

Recent Publications

Sabta



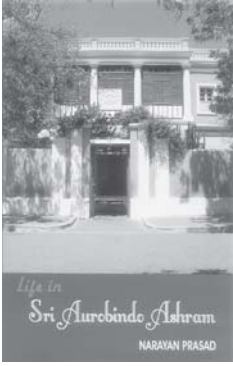
Disciples waiting inside the Ashram main building for the Mother's terrace darshan (in the mid-1940s)

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram by Narayan Prasad was first published in 1965. The book takes a comprehensive look at Ashram life during the Mother's time, revealing how the Ashram took shape, the unique nature of the *sadhana* practised here, and descriptions of daily life that touch on both the individual and collective aspects of the Yoga. A new edition of the book has been published this year and is the subject of our lead articles in this issue.

CONTENTS

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram
A Mirror of Bygone Days
Recent Publications
Ordering Information

2	Reviews	
4	Avatarhood: Human and Divine	13
	Gifts of Grace	15
10	On Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	17
13	The Relevance of Integral Education in the 21 st Century	19



Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

— Narayan Prasad

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Karmi Sangha Trust, Habra-Prafullanagar

418 pp, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This book provides a *sadhak*'s view of life inside the Sri Aurobindo Ashram during the Mother's time. It describes the Ashram's character and atmosphere, its activities, the development of its various departments and services, and its system of education. The author integrates many examples from the lives of *sadhaks* as he writes about spirituality in action and the type of *sadhana* practised in the Ashram. Other chapters portray how the Mother worked to develop the consciousness of each individual and how the

Ashram represents her effort to bring all facets of life under the influence of the Divine. Later chapters deal with the impact of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's force on world events and human evolution. First published in 1965, this new edition is slightly enlarged by the addition of an appendix.

This intimate portrayal of Ashram life called for something more than the usual book review. The lead articles in this issue are written by two people of different generations who have grown up in the Ashram: Prabhakar Rupanagunta, known to all as Batti-da, is a trustee of the Sri Aurobindo

Ashram and in charge of the Sportsground, where he has worked since 1957. Arup Mitra came to the Ashram in early 1956 at the tender age of three. An artist and an art teacher, he is also the author of *Uttara Yogi*, a historical novel based on the life of Sri Aurobindo. These two men offer their reflections on Narayan Prasad's book and the world it depicts: life in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Narayan Prasadji (N.P.) visited the Ashram in the early 1930s. He was slowly drawn to the feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, for he kept coming over regularly for seven long years and finally in 1939 dropped anchor in their Sea of Light. He was later joined by his wife, son and daughter. He was finally absorbed; I dare say attained *moksha*, in 1980.

Narayan Prasadji was not a man of letters. He probably did not think he would be an author whose work would be eagerly consumed by "prince and pauper". By prince I mean a person well read, of an intellectual or even a philosophical bent of mind,



Narayan Prasad (1902–1980)

and by pauper I mean an ordinary man, could be even uneducated and/or just curious, or a person with a passing interest in out-of-the-way matters. His book is like an encyclopedia of interest to all, true seeker or casual visitor, or anyone in between.

N.P. was a very simple, dedicated, hard-working man. I do not know what he was before he came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, but that is of no import here. The Mother put him in charge of the Ashram Granary—a vital link in the food supply chain. N.P.'s sincerity and dedication fitted him admirably for the job of “granarian”. The Mother was extremely particular about cleanliness, more so where food was concerned. He maintained a standard of cleanliness that might have done a hospital proud! In all of my sixty-five years here, I came across only one stone between my teeth. N.P. was then no more, but his equally fastidious son was in charge (he was my classmate, too). I mentioned my ‘stone’ to him. He was very silently regretful!



Narayan Prasad at the Granary in 1947

Now to come to N.P.'s book. The same dedication and simplicity must have driven him to effectively buttonhole his “victims”. It must have been a delicate job to glean, if not pry out all the facts and events from individuals of vastly different natures and upbringings, for a good look at our Ashram reveals the whole gamut of human nature represented here. Small wonder is it that the book is in good demand. One may sit in one's chair and at a leisurely pace read and watch in the mind's eye an unreeling of the Ashram's history and development.

A friend who has seen and read the book opined that it would be more complete and of much greater interest if more pictures could be included. Perhaps the next edition could fulfil this need.

I, for one, (but maybe I'm the exception) had a feeling of being satiated, as if going through the experiences related in the book was a bit too filling. The reader may discover that he must sometimes stop after reading some pages, ruminate, and then proceed. This book is one man's effort to “reveal” the Ashram, its origins and beginnings as well as its *raison d'être*. To what purpose? Is it to enlighten more people? Is it to gather in more devotees? Is it to popularise the Ashram or the *sadhana*, or is it to introduce if not propagate Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and/or thought? N.P. has, it appears, achieved in his own simple but direct way all these.

— Batti-da

Sri Aurobindo's yogic ideal of transformation is the result of his life-long tapasya and yogic research. His quest was for a complete life, a true life—a life endowed with beauty, light and power. ...His intention was “to create a new universe of activities”, thereby ushering in a new era, a new world, a new race, a new order, a new life, a new mode of living, a new literature, a new poetry, a new vision of things and action.

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

A MIRROR OF BYGONE DAYS

A commentary on *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* by Narayan Prasad

During the early 1960s, a stocky old man in blue shorts used to jog along the seafront. He would start his jog towards the old pier just as my A3 group mates and I turned the corner at the Cadastre office on our way to the Tennis Ground. The late afternoons were earmarked for Narayan Prasad's sports, and sometimes I also saw him at the gymnasium.

My house was near the Granary where this energetic old man with shoulder-length hair lived. My classmate, Madhu, who was Narayan Prasad's niece by marriage, also stayed there. And while I only went to play in her courtyard on occasional Sundays, Black Beauty, the Prasad household's dark-haired cat, was a regular caller at my house. Narayan Prasad was responsible for the running of the Granary until his death in 1980. Yet, in his book he remains quiet about the functioning of his own department while giving detailed information about the running of others.

The Ashram was slowly taking shape under the Mother's guidance when Narayan Prasad first visited Pondicherry in 1932. In those days, the dining room, kitchen, dispensary, library and workshop were all located within the Ashram main building. A year later, the Villa Aroumé was taken on lease, and after minor repairs, the dining room was shifted there in January 1934 (pp 20-21).

Interestingly, Aroumé was built in the nineteenth century right over the ruins of the palace where French Governor Dupleix had lived between 1742 and 1754. In that remote era, Rue François Martin (then known as Rue du Gouverneur) did not separate the Government House from Aroumé, and the two plots together formed one large property. Likewise, the present-day Raj Nivas stands on the plot, where, prior to the British siege of 1761, the original Maison de la Compagnie stood.



Preparing to serve food at the Ashram Dining Room at Aroumé

From a modest beginning to feeding several thousands of people on Darshan days, the Dining Room has grown steadily over the years. Narayan Prasad's book narrates how once a special train carrying 550 pilgrims from Gujarat unexpectedly arrived at 9:30 a.m. This number must have been close to half the size of the Ashram's population at the time. Yet the desire of the visitors to eat in the Dining Room was fulfilled, and they were served a hot lunch at noon along with the residents of the Ashram! (p 26)

In the context of the Dining Room, another important event comes to my mind. Although not mentioned in Narayan Prasad's book, which was published a year before the event occurred, the severe cyclonic storm that struck Pondicherry in the early morning of 1 May 1966 forced a huge number of homeless people to take shelter in the camps set up by the government within the town. Clueless about how to feed so many people at such short notice, the local authorities turned for help to the Mother. Not only were the homeless

families fed in a record time thanks to the steam boilers in the Dining Room that had just replaced the archaic firewood stoves, but the Ashram donated the food for the victims. Coming close on the heels of the mob attack that the Ashram had suffered on 11 February 1965, this gesture of goodwill must have effectively soothed the animosity that some of the local people harboured towards the Ashram.

Besides describing how various departments were set up, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* also speaks about the genesis of the Mother's balcony Darshan (p 115), the staircase Pranam and the evening meditation (pp 117–18), and the New Year celebrations (p 143).



Waiting for Balcony Darshan on 15.8.1947

Right at the beginning of the book, the reader is given some unexpected but exhaustive tips about the right attitude to be adopted for taking up Sri Aurobindo's yoga. Numerous examples are cited of how people from different walks of life were attracted to the Ashram and sought the spiritual guidance of the Mother. There is even mention of a tiny tot who asked her parents from time to time 'to take her to someone with a white complexion', and when later shown a photograph of the Mother, 'at once exclaimed, "Yes, it is she, I want to go to her."' (pp 275–76)

*In 1959 the Mother wrote:
"Every morning at the balcony, after establishing a conscious contact with each of those who are present, I identify myself with the Supreme Lord and dissolve myself completely in Him. Then my body, completely passive, is nothing but a channel through which the Lord passes His forces freely and pours upon all His Light, His Consciousness and His Joy, according to each one's receptivity."*



Balcony Darshan on 15.8.49



Nishtha (Margaret Wilson)

Narayan Prasad informs us how Margaret Wilson, eldest daughter of Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States of America (1913–21), came to take up Ashram life. Margaret had procured some books by the Master from the Arya Publishing House after hearing about Sri Aurobindo from an Indian lecturer in America. Intrigued by their content, she immediately wrote to Sri Aurobindo seeking his permission to visit the Ashram. The answer she received was ‘Not now’. Undaunted by this setback, she focused her attention on studying the major works of Sri Aurobindo. Once she became so engrossed while reading *Essays on the Gita* in a New York City public library that it inadvertently ‘closed for the day with her a prisoner’ inside! This unusual event occurred in the late 1920s. Ultimately, Margaret was granted permission to come and she joined the Ashram in 1938, when she was given the name Nishtha by the Master. But she lived for only six years after that and died in 1944 (pp 234–37). I would like to add that Margaret Wilson was buried in the Protestant section of the local Christian cemetery at Uppalam, where her gravesite can still be seen today.



Nishtha's gravesite at Uppalam

The book chronicles how, following the outbreak of the Second World War, numerous parents accompanied by their children sought refuge near the Mother. Predictably, the arrival of the kids brought about a change to the old, quiet ways of the Ashram, ushering in an expansion that continues today. Soon, classrooms were set up, teachers were selected from among the Ashramites and an appropriate infrastructure for sports and boarding houses was created to accommodate the students. A gymnasium, a weight-training complex and a swimming pool were later inaugurated, and a projector was acquired for the weekly screening of films at the Playground. In this context I clearly remember how the Mother used to sit near the projector to watch the films. The 16mm projector was placed in the middle of the Playground facing north, where, adjacent to the wall of the school boarding Dortoir, a screen was hung. Once, the Mother came in after the show had begun, and her moving silhouette was accidentally projected on the screen. Amidst an animated buzz, everyone turned around to look at her. Another time, after watching *Neelachaley Mahaprabhu*, a Bengali film on Sri Chaitanya, she observed how the general consciousness of the Ashram was raised several notches above its usual level. In this regard, a poignant scene from the film comes to my mind. After casting a longing glance at his sleeping wife, Sri Chaitanya leaves his home forever. Films such as *Dhruva*, *Savitri and Satyavan*, *Jogrit*, Satyajit Ray's film *Paurosh Paath* and a Hindi version of Mahabharata were also shown around this time.

In the chapter on Ashram celebrations the author, after briefly describing the background leading up to the descent of the supramental light, force and consciousness, reveals through the Mother's own words how the proceedings unfolded on that momentous evening of 29 February 1956. Then, in a lucid portrayal of the first anniversary of the event in 1960, he narrates the celebrations that were held to commemorate what the Mother named the Golden Day.

I vividly recollect how on the evening of 29 February 1960 the Mother sat at the centre of the inner Meditation Hall and distributed gold-plated broaches with Sri Aurobindo's emblem on one side and her own on the other. We proudly wore our broaches on many subsequent Darshan days. But it was the presence of a smiling little girl sitting beside the Mother that filled our hearts with pride. Mounnou, Rishabhchand's granddaughter and our schoolmate, was handing the broaches to the Mother for distribution.

The ceiling of the inner Meditation Hall had been fitted with stainless steel sheets. They were intended to reflect the golden glimmer from the satin cloth hanging on the walls. In order not to hurt the eyes, the lamps were carefully concealed. That magnificent shimmer of golden light took our breath away. The Mother's soothing presence and her beatific smile seemed to embody heavenly beauty upon earth! The uplift was indescribable.

The Service Tree was artistically covered with thousands of tiny blue electric bulbs whose soft ethereal glow against the backdrop of a violet-orange sky added an impressionistic touch to the charged atmosphere of the evening.

A little later, we went to the Dining Room where the main attraction was the distribution of a quarter-litre or so of honey in transparent plastic containers with flat gold-coloured covers. Not having seen honey before, I simply fell in love with its translucent golden hue!

Another topic highlighted in the book is how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother combated the demonic forces of the Axis Powers during World War II. We learn about the interest they took in the daily news bulletins on the radio and also about how a radio set was later installed in Sri Aurobindo's room. Simultaneously, the Mother had to work hard to make the Ashramites understand that the British-led Allied Forces were in fact the symbolic adversaries of the dark powers, and were not to be viewed as villains just because Britain happened to be ruling over India (pp 150–51).

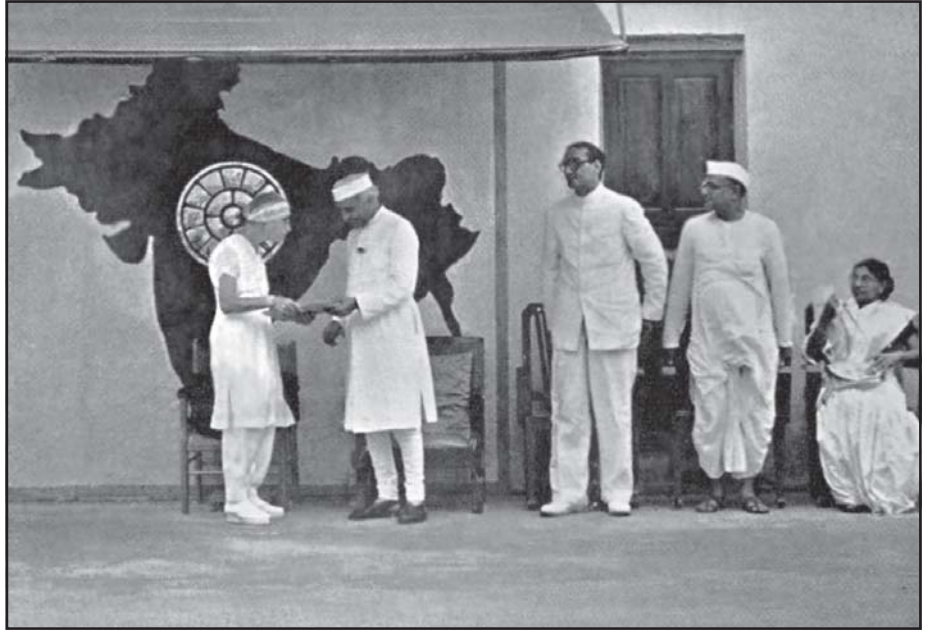
The moving and informative chapter dealing with the Master's withdrawal from his body in 1950 deserves special mention. It reflects the tremendous void felt by the Ashramites then. Narayan Prasad includes the various messages that the Mother issued on the occasion that must have brought immense relief to everyone (pp 322–39).

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram is the amalgamation of numerous topics concerning the Ashram, and the work of the writer in gathering information, quotations, chronologies and the biodata of many of the *sadhaks* is remarkable. Yet his narration remains simple and devoid of exaggeration.



Darshan queue in the Meditation House courtyard on 24.11.49

Thus, we find a fine summary of life in the Ashram, the Mother's reason for creating it and the special place which beauty held in it (pp 5–17). Visitors often wonder about the absence of indoctrination here, and the author points out that the members of the Ashram pursue their *sadhana* according to their individual inner capacities and tendencies (p 80). Darshan days continue to be the focal point for the devotion of visitors and Ashramites alike, and we find a



Jawaharlal Nehru with the Mother at the Playground in 1955

moving description of how the Darshan days were observed during Sri Aurobindo's time. This account wonderfully evokes the magic of that bygone era (pp 127–31). In another section, not only does the author inform us about the landmark visits of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Kamaraj to the Ashram, but also includes Sri Aurobindo's impression of Nehru long before he became the first prime minister of India (pp 201–06).

Notably, the reprint of *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* carries an update on the main events of the post-1965 era, of which the Mother's withdrawal from her body is the most significant. The inclusion of Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya's authoritative account of the last few months of the Mother's life is appropriate.

I remember how, starting on the evening of 20 November 1973 – the very day that the Mother's body was laid to rest –, Pranab began speaking to us spontaneously. Facing south and sitting midway on the staircase near the Samadhi, he narrated incident after incident from the Mother's life from 9 p.m. until the early hours of the morning. The impact on us was so strong that an impregnable silence reigned throughout. These were the only occasions when we repeatedly stayed on the Ashram premises beyond 11 o'clock at night. This continued till the eve of the November 24th Darshan, I think. Then, on 4 December 1973, Pranab gave a formal speech at the Playground, the transcript of which is reprinted as an appendix titled 'A Talk by Pranab' (pp 395–406).

Among the other fascinating topics included in the update is the founding of Auroville, one of the Mother's cherished dreams. In those days All India Radio had just gained its foothold in Pondicherry, and the live transmission by AIR of the Mother's message as part of the inauguration ceremony of Auroville on 28 February 1968 was a remarkable achievement indeed! The feat was achieved through the personal initiative of Mr. Dharmagnyani, then director of AIR, Pondicherry. While the technicians were busy operating their elaborate equipment in the Mother's room at the Ashram, we in Auroville were experiencing goose bumps as we heard her voice wafting from the radio sets kept there!

— Arup Mitra

Narayan Prasad devotes more than twenty pages to the subject of Sri Aurobindo and World War II, providing some historical details of the war, several quotes from Churchill and other war leaders, and numerous extracts from Sri Aurobindo's letters and messages on the subject of the war. He points out how Sri Aurobindo used all his spiritual powers to intervene during the course of the conflict and quotes from one of Sri Aurobindo's letters: "The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question..."

In the following extract Narayan Prasad relates how the radio played an important role in Sri Aurobindo's work for the defeat of Hitler and the Axis powers:

Formerly, there was no radio in the Ashram, and for a long time people were not encouraged to have one....Long afterwards, perhaps in 1938 or 40, a radio set found its way into the Ashram. But there was no question of anybody using it. The Mother had it kept in the storeroom.

In the early days of the war, a young man, a local devotee, who was listening to his own radio at home, was noting the gist of the war news and sending it to Sri Aurobindo daily. Why and how he got the inspiration of doing so is not known to us....This used to be read by Pavitra to Sri Aurobindo, and later it was put up on the Ashram notice board for the Ashramites to read.

As the war began to take a serious turn – by that time Paris had fallen into Hitler's hands – and Sri Aurobindo wished to have more detailed news, the chance for using that radio lying idle in the storeroom came up. So the Mother entrusted Pavitra...to furnish a more detailed account of the war. Pavitra did the job admirably, and from that time on we also got the opportunity of reading a few sheets of detailed information....They were put up on the notice board after Sri Aurobindo had finished with them. This helped people to have the authentic information from the side of the Allies and discouraged false rumours.

When the war entered upon a crucial phase things began to move too fast for these news bulletins. Sri Aurobindo wanted to be constantly informed about the events. It was felt necessary to shift the radio to the main compound of the Ashram; the obvious choice was Pavitra's room. So from that time again the process changed. Pavitra now began taking notes himself and immediately going to Sri Aurobindo and reading them to him, a number of times daily....

With the war taking its definite turn on the fall of Dunkirk, Sri Aurobindo also concentrated himself all the more on the struggle. From that time on he wanted to listen directly to the war news and more especially to the speeches of Churchill, etc. So a direct loudspeaker connection, branched from the main radio in Pavitra's room, was made in Sri Aurobindo's room;...and Sri Aurobindo began to listen to the radio himself from as many quarters of the globe as the radio could pick up, of course all from the sources of the Allies, both in English and in French. Sri Aurobindo never heard Nazi broadcasts nor did he allow them in the Ashram. It may be interesting to note that all the finest and epoch-making speeches of Churchill, of President Roosevelt, and of General de Gaulle started from this time, and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother listened to them....

Except for five or six hours, day and night Sri Aurobindo worked for the Allied victory. Like a Guardian Angel of the Allied Cause, he spent most of his time in hearing the news, following the events and watching the effect of his subtle working. To quote his own words: "My force...is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and for change in the human world."

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Gifts of Grace

Five Aids for Inner Growth

— Gleanings from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

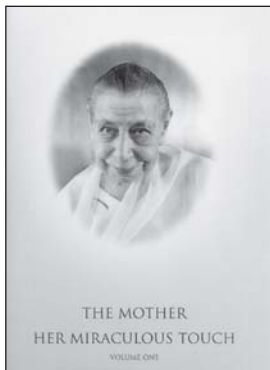
226 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-950-1, Rs 110

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This compilation delves into a study of five aids for inner growth, “gifts” from the Grace which acts as an evolutionary force behind the appearances of life to lead and guide humanity towards the divine realisation which is its destiny. The five aids are aspiration for progress, will for progress, faith and trust, difficulties and suffering, and the psychic being. Selected passages provide the reader with definitions of key concepts such as the roles of personal effort and surrender in the will for progress, understanding the relation between desire and aspiration, and learning to recognise difficulties as the means to make a swifter, more complete progress.

See review on page 15



The Mother: Her Miraculous Touch

— Photographs of the Mother and quotations from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

ISBN 978-81-7058-970-9

585 pp, Rs 1250

Size: 22x28 cm

Binding: Hard Cover (2 volumes)

This is a selection of black-and-white photographs of the Mother (and some of Sri Aurobindo), interspersed with short excerpts from their writings. Starting with Mirra Alfassa at six, the album covers segments of her entire life—in Paris, in Algeria, in Japan, and finally in Pondicherry. Chapter headings such as ‘Growing Consciously’, ‘Exploring Hidden Domains’, and ‘Meeting

Sri Aurobindo’ suggest the sequence the compilers have chosen for the photographs. The collection covers a wide range of the Ashram’s activities in which the Mother was known to have been closely involved. Captions are provided separately at the end of each volume, tagged on to stamp-sized replicas of the original photographs. The high-grammage paper stock used and the sturdy binding provided enhance the appeal of the book.

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

One Essential Condition

To Prepare the Way for the New Creation

39 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-303-0, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Our Present Natural Life and the True Soul Life

40 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-309-2, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Three Stages of Progress in Sadhana

40 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-310-8, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Other Authors

This Earthly Life of the Mother Divine

— Samar Basu

Publisher: Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry

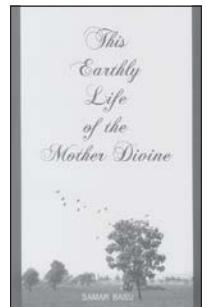
92 pp, ISBN 978-81-86413-47-0, Rs 100

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

A brief survey of the Mother’s life, this book traces her years in Paris and her visits to Algeria and Japan, but concentrates more on the significance of her meeting with Sri Aurobindo in 1914 and the role she played in the founding and development of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It

recounts the circumstances of Sri Aurobindo’s withdrawal from his body in 1950, the Mother’s subsequent activities, and concludes with an account of the Mother’s withdrawal from her body in 1973. The author quotes liberally from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as from reminiscences and other biographies, most notably Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s *On the Mother*.



Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

— Narayan Prasad

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Karmi Sangha Trust, Habra-Prafullanagar

418 pp, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

See article on page 2

Sadhak-Poet Nishikanta

A Centenary Tribute

— Satadal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Sthan, Kolkata

10 pp, Rs 10

Size: 14x11 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This booklet gives a very brief introduction to Nishikanta's early years spent at Shantiniketan and tells the story of his search for a guru, culminating with his arrival in Pondicherry. He is remembered as an artist and an accomplished poet, whose poems in Bengali were often praised by Sri Aurobindo.

On Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

Part One: Essays

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

Publisher: Clear Ray Trust, Pondicherry

368 pp, ISBN 978-81-87916-10-9, Rs 380

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This is the first volume of a two-part compilation of Amal's Kiran's writings on *Savitri* and consists of complete essays which have appeared as chapters or sections of books or as independent journal articles. Essays include "Letters on *Savitri*", which recounts how in 1936, years before its publication, Sri Aurobindo sent the author selected lines and passages from the poem, and the 1946 article "Sri Aurobindo—A New Age of Mystical Poetry", in which *Savitri* was introduced to the public for the first time. Other essays cover glimpses, reflections, and notes on the epic, discussions on *Savitri* in the larger context of English poetry, and studies on earlier versions of the poem. All reveal the author's deep study of *Savitri* and an understanding shaped and illuminated by the insights found in Sri Aurobindo's many letters to him on the subject.

See review on page 17



Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

A Study of the Cosmic Epic

— Dr Prema Nandakumar

Publisher: Wisdom Tree, Delhi,

in collaboration with Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

ISBN 978-81-8328-175-1

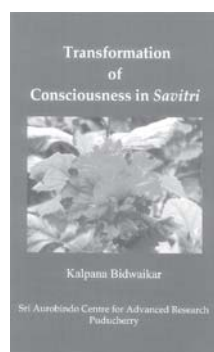
500 pp, Rs 595

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Now in its third edition, this study

of *Savitri* has a wide scope. Part I sets the stage by looking briefly at Sri Aurobindo's life and work and the place *Savitri* occupies there. Part II examines the poem canto by canto in all its elements: the epic story, the poetry, the philosophy, the mystic experiences, the yogic realisations, and *Savitri*'s final victory for the earth and man. Part III considers the significances of *Savitri*, as a legend and a symbol, as a continuing experiment in overhead poetry, as a cosmic epic in relation to human thought and experience across the ages. The detailed references, select bibliography, and index complete the work, which was the author's PhD thesis. The book was out of print for a number of years.



Transformation of Consciousness in *Savitri*

— Kalpana Bidwaikar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

ISBN 978-81-901891-8-7

212 pp, Rs 195

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book explores several themes on the transformation of

consciousness in *Savitri*. It expounds Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of the involution and evolution of consciousness and relates it specifically to the poem, citing passages from his major works and verses from the epic. It explores the different levels of human consciousness as seen in *Savitri* and explains the psychic and spiritual transformations experienced by *Savitri* and Ashwapati, leading ultimately to the supramental transformation and the creation of a new kind of being and a divinised life on earth.

The Relevance of Integral Education in the 21st Century

— An Anthology of Essays

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Education Society, New Delhi
164 pp, ISBN 978-81-88847-26-6, Rs 150

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Focused on a re-examination of the need for radical changes in education, this book is a collection of ten articles by educationists who are committed to implementing the theory of integral education as outlined by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. While all the essays emphasise the basic principle of educating the physical, emotional, intellectual, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the human being, some address specific methods of teaching and learning while others look at some of the challenges confronting students, teachers, and schools as they face an increasing materialism, a pervasive technological revolution, and an atmosphere of misguided zealotry. *See review on page 19*

OTHER LANGUAGES

BULGARIAN

Tchoveshkiyat Tsikl — Sri Aurobindo Rs 500
ISBN 978-954-319-152-9

CATALAN

Savitri : Una Llegenda i un Símbol — Sri Aurobindo
ISBN 978-84-614-1614-1 Rs 2000

FRENCH

Jai Ma: Au Service de Douce Mère
— Pashupati Bhattacharya Rs 10

GERMAN

Sri Aurobindo: Leben und Werk
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BOOK REVIEWS

Avatarhood: Human and Divine

Publisher: Auroville Foundation, Auroville
74 pp, Rs 70
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

The word "Avatar" has been carelessly used in popular culture over the years, most recently thanks to a very successful movie by the same name. James Cameron, the film's writer and director, was quoted in *Time* magazine, "It's an incarnation of one of the Hindu gods taking a flesh form. In this film what that means is that the human technology in the future is capable of injecting a human's intelligence into a remotely located body, a biological body." The term is also used in an online computer game "Second Life", where your "virtual persona" in the game's "virtual reality" is an "avatar". So much of the Western world believes that something you create and control with computers remotely or lives in cyberspace is an avatar.

Meher Baba of Pune claimed he was the avatar of the age. The devotees of Sathya Sai Baba and Mother Meera, among others, make similar statements. But one only understands that there is some claim of superiority for their teacher without knowing what the function and purpose of the Avatar is in the Divine Play.

Therefore, one is grateful to Paulette Hadnagy for making a brief and informative compilation from Sri Aurobindo's writings and conversations entitled *Avatarhood: Human and Divine*. A resident of Auroville, Paulette has a reverence and abiding affection for the elder disciples she first met upon arriving at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She has made a deep study of Advaita Vedanta and the psychology of Carl Jung and is enthusiastic about architecture, but little of her background or personality comes through in this booklet. Rather, she has gathered many quotes from Sri Aurobindo on the topic of Avatarhood and has let him speak for himself.

Even in her introduction, Paulette keeps largely to Sri Aurobindo's words, providing linking phrases together with a number of quotes from *Essays on the Gita*. She again chooses selections from Chapter Fifteen of the *Essays* for the book's first chapter. She then moves to excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's replies to Nirodbaran,

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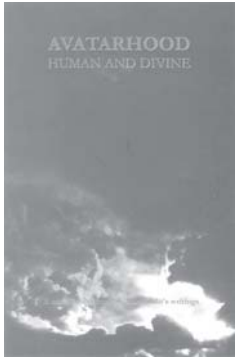
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including a number of humorous comments addressed to the persistent, self-deprecating doctor. She continues with selections from *Letters on Yoga* in a chapter entitled "The Purpose of Avatarhood" and then to



comments from *Sri Aurobindo On Himself*, finally ending with Sri Aurobindo's glorious poem, "A God's Labour". By culling excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's exposition on the subject in *Essays on the Gita*, from the conversational "debates" with Nirod, from the broader comments in reply to queries from devotees, and then ending with the poetic, it is like turning the concept of

Avatarhood around in Sri Aurobindo's vision and experience and presenting a multifaceted perspective.

In the middle of the second chapter, which is compiled from *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, one comes across this gem of an exchange. First we have Nirod's comment:

I have never said that you are only a big human person. On the contrary, you are not, and hence nobody can be like you. Nevertheless, I don't quite follow what you mean when you state that whatever you achieve is possible for humanity to achieve, your attainments opening the way for others to follow.

Sri Aurobindo replies,

I had no urge toward spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting—I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake—a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence. You all seem to think it a great compliment to me to say that what I have done has no meaning for anybody except myself—it is the most damaging criticism on my work that could be made.

Nirod then writes: "If a man has transformed his nature, he couldn't have done it all by himself, as you have

done." To which Sri Aurobindo answers, "I also did not do it by myself, if you mean by myself the Aurobindo that was. He did it with the help of Krishna and the Divine Shakti. I had help from embodied sources also."

There was something touching and profound in going back and seeing this quote in context, in rediscovering the patience and playfulness and profundity of the teacher in relationship to his disciple, as Nirodbaran struggles with his concepts and presuppositions about a Divine incarnation on earth.

In the next section there are references to the ten Puranic avatars of Vishnu from the Fish Avatar to Kalki, the Avatar of the Satya Yuga, a procession which Sri Aurobindo interprets as a parable of evolution to demonstrate that "the idea of evolution is implicit" behind the very theory of Avatarhood. What emerges from Sri Aurobindo's thought is how the calling and work of the Avatar is "something essential and radical needed for the terrestrial evolution".

One can debate who should be on the list of Avatars, and Sri Aurobindo joins the fray with a detached logical analysis, especially concerning the Buddha. But this is in response to questions posed to him. His focus always returns to the work to be done, with little concern for labels and claims and comparisons. He especially does not speak for the Mother, but only from his own experiences.

Many selections make this booklet a worthwhile purchase, but one excerpt, from *Letters on Yoga*, especially stands out:

It is not by your mind that you can hope to understand the Divine and its action, but by the growth of a true and divine consciousness within you. If the Divine were to unveil and reveal itself in all its glory, the mind might feel a Presence, but it would not understand its action or its nature. It is in the measure of your own realisation and by the birth and growth of that greater consciousness in yourself that you will see the Divine and understand its action even behind its terrestrial disguises.

— Julian Lines

Julian is President of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mount Tremper, NY, USA, and Executive Director of Auroville International. He currently serves on Auroville's International Advisory Council.

Gifts of Grace

Five Aids for Inner Growth

— Gleanings from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

226 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-950-1, Rs 110

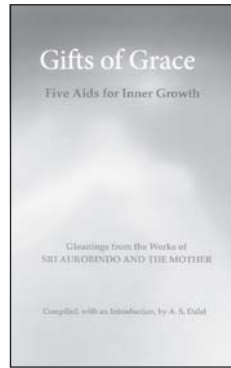
Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This is another compilation by Dr. A. S. Dalal, whose earlier compilations from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, such as *Our Many Selves*, are well known to those interested in the Integral Yoga. Dr. Dalal explains that this compilation can be useful to all seekers of inner growth, no matter what path they follow. For those who are familiar with the original works, the book can be used for a 'more focused study of a particular subject in order to gain a possibly clearer and fuller understanding'. In his preface he also gives the rationale for the title *Gifts of Grace: Five Aids for Inner Growth*. In common parlance, the word 'grace' implies some sort of arbitrary act, a mercy or favour by God or the Divine, who distributes His 'Grace' as freebies to those with whom He is pleased. Dr. Dalal dispels this popular notion, defining Grace as 'the all-powerful, all-knowing and all-beneficent evolutionary Force which impels and guides human beings towards self-realisation'. The Divine is always in a state of Grace. If man can but open himself to receive this ever-present Grace by his aspiration, will and faith, he can achieve the ultimate goal of human existence: God-realization or Self-realization.

Mere aspiration for progress, though an essential requisite, is not sufficient. A constant and unflinching will for progress must also be there.

Coming to the reason for arranging this compilation under the headings chosen by him, he reiterates what the Mother had already said, that the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Herself ought to be studied by subject. In this book these subjects are: **Aspiration for Progress** leading to the strengthening of the **Will for Progress**, aided by **Faith and Trust** in the Divine Grace, undeterred by the ubiquitous **Difficulties and**



Suffering which everyone faces and undergoes for the ultimate realization of one's own truth of being, **the Psychic Being**—this is the progression that unfolds in our terrestrial existence.

How can aspiration be a gift of Grace? Aspiration for progress is a sure indication that there is an awakening in man, a yearning to come out of this

darkness of ignorance and be born in Knowledge, Truth and Light; hence the prayer, 'asato mam sat gamaya, tamaso mam jyotir gamaya, mriyora mam amritam gamaya.' (Lead me from ignorance to Truth, from darkness to Light, and from death to Immortality.) It should be clearly understood that aspiration is not desire, 'which is always a turning back upon oneself', 'which is always something which one draws to oneself'. The Mother clinches the issue when she says that 'desire is a vital movement, aspiration is a psychic movement.' If the aspiration is pure, unsullied by desire, it is a powerful tool to strengthen the will for progress. Dr. Dalal has included a wonderful collection on this subject, culled mainly from the Mother's *Questions and Answers* volumes.

However, mere aspiration for progress, though an essential requisite for progress, is not sufficient. A constant and unflinching will for progress must also be there. Will is the *ichchha shakti* in man. There is a widespread misconception that the Divine will do everything for us, even the willing. Man must will to be free from ignorance, will to launch himself on a never-ending journey of progress towards freedom and self-mastery, and for that a certain amount of *tapasya*, or self-effort, is indispensable. There is a need for personal effort prior to complete surrender, especially in the early part of the *sadhana*. Christ said, 'Ask; and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' We have to ask, seek and knock; that is the minimum we can and should do.

Aspiration and will are only the first two elements of the three-fold effort of man in his quest for Truth. Aspiration can fluctuate and the will can flag if there is no persistent faith to prop them up, for faith and patience are the first requisites in Yoga, nay, in every

human endeavour, mundane or spiritual. An unshakable faith is a sign of the presence of the Divine Will in us, but for that to happen one must have a childlike faith not only in our spiritual destiny but also in the Divine, who carries us through all our ups and downs as the eternal guide, friend and unfailing companion. The popular adage 'Faith can move mountains' is not a mere slogan but a practical truth, exemplified in the lives of great men.

In the fourth section of his book Dr. Dalal has included difficulties and suffering as a grace of the Divine. Man's vital always shrinks from suffering. Brave souls know the truth behind suffering, for it comes as a God-given opportunity to make further progress. Suffering highlights a much lesser-known truth—we have in us divine possibilities; we also have that which opposes their realization. It is the inner Kurukshetra where the bitter war is fought and victory is certain, for the Lord is there to lead us to victory. He is seated in our hearts as the Divine Charioteer to whom we can surrender all our weaknesses, fears, doubts and difficulties.

Dr. Dalal has reserved the fifth and last section of this compilation for what, I feel, is the most important contribution to spiritual philosophy by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – the most glorious and unprecedented contribution that has ever been made by great spiritual personalities that came to the earth at different times to uplift mankind from the mire of ignorance to matchless divine glory – the Psychic.

The Psychic is not an intellectual concept, nor is it a speculative philosophy, but rather an experiential reality, an undeniable fact of human existence. Here one must not fail to state that many people are bewildered by the plethora of terms such as soul, psychic being, *jeeva*, or *jeevatman*, which are used in this connection. Confusion is worse confounded when even knowledgeable people use these terms

indiscriminately and indifferently, using them as synonyms or worse, making a mess of the subtle nuances in the differences that characterize these terms. Shri Krishna says in the Gita that *paraprakriti* (supernature) has become the *jeeva* and it is an eternal

portion of the Divine, *amsah sanatanah*. Dr. Dalal has gathered all that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said in this connection, and the reader is advised to carefully read and assimilate the truth of

The Psychic is not an intellectual concept, nor is it a speculative philosophy, but rather an experiential reality, an undeniable fact of human existence.

this most wonderful grace, a special gift of the Divine to man, a unique terrestrial phenomenon designed to manifest the Glories of the Many in the One. It is the psychic being, immortal and of the Divine essence, which is present in every man and which evolves through all births and deaths. When it comes to the front of the being and takes charge of our life, we can take the first glorious step towards the supramental transformation, which is the goal of evolution. Psychic realization opens the doors to spiritualization which in turn will culminate in supramentalization, the goal of the Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother emphatically say that this supramental realization is a logical inevitability and decreed by the Divine as the goal of human evolution.

The book will undoubtedly be a great help for *sadhaks* and others with similar interests. One must admire the tireless zeal with which Dr. Dalal has been bringing out such compilations. The glossary of names, Sanskrit terms and special terms as well as the references to the original texts enhance the value of this book. But I still cannot help asking myself why this otherwise well-written work should be without an index, which would have been so helpful for quick reference.

— K. Balasubramaniam
Bala-bhai has been teaching English, Mathematics, and Numerical Analysis at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education since 1972.

On Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

Part One: Essays

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

Publisher: Clear Ray Trust, Pondicherry

368 pp, ISBN 978-81-87916-10-9, Rs 380

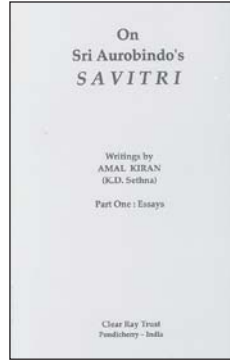
Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This is a long-awaited compilation of interesting and significant letters, observations, explanations, and discussions by Amal Kiran on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and the nature of poetry. Being himself a poet of high calibre and a *sadhak* of the Integral Yoga, Amal was able to comprehend and appreciate Sri Aurobindo's new approach to mystical poetry. It was crucial and essential for someone of his capability to deal with and to comment upon the subject in a language suitable for this profound poetic creation, building a bridge, so to say, between the supreme perception of the Master and the ordinary interpretations of our human understanding.

This book, therefore, can become a most helpful guide for all sincere seekers who want to study Sri Aurobindo and his poetic genius in depth, especially in his revelatory epic *Savitri*. It deals with all major aspects of poetry: poetic inspiration, style, metre, content, and even grammar and the difficulties related to the usage of the English language (such as double adjectives). It introduces and gives an overview of many fundamental elements in poetry from different times and cultures, starting from the Vedic poetry and the epics of the ancient Greeks to the modern poetry of the 20th century. The Vedic and the Upanishadic seers, Vyasa, Valmiki, Homer, Virgil, Kalidasa, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe are mentioned throughout this study. The great poets of English literature such as Milton, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Thompson, and Yeats are often used for comparative analysis in these essays and articles. All this rich poetic creation over the ages is looked at in a subtle and distinguished manner by an intuitive poet and yogi who loves Sri Aurobindo, his poetic genius, and his spiritual vision.

Amal writes about Sri Aurobindo's poetry in an elevated style, almost in a poetic language, the highest possible in prose. Such a style almost becomes a part of the poetry it seeks to admire. Having read some of his explanations, one's understanding of poetry for its own sake ceases to exist; it is no more satisfactory for our



awakened inner perception, and the understanding of poetry as an elevation of consciousness finally emerges from the depth of our being.

Sri Aurobindo makes poetry a means for spiritual experience and growth. He liberates it from the domain of the merely mental and aesthetic, giving it finally a new birth in its real

purpose. In this view Sri Aurobindo follows the ancient tradition of the Veda where poetry was used for spiritual progress and conquest. It was a weapon in the hands of the Aryan to fight against the forces of darkness in his spiritual journey towards the Light. Therefore, to free the Word for its highest spiritual destiny was the great work of the Master when he composed his *Savitri*. This understanding also helps to shed some light on the future utility of the Vedic hymns and how they should be used and approached in this new light.

Moreover, the imagery which Sri Aurobindo developed for the description of his spiritual journey in *Savitri* is based on the imagery of the ancient tradition of the Veda. It would be interesting to expand research in this direction and to try to liberate the Vedic tradition from the loss of its meaning, giving it a new life and inner significance. It is a direction which remains a desideratum for *Savitri* studies. In the first essay Amal only acknowledges the similarity in poetic character and spiritual directness between the Vedas and Upanishads and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and points out that Sri Aurobindo went even farther in his spiritual development. In the article on Agni in the Rig-veda and Aswapathy in *Savitri* Amal compares Sri Aurobindo's translation of several hymns to Agni in the Rig-veda (*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*) with the imagery developed in his *Savitri*. It is a most rewarding exercise, for it sheds some light on the nature and the profundity of spiritual experience and widens the scope of our inner vision, giving us access to a deeper understanding of the Veda and *Savitri*.

The main contribution of Amal's poetic analysis remains in the direction of English literary tradition. Being a master of the English language he could deeply feel the shades and subtleties of the poetic inspiration and

its expression in metre and composition. It is on this ground that the book can be used by scholars and universities in the study of the fundamentals of poetics.

As Amal says in the final pages of this book:

What is specially notable about Sri Aurobindo's epic is that it attempts to open a new dimension of poetic expression. In English literature we have the Shakespearian accent of the thrilled rapid life-force, the Miltonic tone of the majestically thinking mind, the deep or colourful cry of the idealistic imagination as in Wordsworth and Shelley and, recently, Yeats and A.E. *Savitri*, while taking into itself the whole past of English poetry, adds not only the Indian spirit: it adds also in ample measure the typical intonation, at once intense and immense in its rhythmic significance, which the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Gita bring. Sri Aurobindo calls it "overhead poetry"....This poetry may be generally characterised, in Sri Aurobindo's own words from *Savitri*, as consisting of

The lines that tear the veil from Deity's face.

[p.677]

It is a wonderful occasion for all of us to be able to dive into the depths of the spiritual vision of the Master and to start an exploration of our consciousness with the help of his Word. Amal sharpens this perception for us, helping us to take this journey.

— Vladimir Latsenko

Vladimir is a graduate of St. Petersburg University in Russia, in Sanskrit Language and Theoretical Linguistics, and studied Sanskrit Grammar at Pune University. He is a Sanskrit teacher and researcher in the Indian scriptures at Savitri Bhavan, and also teaches at ICIS in Delhi, at SACAR and IPI in Pondicherry, and at the University of Human Unity in Auroville.

** ** *

Excerpt from the book, from the chapter "*Savitri: Some Glimpses and Reflections*":

Hedged in though she [*Savitri*] is by mortality, her life's movement keeps the measure of the Gods. Painting her being and its human-divine beauty Sri Aurobindo achieves some of his supreme effects. Perhaps his grandest capture of the *mantra*

are the nine verses which form the centre of a long passage, variously mantric, in which *Savitri's* avatarhood is characterised:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things beyond.

[p.15]

A hieratic poetry, demanding a keen sense of the occult and spiritual to compass both its subjective and objective values, is in this audacious and multi-dimensional picture of a highly Yogic state of embodied being. Not all might respond to it and Sri Aurobindo knew that such moments in *Savitri* would have to wait long for general appreciation. But he could not be loyal to his mission without giving wide scope to the occult and spiritual and seeking to poetise them as much as possible with the vision and rhythm proper to the summits of reality. Of course, that vision and that rhythm are not restricted to the posture and contour of the summits, either the domains of divine dynamism or

The superconscient realms of motionless peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone

[pp.33-34]

or the mid-worlds, obscure or luminous, fearsome or marvellous, of which *Savitri's* father, King Aswapathy, carries out a long exploration which is one of the finest and most fascinating parts of the poem. They extend to the earth-drama too and set living amongst us the mysteries and travails of cosmic evolution, like that dreadful commerce of *Savitri* with one to whom Sri Aurobindo gives no name:

One dealt with her who meets the burdened
great.

Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit's goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.

[p.17]

The Relevance of Integral Education in the 21st Century

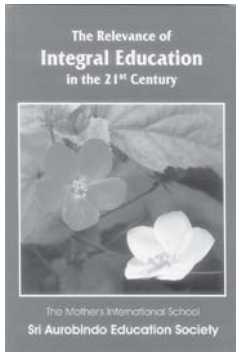
— An Anthology of Essays

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Education Society, New Delhi

164 pp, ISBN 978-81-88847-26-6, Rs 150

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



The book under review deals with a subject of the greatest importance, namely Integral Education in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is a compilation of writings by a number of contributors seeking to share with the reader their views on the principles and practice of Integral Education. As Dr. Karan Singh in his Foreword points out, the book

was brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Education Society to commemorate the golden jubilee of the Mother's International School in New Delhi.

This volume comprises ten essays, beginning with "An Inner Revolution in Education", in which Ananda Reddy gives an overview of the subject, referring to Sri Aurobindo's essays *A National System of Education* (1910) and *A Preface to National Education* (1920–21), in which Sri Aurobindo developed "the essential principles of true education". Ananda Reddy quotes these:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master; he is a helper and guide....

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth....

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be....

Ananda Reddy then dwells on the Mother's contribution to Integral Education, in elaborating a method of education that takes up all the different parts and planes of our being, namely the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual.

Generally the contributors refer to these principles or develop these insights, in varying degrees expressing

concern at the state of education prevalent in the world at large, utilitarian in approach, that the Mother strongly disapproved of.

Manoj Das has titled his essay "The 'Business' of Education", and states that "without a collective awakening to the purpose of education, the corrosion of life by utilitarianism, inevitably leading to hedonism, cannot be stopped." He goes on to express the hope that "despite all the signs to the contrary, the secret aspiration in our consciousness will guide us beyond the present imbroglio."

In an essay titled "The Challenge of Our Times: Education with a Soul", Alok Pandey refers to "a world-wide erosion of values held of old", but finds also "an emergence of new values". He goes on to stress the need for an education that recognizes the soul and affirms that "the challenge of education" is "to facilitate and assist in the evolution of the spiritual being within man".

Prema Nandakumar, in a brief contribution ("Integral Living: New Challenges, New Opportunities"), gives "thanks to the advancement of technology", which provides her more time for "thinking, meditation and active participation in the process of integral living". She considers that "these days, the acquisitive tendency is...paralleled by a readiness to share", and finds hope for the future in that "more and more of the younger generation is coming together to form core groups and present their view of a good and moral universe".

In the next essay, Ramesh Bijlani explores "The Missing Element in School Education". Basing himself on the Vedantic world view, and alluding to Sri Aurobindo's "first principle of true teaching that nothing can be taught", he goes on to make a questionable affirmation: "A child is already in yoga. If we teach the child less rather than more he would continue to appreciate truth, love and beauty; and would not get dependent on the thrills and excitement offered by concrete and palpable objects of desire." While one can discern some truth in this generalization – the Mother has stated that "intensive mental education shuts one off completely from the psychic consciousness" (*Questions and Answers*, 5 August 1953) –, she has also pointed out that "if we did not teach a child to live, he would not know how to live, he would not know to do anything....It is very difficult to learn all alone."

(*Questions and Answers*, 28 July 1954) Another affirmation by Dr. Bijlani can also be questioned. He states: “The soul has been traditionally considered a passive entity which does not influence our daily life in spite of being our divine essence. Sri Aurobindo introduced the concept of the psychic being as the dynamic counterpart of the soul. Unlike the soul, the psychic being can be brought forward and made to influence our instruments of action, namely the body, mind and intellect.” This is at variance with Sri Aurobindo’s own view—“The soul and the psychic being are practically the same, except that even in things which have not developed a psychic being, there is still a spark of the Divine which can be called the soul. The psychic being is called in Sanskrit the *Purusha* in the heart or the *Chaitya Purusha*. (The psychic being is the soul developing in the evolution.)” (*Letters on Yoga*, Vol.22, p.301)

The next contribution, “Relevance of Integral Education”, is by Shri Kireet Joshi, well-known authority on the subject. This is the most comprehensive of all the writings in this volume, and has sought to provide detailed guidelines on principles and methods, and the infrastructure needed to implement a programme of integral education. What comes through is the need for a thorough-going study by all concerned of all that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written on the subject, and a sincere commitment to putting it into practice.

In “Education: Now and Tomorrow”, Amita Sen gives some of her reflections on the subject of education. In a somewhat discursive manner, she refers to language, culture, Nature and technology as topics to be addressed in the education of children. She gives particular importance to the development of memory and sense-training along with development of other mental faculties.

In the next essay, “Relevance of Integral Education in the 21st Century”, Chandrasekhara Rath sees for Integral Education an evolutionary aim, stating that by bringing the psychic to the front, man “can really receive the supermanhood descending into him”. It would seem this might be more an ultimate achievement than a possibility in the near term.

In an article titled “Towards an Integral Education”, Partho discusses at some length prevalent pedagogical ideas, and considers that for “our schools to become centres for growth, human flowering and excellence, they will have to be schools operating out of the unitive consciousness....For that to happen,...those who impart education and are concerned with it will themselves have to start living out of the unitive consciousness. This is the only imperative, and indeed the only real challenge.” One wonders how far this can be realized in actual practice.

The final essay (“Reflections”) in this volume is by Bimal Mohanty, who would give parents a greater role in the education of the child. Even, he goes so far as to assert, “if the Mother’s wonderful concepts of ‘physical’, ‘vital’ and ‘mental’ education can greatly be imparted by the teachers and the institutions, the foundation for ‘psychic and spiritual education’ has to be laid entirely through parental efforts and domestic environment.” This is at odds with views expressed by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the matter; even more so is the claim about “the divine scheme of bringing the souls of parents and the child together. It reflects the trust that the Divine reposes on the parents to nurse and nourish the spiritual upbringing of the life entrusted to them.”

While the insights and opinions in this book are in broad agreement, there are also differing views, some not quite in tune with the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, even though they are generally based on and draw inspiration from their writings. This book can serve as a useful introduction to Integral Education, yet it is to be hoped that the reader would turn to the original writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on education and related topics for the surest guidance in this field.

— Prakash Patel

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