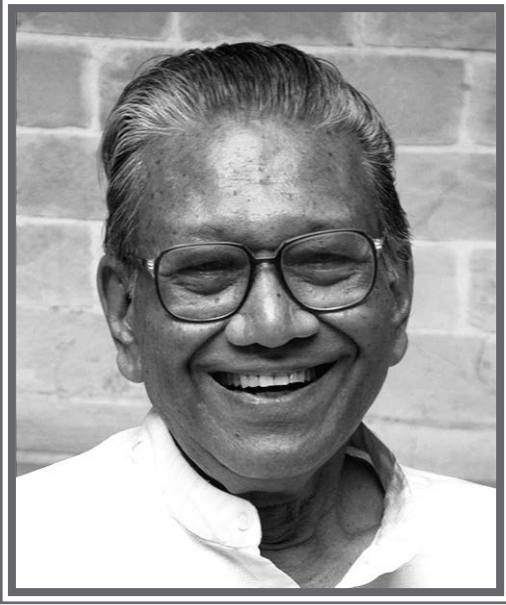


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# Recent Publications

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**M**anoj Das, treasured author, teacher, and friend, writer in both Odia and English, editor, commentator, and essayist, passed away in April 2021. In remembrance, our lead article looks at his life in the Ashram community as well as his literary work widely appreciated in India and abroad. Manoj Das was a gifted storyteller, as is evident in his recently published biography *Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of a Mahayogi*, which charts Sri Aurobindo's life and career during the decade before he settled in Pondicherry in 1910. Documents and photographs unearthed from forgotten archives enliven this compelling narrative of the early days of the freedom movement in which Sri Aurobindo stood at the centre of the political storm that erupted in Bengal and led to his year's imprisonment in jail.

Two new books by Sri Aurobindo are also featured in this issue. *Essays in Vedic Interpretation* and *The Origins of Aryan Speech* are drawn from texts published in *Vedic and Philological Studies*, volume 14 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. These compact editions present to the general reader the essence of that larger work.

# The Many Worlds of Manoj Das (1934-2021)



## The Home and the World

In the winter of 1965, our family travelled from Bhubaneswar to Pondicherry at the initiative of my mother. A distinguished poet and an idealist, she was keen to put her children in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram school; the trip was meant to know more about the institution and its facilities. While my memories of the trip have faded over the years, I distinctly remember that in the evening, we briefly visited a small boarding which housed Ashram students from Odisha. Afterwards, at the Playground, I saw the first English film of my life. Watching the Wild West film *Billy the Kid* in CinemaScope took my breath away, something I had never encountered earlier. It was quite out of this world!

## Meeting Manoj Das, 1965

I came from an insular background and had never met such community life before; the experience left a deep impression on me. This was different from the wedding festivities and social life of the outside world; it brought together people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds for a spiritual life, quite different from conventional religious gatherings. I sensed joy and freedom in the air that I had not experienced before. I remembered, in particular, the Samadhi, the Dining Hall, the Playground and, finally, Manoj Das, and his life companion, Pratijna Devi, who together looked after the Odisha Boarding. It was the very first time that I was meeting Professor Das.<sup>1</sup>

## Ashram School, 1966 and the Home of Progress

Shortly afterwards, we returned to our home town; I got busy in my school life and soon forgot about the trip. Around September of 1966, my mother informed us that my sister Minoti and I were going to join the Ashram school. I was particularly excited to learn that there would be no punishment there. The family travelled to Pondicherry in December 1966, and both of us joined the newly built hostel named Home of Progress by the Mother, although it continued to be called Odisha Boarding.<sup>2</sup> My mother's parting advice was: 'Henceforth Manoj Babu and Pratijna Devi are going to be your parents, treat them as such!' In different measures, this was the attitude of parents who bid farewell to their wards and returned to Odisha.<sup>3</sup>

For the boarders, the Home of Progress was a home away from home. Indeed, for the next phase of our life, the place became for us a house of fun, laughter, study, play, story-telling and mischief; it paved way for what is known as Ashram education: creative,

cosmopolitan and grounded in the best of the Indian traditions, the credit for which should rightly go to the formative influence we received at the hands of Manoj Das and Pratijna Devi. When a medical quarantine took place, we were kept engaged thanks to lively story-telling sessions by our caretakers on the terrace of the building. I recall, in particular, the life stories of great devotees such as Dhruva, Prahalad and Bilwamangal, among others.

The Home of Progress became a great leveller in terms of class and economic differences, endemic to the outside world; in great measure the credit for this should go to the caretakers of the hostel. Coming from a class-and-status ridden society, we merged seamlessly into the egalitarian life of the Ashram, thanks to the wholesome influence of our guardians. While Pratijna 'Apa', (the term denotes 'elder sister' in Odia) took care of the nitty-gritty of boarding life – food, clothing, study and recreation – Manoj Babu kept a watchful eye on us late into the night till we retired. Mealtime, study time and bedtime were strictly observed. We waited breathlessly for the approaching footfall of Manoj Babu before we went to sleep. It could not have been more idyllic!



at the Home of Progress

## Bilingualism and Multilingualism

We must remain grateful to the Home of Progress for other reasons too. While we learned to speak English and French and a variety of Indian languages in the Ashram school, at our place of stay, we had the unique opportunity to speak and write in Odia. This was much before mother-tongue education and multilingualism became watchwords in the academia, and the postcolonialism, propounded by theorists like Edward Said and Stephen Greenblatt who taught us the virtue of indigenous languages and cultures. This principle was central to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, basic to his philosophy and world view.

Manoj Das was an exemplar of this attitude, remaining faithful to multilingualism throughout his life. In 1968, the Mother inaugurated Auroville, the City of Dawn, an attempt to bring different languages and cultures of the world together through the idea of cultural pavilions. She promoted a newer understanding of education and culture through what Sri Aurobindo, in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, calls diversity in oneness.

## The Writer at Work

It would be incorrect to say that hostel supervision was the only thing Manoj Das did at the Home of Progress. For the first time in my life, I had the unique vantage point to observe the life of a writer from close quarters. He lived upstairs on the second floor in a single room, next to the large hall for senior students. The only luxury he permitted himself was an all-

purpose store-cum-dressing room, and a bathroom next to ours. His room, like Apa's on the second floor, was spartan and austere. For the children, the latter was more accessible. After all, she was the mother and her room was an open house for all.

Books, magazines and newspapers in English and Odia were piled up on the divan and table of Manoj Babu's study. For most of the day, when he was not looking after our needs,



with Ruskin Bond

or not stepping out for his professional and personal work at the Ashram, he could be found at his desk, quiet and pensive, reading, reflecting and writing, with a typewriter for company. His solemn approach and demeanour, punctuated by occasional bouts of wit and humour, commanded respect among the boarders. The education we received at his hands went a long way in shaping our minds and personalities, something we would remember and treasure years later. Although young, I knew that I was in the company of a literary genius who was greatly admired for his creativity. The iconic short stories and novels in Odia and English he wrote over the years would bring him distinction and unstinted praise from luminaries such as Graham Greene, Ruskin Bond, R.K.Narayan and K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar. Discipline and inspiration went hand in hand.

## Life in the Indian Village

Manoj Das was born on 27 February 1934 in the village of Sankhari on the bank of the Subarnarekha river to Madhusudan Das and Kadambini Devi. He grew up amid Nature's bounty and yet also experienced devastations like floods, famines and cyclones, which often act as settings in his creative and critical work. After early studies in nearby Jamalpur and Balasore, he completed his higher education in English Literature and Law at Cuttack. While still at high school, he wrote *Samudrara Khyuda*, (*The Hunger of the Sea*), which attracted critical attention.

Drawn to radical causes, he became President of the University Law College Union, Cuttack; General Secretary of the Students Federation of India, Cuttack; and played an active role in the Afro-Asian Students Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1956.

## From Radical Marxism to Integral Yoga

A staunch non-believer in his early life, Manoj Das would often argue against the existence of God. In one of his reminiscences, his elder brother, Prof.M N.Das, the distinguished historian, recalled that Manoj was once found berating his father for the latter's decision to build a family temple in his native village of Sankhari. What good is the meaning of

God and religious rituals when He remained impervious to the miseries of human life and the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden? Only agitation against the oppressors and the unjust and a relentless class struggle could bring about the necessary social change, he thought, as did many Marxists of his time.

This would soon change. After four years of teaching at Christ College, Cuttack, in response to an inner call and inspired by the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, he and Pratijna Devi joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963. It was primarily by an inner change, a radical transformation of the human consciousness that an ideal society could be created, and not through any external mechanisms, he realised. At Pondicherry, he began to contribute pieces and wrote regular columns on literature and culture in leading forums in the country. He edited *The Heritage* (1985-1989) from Chandamama Publications and earned a name for himself and the magazine in discerning circles. He was also an author-consultant to the Ministry of Education, Government of Singapore (1981-1985).

Manoj Das's works in Odia and English received wide recognition for the manner in which he combined fantasy with newer forms of social/magical realism hitherto unknown in the field of Odia literature. His first collection of poems, *Shatabdira Arthwanadha*, was well received. Other works in fiction and nonfiction followed: *Amruta Phala*, *Laxmira Abhisara*, *Sesha Basantara Chithi*, *Godhulira Bagha*, *Kanaka Upatyakara Kahini*, *Samudra Kulara Eka Grama*, *Abolakara Kahani*, *Shesha Tantrikara Sandhane* and *Aranya Ullasa*, among others. Many of these celebrated works were translated or transcreated into English, some by the author himself. Some of his best-known works in English are *A Tiger at Twilight*, *The Submerged Valley*, *The Bridge in the Moonlit Night*, *Cyclones*, *Mystery of the Missing Cap*, and *Myths, Legends, Concepts and Literary Antiquities of India*.

Myth, social realism/magic realism, humour and satire come together effortlessly in some of the best creative works of Manoj Das. As one critic sums up:

Das's fiction is marked by formal features including realism, irony, satire, and the influence of ancient Sanskrit texts, such as the Hindu epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, as well as Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra (animal fables originally written around the 3rd century BCE). *The Statesman* has observed that in Das's reworking of Sanskrit epics, 'instead of using the familiar, imported phrases and idioms, he plays about with the language, picking words and using them in fresh connotation to build imagery suitable to the [modern] Indian background'.<sup>4</sup>

About the dominant presence of nostalgia for lost memories, Das says: 'Nostalgia can cast a spell on you and edit your memory. I voted for my impressions of innocence. That alone could recreate its distant horizon, its own credibility.'<sup>5</sup>

## Recognitions and Lasting Contributions

Many coveted awards and distinctions came to Manoj Das at the national and international level. They include the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award (twice), and the Sarala, the Sahitya Bharati, and the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad (Kolkata) awards. The Odisha Sahitya Akademi also bestowed on him its highest honour, the Atibadi Jagannath Das Samman for lifetime contribution to Odia literature. He also received the Saraswati Samman, Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan. The Sahitya Akademi conferred on him its highest honour, the Fellowship for lifetime achievement. The Government of Odisha has instituted an international award in his name for bilingual creativity following his passing.<sup>6</sup> His loss has been widely mourned by Aurobindoneans as well as the larger world of literature and culture. He remained committed to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother till the end, and was the best face the Ashram had in recent years for the outside world. He was the Assistant Editor of *Mother India*, the Editor of *Sri Aurobindo's Action* and the author of many books and monographs on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the latest of which is *Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi (The Pre-Pondicherry Phase)*, published in 2020. He was a Professor of English Literature and Sri Aurobindo Studies at the Higher Course of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry.



with Dr Mulk Raj Anand,  
sometime in the 1970s

## A New Biography: *Life and Times of the Mahayogi*

In this monumental biography of Sri Aurobindo, running to 716 pages with 65 chapters, 3 postscripts and an epilogue, Manoj Das brings to bear on his treatment of the subject some of the finest attributes of narrative history that have not become outdated, despite the passage of time and the advent of many schools of historiography in the East and the West such as the Marxist, New Historicist and Subaltern historiographies. Written in lucid prose with an accessible style, the text interprets momentous events whose logic often defies human comprehension. Manoj Das attempts to strike a balance between an objective account and a subjective one. Serialised in the monthly journal *Mother India* from 2011 to 2017, and well received at the time, the volume represents 'a development over a much smaller work, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*,' published in 1972. It is based on old and rare material, the work 'mostly made of archival documents and extracts

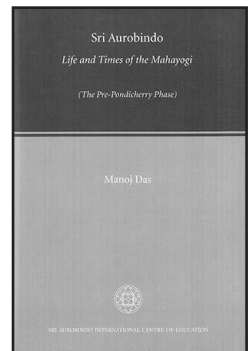
from personal diaries published and unpublished, and reminiscences that are extant'. Das explains why he did not extend the work beyond 1910 to 1950: 'Stretching the work up to 1950,' he says convincingly, 'was beyond me—probably beyond anybody of my generation.'

Manoj Das unfolds this fascinating account by recreating the cultural and political context of the times. He is at his best when it involves the description of historic personalities in vivid terms, the métier of a novelist. And thus, we see a cavalcade of figures like Ram Mohun Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Rajnarain Basu and others who were the makers of the Indian Renaissance.

There are extraordinary photographs of the *dramatis personae* here that one has not seen in any of the earlier biographies. These act more than just to add local colour or recreate the ethos and ambience of the times; they are integral to the overall spirit of the text. The photographs of Sri Aurobindo's sister, Sarojini, and her cousins Kumudini Basu and Basanti Chakravarty, with the period costumes and studio settings, capture the spirit of the times and add to our understanding of documentation history that has gained critical attention in recent times.

Similarly, we see the presence of other notable characters: Okakura, Dinendra Kumar Roy, Annette Akroyd, Ranga Ma [Manorama Devi], Barin Ghose, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sudhir Sarkar, Pramathnath Mitter, Sir Henry Cotton, R. Palit, Jyotish Chandra Ghosh, A.B. Clark, Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick, C.R. Das, Prosecuting Counsel Eardly Norton, Judge C.P. Beachcroft, Ramsay MacDonald, Bijay Nag, and later, Shankar Chetty and Srinivasachariar, who would play an important role at Pondicherry. We marvel at the portraits of the revolutionaries, many of whom readily courted martyrdom for the sake of the nation. We see Sri Aurobindo's close association with the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad, and with periodicals like *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya*, *Yugantar* and *Navashakti* in the service of the nation.

Employing a fast-paced, dramatic style, the author takes us through Sri Aurobindo's life at Baroda, his teaching days and close association with students, from the Surat Congress and his opposition to the policy of individual assassination to his arrest and incarceration in the Alipore Jail, and above all, the discussion of Sri Aurobindo in the British House of Commons. The narrative also captures the history of the editing of *Dharma* and *Karma Yogin*, his departure for Chandernagore, and his arrival at Pondicherry on 4 April 1910.



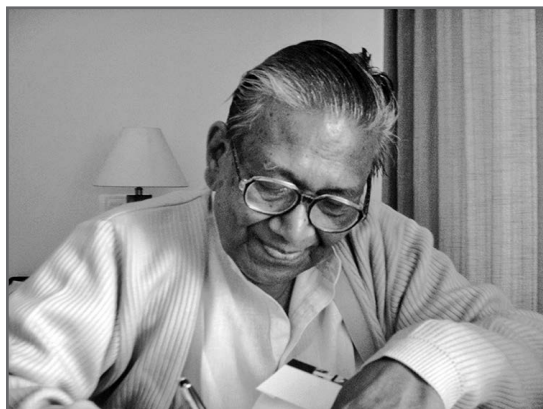
In this biography with its epic sweep that weaves in multiple narratives of events and personalities, the play of forces and the role of the Avatar in human affairs, Manoj Das offers a unique account for the discerning reader. This is an extraordinary record of Sri Aurobindo's life and times during the first decade of the twentieth century. Das reveals, in the process, the hidden hand of Fate and Providence in the making of the nation's history.

This he does primarily and ably through the prism of documents, diary notes, memoirs, pictures and photographs.

He must have been satisfied to see the publication of this major biography before he passed away on 27 April 2021 at the age of 87. He remained engaged in the Odia translation of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* till the very end.

## In Conclusion

Whether in his fiction, speeches, or creative/critical work, Manoj Das conveys his understanding of the human condition and destiny through subtlety and sensitivity. Speaking about his 'message', he aptly suggests to an interviewer: 'What message can I convey, sitting in the shadow of Sri Aurobindo, whose message for humanity is to aspire, grow, and transcend yourself? I do not give any messages, or if I do, it is a subtle message. A pronounced message is a prophet's gift, not that of a writer.'<sup>7</sup>



The dominant voices in the media and academia today reflect a commercial and materialistic culture and a life devoted to hedonism. Undeterred by such clamour, Manoj Das represented unwaveringly, through his writings, the perennial values that India stands for and remained steadfastly loyal to a future full of human possibilities.

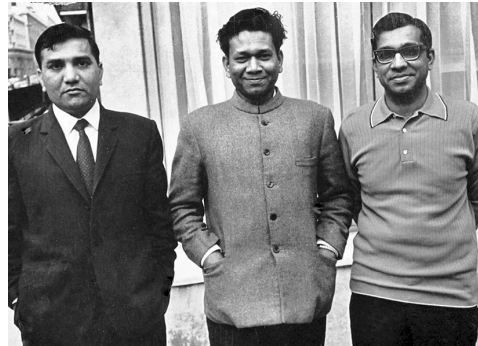
—Sachidananda Mohanty

*Dr Mohanty is former Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Hyderabad, recognised as an Institution of Eminence. Winner of national and international awards (the Katha, British Council, Fulbright, Charles Wallace, and the Salzburg, among others), he has published extensively in the field of British, American, Gender and Postcolonial Studies. He is the former Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Odisha.*

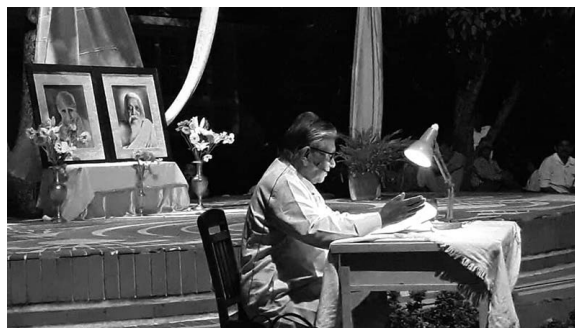
## References

1. This tribute is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Manoj Das and Smt. Pratijna Devi.
2. Apparently, the Government of Odisha under the Chief Ministership of Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo donated a sum for the construction of the Home of Progress. This I learnt from Prapatti of Navajyoti Karyalaya, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
3. There were two non-Odia boarders, if I recall rightly: Matriprasad and Tejendra Parmar. Matriprasad, who serves the Ashram Trust, speaks Odia fluently and is well-grounded in Odia culture.

4. Manav Ratti, Interview: 'Writing the village, becoming the nation: The work of Manoj Das', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2018, p.4. Interview conducted in 2017.  
Also see 'Face to Face: Sachidananda Mohanty Speaks to Manoj Das', *The Hindu Literary Review*, Sunday, January 7, 2007 and  
Obituary Tribute, 'Master Storyteller', by Sachidananda Mohanty, *Frontline Magazine*,  
<https://bit.ly/3yT5n9P>. Accessed on 22.5.2021.
5. 'Face to Face: Sachidananda Mohanty Speaks to Manoj Das', *The Hindu Literary Review*,  
Sunday, January 7, 2007.
6. 'Odisha institutes an award for creative writing in English by Odia writers in memory of  
Manoj Das', *Frontline Magazine*, <https://bit.ly/2RhyNO6>. Accessed on 22.5.2021.
7. Manav Ratti, Interview: 'Writing the Village, becoming the nation: The Work of Manoj  
Das', p.11.



with friends in London, 1971



giving a talk at the Ashram School Courtyard

If there is a body of texts that can be said to represent the roots of India's ancient civilisation, it is the Veda. Yet, for untold centuries these foundational texts of a great spiritual culture have lain in a sacred oblivion, preserved, revered and recited, but hardly understood. Traditional pundits and modern scholars alike have despaired of penetrating their obscurities. But early in the last century, Sri Aurobindo embarked upon a new approach to the old problem of Vedic interpretation. Finally, in the light of his discoveries, the tradition of the Veda as a book of inspired knowledge, and not merely a collection of ritual formulas, appears fully justified.

Sri Aurobindo's essential writings on the Veda have long been available under the titles *The Secret of the Veda* (including *Selected Hymns* and *Hymns of the Atris*) and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. But for those who are eager to read all that he wrote on this subject, a considerable amount of additional material found in his manuscripts has more recently been published. In *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, these newly published writings on the Veda can be found in volume 14, *Vedic and Philological Studies*, and in Part Three of volume 16, the latest edition of *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. But much of this material, especially in the sections called "Commentaries and Annotated Translations" and "Vedic Notes", is likely to be too technical for any but the most scholarly of Vedic enthusiasts. *Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, a reprint of Part One of *Vedic and Philological Studies*, is therefore being made available separately. This comparatively small volume contains most of Sri Aurobindo's previously unpublished writings on the Veda that could be expected to interest the general reader.

Sri Aurobindo's abilities as a scholar are nowhere more apparent than in *The Secret of the Veda*, where he supports his radical reinterpretation of the Rig Veda with verses and passages drawn from all ten Mandalas in a tour de force of logical argumentation. But it was not scholarship alone that enabled him to find the key to the symbolism of this long-misunderstood scripture of prehistoric mysticism. When we read his writings on the Veda, what is most fascinating is to see a modern Rishi encountering the ancient Rishis on equal terms and recognising his own spiritual experiences behind the translucent veil of their "secret words".

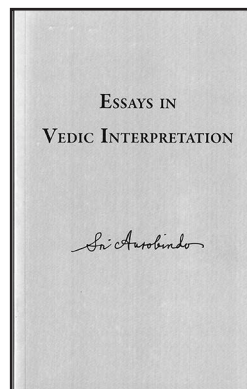
As a scholar, Sri Aurobindo presents his interpretation of the Veda as a hypothesis to be accepted or rejected only after considering all that can be said for or against it. Even in the summary at the end of *The Secret of the Veda*, after marshalling a formidable array of evidence to support his theory, he concludes:

Our object is only to see whether there is a *prima facie* case for the idea with which we started that the Vedic hymns are the symbolic gospel of the ancient Indian mystics and their sense spiritual and psychological. Such a *prima facie* case we have established; for there is already sufficient ground for seriously approaching the Veda from this standpoint and interpreting it in detail as such a lyric symbolism. (CWSA 15: 246)

Unrevised and technically incomplete though it is, *The Secret of the Veda* as published in the *Arya* in 1914–16 remains Sri Aurobindo's definitive work on the Veda, along with those translations of hymns to Agni in *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* that belong to a still later period. *Essays in Vedic Interpretation* represents the preparatory work on the Veda with which he filled notebook

after notebook between his arrival in Pondicherry in 1910 and the launching of the *Arya* in 1914. Some of these writings can be regarded as preliminary sketches for the first few chapters of *The Secret of the Veda* and one or two of the *Selected Hymns*. Since he made a fresh start in the *Arya*, he did not directly use what he had already written. However, these essays are not merely drafts. Perhaps they do not strengthen the arguments found in the book he later published, or enrich significantly our understanding of the Veda itself. But they are full of passages that are of interest both for a study of the development of his theory and as part of the documentation of the period when Sri Aurobindo was, as he wrote in his diary in July 1912, “passing beyond the limitations of the sadhan of the Gita to the sadhan of the Veda” (CWSA 10: 79).

Prospective readers will be happy to know that *Essays in Vedic Interpretation* also contains material which overlaps little with *The Secret of the Veda* and could be recommended even to those who do not have a passion for Vedic scholarship. Especially noteworthy is a piece which, in the absence of a title in the manuscript, has been printed as simply “A Chapter for a Work on the Veda”. Central to this chapter is Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of how the Veda, long after it had almost ceased to be understood, could continue to exercise the influence it is widely recognised to have had on the course of Indian civilisation. The implications of this passage extend far beyond its context to illuminate the occult mechanisms of cultural diffusion and continuity in general:



As psychology progresses, I think it will be more and more clearly recognised that just as men live in one physical atmosphere and are affected in their physical conditions by its state, currents and contents and by the physical condition of others near to them, so also and even to a greater extent we live in one mental atmosphere.... The dynamic action of the mental atmosphere is evident enough in the psychology of crowds, in the rapidity of development of great thought-movements & general tendencies of corporate action and in their contemporaneous efflorescence in widely divided countries.... But if, instead of confining ourselves to these superficial and striking phenomena, we go deeper down into the normal and obscurer action, we shall find in addition to the dynamic movements a constant static condition and pressure of the mental atmosphere which varies but seems hardly to change substantially from age to age.... It is the pressure of this atmospheric sea that more permanently determines the constant mentality of a continent or a nation.

In the rest of the same chapter, Sri Aurobindo discusses other factors that have assisted in the millennial survival of the Vedic spirit behind the changing forms of Indian spirituality and culture. But in the end, here as elsewhere, he is less concerned with understanding the past than with creating the future. It is from this point of view that he regards the recovery of the Vedic knowledge as important for India:

From these considerations there arise two apparently conflicting, but really complementary truths,—first, that in spite of powerful external aids, by the inexorable vicissitudes of Time, we have lost the sense of Veda and do not possess the full sense of Vedanta,

secondly, that both these capital losses can, though with difficulty, by the methods of Yoga & the revelatory experience of great souls, be repaired.

What motivated Sri Aurobindo to plunge into Vedic hermeneutics was not just academic interest. Nor did he limit the spiritual relevance of the Veda to India:

The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race. For I believe firmly that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return and is actually at the present dawn, in the impulses of its vanguard, tending more and more, but vaguely and blindly, to return.

Here we see foreshadowed the opening of *The Life Divine*—whose first chapter, prefaced with verses from a Vedic hymn to the Dawn, appeared in the *Arya* a year or two later along with the first instalment of *The Secret of the Veda*. In this personal statement, written in a notebook with no immediate prospect of publication, we do not hear as yet the magisterial tone of Sri Aurobindo's major works which, chapter by luminous chapter, would soon begin reaching a global readership. But like the commentaries on the Isha Upanishad that he also wrote between 1912 and early 1914, these *Essays in Vedic Interpretation* are of value not only for their declared subject matter. They also open a window into the mind of the Yogi from the North during that fruitful period of his spiritual development when the light of the Vedic dawn was first breaking upon his consciousness.

—Richard Hartz

### The Origins of Aryan Speech ❧ An Introduction

**A**mong the writings that Sri Aurobindo left unfinished and unpublished, *The Origins of Aryan Speech* represents a most significant contribution to human knowledge which long lay buried in his notebooks. During his lifetime, the results of his research on the nature and early development of language saw the light of day only in the form of the general observations in the fifth chapter of *The Secret of the Veda*, “The Philological Method of the Veda”, and in etymological explanations scattered through the same book. Sri Aurobindo referred in a footnote to a proposed and, as we now know, partially drafted work dealing with this topic in detail. But this intention to complete and publish that work remained unfulfilled.

By the late 1950s, his philological writings had begun to be transcribed from his manuscripts and published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The process thus set in motion led to the inclusion of almost two hundred pages of “Essays and Notes on Philology” in Part Five of *Vedic and Philological Studies*, volume 14 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. More than half of Part Five is contained in its third and last section, “Philological Notes”. Consisting mainly of categorised lists of words and roots in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and Tamil, this selection from an even larger body of such notes found in Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts is a sample of the data from

THE ORIGINS  
OF ARYAN SPEECH

Sri Aurobindo

which he drew his conclusions. Much of this material, however, would be of interest to relatively few readers. Therefore only the essays in the first two sections of Part Five, “Drafts of *The Origins of Aryan Speech*” and “Other Writings on Philology”, are reproduced in the present book, along with the general notes on root-sounds at the beginning of the third section.

The use of the word “Aryan” in this context needs to be clarified. At the time when Sri Aurobindo was writing, the languages now referred to by linguists as “Indo-European” were still commonly called the “Aryan languages”. Though he accepted this usage, he was careful to explain not only that he questioned “the rigid philological divorce of the Dravidian & Aryan languages”, but that he excluded from his inquiry any notion of race and “all ethnological conclusions, all inferences from words to the culture & civilisation of the men or races who used them, however alluring may be these speculations”. Limiting himself strictly to the history of words and their meanings, his focus was on the proper domain of philology in the older and British sense, encompassing what is now often called historical and comparative linguistics.

At the heart of Sri Aurobindo’s theory is a psychological insight into the evolutionary origins of language. This is nowhere better expressed than in a passage in *The Secret of the Veda*:

In their beginnings language-sounds were not used to express what we should call ideas; they were rather the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and emotion-values.... Words, which were originally vital ejections full of a vague sense-potentiality, have evolved into fixed symbols of precise intellectual significances. (CWSA 15: 51–52)

In the two unfinished drafts of *The Origins of Aryan Speech* and several related fragments which are reproduced in this book, Sri Aurobindo sets out to trace the early stages of this evolution through a detailed examination of the formation of Sanskrit words supplemented by data from other languages. The result is a sketch of the outlines of a “science of linguistic embryology” whose key tenet is the “superior importance of the root in early language to the formed word”. The development of these ancient languages, as far as it can be reconstructed, reveals itself as “a physico-mental growth as organic, as clearly related in its members, species, families, subfamilies as any particular species of physical fauna & flora”.

In the first draft of *The Origins of Aryan Speech*, Sri Aurobindo takes up words of the “D clan” in order to illustrate his theory. After a meticulous analysis proceeding systematically from fully formed words to their roots and finally the seed sounds they have in common, he sums up:

If there is any soundness in the theory I have been advancing, then as we have found the word-families united in a single root family with a single paternal root (as, *dal*, *dah*, *dabh*, etc), these root families united through the paternal roots in a single primitive root family, phratria or brotherhood (as, the *da* family) with one paternal simple root, & these primitive brotherhoods united through their paternal root (*da*, *di*, *du*, *dr*) in a single clan with one paternal seed sound (*d*), so also we ought to find kindred clans united through their ruling-sound into a single tribe based on the kinship of the paternal seed sounds.

This reflection leads to a consideration of the “guna or mind impression” associated with other dental consonants besides *d*, beginning with the voiced aspirate, *dh*. At this point the draft breaks off. Sri Aurobindo began another draft under the heading “Aryan Origins”. But what promised

to be an even more wide-ranging treatment of the subject – of interest especially for its clarification of the difference between physical and mental sciences – never got beyond the introduction.

Sri Aurobindo's innovative approach to understanding language and its development was not pursued to a final conclusion, as he himself acknowledged. Nevertheless, his ideas were worked out sufficiently to constitute a challenge to mainstream linguistics that is surely worth investigating. Unfortunately, it is hard to see any likelihood that this work will get a hearing under present circumstances from professional linguists. Perhaps it has a better chance of being presented in the context of philosophy of language, now that academic philosophy is beginning to diversify itself and become somewhat more receptive to non-Western perspectives. Whether or not this happens, the intrinsic value of Sri Aurobindo's contribution to this subject is unaffected and awaits its hour for an open-minded appreciation.

When we speak of a Renaissance man, we usually think of the European Renaissance. Figures such as Leonardo da Vinci come to mind. But there have been other Renaissances outside of Europe. Wherever they occur, these cultural rebirths stimulate the expansion of the human mind and spirit in many directions. In the Indian Renaissance, it is Sri Aurobindo who best illustrates the multi-faceted personality that tends to arise in such an age. His work on language is a striking instance, among numerous others, of the range and depth of his interests.

These interests were not only intellectual in nature, even when they coincided with ordinary fields of rational inquiry. In the diary of his spiritual practice, *Record of Yoga*, we find in the early years a number of references to his progress in “bhasha” (language) and “nirukta” (etymology). In one entry, he speaks in this connection of “the superior results of the vijnanamaya method” (CWSA 10: 154). Elsewhere he observes with regard to *nirukta*, referring evidently to his philological research, “much that was seen by intuition formerly is being proved by the data” (CWSA 10: 180). Sri Aurobindo found that attention to such “mundane” topics was entirely consistent with an intensive concentration on the Yoga of self-perfection he was practising. Clearly, he was speaking from his own experience when he wrote in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

It is possible at any period of the inner spiritual progress that one may experience an extension rather than a restriction of the activities; there may be an opening of new capacities of mental creation and new provinces of knowledge by the miraculous touch of the Yoga-Shakti. (CWSA 23: 146)

In his essays on philology, however, Sri Aurobindo made no claim to suprarational means of knowledge as the source of his assertions. Writing as a scholar, he formulated hypotheses, collected data and drew reasoned conclusions. He expressed the hope that one day his work would stimulate others to follow this line of research wherever it might lead:

If it does no more, it may possibly lead to a deeper & freer approach to the problem of the origin of speech, which, once undertaken in the right spirit and with an eye for the more subtle clues, cannot fail to lead to a discovery of the first importance to human thought & knowledge.

—Richard Hartz

*Richard studied philosophy at Yale University and South Asian languages and literature at the University of Washington. He first visited Pondicherry in 1972 and settled in the Ashram in 1980. He works in*

a sample page of Sri Aurobindo's notes on philology



# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## ENGLISH

### WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO

#### The Origins of Aryan Speech

—Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication  
Department, Pondicherry  
88 pp, Rs 65, ISBN: 978-93-5210-189-4  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Sri Aurobindo became interested in researching the origins and nature of the Indo-European languages (of which Indo-Aryan is a branch) and their relationship to the Dravidian languages after he settled in Pondicherry in 1910. His examination of the vocables of the Tamil language led him to discover missing connections and new relations between Sanskrit and Latin, between Greek and Sanskrit. The possibility of an original connection between the Dravidian and Aryan tongues was one reason he took up a study of the Veda in the original. The material in this book is extracted from *Vedic and Philological Studies*, volume 14 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, and contains the title essay as well as other writings on philology and a selection of his notes of simple root-sounds and their most general meanings.

(previously introduced in the February 2021 issue)

See article on page 12

#### Essays in Vedic Interpretation

—Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication  
Department, Pondicherry  
202 pp, Rs 110, ISBN: 978-93-5210-188-7  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Sri Aurobindo began his study of the Veda in Pondicherry; between 1912 and 1914 he took extensive notes and wrote a number of incomplete works on the Veda and on philology. In August 1914 he began to publish his essays on the Veda under the title *The Secret of the Veda*.

Although these essays were newly written for the *Arya*, they made use of ideas and interpretations first introduced in his earlier manuscript writings, which were left unrevised and often incomplete.

The essays in this book are Sri Aurobindo's initial exploratory writings on Vedic interpretation that he had left unpublished. Many ideas and examples that occur in *The Secret of the Veda* are found in these earlier pieces, along with other material. They are reprinted here from Part One of *Vedic and Philological Studies*, volume 14 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo.

See article on page 10

### COMPILATIONS FROM THE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

#### Darshan Messages of The Mother

21 February 1978 to

21 February 2020

—Compiled from the  
works of Sri Aurobindo  
and the Mother

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



### OTHER AUTHORS

#### Sri Aurobindo—Life and Times of the Mahayogi (The Pre-Pondicherry Phase)

—Manoj Das

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Centre  
of Education, Pondicherry  
716 pp, Rs 750, ISBN: 978-93-5210-228-0  
Size: 16 x 24 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

This meticulously researched account of Sri Aurobindo's pre-Pondicherry life is a revised and substantially enlarged version of an earlier work published in 1972, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*. The book is mostly built upon archival documents and extracts from

personal diaries published and unpublished, and extant reminiscences. There is an abundance of quoted material and rare photographs, and many sketches of people who played important roles in his life, whether friend or foe. For example, there is even a story that US President Theodore Roosevelt requested Lord Minto to send him a copy of an issue of *Bande Mataram*, which he enjoyed.

The book charts Sri Aurobindo's early life, his initial entry into politics, his active leadership of the freedom movement, and ends with the story of his departure for Chandernagore and then for Pondicherry. The work is so broad in its scope that three introductions are required to set the stage for the narrative and three postscripts and an epilogue to satisfy its completion. The work was serialised in *Mother India* from April 2011 to November 2017.

(previously introduced in the February 2021 issue)  
see article on page 2

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 7**  
**Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, Cantos Five and Six)**

*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
320 pp, Rs 650, ISBN: 978-93-82474-34-0  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Volume Seven in this series on *The English of Savitri* explores Cantos Five and Six of Book Two: The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. The fifteen cantos of Book Two describe King Aswapati's ascent through all the planes of consciousness, from the subtle-physical planes through the realms of Life and Mind into the higher realms of Mind and beyond. This volume explores Canto Five: "The Godheads of the Little Life", which throws light on the activities of the subtle beings that live in the realms behind the surface of the physical world and seek to block Aswapati's forward journey. In Canto Six: "The

Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life" Aswapati enters the realm of the Greater Life with its higher and nobler possibilities, but still a world restricted by dualities and oppositions.

Like the previous volumes, this book is based on the transcripts of classes held at Savitri Bhavan. Its aim remains the same, to read the poetry according to the natural rhythms of English speech and to gain a better understanding and appreciation of *Savitri* by explaining Sri Aurobindo's vocabulary, sentence structure, and imagery.

*See review on page 20*

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 8**  
**Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, Cantos Seven Eight, and Nine**

*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
166 pp, Rs 400, ISBN: 978-93-82474-35-7  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Volume Eight in this series on *The English of Savitri* explores Cantos Seven, Eight and Nine of Book Two. Aswapati continues his search for the underlying cause and the final cure of the imperfection of our earthly life. He now enters the last three of the Life realms. In Canto Seven "The Descent into Night" and Eight "The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil, and the Sons of Darkness", he descends deeper into the Night of Falsehood and Evil until he finds "the secret key of Nature's change". This discovery at once casts him up into "The Paradise of the Life-Gods" (Canto Nine), a world of unfettered delight where the anguish of his long journey through the realms of Life is healed and he is prepared to enter the worlds of the Mind.

*See review on page 20*

### **Radha's Pilgrimage & other Krishna Stories**

—Written by Lopa Mukherjee; Illustrated by Ritam Upadhyay  
Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry  
152 pp, Rs 180, ISBN: 978-81-7060-424-2  
Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The fourteen stories in this collection are inspired by Lord Krishna and his lila of love. They recall the many relationships he had in his life—with Radha, Rukmini, Sudama, Yashoda, Pradyumna, Arjuna, with friends and enemies, too, and his love for all of humanity. These stories joyously affirm the relevance of Krishna's life amid all the complications of our modern world.

*See review on page 27*

### **Auroville: A City for the Future**

— Anu Majumdar  
Publisher: Harper Element: An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, Noida  
350 pp, Rs 499, ISBN: 978-93-5277-028-1  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

A resident of Auroville for more than thirty-six years, the author explores the extent to which the city's growth reflects its founding vision. To this end she has structured the book broadly along the four main lines of the Auroville Charter: to serve the Divine Consciousness, to be a place of unending education, to bridge the past and the future with a bold step into future realisations, and to work towards a living human unity. Her observations shift between historical narratives and personal perspectives, her own as well as those of other residents of Auroville, to reflect on how the city has grown through some of its most challenging periods and experimental efforts as it strives towards the promise of its charter. Numerous accounts of individual Aurovilians help build up a vibrant picture of the city today.

*See review on page 25*

### **New Earth**

— Avigal Lemberger  
Publisher: Healing Center, Bommayarpalayam  
194 pp, Rs 2700, ISBN: 978-1-947104-0-0

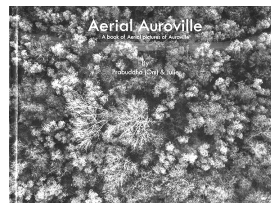


Size: 21 x 28 cm,  
Binding: Hard Cover

The “New Earth” is the result of the composting process when flower mandalas are decomposing into the earth beneath them. It was begun in the Ashram by Auroculture, an Austrian devotee, who collected the wilted and faded flowers from the Samadhi every day. She experimented to find the best way of composting them and eventually brought the first all-flower compost, called “New Earth”, to the Mother. Her work continued in Auroville, and in 1999 the New Earth project moved to the Matrimandir garden. In 2015 the author took over after Auroculture passed away. In this book she describes the process of creating the flower mandalas and the compost from them, but the brilliantly coloured photographs of the mandalas and some apt quotations from the Mother are the heart of the book.

### **Aerial Auroville**

*A book of Aerial pictures of Auroville*  
— Prabuddha (Om) & Julie  
Publisher: The Drone Zone, Auroville  
119 pp, Rs 3000, ISBN: 978-93-82474-33-3  
Size: 30 x 21 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



The aerial colour photographs in this book are arranged according to the different sections, or zones of Auroville, interspersed with words of the Mother on Auroville. In the Peace Area are photos of the Matrimandir and its surroundings. The Residential Zone provides a bird's eye view of the many communities of Auroville. This is followed by aerial shots of the buildings and gardens of the Cultural,

International, and Industrial Zones. The Green Belt, the places lying outside the designations of the Master Plan, and an index identifying the individual photos conclude the presentation.

### ASSAMESE

Surya Alokita Pathere Dibya Jeevanaloy Uttaran  
— Indrajit Goswami, Rs 150  
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Aurobindo and the Mother, Rs 60

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### FRENCH

Guérir par le Yoga—Compiled from the works of  
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, ISBN: 978-93-  
5210-193-1, Rs 240

### GERMAN

Eine Inhaltliche Zusammenfassung von Sri  
Aurobindo's *Savitri*—Zusammengestellt von  
Shraddhavan, ISBN: 978-93-82474-32-6, Rs 125

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Divyashakti Sri Mataji—Jyoti Thanki, Rs 75  
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### ITALIAN

Vita di Sri Aurobindo— collected and  
commented by Adriano Baldo,  
ISBN: 978-93-5210-231-0, Rs 1100

### SANSKRIT

Katharavindam—Vidya Mahajan,  
ISBN: 978-81-7060-421-1, Rs 160  
Kathapallavi—Madhusudan Mohapatra  
ISBN: 978-81-7060-420-4, Rs 220

### SPANISH

La Sintesis del Yoga: Tomo III—Sri Aurobindo  
Translator: José Martín Martín  
ISBN: 978-84-121733-2-1, Rs 2300

### TAMIL

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# BOOK REVIEWS

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 7  
Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the  
Worlds, Cantos Five and Six)**

*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's  
epic Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

320 pp, Rs 650, ISBN: 978-93-82474-34-0

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

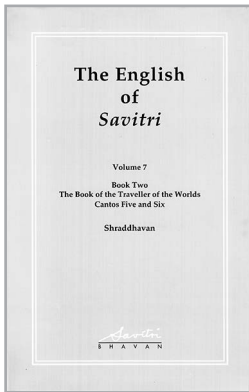
THERE ARE VARIOUS WAYS in which we can enjoy *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo's epic poem that the Mother called "a Mantra for the transformation of the world". We can read it silently, or aloud, to ourselves. We can read it in a group, taking turns. We can read it in short segments or we can have an extended reading of the entire poem together with others. We can read the book from cover to cover or we can open it at random and read a few lines to meditate on. In Shraddhavan's series of books called *The English of Savitri* we are offered another way: to read each passage in succession along with a commentary and analysis that focuses on the meaning of the words and lines, the images and allusions, thereby illuminating the underlying depths of the text. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. In reading *The English of Savitri*, we miss something of the music of *Savitri*, for the continuous flow of passages is broken by the commentary, but those breaks allow us to pause and dive below the surface rather than skim or bob along the top, to consider deeper or hidden meanings, and to bask in the light of a greater understanding. Fortunately, we do not have to choose among these methods;

we can employ them all and each will complement and enrich the others.

Volumes Seven and Eight of *The English of Savitri* concern Book Two of *Savitri*, "The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds". Volume Seven covers Cantos Five and Six, which are respectively titled "The Godheads of the Little Life" and "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life". Volume Eight covers Cantos Seven, Eight and Nine, respectively titled "The Descent into Night", "The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness", and "The Paradise of the Life-Gods". Together the two volumes take us on a rigorous exploration of the vital levels of existence, both in the occult, supraphysical planes of existence, but also in our world and in our individual lives, as the occult planes powerfully influence and shape our own lives. Volume Seven is concerned with the vital beings and forces that most commonly affect our everyday lives; it sheds a bright light on the instincts, desires, motivations, and higher aspirations that drive our behavior and emotions. Volume Eight, much shorter in length, is concerned with the dark foundations of our being, with its adverse and hostile forces and beings which unfortunately hold us tightly in their grip, and briefly with heavens of the Life-Gods, which shed their divine light and love upon us and subtly call us to rise to the heights of our existence and partake of their delights.

As in the earlier volumes of the series, Shraddhavan's approach, which is also used

in her classes at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville on which these books are based, is to focus on elucidating the language of the poem. This is a fundamentally necessary and helpful approach for a number of reasons. One is that *Savitri* is widely read across the world by people for whom English is a second or tertiary language, together with the fact that



the poem employs a vast vocabulary and complex syntax. A related advantage of focusing on the language is that specific words often have several different meanings, or may have subtle secondary suggestive meanings, and clarifying these

gives greater accuracy and precision to our understanding. Many such clarifications were stimulated by questions from the class members, which are scattered throughout the commentary. We also find in *Savitri* numerous allusions to ancient myths and philosophical and spiritual traditions which may be unfamiliar to many readers, and Shradhdhavan's explanations of these enrich our understanding and appreciation of the poem. Another advantage of focusing on the language is that *Savitri* is the poetic expression of a vast and exceedingly complex view of existence, and each element in the poem – represented by words, phrases, individual lines, sentences, paragraphs, cantos – has a place in that vast philosophical system, so providing context is often necessary to understand the significance of the individual elements. This contextualisation comes in different forms, for example, in the Introductions to the volumes

which usually provide a wide perspective on the cantos that are covered, in summaries at the beginnings of new cantos, in brief reviews at the start of some of the sections within cantos, and in specific commentaries on particular passages and words. At the same time, by closely following the text, Shradhdhavan avoids going into speculations or digressions that may distract the reader from the direct meaning and story of the poem.

Some examples of the author's approach to explicating the poem will help to illustrate its style and strengths while also showing something of the substance of the cantos that are covered in these two volumes. The following sentence from the Introduction to Volume Eight is an example of the broad context the author provides and serves as a general guide to the content of both volumes:

In this volume, covering Cantos Seven, Eight and Nine of Book Two, we continue to follow Sri Aurobindo's protagonist, the *rishi*-king Aswapati, in his exploration of the subtle realms and worlds in search of a Power that he has glimpsed in the course of his *sadhana* which would have the capacity to transform the present state of life on earth from its current subjection to death and ignorance into a Divine Life of spiritual freedom and eventual Immortality.

One would be hard-pressed to find a more concise and penetrating summary of Book Two of *Savitri*.

In the first part of Volume Seven there is a short summary of the cantos covered in the previous Volume Six, and then the author begins to analyse Canto Five passage by passage. We get an idea of her approach to

the passage-wise commentaries from her analysis of the first passage of Canto Five:

*A fixed and narrow power with rigid forms,  
He saw the empire of the little life,  
An unhappy corner in eternity.  
It lived upon the margin of the Idea  
Protected by Ignorance as in a shell.*

Aswapati sees '*the empire of the little life*', the realm of lower life-forms and movements, as '*An unhappy corner in eternity*', far removed from the blissful higher levels of Life which were revealed to him in Canto Three. The '*little life*' appears to be '*A fixed and narrow power with rigid forms*', narrow in scope and lacking in flexibility, situated on '*the margin of the Idea*', as if on the outermost edge of the creative conception which has given rise to the manifestation. That realm exists '*Protected by Ignorance*', like a soft-bodied creature which needs to hide inside a hard '*shell*' to feel safe. '*Ignorance*' is the state into which Life emerges as it begins to escape from the total domination by the inconscience of Matter. That state is limited, restricted, subject to error and falsehood, because it cannot see the whole of which it is a tiny part. '*Idea*' with a capital 'I' refers to the original creative conception which has brought the Universe into existence.

Here there are no obscure words to elucidate, but the author expands on the words and phrases to bring out their suggestions and amplify their meaning. We can see how it leads us into a richer, more sumptuous experience of the compact and concise language of the poem. The following passage about the influence that the godheads of the little life have upon us has several unusual words and ideas which the author explains in her commentary:

*For none can see the masked ironic troupe  
To whom our figure-selves are marionettes,  
Our deeds unwitting movements in their grasp,  
Our passionate strife an entertainment's scene.*

The poet refers to the elemental puppeteers who manipulate us on the lower mind levels as a '*troupe*'. This is a word which is used for a group of travelling performers, a circus troupe or a troupe of acrobats. This troupe of puppeteers wear masks so that they cannot be recognised; and they are '*ironic*': They are making fun of us in a rather unpleasant way. They want to make fools of us and pull our strings to make us dance like marionettes, so that '*our deeds*', the things that we do, are '*unwitting movements*' that we do unconsciously, without realising what we are doing or why. Our '*passionate strife*', the struggles that cost us so much anguish and difficulty, are just '*an entertainment's scene*' for them: they laugh at our troubles and enjoy them.

Towards the end of a lengthy discussion of another passage, the author relates an ancient tale which the passage very subtly suggests, a suggestion most readers would otherwise overlook. It concerns the way the world sometimes seems to us so strange as to be even unreal:

*At times all looks unreal and remote:  
We seem to live in a fiction of our thoughts  
Pieced from sensation's fanciful traveller's tale,  
Or caught on the film of the recording brain,  
A figment or circumstance in cosmic sleep.*

...The consciousness which is supporting the world is sleeping; it is dreaming us – our thoughts, our dreams, our experiences, our sensations. Some people have experienced things very vividly like this and concluded that this whole universe is just a dream. And who

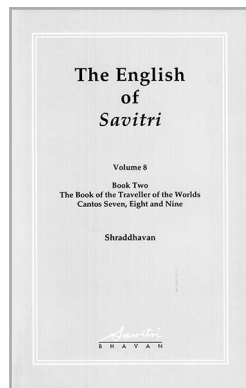
**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 8**  
**Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the**  
**Worlds, Cantos Seven Eight, and Nine**  
*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's*  
*epic Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

166 pp, Rs 400, ISBN: 978-93-82474-35-7

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



peace and delight. Aswapati, the *rishi*-traveller of the inner worlds, successively encounters several different regions in this greater life plane, but none give the satisfaction for which he yearns. The following passage and its commentary

beautifully describe the character of this realm:

*A child of heaven who never saw his home,  
 Its impetus meets the eternal at a point:  
 It can only near and touch, it cannot hold;  
 It can only strain towards some bright  
 extreme:*

*Its greatness is to seek and to create.*

We have to remember that these worlds that King Aswapati is travelling through are typical worlds. They represent planes of manifestation, planes of consciousness. This particular plane, he tells us, is *'A child of heaven'*. There is something heavenly about it, something divine. But it has never seen where it has come from, its origin. So it has this drive, this *'strange enthusiasm'*, this longing, this hunger to meet the eternal, but it can do so only *'at a point'*: a point in time, a point in space, something that is limited. *'It can only'* draw *'near and touch'*, *'it cannot'* get *'hold'* of it, it cannot possess that which it is longing for. *'It can only strain towards some bright extreme'*. There is a constant sense of effort and longing. What is *'extreme'* is at the far end, the Ultimate. The consciousness of that realm can *'strain'* or make an effort *'towards'* such an extreme, but without being able to hold on to it. So the *'greatness'* of this world *'is*

is dreaming it? There is an Indian tale which tells about a rishi who very, very much wanted to experience the true reality. It happened that as Lord Vishnu was sleeping on the infinite serpent Ananta and dreaming the universe into existence, the rishi fell out of his mouth and awoke to find himself in the midst of the cosmic ocean; he sees Vishnu sleeping there, cradled on the coils of Ananta, the snake of infinity. After a while Vishnu woke up a little bit and seeing the rishi floundering in the cosmic waters, picked him up and popped him back into his mouth, so that he finds himself back in his forest abode. Then the rishi did not know which of his experiences was real and which was the dream.

Shraddhavan's discussion of Book Two, Canto Five of *Savitri* which concerns the "Godheads of the Little Life" hits the reader strongly because it is the realm of life with which we are most familiar and which in some ways we may feel is blocking us from our higher hopes and aspirations most poignantly. Canto Six, "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life", covered in the second half of Volume Seven, concerns the part of our nature that is turning to higher things, that feels their call and strives to seek and to find some true and lasting

to seek and to create', in its attempt to realise the impossible.

Whereas Canto Six is an exploration of the higher levels of the life plane, Cantos Seven and Eight, covered in Volume Eight of *The English of Savitri*, are an exploration of the lowest and darkest levels of the life plane. These worlds also have inroads into our world, and they inspire the most horrible scenes, events and atrocities that we witness and suffer here on earth, and which were on full display during the period of the Second World War when Sri Aurobindo wrote this part of the poem. Shraddhavan explains the character of these worlds and their significance in her commentary on the first section of Canto Seven:

In order to find out how to bring about the great change he has glimpsed, the possibility of a divine life here in our own world, Aswapati has to go right to the very root of the problem. That is what is described in these two cantos: this and the next, and it is really not a pleasant journey at all. We have to go through this journey, as King Aswapati does, with courage and endurance and the determination to understand what is being shown and said in order that we might have some possibility of contributing to changing it. The recipe for the change is given in the course of these cantos, but as I said earlier, it becomes really terrifying in some places, like a nightmare. But we must remember that Sri Aurobindo has passed through all these dreadful experiences, and that he has his good reasons for choosing to share them with us.

The following passage from Canto Seven gives a taste of the terror of these realms:

*A peril haunted now the common air;  
The world grew full of menacing Energies,  
And wherever turned for help or hope his eyes,  
In field and house, in street and camp and mart  
He met the prow and stealthy come and go  
Of armed disquieting bodied Influences.  
A march of goddess figures dark and nude  
Alarmed the air with grandiose unease;  
Appalling footsteps drew invisibly near,  
Shapes that were threats invaded the  
dream-light,  
And ominous beings passed him on the road  
Whose very gaze was a calamity:*

In her commentary on this passage, in which she elaborates on the meanings of the words and images, Shraddhavan notes the following:

There have been times and places in human history that were like this. Perhaps in previous lives we have experienced those times and places and so we recognise this description that the poet gives here, of the sense of danger everywhere, all around, wherever you go.

The final part of Volume Eight covers the very short Canto Nine, "The Paradise of the Life-Gods". Shraddhavan explains in her commentary that Aswapati had found in his exploration of the depths of the world of falsehood, 'the secret key of Nature's change', and as a result was projected up from those depths to the paradise of the life-gods. The canto itself is less than three pages, and together with Shraddhavan's commentary it extends to just eighteen pages. It is a beautiful ending to the volume because it carries us out of the horrors described throughout the earlier part into a world of felicity and delight. The closing lines of the canto, which Shraddhavan unpacks in her commentary, give us a taste of that nectar:

*A giant drop of the Bliss unknowable  
Overwhelmed his limbs and round his soul  
became  
A fiery ocean of felicity;  
He foundered drowned in sweet and burning  
vast:  
The dire delight that could shatter mortal flesh,  
The rapture that the gods sustain he bore.  
Immortal pleasure cleansed him in its waves  
And turned his strength into undying power.  
Immortality captured Time and carried Life.*

In her final comments, Shraddhavan explains:

Aswapati has not yet found what he was looking for when he took up his great quest at the beginning of Book One, Canto Five: the Power which can bring about a transformation of humanity and establish a Divine Life upon Earth. But he has discovered the 'secret key of Nature's change' which was hidden deep in the lowest level of subconsciousness, and that discovery has brought him to the Paradise of the Life-Gods and this experience of transformative *Ananda*. In the cantos ahead we shall follow him as he moves on, armed with all this unique knowledge and experience, through a series of lower, higher and greater Mind worlds until at last he reaches the feet of the Supreme Divine Mother and realises that She alone has the Power to fulfil his aspiration.

We look forward to the next volumes of *The English of Savitri* to follow Aswapati's continuing journey, armed with Shraddhavan's revealing explanations and insights.

—Larry Seidlitz

*Larry Seidlitz, Ph.D., is a psychologist and scholar focusing on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He is presently*

*associated with the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) where he is an editor of books and a participant in seminars on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's spiritual teachings. For many years he edited Collaboration, a USA-based journal on the Integral Yoga, and he has authored the books Transforming Lives, Integral Yoga at Work, and The Spiritual Evolution of the Soul.*

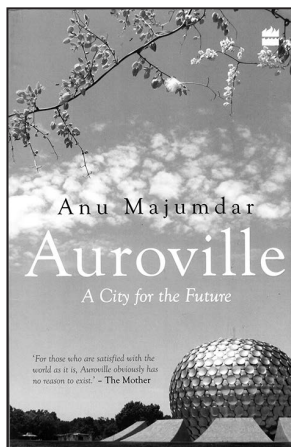
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### Auroville: A City for the Future

— Anu Majumdar

Publisher: Harper Element: An Imprint of  
HarperCollins Publishers, Noida  
350 pp, Rs 499, ISBN: 978-93-5277-028-1  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

IT IS ALWAYS HEARTENING to see an international imprint such as HarperCollins publish a book such as this, as Auroville is still largely unknown amongst the general public. One hopes someone browsing a bookstore would notice the beautiful cover and discover that yes, there are people working at the service of a greater ideal, trying to work out the details of a vast vision. That there is hope.



As a longtime resident, having arrived in 1979, Anu certainly has seen all the facets of the community. And it is especially important that she puts an emphasis on its spiritual foundation. Certainly the afforestation and the international dimensions

are important and part of the integral vision, but what is it that makes Auroville unique when compared to dozens of other ecovillages and various attempts at community or utopian living?

Using the Charter of Auroville as a guide, she divides the book into four sections: Consciousness, Unending Education, City, and Unity. A basic history of the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother begins the narrative, but Anu weaves the past together with her own reflections and anecdotes including those from various Aurovilians. Indeed, this blending continues throughout the book and expands the personal narrative.

Anu recounts a few of the charming stories of those led to Auroville in the early years. Some came from an inner inspiration, others in search of a French meal, still others following what they thought was their true love only to discover a higher kind of love drawing them in.

Of special interest are the Ashramites who first commuted to Auroville and ended up living there, in spite of the many challenges. And there was certainly a great deal of collaboration and support between the two communities, especially during the early years.

Critical to understanding Auroville's *raison d'être* is the Matrimandir. There is a general introductory chapter, but Anu, who spent time working there, also shares personal stories about the early stages of its construction and the various people who worked there, including the remarkable former Catholic priest, Ruud Lohman, who gave himself completely to the Matrimandir's realization.

Anu also had a trial by fire, taking over the Pour Tous food distribution service for the entire community while the manager went to France, and getting immersed into management, computers, Tamil and French all at the same time.

As Anu is a dancer as well as a writer, the arts also weave in and out as a leitmotif throughout the book, and many artists make an appearance through a short profile and description of their work. Anu also includes her own poems from time to time as another portal through which to view Auroville's evolution.

One of the happy detours taken is a section on Golconde, a guesthouse of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Anu sees that in many respects the Ashram, as Udar Pinto used to say, was the laboratory and Auroville the field experiment. Antonin Raymond, the architect of Golconde, came to the project through Pavitra, whom he had met in Japan. Raymond had been working with Frank Lloyd Wright on the Imperial Hotel. He brought his family as well as two other architects, François Sammer, a student of Le Corbusier, and George Nakashima, a Japanese American who had studied at MIT. The result was a remarkable building hailed both in India and abroad. Golconde is the subject of a traveling exhibition based on the book *Golconde: The Introduction of Modernism in India* by Pankaj Vir Gupta and Christine Mueller. The Nakashima compound in New Hope, Pennsylvania, will feature the Golconde Exhibit in May, 2022. George Nakashima became a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and was given the name Sundarananda. He later returned to the USA and became world-renowned as a woodworker. He named his daughter Mira.

Anecdotes about education, and town planning and governance continue the narrative, but what is most important about the entire effort is the constant reference to the foundational insights of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into human nature and the need for inner growth leading to a new consciousness. Quote after quote in various contexts and subjects shows the breadth and depth and radical nature of the vision guiding Auroville. That the Aurovilians are not up to the task at various critical points is a great frustration and Anu does vent with pointed words from time to time. But on the whole this spices up the narrative.

The book ends with a focus on the youth, as we all pray that the next generation does better than ours, and so some highlights of dynamic young second and third generation Aurovilians are featured. Then, like *The Lord of the Rings* movie, there are four more “endings”: reflecting on the Galaxy plan, the esoteric supramental vision of the Mother, another of Auroville’s endless meetings, and the final fifth dream of Sri Aurobindo from one of his essays about India’s independence.

And this extended opportunity to again learn about the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the context of Auroville is the real treasure of reading this book. One could say that often Sri Aurobindo’s teaching is reduced to “All Life is Yoga”, as it appeared on the coins issued for his 125th Birth Anniversary. But in this four-year period between Auroville’s 50th anniversary and Sri Aurobindo’s 150th, it is good to see concrete examples of the lived experience Anu chronicles. She pushes into how we actually try to work out these high ideals in daily life. And this is what makes this book and Auroville itself so special.

I wonder if an outsider will be overwhelmed by so many characters mentioned in this book. Having known many of them personally, I am delighted to be reminded and wish each one could come with a bio and photo. And, of course, Auroville itself is so colorful and visual, yet the photos are all in black and white—and too few and they lack captions. But as Auroville is so dynamic one can only look forward to the next effort to capture what is not always on the surface.

—Julian Lines

*Julian is President of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mount Tremper, New York, USA, and serves on the Board of Auroville International USA.*

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### **Radha’s Pilgrimage & other Krishna Stories**

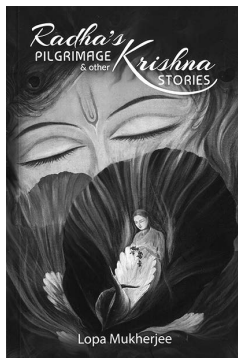
—Written by Lopa Mukherjee; Illustrated by Ritam Upadhyay

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

152 pp, Rs 180, ISBN: 978-81-7060-424-2

Size: 12 x 18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



THE BEAUTY OF MYTHS is that they are ageless and timeless. The essence they shelter and embody in the fold of their words runs deep and touches the narrator and the reader in most profound

ways. The short stories in this book are inspired by the love of Krishna, a boy who loves to steal butter—and our hearts; a lover who entices and ensnares us with his enchanted flute and his mischief; a mentor and compassionate companion who walks

with us and guides our steps with his timeless wisdom, even when we have given up; a god who accepts one and all – the villain and the hero, the coward and the brave, the fallen and the mighty, and the naysayer and the believer – and binds us forever with his universal love.

Some of the stories unfold in the present day with characters we can all relate to: Kanha, an errant boy who is sent away to boarding school; Veer, a modern-day thief who is lured by a storyteller's description of Krishna's jewels, but dissolves in tears and devotion when he sees the cowherd; Leelavati, a dancer who escapes her evil captors with the help of Damu, the cook-turned-collaborator only to realise that it was he, none other than Damodar, who had been helping her all this while and was her true rescuer. The author skilfully and seamlessly slips the many characters, including those from other religions and faiths, into her tales and breathes new life into stories and myths we might have heard from our grandparents.

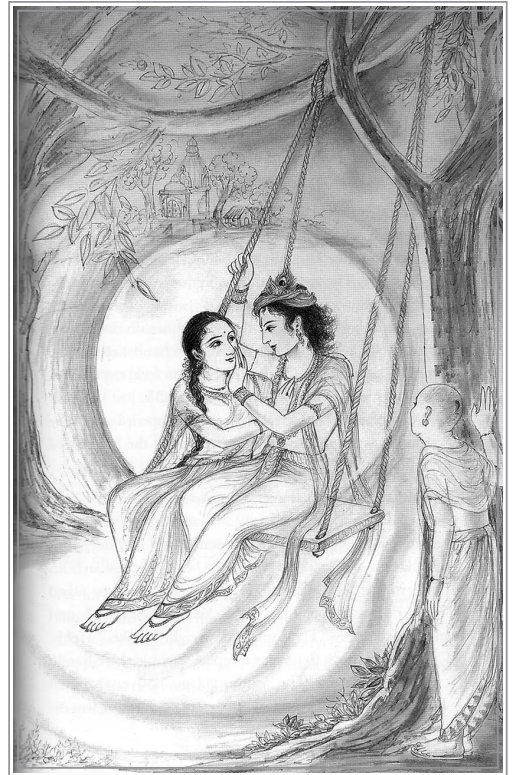
The author also brings to life the towns of Brindavan and Mathura with vivid descriptions, weaving in and recreating beautiful anecdotes and adventures of Krishna, Radha, the gopis and other playmates through stories such as "Radha's Pilgrimage", "Radha and the Birds", "Who is the Luckiest?" and "Radha out-pranks Krishna".

Through a delightful mix of storytelling, interpreting, explaining, teaching and translating *shlokas* and verses from the Gita, the author both entertains and educates the

reader. The book is further enriched by evocative and intricately detailed illustrations by Ritam Upadhyay. If you are a lover of Krishna this book is a must-read and if you are not, you will fall in love with him when you read it.

—Meera Guthi

*Meera is an alumna of SAICE. She has published stories for children and adults as well as journalistic features in various newspapers and magazines. She currently teaches at SAICE, helping students discover the wonder of the written word by exploring literature and honing their own skills as writers.*



an illustration from the book