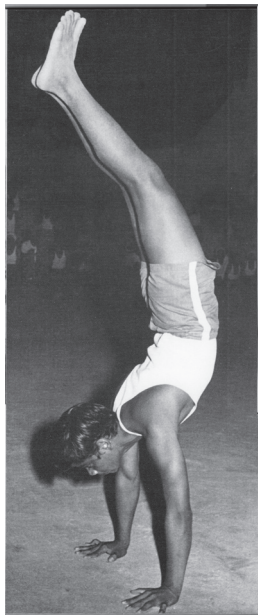


Recent Publications

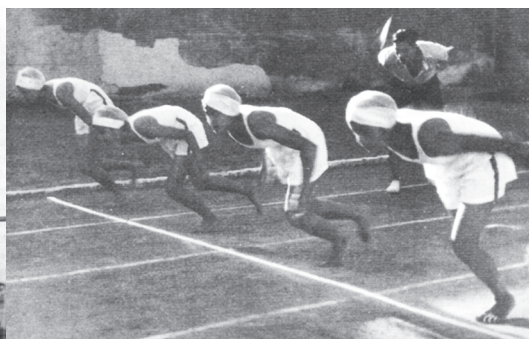
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*Gymnastic Competition
at the Playground, 1950*



High jump at the Tennis Ground, 1949



100 metre sprint at the Sportsground, 1951

The first two books reviewed in this issue mark the 75th anniversary of the start of the Ashram's school, followed soon by organised physical education activities in the Ashram. *Memorable Years with the Mother* is a two-volume photo-narrative, a thorough historical record. *The Mother and Women's Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1946–1958* is a more personal account, filled with lively recollections and anecdotes from those who experienced the early years when the physical education programme was being developed.

Another recent publication marks the 50th anniversary of Auroville's inauguration. The issue concludes with a thoughtful essay on Sri Aurobindo and social reform.

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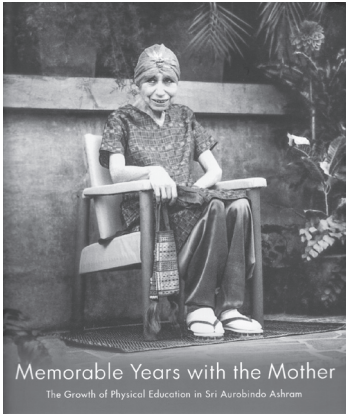
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BOOK REVIEWS



Memorable Years with the Mother

The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

— Namita Sarkar

Publisher: The Golden Chain Fraternity

2 volumes, 432 pp, ISBN: 978-93-87175-00-6, Rs 1450

Size: 21 x 25 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Here is a beautifully illustrated and detailed account of the development and flowering of the Department of Physical Education under the direct impetus, supervision, and guidance of the Mother. Our gratitude to Namita Sarkar for initiating the work and compiling all the material in these two volumes of more than 420 pages, and to all who helped her and participated in this effort. We can feel the Mother's Presence and Power through this collection of photographs as well as experience the

Truth through all She said, wrote, and did. Within these pages we see not only the multitude of activities that comprise our physical education programme but also the individuals, those strong pillars, each one a dedicated, willing, and sincere instrument through which She could work out what was waiting to manifest. For right in the Introduction we read this short remark that rings so true: "The Mother sent forth a Force, an Idea, – there was then the Playground – just a piece of land, some 20m x 50m. That was but the beginning." Truly it is magnificent research and a careful study.

Let us make it clear that this is not just a record of bygone days. Individually and collectively, it will certainly give advice and encouragement to all those who aspire to teach and to learn an ideal physical education. For the instructor or coach has first to learn much and master many things. From concentration to the right attitude in competition, from the question of gender rights to simply learning how to see things from a different and truer state of mind, the information given here is invaluable. There are other books that bring us valuable touches of the Mother's work for physical education in the Ashram. The section titled "Becoming Conscious" in *Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes*, compiled faithfully by Mona Sarkar, gives us glimpses of Her guidance. Tara Jauhar's *Learning with the Mother*, though not so exhaustive, is an important personal record. And most recently, there is Chitra Sen's book *The Mother and Women's Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1946–1958*. Incidentally, I find that *On Education*, Volume 12 of the Collected Works of the Mother, is the most useful guidance from the Mother on physical education, and in fact on all education.

In these modern times, we look always for a picture, recalling subconsciously perhaps the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt when a picture conveyed a word and an experience. And is it not true that a painting, or a picture, or even a symbolic line-drawing can convey more than a host of words? Yes, one can enter into a picture and get the feeling, breathe the atmosphere, and then fathom the meaning of it all. This is what I feel, perhaps because I have lived through the early years of physical education in our Ashram, and the many photographs in this book evoke strong experiences for me.

The first chapter, "The Beginning of the School", sets the mood for the right attitude with this short inspiring message of the Mother: "School is just a preparation to make the students capable of thinking, studying, progressing and becoming intelligent if they can—all that must be done during the *entire life* and not only in school." The Mother shows us the importance of beginning young and without undue interference from parents and teachers. For those aspiring for a future of yoga – "All life is Yoga" – She gives this advice:

If one wants this material life to participate in the divine life, to be the field of action and realisation, it is preferable not to wait until with wear and tear the body becomes sufficiently quiet so as not to obstruct the yoga. It is much better, on the contrary, to take it quite young when it is full of all its energies and can put enough ardour and intensity into its aspiration.

The Playground takes centre stage in both volumes, and rightly so, as the map of a United India rests there on the wall in front of which the Mother took the March Past or sat during classes and meditations. Let us also remember that it was here that She experienced during the meditation on 29 February 1956 the Descent of the Supramental “Light and Force and Consciousness” rushing “down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow”.

I remember when She once walked forward from where She stood, turned, and, observing the map, said something like this: “Look at the left top corner, a lion is guarding India and to the right lower side an elephant stands on guard too. India is well-protected!” Much later, when the French transferred the Pondicherry territories to the Government of India (de facto) on 1 November 1954, She declared Her flag to be “the spiritual flag of India”. Sri Aurobindo had described it earlier in these words: “The blue of the flag is meant to be the colour of Krishna and so represents the spiritual or Divine Consciousness which it is her work to establish so that it may reign upon earth. This is the meaning of the flag used as the Ashram flag, that our work is to bring down this consciousness and make it the leader of the world’s life.”

The care taken of the young children in the Green Group (ages six to thirteen or so) shines through these early pages too. In reply to their prayer when they first received their green shorts in 1949 She said to them: “My little ones, you are the hope, you are the future. Keep always this youth which is the faculty to progress; for you the phrase ‘it is impossible’ will have no meaning.” My own indelible impression of the Mother’s first coming to the Playground is that memorable moment when, alongside Pranab (fondly called Dada) and standing at a prominent spot, She explained that things would now be different. She then distributed a copy of *The Code of Sportmanship* to all of us. This was a text chosen from a book in Pranab’s library and adapted by the Mother. It began thus: “Keep the rules. Keep faith with your comrades. Keep your temper. Keep yourself fit. Keep a stout heart in defeat. Keep your pride under control or in check in victory. Keep a sound soul, clean mind, and a healthy body. Play the game.” This was followed by the right attitudes to be maintained on the field, in school, and in life. Very soon, another small booklet was given to us: *The Ideal Child* (or *What a Child Should Always Remember*). These words too became the guide and ideal to put into practice. The Mother begins Her text with these words: “What a Child Should Always Remember—The necessity of an absolute sincerity. The certitude of Truth’s final victory. The possibility



of constant progress with the will to achieve.” Then, listing twelve qualities, the Mother explains what an ideal child should be: good-tempered, game (acting always to the best of his or her capacity), truthful, patient, enduring, persevering, poised, courageous, cheerful, modest, generous, and lastly, fair and obedient. Much later, while recording this in French, She said: “Childhood is the symbol of the Future and the hope of all the victories to come.”

It is interesting to note that the first issue of the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* (then called *Bulletin of Physical Education*) came out on the Darshan day in February 1949. Each of the four issues published in English and French comes out on a Darshan day. This was indeed a momentous beginning to which the Mother gave, I am sure, the greatest importance, for it became a much-awaited journal for disciples, teachers, and students. When the Mother requested Sri Aurobindo to write an article for the first issue, She Herself translated it into French. Sri Aurobindo wrote seven more articles for the *Bulletin*. They are now available in the book *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*.

The early issues of the *Bulletin* also contain the Mother’s vision and the promise of many changes to come. One striking example, not specifically mentioned in the book but that I would like to share, centres on the Olympic Games symbol with its five interlocking coloured rings. She mentioned that the choice of black for one of the rings was most unfortunate, as well as its position at the centre of the five rings. This is sad, yet it still reflects the lingering condition “of the world’s black chaos and the blindness of those steering humanity’s ship on the obscure sea of ignorance”. She added:

Our hope is that in the future the black ring will be replaced by a white one, when a reversal in the tide of human affairs occurs and the dawn of a new light, the white, brilliant and self-luminous light of the new Consciousness shines in the eyes of those at the helm. Then, facing that sparkling brilliancy, they will maintain the ship’s course towards the Promised Land.

As always, the Mother reminds us that one can find significance in everything if one looks carefully enough at the symbolism and the intrinsic beauty behind it.

In this chapter too, we read about the Mother’s symbol on the flag, on the badge worn by all members of the Physical Education Department, and on the cover of the *Bulletin*. “[It] is a full-blown lotus in gold with two rows of petals (4 inside and 12 outside), exactly in the centre of a square field of silvery blue. This blue is the blue of the Spirit, and the gold is the colour of the Supreme Mother.” The *Bulletin*’s red cover surrounding the symbol “signifies an illumined physical consciousness”. And for those unfamiliar with the meaning of Her symbol: “The central circle represents the Supreme Mother, the Mahashakti. The four central petals are the four aspects of the Mother [Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati]—and the twelve petals, Her twelve attributes.” It was only much later, when Auroville was founded, that She revealed these attributes as “Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, and Peace”.

In days gone by, when girls and women were often treated as inferior to boys and men, the Mother was already firm and categorical: “I have come to break all superstitions and conventions.” In the beginning, and now too till a certain age, boys and girls practise, play, and compete together. I remember running races along with girls in a common competition and being asked to practise wrestling with a girl. In Chapter 21, “Competitions and Tournaments”, it is mentioned that when asked whether it could be announced that a women’s record had been broken, the Mother said, “No! We are not here to break records. Break your own record, not somebody else’s record.” And more explicitly:

We have, I believe, repeated and reiterated that there are no women’s and no men’s records, there are only group records.... You may tell me that some of these groups are exclusively men’s or women’s. I shall answer what I have just said, that unless one comes here very young, it is difficult to change one’s habits and that is what has made this separation necessary—but it is not the ideal. And if we made it a habit to announce

gloriously: “This very remarkable girl has done what no other girl could do before,” oh, la, la, what a fall it would be! Not to mention that this encourages vanity – which is not good – it is also an assertion that this fact is remarkable because it is a girl.

I would like readers to look at the 24 April 1950 Darshan photograph on page 108 and the selected lines from Sri Aurobindo’s epic, *Savitri* (Book II, Canto XIV), since both are exceedingly powerful. Feel the power and tender compassion in this closing line: “Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.” For this dual Power, the Two-in-One, truly sustains all! This brings us to the very crux of the matter: the attitude, consecration, and receptivity required for all physical accomplishment. It is not only physical stamina, determination, and rigorous practice that bring results.

This attitude is brought out clearly in Chapter 13, “Gymnastic Marching”, though having the correct attitude is a constant refrain throughout. Filing silently before the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on 24 April 1950 inspired the elder members to continue marching as a daily exercise. Pranab felt that only marching would be monotonous, so he included some free-hand exercises for the entire body. And the Mother, in Her characteristic manner, wrote out in French the command for each exercise. Each evening, after roughly half an hour of marching by the older



The Mother watching gymnastic marching at the Playground

men (after the usual group activities were over), a short concentration was held in the presence of the Mother, who stood in front of India’s map. Other group members soon asked to join in. I remember that I tried not to miss this. About this group concentration the Mother said:

I take you as you are; each one of you comes saying, “Here we are with our whole day’s activities, we were busy with our body, here it is, we offer to you all our movements, just as they were, just as we are.” And my work is to unify all that, make of it a homogeneous mass and, in answer to this offering (which each one can make in his own way), to open every consciousness, widen the receptivity, make a unity of this receptivity and bring down the Force. So at that moment each one of you, if you are very quiet and attentive, will surely receive something. You will not always be aware of it, but you will receive something.

So often in this book we come across such simple and beautiful words. During the classes the Mother took with the youngest ones in the Guest House at the Playground, She gave short dictations in French. Here is a striking one: “Do not pay attention to the stupidity of others, pay attention to your own.” And truly, there is a child in each of us, I feel, as clearly expressed by Nolini-da:

As soon as we stepped into the Playground, a new atmosphere enveloped us, a new life, full of joy, happiness and delight and freedom. When we used to put on our group uniform, we felt quite different from what we were normally. Old people with their blue shorts in our group, really old people,—they felt very young, youthful and trotted about as if they had left their age behind with all their cares.



Chapter 20 covers some of the later developments in our physical education programme: *malkhamb*^{*}, bodybuilding, weightlifting, and asanas. I was fascinated by the “Indian Pole” or *malkhamb*, and though not so strong or supple as others, it was for me the exact combination needed for developing strength and suppleness. So once, when a few of us who practised after our group activity was over called Vishnu-bhai to come and see our progress, he asked me to show him a figure. Perhaps he chose a pose I had some difficulty with, but when I performed it, I found I could do it effortlessly! This convinced me how helpful even the presence of an accomplished teacher can be.

Volume II begins with Chapter 21, “Competitions and Tournaments”, and we find a facsimile of the Mother’s handwriting where She says something that stands good for all time:

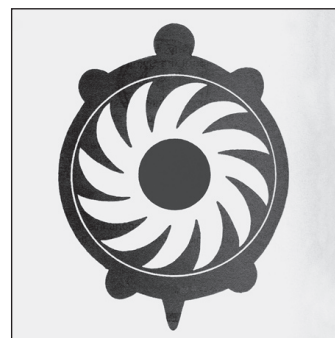
Small and big all participate with the same ardour; but, I must say, not in the spirit of the ordinary competitors. We are not aiming at success – our aim is perfection.

We are not seeking fame or reputation; we want to prepare ourselves for a Divine manifestation. That is why we can boldly say: It is better to be than to seem. We need not appear to be good if our sincerity is perfect. And by perfect sincerity we mean that all our thoughts, feelings, sensations and actions should express nothing but the central Truth of our being.

In this, the longest chapter, we read several interesting examples of the Mother’s way of judging athletic events. First, when during the javelin throw competition there was a very strong headwind, She added five metres to the distance of each competitor. Then again, in a running race, She gave first place to the boy who actually came second, remarking that his attitude was superior to the better runner. I am reminded of my own case when, coming first in a novelty dressing race, the Mother saw my shoelaces tied with only one bow and gave me second place!

When the Mother could no longer attend the competition seasons, She recorded the following message in 1959: “Behind the appearances that the physical eyes can see, there is a reality much more concrete and lasting. It is in this reality that I am with you today and will be during all the athletic season. The force, the power, the light and the consciousness will be in your midst constantly to give to each one, according to his receptivity, the success in his endeavour and the progress which is the crowning result of all sincere effort.”

In this compilation we often see signposts of things to come—for instance, the symbolic tortoise on the championship badge. The Mother made a preliminary sketch for it and later wrote: “The tortoise is the symbol of terrestrial immortality, that is, the immortality of the physical body on this earth. The red centre symbolises the illumined physical and from this radiate the twelve white rays of the integral Light of Truth. The rays are curved to indicate that the Light is dynamic in its nature and its action. The golden colour of the tortoise itself shows that it is the Supramental which supports this terrestrial immortality and which alone can bring about the transformation.”



* *Malkhamb*, meaning *Malla-khamba* or wrestler’s pillar, was conceived as a way to practise before wrestling. It is a smooth, rounded pillar, two to two-and-a-half metres tall and tapering towards the top. One grasps the pole firmly and successively lifts the body to clasp the *malkhamb* with the thighs. It was later systematised as a separate art with several different ways of mounting and difficult balances to perform on the small rounded top.

Yet a physical base is needed to manifest this dynamic Force in action. And we see, through these pages, shining behind the photos and the words, the respect that is given to the various grounds, playing fields, the rooms, and the equipment. All the persons mentioned are important, even the unidentified ones. Did not the Mother write to this effect in different words? “I may not be here, but 50 years or so from now what the children of mine have done will be recognised and this Centre will be recognised the world over.” No one person can claim to have done the work. Each was but an instrument in the hands of a mighty artisan, shaping to perfection the idea put forth by the Divine Mother. We are simply receptacles, opening as much as granted by the Grace, for the Supramental Light prepared by Sri Aurobindo. I am sure that when the very best comes out of an individual or a collective action and endeavour, one wonders whether truly any “I” or “we” have achieved it.

The goal set before us for our work on the body is clearly given by the Mother in numerous messages for the competition seasons and for the 2nd December programmes. I may quote this one, given in 1969 for the competition season, as it is not mentioned in the book. She said:

A new consciousness is at work upon earth to prepare men for a new creation, the superman. For this creation to be possible the substance that constitutes man’s body must undergo a big change. It must become more receptive to the consciousness and more plastic under its working. These are just the qualities that one can acquire through physical education. So if we follow this discipline with such a result in view, we are sure to obtain the most interesting result. My blessings to all for progress and achievement.

Let us now grasp more fully and deeply the message that takes us a step forward. It is the prayer of the cells of the body: “Now that, by the effect of the Grace, we are slowly arising out of inconscience and waking to a conscious life, an ardent prayer rises in us for more light, more consciousness: ‘O Supreme Lord of the universe, we implore Thee, give us the strength and the beauty, the harmonious perfection needed to be Thy divine instruments upon earth.’” This reveals how conscious our very cells can become through continuous and regular physical training with that goal in view. Even then, it is the Grace that gives the sanction.

To conclude, here is the Mother’s reply to the prayer of the Captains’ group in the Playground when they stood before the Mother in their new uniforms. Prominently printed at the beginning of Volume I, it is equally addressed to every sincere aspirant for a divine life on earth:

My children,

We are united towards the same goal and for the same accomplishment—for a work unique and new that the divine Grace has given us to accomplish. I hope that more and more you will understand the exceptional importance of this work and that you will sense in yourselves the sublime joy that the accomplishment will give you.

The divine force is with you—feel its presence and be careful never to betray it.

Feel, wish, act, that you may be new beings for the realisation of a new world and for this my blessings shall always be with you.

Glorious days they were indeed, inspired by Her words to help us establish the right attitude towards physical education. Yet I feel that these volumes, packed with information from the past, should be taken rather as a powerful spur towards an even greater future. May all who aspire individually and collectively for the perfect body absorb the Presence of the Mother radiating from the pictures and Her guidance towards realising a great Ideal.

—Richard Pearson

Richard arrived in India from England to join his father in 1946 at the age of eleven. He studied at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education where he teaches Natural History and is a captain of gymnastics. He is the editor of the book Flowers and Their Messages.

The Mother and Women's Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1946–1958

— Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

250 pp, ISBN: 978-93-85391-07-1, Rs 250

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

For this review we asked several people who lived through these years and were eye witnesses to the development of physical education activities in the Ashram to record their impressions of the book.

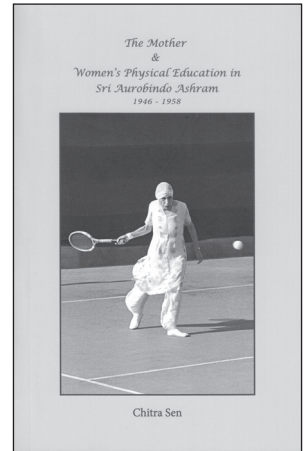
Part I

Chitra Sen can pat herself on her back—well, it is understood she cannot do so literally, but she would not do so even figuratively. That gives us the option to do so, so here we go!

The book is a work well done, a work done not just for herself, but one that would touch all who are interested in the Ashram. It is a fount of information consisting mostly of her own experiences and also those of many close friends and associates as well as other members of the Ashram.

I start with the cover. To me it epitomises the whole subject of the book—“A touch that brings the divine whole” (from Sri Aurobindo’s poem “One Day”). Chitradi’s search and/or research to gather so much old (“old is gold” in this instance) information, almost gives the reader the impression that the events were noted down in diaries of that particular enactor immediately after the event. Maybe the impression is, I would aver, because of the Mother’s presence and the lasting effect she had on us all.

The reading of such books leaves us much lighter, that is, it lifts off or helps us to forget heavy moods and feel happier. But a vague feeling of nostalgia seeps in, too. Nostalgia is a mixture of feelings, for it involves a casting of our memories, our mind’s eye, into a past, and means, in most cases, a longing for an irretrievable past, bringing sadness (though some of the past we would all like to forget!). But one can dwell on happy events and feel the joy without regrets, especially if what had been done were as the Mother would have wanted.



THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

This extract from the book refers to the meditation of 29 February 1956 when “the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow”:

When we asked her about that special day, Gauri-di said that on the day of the Supramental descent, on 29th February 1956, when the Mother entered the room after the evening meditation, only Pranab-da and Gauri-di were present. The Mother told them simply: “I have felt it today”, and immediately after this remark, the Mother sat at her table in the room and wrote about her experience then and there.

Then there are also many revealing events and happenings of educative value, too. I would mention one or two of each in these categories. One particularly stunning and revealing one is the experience of Priti Das Gupta when the Mother gave Pritidi darshan of her four Divine aspects, first announcing: “I have come this time in all my aspects. This has never happened before in the history of the earth. I have never come in this totality.” And then Pritidi was shown, one after the other, the avatars of Durga, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati, Rajarajeshwari, and, finally, Mahakali. I am amazed at the event

and amazed at Pritidi's good fortune – nay, it must be the result of many lives of *sadhana* – and amazed too that Pritidi could take in all those visions without collapsing. In this context, I am reminded of Charupada, known as Motakaka, being near senseless when shown one aspect of hers when he confronted her with his doubts about her divinity.

Another event I would like to quote is the time that the Mother, when walking with Chitradi at her side, suddenly smiled and said: “You know, we would make very good partners in the three-legged race.” While pointing at their feet, she then explained: “Look, we have the same length of strides!” How human the Divine can consent to be, perhaps to raise the human to a higher level of consciousness. Just compare this picture to that of an ancient one where Lord Vishnu as Vamana Avatar took just three strides to cover the earth, heaven, and *patal* via Mahabali's head.

VICTOIRE À LA DOUCE MÈRE

On Darshan Days after the March Past by group members in the Playground, “the captain-in-charge walks forward... and pledges our allegiance in the formal terms—Victoire à la Douce Mère (Victory to the Sweet Mother).” All the group members and onlookers then repeat this aloud.

In a letter dated 12 November 1936, Sri Aurobindo wrote that “the Mother's victory is, essentially, the victory of each sadhak over himself. It can only be then that any external form of work can come to harmonious perfection”.

The book is filled with such recollections, such as the time when the girls, Chitradi included, missed their exercises and joined the boys who were playing volleyball. The Mother reproached Chitradi: “You are spoiling what I am trying to build up with Pranab and Biren.” Chitradi realised that it was a matter of a breach of discipline, on which subject the Mother had occasion to remark:

There can be no physical education without discipline. The body itself could not function without a strict discipline. Actually the failure to recognise this fact is the principal cause of illness.

She further added:

Digestion, growth, circulation of blood, everything, everything is discipline. Thoughts, movements, gestures, everything is a discipline, and if there is no discipline people immediately fall ill.

There were tennis tournaments held during a particular season. One Sunday, Anjou and Chitradi were late for work in the Press (a cleaning day). Ravindraji, a great worker and a greater taskmaster, complained to the Mother about their being late. She replied: “Leave them alone!” Why this seeming leniency? Chitradi found out that these games were not just “playfulness” but a means to make the physical being more conscious, and that was also part of the Mother's work.

About the game of tennis, Nirod-da adds:

In Her vision tennis is the best game spiritually and physically. She used it not only for Her physical fitness, but as in everything else, as a medium for Her spiritual action on the players.... What She imparted to us by this means can be compared to the joy that we had in our talks with Sri Aurobindo, different in kind, of course.

The Mother herself had said: “In each of my strokes I put my consciousness.”

Such priceless words of guidance make Chitradi's book a source of “that permeating light” that is our Mother. For this, our thanks to Chitradi.

—Batti

Prabhakar Rupanagunta, known to all as Battida, is a trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Asham, a captain in the Department of Physical Education, and oversees all the Ashram Farms.

Part II

The author has highlighted women's physical education in the Ashram from 1946 to 1958, but the Mother did not differentiate the girls from the boys. The Mother had lofty ideas and an impartial way of working with her children. It is our incompetent mind which cannot accept and live up to her expectations. She was far ahead of the times and brought our conservative way of thinking closer to the modern, fast-changing world. As we read the book we have a feeling of running fast ahead of time.

The Divine Mother herself did physical activities. She walked, cycled, and played games in her younger days when such activities were generally not so common among girls. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the two avatars, together shaped a new and unique world of action through work in every field of life and through physical activities. They were Purusha-Prakriti, Gods Omnipotent and Omniscient representing Power, Knowledge, and Action.

The author herself is a very talented woman, senior, but living an active life of work and other activities with devotion, exemplifying the qualities and ideals that the Mother is constantly pouring into us. In an interesting way the book teaches us discipline, obedience, and the right attitude in work. Positive thinking will lead one to be a proper child of the Mother. Our education is based on self-will with the constant guidance of the Mother. A conscious life will lead us to our goal.

The book carries a strong presence of the Mother. As we read, we find ourselves slowly led towards a great goal. Truly the book is very interesting and captivating. The incidents are related in such a vivid, living manner that one gets transported into the past to relive those days, those of a Mother with her children.

—Parul Chakraborty

Paruldi, who came to the Ashram in 1944 at the age of six, has been looking after Dortoir boarding since 1964. She is also a captain in the Department of Physical Education.



Paruldi during a physical education demonstration

Part III In conversation with Bhabudi (Bhavatarini)



Bhavatarini during a weightlifting demonstration

Bhavatarini arrived in the Ashram in 1944 at the age of ten. When her parents learned that a school had started in the Ashram, they decided to bring their children to Pondicherry. Reading Chitradi's book brought up many memories for her, which she kindly agreed to share with our readers. Bhabudi was known for her prowess as a weightlifter. As a young girl she wanted to become strong. At that time Birenda was leading a group of boys in exercises to increase body strength using barbells and the parallel bars. Bhabudi watched the boys and began to do the exercises with them. Then when weightlifting started she also joined in. She trained in weightlifting, discus, shot put, and hammer throw, and still holds the hammer throw record set by her in 1962. She recalled the "Feats of Strength" item organised by Birenda for a demonstration in the Playground. Rod-bending was one item and, when the boy who was supposed to bend the rod "ran away from the challenge", Birenda called on her to try—and she succeeded! Then she shared the story of Battida lying on a bed of nails

while someone drove a motorbike over a plank resting on top of his body. "Immediately after this item took place, Mother came to his side and rubbed his back with Friction de Foucaud."

When the women received their new uniforms of white shorts and shirt, Bhabudi's mother was not very happy and did not allow her to go out on the street with bare legs. To solve this problem without upsetting her mother, Bhabudi began wearing a pair of loose pyjama pants over her shorts until she reached the Playground. She was the first to take up this habit and continued it for many years.

Bhabudi's main work was to help Gauridi take care of the Mother's room in the Playground. One day the Mother told Gauridi that she must not bring maids to clean the room there. When Gauridi protested that she needed help, the Mother pointed to Bhabudi, who was doing some activity in the Playground, and said, "She will do the work!" Since then Bhabudi became Gauridi's main helper.

She also brought the flowers for Gauridi to arrange and helped to keep clean and tidy the almirah full of the Mother's capes. "There must be more than fifty capes in that room. Priti Das Gupta's uncle used to send them from Calcutta—such a fine quality material, all stitched and ready for the Mother to wear when the evenings became chilly."

Bhabudi also accompanied people to the hospital when required and attended Dr Sanjal's nursing classes with some other captains, so they could administer first aid should any injuries occur during group activities. She became a captain in the Physical Education Department when she was twenty-two and worked with the women in groups C, E, and G doing exercises and playing games.



The Mother is at the door to her room in the Playground, distributing groundnuts. The women are in their group uniforms of white shorts, white shirt, and white kitty cap. (1950)

NEW UNIFORMS FOR WOMEN

We learn from the book that the Mother called Milli-di one day and asked her to find some sort of a uniform that would be suitable for girls' exercises. Milli-di borrowed the shorts of one Gujarati lady who was visiting the Ashram and found them "quite decent and convenient". Then one evening, after the Mother arrived in the Playground, Milli-di entered dressed in white shorts, white shirt, white kitty cap, white socks, and white shoes. Soon after, the Mother prepared a list of girls who would be wearing the new uniform. She added that it was not compulsory; "only those who wished could change to this new uniform. Naturally, everyone wanted the new uniform." The Mother later commented to a girl, "I like this outfit very much."

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Darshan Messages of Sri Aurobindo

15 August 1972 to 15 August 2010

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Sadhak Sangha, Howrah
40 pp, Rs 100, Size: 18 x 12 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

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

The City of Dawn

50 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-399-3, Rs 30
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Life After Death

50 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-398-6, Rs 30
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

House of the Lord

57 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-397-9, Rs 30
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Other Authors

Inauguration of Auroville Concept and Purpose

— Concept & Layout: Franz Fassbender

Publisher: PRISMA, Auroville

151 pp, ISBN: 978-81-928152-5-1, Rs 650

Size: 21 x 24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



On 28 February 2018 Auroville celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its inauguration and this book, replete with historical information, photographs, reminiscences, and conversations with the Mother about the event, presents a narrative that captures the optimism and high feeling of the day. The Mother directed the organisation of the inauguration and, from her room in the Ashram, read out her message and the Charter of Auroville that was broadcast live to the guests and participants at the arena in Auroville. From the smallest detail, such as the badge to be worn by the security volunteers, to the dramatic moment, when young people deposited the soil of countries from around the world into the inaugural urn, the book tells the story of how Auroville was announced to the world.

Auroville celebrated its Golden Jubilee on 28 February 2018. To mark the occasion, the book *Inauguration of Auroville: Concept and Purpose* looks back to the very beginnings of Auroville, from when the idea first took hold to the flurry of preparations for the ceremony—directed by the Mother and carried out by willing hands. Photographs and interviews with those who worked on the preparations or participated in the event create a very personal and intimate, as well as a historical, record.

In the initial pages we get some background on Auroville, fleshed out with “before” photos of the stark landscape, followed by some early conversations with the Mother about Auroville, its ideal and purpose, and also about the design developed by Roger Anger, the French architect whom the Mother invited to come up with a conceptual town plan.

The narrative moves quickly on to the question of the site for Auroville. In early 1967 Roger brought a map of the area north of Pondicherry to the Mother. “She concentrated, and pointed to a particular location on the map, suggesting it could be the centre of the town.” Roger visited the place by jeep and found there a solitary banyan tree on a barren plateau. The Mother was “very happy about the presence of the tree, banyans being one of the seven sacred trees of India, and decided to make it Auroville’s geographic centre.” She was architect-in-chief, master planner, the life and soul of the project.

The two or three months prior to 28 February 1968 were ones of feverish activity. The amphitheatre and its inaugural marble urn that would receive the soil from nations around the world had to be constructed, roads

roads and viewing stands built in record time, an exhibition on Auroville arranged under the spreading branches of the banyan tree. Members of the Ashram and the students of the Ashram school were mobilised, almost on a war footing.

Kalya, who represented Auroville during the ceremony, recalls the logistical problems getting two young people from each country and from each Indian state selected and transported to Pondicherry before the inauguration. Another problem was the soil from the different homelands. Many samples did arrive with the representatives, but so many were missing that the Mother was asked what to do. "She came up with the idea of using sea salt...that being a substance by origin that touches the shore of practically every nation on Earth, only barring a few landlocked countries."

But it was the live broadcast of the Mother reading the Auroville Charter from her room in Pondicherry that enthralled the 5000-strong gathering around the amphitheatre. Reading this absorbing narrative draws one to the vision of human unity symbolised by the founding of Auroville and re-ignites the exhilaration of building what the Mother called "the city the earth needs".



Fabienne carries the Auroville flag while Kalya places the earth in the urn.

The English of Savitri: Part 3 (Book Seven—The Book of Yoga)

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

442 pp, ISBN: 978-93-82474-15-9, Rs 550

Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Like the first two books in this series, this one is also based on transcripts of classes held at Savitri Bhavan. The author's aim in those classes was to read the poetry as correctly as possible, according to the natural rhythms of English speech, to gain a basic understanding of the vocabulary, sentence structure, and imagery used by Sri Aurobindo, and thereby gain a better understanding and appreciation of the poem. This volume covers the seven cantos of Book Seven, The Book of Yoga. As the previous volume covered Book Three and this one resumes with Book Seven, brief summaries of Books Four, Five and Six are given in an introductory section to provide some continuity to the series. Also included at the end is a summary of Book Eight.

See review on page 17

The Mother and Women's Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1946–1958

— Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

250 pp, ISBN: 978-93-85391-07-1, Rs 250

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Tracing the beginnings of the physical education activities in the Ashram under the Mother's guidance, the book pays special attention to physical education for women. The narrative encompasses various aspects of the overall programme: the philosophical underpinnings of the approach – aimed at awakening the body consciousness to become a fit instrument for the Divine work of self-perfection –, the attention to discipline and healthy physical habits, the accretion of playing fields, grounds, equipment, and expertise as the activities multiplied and expanded. The Mother's presence and intimate involvement in physical exercise and sport are constantly highlighted and her groundbreaking attitude towards equal physical education opportunities for women and girls was considered

radical for the times. The numerous photographs and recollections from early participants reinforce the organic growth of what has become a complex and well-rounded programme for the students and members of the Ashram community.

See review on page 8

An Introduction to the Integral Yoga *Sri Aurobindo's Vision and Practical Guidance*

—Ashesh Joshi

Publisher: Ashesh Joshi, Auroville
121 pp, ISBN: 978-93-5268-026-9, Rs 100
Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

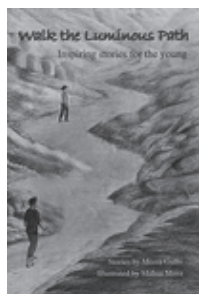
This compact introduction to the Integral Yoga has four main sections. Each section consists of extracts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother interspersed with explanatory notes or comments by the author. The first section introduces some basic concepts of Yoga. The second deals with specific aspects of Sri Aurobindo's vision, the third with some features of the practice of the Integral Yoga, and the fourth with guidance on the path. This last section also contains short biographies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, brief summaries of their major writings, and a few pages on the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Society, Auroville, and Auroville International.

See review on page 21

Walk the Luminous Path *Inspiring stories for the young*

— Meera Guthi

Publisher: Nava Vihan, Pondicherry
56 pp, ISBN: 978-81-935227-1-4, Rs 120
Size: 14 x 21, Binding: Soft Cover



The author of these five short stories was inspired by the writings of the Mother. The stories are tales of courage and perseverance, loyalty and friendship, reflection and self-mastery, and peopled with characters that a child can easily relate to. They teach children about overcoming their fears, how to believe in themselves, and how both negative and positive thoughts can impact the atmosphere that surrounds them. The book includes several hand drawn illustrations for each story.

Sri Aurobindo and Uttarpara Speech

— Trija Ray

Publisher: Uttarpara Sri Aurobindo Parishad, Uttarpara
40 pp, Rs 50, Size: 12 x 18 cm
Binding: Soft Cover



This short book discusses Sri Aurobindo's speeches as a leader of the independence movement in general and the background for this historic speech given on the grounds of Uttarpara's public library after his release from Alipore jail in 1909. In the Uttarpara speech Sri Aurobindo spoke publicly for the first time about his spiritual experiences in prison. He explained that God had given him the strength "to speak a word to this nation which will help to raise it". The message on Sanatan Dharma was the central theme, and some have written that the speech contained in seed form the basic principles of his Integral Yoga that evolved later.

The Ascent of the Sacrifice



In the words of Sri Aurobindo
(with Comments and Discussions)

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Divine Life Trust, Jhunjhunu
127 pp, ISBN: 978-81-86510-20-9, Rs 125, Size: 14 x 21 cm,
Binding: Soft Cover

Based on a series of study classes conducted at the Sri Aurobindo Divine Life Education Centre, this book is a compilation of extracts drawn primarily from Sri Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, and his writings on the Veda. At places the extracts are followed by comments and discussions from the classes. The selections are organised by theme: the nature of sacrifice, its Vedic symbolism, its significance, the law of sacrifice based on the the descent of the Purusha, and the ascent of sacrifice through the works of knowledge, love, and will through a labour of self-discipline and self-perfection.

Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies
Vedanta as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo

— Arun Chatterjee

Publisher: Lotus Press, USA

152 pp, ISBN: 978-0-9406-7636-7, Rs 175

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Focussing on Vedanta as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo, the author finds similarities between certain concepts in the philosophies of the East and West, including the Ultimate Reality and the Self, the nature of the Divine and his relation to the world, immortality and rebirth, and free will and determinism. Key to his analysis is the first chapter on the meanings of the terms religion, philosophy, and spirituality. In his comparative studies the author's primary interest is in the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta, Schopenhauer, Spinoza, and Sartre. There is also a chapter comparing Jewish mysticism and Hinduism and an appendix on the place of *bhakti* in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. These essays were originally published as articles in various journals.

Visions of Champaklal at the Matrimandir

— Compiled and Edited by Roshan and Apurva

Publisher: Divyanand Kripandhi, Surat

87 pp, Rs 150, Size: 28 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



These visions and inner experiences recorded by Champaklal between 1978 and 1987 form the centrepiece of this book. They are accompanied by introductory

and background material related to Champaklal's life and service to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a narrative related to Auroville and the Matrimandir, extracts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the symbolism in visions, and a few personal comments by Nirodbaran and other friends of Champaklal. The work is enhanced by a number of photographs, colour plates, and facsimiles of messages in the handwritings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Memorable Years with the Mother (2 volumes)
The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram

— Namita Sarkar

Publisher: The Golden Chain Fraternity

432 pp, ISBN: 978-93-87175-00-6, Rs 1450

Size: 21 x 25 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

To manifest a divine life in a material world requires the development of a strong body and a receptive physical consciousness. This two-volume narrative and pictorial history documents how the Mother in her central role encouraged and promoted physical activities in a manner that would help prepare the body to manifest a higher consciousness. From the beginning of the Ashram school and the subsequent organisation of physical education in 1945 to the network of playing fields and facilities designed and created by members of the community, from the sports and physical exercises introduced for both boys and girls, men and women, to the Mother's intensive involvement in all activities, from gymnastic marching and a brass band to bodybuilding and asanas, from competitions and tournaments in quest of self-perfection to the cadre of group captains at the forefront of physical education—all are described and brought to life with numerous photographs, often full-page, to tell this remarkable story. The book, which is printed entirely on art paper, also draws on interviews and reminiscences, and recognises those who contributed in special ways.

See review on page 2

Matrimandir: Moments in Eternity

Publisher: Matrimandir Publications, Auroville

195 pp, Rs 1450, Size: 30 x 21 cm,

Binding: Hard Cover

This book of colour photographs captures moments at and around the Matrimandir over the years. Different sections are devoted to mist-shrouded



landscapes; sunrises, sunsets, and moonscapes that reflect the beauty of nature surrounding the structure; early morning meditations with the bonfire and special flower decorations at the Amphitheatre; Aurovilians at work on the structure and children at

work and play in the environs; evening performances at the Amphitheatre; owls, parrots, and peacocks at the Banyan Tree; and views highlighting the Park of Unity. Quotations from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother appear throughout the book.

ASSAMESE

Bharatiya Sanskritir Bhatti—Sri Aurobindo, hc Rs 444
Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: “ati nirmal tatha nirvik jiban” —Manoj Das Gupta, hc Rs 150

BENGALI

Purner Sadhana—Simay Simantare— Dr Saurendranath Basu, hc Rs 350
Ma (Sri Aurobinder “The Mother” Granther Saransha) —Adhyapak Haridas Chaudhuri, sc Rs 45
Sri Aurobindo “Ei je aami, aami ekhane” —Nirodbaran, sc Rs 30
Nomi Chorone—Gauri Dharmapal, sc Rs 40
Janani—Sudha Basu, sc Rs 50

FRENCH

Journal du Yoga: Livre II: 12 mars–31 décembre 1914—Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-902032-5-8, sc Rs 1250

GUJARATI

Savitri Shabdamrut—7—Shraddhavan, ISBN: 978-93-5268-595-0, sc Rs 160

HINDI

Shrimadbhagavad Gita: Mool tatha anuvad sahit — Compilation from the Works of Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-86510-24-7, sc Rs 450
Shrimadbhagavad Gita: Mool tatha anuvad sahit — Compilation from the Works of Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-86510-25-4, hc Rs 550
Prithvi par Divya Jeevan ka Avirbhav: Sri Aravind va Srma ke Shabdon men (Tippaniyon sahit) — Sankalankarta: Chandra Prakash Khetan, ISBN: 978-81-86549-03-2, hc Rs 400
Prithvi par Divya Jeevan ka Avirbhav: Sri Aravind va Srma ke Shabdon men (Tippaniyon sahit) — Sankalankarta: Chandra Prakash Khetan, ISBN: 978-81-86549-04-9, sc Rs 300
Bachche ki Parvarish Kaise Karen: Adhyapakon tatha Abhibhavakon ko Salah—Srma va Sri Aravind ke shabdon men, ISBN: 978-93-86588-00-5, sc Rs 40

Purna Yog: Sri Aravind ki shiksha thatha sadhan-paddhati— Selected Letters of Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-7060-392-4, sc Rs 300

ITALIAN

Sri Aurobindo su Se Stesso—Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-93-5210-142-9, sc Rs 650
Saggi su Savitri— Nolini Kanta Gupta, ISBN: 978-93-5210-147-4, sc Rs 280

KANNADA

Sri Aravindara Savitri: Sankshiapta kannada avtaranike — Dr Bheed, sc Rs 50

ORIYA

Vedarahasya (Pratham Bhag) — Sri Aurobindo ISBN: 978-93-5210-133-7, sc Rs 160

RUSSIAN

Savitri: Legenda i Simbol (Knigi II [2], III) —Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-5-88947-047-2, hc Rs 825
Transformatsia ve Integralnoi Yoge— Iz rabot Sri Aurobindo i Materi, ISBN: 978-5-7938-0077-8, sc Rs 70
Religia i Yoga—Iz rabot Sri Aurobindo i Materi, ISBN: 978-5-7938-0080-8, sc Rs 70

SANSKRIT

Kim Bhoh Balah! Aksharamala—Asha Agrawal, ISBN: 978-81-7060-396-2, sc Rs 110

TAMIL

Rahasya Gyanam— M. P. Pandit, sc Rs 70

TELEGU

Isha Upanishath— Sri Aurobindo, sc Rs 60

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BOOK REVIEWS

The English of Savitri: Part 3

(Book Seven—The Book of Yoga)

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

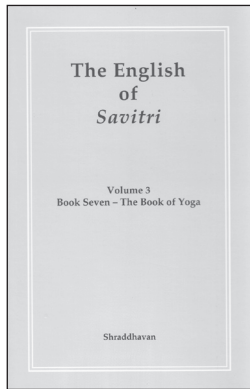
442 pp, ISBN: 978-93-82474-15-9, Rs 550

Binding: Hard Cover, Size 14 x 22 cm

The Mother called *Savitri* the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision, and therefore it behooves us to read and understand it to the best of our ability. In this third volume of Shraddhavan's book series, which she subtitles 'Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*', the author elucidates the meaning of 'Book Seven—The Book of Yoga', which describes in seven cantos Savitri's practice and experience of yoga. The first volume of the series focused on 'Book One—The Book of Beginnings' and the second volume explicated 'Book Three—The Book of the Divine Mother'. As in the second volume, in which the author provided a summary of the omitted Book Two, in this third volume Shraddhavan provides a canto-wise summary of the intervening Books Four, Five and Six of *Savitri*. At the end of the book, she also provides a two-page summary of 'Book Eight—The Book of Death', which consists of just one short canto.

In her Foreword, Shraddhavan puts Book Seven into the context of the overall epic, both in terms of its story line and in terms of the chronology of its composition. For example, we learn that Book Seven belongs to the later period of the epic's composition, six of its seven cantos having been 'dictated to Nirodbaran after March 1947'. Its first canto, however, 'contains passages which date back to the earliest stages of the composition of the epic, from 1916 onwards into the 1920s'. She also provides a brief overview of the stages of Savitri's yoga which are elaborated in her commentary throughout the book.

Like the earlier two volumes of the series, this book is based on transcripts of the author's classes on *Savitri* held at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville, and like the earlier books, the transcripts are edited such that the text is crisp, clear and error-free. Also, as indicated by the subtitle, the book focuses on elucidating the



meaning of the language used in the epic, rather than on subjective interpretation of the poem. It explains the meaning of the words and lines, examining them line by line throughout the whole of Book Seven. It explains unfamiliar words, sometimes identifying their connotations or original meanings; unusual turns of phrase; allusions to various

Vedic and ancient Greek myths; and reiterations of related preceding words, lines or themes. She also frequently provides contextualisation for particular lines or passages in terms of the unfolding story as well as in terms of modern theories or ancient traditions to which they allude. All of this helps us to understand the poem better through a deeper and richer appreciation of its language.

Savitri is remarkable in that it can capture a world of meaning in a line, a passage, a canto, one of its twelve books, or the epic poem as a whole. 'Book Seven—The Book of Yoga' is no exception. Whereas the first three books of *Savitri*, comprising nearly half of the epic, describe Aswapati's yoga, Book Seven details Savitri's yoga, though Books Nine through Eleven could be said to be a continuation of her yogic experience and transformation into its further dimensions. Still, in the course of Book Seven, Savitri develops from a newly-wed young woman, and though exceptional, one who is unaware of her life's purpose and is still subject to grief and pain, to a great yogini who has undergone the psychic and spiritual transformations, that is, who has realised her individual soul, Nirvana, and the cosmic consciousness.

The first canto of Book Seven, having the long title 'The Joy of Union; the Ordeal of the Foreknowledge

of Death and the Heart's Grief and Pain', provides a transition from 'Book Six—The Book of Fate' to the latter six cantos of Book Seven which describe Savitri's yogic transformation. It begins with some powerful lines which convey the essence of Sri Aurobindo's teaching about fate and free will. It continues with beautiful imagery of the forest hermitage in which Savitri resides with her new husband Satyavan, and exquisite passages about the highest reaches of human love. Savitri's bliss of union with Satyavan, however, gradually becomes overrun by the dread and grief born of her foreknowledge of his impending death within one year's time, a terrible secret which she locks concealed within her breast.

'Canto Two—The Parable of the Search for the Soul' describes a deep experience that Savitri has during one fateful night in which she was bearing the 'load of grief' within her breast, facing the 'ever-nearing Fate' of Satyavan's approaching death. A Voice from her being's summit speaks to her, and in turn she out of her heart replies and converses with it. The Voice brings a crucial message, one applicable to us all, a call to seek for her soul:

Remember why thou cam'st:
Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self,
In silence seek God's meaning in thy depths,
Then mortal nature change to the divine.

Not only does it beckon her to find her soul, it also quintessentially describes the way to do this in a brief passage. As she turns within to seek for her soul, she experiences a dream which '[i]maged to her the world's significance'. This significance, described in the remaining pages of the canto, covers such fundamental issues as the spiritual evolution on earth, the inner spiritual being hidden behind 'the little surface of man's life', the immanent Divine, the duality of good and evil, karma and rebirth, and the possibility of spiritual transformation through the agency of the soul within, if we would enable the soul to '...step into common nature's crowded rooms | And stand uncovered in that nature's front | and rule its thoughts and fill the body and life'. Shradhdhavan elaborates on each of these important issues and helps us to grasp them.

'Canto Three—The Entry into the Inner Countries' recounts Savitri's journey into the subtle realms of

the inner being that intervene between the outer waking self and the deep recesses of the soul. It summarises in a fashion much of ‘Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds’, which elaborated in fifteen cantos Aswapati’s similar journey. This is a journey through the worlds of the inner being: the subconscious, the subtle material, the vital, the mental, and the spiritual realms nearest to the soul. The author leads us through these mysterious realms, step by step, carefully explaining each recondite word, symbol and turn of phrase.

In ‘Canto Four—The Triple Soul-Forces’, Savitri encounters in her inner journey three Madonnas, three beings representative of her soul, and, paired with them, three male voices representing distorted reflections of them. Each of the three Madonnas claims to be Savitri’s soul, but Savitri understands that whereas they may be forces or outward expressions of her soul, they are not her true, inmost soul. Savitri addresses the first as ‘Madonna of suffering, Mother of grief divine’, and says, ‘Thou art a portion of my soul put forth | To bear the unbearable sorrow of the world.’ The distorted reflection, ‘[t]he beast that crouching growls within man’s depths’, calls himself ‘the Man of Sorrows,’ and blaming God, sums up his character thus: ‘I suffer and toil and weep; I moan and hate.’ Savitri tells the Madonna that while she (the Madonna) has the power to solace, she has not the strength to save, and that when Savitri finds her deepest soul, she will bring the needed strength and wisdom to complement the Madonna’s compassion.

Ascending in her inner journey, Savitri encounters the ‘Madonna of might, Mother of works and force’. This Madonna brings strength to the battle against the adverse forces in the world, and protection to those on the upward spiritual path. The distorted reflection represents ‘[t]he Ego of this great world of desire’. Savitri tells the Mother of might that while she brings power, she lacks the wisdom that can deliver mankind, and that when she finds her true soul, she will bring that wisdom to join with that power.

Third, Savitri encounters the ‘Madonna of light, Mother of Joy and peace’. This Madonna explains that she brings into the world peace, knowledge, beauty, goodness and kindred forces that help in its spiritual ascent. The voice of this Madonna’s distorted reflection identifies himself as ‘the all-discovering thought of man’. This mind, however great its discoveries, is bound by the senses and lives within limits, and it is doubtful of any higher spiritual power. Savitri tells the Madonna of light that she cannot divinise mankind through the power of thought, and that only by filling man’s yearning heart with heaven’s fire, and bringing God down into his body and life can this be achieved. The canto ends with Savitri promising to return with this power.

The author frequently provides contextualisation for particular lines or passages in terms of the unfolding story as well as in terms of modern theories or ancient traditions to which they allude. All of this helps us to understand the poem better through a deeper and richer appreciation of its language.

In ‘Canto Five—The Finding of the Soul’, the first section recounts Savitri’s passage through ‘a night of God’ prior to finding her soul. While staying close to the text, the author explains this experience to us. After passing through this darkness, ‘the emptiness broke’ and the ‘spaceless Vast became her spirit’s place’. Savitri then feels very close to her soul, and ‘[t]he air trembled with passion and delight’. She then enters a ‘mystic cavern,’ ‘the dwelling of her secret soul’. There she encounters living symbolic figures carved in the stone walls, and Shradhdhavan discusses these mystic images. In the second section of the canto, Savitri meets her secret soul, which is imaged as a Being whose detailed description is elaborated by the author. At the end of the section, this soul, a deity, and Savitri, its human portion, ‘rushed into each other and grew one’. The third section relates a mystical transformation that Savitri undergoes as a result of this experience of union. Her *chakras*,

the subtle energy centres of her being, open one by one, and we are led by the author through this vividly described, extraordinary experience and its results.

In 'Canto Six—Nirvana and the Discovery of the All-Negating Absolute', Savitri undergoes another fundamental spiritual realisation. The first section begins by further describing the beautiful experience resulting from her psychic awakening and transformation, but then she encounters another dreadful barrier: 'An abyss yawned suddenly beneath her heart.' It is described as a 'formless Dread' and '[a]n ocean of terror and of sovereign might, | A person and a black infinity'. As Shraddhavan explains, '[t]hat being of darkness tries to convince Savitri that she has no right to exist; and '[a]ccording to him, all appearance is illusion'. But then a voice of Light comes and tells Savitri that this dark void is a passage to a greater realisation, not the end: 'Fear not to be nothing that thou mayst be all; | Assent to the emptiness of the Supreme | That all in thee may reach the absolute.' In the second section, the author leads us through Savitri's experience of silencing the mind, standing back from all thoughts in 'the witness soul', until finally '[a] silent spirit pervaded silent Space'. The third section elaborately describes this experience of Nirvana, and in a number of passages the author relates it to Sri Aurobindo's explanations of his own experience of Nirvana.

'Canto Seven—The Discovery of the Cosmic Spirit and the Cosmic Consciousness' relates a further transformation of Savitri's spiritual realisation. The first of its two sections provides an elaboration of the Nirvana experience and its outward manifestations in Savitri's life. For example, we are told that for the most part those around her did not notice the change in her: 'They saw a person where was only God's vast, | A still being or a mighty nothingness.' She continued to act in the way she acted before, and she spoke in the same manner that she used to speak. However, for her the experience was completely different: 'There was no will behind the word and act, | No thought formed in her brain to guide the speech: | An impersonal emptiness walked and spoke in her.' In the second section,

the experience changes from a sense of the utter unreality of things to one of '[a] stark and absolute Reality'. As Sri Aurobindo writes: 'The sense of unreality was slain: | There all was conscious, made of the Infinite, | All had a substance of Eternity.' Shraddhavan takes us line by line through Sri Aurobindo's fantastic description of this experience, such as these lines:

Nowhere she dwelt, her spirit was everywhere,
The distant constellations wheeled round her;
Earth saw her born, all worlds were her colonies,
The greater worlds of life and mind were hers;
All Nature reproduced her in its lines,
Its movements were large copies of her own.

In short, *Savitri's* 'Book Seven—The Book of Yoga' describes both the psychic and the spiritual transformations of the Integral Yoga in Sri Aurobindo's most powerful and vivid language, mostly dictated to Nirodbaran during the last years of his life at the height of his mastery of poetic expression. Both the language and the subject matter are exceedingly complex and sophisticated. By taking us through these descriptions line by line, elaborating on their surface and extended meanings, relating them to the context of the poem and to other relevant expressions, Shraddhavan helps us develop a deeper and richer understanding of the poem and the truths that it expresses.

—Larry Seidlitz

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An Introduction to the Integral Yoga **Sri Aurobindo's Vision and Practical Guidance**

— Ashesh Joshi

Publisher: Ashesh Joshi, Auroville

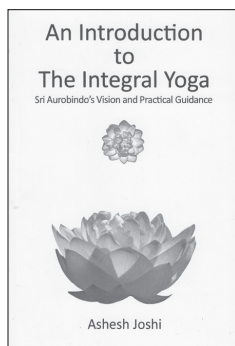
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An Introduction to the Integral Yoga is divided into four parts. The first section introduces some basic concepts of yoga. The second highlights aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, such as the transformation of human nature, the psychic being, the triple transformation, and the supermind. The third covers some features of the practice of the Integral Yoga, such as the triple attitude of aspiration, rejection, and surrender, as well as discussing some difficulties on the path. The fourth section consists of short biographies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a brief listing of their main works, and some information on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Society, and Auroville. It is a short work comprising extracts from Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's writings interspersed with explanatory passages by the author. After spending twenty years in the Ashram, the author moved to Auroville. He has created his own area of work by holding workshops in Auroville on the Integral Yoga and Sri Aurobindo's vision.

Sri Aurobindo's works being voluminous and the content often being dense, many people tend to read them based on a subject they are interested in. Not many take up his major writings from the first page and go through till the end. Those who are curious to study his works in greater depth often take the help of people who are conducting classes on his writings or have practised his Yoga. It is only over a considerable period of study that one can understand the full range of his vision.

There is another aspect to his works which is important to note: a single short passage is often enough to answer a specific question and keep one engaged over a period of time in practising the solution found. This allows a person to read him in small excerpts and be satisfied with it. But these short readings are dependent on one's personal need.



This introductory book serves both points discussed above. The author holds workshops in Auroville on Sri Aurobindo's vision of life. That has allowed him to work on his subject matter with constant feedback from people. Therefore, the arrangement of the chapters in the book is simple, logical, and intelligible. And being an introduction the form is concise, in fact so concise that he has done well to quote more from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and not tried to explain too much in his own words.

I conducted a small informal survey, where people in a book shop were randomly chosen and asked a few questions. First, if they came across an introductory book on a new philosophy, what were their expectations of its content. The outcome was that most of those questioned would certainly want to know something about Sri Aurobindo's early spiritual life or some anecdotes enabling them to connect to his early spiritual experiences leading to his vision. Secondly, most felt that in an introductory book they were not interested in details extraneous to understanding his basic vision. This general feedback led me to believe that the author could have excluded some portions of this book and given each topic a longer treatment, allowing the reader to settle in his reading and have the time to picture the reasoning line of connectivity.

Nonetheless, I am sure that not only people attending the author's workshop but also readers attracted to Sri Aurobindo's vision will profit from the material presented in this book.

—Shyama Prasad

After completing her studies at SAICE Shyama joined the Ashram, where she currently looks after a guest house and serves as a captain in the Physical Education Department. She enjoys theatre, dance, music, drawing, and writing, and has written articles for the SAICE alumni journal, The Golden Chain.

Sri Aurobindo and Social Reform

an essay

In Sri Aurobindo's life, his passion for nationalism and, later, his dedication to working for the spiritual evolution of humanity were pre-eminent. Social reform, as a historical movement in India, was not one of his main interests. Yet, he did address it in various places. During the 1890s and in the early 1900s, while he was living in Calcutta, he was generally critical of the prevailing social reform movements that derived from Western norms. He understood that social reform in India had to be built on a firm foundation of political freedom. Later, in Pondicherry, he laid out his own vision for the reform of society.

Sri Aurobindo's 1893-1894 series of articles, "New Lamps for Old," is well known among admirers of his work as a freedom fighter. It blasts the Indian National Congress for its attempt to change British rule by petitioning the British. Not as well known, Sri Aurobindo published a second series in 1894, also in *Indu Prakash*, entitled "Bankim Chandra Chatterji." This was a tribute to the recently deceased writer, who had portrayed Bengali life and culture in a story form influenced by the English novel. Sri Aurobindo praised Chatterjee for helping to lay the foundations for the modern Bengali language, and rousing pride among Bengalis in their heritage. The topics of "New Lamps" and "Bankim Chandra Chatterji" are different, but they are companion pieces. In positive terms, the first held out the goal of independence and the second was a tribute to Bengali pride. In negative terms, in the first Sri Aurobindo criticized the pandering ways of the Congress, and in the second he criticized efforts at social reform as commonly idolized in those days.

Sri Aurobindo singled out the reformer, Keshub Chandra Sen, for criticism. Sen belonged to the Brahmo Samaj, which Raja Ram Mohan Roy had founded in 1828. Roy had been a social reformer, and one of his main contributions was his work against *sati*, or widow burning. In addition, he had believed that if people would focus on the formless divinity of the Upanishads, turning away from the temple worship and puranic deities, many social evils could be eliminated. In 1843, Debendranath Tagore had assumed the leadership of the Samaj, and around 1857, the young Keshub Chandra Sen joined. Sen recruited many young people to join, and he became close to Tagore.

Although Tagore and Sen were close, Sen and his followers were more committed to social reform than Tagore and the old-

er generation. This young faction was puritanical in its morality, they completely eschewed image worship, and they discarded their caste threads. In 1866, after a dispute over authority, Sen's followers split from the original Brahmo Samaj to form the Brahmo Samaj of India. Later, after an 1870 trip to England, Sen became involved in philanthropy, women's education, raising the legal age limit for marriage, and other projects.

In the 1860s, Sen was popular among the Western educated youths of Calcutta, but his popularity eventually waned. In the 1870s, Surendranath Banerjee, who had a message of patriotism and Indian political unity, became a new star of Calcutta's youth. In addition, by the 1880s, many Bengalis were exhibiting a new pride in Hinduism and Bengali heritage. This made the stances of men like Sen unpopular. The historiography of late nineteenth century Bengal, especially the early historiography, identifies these changes as a transition among the Western-educated elite, in rough terms, from social reform to nationalism.

Expressing the spirit of the times, Sri Aurobindo criticized Sen in his 1894 essays on Chatterjee. He criticized the "generation formed in the schools of Keshab Chandra Sen" for "its religious shallowness, its literary sterility and its madness in social reform. Servile imitators of the English, politicians without wisdom and scholars without learning, they have no pretensions to greatness or originality" (CWSA 1: 96). The closing line of this work tied together the topics of the Congress, the reformers, and Chatterjee: "And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place-hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer, but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, . . . , [who] was able to create a language, a literature and a nation" (CWSA 1: 119).

Reading the Western historiography on this era in Bengali history, one can feel critical of the general transition from reform to nationalism. One can gain the impression that reform was sacrificed on the altar of national pride. However, at least in the case of Sri Aurobindo, the matter was more complex than that. In his series on Chatterjee, he considered the results of women's education, and he was not impressed: "They have passed woman through an English crucible . . . , they have turned out a soulless and superficial being fit only for flirtation, match-making and playing on the piano" (CWSA 1: 110). In Sri Aurobindo's estimation, women's education at that time was

not yielding women who were truly free and strong, but was simply replacing one dissatisfactory condition with another.

Sri Aurobindo's objection was not to Western influence itself, but to mere imitations of the West. He believed that Western influences should be integrated with the Indian context to create something new, strong, and vital: "Originality does not lie in rejecting outside influences but in accepting them as a new mould into which our own individuality may run" (CWSA 1: 94). Far from being opposed to reform in principle, he approvingly referred to the work of Ram Mohan Roy. The difference between Roy and Sen is that Sen was a mere imitator whereas Roy created something original. For instance, by integrating the Vedas with Western and other influences, he "arose with a new religion in his hand" (CWSA 1: 94).

In addition, Sri Aurobindo praised Chatterjee, who, in his later works, synthesized certain Western, egalitarian values with classic Hindu themes, but who also "saw what was beautiful and sweet and gracious in Hindu life" (CWSA 1: 110). Likewise, in a 1915 memorial to Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who placed a renewed emphasis on the Vedas and was somewhat liberal in his approaches to caste and gender, Sri Aurobindo stated, "To be national is not to stand still. Rather, to seize on a vital thing out of the past and throw it into the stream of modern life, is really the most powerful means of renovation and new creation. Dayananda's work brings back such a principle and spirit of the past to vivify a modern mould" (CWSA 1: 665).

Sri Aurobindo severely critiqued Sen in his 1894 tribute to Chatterjee, but he also advanced a certain harmony or integration between reform and nationalism. Yet, more of a tension between the two was reflected in Sri Aurobindo's writings in the first decade of the twentieth century. Protests broke out over the partition of Bengal, and through public speeches and editorials in *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo and other "Extremists" attempted to transform the protests over partition into a countrywide movement for independence. An oppositional approach between reform and nationalism thus appeared in terms of the question of priority: should the people of India invest their effort and energy in reform or in the goal of independence?

Sri Aurobindo, who was one of the most fiery and intellectual of the nationalists at that time, argued in favor of nationalism over and above reform. His key argument was that political freedom was an essential condition for efforts at social reform to be effective. Like in his memorial to Chatterjee, he

gave a brief assessment of the results of reform in the 1800s: "We have fumbled through the nineteenth century, prattling of enlightenment and national regeneration; and the result has been not national progress, but national confusion and weakness. Individuals here and there might emancipate themselves and come to greatness; particular communities might show a partial and one-sided development, for a time only; but the nation instead of progressing, sank into a very slough of weakness, helplessness, and despondency" (CWSA 6: 266). The reason for this failure is that "industrially, socially, educationally there can be no genuine progress carrying the whole nation forward, unless there is a central force representing . . . the majority of its citizens and able to enforce the views and decisions of the nation on all its constituent members" (CWSA 6: 265). Without a representative, governing body, there will be no progress in any area.

Some argued that British rule was more favorable to reform than indigenous rule would be. It is true that segments of British society had a history of supporting social reform through legislation. However, Sri Aurobindo argued that to be truly effective, reform had to come from within the communities concerned, and not merely be imposed from without: "The alteration of the social system . . . is a matter for the general sense of the community and the efforts of individuals" (CWSA 6: 371). This is especially true in India, where there are so many "religious views and various social opinions" (CWSA 6:371).

In today's post-colonial era, Sri Aurobindo's single-minded emphasis in *Bande Mataram* may seem questionable. Some countries which formerly suffered from colonial rule continue, today, to struggle with the problems that social reform was supposed to address. Political freedom has not proved to be the key gate through which everything else can pass. However, one can appreciate Sri Aurobindo's single-minded focus in the context of his times. At the turn of the century, generally speaking, Indians were indifferent towards British rule and had no desire to engage in a protracted struggle. In order to change public opinion, Sri Aurobindo emphasized independence above all other goals.

Later, in Pondicherry, as Sri Aurobindo's "vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of Forces of which he became aware" (CWSA 36: 64). Further, his sadhana brought him new perspectives. He wrote on social reform in various places in his later writings. This essay will focus on two sources. These are

"Social Reform," written around 1912, and "Indian Culture and External Influence," which was published in the *Arya* in 1919.

During Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary days in Bengal, there was a type of dualism between reform and nationalism, but in "Indian Culture," there was an integration. Whereas in *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo set nationalism over and above reform, in "Indian Culture," he considered reform as an important part of the nationalist defense of the incipient nation. One had to assume the best aspects of the invasive culture in order to stand strong against it. In words similar to what he stated in his tribute to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, about fashioning something new from the encounter between East and West, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "India can only survive by confronting this raw, new, aggressive, powerful world with fresh diviner creations of her own spirit, cast in the mould of her own spiritual ideals. . . In that connection I spoke of the acceptance and assimilation from the West of whatever in its knowledge, ideas, powers was assimilable" (CWSA 20: 43).

Whereas in previous decades, Sri Aurobindo had mainly critiqued efforts at reform, in "Social Reform," written around 1912, Sri Aurobindo put forth a positive foundation for reform. This foundation is the "eternal religion," the basis of the "mutable and multiform thing we call Hinduism." This foundation is the realization of "God in our inner life and our outer existence. . . God who is essentially Sacchidananda, . . . Truth, Strength and Love" (CWSA 12: 53-54). This standard relativizes all else: "Whatever is consistent with the truth and principle of things, whatever increases love among men . . . , is divine" (CWSA 12: 54). In prior decades, Sri Aurobindo critiqued the reformers, but in "Social Reform," he critiqued both the reformers and the orthodox. The standard should be that which "increases love among men". Both the Hindu past and the modern West are relativized: "God is not antiquity nor novelty: He is not the Manava Dharmashastra, . . . ; neither is He an European" (CWSA 12: 53-54).

Sri Aurobindo critiqued the orthodox and the reformers in other ways, too. He charged the former with a poor understanding of the dynamics of Hindu history. For instance, "One is

astonished at the position of the orthodox. They labour to deify everything that exists. Hindu society has certain arrangements and habits which are merely customary. There is no proof that they existed in ancient times nor any reason why they should last into the future" (CWSA 12: 50). Just as he criticized the orthodox for a naïve understanding he criticized the reformers for a shallow grasp of the West: "Very few of them know any-

thing about Europe, and even those who have visited it know it badly. . . . They are charmed by the fair front Europe presents to herself and the world; they are unwilling to discern any disease in the entrails, any foulness in the rear" (CWSA 12: 52). Sri Aurobindo had no patience for the moderates either, stating that moderation "is often an euphemism for purblindness, for a tepid indifference or for a cowardly inefficiency" (CWSA 12: 50).

For the right shape of society, Sri Aurobindo looked neither to the Hindu past, exclusively, nor to the modern West, exclusively. Rather, consistent with his emphasis on originality in his 1894 tribute to Chatterjee, and consistent with his emphasis, later, in *The Life Divine*, on the freshness and potentiality of the spirit, he looked to something entirely new: "As to the precise way in which society will be reconstructed, we have hardly yet knowledge enough to solve the problem. . . . One thing seems to me clear that the future will deny that principle of individual selfishness and collective self-interest on which European society has hitherto been based and our renovated systems will be based on the renunciation of individual selfishness and the organisation of brotherhood,—principles common to Christianity, Mahomedanism and Hinduism" (CWSA 12: 58).

—Edward Ulrich

Dr Ulrich is a professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in the United States. After attending the 2004 National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminar, "Religion and Politics in India," he became interested in studying Sri Aurobindo's life and work, particularly his nationalist activities. Currently, he is conducting a comparative study of the roles of Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo in India's freedom struggle.



Bankim Chandra Chatterjee