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# Recent Publications

## S a b d a

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In the reach of his thought and the manner of its expression Sri Aurobindo can assuredly be cast as a global thinker. This year, as we mark the 150th anniversary of his birth, it is important to remember that as far back as 1915–18, while the First World War raged, he was envisioning a different future for mankind, writing thirty-five chapters in successive issues of the *Arya* on *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

Our lead essay presents Sri Aurobindo's acute understanding of human nature and society in the framework of building a vibrant and free human unity. While examining the political, psychological, and geographic factors at play in any attempt at human unity, Sri Aurobindo stresses that "[a] spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future" and that "[a] religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here".



a spiritual oneness to unite the world

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# Sri Aurobindo and World Unity

SRI AUROBINDO, acclaimed as the prophet of Indian nationalism and believed to be the first voice to demand complete independence from British rule, shifted his focus to human unity in a global context once he was assured of the historical necessity and political inevitability of Indian independence. He initiated this quest three decades before India won her freedom and chose to do a painstaking research amidst the flux and turmoil of World War I (during 1915 to 1918), when he penned his blueprint for a future world order in his treatise *The Ideal of Human Unity*. This was an assured testimony to his unshakeable faith in the unity-principle of the Supreme consciousness that consented to manifest a variegated multiplicity with the potentiality to express a vibrant unity. In doing so he laid a metaphysical basis for a principle of unity that could support a diversified matrix of cultures, societies, nationalities and polities without being steamrolled by a bland uniformity.

Having been involved in active politics, Sri Aurobindo had the pragmatism to dwell extensively on the issue of constructing a harmony between individualism and collectivism. In fact, one of the many reasons for the collapse of the USSR was that the attempt to resolve class conflicts was not accompanied by an insightful attempt to resolve the conflict between the individual and the collectivity. Apparently, such a reconciliation is beset with momentous hindrances. The science of polity has tried to deal with it by balancing the authority of the State with the freedom of the individual, but that ended only in skewed compromises. This conflict can never be satisfactorily resolved unless human nature, which is operative both in individualism and collectivism, remains as it is with egoism in both individual and collective spheres changing its denouements at different stages.

Sri Aurobindo views this issue from the perspective of an evolution in consciousness. Evolution begins from Matter and it is physical consciousness with which we start our journey. The material life based on physical consciousness is concerned more with persistence than progress, more with self-repetition than self-enlargement. The end result is that uniformity in material life manifests in the gregarious nature of human groups since the beginning of our race. Association became imperative to the survival of the human species. Sri Aurobindo explains that uniformity in human groupings brought safety, security, growth, efficiency, self-assertion, self-preservation—attributes that constitute “the dominant idea of all collectivism”. [291]<sup>1</sup>

The poise of uniformity got unsettled with the appearance of the Life-principle followed by the Mind-principle. The former brought in robust vitality and the latter led to a quest for a progressive perfection. Human groups became increasingly complex as the growing clash between the freedom and variation of the individual with the uniformity of group norms led to the mighty conflict between individualism and collectivism.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations are from volume 25 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* with page numbers shown in square brackets after the quoted material.

Such a conflict needs resolution to build a foundation for world union. Sri Aurobindo started his magnum opus *The Life Divine* by explaining that Nature progresses by continually harmonising apparently irreconcilable principles. Nature successfully harmonised the buoyancy of Life-Energy with the inertia of Matter to change the quality of substance from inanimate to animate. Beginning from the rudimentary brain in animals, Nature perfected the central nervous system through the biological spiral of evolution till it could support the spectacular world of ideation in the human mind. Sri Aurobindo explains that the human being is a transitional being in the trajectory of evolution and consciousness per se would facilitate the emergence of higher models of human beings who would form higher-order gnostic societies where freedom would be intuitive, spontaneous and truthful. In consonance with the inner law of love, light, right thinking and right action, these societies therefore would not be in conflict with discipline. In such a milieu, individualism and collectivism could spontaneously harmonise.

But this “high dream of philosophic Anarchism” [292] would not materialise until the human being as the forerunner of progress consciously participates in the evolution of consciousness. And *pari passu* with the individual’s progress, the collectivity has also to progressively shift its denouement to support the continual unfolding of human potentials along the evolutionary trajectory of consciousness.

The collectivity has traversed many formations ranging from the tribe and clan and commune to become a living group-unit in the garb of the nation. The nation-idea has consolidated in the psyche of the race and would persist till it is surpassed by the whole of humanity. With time, the nation as a psychological unit had to be buttressed by administrative laws, territorial integrities and political sovereignty to develop into a State.

However, this shift from the psychological status of the nation-idea to the administrative domain of the State-idea brought new equations. The State transgresses its limits to dictate the intellectual and moral development of the whole community. Sri Aurobindo quipped, “This attempt of the State to grow into an intellectual and moral being is one of the most interesting phenomena of modern civilisation.” [299]

It is in the background of an evolutionary trajectory towards the freely conscious individual, the passion of the nation-idea and the administrative rigidities of the State-idea that Sri Aurobindo proceeds to visualise a global unity which could take two forms:

- (a) A federation of free nations, or
- (b) Distribution of the earth into a few great transnational hegemonies.

He also hinted that a practical combination of the two ideas could also be “the foundation of a new enduring order of things”. [311]

Sri Aurobindo navigates to his vision of global unity by examining several thematic issues.

### **Multiple unity**

It was important to understand firstly how a national aggregate could shift to a heterogeneous multinational aggregate and secondly how an artificial political unity of a heterogeneous setup

could get translated into a real and psychological unity. The expansionist zeal of imperialism that was motivated by egoistic political overtures could not be replicated in the saga of internationalism that would ideally be more value-based. Yet a premature enforcement of symmetrical homogeneity by effacing heterogeneous elements could prove counterproductive. There could even be a resurgence of the empire-idea from the subconscious of the race. Perhaps a loose confederation characterising a federal heterogeneous conglomerate would be preferable, where the right of self-determination could support particularism instead of separatism. A multiple unity where the sub-units of a heterogeneous aggregate would retain their uniqueness while surpassing their limitations could be the transcript of the future.

### **Free association of free human aggregates**

Sri Aurobindo believed that just after World War I a federation of free nations would not be feasible, but a system of federated empires and free nations drawn together in closer association could be a stepping stone. Europe seemed to offer an optimal field for such an experiment. Though it was not a new idea, Sri Aurobindo envisaged a kind of European union not for consolidation of pan-European power and prestige but as a transitional step towards global unity. Yet this would sound too reactionary as long as European States had colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The fact that the United States was showing little interest in maintaining colonies was a signal that a new energy would replace the old order. Moreover, an international or inter-European law should evolve as something more than a moral force if it meant to eliminate war. He wrote in 1916:

Some form of European federation, however loose, is therefore essential if the idea behind these suggestions of a new order is to be made practically effective, and once commenced, such a federation must necessarily be tightened and draw more and more towards the form of a United States of Europe. [350-351]

He was pragmatic enough to add that a European union would have to symbolise a free association of free human aggregates and would need to let go of their colonies once subject-nations attained the capacity for self-administration. The European Union was formalised through the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, as he had foreseen in 1916. It happened once age-old disputes between archrivals like Germany and France ended, and the Fascist regimes that ruled Spain, Italy and Portugal, as well as the Soviet puppet regimes, fell. (Apropos the Russia-Ukraine War of 2022, it is significant that neither country is a member of the European Union though Russia has a permanent representative in the Union and Ukraine has an association agreement with it.)

### **The future of the principle of nationality**

The persistence of national egoisms can always precipitate armed conflicts and the Time-Spirit could move towards an eventual dissolution of the nation into a larger principle of aggregation. Sri Aurobindo hinted at two possible outcomes, either the gradual dominance despite setbacks of the idea of the *“sans-patrie”*, the citizen of the world that runs counter to the nation-idea or the persistence of the nation with “vigorous particularism” within a larger unity. [412] Finally, the nation may persist “but with a reduced and subjected vitality, or even

without any real vitality or any living spirit of particularism or separatism, as a convenience, an administrative rather than a psychological fact like a French department or an English county”. [412] Sri Aurobindo simultaneously cautions that the reduced vitality of the nation can retain sufficient mechanical distinctness to re-assert itself if the assimilation is mechanical and does not reflect true unity.

### **The shadow of the State idea**

Sri Aurobindo explains that eulogising Reason is an impediment to the harmony between regimentation and liberty as well as between nationalism and internationalism for Reason can justify any strife or discord. He was worried that the post-World War I period would witness the shadow of the State idea [410] that with the help of a skewed Reason could eclipse the principle of liberty needed to be a free world citizen. A new integer of liberty would have to arise from the consciousness that manifests the world. In 1916 he had visualised that after a cycle of violent struggle between the ideals of regimentation and liberty, a socialistic period “might prove comparatively of brief duration” and followed by the principle of unbridled freedom or a makeshift compromise till a fresh experimentation started. [414] The political and administrative unification of mankind would have to wait until collective evolution led to a federation of free and equal nations or until it could adopt as its motive a perfect harmony between nationalism and internationalism.

### **Free and natural groupings**

The move towards human unity must take into consideration that human groupings should be free in spirit and natural in structure. “The first principle of human unity, groupings being necessary, should be a system of free and natural groupings which would leave no room for internal discords, mutual incompatibilities and repression and revolt as between race and race or people and people.”[429] The defeat of old empires as a result of World War I logically gave rise to a new principle of free groupings that was named “the idea of self-determination”. [435]

Such free groupings are needed to develop the sense of psychological unity. If unity cannot be established for certain reasons, the old principle of force may be temporarily useful. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1917 that a forced unification could act as a “half-way house to the unity of all the nations of the world”. [431] His insight was proved correct when we see reflections of the half-way house in the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in 1958 acting as precursors of the European Union in 1993.

### **The Russian experiment**

Throughout 1917 while the Russian revolution was taking place, Sri Aurobindo was watching with curiosity how the two rival principles—the principle of self-determination underlying the Nation idea and the principle of political and economic necessity underlying the State idea were operating in Russia. Could that lead to a psychological union? A federation cannot succeed in the absence of a common heritage, which Sri Aurobindo pointed out existed in



the American States, Germany, India and China but not in Russia, and the dissolution of the old Russian fabric made a united action difficult. Writing in 1918 he pointed out that the only way Russia could achieve unity was by force – military, administrative and political – a ploy that had succeeded in the past but now would not be smooth. He noted that even if it failed, the seed-idea of the Russian experiment would remain in the psyche of the race and could become relevant under better circumstances. He was emphatic that the principle of free confederation was worthy to be pursued:

For it belongs to a future of free world-union in which precisely this principle of free self-determination must be either the preliminary movement or the main final result, to an arrangement of things in which the world would have done with war and force as the ultimate basis of national and international relations and be ready to adopt free agreement as a substitute. [539]

### **Conditions of a free world union**

Sri Aurobindo enumerated: “A free world-union must in its very nature be a complete unity based on a diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination.” [540] It should have two intertwined principles—elimination of war and recognition of the equal rights of all peoples and adherence to the principles of justice, reason, and human rights as well as to the principle of freedom. To balance freedom in a world order marked with political inequality, international arbitration would be needed. A year after Sri Aurobindo penned these lines in 1918, the Versailles Treaty was signed on 28 June 1919 wherein Article 14 proposed a Permanent Court of International Justice to reconcile political inequality of States with judicial equality of States. When the International Court of Justice was established in 1945, it continued that tradition. Sri Aurobindo also reiterated that the demand for equality and justice in economic affairs would have to be accommodated in a free world union.

Also, a free world union cannot support cultural imposition:

For the final end is a common world-culture in which each national culture should be, not merged into or fused with some other culture differing from it in principle or temperament, but evolved to its full power and could then profit to that end by all the others as well as give its gains and influences to them, all serving by their separateness and their interaction the common aim and idea of human perfection. [545]

### **Modes of unity and religion of humanity**

Sri Aurobindo speculated that international unification could be in the form of a “centralised World-State” or “looser world-union” that could be a “close federation or a “simple confederacy”. [574] The looser federal setup would be more desirable than the World-State as it would give ample scope to the principle of variation needed for a freer play of life and progress. Whether there would be one such single federation of free nationalities or two or three such federations in mutual harmony was best left to the future.

Yet a looser confederacy can succumb to centrifugal forces and break up unless there be a saving power. The saving power that would ensure unity without compromising freedom and self-determination could not be an ego-based, divisive principle but a true religion of

humanity arising not from creeds or dogmas but from the matrix of a unitary consciousness that reflected spiritual universalism. “A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development”. [577]

In practical terms this would mean a reappraisal of what Sri Aurobindo considered the “three godheads of the soul”—Freedom (liberty), Equality and Brotherhood (fraternity). [569] An emphasis on liberty makes the ego harp on competitive individualism. An assertion of equality ignores the variations in nature. Fraternity fails to consolidate as it is based on mechanical comradeship and egoistic interests. Liberty and Equality can be upgraded and harmonised only when Fraternity is based on soul-kinship. That would lead towards a new psychological basis of world unity.

### **Towards the future**

During the time when Lenin fled to Finland after the July 1917 uprising and wrote his treatise *The State and Revolution* before returning to Russia in October, Sri Aurobindo was speculating that a proposed League of Nations would not be durable. It would break up as soon as the interests of the constituent powers became disunited should a new situation arise by a resurgence of oppressed powers; or there could emerge a “duel between the young Titan, Socialism, and the old Olympian gods of a bourgeois-democratic world”. [478]

*The Ideal of Human Unity* appeared serially in the *Arya* between September 1915 and July 1918; was published as a book in 1919 and then revised in the late 1930s. When it was published again in 1950, it contained a postscript chapter in which Sri Aurobindo hailed the advent of the United Nations but was skeptical about the veto power of the members of the Security Council as it reflected “a strong surviving element of oligarchy”. [582]

Sri Aurobindo remained a true visionary. In speculating on the nature and consequences of a possible third World War, he remarked that if the two World Wars had laid the foundation of internationalism that led to the United Nations, a third World War could conceivably push to consolidate that endeavour for a more lasting world peace. [580] And if the United Nations collapsed, a third attempt would ensue with “a differently constituted body” which would be more successful and facilitate a true World-State on a principle of equality into which considerations of size and strength would not enter. [583]

On 7 June 1967, The Mother related a vision of Sri Aurobindo explaining to her “A federation of all nations and countries without exception, all continents. A single federation: the federation of all human nations of the earth.” She elaborated further:

And a group – a governing group consisting of one representative from each country, the most able man from the standpoint of political and economic organisation. And nothing of the proportional question that would give large countries many representatives and small ones only one – one representative for each country. Because every country represents one aspect of the problem. And they would sit in rotation.

The concept of world unity would no longer be an unfulfilled ideal.

—Dr Soumitra Basu

*Dr Basu is a psychiatrist exploring the consciousness paradigm of health, psychology, and psychotherapy from the integral perspective of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.*

Some Notes on the Text of *The Ideal of Human Unity*

*The Ideal of Human Unity* first appeared in the *Arya* in thirty-five chapters between September 1915 and July 1918. At the time he commenced the series, Sri Aurobindo wrote to the Mother:

I have begun in the issue of the *Arya* which is just out a number of articles on the Ideal of Human Unity. I intend to proceed very cautiously and not go very deep at first, but as if I were leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity—especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.

In June 1949, asked about the possibility of publishing this book and *The Psychology of Social Development* (which had not yet been renamed *The Human Cycle*), Sri Aurobindo answered that

they have to be altered by the introduction of new chapters and rewriting of passages and in *The Ideal* changes have to be made all through the book in order to bring it up to date, so it is quite impossible to make these alterations on the proofs. I propose however to revise these two books as soon as possible; they will receive my first attention.

Sri Aurobindo did not revise either book to the extent he had proposed. Although he made minor changes throughout *The Ideal of Human Unity*, his attempt to bring it up to date was largely confined to adding and revising footnotes. The only new chapter introduced was a long Postscript Chapter reviewing the book's conclusions in the light of recent international developments.

The seventy-eight footnotes in the present edition of *The Ideal of Human Unity* reflect the complex history of the text. Only three of these can be traced to the *Arya* (two other footnotes found in the *Arya* were deleted during revision). Sri Aurobindo added more than fifty footnotes in his first revision, many of them referring to political developments of the 1930s such as the rise of Fascism. In his second, lighter revision, undertaken more than ten years later, he also made extensive use of footnotes for updating the text. Some two dozen new footnotes were added at this time and an equal number of the earlier ones revised. Thus the majority of the footnotes in the final version may be taken to represent the standpoint of 1949–50.



# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

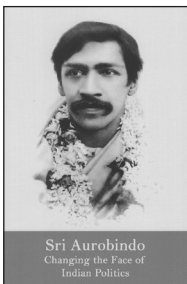
## ENGLISH

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

### **Sri Aurobindo: Changing the Face of Indian Politics**

—Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication  
Department

82 pp, Rs 50, ISBN: 978-93-5210-255-6  
Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



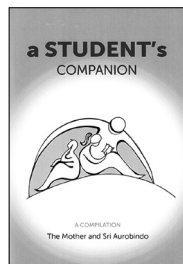
Comprising passages from Sri Aurobindo's speeches, newspaper editorials, and writings on his political life, this book highlights his leadership of the Nationalist movement from 1905 to 1910, when he claimed complete independence from

British rule as the primary step towards the resurgence of India on all fronts of national life. It reveals the development of his political thought to secure India's freedom, his vision of a free and united India working for the progress of human unity, and his belief in her role as a spiritual leader of the world.

### **A Student's Companion**

—A compilation from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo  
Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

159 pp, Rs 180  
ISBN: 978-81-7060-425-9  
Size: 14 x 21 cm  
Binding: Soft Cover



These selections remind the reader that the highest and deepest parts of the being are not the mind or the emotional being but the spirit within. Students of all ages should strive to grow

into this truth by discovering one's true aim in life and preparing oneself, becoming more conscious, and dedicating one's will to achieving this progress. Chapters highlight a student's attitude to study, the education of the entire being – body, vital, mind, including a psychic education –, how to live consciously with respect to prayer, beauty, love, friendship, Mother Nature, time, and work, and how to face fear, pain, and death.

### **India: Its Spirit and Mission**

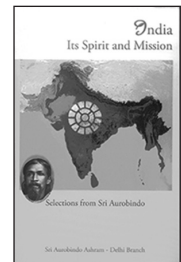
—Selections from Sri Aurobindo  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch  
48 pp, Rs 75

ISBN: 978-81-952762-3-3

Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These selections from Sri Aurobindo's writings point to the Indian idea of nationhood—the nation as Shakti, a great communal soul and life with its own law of nature. They describe the keys to the greatness of the Indian civilisation as her spirituality, her stupendous vitality, her strong intellectuality, and a profound psychological foundation. They portray the distinct value of Indian civilisation, her originality, creative genius, and their impact on the world. They lay bare her mission, with its challenges and future directions, to be a living example of how to find the larger self in others, in the nation, in humanity, in God. The book concludes with extracts from Sri Aurobindo's own description of his political action in the first decade of the twentieth century.



## OTHER AUTHORS

### **Love Treasures**

—144 Watercolour Paintings by Usha Patel  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry  
180 pp, Rs 600, ISBN: 978-93-5210-236-5  
Size: 22 x 28 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

This book contains 144 watercolour paintings that illustrate brief passages from *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo. Usha Patel, the young artist, took up this work in 1970 with the Mother's blessings and completed the paintings in seven years. Encouraged by the Mother, she showed the first forty-six finished paintings to her. Each colour plate is presented on a full page with the corresponding sentence from *The Mother* printed below. A life sketch of Usha, some photographs of her, and several birthday messages and letters to her are placed at the end of the book. In 1985 a book with the first twenty-four paintings was published. The present edition contains the complete set.

*See review on page 16*

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 9  
Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the  
Worlds, Cantos Ten and Eleven**

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

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
252 pp, Rs 500, ISBN: 978-93-82474-38-8  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

*(previously introduced in the February 2022 issue)*

*See review on page 19*

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 10  
Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the  
Worlds, Cantos Twelve to Fifteen**

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

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
189 pp, Rs 450, ISBN: 978-81-955260-1-7  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Volume Ten in this series on *The English of Savitri* explores the last four cantos of Book Two: The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. In Canto Twelve Aswapati enters "The Heavens of the Ideal" where he finds the ideal of delight in beauty and the ideal of the power of the dedicated will. Beyond them, in "The Self of Mind" of Canto Thirteen, he experiences a liberation, where his soul found peace, knowing the "cosmic whole".

Moving past this plane, he discovers, in Canto Fourteen, a secret entrance into "The World-Soul", the psychic world, where he encounters the Mother as the Soul of the World. In Canto Fifteen, "The Kingdom of the Greater Knowledge", Aswapati reaches the top of all that can be known but has still not found the transforming power he sought, the power that can give a life divine on earth. He will continue his quest in Book Three: The Book of the Divine Mother.

*See review on page 21*

**Sri Aurobindo's Poetry: The Many and the  
Harmony**

—Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan  
286 pp, Rs 500, ISBN: 978-93-90873-65-4  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Approaching the poetry of Sri Aurobindo based largely on a thematic division, the author stresses throughout that while diverse in theme, form, style, and technique, his poems almost all relate to his integral philosophy and vision of the future. There are chapters devoted to the early romantic poems, to poems with a distinct political cast, to those where philosophical issues were taken up as themes, and to his later poems that are mostly transcriptions of the poet's spiritual experiences. The final chapter, "The Legacy", on the poets he nurtured and inspired, reveal through the comments and suggestions aspects of his own theory of poetics. The author has purposely omitted *Savitri* and Sri Aurobindo's longer narrative poems from this analysis but includes an introduction that examines the spiritual poetics and foundations of the poetry of the future as laid out in *The Future Poetry, Savitri*, and his letters.

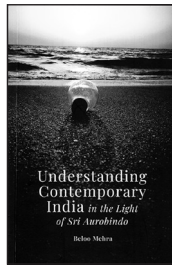
*See review on page 12*

**Understanding Contemporary India in the Light  
of Sri Aurobindo**

—Dr Beloo Mehra

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society,  
Pondicherry  
207 pp, Rs 390, ISBN: 978-81-7060-430-3  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

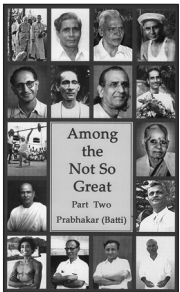
As the title of Dr Beloo Mehra's book suggests, this collection of essays written over a period of time provides a bird's-eye view of contemporary India in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought. The essays capture current Indian mindsets on social and cultural issues confronting the country and emphasise the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's views on revitalising India in ways that will allow the nation to live out its essential characteristic, spirituality, in all walks of life. Dr Mehra stresses the importance that Sri Aurobindo placed on original thinking for a vibrant national life, affirming its power to add vigour and strength to the character of a people.



### Among the Not So Great (Part Two)

—Prabhakar (Batti)

Publisher: Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry  
77 pp, Rs 100, ISBN: 978-81-86413-66-1  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



In this continuation of Batti's reminiscences of several *sadhaks* from the early years who have since passed away, there are nineteen brief portraits, each accompanied by a photograph that embellishes the author's evocation of the person. Among the company are both well-known figures such as

A.B.Purani, Udar, and Mona Sarkar as well as some equally admired but perhaps lesser-known disciples. All are treated with the author's obvious affection and sense of humour. The title, inspired by Dilip Kumar Roy's book *Among the Great*, suggests how the achievements of these figures may not have been great in the conventional sense, but their utter devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the moments of joy their memories evoke reveal that often true and lasting greatness lies in the profoundest simplicity and humility.

## ASSAMESE

Mohaxokti—Maa, Rs 50

Otimanobor Obotoron—Sri Aurobindo aru  
Srimaar Rosona Xongrohor pora Xonkolito aru  
Onudito, Rs 70

Maar Protik Aru Teor Xoktixomuh—Sri  
Aurobindo aru Srimaar Rosona Xongrohor pora  
Xonkolito aru Onudito, Rs 80

Dibyo Hahi—Sri Aurobindo aru Srimaar Rosona  
Xongrohor pora Xonkolito aru Onudito, Rs 50

## BENGALI

Sugandhi Alap—Dheemoyee

ISBN: 978-93-5566-801-1, Rs 150

Nishikanta Kabita Samagra—Nishikanta, Rs 1050

## GUJARATI

Prashno Ane Uttaro 1957–58 (Granth 9)

—Sri Mataji, Rs 300

Yogasamanvaya Volume 2—Sri Aravind

ISBN: 978-93-5210-204-4, Rs 390

Ma (Gujarati/English)—Sri Aravind, Rs 60

Savitri Shabdarnut-13—Shraddhavan, Rs 300

Esha: Ek Asadharan Chokari—Nirodbaran, Rs 20

Sri Aravinda Patravali Vivaran—Makarand

Brahma, Rs 20

Sri Aravinda Rachita Grantha The Life Divineno

Samooaha Abhyaas 1, Grantha 1 : Prathama Saat

Prakaranano—Shraddhavan, Rs 300

## HINDI

Sri Aravind Apne evam Ashram ke Sambandha  
mein (Bhag 2), Sri Aravind ki Yoga-Sadhana:

Sadhak-Shishiyon ke sath Patrachar

—Sri Aravind, ISBN: 978-93-5210-238-9, Rs 150

Sri Aravindakrita Rodogune—Amrita Bharati

ISBN: 978-93-80424-63-7, Rs 900

## ITALIAN

Sulla Guerra—Sri Aurobindo e Mère

ISBN: 978-93-5210-256-3, Rs 130

Microbi e Epidemie—Compilation from the  
works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

ISBN: 978-93-5210-249-5, Rs 130

## TAMIL

Bassora Amaichchargal—Sri Aurobindo, Rs 300

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## Sri Aurobindo's Poetry: The Many and the Harmony

—Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan

286 pp, Rs 500, ISBN: 978-93-90873-65-4

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Professor Dutta has written a wonderful book for those of us already happily in love with Sri Aurobindo's poetry, as well as the ones who know there's something deeper to explore in His writings, yet haven't already found their keys to the kingdom of His visionary poetic corpus.

Indeed, Ms Dutta provides an ideal introduction to the poetic expressions of the Master. In the Preface to the book she gives a thorough disposition about how she, for herself, approaches this unique Indo-Anglian poetry: "I see it, approach it, seek it as a seeker of the True and the Beautiful in life." The author doesn't consider herself a critic, rather a "participant" in the "infinite adventure" that the reading of Sri Aurobindo's poems has been for her, a journey to which she would like to invite us. The chapters devoted to the poet's romantic, political, philosophical and experimental works are steps along the path drawing us towards a unique appreciation of his poetry.

In the Introduction Professor Dutta presents the central thesis of *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry: The Many and the Harmony*, the integration and inclusivity of universal themes and their particular expressions in and as poetry throughout Sri Aurobindo's works. She familiarises the reader with the Vedic theory of *rasa*, which intimates an

essential delight behind any artistic experience, and relates it to the overarching concept of *lila*, the world as play. She frames Sri Aurobindo's poetic works in different aspects of his integral philosophy and dimensions of his yoga as well as the sources of inspiration he postulates; from imagination and intuition up to the Overmind. Flowing from these, language turns to mantra and what Sri Aurobindo termed Overhead Poetry. Vedic, psychoanalytical and Aurobindonian perspectives on impersonal and personal aspects of poetry are discussed, as well as their different assessments on the possibly cathartic effects of art. Setting the stage for her reflections on the varieties of themes and styles in Sri Aurobindo's poetry in the book's chapters, the author emphasises again the qualities of universality and integrality in the poet's works. The topics of Sri Aurobindo as an Indian and "really an English writer" (Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*) and the utility of the English language to express inner experiences from distinct inspirational roots within and above are discussed. The scholar relates Sri Aurobindo's poetry to relevant literary traditions, especially the genre founded by himself, the Future Poetry.

### The Romantic Phase

Beginning with what Professor Dutta terms Sri Aurobindo's romantic phase, she is able to parse the term with nuance by situating it within the first literary flourishing of a teenage Aurobindo Ghose in England, as well as the English language literature and romantic genre of poetry that might have influenced him at the time. I was surprised to learn here that the first poem published by Aurobindo, when he was just ten, "Light", was what she termed prophetic, and involved biblical themes such as the Garden of Eden, Noah's ark and the birth of the messiah of the

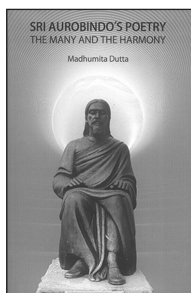
Christian faith. In "Songs to Myrtilla" she predominantly identifies "sensual poetry" in the "Romantic temper" that, according to her, "is felt throughout" this poem, but also first hints "of the nature-mystic to be" and lines that bear similarities to some of Shakespeare's and Kalidasa's. While in "Myrtilla" "*Love's feet were on the sea*" and part of a movement "*into the perfect day*", Sri Aurobindo's poems "Night by the Sea" and "The Lover's Complaint" cause the author to contemplate that the young poet's "heart's desire remains unfulfilled perhaps" and that "Sri Aurobindo has recruited the myth [of Virgil's Eclogues] to reflect on his personal experience of love and loneliness." These aforementioned poems, according to the author, share with "Love in Sorrow" an atmosphere of "gloom", and, together with the "brilliant imagery" and "original lyric" of "The Sea at Night", reflect "common themes of love, hope, fear, desire and discontent".

### The Sonnets

Additionally to the love poetry of Sri Aurobindo's adolescence, his sonnets, composed after his return to India around 1900 while he was in his late twenties, represent another phase. The professor finds these later contributions to the genre to be more confident and playful, as "Since I have seen your face" exemplifies, and in other poems becomes even "Shakespearean" and reflects an "inward turn" towards the "love as something higher" and "something eternal and infinite", as declared in the line "*Immortal love, immovable by death*" from the sonnet "Because thy flame is spent". This latter trend is mirrored in the sonnet "I cannot equal". Here the poet describes detachment, equanimity and acceptance in the face of unrequited or impossible love and the joy of love for the sake of love, independent of life's denials of



the inner experience. Professor Dutta: “We may read these lyrics of the heart as imaginative exercises on the passion and power called love, which is strong, immortal and divine.” “My life is wasted” again showcases a more conflicted and ambivalent experience of human love that reminds the author of the poet Petrarch and shares its symbolism of fire with “Because thy flame is spent”. “I have a hundred lives” continues the theme of an undying love orienting itself beyond the human world, towards the “*Spirit ethereal*”, and similarly in the sonnet “Rose, I have loved” and the later poem “Immortal Love”. She attributes these changes to Sri Aurobindo’s intensifying yogic *sadhana* and sees the poem “Appeal” as a subsequent encouragement of his readers to also “believe in the power of love”. The author sees this journey of the “love-poet” from human to divine to reach a culmination in “Surrender”.



Sri Aurobindo’s farewell from England and its literary muses, and his wish to return home to a “greater work” Professor Dutta finds expressed in the Romantic poem “Envoi”. This change the author also finds reflected in the poet’s critical re-evaluation of his literary works produced in England (“To a Hero-Worshipper”) and a greater presence of Indic themes in his poetry (“O Coil, Coil”). Finally, returning to the main theme of her book *The Many and the Harmony*, she traces the integration of the poet’s development in the Romantic style in his later works, even in passages of *Savitri*, which reflect “attitudes of the poet to love, romance and Nature”.

### Political Themes

In the chapter titled “The Political Code” the author examines Sri Aurobindo’s poetry in relation to themes of the struggle for

independence, war and other societal trends he observed at the time and, according to her, foresaw. Already in England, Sri Aurobindo had dedicated poems to an Irish independence fighter, namely “Charles Stewart Parnell”, “Lines on Ireland” and “Hic Jacet”. In these the professor identifies a still young Sri Aurobindo’s empathy for someone who had given his life for an aspirational vision of their country, one they were ready to sacrifice everything for. After his return to India, Sri Aurobindo contributed to the genre of Indian patriotic poetry during the struggle for his

Motherland’s independence, most importantly with the narrative poem *Baji Prabhau*. In her analysis of these writings Professor Dutta emphasises the intention of the poet to heighten a *rajasic* drive to overcome *tamasic* tendencies in his fellow sons of Mother India in order to liberate their embodied collective deity. Especially in *Baji Prabhau* she finds the theme of divine inspiration and empowerment of someone fighting valiantly for a just cause to have been rendered viscerally.

“A Dream of Surreal Science” is a satirical poem of prophetic warning that the author interprets as having foreseen the tendency of the scientific mind to reduce everything to its biological, chemical and atomic processes, thereby gaining immense knowledge and power on these levels of existence, yet not necessarily the wisdom to use them for the greater good of the whole:

*Thus wagged on the surreal world, until  
A scientist played with atoms and blew out  
The universe before God had time to shout.*

This poem written in the late 1930s naturally leads to Sri Aurobindo’s similarly satirical and cautionary poems, “The Dwarf Napoleon” (1939) and “The Children of Wotan” (1940), which thematise this knowledge and power



over the material world being turned against its inhabitants, clearly relating to Nazi Germany, its Fuehrer and the Second World War raging at the time of writing.

### Poems Philosophical

“Poems Philosophical” examines expressions of Sri Aurobindo’s vast knowledge of mental ideas he encountered in his studies of Western and Indian literary works and scriptures, but much more so, Professor Dutta insists, of his inner experiences and those above the mind formulated for the heart and intellect in verse. Maybe most famously, “Who” exemplifies this “philosophical-mystical” poetry contemplating the presence and nature of the Divine. Poems like “To the Sea” seem to be deeply intimate expressions of the poet’s yogic journey with its wider implications for spiritual life in general. This theme is even more explicitly explored in “The Vedantin’s Prayer” and continued in “Rebirth”, which “rests upon the philosophy of the Upanishads”. “In the Moonlight”, “Parabrahman”, “O Will of God” and “The Rishi” seem to explore most prominently Vedantic thoughts, concepts and experiences, in varying degrees of more veiled or direct language. A spiritual-philosophical perspective on the titular theme is given by the poet in “Life and Death”, a topic explored as well in “The Meditations of Mandavya”. The author praises the thematically related “reconciling of opposites” in the poetic experiment in quantitative metre “The Tiger and the Deer” as “wonderful craftsmanship”. Further, she reflects on “The Mother of Dreams” as a poetic expression of mystical vision, the originally paradoxical descriptions of Siva in “Epiphany” and the theme of oneness in “The Cosmic Man”. The professor concludes the chapter with her thoughts on the poem “Revelation” and how its title, style and content can be seen as somewhat

representative of Sri Aurobindo’s works of this phase.

### Experimental Poems

The longest chapter in *The Many and the Harmony* is dedicated to “Experiential Poetry”. Professor Dutta assesses this kind of lyricism to be the most developed expression of Sri Aurobindo both as a yogi and as a poet, and therefore the most challenging to interpret. So the interested reader is encouraged to read her reflections without an attempt at summary or even critique of her commendable approach to this difficult task here. In a way, her book builds towards this chapter, as she sees this latest phase of Sri Aurobindo’s writings between the 1930s and the 1950s as most informed by his highest experiences and their translation into Overhead Poetry that integrates his previous poetic growth. In this context, the author reflects on poems such as “Bird of Fire”, “The Inner Fields” and “Jivanmukta”, also in relation to relevant writings of Sri Aurobindo from *The Life Divine* and *The Mother*.

Towards the end of the book the scholar sheds light on the influence of Sri Aurobindo on poetry more generally, the development of an “Aurobindonian school”, most prominently present in the writings of his disciples, some of whom he himself guided in their craft’s development. Among them were many who discovered and grew in their poetic capacity without any prior literary training or education and yet were able to aid and express their own inner growth by means of Sri Aurobindo’s inspiration and guidance. Maybe we can take this as encouragement for the development of our own creative expressions.

The author closes the book with a differentiated positioning of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry, considering influences of tradition

and genres as well as the poet's unique aims in the context of yoga and spirituality. Again the book's theme of integration comes into play, even as she defends the poet from critics whom she perceives misjudge him from too one-sided perspectives. Rather than judge poetry based on current cultural and literary sensibilities, we may find greater insights and joy in opening to the possibilities of a Future Poetry: "Poetry will help in the heightening and widening of consciousness, enlargement of vision, and reveal the truth of the universe."

Madhumita Dutta's book, with its breadth of scope and perspectives as well as minuscule analysis, is an absolutely delightful read. It reminds us that "Poetry is the power of our inmost life.

—Matthias Pommerening

*Matthias, who lives and works in Auroville, has an academic background related to research into consciousness and is fascinated with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's explorations in the field.*

#### Revelation

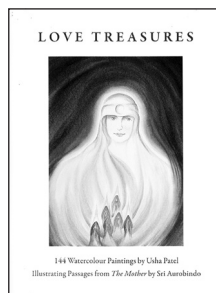
Someone leaping from the rocks  
 Past me ran with wind-blown locks  
 Like a startled bright surmise  
 Visible to mortal eyes,—  
 Just a cheek of frightened rose  
 That with sudden beauty glows,  
 Just a footstep like the wind  
 And a hurried glance behind,  
 And then nothing, —as a thought  
 Escapes the mind ere it is caught.  
 Someone of the heavenly rout  
 From behind the veil ran out.

—Sri Aurobindo

#### Love Treasures

—144 Watercolour Paintings by Usha Patel  
 Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry  
 180 pp, Rs 600, ISBN: 978-93-5210-236-5  
 Size: 22 x 28 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

This book contains a collection of 144 watercolour paintings, depicting Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*, painted by the Ashram artist Usha Patel. Usha settled in the Ashram when she was nine years old, in April 1944. She studied in the Ashram school, and the Mother made her captain of the young children's group. She developed as



a painter under the Mother's direct guidance. Many of her paintings were shown to the Mother, who even gave titles to some of them. She also learned painting from the Ashram artists Krishnalal and Jayantilal, who had been students of Nandalal Bose of Shantiniketan.

Usha felt the inspiration for the paintings in this book in 1970 while listening to a reading of Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*. With the Mother's approval, she commenced her inner journey. She plunged into the consciousness of the words and phrases, and expressed it through paintings with colours and lines. On certain occasions, the Mother gave detailed instructions on how to depict a particular passage from the book.

The Mother used multiple instruments for her work to express the new consciousness on earth, whether through art, music, poetry, or through work in Ashram departments. She was always looking for a receptive instrument to express it. She chose her prayer of June 14,

1914, for Usha's sixteenth birthday, and told her, "This is your prayer":

It is a veritable work of creation we have to do: to create activities, new modes of being so that this Force, unknown to the earth till today, may manifest in its plenitude. To this travail I am consecrated, O Lord, for this is what Thou wantest of me. But since Thou hast appointed me for this work, Thou must give me the means, that is, the knowledge necessary for its realisation. We shall unite our efforts: the entire individual being will concentrate in a constant call for the knowledge of the mode of manifestation of this Force, and Thou, supreme center of the being, Thou wilt emanate the Force fully so that it may penetrate, transfigure and overcome all obstacles. It is a pact Thou hast signed with the worlds of individual life. Thou hast made a promise, Thou hast sent into these worlds those who can and that which can fulfil this promise. This now demands Thy integral help so that what has been promised may be realised. [CWM, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 173]

The Mother spoke about what one might refer to as the future painting, where the artist should not be limited by modern or classical style and technique, but try to express the true inner vision of the soul, without blindly replicating outer appearances. She said:

The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this

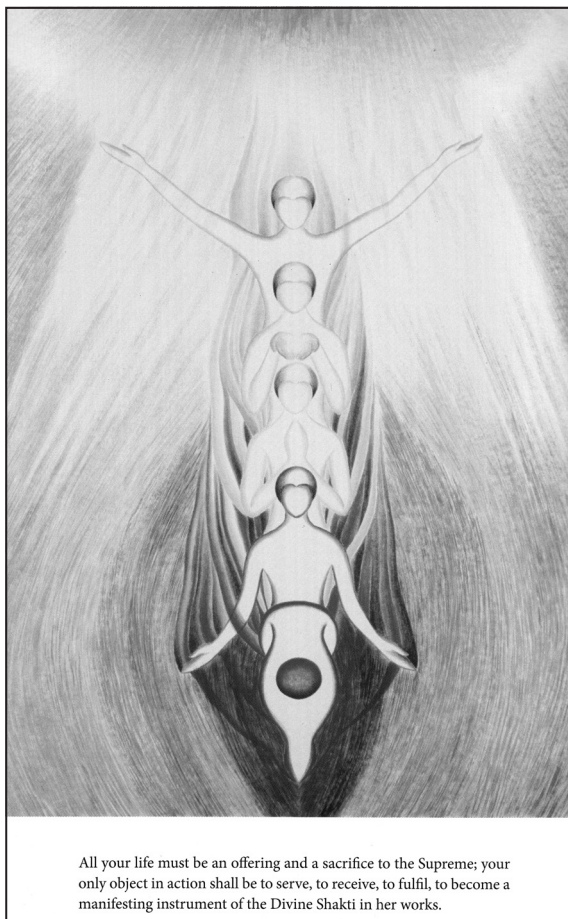
concentration. [CWM, *Questions and Answers 1929–31*, p.105]

When Usha wanted to go to Paris to study painting, the Mother wrote: "You cannot learn to be an artist with the tricks – it is as if you wanted to realise Divine by imitating religious ceremonies.... Develop your inner being—find your soul and at the same time you will find the true artistic expression." [CWM, *On Education*, p. 235]

The Mother valued true feeling and consciousness more than any precise and decorative but lifeless work, and a true artist puts the full power of his aspiration in his work to reach perfection.

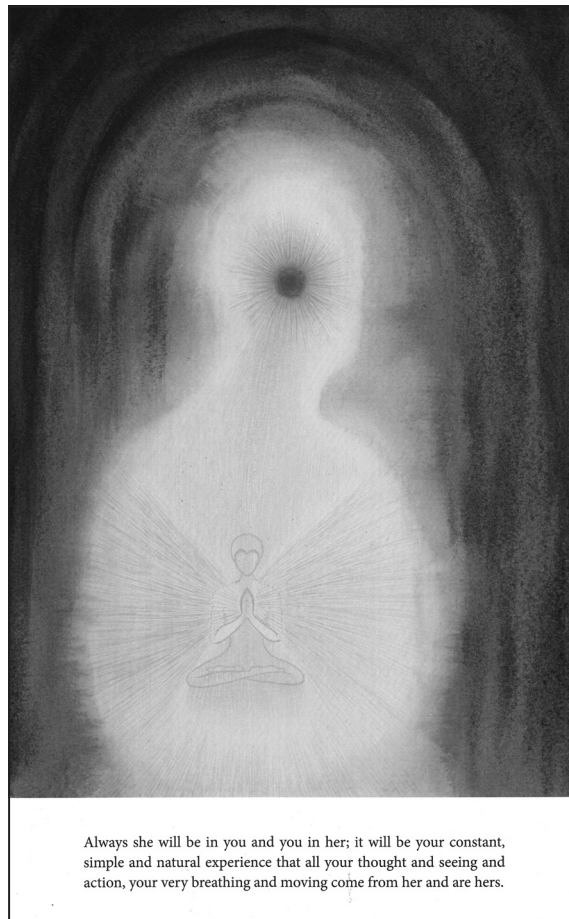
As we go through this book, we feel the artist's sincerity and appreciate her ability to capture this consciousness. Using the symbolic style of painting, at times leaning towards graphics, she developed her unique style. Sometimes, while depicting Divine forces, she used dots and not lines to express the subtlety. She used very vibrant colours and powerful rays of light in rhythmical lines descending from above. Through these paintings, we experience an inner journey of aspiration, surrender, and openness of the being to the Divine. Through the painter's inner vision of rejection, courage, and faith the inner sadhana is reflected, in all its beauty and complexity. The paintings evoke a meditative mood, and urge the observer to turn inwards. They carry a spiritual atmosphere, a joy and aspiration that one feels in a sacred Presence.

The following painting depicts the true state of action. It has a very balanced central composition, where we can see five figures in a stream of light, portraying different states of the being: offering, sacrifice, service, receptivity, and finally the manifestor—the figure at the summit with outstretched hands.



*All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme; your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfill, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works. —Sri Aurobindo*

In this next painting we see a calm and serene world. The delicate outline, or silhouette, of the Divine Mother, softly merging with the aspiring soul, expresses the divine words of Sri Aurobindo: “Always she will be in you and you in her; it will be your constant, simple and natural experience that all your thought and seeing and action, your very breathing or moving come from her and are hers.” These profound words and the visual image stir our deepest layers; one can meditate on this painting.



*Always she will be in you and you in her; it will be your constant, simple and natural experience that all your thought and seeing and action, your very breathing and moving come from her and are hers. —Sri Aurobindo*

This book will be valuable for art lovers who want to experience the words of Sri Aurobindo through paintings.

—Liubov Romashko

*Liubov grew up in St Petersburg and studied culture and arts at St Petersburg University. Currently she lives in Pondicherry and works at Mother's Embroidery Department. She also teaches Russian in the Higher Course at SAICE.*



**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 9**  
**Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the**  
**Worlds, Cantos Ten and Eleven**  
*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic*  
*Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

252 pp, Rs 500, ISBN: 978-93-82474-38-8

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Shraddhavan's series on *The English of Savitri* continues in volumes 9 and 10 with its explication of Book Two, "The Traveller of the Worlds", detailing King Aswapati's journey through the varied worlds of mind and above into the worlds of spirit and soul and the mystic peaks of knowledge. The effectiveness of Shraddhavan's approach of focusing on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem – clarifying its complex termin-

ology and turns of phrase, its symbolism and references to legends and myths, and the structure and detailed forms of its grand architecture of spiritual thought and vision – has been described in reviews of previous volumes. One notable feature here is that volume 10 includes a relatively long, forty-two page introduction based on a talk Shraddhavan had given on "The Traveller of the Worlds", providing an illuminating and contextualising overview of the whole of Book Two. Rather than expanding on issues relating to Shraddhavan's approach and style, this review will give an overview of the fascinating and relatively abstruse substance of the poem that is covered in these two volumes, utilising selected passages from the poem and illustrating some of the author's elucidations which help the reader decipher them.

Volume 9 examines Cantos Ten and Eleven of Book Two, titled respectively "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Little Mind" and "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind". The first of these is relatively more accessible to our understanding because it deals with the mind that we are conscious of, though Sri Aurobindo reveals its various facets and underlying dimensions and surprising realities in absolutely unique and captivating images and descriptions. Canto Eleven deals with higher, more remote levels of the spiritual mind that we normally do not have access to, though they do sometimes reveal something of themselves to our mind through intuitions, and more readily cast influences on our minds and lives. It should perhaps be emphasised that for Sri Aurobindo these are not merely impersonal mental powers; the sources of these mental and intuitive perceptions and insights are subtle occult worlds populated with living beings, referred to as godheads in the poem. Although we living in the physical world are more or less blind to their existence, they have relatively free access to us, prompting our thoughts and shaping our lives.

One of the critical insights Sri Aurobindo gives us about the "Little Mind", associated with our normal mentality, is its paradoxical nature of being on one side extraordinarily inept, narrow, mechanical, earth-bound, prone to error, deluded; and on the other side, a medium and conduit for the higher spiritual consciousness, divine wisdom, and God himself to create and manifest the material world. These characteristics are exemplified in the poet's descriptions of the various godheads reigning on the different levels of the mind.

Sri Aurobindo illustrates three levels or aspects of the "Little Mind", by describing the godheads living in these subtle mental worlds. The first represents a part of the mind dominated by our corporality, by the body and materiality. This being is described as

The second depicts a part of the mind dominated by drives and desires. It is illustrated thus:

The third represents a part of the mind associated with reason. This being is described as

Sri Aurobindo's elaborate depictions of these three types of beings and their characteristic nature and action show with stark clarity the different strands of human mentality and its severe limitations. Shraddhavan's extensive commentary on this section, punctuated with students' questions and her answers, clarifies the significances of Sri Aurobindo's fantastic images.

In the canto “Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind”, Sri Aurobindo describes what he calls ‘The splendours of ideal Mind’. Commenting on one of its early passages, Shraddhavan says: “In that vast ‘ideal Space’ all the many different ‘truths’ of the spirit get embodied and ‘take form as living Gods’, and each of those cosmic powers, those truths of the spirit, ‘can build a world in its own right’. This statement makes me think that here the poet is telling us about the Overmind realm.” (168) Contextualising the function of this realm and godheads, she says,

20



We begin to see perhaps that the function of mind is to connect the levels of pure spirit with the more material levels, the life levels and the physical levels. And to do that, all the freedom of the spirit has to be turned into something that can be connected with matter. The different levels of mind are doing this work progressively. Sri Aurobindo describes these godheads as ‘Creators of Matter by hid stress of Mind’. (208)

The poet describes three levels of this Greater Mind, each with its characteristic godheads. Shraddhavan’s commentary helps to tease apart and define their respective functions. The first is closest to matter; she explains that “[t]heir characteristic is that they mould and measure and give form to the ideas that are coming from higher above”. (207-208) She says that the poet describes them “as ‘The Masters of things actual’ and ‘Creators of Matter’, ‘Archmasons’, highly-skilled head masons”. Shraddhavan contrasts their function with the godheads of the higher, second realm, which the poet describes as ‘high architects of possibility’, ‘engineers of the impossible’, ‘Mathematicians of the infinitudes’, and ‘theoricians of unknowable truths’. (214) Shraddhavan explains that “[t]hey are more subtle, not so much under the domination of earth matter...these beings have a larger power of vision than the ones we read about earlier, and their ‘looks’ are not so much concentrated on matter but search for what is not seen normally, ‘the unseen’”. (213) Regarding the godheads of the third and highest level of this realm, Shraddhavan comments: “They survey, they look out over everything in ‘Space’ and ‘Time’... And on that level, it seems as if there is an ‘all-containing Consciousness’ – very broad, very wide – which is embracing all existence, supporting all existence, supporting ‘Being in a still embrace’. There is a silent, immobile, unmoving ‘Consciousness’ which is supporting all existence”. (228) She further explains that “they make a connection between our ‘world’ and the ‘luminous Unseen’ which is far above and beyond it. Their work is to catch hold of ‘The imperatives of the creator Self’. The Lord gives his fiats, his commands that certain things should happen.” (228-229)

**The English of *Savitri*, Volume 10**  
**Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds,**  
**Cantos Twelve to Fifteen**

*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo’s epic Savitri*  
 —Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
 189 pp, Rs 450, ISBN: 978-81-955260-1-7  
 Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Volume 10 of *The English of Savitri* follows Aswapati’s upward climb into still more sublime regions of consciousness, helping the reader decipher their profound and mystical significances. It covers the last four cantos of “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”, while contextualising Aswapati’s entire journey with its extensive introduction.

In Canto Twelve, “The Heavens of the Ideal”, Sri Aurobindo describes a staircase ‘Mounting in haste to the Eternal’s house’, and

At either end of each effulgent stair  
 The Heavens of the ideal Mind were seen  
 In a blue lucency of dreaming Space  
 Like strips of brilliant sky clinging to the moon. (60)

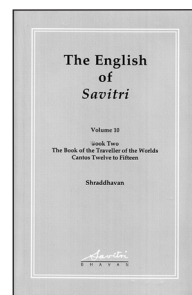
On one side were 'The lovely kingdoms of the deathless Rose.' (60) Sri Aurobindo depicts this realm as existing deep within, 'behind our life':

Unseen, unguessed by the blind suffering world,  
Climbing from Nature's deep surrendered heart  
It blooms for ever at the feet of God,  
Fed by life's sacrificial mysteries.

He further explains that 'Here too its bud is born in human breasts; / Then by a touch, a presence or a voice / The world is turned into a temple ground / And all discloses the unknown Beloved.' (62-63) Shraddhavan clarifies "that this 'Rose' has something to do with our psychic being". (63) After describing the 'sweetness and delight' of this realm, Sri Aurobindo explains that

On the other side of the eternal stairs  
The mighty kingdoms of the deathless Flame  
Aspired to reach the Being's absolutes.  
Out of the sorrow and darkness of the world,  
Out of the depths where life and thought are tombed,  
Lonely mounts up to heaven the deathless Flame. (70)

Shraddhavan comments: "That aspiration for something truer and purer has a power in it; it has an energy in it; and it is immortal, 'deathless'." (70-71) She says, "Each step is a little more powerful and energetic than the one before it; it has more force, more energy. And then the poet gives examples of those different levels." (72)



Canto Thirteen, "In the Self of Mind", describes a summit on the rising stair of worlds. The poet says, 'At last there came a bare indifferent sky / Where Silence listened to the cosmic Voice, / But answered nothing to its million calls; / The soul's endless question met with no response.' (87) This realm is described as 'a mighty calm', 'a blank of wordless peace'. (88) The poet describes it as 'Omnipotent, immobile and aloof, / In the world which sprang from it, it took no part'. (89) Aswapati unites with this witness self. Shraddhavan comments that "the realisation which he will describe for us in this canto has been the goal of thousands of years of spiritual seeking, and that those who have reached it often felt that they have truly reached the summit of existence." (89) Aswapati, however, soon realises that it is not the highest Truth. He understands that it

Was some pale front of the Unknowable;  
A shadow seemed the wide and witness Self,  
Its liberation and immobile calm  
A void recoil of being from Time-made things,  
Not the self-vision of Eternity. (106)

Shraddhavan comments: "It may seem like the ultimate realisation, but Aswapati feels that something absolutely fundamental is missing: 'the...Force', the power that has brought all this into existence, and that keeps it all in existence, that mother-power, who says 'Yes' to all of us, to all the things that she made, is simply not there". (107) The commentary on this canto closes with a short talk by the late Prof. Arabinda Basu, a well-respected philosophy professor, explaining this Self of Mind.

The next canto, “The World-Soul”, is one of the most beautiful and profound cantos in the poem. Shraddhavan reveals at the outset, “Out of all the 49 cantos this is perhaps the one that I love the best.” (121) We have seen that although the Self of Mind is liberating and peaceful, it lacks something essential. But here Aswapati discovers a different experience that is absolutely fulfilling. It comes to him as if calling from some depth of his being, ‘A well, a tunnel of the depths of God’(122), ‘An intimation of a lurking joy / That flowed out from a cup of brooding bliss’. (124) It calls, entices him:

As one drawn to his lost spiritual home  
Feels now the closeness of a waiting love,  
Into a passage dim and tremulous  
That clasped him in from day and night’s pursuit,  
He travelled led by a mysterious sound. (125)

This ‘mysterious sound’ takes many different forms, such as ‘the summoning voice of one long-known, well-loved’, ‘a lonely flute’, and “A jingling silver laugh of anklet bells”(125-127), experiences familiar to many spiritual seekers. Following these inward sounds, Aswapati comes into ‘a wonderful bodiless realm’. (130)

The silent soul of all the world was there:  
A Being lived, a Presence and a Power,  
A single Person who was himself and all  
And cherished Nature’s sweet and dangerous throbs  
Transfigured into beats divine and pure. (131).

Sri Aurobindo describes the beauty, wonder and delight of this realm, and Shraddhavan elucidates his sublime and mystical illustrations with her explanations and clarifications.

The oneness of all beings and things with God that characterises this world was not its only wonder; it also had a function, a crucial role in the life of our world. As Sri Aurobindo says,

Immersed in voiceless internatal trance  
The beings that once wore forms on earth sat there  
In shining chambers of spiritual sleep.  
Passed were the pillar-posts of birth and death,  
Passed was their little scene of symbol deeds,  
Passed were the heavens and hells of their long road;  
They had returned into the world’s deep soul. (144-145)

This is the place where our souls go to rest between one life on earth and the next. Sri Aurobindo describes here what happens during this period. For example, he says: ‘In trance they gathered back their bygone selves, / In a background memory’s foreseeing muse / Prophetic of new personality / Arranged the map of their coming destiny’s course’. (146) The souls review and assimilate their previous life on earth, and prepare the “map” of their future destiny.

Aswapati continues journeying inward:

Along a road of pure interior light  
Alone between tremendous Presences,

Under the watching eyes of nameless Gods,

. . . . .  
To the source of all things human and divine. (152)

Aswapati sees ‘the deathless Two-in-One, / A single being in two bodies clasped / Seated absorbed in deep creative joy; / Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.’ (153) Behind this ‘Two-in-One’, Aswapati sees another being, ‘Who brought them forth from the Unknowable’. (153) Shraddhavan explains: “This is one of the places in the poem where we get a description, an evocation, of the supreme Divine Mother.” (154) Aswapati is ‘Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss / ... / He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone’. (157) These lines end this amazing canto; Aswapati has surrendered himself to the Mother, and, overwhelmed, he lies unconscious at her feet.

In the fifteenth and final canto of Book Two, “The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge”, Aswapati awakes from his unconscious slumber at the Mother’s feet, and returns to the ‘surface fields’ of consciousness. He finds himself ‘in a realm of boundless silences / Awaiting the Voice that spoke and built the worlds’. Shraddhavan explains that “[i]t is the experience of the pure Self on a higher plane than the plane ‘of Mind’.” (163) Sri Aurobindo describes this state in many ways in many lines. He calls it ‘A high vast peak whence Spirit could see the worlds’, and ‘A lonely station of Omniscience’. (164) Shraddhavan elaborates on many of his descriptions; for example, she says, “There came too ‘The Knowledge by which the knower is the known’: the power of ‘knowledge by identity’. Above all, there is not only oneness through ‘Knowledge’; there is also oneness through ‘Love’, the ultimate form of ‘Love’; ‘The Love in which beloved and lover are one’: the ultimate union.” (165) In her concluding comments, she says, “Aswapati has ‘reached the top of all that can be known’. He has reached the borders ‘of the empire of the Sun’. He is able to control the ‘cosmic Force’. But he still has not found the transforming power that he was looking for, the Power that can bring about the divinisation of Matter and a Divine Life on Earth. So Aswapati will continue to look for that, in the next Book, Book Three: The Book of the Divine Mother. (189)

—Larry Seidlitz

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