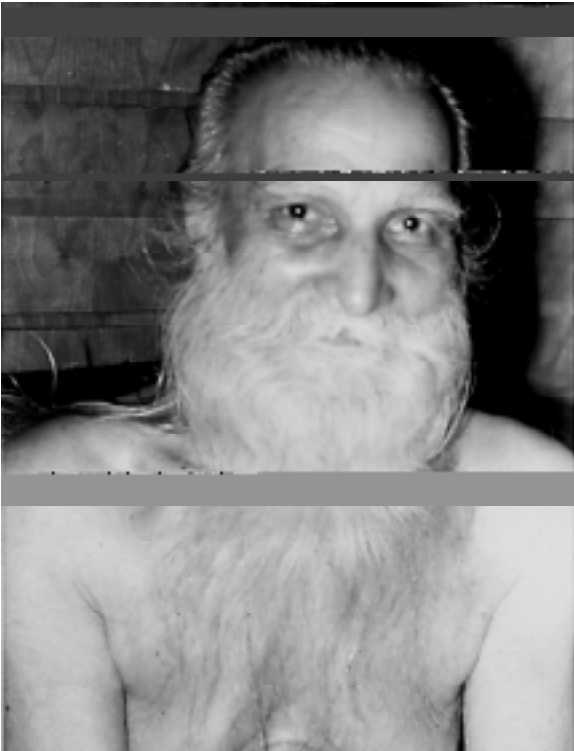


Sabda Newsletter

(A publication of SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002)

Number 21

November 2002



Champaklal

*... each wrinkle,
each line on his face had its own story;
almost every time his eyes flickered,
he remembered the days gone by,
his childhood, how he disliked academics,
his experiences with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,
their ways of doing things...*

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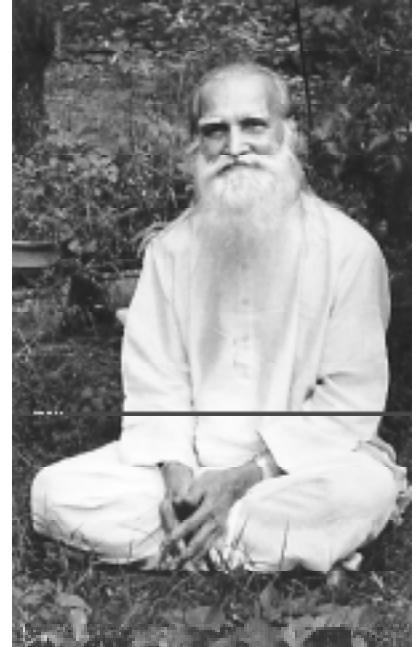
Special Display at Landmark, Chennai 18

THE RELEVANCE OF CHAMPAKLAL TODAY

Several years ago, in the mid '80s, at someone's home in Mumbai, I chanced upon some pages written in Gujarati. It was a vision which Champaklal had seen and later described in Gujarati in those pages. I found it very interesting as around the same time I was reading what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had said about dreams, visions, symbols and related things. Based on what I had read, I penned down some thoughts which came to me and later showed the scribbles to Roshanben (who has compiled and got published five books on Champaklal) as my understanding — what we finally called interpretation — of that vision which I had read. She gave me some more visions and I did the same thing. And ... that is how grounds were prepared for the book *Visions of Champaklal*. From Mumbai Roshanben sent a couple of interpretations to Amal Kiran. He obliged and readily suggested corrections and modifications to these interpretations and later the same process was followed for all other interpretations too. During my subsequent visit to Pondicherry, I first met Amal Kiran. I found him simple and humble to a fault. Such was his charm that I was utterly captivated by him. He discussed the subject matter of this book with us freely and spontaneously during the many sittings we had with him later on. The next day, I was introduced to Champaklal — that was my first meeting with him. His face was bright and he gave me a long look with his deep and penetrative eyes. After reading what we had written about his visions and hearing what we proposed to do, he readily agreed that we publish a book entitled *Visions of Champaklal*.

A few months later the entire manuscript of the book was ready and we started having daily sittings with him in his room in the Ashram adjacent to Sri Aurobindo's room. From morning till late in the evening, we read every page of the manuscript with him. He examined the entire draft of the manuscript with the intensity of a perfectionist and suggested or made changes to ensure accuracy. These were my initial contacts with him. It turned out to be very interesting for me as during the same period I was reading a book in Gujarati *Champaklalna Sansmarano* containing reminiscences of Champaklal. I could learn many things from these revelations by Champaklal. I could see that each wrinkle, each line on his face had its own story; almost every time his eyes flickered, he remembered the days gone by, his childhood, how he disliked academics, his experiences with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their ways of doing things, how they worked with others and helped them develop the right attitude for work and so on.

All these recollections by Champaklal form a major part of the current, the third edition of a book in English *Champaklal Speaks* published this year. It is a revised and enlarged version of the previous edition. Turning the pages of this book, some readers might think it is Champaklal's biography. No, it is much more than that. It crystallizes an epoch through the narrations and recollections of Champaklal, an era during which our Ashram was founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and grew and developed in their physical presence. It is not of a philosophical-enquiry type and is best enjoyed when one reads in empathy.



steeped in bhakti

Do these recollections of the past, devoid of any erudite discourse for the intellectuals, have any relevance for this age? My answer is that these can provide enlightenment for all, whether one is a developing sadhak or a yogi or an uninitiate. For a developing, aspiring sadhak Champaklal's life has plenty to say: be humble, harmless, unpretentious, serve your master in true obedience, know the weaknesses in one's own nature, be honest about them and learn to accept one's mistakes, pay attention to the smallest detail even in physical work. The recollections reveal many such attributes and their practice in day to day life, both individual and collective. Champaklal says our masters were what they taught us, "Sri Aurobindo is a living example of complete surrender. The Mother is a living example of perfect service to the Lord." (*Champaklal Speaks*, p.39) These words can inspire even a yogi. For anyone in any field of work Champaklal's life has a lot to offer. One can easily see that Champaklal did nothing that others did not do, he simply did it better

under the Mother's guidance. Further — aspire and set life's goals big, actualize yourself to attempt the difficult, work hard for it, do your best and enjoy the work and through work discover your potential, your true self. Are these not relevant for one who wants to achieve something in life? Even for a common man, instead of strict religious rituals, Champaklal's life may have something more effective and uplifting.

Faith is a rare gift of God which can form the basis of the relationship between man and God. It is then reflected in man's aspirations, works and behaviour. This is amply shown in Champaklal's life with two clear messages. First, love God instead of fearing God. For him, *bhakti* to the Divine was everything. The second message for a spiritual seeker is, get back the lost childhood. There is something divine in the purity, innocence and simplicity of a child. Champaklal had and was all these. He handed himself over to the Divine and through Their Grace found a way to enlightenment.

Champaklal's recollections cover an entire life in the Ashram from 1920 onwards, the domestic and collective life from the perspective of a *bhakta* and with the privilege of having worked so intimately with the Mother — those magical times and moments that sound like music to the ear.

Champaklal's one hundredth birth anniversary is on February 2, 2003. Let us remember him and resolve to live his motto which was to serve the Divine.

Individually for me, those meetings and sessions I had with the two outstanding personalities, Champaklal and Amal Kiran, have value beyond words, as they were very intimate and deep. They were the first sadhaks from our Ashram whom I had the privilege to meet so closely. It was as if in response to my aspiration the divine architect was shaping my future and laying its foundations. The atmosphere was a rare blend of two; one serious, silent and steeped in *bhakti*, the other full of light and laughter and yet with the heart and soul of a little child. I felt reborn. The experience was self-fulfilling, revitalizing and reassuring about the promise and possibilities of life. It inspired a passionate urge in me to join the mainstream of the Ashram life.

I am grateful to the Divine Mother. It was Her Grace.

— Apurva



simplicity of a child

TENDER CARE

In those days Mother used to give interviews in the mornings in the Darshan room. Sri Aurobindo would be alone in his room but the doors would be closed. After the interviews were over, Mother went to his room and opened the doors. Only then would Sri Aurobindo come out.

Except on Darshan days, the sofa on which the Darshan photo is now kept was placed in the northeast corner of the room. Mother sat on it during these interviews. After everyone had finished, it was my turn. Mother had asked me to come last, on purpose.

She knew that throughout the day I was occupied with some work or the other and had hardly a few hours of sleep at night. So she told me to come to that room at this time and rest in her presence. When I went to her, she would ask me to lay my head in her lap and rest. And the wonder of it was that almost immediately I would fall asleep. Gently she would lift my head and place it on the Darshan couch on which she had been sitting. At times I would be aware, at times not. After that she would



go to Sri Aurobindo's room, open the doors and return, stop where I was sleeping, caress me tenderly, and then go to her room.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, page 87)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**Sri Aurobindo Reader**

(Published by Penguin Books India)

— Edited by Makarand Paranjape
375 pp., Rs.295.00

ISBN 0-14-027840-0

From the blurb, “As a writer, Sri Aurobindo’s range was staggering; there is hardly a field of human endeavour that escaped his notice. This collection offers a representative sampling of his

writings with selections from most of his major works and areas of interest. The volume begins with the early, often-ignored essays written during the struggle for independence, and traces the development of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophical and religious thought, culminating in the system of Integral Yoga. Also included are some of his poems, letters and aphorisms. Together, they provide an ideal introduction to the complex and brilliant mind of a remarkable yogi and seer-poet.”

With an introduction by the editor tracing Sri Aurobindo’s life and thought.

Reprints from All India Magazine:

Creation and the Creator

112 pp., Rs.35.00, ISBN 81-7060-187-8

Yoga: Its Meaning and Objects

40 pp., Rs.15.00, ISBN 81-7060-188-6

Depression: Its Cause and Cure

56 pp., Rs.15.00

Other Authors**Brahman and Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Approach to the Upanishads**

(Published by Ultra Publications)

— G.N.Sarma

94 pp., Rs.125.00

ISBN 81-87544-05-8

This book “aims at revealing in a lucid and analytical way, the significance and appeal of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit as possibly conceived by Sri Aurobindo according to his principle of Synthesis. ... Its main source is *The Life Divine*, the magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo...”. From the Foreword by V.Sivaramakrishnan, editor of Encyclopedia of Hinduism, “In Dr.Sarma’s view, Sri Aurobindo is more faithful to the Upanishadic texts, which contain the most

authoritative statements on the nature of Brahman, and understands them better in their wholeness than the three Acharyas of the Vedanta, namely Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa.” The volume is “profoundly scholarly” yet at the same time “reader friendly” as the author puts his message across using “examples from real life experiences”.

Breath of Grace

— Editor: M.P.Pandit

348 pp., Rs.150.00

ISBN 81-7509-085-5

From the blurb “This is an invaluable collection of reminiscences of early sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, recording their personal experiences of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s Grace in day-to-day life. It presents a rare and intimate history of the Ashram. The personalities of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stand revealed in all their compassion, love and solicitude for humanity.” The editor asks “how have they (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother) radiated their Light in this obscure and resisting world, how have men and women received their Grace in day-to-day life?” This book is inspired “by a strong need to record this practical side of their Manifestation”.

See review on page 9

Gavesana 2002

— Edited by Arabinda Basu

36 pp., Rs.30.00

Gavesana (quest for light) is an annual with research articles on Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and yoga, as well as selected passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Golconde

— Compiled from various sources

14 pp., Rs.30.00

Golconde, named after the Golconda fort of Hyderabad, is a dormitory for disciples of Sri Aurobindo. This unique, naturally cooled structure was designed by three architects: Raymond, Sammer and Nakashima. Construction started in 1937 and was almost completed by 1948. This book traces the history, design, construction, materials and architectural features of Golconde, with supporting photographs, sketches, and detailed plans.

Renowned architect Charles Correa has said, “Golconde is the finest example of modern functional architecture built in India in the pre-independence period.”



The Mother about Golconde

“Golconde is not a guest house. It is a dormitory (dortoir) in which those who reside there can meditate and do their sadhana in beautiful surroundings, in very fine rooms and with many of the little daily jobs done for them, to keep them more free for their sadhana ... In the old days, the Rishis used to live in the mountains and their disciples lived in caves in these mountains. Golconde is the modern equivalent of the caves for the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.”

The Mother : The Divine Shakti

(Published by Rupa and Co.)

— Georges Van Vrekhem

78 pp., Rs.95.00

A brief biography of the Mother from Rupa's Charitavali Series, with numerous photographs. From the blurb, “Aravinda Ghose, born in Bengal, assimilated the spirit of the West in England; Mirra Alfassa, born in France, came to live in India. As Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, they incorporated the essence of the global spirit. Together, they created a vision and worked out the foundations of a spiritual revolution that reaches far into the future.”

Printed on art paper.



Patterns of the Present

From the Perspective of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

(Published by Rupa and Co.)

— Georges Van Vrekhem

238 pp., Rs.150.00

ISBN 81-7167-768-1

In this account “the author puts the present situation of humanity in the perspective of the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The

result is a positive interpretation of the global situation. The meaning of history, the globalisation of our planet, the values represented by East and West, their meeting and reciprocal fertilisation, the future evolution of mankind — all these topics and more are presented here ...”. Sri Aurobindo spoke of three kinds of revolutions — the material, the moral and intellectual, and the spiritual. The author states that the spiritual revolution is now underway: “it is what is happening all around us, everywhere. Since 1956 it cannot but be underway, for the Supermind, manifested in the earth-consciousness in that year, cannot but be active. Its action, though, has to be prudently dosed not to cause too much damage and

therefore takes some time to be apparent.” He goes on to say, “In 1972 the Mother said that there was ‘a golden Force’ exerting pressure on the Earth, so heavily that catastrophes seemed inevitable. But as this was the supramental Force, harmonious and all-powerful, time and again a solution cropped up in circumstances that seemed miraculous, she added. This is what, at present, is causing our world to spin so wildly and what, at the same time, is ensuring that apparent chaos may lead towards the right outcome. This is a change so great that the way to bring it about must of necessity be drastic and bewildering to the human mind.”

The Renaissance : Notes and Papers

(With Commentaries on Sri Aurobindo's Criticism)

— Goutam Ghosal

72 pp., Rs.65.00

In Sri Aurobindo's words the Renaissance in Europe meant “above all everywhere, the discovery of beauty and joy in every energy of life”. He also referred to it as “Hellenism returning with its strong sense of humanity and things human”. From the Preface, “This study seeks to interpret the views of Sri Aurobindo on the renaissance, on Shakespeare and Marlowe in particular. My own thoughts on them have grown out of the clues offered by the Master.” The chapter headings convey the themes explored in this book: “Elizabethan Drama”, “Hindu Drama”, “Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare”, “Timon of Athens”, “Doctor Faustus”, “Three Layers of the Self”, “Petrarch and Shakespeare” and “The Courtier”.

Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

— Asoka K. Ganguli

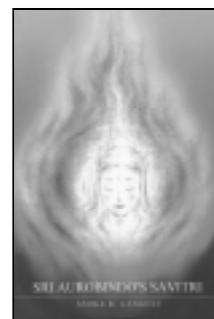
288 pp., Rs.90.00

ISBN 81-7060-183-5

Savitri, the epic of the future, stands on “Sri Aurobindo's new concept of poetry and his Overmind aesthetic”. From the ‘Apologia’, “The present volume deals with Sri Aurobindo's new concept of poetry of the future — its ‘laws’ of composition and the new aesthetic.

It also deals with the form, design and structure and technique of *Savitri* along with its thematic scheme. The purpose is to provide a foothold that the readers might require to have some sort of understanding of *Savitri* as an epic poem.”

“The book has been mainly prepared in view of the need of students and of common readers of poetry, specially of Sri Aurobindo's poetry.”



French**Longs Poèmes de Sri Aurobindo**

— Sri Aurobindo

(Traduits par Raymond Thépot)

257 pages, Rs.200.00

Urvasie, L'Amour et la Mort, Khaled le Marin, Baji Prabhau, Le Rishi, Chitrangada, Uloupie, L'Histoire de Nala, La Descente d'Ahana, Ahana.

Le Yoga Intégral

L'enseignement de Sri Aurobindo :

Méthode et pratique

— Sri Aurobindo

500 pages, Rs.235.00

ISBN 81-7058-666-6

Cette anthologie est composée de lettres de Sri Aurobindo traitant de divers aspects de son enseignement spirituel et de la méthode de pratique yogique. Les quatre premières parties exposent les fondements philosophiques et psychologiques de son enseignement; les six parties suivantes, sa méthode; la douzième et dernière partie contient des éléments de tous ces aspects.

Sri Aurobindo a donné à son système le nom de "Yoga Intégral" parce qu'il propose:

"une union (yoga) de toutes les parties de notre être avec le Divin, ce qui aura pour effet de transmuter tous ces éléments aujourd'hui discordants en l'harmonie d'une conscience et d'une existence supérieures et divines".

Vers l'Indépendance

Écrits et discours (1906-1910)

— Sri Aurobindo

— Traduction, introduction et notes par Michèle Lupsa

383 pages, Rs.200.00, ISBN 81-5058-676-3

Ces articles et discours, datant de 1906-10, mettent en lumière le rôle de Sri Aurobindo dans la lutte pour l'indépendance de l'Inde.

**Italian**

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*see review on page 13***Gujarati**

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E-mail : sabda@sriaurobindoashram.org

Website: <http://sabda.sriaurobindoashram.org>**ORDERING INFORMATION FOR BOOKS**

- All payments should be sent through bank draft or money order to : SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002.
- Readers in India may add on 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs.30.00 towards postage and packing. For example, for books worth Rs.240.00, the amount to be remitted is Rs.240.00 + Rs.12.00 + Rs.30.00 = Rs.282.00.
- Books are sent by registered post immediately on receipt of the order.

Nagin-bhai Tells Me

(By R.Y.Deshpande; Published by Aurosoorya, Pondicherry; Price Rs.60.00, pp.82)

Nagin Doshi came to Sri Aurobindo at the age of fourteen “for the sake of making a nice long journey” to Pondicherry during his school vacations. However during the month that he spent at the Ashram certain changes were wrought in his being so that, back home at Bhavnagar, Gujarat, he could stay for no



These confidences make up Part I of the book. Part II contains several interesting documents that help us to place Nagin. To the average reader it would definitely serve as an introduction and provide a background to situate the first part. His poems, extracts from his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, a report of his contact with a visionary called Esha, and two testimonials from fellow-sadhaks Kailas Tippesamy and Amal Kiran all serve that purpose.

The first poem given is of particular interest because it seems to bear a connection to the experience of the Supramental Descent on earth, which the Mother had nearly a year after Nagin wrote his poem. Her experience of 29 February 1956 centres around a “golden door which separated the world from the Divine”. The Mother struck the door and smashed it to bits, “the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.” In Nagin’s poem too a golden gate opens in “a movement of light” and “then gushed out air the world had never breathed before”.

Another interesting point in Part II concerns an experience known to most sadhaks, when all progress stops. Amal Kiran in his tribute says that Nagin had “six long years of sadhana-stoppage”. Nagin himself in his comment of 9 February 1995 says “Almost for twenty years, I was not doing anything.” Then on 29 June 1994 he reveals “the last 30-40 years there was really no sadhana.” Amidst this juggling of figures is there any lurking figure of despair or hopelessness? Has the barren stretch broken the camel’s back? Not a whimper. And indeed, no time for all that, for “The work is going on now.”

And that is the whole thrust of the booklet. It stands as a testimony to the ongoing experiment of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in man. As Deshpande says, “what we see in it is the work the Master and the Mother do in each prepared soul of theirs.”

— Sunam Mukherjee

Of Another Dimension

(By Tarun Banerjee; Published by Tarun Banerjee, Pondicherry; Price Rs.50.00, pp.64)

Tarun-da’s book *Of Another Dimension* came as a happy surprise. In spite of having been a teacher for so long in the Ashram School there is no attempt to be didactic. On the contrary, he *lives* every moment of life depicted in his book.

Yet there is a clear message. And the message is clothed in such extraordinary detail that it sounds *real* and is not a mere intellectual statement. Neither is it beyond our reach, we who go on quoting ceaselessly “the supramental message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother” without really *feeling* it. Nor does it ever fall below our dignity. For example, the first story *The Heart of Love and the Hand of Might* touches that most “reprehensible topic” called Love *without being at all sentimental*. Yet it is brimming with emotion; in fact, it is all feeling and emotion, as if the events in the story were the consequences of this emotion and not the other way round. It reads like a modern day fairy tale and is the best piece of the book. The memoir of his first meeting with the Mother in 1953 on a rainy Christ-



mas evening, with the small children shivering while the Mother is distributing Christmas gifts, is another superb piece. The art of storytelling has converged with the magic moments of devotion. The *Experience* is yet another eye-opener to the occult realms that constantly surround us but mostly remain invisible to our physical eyes. Tarun-da seems to have definitely imbibed something from his two grandparents, Dr. Babu (Upendranath Bannerji) and Jaya Devi, who were among the twenty-four disciples present in the Ashram on the Siddhi Day of 24 November 1926.

My only complaint is that the book is too slim, only 60 pages, out of which again the two *travels* to Gingee didn’t draw my attention. Then it makes the serious mistake of trying to cater to too many tastes — *Vision, Travels, Memoirs, Experiences, Short Stories* — and gives us a nibble of everything without satisfying the appetite. I would have wished for fewer categories with a more ample sweep, say about 150 pages of *Short Stories* and *Memoirs*. The cover page is well designed. We seem to be at least emerging from an era of unimaginative getups. The price is Rs.50 only and has been deliberately kept low to meet the bare cost of printing.

— Raman Reddy

ESSENTIAL READING

Breath of Grace

(Edited by M.P.Pandit; Published by Dipti Publications; Price Rs.150.00, pp 348)

In recent years, there has been a welcome interest in the early years of Ashram Life. There have been special issues of Ashram journals dealing with this important theme. A photography exhibition in the Ashram has also brought to lime-light, probably for the first time, an ensemble of extremely rare photographs dating back to this period.

Collectively, these efforts, mounted by the initiative of different individuals, have kindled a new interest in this era, often described as the golden age in the Ashram history.

This has served several purposes: a look back at the Ashram's past for inspiration and rededication to the ideal, a homage to the memory of the extraordinary group of dedicated seekers, an essential education for the younger generation about the spiritual history, and above all the answer to a paramount need to immerse ourselves in the grace of the Master and the Mother. Clearly their presence permeates every single account of this volume.

In the wake of these developments, we are fortunate now in having a new edition of an excellent period history by one of the senior Sadhaks of the Ashram, the late M.P. Pandit. It will be hard to recall the various contributions Panditji made over the years for the Divine cause in the Ashram and outside. He lived in the Ashram for over fifty years in an exemplary manner, a greater part of which was spent as the Mother's secretary. He was also a professor at the SAICE. His commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads, occultism, psychology and yoga in the light of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy and practice have greatly helped to ensure a wider dissemination of the Mother and the Master.

In the present book, which I consider as one of the most outstanding in its category, Panditji has commendably



brought together sixteen personal narratives of early Sadhaks and Sadhikas. In doing so, he has rendered a signal service to the Ashram as a community. The book also shows his great devotion to his Guru, marking a lasting contribution to the future generations.

As Panditji rightly informs us in the preface while underlying his basic aim in the book, there exist very few accounts as to how the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's writings and talks have radiated their light in this obscure and resisting world and how men and women have received "their grace in day-to-day life".

This collection offers a rare glimpse into an extraordinary chapter of Ashram's history. As one goes through this book, one is struck by the depth of vision, the spirit of total surrender to the Guru, dedication to the cause, attention to the smallest details of day-to-day living.

Thus, the volume operates primarily at two levels: a record of yoga along with glimpses into the inner world, and secondly a fascinating account of day-to-day life in a spiritual community.

The next remarkable aspect of the collection is the great variety of personality types that we find in the book. While all focus on their relationship with the Gurus, they bring with them an extraordinary variety in terms of their upbringing, education, initiation and maturation. These are Bengalis, Gujaratis, Telugus, Tamils and others who come from unequal socio-cultural background. But this fact is no hindrance to a life of spiritual quest.

This collection offers a rare glimpse into an extraordinary chapter of Ashram's history... one is struck by the depth of vision, the spirit of total surrender to the Guru...

The record of their proximity to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo elevates even an ordinary reader to a state of elevated consciousness, such is the charged atmosphere underlying the texts. Each speaks with honesty and transparency. An overall spirit of humility marks the account of each individual seeker. Diaries and notes are joyfully kept as a record of inner life. No part of the day or night is ignored as unworthy of attention. There are reproductions of conversations and letters exchanged with the Mother and the Master. Irrespective of the length of the narrative, each contributor brings in a unique perspective, a note that adds to the overall beauty of the symphony.

With Ganpatram, we see a simple child whose obsession with Pranayam and a near death experience saves him from the clutches of a worldly father. Similarly, K chooses to write about himself as an observer in the third person, a story of how “Grace comes to the seeker”. Kanailal Ganguly’s arrival at Pondicherry is described with wit and humor. Similarly, Kodandarama Rao recalls that Sri Aurobindo’s way of judging a person was unique: he never asked anyone regarding his parentage, antecedents etc. His way of knowing was by identity. Others like Sahana Devi and Mrutyunjy speak of unique Ashram institutions like the Soup ceremony, Pranam and many instances of Mother’s infinite grace. Romen Palit offers recollections of his life as one of the first children to come into the fold of the Ashram. The story of his training in the hands of the Mother provides a priceless glimpse into her personality.

ST, likewise, speaks of his occult and mystical experience. Shanti Doshi remembers the special gesture of Sri

Aurobindo at the time of the Pranam. His declaration to the Mother: “I do not want to be a yogi, I want to be a child” is most memorable. Poojalal’s poignant account about the surrender of Bushy the cat, and the story of the sparrow that alights on Sri Aurobindo’s chair reveal the deep compassion of the Master vis a vis the natural world.

Then there are the minute details of day-to-day life: the meaning and relevance of horoscope, the merits of keeping a file, the purpose of writing a book and the ethics of receiving a gift in spiritual life. All are taken up by the seekers. And all questions receive patient, equal and considerate answers from the Gurus.

In the spiritual annals of the Ashram, some books are destined to find a special place. *Breath of Grace*, in my opinion, is one of them.

— Sachidananda Mohanty

Beyond Good and Evil *A Comparative Study of the Moral Philosophies of Nietzsche and Sri Aurobindo*

(By Ranajit Sarkar; Published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education; Price Rs.80.00, pp 187)



All comparisons are odious, more so between Sri Aurobindo and others whatever may be their claim to intellectual fame. The book *Beyond Good and Evil*, a title taken from Nietzsche’s works, highlights and affirms the profundity and supremacy of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy as compared to that of Nietzsche. The author admirably explains the totally different connotations that the title signifies. He says, “The solution of one (Nietzsche) was a drastic denial of the dualism, of the other (Sri Aurobindo) a reconciliation by transcendence.” Nietzsche’s obsession with “will to power” is Asuric in nature whereas Sri Aurobindo’s evolutionary urge for Superhumanity is the inevitable outcome of a process willed by the Divine and not by man.

The author in his introduction admits candidly that

Nietzsche’s influence on Sri Aurobindo is very minimal and there is no comparison whatsoever between the Avatar and the Antichrist. The justification of a comparative study (it is more a study in contrast) stems from the fact that Sri Aurobindo describes Nietzsche as a man with “gleaming intuitions that came marked with the stamp of an absolute truth and sovereignty of Light”. Nietzsche’s vision is a perverted vision, a turbid and distorted vision of a seer who enthrones absolute power for absolute domination and vitalistic self-aggrandisement. This is the ground from which Hitlers are born.

Problems of morality are essentially problems of evil and good. Nietzsche’s castigation of the two moralities, religious and philosophical, the former formulated by Christianity which is his favourite whipping-boy, and the latter as set forth by Socrates is of a piece with some of his thoughts as stated below:

- (i) The moral implications of good and evil must be rejected because they do not allow a human being to become a personality.
- (ii) Life is will to power and there is no such thing as will to life.
- (iii) All moral and ethical values that have been so painstakingly nurtured by religions, especially Christianity, must be mercilessly jet-

tioned in favour of the healthy and strong men brought about by selective breeding or Eugenics. These will be the masters of the future where there will be no God nor the duality of good and evil.

- (iv) A new set of values must be established by revaluation which is first an inversion of all the values of Life where the “Self” came first, a thing unstable and flexibly determined by its deeds which now gains predominance over “Self”. These deeds are shorn of all moral values and solely determined by the perfectly effective application of will, a will to power. Since there is no Divine or God there is no Divine Will that man has to obey. It is his sole personal will initiating and performing action for which he has no responsibility. The very willing liberates him from the thralldom of old values.
- (v) The gifted man or Superman who has will to power will, in the course of evolution, overcome other men but this is not the purpose of evolution. It is the process itself which will “by chance” develop the Superman.

These are some startling ideas that Nietzsche propounds and the author in his scholarly and brilliant fashion sets Sri Aurobindo’s views in juxtaposition as well as in opposition to the Nietzschean theories which sometimes pale into insignificance before the brilliance, comprehensiveness, and unity of vision of Sri Aurobindo. The author has devoted many pages to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy to bring out the inadequacy of Nietzsche’s vision of the Superman and they should not be overlooked as *déjà vu* but must be looked upon as the essential elements of this venture of comparison and contrast.

In the last two chapters before the conclusion the author brings out the utterly irreconcilable differences between the conceptions of Nietzsche and Sri Aurobindo vis-à-vis Evolution and the evolutionary goal. The shockingly irrational idea of Nietzsche about absolute fatalism causing eternal return without change under a compulsion over which one has no control is set against the Aurobindonian view of Evolution which presupposes involution of Satchidananda and the subsequent evolution

which is a predetermined process by which heightening, widening and transformation of Consciousness is achieved. Nietzsche does not envisage any issue or goal for evolution unlike Sri Aurobindo who emphatically asserts the inevitability of the emergence of the “Superman”, a spiritual being, naturally divine, transcending good and evil, a part of a Gnostic society where harmony is the keynote. Witness the stark contrast with the “Superman” of Nietzsche, a glorified vital man, lording his power over others, eternalising the dichotomy of master-morality and slave-morality, even not hesitating to mercilessly cut down anyone daring to contend with him without any moral qualm or scruples and the contrast is complete.

As a fitting finale to his scholarly exposition, the author in his concluding chapter “Eugenics or Yoga” marshals enough facts to acquaint the readers with the subtleties and niceties of modern evolutionary theories with genetics as one of its cornerstones which Nietzsche accepted to formulate his idea of emergence of the “Superman” liberated from the “chiaroscuro” of the dualities (good and evil, truth and falsehood, etc.) and living an amoral life of dominance of the lesser mortals. He then gives a sumptuous account of Aurobindonian theory of

Evolution which is Yoga of man or Yoga of Nature culminating in the embracing and transforming of the physical life and revealing the inner Godhead in all its plenary effulgence as the Ishwara, Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent.

This book will leave an atheist profoundly disturbed and shaken while the theist will be again reassured about the eternal good triumphing over evil...

This is an eminently readable and reasonably priced book and the author must be congratulated for adding to the existing literature of comparative study of Sri Aurobindo’s thought with that of eminent philosophers of both East and West. This book will leave an atheist profoundly disturbed and shaken while the theist will be again reassured about the eternal good triumphing over evil, for the Superman of Nietzsche, despite his “deification”, is an Asura and his destruction an inevitability guaranteed by the Supreme Lord.

Though the author has thoughtfully included notes and references, an index would have enhanced the value of the book.

— K. Balasubramaniam

Perspectives of Savitri

— Volume 2

(Essays by various authors; Edited by R.Y.Deshpande; Published by Aurobharati Trust, Pondicherry; Price Rs.300.00, 605 pp.)



The publication of the second volume of the *Perspectives of Savitri* brings to completion the intention of its editor — i.e. to collect representative samples of the variety of writing to date on the subject of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, so as to provide a foundation for future studies. *Savitri*, which many see as Sri Aurobindo's message and expressive legacy to humankind is a quarry of infinite riches, whose surface only we have so far excavated. It is a truth pertaining to all of Sri Aurobindo's writing that it discloses only as much of itself as the limit of our present consciousness. But its invisible action goes far beyond this disclosure to our understanding. It draws us from the horizon and makes us grow. With our growth it grows. Of all Sri Aurobindo's writing, this power is perhaps most manifest in *Savitri*. So what ultimate utility is there to our apologetic or interpretative attempts? For one (as offered in my review of the first volume), these attempts establish a variety of contexts, each bringing into focus one or more layer(s) of the multi-dimensional holographic reality of *Savitri*, so as to initiate an integral relationship with the epic. A collection of such approaches establishes a topography of on-ramps facilitating adequate entries for personal journeys of the future. Adapting a beautiful metaphor from the Maharashtran saint-poet Jnaneshwar, the editor offers another justification to these perspectives. In his words, "we are like a bird that can hardly hold in its beak any quantity of the water of a vast sunlit lake by whose side it builds its tiny nest. Yet whatever is there in that little bird's bill is that lake's own wonderment. Such only can be the glad merit of a collection of works being presented in two volumes with some fifty and odd articles in it."¹

If the first volume of the set, with the majority of its articles written by "first generation authors ... many of [whom] came directly in contact with Sri Aurobindo", established a high standard of excellence, the present volume, consisting mostly of essays by contemporaries, very successfully continues that tradition. Even in terms of content, the editor's selection reveals a remarkable paral-

lelism between themes and approaches of the two volumes, but devoid of any repetition. If the essays in the first volume highlighted general approaches to spiritual, occult, poetic or autobiographical aspects of the epic, the present volume continues these approaches at a more focused and detailed level of engagement, opening up new possibilities. These essays are a bright testimony to the continuing expansion of consciousness inspired and effected by the visible and invisible action of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and particularly of *Savitri* itself as the "sun-word", the living revelatory word-body of the future manifestation.

The editor's arrangement of articles in this volume is also designed to spark comparisons and parallels with the earlier set. Corresponding to Sri Aurobindo's letters to Amal and the Mother's conversation with Mona Sarkar, the present volume opens with Huta's record of her work with the Mother to contact and express the realities of *Savitri* through painting; and Shyam Sundar's exchanges with the Mother on the esoteric significance of specific lines of the epic. Many have by now seen Huta's paintings, but to read of the Mother's guidance and action in explaining *Savitri*'s lines and passages, not only in words, but through experience, is to put ourselves in contact, even now, with Her supreme power to reveal.

Again, corresponding in the first volume with Nirodbaran's background to the composition of *Savitri* and his scribal role in its final phases, we have here Richard Hartz's essay on the Genesis of *Savitri*. As a member of the Sri Aurobindo Archives, Richard has worked with all the various manuscripts of *Savitri* for several years now and his penetrating ability to relate chronology to contextual meaning has found commendable ongoing expression in his articles on the Composition of *Savitri* serialized in *Mother India*. As an example of his wide-ranging insight, in this essay, after touching on a number of developmental issues, he outlines the semantic mutations of the *Savitri* symbol in terms of the four ages or *yugas* as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*. He then relates these to the development of the symbol in Sri Aurobindo's own conception, culminating in the all-inclusive version we have at present. In his words, in the final version, "Sri Aurobindo gave it an interpretation that overleaps, perhaps by centuries, the stage of development achieved by the collective mind. At the same time, his synthesis includes elements from most of the previous periods: the Vedic symbolism, the strength of character of Vyasa's hero-

¹ *Perspectives of Savitri II, lxiv.*

ine, the individualistic spirit of revolt, and an intimately subjective handling of the human aspects of the story.”

In my review of the first volume, I had drawn attention to Madhusudan Reddy’s exposition of Savitri’s yoga as the rare inner record of the Mother’s avatic self-revelation and had expressed the hope that a similar exercise relating Aswapati to Sri Aurobindo may be presented in the second volume. This expectation has been amply fulfilled. Mangesh Nadkarni’s overview of Aswapati’s travels up the ladder of existence offers glimpses of the esoteric steps of Sri Aurobindo’s own journey. But even more directly, Georges van Vrekhem’s article unveils the identity between Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati and makes a forceful and persuasive case against the neglect of this equivalence as a primary understanding of the epic. In addition, Ananda Reddy concludes his outline of the inner significance of the poem by equating the Mother with Savitri and Sri Aurobindo with Satyavan, “the avatar, the earth’s Jiva, the spirit incarnated in Matter.”²

As in the previous volume, the remaining articles can be divided into those dealing with spiritual aspects and those with poetic analyses, though again, as before, these two aspects are not easily separable. As mentioned earlier, the spiritual approaches in this volume tend towards a greater specificity when compared to the necessary broadness of structural or sequential elucidation in the first volume. Even when the poem as a whole is taken for consideration, it is specialized features that are brought to our attention. An example par excellence of this is Jugal Kishore Mukherjee’s study of the Ascent of Sight in *Savitri*.

Thought is known to be an articulation of sight to the overhead experience and by this reckoning it may be said that the entire poem is the word-body of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual seeing,

pashyanti vak. But aside from this, the epic itself contains a variety of lines characterizing sight from different planes of consciousness. Jugal Kishore Mukherjee (who has also

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published an enlarged version of this essay in the form of an independent monologue) tries to isolate here instances of sight which correspond to the ascending planes of consciousness belonging to the spiritual mind and beyond. Drawing on Sri Aurobindo’s other writings as support for his identifications, he provides us with convincing mantric pointers for an evolutionary progression towards future sight.

Devan Nair’s eloquent consideration of the epic identifies instead its central core and message to be the irresistible and invincible power of Divine Love embodied in Savitri and indeed, in the Mother. Knowing the story-line, such a conclusion might seem obvious, were it not for the fact that the author makes forcefully alive for us the fact that the Divine Love embodied as Savitri, as the Divine Mother is present before us and for all time as Sri Aurobindo’s mantric poem. Daniel Albuquerque’s erudite and perceptive article likewise utilizes the broad canvas of *Savitri* to draw his philosophical conclusions on a conscious life seen through the interplay of time and eternity and of choice and fate.

But if some of these authors have tried to extract specialized themes from a general consideration of the epic, a number of others have narrowed their attention to specific cantos or passages, loaded with esoteric significance. The editor, R. Y. Deshpande, isolates a critical moment in Savitri’s occult struggle with Death — a moment of inner withdrawal when Savitri retires

In a deep room in meditation’s house.

.....

Where burns for the high house-lord and his mate
The homestead’s sentinel and witness fire
From which the altars of the gods are lit.³

This movement on Savitri’s part brings about an abrupt reversal of relative positions:

The mortal led, the god and spirit obeyed
And she behind was leader of their march
And they in front were followers of her will.⁴

Deshpande’s fascinating reflections on Savitri’s “House of Meditation” — what is it, who is the house-lord and who his mate and what is meant by the witness fire and the altar of the gods — uncover Vedic depths to reveal the formidable yogic power coded into Sri Aurobindo’s brief description.

Likewise, M.V. Sitaraman turns his attention to Canto

² *Ibid.* pp. 151-2.; ³ *Savitri*, p. 639, quoted in *Perspectives*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 97; ⁴ *Ibid.*

Seven in Book VII of the epic. This is the book of Savitri's yoga, where after the realization of her soul, she prepares herself for the two further transformations, the universal and the supramental. She widens into the cosmic consciousness and bears the obliteration of her personal existence on the threshold of the Transcendent. With surcharged illumined prose, Sitaraman elaborates on the ontological and functional condition of this Nirvana — the experience and its necessity in dissolving the ego and suspending the habitual workings of the instruments of nature, that the supreme Shakti, the transcendental Divine Mother who is Savitri's origin, may take full possession of her being and nature. Interspersing the culminating paragraphs of his essay with passages from the canto and excerpts out of Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* and the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*, Sitaraman presents us with a self-evident collage that establishes the identity of Savitri's transfiguration in this canto with the Mother's own experience and self-manifestation.

My own contribution to this volume follows a similar pattern of attempting to extract specific significance from a single canto — in this case, Canto Two of Book II, Aswapati's journey into the Kingdom of Subtle Matter. As in the Gita, each canto of *Savitri* may be seen as presenting us with a different yoga, and I have tried to show how in this canto the yoga in question is the yoga of artistic creation, *shilpa-yoga*. Sri Aurobindo takes up the variety of philosophical approaches, both western and Indian, to the question of the creative act and points the way to a future art and I have attempted to unravel this thread in the form of western and Indian histories of the philosophy of creative representation.

The categories of east and west are seamlessly included and transcended in Sri Aurobindo and a number of essays in this volume provide pointers to this fact. *Savitri* carries within its symphonic swell echoes from a variety of cultures and spiritual traditions, integrated and transformed by the magician's creative wand; but to the receptive ear, these echoes invite comparison with their sources and reveal the subtle alchemy which has lifted them into a higher order and wholeness. *Savitri* is rich with mystic metaphors and esoteric significances from the Bible and K.B. Sitaramayya studies the deep allusions of the epic from this perspective. At the same time, as a work cen-

trally about the Divine Shakti, the Devi and Her supreme power of transformation, can it not be seen as a Devikavyam, falling into the tradition of Indian Tantric literature? Prema Nandakumar draws on this correspondence for her article. A number of those attentive to the literary merits of *Savitri*, also take their subjective positions in different climes and times to view the epic. An early appraisal of *Savitri* by Lotika Ghosh, daughter of Manomohan and Sri Aurobindo's niece, dwells on the influence of Greek literature on Sri Aurobindo and concludes with the epic's thematic correspondence with Dante of the Italian Renaissance. P. Marudanayagam takes the comparison further back in time and space to Lucretius, Roman poet of the 1st c. BCE. In contrast, Ranajit Sarkar provides a brilliant and wide-ranging study of *Savitri* in relation to the tradition of Sanskrit literature, isolating the three poets, Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa for comparison. He concludes with some enlightening comments on the Overmind aesthesis and the mantra.

A number of authors take the stylistic and symbolic aspects of *Savitri* for their points of application. While Gautam Ghosal deals with general issues of style in the poem, William Flick conducts a detailed formalist analysis of the first canto, identifying three lines of contrasting imagery which run through it and a structure of enunciation furthering a succession of thematic units. Such an analysis heightens and details our appreciation of the dynamics through which the unfoldment of the poem becomes effective. But if style relates to functionality, image or symbol relates more intimately to the essence or being of the epic. After all, the epic itself establishes its identity, at the very outset, as a symbol. Here, Asoka Ganguli's study of symbolism in *Savitri* isolates different image-units through

which symbols of varied gravity operate. Thus phrases, lines or entire passages may code symbols. Long passages may sometimes sustain a single image, as for instance in the justly celebrated symbol of the sailor in Canto Four of Book I, or a sequence of images may be used to elaborate a single symbol, as in the example of dawn in the first canto. This fractal nature of the symbol, introduced by Asoka Ganguli, can be further extended to apply to entire cantos and finally, to the entire epic, which, as mentioned above, Sri Aurobindo identifies as a symbol.

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Of cantos, it is undoubtedly the first in the poem which has attracted the most attention. In the first volume, we had stalwarts like Nolini Kanta Gupta and M.P. Pandit share their interpretations of this canto. But can this canto specifically or symbols in *Savitri* generally, be exhausted with singular explanations? The multi-layered quality of symbolism in *Savitri* is one of its characteristic delights and challenges, arising from the global complexity of the overmental expression. In this volume, Sonia Dyne, for example, wonderfully evokes the divine presences of the early cantos, specially the first, as initiatory means towards a personal spiritual journey. Shradhdhan identifies this polysemy as the norm of Sri Aurobindo's symbolism in the first canto, enumerating its significances. The significant movements of the first half of Canto One, comprising the symbol Dawn are, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind the 'day' of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out."⁵ But the Dawn is also the dawn of the day that Satyavan will die, it is the dawn common to the temple-life of India for millennia, it is the Vedic dawn, which ever repeats with the splendid annihilation of the night by the sun, it is the re-awakening or renewal of consciousness on an individual plane, it is "the condition of the earth before the coming of the Ava-

tar — the embodied Dawn who can illumine mankind for a brief 'Hour of God' during which is almost disclosed 'the epiphany of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;' but 'only a little the God-light can stay.' After the divine messenger has passed, we are left to face 'the common light of earthly day.' Or the whole incident of Savitri's incarnation and her debate with and triumph over Death can be seen as just such a 'splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light' at a very early point in human development, leaving a seed to be worked out in the 'day of ordinary human development'.⁶ The multi-dimensionality and fractality of the symbol boggles and silences the thinking mind.

The contents of Volume Two have even more riches to offer. Taken with its companion volume, it brings together a wealth of research, is a wonderful tribute to the inexhaustible inspiration of *Savitri* and truly fulfils its editor's intention of laying soundly a "foundation to launch on specialized themes in future."⁷

— Debashish Banerjee

⁵ *excerpted from a letter to K.D. Sethna, quoted in Perspectives, Op. Cit., p. 378*

⁶ *Ibid. pp. 378-9.*

⁷ *Ibid., lxx*

THE DIVINE BEING

The supreme being of the Divine is beyond manifestation: the true sempiternal image of him is not revealed in matter, nor is it seized by life, nor is it cognisable by mind, *acintya-rupa, avyaktamuti*. What we see is only a self-created form, *rupa*, not the eternal form of the Divinity, *sva-rupa*. There is someone or there is something that is other than the universe, inexpressible, unimaginable, an ineffably infinite Godhead beyond anything that our largest or subtlest conceptions of infinity can shadow. All this weft of things to which we give the name of universe, all this immense sum of motion to which we can fix no limits and vainly seek in its forms and movements for any stabler reality, any status, level and point of cosmic leverage, has been spun out, shaped, extended by this highest Infinite, founded upon this ineffable supracosmic Mystery. It is founded upon a self-formulation which is itself

unmanifest and unthinkable. All this mass of becomings always changing and in motion, all these creatures, existences, things, breathing and living forms cannot contain him either in their sum or in their separate existence. He is not in them; it is not in them or by them that he lives, moves or has his being,—God is not the Becoming. It is they that are in him, it is they that live and move in him and draw their truth from him; they are his becomings, he is their being.* In the unthinkable timeless and spaceless infinity of his existence he has extended this minor phenomenon of a boundless universe in an endless space and time.

Footnote: *matsthDni sarvabhutDni na cDharm eIvavasthitaU.*

— Sri Aurobindo
(*Essays on the Gita, page 311*)

 THE HUMAN – BEARER OF THE GOD CHILD JESUS

The Virgin Birth and the Earliest Christian Tradition

(By K.D.Sethna; Published by The Integral Life Foundation, U.S.A.; Price: Rs. 85.00, pp.92)



The Virgin-Birth doctrine is a much discussed topic among theologians and comparatists of religions. *The Gospel of the Hebrews*, the early Christian Apocryphal book informs us: “The saviour himself saith, ‘Even now my mother the Holy Spirit took me!’” In the fourth century Aphraates of Edessa spoke of a man having god for his father and “The Holy Spirit his mother”. *The Odes of Solomon*, a Jewish Christian work of the second(?) century associates Mary’s virginity with the thesis of a painless birth and a feminine Holy Spirit. The combination of Mary with the Holy Spirit has triggered off new interpretations of the developing doctrine of the Divine Trinity.

Out of the twenty-seven books in the *New Testament*, the gospels of Mathew and Luke were the sole documents to narrate the Virgin Birth. And all the rest, as Father Raymond E.Brown in his scholarly work *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* repeatedly grants, are silent.

The Virginity ascribed to Mary, ‘Mother of God’, as the representative of a creative goddess-force would essentially be symbolic. Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gita* observes: “In the Buddhist legend the name of the mother of Buddha (Mayadevi, also Mahamaya) makes the symbolism clear; in the Christian the symbol seems to have been attached by a familiar mythopoeic process to the actual human mother of Jesus of Nazareth.”

K.D.Sethna, an eminent scholar-poet, has taken up the Virgin Birth of Jesus for the subject matter of his study in this scholarly work under review. “By Virgin Birth”, writes the author K.D.Sethna, “we must take care

not to involve the manner in which Orthodox Christians understand Mary’s child to have emerged from her womb: that is to say, with the physiological sign of virginity still present — an unruptured hymen — and with no pain of labour. We must focus simply on the nature of the conception by which that child is said to have been born virginally: in other words, the birth took place from a conception for which no male agent was responsible. The more correct term, therefore, would be the virginal conception of Jesus. We are retaining the other for our title because of its historical and current use, but it is meant to convey that Jesus came out of Mary’s body in whatever manner as the result of her previously conceiving him in a state of virginity without the sex act.”

The purpose of Sethna’s study is to find if the basic Christian tradition itself affords ground for belief in such a beginning of life as these documents describe for their Messiah. The book is an adventure of exploration for genuine evidence from the *New Testament* and from the background to it of the earliest Christianity. It is not a ‘willing to wound and yet afraid to strike’ thesis. Jesus’s status as an Incarnation is not called into question at all. What is critically examined from a certain viewpoint is merely the kind of nativity Christendom associates with him.

The book is an adventure of exploration for genuine evidence from the New Testament and from the background to it of the earliest Christianity.

No doubt, the subject is too sacred to be touched. And so, Sethna chose to look at it in some detail through the eyes of a modern scholar, Father Raymond E.Brown, S.S, for the reason that he has given with an exemplary open mind an admirably many-sided treatment to the problem. This is not to say that Sethna, an equally eminent scholar,

has completely relied on Brown’s wide knowledge. Whenever Brown is perceived to have gone astray Sethna has essayed some corrective comments of his own. At the end of the study a few observations are made on the original religious motif at work, its ultimate significance in a spiritual view of reality, its true nature in the eyes of India’s great modern Seer Sri Aurobindo and the form under which it may finally function.

— P.Raja

Great Sir and the Heaven Lady

(By Maggi Lidchi-Grassi;
Published by Writers Workshop;
Price Rs.350.00 [hard cover],
241 pp.)



Great Sir and the Heaven Lady tells the true story of John Kelly, an 18 year old American who found himself catapulted into the thick of the Allied offensive in World War II. A sensitive young man, he is quite unprepared for the grisly conditions at the warfront. His whole world falls to pieces within hours of joining active service. The book is a powerful portrayal of the despair confusion helplessness sordidness of war.

But when we get past the circumstantial trappings what is left is the individual soul in its journey. It is this journey, full of obstacles, progress alternating with slidings back, that is described so vividly in *Great Sir*. Kelly has to make a certain progress and so the stage is set for him to get there. Throwing him into the war serves the purpose of making him quest after the meaning of human life and civilisation. Shock after shock benumb his mind so that his other faculties may get a chance to surface. Then he is taught the means of right action: a silent, receptive mind and an implicit obedience to instructions from within.

The guidance which he needs is sometimes given to him through other people, possibly because his opening is not yet enough for him to receive it directly. Thus, a Polish Colonel encountered in a concentration camp becomes his guide, synthesising his experiences into a system and showing him the next step, before disappearing from the scene. His girlfriend is given the clarity of mind to perceive and bring home to him the fact that in the quest on which he is launched it is impossible to retain any "private sectors", the whole of life must be dedicated. Even more importantly, she allows him to see that in fact he has no choice. He can only obey Great Sir. His grandmother in Ireland, who has the second sight, pours love into him and tells him that his work lies in the future: "'Tis the future that wants you."

Along with these positive forces the hostile ones also are in play. They cloud his mind with confusion and negative suggestions. Every time he makes some progress their efforts are redoubled. However, eventually he seems to be pulled out of their clutches and the book ends on a positive note. He realises: "There was only one thing to do, to follow the Lady and Great Sir."

The story proceeds parallelly on three planes. These inevitably affect each other and are interlinked but still manage to retain their distinctness. There is the outward action: the vividly sketched fighting and Kelly's fellow soldiers relating to him and to each other. Then comes Kelly's mind: his despair, his aspiration, his hallucination, his experience of Grace. The third level, of which we are given no more than a very occasional glimpse, is Great Sir. And that brings us squarely to the issues with which one is left grappling at the end of the book: Why did Great Sir choose Kelly? What was the scope and magnitude of Great Sir's involvement in the World War? What was Great Sir's agenda once the war was over?

Some inferences may be drawn from the book. Kelly is probably chosen because he is sensitive and had a psychic opening to Great Sir when he was young. Also I dare say that in a situation like World War II Great Sir could not really pick and choose. However deficient the instrument he had to make do.

About the scope and magnitude of Great Sir's involvement we are given three indications. After having a vision of Great Sir and the Heaven Lady in a trench, Kelly overhears the following exchange between two soldiers:



- Did you see that light last night?
- Yeah, I'll say there was something there. There was something there.
- Like someone turned on stage lights and a play was going to begin.
- It was beautiful. I never seen anything like it. It was kinda scary too.
- I thought I was going clean out of my box, but when it went away I wished it would come back.

The second hint we pick up through Kelly's experience while looking at his commanding officer Lieutenant Drummond. He sees in Drummond's eyes the red-gold light

that had pervaded the woods in his vision of the Heaven Lady and Bill, a dead comrade.

The third and most explicit indication we get from Colonel Grissinsky of the Polish Army. He reveals that the Being who inspired him to stay alive and showed him the true meaning of the war named itself Shriarbin.

Now we come to the question of Great Sir's agenda after the war. Kelly rushes out in panic from a celebration of the Allied victory in a nightclub because he sees there the same darkness he had seen in the concentration camp. The spectres dancing in his inner vision tell him: "nothing has changed — we *still* rule here." So the war is not over. By Great Sir's Grace Kelly is taken in his subtle body to view the Lord's experiment: "Once again they looked down at the grey and white houses within which jewelled points of energy began to bud. He knew that men and women were offering their lives to the Force that sought to penetrate the earth." Grissinsky's contribution concerning Great Sir's agenda is sublime: "He wanted the Earth as a new body, an everlasting body."

— Sunam Mukherjee

Special Display at Landmark, Chennai coinciding with Sri Aurobindo's Birth Anniversary on 15th August

In the month of August for about 2 weeks there was a special display of books, CDs and cassettes by and on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, at Landmark, Chennai. Both showrooms of Landmark, Apex at Nungambakkam and at Spencer Plaza on Anna Salai (Mount Road), displayed books and items distributed by SABDA on exclusive and tastefully decorated tables and racks at prominent locations within the showrooms. Large framed photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother formed the backdrop for the display.



This was organised in collaboration with Hindustan Record, the producers of audio CDs and cassettes on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother such as "Four Aspects of the Mother" in the Mother's voice.

The response from the public was encouragingly positive. This arrangement is to be repeated in November. SABDA is grateful to Landmark and Hindustan Record for the help and cooperation extended in this regard and looks forward to more such occasions.