening of perspective. The first of these, the emphasis on direct brushed strokes, is a controversial feature, since it is certainly not found in woodcuts nor in the predominant trend to emphasize outlines. However, it can be thought of as an extension of the calligraphic line, partaking of the same spontaneity in execution, but applied here in terms of color and texture. This emphasis harkens back to the first of the six principles of painting canonical to most East Asian painting, as enunciated by Xie He, the

1 *The Mother: Paintings and Drawings* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1992), 157

2 *Collected Works of the Mother [CWM]* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1979; 2nd edn., 2003), iv, 300.

3 *Paintings and Drawings*, 180. [Though this sounds like Pointillism, that movement developed a more principled approach in using dots derived from Impressionism.]

Chinese art theoretician of the late fifth century. This is “animation through spirit consonance,” a principle that the Mother must have related to the direct animation of the hands by consciousness, something she identified as essential to execution in all the arts. Interestingly, the second principle, “structural method in the use of the brush”, in conjunction with the first, is what led to the desirability for spontaneous delineation of outline, analogous in calligraphy and art. But, though the importance of line and its relation with framework, volume and negative space in East Asian art cannot be denied, a tradition of “boneless” painting going back to Mi Fu and others of the Northern Song dynasty and followed by great masters of China and Japan through the centuries, can also be traced. To what extent the Impressionists were conscious of this is difficult to tell. They may have arrived at it independently, but it is unlikely that they saw anything related to consciousness in this, as the Mother seems to have done from the start. Later, she was to find the explicit acknowledgment of this when she went to Japan.

Composition and design correspond to the fifth of Xie He’s principles—“dividing and planning, positioning and arranging.” In Japanese painting, this element took on a place of prime importance, related to the aesthetics of space. This is certainly something the Impressionists discovered in woodblock prints and used to great effect in their paintings. The making of novelty in composition into a prime aesthetic factor, so as to attract attention and become an integral part of the painting, brought to the fore the mental subjective element, just as spontaneous brushwork could be said to bring forward the vital subjective element. This subjective turn could open the door to something even deeper, a principle of spiritual Beauty, which flooded form and design with its significances. The Mother, who followed her own guidance in developing her artistic sensibility, later expressed the special power of vision of an artist in terms of this kind of proportional and compositional sense:

There is a considerable difference between the vision of ordinary people and the vision of artists. Their way of seeing things is much more complete and conscious than that of ordinary people. When one has not trained one’s vision, one sees vaguely, imprecisely, and has impressions rather than an exact vision. An artist, when he sees something and has learned to use his eyes, sees – for instance, when he sees a face, instead of seeing just a form, like that, you know, a form, the general effect of a form,



One of more than a dozen handpainted paper scrolls the Mother brought from Japan. This partial image is particularly elegant in its depiction of a bird on a bamboo stalk.

...— sees the exact structure of the figure, the proportions of the different parts, whether the figure is harmonious or not, and why;...all sorts of things at one glance, you understand, in a single vision, as one sees the relations between different forms.⁴

This sense of spatial harmony heightened to express spiritual beauty is something that the Mother carried with her to Japan, and discovered there in extraordinary expressions which opened up in her profound spiritual experiences (as we will see).

I have pointed to the flattening of perspective as the third aspect of Japanese painting adapted by Impressionism and internalized by the Mother even prior to her visit to Japan. If spontaneous brushwork and power of composition form vital and mental innovations in Western modernism, this is more essential and may be considered an ontological factor. Yet it isn't made a principle in East Asian art. This is because the sense of completed separation between objects implied in the visuality of the third dimension is not quite as radical in the East Asian (and for that matter, South Asian) experience. The two-dimensionality of Asian painting is not a projection or reduction of a three-dimensional space but a representation of the ground of being, from which beings arise and to which they are anchored. This is also clearly a spiritual principle, a unitary foundation of being, whose mood or quality was conveyed through negative space and color. European post-Renaissance naturalism, on the other hand, made the representation of three-dimensional reality a principle, accomplished through the devices of perspective, modeling and chiaroscuro (light-and-shade).



A woodblock print acquired by the Mother in Japan

The exposure to Japanese painting opened the founders of Impressionism to this new intuition of space, but they were left with the problem of moving from a three-dimensional space to this new visuality. They approached this through a variety of means, sometimes through a continuity in gradations of color and sometimes through the use of thin or flattened perspective. The initiating instance of Impressionism, Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* shows the first of these two methods at work. Sea and sky merge into one another, the "depth" of the painting overcome through color continuity and variation. In the Mother's landscape paintings, we find the use of both the methods mentioned above.

⁴ CWM, vi. 83

The Mother followed the general artistic interest in Japan (Japonisme) of her times⁵ in making a copy of a geisha with a lantern in oils, evidently from a woodcut. Geishas were a principal theme of ukiyo-e prints and when she visited Japan from 1916 to 1920, the Mother collected a few such prints, by reputed artists such as Suzuki Harunobu, the first maker of multicolor prints (nishiki-e) and Kitagawa Utamaro, perhaps the best of the geisha print designers. Other popular Japanese objects of interest in France included lacquer boxes, dolls, fans and notepads, and the Mother collected instances of many of these objects. In her training as an artist, the Mother was led from within by a spiritual intuition. When she went to Japan in 1916, she found explicit affirmation of her intuitions in the pedagogical ideas and cultural expressions of Japan. She also found the extension of the principles of composition, color, animistic sensibility and sense of space in all aspects of Japanese life in senses, particularly the visual, the making up the fabric of social life. She has spoken on a number of occasions about how “Japan is essentially the country of sensations; she lives through her eyes. Beauty rules over her as an uncontested master.”⁶ In this she has noted how integrated the sensibility of visual beauty is at all levels of Japanese life – “very simple people, men of the working class or even peasants go for rest or enjoyment to a place where they can see a beautiful landscape” – and how attuned such a life is with the nature’s temporal moods—“for each season there are known sites. For instance, in autumn leaves become red; they have large numbers of maple-trees (the leaves of the maple turn into all the shades of the most vivid red in autumn, it is absolutely marvellous), so they arrange a place near a temple, for instance, on the top of a hill, and the entire hill is covered with maples.”⁷



*The Mother’s signature
as a monogram †*

The power of such a sensibility to induce spiritual experiences is attested to by her in a number of instances. For example, even when she was a child in France, before knowing anything about Japanese gardens, it is as if her encounter of the future prefigured itself to her in visions where she saw scenes which she took to be of some heaven world; and which she recognized physically later when she visited Japan:

The other day I spoke to you about those landscapes of Japan; well, almost all – the most beautiful, the most striking ones – I had seen in vision in France; and yet I had not seen any pictures or photographs of Japan, I knew nothing of Japan. And I had seen these landscapes without human beings, nothing but the landscape, quite pure, like that, and it had seemed to me they were visions of a world other than the physical; they seemed to me too beautiful for the physical world, too perfectly beautiful. Particularly I used to see very often those stairs rising straight up into the sky; in my vision there was the impression of climbing straight up, straight up, and as though one could go on climbing, climbing, climbing... It had struck me, and the first time I saw this in Nature down there, I understood that I had already seen it in France before having known anything about Japan.⁸

† While in Japan the Mother began to sign her pictures with a monogram of her initials MA.

5 Several of the Impressionists were avid collectors of ukiyo-e prints.

6 CWM, ii. 154

7 CWM, iv. 305

8 Ibid., 318

Elsewhere, she has described these stairs passing through a maple garden as she saw them in Japan, where families visit in autumn:

There is a stairway which climbs straight up, almost like a ladder, from the base to the top, and it is so steep that one cannot see what is at the top, one gets the feeling of a ladder rising to the skies – a stone stairway, very well made, rising steeply and seeming to lose itself in the sky – clouds pass, and both the sides of the hill are covered with maples, and these maples have the most magnificent colours you could ever imagine. Well, an artist who goes there will experience an emotion of absolutely exceptional, marvellous beauty. But one sees very small children, families even, with a baby on the shoulder, going there in groups. In autumn they will go there.⁹

Similarly, she refers to the enjoyment of viewing cherry trees in blossom in spring:

[J]ust at the beginning of spring... , there are the first cherry-trees. These cherry-trees never give fruit, they are grown only for the flowers. They range from white to pink, to a rather vivid pink. There are long avenues all bordered with cherry trees, all pink; they are huge trees which have turned all pink. There are entire mountains covered with these cherry-trees, and on the little rivulets bridges have been built which too are all red: you see these bridges of red lacquer among all these pink flowers and, below, a great river flowing and a mountain which seems to scale the sky.¹⁰

And corresponding to this, we find her description of her experience of identity with the spirit of the cherry trees in her *Prayers and Meditations*:

A deep concentration seized on me, and I perceived that I was identifying myself with a single cherry-blossom, then through it with all cherry-blossoms, and, as I descended deeper in the consciousness, following a stream of bluish force, I became suddenly the cherry-tree itself, stretching towards the sky like so many arms its innumerable branches laden with their sacrifice of flowers. Then I heard distinctly this sentence: “Thus hast thou made thyself one with the soul of the cherry-trees and so thou canst take note that it is the Divine who makes the offering of this flower-prayer to heaven.” When I had written it, all was effaced; but now the blood of the cherry-tree flows in my veins and with it flows an incomparable peace and force.¹¹

It is interesting to note the animistic content of this experience and relate it to the first of Xie He’s principles of painting that we discussed earlier: “animation through spirit consonance.” This implies an ability to identify with the vital spirit of things through heightened concentration, allowing oneself to be moved by it, as in calligraphic brushwork.

Perhaps most of all, she was struck by the sensibility of arrangement, of the harmony of parts and whole, which she found everywhere in Japan. When she speaks of this, she expresses it as a general principle which was present in all great pre-modern cultures but is largely lost except in Japan:

True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life. You see something of this intimate wholeness in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt; for there pictures and statues and all objects of art were made and arranged as part of the architectural plan of a building, each detail a portion of the whole. It is like that in Japan, or at least it was so till the other day before the invasion of a utilitarian and practical modernism. A Japanese house is a wonderful artistic whole; always the right

9 CWM, *iv.* 306

10 *Ibid.*

11 CWM, *i.* 364

thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it needed to be, and the house itself blends marvellously with the surrounding nature.¹²

Corresponding to such a house in its street setting, we find one of her most beautiful experiences:

It was a Japanese street brilliantly illuminated by gay lanterns picturesquely adorned with vivid colours. And as gradually what was conscious moved on down the street, the Divine appeared, visible in everyone and everything. One of the lightly-built houses became transparent, revealing a woman seated on a tatami in a sumptuous violet kimono embroidered with gold and bright colours. The woman was beautiful and must have been between thirty-five and forty. She was playing a golden samisen. At her feet lay a little child. And in the woman too the Divine was visible.¹³



While she was in Japan, the Mother painted a few portraits and some landscapes in oil. In these the principles of spontaneous brushwork, compositional novelty and thin perspective are all at work. She also tried her hand at ink painting and took back with her some ink brushes, an ink-and-brush calligraphic set and an

**The Poet and Artist Hayashi
Ink & Brush.
Signed: MA (monogram).
25 x 17 cm. 1916–20. Japan.**

example of spontaneous ink painting (sumi-e). In Pondicherry, she found little time to paint, but made a few oil paintings and a number of portraits

with pencil, ink-pen and ink-and-brush. Particularly the ink-and-brush portraits evidence strongly the Japanese conception of calligraphic outline and realism through minimalism. In Pondicherry, the Mother's engagement with the artistic sensibility of Japan continued to express itself, and found perhaps its most integrated expression in the spatial and material principles she could manifest in collaboration with architects Antonin Raymond, François Sammer, and George Nakashima, whom Sri Aurobindo named Sundarananda (Delight-in-

Beauty), in the construction and use of the guest house, Golconde. Here the modernist principles of functional built environments as residential space were combined with the visual and tactile elegance of Japanese life and an attention to consciousness in material things, which formed part of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral Yoga.

— Debashish Banerji

Debashish is the Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophy and Culture and the Doshi Professor of Asian Art at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco. He has curated a number of exhibitions of Indian and Japanese art and is the author of two books: The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore (Sage, 2010) and Seven Quartets of Becoming: A Transformational Yoga Psychology Based on the Diaries of Sri Aurobindo (DK Printworld and Nalanda International, 2012).

¹² CWM, iii. 109

¹³ CWM, i. 322

The Mother's Japanese Collection

The Mother's love of beauty found a natural, spontaneous affinity with the artistic sensibility evident in so many aspects of Japanese life. She began to paint again and these appealing works reveal her kinship with the landscape and the people of Japan. During her four years there she not only wore the Japanese dress and studied the language, but also collected many fine examples of painted scrolls, woodblock prints, lacquer boxes, and ceramics. She brought her collection of Japanese objects to Pondicherry with her, and the items shown here demonstrate how she appreciated the Japanese aesthetic of that time.



Clockwise from top right: A well-used wood box with compartments for stationery and a drawer for ink and brushes; a small carrying case for brushes; a lacquer box with water pot, ink, and brush; and utensils for preparing tea as used in a Japanese home (the small table later served as a model for the individual tables used in the Ashram's dining hall).



Clockwise from top left: A very old, rust-coloured lacquer box with a bird painted in gold on the lid; one of the Japanese dolls collected by the Mother; two small notepads whose individual pages each bear a faint image of the cover design; and a large, black lacquer box with a chrysanthemum design.





Clockwise from top left: The Mother's copybook in which she practised her Japanese script from the samples on the upper page; a pocket-sized calendar from 1917; and two pairs of the Mother's Japanese *geta*, or wooden sandals with an elevated base to keep the feet well above the ground.



Srismriti

All the articles pictured in these pages, except for the Mother's sketch on page seven and her two paintings on page eleven, are currently preserved or displayed at Srismriti, known familiarly as the Mother's museum. Housed in four rooms in an upper storey of the main house at Nanteuil, Srismriti is a repository for objects used by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as many artefacts offered to them. One room is dedicated to Japanese items and contains a sizeable collection of objects the Mother brought from Japan in 1920. The museum undertakes conservation work on many of the older pieces that have deteriorated over time. Srismriti is open to visitors from 9 to 11 a.m.



Two paintings done by the Mother in Japan

Japanese Poet Hirasawa Tetsuo

The Mother finished this portrait
in one sitting. Hirasawa later vis-
ited the Mother in Pondicherry, in
October 1924.

Oil on board. 19.5 x 14 cm.

1916–20. Japan.



Roof of Daiunji Temple

Oil on board.

Signed: *MA*
(monogram)

15 x 22.5 cm.

1918. Japan.

The Kokka



Revealing of the Mother's appreciation of fine art is her collection of thirty-nine issues of *The Kokka: A Monthly Journal of Oriental Art*. Nineteen issues are in Japanese and twenty in English. "Kokka" means "flowers of the nation", and since publication commenced in 1889, it has published thousands of prints that illustrate original pictures, many held in private collections or in temples. Although age has affected the condition of the journals, the excellence of the coloured plates can be discerned even today. The Mother collected back issues from 1909 and 1910 as well as issues current during her stay there. To the left is the cover of an issue in English and below are two reproductions from these journals.



RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilation from the Works of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo: A Postcolonial Reader

Postcolonial response in colonial India

—Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, ed.

Sati Chatterjee

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata,
in collaboration with Maha Bodhi Book Agency

548 pp, ISBN 978-93-84721-35-0, Rs 800

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

The editorial premise of this compilation from the works of Sri Aurobindo is to demonstrate how, long before the formal articulation of the postcolonial, anti-imperial spirit in the closing decades of the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo had focused on the complex nature of the opposing ideas behind the West-East cultural confrontation and rejected the Western interpretation of India's ancient culture. After a scholarly introduction the editor has arranged selected texts by Sri Aurobindo in five categories: his writings on the Veda, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Indian culture, and the beginnings of a linguistic study. The second part contains additional texts by Sri Aurobindo related to these five categories.

See review on page 21

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Krishna—The Eternal Godhead

50 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-384-9, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Blossoming of Faith

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-379-5, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The Divine Touch

41 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-360-3, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Dynamic Spirituality

38 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-347-4, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Meditations on Love

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-383-2, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Protection

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-382-5, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Importance of Self-consecration in Sadhana

34 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-304-7, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

What is the Truth and How to Serve It

58 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-333-7, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Other Authors

Learning with the Mother

—Tara Jauhar

Publisher: Matri Store, New Delhi

156 pp, ISBN 978-81-88847-55-6, Rs 150

Size: 24x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

From the arrival of the first children in the Ashram in the early 1940s the Mother took a keen interest in their development. In this book the author recounts how the Mother helped her from an early age to develop the qualities of leadership and strength of character. At the same time, the book provides an inside look at the beginnings of the physical education activities. Also included are descriptions of the Mother's work from 1950 to 1954 with the youngest children and the genesis of her French classes with them. The author has collected the dictations, recitations and poems, stories, and translations used in class as well as a record of other topics that arose. The Mother's method of teaching and the manner in which she instilled discipline and inspired a thirst for progress in the children are revealed in these pages.

See review on page 16

Integral Yoga at Work

A Study of Practitioners' Experiences Working in Four Professional Fields

—Larry Seidlitz

Publisher: Indian Psychology Institute, Pondicherry, and the Digital Empowerment Foundation, New Delhi

181 pp, ISBN 978-81-86413-59-3, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Formerly a research psychologist in the USA, the author conducted a qualitative study of sixteen long-term practitioners of the Integral Yoga working in the fields of business management, education, health care, and the arts. Initial chapters frame his research methodology and examine some general findings regarding the participants' practice of the Yoga in work. Results of the study in each field are based largely on interviews with the participants, and include textual references from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the author's reflections on central themes and common experiences. The final chapter identifies the various principles and insights regarding the application of Integral Yoga in these four professional fields and presents some of the broader implications of the study.

See review on page 17

The Clasp of Civilizations

Globalization and Religion in a Multicultural World

—Richard Hartz

Publisher: Nalanda International, Los Angeles, USA, and D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India

270 pp, ISBN 978-81-246-0805-0, Rs 750

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Situating the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 as one of the first instances of a global cultural event, this collection of essays springboards into a discussion of globalisation and religion in our multicultural world. The book examines the factors in play as many of the old barriers to global movement and communication have dissolved or crumbled and a new interdependence has emerged, engendering a volatility filled with both promise and pitfalls. Sri Aurobindo's writings on human unity and social and political development form the basis of the dialogue and discourse presented here. His vision of a spiritual religion of humanity, the growth of an inner spirit of oneness

and unity that will become the dominant principle of life, informs the message of the book.

See review on page 19

Alipore Conspiracy Case

An Outline of the Sensational Trial in the History of the Indian Independence Movement

—Niharendu Roy

Publisher: New House, Kolkata

160 pp., Rs 150

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Drawing on an array of resources, the author presents an overview of the history of the nationalist movement led by Sri Aurobindo and other prominent political leaders of the day. He recounts how the movement intensified as a result of the repressive stance of the British Government in India. The arrest of the group of young revolutionaries at Maniktala Gardens and the subsequent arrest of Sri Aurobindo set the scene for the Alipore Conspiracy Case, which is outlined in detail in this book. The valour and dedication of the young men is underlined by the short life sketches appended after the main narrative. Originally presented as an exhibition at a book fair in Kolkata, the book includes more than fifty pages of photographs of the people and events related to this historic trial.

Tracts for His Times

Bande Mataram and Sri Aurobindo's Anti-colonial Discourse

—Sabita Tripathy, Nanda Kishore Mishra

Publisher: Authorspress, New Delhi

404 pp, ISBN: 978-93-5207-302-3, Rs 1600

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

The authors of this study set out to explore Sri Aurobindo's political thought and revolutionary ideas embedded in his early political writings and speeches, most notably in his articles for the journal *Bande Mataram*. Chapters are devoted to the germination of his patriotism and his early action in the political field, his critique of the moderate policies of the Indian National Congress, a study of his concept of nationalism, his strategy to achieve political freedom through civil struggle, his journalistic crusade to demand Swaraj as the natural right of his countrymen, his scheme for a national system of education, and an analysis of the

rhetorical devices and unique narrative voice used by him as an offensive weapon against both the British Government and the Moderates of the Indian National Congress.

FRENCH

Belles Histoires

—La Mère

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

151 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-075-0, Rs 95

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Plus de cent contes ou anecdotes traduits et adaptés en français par la Mère d'un livre anglais de F. J. Gould, «Youth's Noble Path». Elles sont regroupées en seize chapitres aux titres évocateurs: «La maîtrise de soi», «Courage», «La vie simple», etc.

ITALIAN

Individuo e Società—Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Rs 120

BENGALI

Prakrita Hindutva Kake Bole: Bharatiya Sanskriti O Dharma—Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Rs 30

Sri Aurobindo O Hooghly College—Ashish Kumar Basu, Rs 100, ISBN 978-93-80761-94-7

GUJARATI

Savitri (Gadyanuvad) Dwitiya Grantha (Parva 2: Sarga 1–15)—Sri Aurobindo, hc Rs 200

Tej Taran—Morli Pandya, hc Rs 200

HINDI

Sri Aravind ki Prerana: Unke Vyaktitwa tatha Karya ki Panchavidha Dhara—Indra Sen (Ed.), Rs 150
ISBN 978-81-88847-73-0

ORIYA

Shishura Mana O Buddhira Bikashare Khela Kashrat
Tatha Shilpa Charchara Gurutwa—Debabrata Majumdar, Rs 50, ISBN 978-81-7060-358-0

SANSKRIT

Prathamikam Panineeyam—Dr Narendra, Rs 50,
ISBN 978-93-5210-097-2

Shanai Shanai (Balageetavali)—Dr Sampadananda Mishra, Rs 100, ISBN 978-81-7060-381-8

TAMIL

“Savitri” Padippathu Yeppadi?—Dr S. M. Krishnan
Rs 80

TELUGU

Sri Aravindula Yoga Samanvayam (Nalgava Bagam):
Atma-Samsiddhi Yogamu—Sri Aurobindo, Rs 250
Sri Aravindula Pravachanamulu—Compiled from the
works of Sri Aurobindo, Rs 190
ISBN 978-93-5210-079-8
Sri Aravindula Purna Yoga Sadhana—Jugal Kishore
Mukherjee, Rs 200

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Pondicherry 605 002 India
Tel. +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656
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Email mail@sabda.in
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BOOK REVIEWS

Learning with the Mother

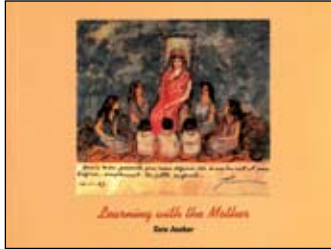
—Tara Jauhar

Publisher: Matri Store, New Delhi

156 pp, ISBN: 978-81-88847-55-6, Rs 150

Binding: Soft Cover

Size: 24 x 18 cm



The Singer Not the Song is the title of a film that was shown in our Playground. It metaphorically questioned whether the message

of the song (religion or the Church) was important or the charm of the singer (the priest) for the atheist character who was asked to convert by the priest. In the movie the dying atheist murmurs the line, “It’s the singer not the song.” If one plays with the movie’s title by inverting the order of the words to “The Song Not the Singer”, one could say that Tara’s book should be read in this spirit. This is not to belittle or bypass the author. On the contrary, the author deserves all praise for her forethought and diligence in noting down those precious “words” of the Mother for all posterity.

An offshoot of these notes is that one gets a glimpse into the history, at least one facet of it, of those times, of this institution – our Ashram in Pondicherry – during its golden era. Moreover, reading the book widens the vistas of the mind towards a variety of thoughts from many authors and important figures such as the Buddha (India), Victor Hugo (France), and Cicero (ancient Rome). It is a treasure-trove for a child or an adult, for a seeker or a man of the world who would be guided for a life in decent society.

The book has one thing in common with most such books that are inspired by the past: it awakens a sort of nostalgia. Often, nostalgia is tinged with a touch of sadness. But I would think one could get over that sadness or replace it with its opposite, a cleansing gladness, quite appropriate for this occasion. A gladness engendered by a casting of oneself into a future (for nostalgia belongs to the past) suffused with youthful vigour, every dawn bringing in new possibilities for progress and achievements, all made possible by the Great Mother’s Presence, and

her encouragement beckoning us from ahead and urging us on from behind.

Now, in the present, the whole scene has shifted to a subtler plane—something that is harder to feel and act upon. But nothing is there that trying will not one day get. And who has promised an easy, safe path and/or an easy goal?

My one hesitation in writing such a “review” was that when I saw some of the group photographs, a question crossed my mind: “Where are all those people now?” Then, as I turned the pages, some sayings of those assuredly wiser than me struck home:

Do not pay attention to the stupidity of others, pay attention to your own. —The Mother

Question attentively and then meditate at leisure over what you have heard. —Confucius

He who loves to question, expands his knowledge; but he who considers only his personal opinion becomes more and more narrow. —Tsu-Ching

To sum it all up: “Let us sing the Song and thank the author.”

—Batti

Prabhakar Rupanagunta, known to all as Batti-da, is a trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the author of Among the Not So Great.

Learning with the Mother is a type of memoir, one which allows us to experience how the Mother helped the children who came to live in the Ashram to develop their inner lives, their thirst for progress and perfection through their lessons and through the discipline of their physical education activities. The author credits this early education with her ability to shoulder the responsibilities of managing the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch in her later life. The book is a cornucopia of details, photographs, and facsimiles that help document the care with which the Mother guided these children from the early 1940s to the early 1950s, laying the bedrock of a new consciousness and calling them, her “brave little soldiers”, to “the rendezvous with Victory”.

Integral Yoga at Work

A Study of Practitioners' Experiences Working in Four Professional Fields

—Larry Seidlitz

Publisher: Indian Psychology Institute, Pondicherry, and the Digital Empowerment Foundation, New Delhi

181 pp, ISBN 978-81-86413-59-3, Rs 250

Binding: Soft Cover, Size: 14 x 22 cm

IN THIS UNIQUE and engaging book Larry Seidlitz shares his deep and comprehensive understanding of the Integral Yoga in the context of describing in-depth research on the role of work in the Yoga. Seidlitz's research into the application of the karma yoga aspect of the Integral Yoga reveals rich spiritual experiences in the lives of those he interviews and is intriguing and enlightening in its detailed discussion of the Integral Yoga as a whole. The book presents a valuable elucidation of karma yoga as essential to the Integral Yoga in both conceptual and concrete, pragmatic terms. Moreover, because of the author's ability to concisely articulate concepts which are central to the Yoga without sacrificing their subtle aspects, *Integral Yoga at Work* can also be appreciated as a blueprint for practicing the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in life generally.

Integral Yoga at Work is the fruit of the author's qualitative research into experiences of sixteen long-term practitioners of the Integral Yoga. With a PhD in psychology, Seidlitz brings to his work an extensive background in the field of psychology and psychological research and an even lengthier background as a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and practitioner of their Yoga. The author provides essential context for his research by including an excellent introduction to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and also to some basic concepts of the Integral Yoga. This is followed by a discussion of research methodology, beginning with specific explanations of various recognized types of research approaches and progressing to how this current qualitative research relates to them. Seidlitz also points out the distinct nature and appropriateness of his methodology and why he does not aim to be

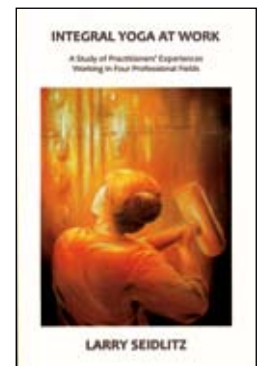
detached and objective, but rather joins with the practitioners he interviews in their perspective on the truth of spiritual reality, practice and experience. Citing the ability to enter more deeply into the meaning of the experiences involved, he writes:

Rather than skeptically examining or questioning them as an outsider, I utilize my own experience in studying and practicing the Yoga to further elaborate on them and place them into the larger context which I share with the participants.

The subsequent description and qualitative analysis is done through interviewing the participants in four broad categories of work: management, education, health care and the arts.

The reader receives the benefit of the author's ability to relate to, interpret and communicate the participants' observations and experiences. The sixteen participants, whose identities are concealed, included seven women and nine men, and equally represented general places of origin as described in terms of being from India or from Western countries. They ranged in age from 32 to 84 and had between eleven and more than thirty years of commitment to the Integral Yoga. Some work in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, some in Auroville, and some live and work at a distance and spend extended periods of time in either place.

Before examining the application of the Integral Yoga in the four broad areas of work identified for study, the book examines its application to work in general, focusing discussion of the participants' experiences around quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which apply specifically to the integration of work into life and the practice of the Yoga. Next, each of the four areas of work is explored, first by considering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's perspective on their significance and their observations about how best to approach each type of endeavor, and second by considering the participants' experiences working in these fields. The



wisdom shared here, including the quoted passages, comprises rich and meaningful direction for living consciously in the world.

Experiences of the participants include narrative descriptions from each in which they express their perspectives on how they apply their understanding of the Integral Yoga in the specific types of work which they perform and also how this relates to their daily lives and overall spiritual experience and its integration into their lives. Seidlitz incorporates interpretive analysis into his discussion of the narrative reports and also, more comprehensively, into the conclusions on each of the four areas of work. Not surprisingly, in the process of making comparisons and drawing parallels between these, some significant common elements are revealed. Some of the frequently expressed themes which Seidlitz identifies are: “merging of life, work, and yoga; equality towards money...; service as a motivation in work; feeling the Divine’s Presence in work; feeling that one is an instrument of the Divine; feeling connected with the Divine leads to harmony and efficiency in work; receiving concrete help from the Divine in work; difficulties in work seen as part of the Yoga; and fulfillment in life and work.” (p. 45) These examples from the research findings can be seen as indicative of the truly dynamic and integral nature of the practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Before summarizing the broad implications of his research, Seidlitz provides additional context with an enlightening description of his personal experience of discovering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the subsequent journey which followed his awakening to the Integral Yoga, including his experiences of karma yoga. This also provides opportunity to incorporate interesting comparative descriptions of work in the Ashram and Auroville, in which some of the distinct characteristics of each, as well as similarities and contrasts, are noted. For those unfamiliar with either or both of these two foci of the Integral Yoga, this should be a particularly interesting aspect of Seidlitz’s discussion.

In focusing on the essence of applying the Integral Yoga in each of the four categories of work, Seidlitz

develops an excellent summary of his research. He writes:

We all can apply the insights discussed in this book to act more consciously, with a remembrance of the divine Source of all action, and more in harmony with the divine Force that is in us and seeks expression through our work in the world, whatever that work may be.

Altogether, *Integral Yoga at Work* makes a unique and significant contribution to the literature of the Yoga. It comprises a valuable resource for developing an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of karma yoga and the manner in which it is an essential component of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. *Integral Yoga at Work* also demonstrates concretely how work in the light of the Integral Yoga has the capacity to enrich individual development and facilitate one’s progress in the evolution of consciousness.

—Martha Orton

Martha is a writer and scholar with a PhD in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. She has been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years, having lived in both the Ashram and Auroville, and is the author of several books and numerous journal articles on the Integral Yoga.

An excerpt from one of the interviews in the book:

Charles also explained that establishing rapport with students was essential to his role as an educator; “you could say that most of the time goes into that,” he said.

So you open yourself as much [as you can] personally and honestly, and you try to make them as honest. So you are quite non-judgmental...and teach them to open themselves a little more. But it is a very personal and interactive process. You try to establish that contact and in that process lift them up if you can into a little higher consciousness from where it is a little easier to solve the problems.

The Clasp of Civilizations

Globalization and Religion in a Multicultural World

—Richard Hartz

Publisher: Nalanda International, Los Angeles,

USA, and D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India

270 pp, ISBN 978-81-246-0805-0, Rs 750

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

AS WAR CLOUDS rumble across India, and the pendulum of strategic discourse swings between the calls for violent retribution against Pakistan and a submissive acceptance of abuse through a peace that may remain elusive forever, we may be forgiven for thinking that this is yet another instance of “the clash of civilizations”, so elegantly articulated by Samuel P. Huntington, whose brilliant 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, laid the foundations for examining religion as a conflict zone. Since 9/11 and its allied avatars, from Al Qaeda to ISIS, accentuated the idea and the expression found a rebirth, this has been the overarching discourse around globalization.

Almost two decades later, Richard A. Hartz questions Huntington’s treatise and offers an alternative view. In *The Clasp of Civilizations: Globalization and Religion in a Multicultural World*, Hartz leans on Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda to re-examine this powerful paradigm. “We know,” the independent scholar quotes from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “that nations closely connected by every apparent tie, are actually divided by stronger antipathies than those which separate them from peoples who have with them no tie of affinity.” While Sri Aurobindo’s book was published serially in the journal *Arya* a century ago, between 1915 and 1920, when even the idea of Pakistan didn’t exist, his theory was flush with living examples of the time—Japan and China; Norway and Sweden; Arabs, Turks and Persians.

“Culture is only part of a complex problem,” Hartz argues and makes his own case. “But if civilizations, the largest generally recognized cultural units, do not help us as much as Huntington thought in interpreting and predicting post-Cold War conflicts, it does not follow that it is meaningless or irrelevant to speak of them. Perhaps Huntington draws our

attention to the right thing for the wrong reasons. Civilizations, after all, are repositories of humanity’s highest achievements through the ages. They enshrine the beauty and wisdom of its arts, philosophies, ethics and spirituality. Their diversity multiplies the resources available to us for meeting the challenges of the present. Their cooperation, not their conflict, their clasp rather than their clash may hold the key to the future.”

Hartz takes a wider look at history. “Lesser minds often erect artificial barriers such as those between religion and science or East and West,” he writes. “But history is on the side of the barrier-breakers.”

You may dismiss this as the idea of a dreamer, but hold your judgement. True, India and Pakistan share identical civilizational origins, even the same spiritual DNA. But over seventy years, Pakistan has been relentlessly destroying these identities. Using religion as a lever, it has steered an unholy separation that is not merely physical but vital and mental. We have been told Kashmir is a religious problem. Or else that the fight for that state’s independence is really an excuse for Pakistan waging a jihad against ‘Hindu infidels’. That fits the Huntington narrative of clash. But walk to the western border of Pakistan towards Afghanistan and you see Islam fighting Islam. Travel farther west and you land up in the ongoing Islamic implosion in Syria.

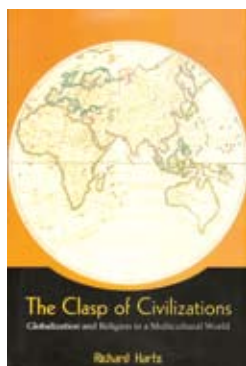
So, was the 18 September 2016 Uri attack – and surely it’s not going to be the last – from Pakistan the coarse aspiration of a nation seeking territory, or is there a civilizational underpinning to it? For that matter, is the expansion of the ISIS to northern Iraq and Syria one of territory or ideas? How do you view the presence of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon—political or religious, territorial or ideological? Today, it is all these, but the evolving future lies in the realm of cultural affinities.

“Huntington was not the first to conceive of a world order based on groupings according to cultural affinities,” Hartz writes. “Several decades earlier, Sri Aurobindo had written that ‘the peoples of human-

ity must be allowed to group themselves according to their free-will and their natural affinities'. He believed that 'the unity of the human race to be entirely sound and in consonance with the deepest laws of life must be founded on free groupings, and the groupings again must be the natural association of free individuals'. In political terms, 'the free and natural nation-unit and perhaps the nation-group would be the just and living support of a sound and harmonious world-system.'"

Hartz's conclusion, that "[a]ll the more are our intuitive faculties likely to flower, as Eastern civilizations, which have traditionally cultivated them, assimilate what they have learned from the West, rediscover their own genius and turn their reviving creative energies toward the future", may seem a little wishful. But the logical steps he provides to reaching this conclusion can't be ignored. The dominance of science, materialism and the accompanying prosperity of the West make us feel that the pinnacle of civilization lies in these ideas. But intuitively we know, as does the West, that perhaps the institutions of logic and mind – democracy and capitalism, to name the most dominant among them – are not architectures of perfection as much as they are new articles of ideology and faith, even religion. In fact, the two in themselves today are at cross-purposes when you examine them through the underbelly of globalization that binds all nations alike—inequality, marginalization, disenfranchisement, each of which puts pressure not only on the geographies of nations but questions the idea of a nation-state itself.

Cooperation, in the form of tackling international problems, is already creating new global organizations. From the regional political organization of the European Union to the economic crisis management at the G20, or even smaller groupings like SAARC and ASEAN, the idea of collaboration is softening hard national boundaries. In fact, it was among the first few meetings of the G20 in Washington and London that the reforms in the IMF and the World



Bank got their moral trigger and countries like India got their voices heard. The UN Security Council is yet another intransigent institution that will head the same way. Clearly, clashes between nations are getting them to create and clasp new institutions whose moral – but not sovereign – authority runs larger than any single nation's.

Driving these institutions is a conscious force. "A time must come, is already coming when the mind perceives the necessity of calling to its aid and developing fully the intuition and all the great range of powers that lie concealed behind our vague use of the word and uncertain perception of its significance," Hartz quotes Sri Aurobindo. And then makes his own argument: "In the past such heightened powers of consciousness were often associated with the revelations that inspired religions and shaped civilizations. Modernity has tended to replace belief in these revelations with faith in reason. But rationalism may be a stage in our preparation for a new and more direct approach to the suprarational, shrouded no longer in a haze of mythology."

Hartz takes a wider look at history and provides us with a loftier context. "Lesser minds often erect artificial barriers such as those between religion and science or East and West," he writes. "But history is on the side of the barrier-breakers." In the short term, we hope this indeed will be the path for India and Pakistan in particular and all violent conflict in general—in the long term it is predestined. "Its [religion's] power to sanctify irrationality points in one direction, the spiritual urge towards self-discovery and transcendence in the other," Hartz writes. "Today both are accentuated. It is yet to be seen whether the aspirations towards peace, harmony and enlightenment found in all religions will outweigh their use as tools of identity politics. But their appeal to what is best in humanity may yet trump the sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism decried by Vivekananda on that now half-forgotten September 11, in Chicago. If so, religions as vital manifestations of human diversity could impart their ardor to a vibrant unity in difference—not a clash, but a clasp of civilizations."

However appealing the argument may be, we are unlikely to see Hartz's "clasp" come to life in our

lifetime—not in the near future and certainly not in the near geography. To quote Sri Aurobindo, “So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return.” And even though “today we may be living in the most peaceable era in the existence of our species,” as Steven Pinker, psychology professor at Harvard, argues, the psychological and individual transformation from war to peace – or from clash to clasp – is an aspiration that will take several decades, if not centuries and millenniums, of death and destruction before materializing.

The Clasp of Civilizations is an important book. It offers an alternative discourse from the one plaguing us through the actions of the few, the denial of the intelligentsia, the us-versus-them traps that the politically motivated are laying and into which the rest of us keep falling. While short-term events dominate our minds and tend to push us towards Huntington’s “clash”, we need to step back and allow the larger and inevitable forces of harmony and evolution to make themselves heard through Hartz’s “clasp”. In our hearts and minds we know the victory of “clasp” is destined; it is the vital that now needs to be convinced about this narrative.

—Gautam Chikermane

Gautam is a writer tracking the world of money, power, faith, and mythology. Currently the New Media Director at Reliance Industries Ltd, his latest book, Tunnel of Varanavat, was published in March 2016. Views are entirely personal.

A religion of humanity may be either an intellectual and sentimental ideal, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects, or else a spiritual aspiration and rule of living, partly the sign, partly the cause of a change of soul in humanity.

Sri Aurobindo
CWSA: 25: 565

Sri Aurobindo: A Postcolonial Reader

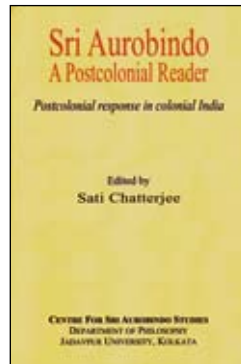
Postcolonial response in colonial India

—Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, ed. Sati Chatterjee

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata, in collaboration with Maha Bodhi Book Agency

548 pp, ISBN: 978-93-84721-35-0, Rs 800

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



IN THE ACADEMIC and literary-cultural world we live in, postcolonialism is understood as an intellectual movement that arose in the aftermath of political emancipation from erstwhile colonial powers in various parts of the world such as Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean

during the early and mid-twentieth century. While anti-colonial figures campaigned actively against political and economic subjugation of native populations, postcolonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Edward Said and others drew our attention to the manner in which colonialism was internalized by the native elites under the influence of the dominant sections of the imperial West. This movement was spearheaded from the 1970s onward by leading Indian intellectuals such as Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and nearer home, by thinkers like Meenakshi Mukherjee and Harish Trivedi. For the first time, scholars began to pay close attention to the manner in which cultures functioned and “subjectivities” were “constructed”, the latter a favorite expression of the postcolonial thinkers. In the late 1980s, a new school of postcolonial study, called the subaltern, was created by scholars like Ranajit Guha who carefully looked at history “from below”. The movement gained intellectual strength from Marxist thinkers in Britain such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) was a path-breaking volume that exposed the Eurocentric bias of the

colonial West. His students at Columbia University, like Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest*, underlined the motivations for the introduction of English literary education by the British Raj in colonial India.

While many of these movements in academia and the media have led to useful intellectual churnings and generated a drive towards concepts such as hybridity and multiculturalism, they have also often resulted in hasty generalizations and a wholesale condemnation of movements and thinkers that stemmed from the West. Such facile biological and cultural determinism as a fad has also done a great deal of harm to understanding the complex manner in which cultures and societies function and the way we see the working of the dialogue of civilizations. In fact, the term civilization seems to have been banished from the current lexicon as *passé*.

It is in this context that we need to view works such as *Sri Aurobindo: A Postcolonial Reader*. While new volumes of this kind are certainly welcome, we need to carefully think through the range of similarities and, more crucially, the differences that exist between Sri Aurobindo and the postcolonial thinkers that are discussed above. The fact that the volume comes from Jadavpur University, whose predecessor was the National Council of Education (NCE), makes the publication noteworthy. The NCE was founded in 1906 to provide education on national lines and under national control, and Sri Aurobindo, leaving a prestigious post in Baroda, became the first principal of the Bengal National College and School started under its auspices.

Sri Aurobindo, by all accounts, spoke for the need to decolonize the Indian mind. His writings in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and his essays such as “The Origins of Aryan Speech” powerfully reveal the manner in which Western theory has blinded us to the inner spiritual truths of sacred texts. But was Sri Aurobindo a postcolonial thinker?

In her introduction (especially on pages 18 and 19), the editor Sati Chatterjee rests her claim based solely on the argument that the European knowledge system constructs the East or the non-West as the “other”, and sees it as derivative or secondary. She brings in figures such as Ania Loomba,

Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha to buttress her arguments. For one thing, not all of them take the same position, and more crucially, it has to be noted that the postcolonial thinkers themselves rely primarily on cultural and material readings of the texts; they are, as a rule, unsympathetic to texts and world views that are regarded as sacred and of the inner spiritual world. Such thinkers would have huge problems if they were to be brought into supporting the Vedas and the Upanishads from the Aurobindonean point of view.

Regretfully, the Introduction to this volume does not foreground the issues and problems of postcolonialism as a movement, and as a theory. It does not delve sufficiently into the genesis of the movement, its ideological and cultural underpinnings, its oppositional and adversarial stance towards religion and spirituality and a general attitude of disfavor of the sacred. Nor does it provide a persuasive rationale linking postcolonialism as understood today with the choice of the texts in the anthology. While the volume seems to have a sense of novelty as seen in the title, it may not hold its ground in the larger world of postcolonial thought and research. After all, a compilation of texts, however sympathetic the point of view, does not become a Reader unless the texts are bound by a common thread and logic. It is in this sense that *Sri Aurobindo: A Postcolonial Reader* does not live up to expectations.

In contrast, we may look at a significant work that has just appeared on this very subject, a book I have had the pleasure to review for the *India International Centre Quarterly* in a forthcoming issue. In *Cultural Politics in Modern India: Postcolonial Prospects, Colourful Cosmopolitanism, Global Proximities*, Makarand Paranjape astutely brings in figures such as Gandhi, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo and reveals the working of alternate modernities, cosmopolitanism and postcolonialism in the Indian context. Paranjape uses the theoretical and methodological tools of the Western academy to argue that materiality and spirituality need not be seen in binary or dualistic terms. Indeed, “historicity and specificity of textual production” can coexist with the sacred

readings of texts. We can learn from D. D. Kosambi's reading of the Gita while going beyond it.

At 548 pages and a price of Rs 800 the volume may be beyond the reach of the general reader. Reduced in size, and with a more cogent set of arguments in the Introduction, a future edition might have greater appeal to those who see the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's thought to our times.

—Sachidananda Mohanty

Dr Mohanty is Professor and former Head, Department of English, University of Hyderabad. He is currently the Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Orissa.

Sri Aurobindo and European Philosophy

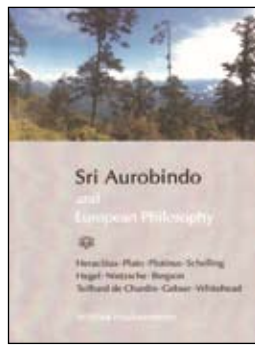
—Wilfried Huchzermeyer

Publisher: PRISMA, Auroville

193 pp, ISBN: 978-81-928152-9-9, Rs 399

Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

COMPARING SRI AUROBINDO with other writers is a precarious enterprise. To a devotee or *sadhak* of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, it might in fact seem an activity that is best avoided. For them, comparing involves, by necessity, some degree of objectification of one's guru, and this may well come in the way of one's surrender, which is so central to the *sadhana*. Writing about one's guru moreover can all too easily lead to a sense that one can judge him, while one evidently cannot. And most seriously perhaps, the guru is – amongst many other things – a path to the Divine, and the Divine simply does not lend itself to objectification and comparison. But whatever the reason is, comparing Sri Aurobindo to others tends to leave behind a bit of a bad taste, a feeling that injustice is done both to him and to those he is compared with. Before one knows it, somewhere along the road, something goes wrong and the essence goes missing. While the mind might find it interesting to discover which thinkers have said things similar to what Sri Aurobindo says – how they agree, how they differ and who has managed to argue the opposite – in the end such things matter little. In the last instance, it is the infinity of consciousness which shines through Sri Aurobindo's writings that really matters.



In this context, Wilfried Huchzermeyer's *Sri Aurobindo and European Philosophy* comes as a pleasant surprise. First of all, he writes with a refreshing humility, not only towards Sri Aurobindo, but also towards all the great thinkers he compares him with. What is especially uplifting is that while the depth of his respect for Sri Aurobindo is palpable throughout this compact book, nowhere does one feel that he is too negative or judgemental about the other writers who populate its pages. Secondly, he tackles the complexities of philosophy with such utter simplicity and mental clarity that even those with a limited interest in the intricacies of philosophical argument may find themselves reading on with a happy mind.

The overall landscape he draws with his light and unassuming pen is beautiful and inspiring. On the one hand, we have Sri Aurobindo, whose ideas he reveals almost entirely in Sri Aurobindo's own words. He offers Sri Aurobindo's ideas only gradually, whenever he needs them to support, refine

or occasionally rebut the ideas of the European thinkers he introduces. On the other hand, we have an impressive line of European philosophers whose thought resonates with different aspects of Sri Aurobindo's work. Readers who have no background in the rather interesting history of European thought may be surprised how many parallels there are in it to Indian philosophy. Those more familiar with this field may still enjoy the clear and simple overview that is presented here. The most interesting commonality is perhaps to be found in philosophical idealism, the belief that the world originated out of spirit through a mediating, form-giving world of ideas. This basic understanding of the nature of reality was not only held by Indian thinkers, but also by Plato and by such a long list of leading European philosophers that it can certainly be considered part of mainstream Western thought. Popular modern philosophers like John Searle who proudly proclaim that idealism is dead are not only wrong, but they cannot claim to be representative of European or Western thought as a whole. The

only place where philosophical idealism is entirely missing is in the simplified, physicalist philosophy that underlies much of the hard sciences, most of modern education and even the constructionist social sciences. Given the important role of science and universal education in the modern world, this is of course a rather serious tragedy. The global civilization we see around us appears increasingly engulfed in a crass and essentially barbaric, desire-driven materialism. In its present form, this primitive derailment of the human enterprise originated in the USA, but its psychological roots are unfortunately common to all of humanity. Fortunately, the opposite tendencies and higher aspirations are also panhuman, and, as this book testifies, so are the philosophies supporting them. Humanity is more “one” than many people think. Another fascinating area where a few European thinkers have followed similar lines as Sri Aurobindo is the field of evolution. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is probably the most famous of them, but more interesting is perhaps the somewhat lesser known German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who in the beginning of the nineteenth century had ideas that come surprisingly close to Sri Aurobindo’s.

Wilfried Huchzermeyer’s book shows in a quiet but clear manner that in the wide landscape of global thought, Sri Aurobindo’s work did not arise in isolation, but still stands out in a number of major areas. In contrast to European thinkers with similar thoughts, he could build on the enormous wealth of inner knowledge, experience and psychological know-how available in the Indian tradition. In contrast to virtually all earlier mystics, in the East or the West, his knowledge of the highest heights of the spirit did not make him shun the world. While he was acutely aware of humanity’s past and present shortcomings, he took the splendours on the heights as the Divine’s promise for our future.

—Matthijs Cornelissen

Dr Matthijs Cornelissen teaches Psychological Aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s Work at the SAICE and is the founder-director of the Indian Psychology Institute.

An excerpt from the book:

Schelling has coined the term *Real-Idealismus*, which is of special interest in the context of comparative studies with Sri Aurobindo, because it calls up the association with the latter’s Real-Idea—a term he has used in *The Life Divine*...:

The view I am presenting goes farther in idealism; it sees the creative Idea as Real-Idea, that is to say, a power of Conscious Force expressive of real being, born out of real being and partaking of its nature and neither a child of the Void nor a weaver of fictions. It is conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own substance. The world is therefore not a figment of conception in the universal Mind, but a conscious birth of that which is beyond Mind into forms of itself. [CWSA:21:125]

For Schelling, the outer world “lies open before us to rediscover in it the history of our spirit”. “Nature shall be the visible spirit, spirit shall be the invisible nature. So it is here, in the absolute identity of the spirit in us and nature outside us, that the problem of the possibility of a nature external to us has to be resolved.”

As for Sri Aurobindo, so for Schelling too the term “unity”, *Einheit*, is of central importance: unity of nature and spirit, being and consciousness for which he coined the term Real-Idealism or Identity Philosophy... “Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism its body; only both of them together make a living whole. Never can the latter provide the principle, but it must be the ground and the means in which the first realises itself.”

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