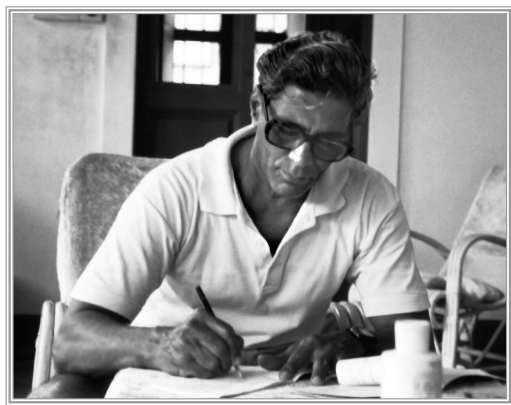
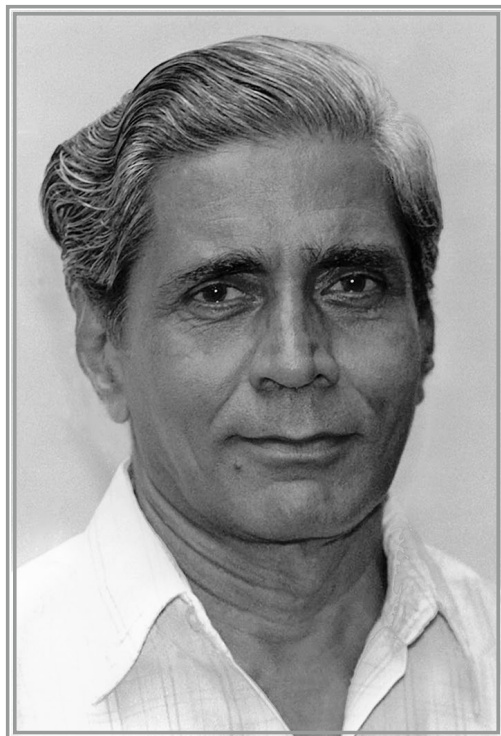


Recent Publications

S a b d a

Among those who have served the Mother with devotion and diligence through their work for the Ashram, Mona Sarkar, who passed away in October 2019, occupies a special place. A loyal and resolute captain in the Physical Education Department, his transparent nature and inquisitive mind were qualities that shone through in his books, especially those that record his conversations with the Mother. In this issue our lead article is an appreciation of his books and his leadership in the physical education programme, written by Krishna Dundur, a former student and longtime teacher at SAICE. And his most recent book, *Throb of Nature*, is reviewed by his fellow captain and nature-lover Richard Pearson.



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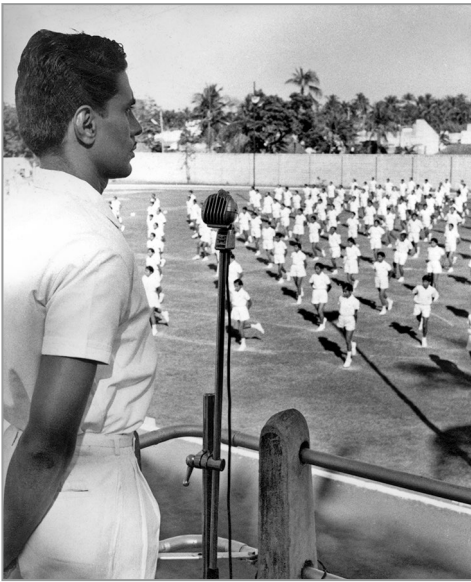
Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna

A Salute to Mona-da

Victoire à la Douce Mère! Vande Mataram!

Loud and clear rang his voice as we halted after the March-past, and all of us, our blood tingling, repeated *Vande Mataram* three times, and each time the salute to our Motherland and to our divine Mother grew more powerful. On every Darshan day and on the 2nd of December, Mona-da's commanding voice inspired us to march or perform with more vigour and perfection in front of the Mother. We remember Mona-da, the captain. Always spic and span, his posture and gait soldier-like; his sharp look and crisp commands whipped us into being smart and strong as we marched. And when we were in the younger group and did vaulting, he removed all fear in us as he stood at the spotter's place, and we jumped or vaulted freely, knowing he would not let us fall or get hurt.

He was the captain for the young men's group, group 'C' as it was called then. There are stories galore about their adventures. Whenever the Mother wanted young people to do something for her she would tell Mona-da, and he would be ready with his battalion of boys to accomplish the Mother's wish. Among many incidents, one comes to my mind—the building of the room for Parikshit-da, a member of his group. The Mother wanted her boys to construct it. Mona-da and his team took up the task and completed the work.



Mona-da conducting the 2nd December programme at the Sports Ground

We grew up with the Mother's assurance that she was always among us, watching over us. She particularly emphasised how minutely she followed and guided all that was happening for the 1st and 2nd December programmes on the anniversary of our school. Most of us felt the atmosphere charged with her presence even after she had retired. We felt very happy. When I read Mona-da's book, *The Supreme*, and I came across his conversation with the Mother relating to this, I felt elated:

The 2nd of December is the anniversary of our school. Every year, on that day, we have a programme of drills and demonstrations....The Mother not only took keen interest in the preparation and execution of these programmes, but for many years she was present on both the occasions.

She considered the physical demonstration to be a great occasion for collective progress, for receiving physically, through our efforts, Her Grace and Her Power....

In 1966 ... She gave me a prayer and the assurance that

She would be amongst us. She spoke at length about the importance of the day and at the end She added: "I hope that everything will be all right today."

... "I have said that I will be with them. When I say I shall be there, be sure that I shall be there with all my will. I shall be there to participate and to assist in all that is going on."

Two days later, when Mona-da went to see the Mother, she asked him in detail about the programme and what he had done with the prayer she had given him. I was amused to find how the Mother teased him. It reminded me of the talks and correspondence Sri Aurobindo had with

Nirod-da: that sweet relation between the divine Master and his very human disciple with all his faults and foibles. It is heartwarming and encouraging for all of us. I felt a similar sweetness while reading *The Supreme*:

Bonjour!

Mona: Bonjour, Douce Mère.

Was everything all right on the 2nd?

Mona: Yes, Mother, everything was all right.

How long did it last?

Mona: An hour and a half.

Did the Band play for the drills?

Mona: Not much, only for the March Past, Mass Exercises and Au revoir.

They did not play the *Bande Mataram*?

Mona: Yes, just after the March Past.

And what did you do with the prayer[†] I gave you?

Mona: I read the prayer after March Past.

(*In a teasing tone*) In front of everybody?

Mona: Yes, Mother.

And how did you read it?

Mona: Why, Mother? I read it in front of the mike.

(*Still teasing*) How I would like to hear it! (*Mother laughs*) You reading a prayer? This is really ... something ... (*Mother laughs and continues teasing*) I would very much like to hear how you read it!

Mona: Mother, would you like to hear it now?

No, not now. I do not have the time. I was only teasing you.

During this same conversation, the Mother talks about her voice:

My voice is not ordinary. This voice, clear, pure, tranquil, is filled with love and light and above all, an infinite compassion which extends towards all those who hear it....

My voice awakes the calm certitude in all hearts.... My voice comes from the Supreme and He expresses himself through me.... It vibrates and gives an impetus to our aspiration.... dispels the cloud of ill-will.

This voice – tender, clear, pure, powerful, vigorous and energetic, – gives an amplitude and calm lucidity.... It is like a gentle peace ... and resounds like a note of music.

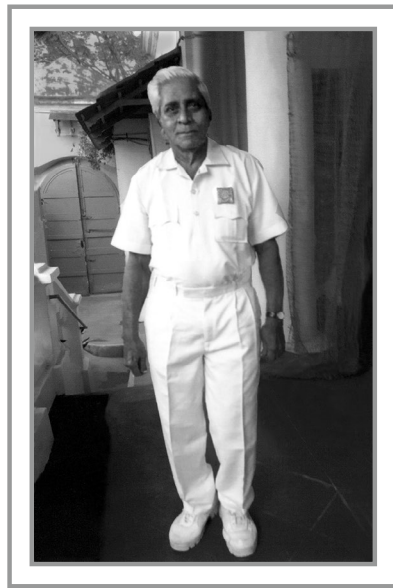
... it gives an assurance, a will for launching towards the unknown.

The Mother continued describing her voice, then consoled Mona-da, saying she knew he had read the prayer well. Mona-da suggested that one could record the prayer in the Mother's voice. From then on, when the Mother gave a prayer for the occasion, it was recorded and then played at the Sports Ground after the March-past.

This book has gathered many precious thoughts and truths with which the Mother has woven our lives. Her luminous gaze and Sri Aurobindo's penetrating and compassionate look have been a solace to us all. We have been drawn by the magnetic power in the Mother's look. As she explained to Mona-da the power behind that look, she concluded by saying:

Do you know, my child, the thing that I do through my look,... very gently, full of affection and

[†] The prayer was, "Be courageous, enduring, vigilant; above all, be sincere, with perfect honesty. Then you will be able to face all the difficulties. And victory will be yours."



Mona-da just before the 2nd December programme in 2018

sympathy ... wherever I have looked, I have planted an aspiration of the Transforming Force, I have sent a vibration of the Divine Consciousness, I have transmitted the power of an Eternal Joy ... This look is filled with Love, Light, Grace and Divine Compassion.

I am grateful to Mona-da for writing down his interviews with the Mother, bringing precious truths more easily within our reach. In addition to *The Supreme*, we can also draw inspiration from his books, *Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes* and *Blessings of the Grace*.

On Reading Savitri

Mother has told us we should read, every day, from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, even if we don't understand it. "It does not matter if you do not understand *Savitri*, read it always. You will see that every time you read it, something new will be revealed to you. Each time you will get a new glimpse, each time a new experience; things which were not there, things you did not understand ... suddenly become clear ... it is a revelation at each step." (*Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes*, p.45)

Sports and Games

Sports and games form an important part of our life. Football was a very popular game, but unfortunately every day there was some accident or an unpleasant story. The Mother chided the players saying, "Can't one be a little more conscious?" Then she described how flawless was the game played by Mohun Bagan's team: "To me, it seemed to be a complete game in itself. I liked it very much." The Mother continued:

And you know, the best way of protecting oneself or avoiding accidents, is to have the right attitude, and a correct attitude towards the game and the opponent.... the game has to be played well, as a sportsman, without hurting the others,... or without being frightened, without getting nervous or irritated, above all not to get excited ... keep the inner calm ... concentrate a little before the game, ... then one will never be a victim. Because my protection is always there.

(*Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes*, p. 146)

The Eternal Presence at the Samadhi

The Mother told Mona-da:

If you are in difficulty or you want an answer ... bow down your head at the Samadhi and speak frankly to Sri Aurobindo all that you have to say, without hesitation, without doubt, as you come to tell me—and you have seen so many times that your difficulties have disappeared....

You know, earlier, when He was in His body, people used to say He was very far, remote and inaccessible to men ... During that period He had hardly any time to occupy Himself with the people or hear their complaints. But now He has universalised himself, become vast, very intimate and close. There is a bond with everyone ...

It is formidable. His presence vibrates, concrete, all round the Samadhi.

(*Blessings of the Grace*, pp.119–122)

What She Has Done for Us

"You will be astonished to see the work I have done for you all – for each one,... all the obstacles, all the impediments removed, all that was blocking the way demolished, – so that you may walk freely towards the Truth in the full light of the New Consciousness. Once there, you have nothing to worry about, you can walk straight ahead.

... you know nothing of what I have done for you ..."

(*Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes*, pp.169–170)

With gratitude to the Mother, and to Mona-da for sharing these very precious conversations with the Mother, we bid Mona-da good-bye. The sickle of Time will spare no man—"Sceptre and Crown must tumble down", but as Sri Aurobindo wrote in one of his poems:

Is this the end of all that we have been,
And all we did or dreamed,—
A name unremembered and a form undone,—
Is this the end?

There is no end ...

The Mother once teased Mona-da that she could hear his strong commands during Marching drill even in her room. We will always hear Mona-da's resounding *Vande Mataram* ringing across the wide plains of our memory, and our echoing cries will follow him as he marches on—on his luminous journey.

—Krishna Dunder

Krishna Dunder came to the Ashram in 1949. She teaches at SAICE, the work given to her by the Mother after she completed her studies here.



Mona-da executing a swan dive in 1958

The Mother witnessed the dive and the following day told Mona-da: "My child, you deserved to be first in execution and also in your attitude.... It seemed that you were diving into the Inconscience to explore it."

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Path of Prayer

Reprint from *All India Magazine* booklet
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry
50 pp, Rs 60, ISBN: 978-81-7060-411-2
Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Other Authors

Throb of Nature

—Conversations with the Mother on flowers and nature, recollected by Mona Sarkar
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry
241 pp, Rs 325, ISBN: 978-93-5210-161-0
Size: 18 x 25 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

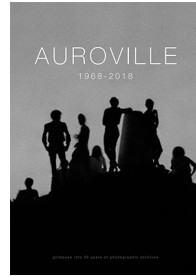
The compiler has collected his notations on Nature and flowers from his numerous conversations with the Mother. The notations are organised into chapters such as “Flowers Have Their Own Language”, “Aspiration”, “Transformation”, “Promptings of Nature”, and “The Universal Game”. Each chapter begins with the picture of a flower with the significance given by the Mother, along with her comment. In these conversations the Mother reveals her identity with the powers and forces of universal Nature, how to communicate in joy and harmony with this subtle world, and the ways in which she used flowers to transmit to her disciples the vibrations and spiritual qualities carried by each flower.

*See review on page 10
(previously introduced in the June 2019 issue)*

Auroville 1968–2018: Glimpses into 50 Years of Photographic Archives

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER)
447 pp, Rs 5300
ISBN: 978-93-82474-23-4
Size: 24 x 34 cm
Binding: Hard Cover

Celebrating fifty years through photographs, this book is a dynamic visual narrative of Auroville’s development. Although the photographs, both familiar and fresh, do not follow a strict chronological order, there are recurrent themes that provide a historical perspective. It begins with the local inhabitants of the land on which Auroville is built, followed by photos of the inauguration ceremony



in 1968 and the first settlers to arrive on the dusty plains, some very dramatic photos of the Matrimandir construction, and ends with the golden jubilee celebration on 28 February 2018. Interspersed are photographs of several people who played a role in supporting the growth of Auroville, a photomontage of Auroville’s children, studying, playing, and growing up before our eyes, and views of Auroville life through the creative arts, sport, experimental architecture, alternative energy, village development, quiet moments of contemplation in the beauty of the growing surroundings, and informal portraits of its residents.

Meditations on Savitri—II Books Two and Three

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother’s Guidance
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
258 pp, Rs 1250, ISBN: 978-81-87372-38-7
Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

This is the second in a series of volumes that will present all of the 472 paintings on *Savitri* made by Huta under the Mother’s guidance. From 1961 to 1966 the Mother and Huta meditated together on lines chosen from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, and when an image appeared to the Mother she described it to Huta with the help of a few strokes. Huta then completed the work in her studio as an oil painting. The Mother named the series of paintings *Meditations on Savitri*. This book of 111 paintings accompanied by the corresponding lines

from *Savitri*, covers *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds* (94 paintings) and *The Book of the Divine Mother* (17 paintings).

See review on page 15
(previously introduced in the June 2019 issue)

Meditations on Savitri—III

Book Four to Book Seven

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother's Guidance
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
282 pp, Rs 1250, ISBN: 978-81-87372-39-4
Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

The third volume in a series that will present all of the 472 paintings on *Savitri* made by Huta under the Mother's guidance, this book of 124 paintings accompanied by the corresponding lines from *Savitri* covers *The Book of Birth and Quest* (31 paintings), *The Book of Love* (21 paintings), *The Book of Fate* (23 paintings), and *The Book of Yoga* (49 paintings).

See review on page 15

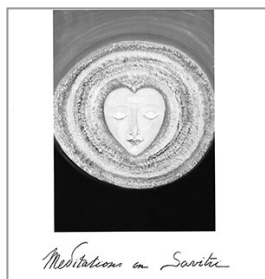
Meditations on Savitri—IV

Book Eight to Book Twelve

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother's Guidance
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
225 pp, Rs 1250 ISBN: 978-81-87372-40-0
Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

The fourth volume in a series that presents all of the 472 paintings on *Savitri* made by Huta under the Mother's guidance, this book of 100 paintings accompanied by the corresponding lines from *Savitri* covers *The Book of Death* (7 paintings), *The Book of Eternal Night* (22 paintings), *The Book of the Double Twilight* (24 paintings), *The Book of Everlasting Day* (34 paintings), and *Epilogue: The Return to Earth* (13 paintings).

See review on page 15



Mirra Alfassa—The Mother

Her Life and Her Work

—Sunayana Panda

Publisher: First Feature Ltd., London UK
145 pp, Rs 200, ISBN: 978-0-9562923-4-6
Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Essays about the Mother written by the author over a period of fifteen years are collected in this volume, whose stated aim is to introduce the Mother and her work to a wider audience, outside the environs of the Ashram and Auroville communities and people associated with them. Starting with the biographical facts of her birth, her family, and her education, the essays then look more closely at how her early life prepared her for the work she undertook with Sri Aurobindo in India, her cultural background, her life in Paris and her training as an artist, her sojourn in Japan, her spiritual seeking, her literary and artistic works, her contribution to the field of education, and her spiritual collaboration with Sri Aurobindo.

See review on page 14
(previously introduced in the June 2019 issue)

The English of Savitri: Volume 4

Book Ten: *The Book of the Double Twilight*
Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
334 pp, Rs 550, ISBN: 978-93-82474-18-0
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Continuing from the previous book in this series, this volume, also based on transcripts of classes held at Savitri Bhavan, begins with a summary of Book Nine, *The Book of Eternal Night* before proceeding to a detailed examination of all four cantos of Book Ten. The author's 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 the poem by explaining Sri Aurobindo's vocabulary, sentence structure, and imagery. She also notes that the Mother took a particular interest in Book Ten, even translating into French a section from Canto III, "The Debate of Love and Death". In this debate with Death, Savitri's

replies to his arguments reveal a higher Truth that dissolves the darkness of ignorance and death.

*See review on page 15
(previously introduced in the December 2018 issue)*

The English of Savitri: Volume 5

Book Two: *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*

Part One: Cantos I–IV

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

301 pp, Rs 550, ISBN: 978-93-82474-27-2

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Like the previous volumes in this series, this book is based on the transcripts of classes held at Savitri Bhavan. The classes concentrated on how 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. The book begins with an Introduction that explores two questions inspired by the title of Book Two: "Who is the traveller?" and "What and where are these worlds?" The author then studies line by line the first four cantos of Book Two. The remaining eleven cantos of Book Two, Cantos V–XV, are summarised in a page each at the end of the volume. The Afterword places the content of this volume in the context of the series.

*See review on page 15
(previously introduced in the June 2019 issue)*

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*: An Apocalyptic Literature

—Prof. Dr Madhumati M. Kulkarni

Publisher: Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Belgaum

370 pp, Rs 575, ISBN: 978-81-93953-80-8

Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This book is a study of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* based on the concept of revelatory visions of the future of mankind. Taking a scholarly approach to the subject, the author includes chapters defining the genre of apocalyptic literature and its mystic or spiritual basis, and *Savitri* as an Indian illustration of the genre. Subsequent chapters examine

the revelatory aspects of the poem in relation to the true nature and purpose of the human being, the mystery of consciousness on the mental, vital, and physical planes, and the hidden meaning of consciousness on the planes of the higher mind, the illumined mind, the plane of intuition, the overmind, and the supramental.

See review on page 15

Invitation to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

Based on a series of talks in Pondicherry

—M. V. Nadkarni

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

426 pp, Rs 450, ISBN: 978-81-7060-400-6

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The first chapter of this book, which is based on the author's series of thirty-one talks introducing the poem, lays down a few key principles in his approach to the subject. First, that in writing *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo was leaving for posterity a verbal embodiment of his own consciousness. Then, through the poetry he was flooding the earth



atmosphere with the vibrations of hope and love in an age already wallowing in nihilism, building a bridge between this world of human limitations and the future world that he was opening up. And that is why the writing of *Savitri* is a very significant event in human history. The transcribed talks

cover the entire epic as well as chapters on how to read *Savitri* and comparisons with the original legend. The book concludes with a glossary of Sanskrit terms used in the poem and references for the many quotations from *Savitri* and from other texts by Sri Aurobindo cited by the author.

Sri Aurobindo's Commentaries on Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna

Their Role in the Evolution of Humanity

—Wilfried Huchzermeyer

Publisher: Prisma, Auroville, in collaboration with Verlag W. Huchzermeyer, Germany

115 pp, Rs 300, ISBN: 978-81-939500-0-5

Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

In this short work, the author studies the various statements and commentaries made by Sri Aurobindo, and a few by the Mother, on the life and work of these Avatars of the past. The interpretations revealed in these commentaries indicate that he saw all four as messengers who came to earth with a special mission, to support and accelerate the evolution of humanity in a particular way. The chapters discuss what Sri Aurobindo has written in his major works and in his letters to disciples on each of the four Avatars, beginning with Krishna, who played a significant part in Sri Aurobindo's own *sadhana*. Comments by the Mother shed additional light on these subjects.

*See review on page 19
(previously introduced in the June 2019 issue)*

BENGALI

Srimayer Aloy Bharat O Tar Bhabisyat—Srima
sc Rs 10

FRENCH

Journal du Yoga: Livre III, 1915–Fin 1919
—Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-902032-6-5
sc Rs 2250

Journal du Yoga: Livre IV, 1920–1927
—Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-81-902032-8-9
sc Rs 1560

GUJARATI

Sri Matajinu Param Sannidhya—Shobha Mitra
sc Rs 150

Upanishad Achaman—Prof (Dr) Suryakant
Vaishnav, sc Rs 100

HINDI

Shrimadbhagavad Gita (Bhag 1) Mool tatha anu-
vad sahit—Compilation from the Works of
Sri Aurobindo with commentary
ISBN: 978-81-86510-26-1, sc Rs 450

Shrimadbhagavad Gita (Bhag 1) Mool tatha anu-
vad sahit—Compilation from the Works of
Sri Aurobindo with commentary
ISBN: 978-81-86510-27-8, hc Rs 550

MARATHI

Suryalokit Path—Sri Mataji,
ISBN: 978-81-942132-1-5, sc Rs 200

SANSKRIT

Lalanagitani—Asha Agrawal
ISBN: 978-81-7060 -404-4, sc Rs 125

TAMIL

Arulalar Sri Aravindar Aruliya Savitri
—Sri Aravindar, ISBN: 978-93-82474-22-7
sc Rs 250

TELUGU

Yoga Samanvayam Vol 2 (Bhagalu 3 nundi 4)
—Sri Aravindulu, ISBN: 978-93-5210-192-4
sc Rs 280
Sadhana—M. P. Pandit, sc Rs 60

Ordering Information for Books

Our complete catalogue of books, with cover images and description of content, can be viewed at our website. Submit your order through the website's shopping cart facility, which will instantly generate an online quote including postage and forwarding. You may then proceed to pay online or by other indicated options.

In India: For orders of total book value above Rs 800, shipping is free. For orders below Rs 800, add 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs 30 towards postage and forwarding. Payment can be made by bank draft favouring *SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram* payable at Pondicherry, by money order, or online via our website. On receipt of payment, the books will be sent by registered post/surface courier.

Overseas: Place your order through our website as indicated above. Those without internet access may contact us to receive quotes for the various available mailing options.

SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry 605 002 India
tel: +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656
email: mail@sabda.in
web: <https://www.sabda.in>

BOOK REVIEWS

Throb of Nature

—Conversations with the Mother on flowers and nature, recollected by Mona Sarkar
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry
241 pp, Rs 325, ISBN: 978-93-5210-161-0
Size: 18 x 25 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch with the Conscious Force that upholds us and the universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds.... Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.

Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 32:14

In this collection of conversations between the author and the Mother, she reveals the ways in which she used flowers to transmit to her disciples the spiritual qualities carried by each flower and shows how to harmoniously communicate with this subtle world. She also speaks more generally of Nature, unmasking the universal forces behind its workings and movements. The book begins with a brief personal note from the author, alerting us to the meaning of his title:

O adorable Nature. How charming and wonderful is your creation ... Yet none has been able to understand, none has been able to unravel the heart of your mystery ... we must launch ourselves into a newer and more daring exploration, the discovery of that which awaits us—behind the appearances, in the throb of Nature, beyond the vastnesses of space, in the secret heart of things and in the depths of our being.

the secrets of Nature

Each chapter or section does indeed lead the reader towards new perceptions and truths, latent in the heart of things, beyond the surface. As if in

answer to the author's note, the Mother's words, in the opening pages, ring clear and true:

If you want to know the secrets of universal Nature, you must be able to open yourselves upwards; or else, if you want to know the plants, the flowers and the animals and the message they announce to the world, you must learn to open your consciousness towards them and wait with patience to receive all they transmit constantly.

To know how to communicate with Nature or else to receive the vibrations which she transmits, this is another way of finding the Truth of existence, and also the Beauty, the Peace and the Harmony which uphold all the worlds and the terrestrial existence.

If one can communicate with Nature, one learns quite a few secrets of life, which can be very useful....

To communicate is to find an understanding in the Joy of Harmony which presides over all existence and to vibrate by its consciousness. This is something worth finding. It is a work for a lifetime.

And the Mother encourages her disciple thus:

Don't you know that you have to participate in this marvellous quest of the transformation in which I have launched myself? Wake up and do something.

To do the minimum,—that is what I ask of you, but it should be sincere and consistent. And then I shall do what is necessary.... it is in proportion of your effort that the Grace answers.

aspiration

In the chapter "Aspiration in the Depths of the Atoms" we are led into the realm of Matter, to the very atoms where, she said: "at certain moments one hears a faint voice, one perceives a quiver in the earth, one feels a vibration of the divinity that awakes and a profound aspiration for the light surging up from the depths of the atoms.... In the very depths of the nucleus of these atoms I have

kindled a flame that awakens with a quiver, like a palpitation, in this inert mass of inconscience.”

And she adds, with respect to the earth: “The earth invokes the Supreme to extend his reign everywhere in the world and remembers with gratitude in an adoration and an ecstasy the felicity of the memory of these footprints that I have left behind on the earth.... all that constitutes this universe implores for a new birth to blossom in the joy of participating in the New Consciousness.”

We often come across similar references to the touch of her feet on the ground. For example:

“Wherever I have placed my feet on the earth, it has been blessed and has become receptive to my force.” This reminds me of what the very old-time gardener, my beloved friend Jyotin-da, told me. He was present when the Mother visited the Lake Estate. And when she was advised to take a shortcut across a small stretch of the land, she looked down at the tiny country flowers studding the ground. “Where shall I place my feet?” she asked with her typical good humour and respect.

communicating in silence

Regarding flowers and their spiritual gifts, which is the substance of nearly the entire book, there is a mine of treasures for one accustomed to relating to them. “You know, if one knows how to communicate in silence with flowers, then one receives their message.” And she shows the attitude needed to begin with: “Be like a flower. One must try to become like a flower – open, frank, equal, generous and gentle,” adding that “they possess a power and a very subtle and deep influence.”

This is not, however, the kind of book one reads from page to page. That would be like trying to read through a dictionary. For a seeker, this book is a source of inspiration since one is

absorbing the presence of the Mother as she encourages and guides, even teasingly scolds the *sadhak* for his ignorance or lack of faith.

I find one can learn a lot here. For example, when in difficulty one spontaneously calls, even aloud: “Ma! Ma! Ma!” Here one comes to know that this is but the first step. She assures us of her constant help, it is true, but to be in conscious contact with it, one has to enter within the heart, reside there, I believe, and feel this constant sustaining Divine Presence in silence and with a candid trust.

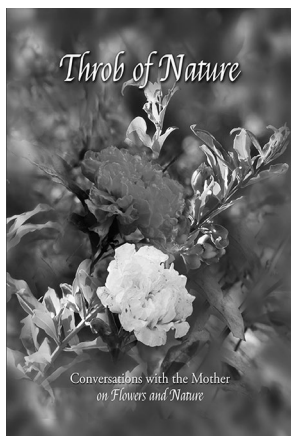
perfection

It is revealing to note that each new flower that came to her was the occasion for a new step forward or, shall we say, for the manifestation of her unfolding materialisation for the earth. When she named the Shrimp flowers (*Beloperone guttata* and *Justicia brandegeana*) Thirst for Perfection, she then commented:

It is not the need for perfection but the need of perfection. It is not that which falls short of perfection, as in every work there is room for more perfection. I do not mean the striving for perfection but it is the inner urge, the heart’s desire of perfection. It is this need of Perfection which is one of the four Powers of the Mother—that of Mahasaraswati.

The New Year message of 1962, given just a few months after this conversation took place, is also relevant: “We thirst for perfection. Not this human perfection which is a perfection of the ego and bars the way to the divine perfection. But that one perfection which has the power to manifest upon earth the Eternal Truth” [CWM 15:173].

The Mother goes further, adding her own sense of this word, in the prayer found on page 26: “The perfections of today are no longer sufficient for me. I want to be able to understand and realise the perfections of tomorrow. Give me the



consciousness that I am nothing, in order to be able to become something.” And elsewhere, I recall reading: “You serve me as best you can, but your best of tomorrow must be better than your best of today” [CWM 16:179].

divine grace

Regarding the subject of the Grace, symbolised by the double white hibiscus (*H. mutabilis*) that changes colour to pink during the day and is poetically named the lotus of the earth (*shalapoddo* in Bengali), she said: “you are not aware ... of the Grace that is showered constantly on all of you.... You have no idea what it is, the phenomenon, the Grace that works around all of you to protect you, to fill you with energy, to sustain all of you, with its wings spread out like a mantle of compassion.... Be humble in order to become even more receptive and admit His Presence.” Her commentary for this flower (not quoted in the book) adds something more: “Thy goodness is infinite. We bow before Thee in gratitude.” The divine humility of the Mother is touching.

agni

Another very special hibiscus is the salmon-coloured Agni. It is also a double flower, a bit smaller than the Divine Grace, of light to deeper salmon. The Mother said that to kindle *agni* one must concentrate in the heart, not the mind. In her comment on this flower (not quoted in the book) she said: “The flame of purification which ought to precede all contact with the invisible worlds.” To the author she explained:

It is not enough to open oneself and remain calm. Neither is it enough to make a hole in the head, so that the force and the light can enter into you and envelop you. It helps a little, but it is not the end.... To do this work, one must know how to give, give everything, everything that you have.... You have to give your thoughts, your desires, your actions, your sensations, your possessions, your being, all that you have, all that you are.... You know this action

of pranam, the pranam which one does in India, completely stretched, the body flat on the ground? It is a bit like this, the movement of giving oneself completely.

Although I feel that the Mother has, with nine-score flowers, given the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo to us in unspoken words, I would like to mention three that the Mother insists on here: first of all, Aspiration (from the *parijata* tree, *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) and Transformation (from the Indian cork tree, *Millingtonia hortensis*). Note how significant it is that both trees let their blossoms fall abundantly to earth, leaving no flowers on the *parijata* tree and only a few on the other. It is believed that the first was brought by Sri Krishna from Heaven to the Earth (to *Satyabhama*, rather). The second tree is associated with rain and its flowers are the most sought after by aspiring *sadhaks* who like to collect them. Now, besides these two, she is particular in talking about the rose, the Queen of Flowers, whose meaning as expressed by the Mother is Love for the Divine. However, she insists on Surrender, the significance she gave to the country rose (the *gulab* of *attar*). It is the first step in the Integral Yoga, and the final one too.

Early on in the book, the Mother explains in detail the meaning of her signature. It is “the Bird of Peace Descending upon Earth.” She makes a sketch of a bird in flight swooping down, and beneath it her usual signature. “This is a graphic representation.... It has its wings tilted towards the earth.”

Now I will explain to you how this bird corresponds to the signature. Look, first, this is the tail of the bird. Here are the two tips of the tail, and I extend it as the wing which is shown like a curved line.... So, with these two tips of the tail and one wing, it is one part of the bird. And this is the other wing. They are large wings. And these are the eyes, which are represented here by two points. And here is the head. One sees the bird appearing from far, that is why one sees only the eyes that shine and not all

the details of the figure. It has very large wings and is inclined like this to one side; that is why the body is hidden.... And from far one sees only its two eyes and the beak and all that; because it is only the eyes that shine—the eyes reflect the soul. They are important, the eyes.

I have made a symbolic drawing which represents the bird ... descending towards the earth. It is still far, but one day it will alight upon the earth. Then, there will be Peace.

We are constantly reminded that the truth of things lies behind surface appearances, and that we must look within and from within. Besides the subject of the Mother's giving of flowers, which occupies most of the conversations, there are also details of Nature's violent actions, such as cyclones, storms and floods. Regarding a cyclone that hit Pondicherry on 1 May 1966, the Mother wrote clearly: "This cyclone was simply a push from the Earth-Nature to wake up some of her somnolent human children to the necessity of making a progress based on Sri Aurobindo's saying 'Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything.'"

The Mother also speaks of the trees in the Ashram courtyard, the Eucalyptus tree and the Service tree, and for the latter especially, she had always a deep feeling and sympathy. Then, about the fear of snakes, she explains: "You know, this mutual fear between man and animal is due to man's mistake—because he did not give to the animals what belonged to them.... all my children who are not afraid of a serpent or any other animal have always my protection."

It is well known, I believe, that both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were fond of cats. In one chapter on the perseverance of cats, we learn how a mother cat patiently teaches her kittens:

[C]ats ... train their young ones, hours after hours, doing the same movements—be it jumping from one wall to the other or teaching the kittens to defend themselves ... it is worth watching. To

show how it is to be done, the cats repeat the same movements a thousand times.... What a conscientious work! My God! And over that, without getting angry, or without getting discouraged—they repeat the same thing with a resolute obstinacy, so that the young ones learn the rudimentary things which are indispensable in life.

Do not these words seem familiar? For the Mother tells us too, when trying to change ourselves, be it a lesser or greater habit or defect, that the same resolute obstinacy is required.

Although this is a record of the *sadhak's* personal and intimate conversations with the Mother, it is a most useful guide and source of inspiration for all who aspire for constant progress and unending perfection. It is filled with Ashram messages, coloured pictures of the many flowers named by her, and innumerable photographs of her many activities as she moved among us.

I would like to conclude with a message in French, simply to remind us that all these conversations were originally conducted in French. These simple words full of power and truth were written by the Mother under the painting of a single rose with two buds offered to her by the author:

*Quand la terre entière fera sa soumission,
la vie sera transformée.*

*Permets que mon effort total collabore à cette
réalisation.*

(When the whole world surrenders itself,
life will be transformed.

Grant that my entire effort collaborates for
this realisation.)

—Richard Pearson

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

Mirra Alfassa—The Mother

Her Life and Her Work

—Sunayana Panda

Publisher: First Feature Ltd., London UK

145 pp, Rs 200, ISBN: 978-0-9562923-4-6

Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The book *Mirra Alfassa—The Mother: Her Life and Her Work* is an excellent introduction to the Mother for people who haven't yet come into contact with her work and also for those who are not fully aware of her numerous accomplishments and her vast field of experience. The author, Sunayana Panda, has done a remarkable job of capturing in a little pocket book of less than 150 pages the essence of who the Mother was and what she represented.

The book traces parts of the Mother's physical, psychological and spiritual journey and helps the reader understand and appreciate the full scope of her being. It explores many of the experiences she underwent and reveals their significance in her growth. It also offers a keen insight into the Mother's life before she came to the Ashram, something not many have taken the time or made the effort to know more about.

After briefly introducing the Mother and the groundbreaking work she did in the Ashram, the book plunges into her early beginnings, looking first at her rich cultural heritage, then her time growing up in Paris, her artistic training and finally her journey of self-discovery in Japan. Sunayana has added a nice personal touch to these chapters by including her own observations of the places where the Mother had stayed. Though much has changed with time, one can still see why the Mother chose the circumstances, places and experiences she did in order to propel her own inner development.

Once the initial journey is covered, the book goes into the Mother's deeper spiritual quest and looks at many different aspects of her being. It explores her contributions to the world as a writer, an artist and a playwright and marvels at how beautifully her work expresses the deeper

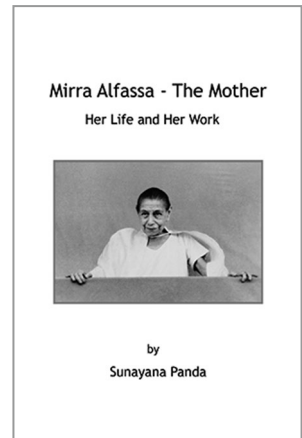
truths she was born to reveal.

The final part of the book covers the significance of the Mother's arrival in Pondicherry, her collaboration with Sri Aurobindo, her pioneering work in the field of education and the creation of Auroville, a drive towards human unity. In the last few pages especially the author shows how the Mother's work to manifest Sri Aurobindo's thought in the material world took form in the Ashram and Auroville.

Here's a passage from the book that clearly conveys what the Mother worked for, explained simply and beautifully by Sunayana:

In the Integral Yoga, all aspects of the world and the self have to be included; nothing must be left out. It is not a turning away from the world—it is taking the world and making it more perfect. The physical world, the most material aspect of our lives, had to be transformed. The Mother made it clear that in the physical plane it was through beauty that the Divine manifests Himself. This clearly means that beauty is one of the faces of the Divine and that looking for beauty is another way of looking for the Divine. Whether it was the Dining Room or the School or the Library, the places were immaculately maintained and beautifully kept.

I would also like to add that this book contains a number of photographs, some familiar and others perhaps less so, that depict various stages of the Mother's life and work. There's one of the Mother with her fellow students at the Académie Julian, and there are others including those of a painting by Henri Morisset showing the Mother in their flat in Paris, the Mother with



Rabindranath Tagore in Japan, the Mother with Jawaharlal Nehru, K. Kamaraj, Indira Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri at the Playground in 1955, and the Mother attending a rehearsal at the Ashram Theatre.

Anurag Prasad

Anurag graduated from SAICE in 2010. He works in the field of online learning and development. Reading and writing are his hobbies and he has self-published a book, Above Hatred, brought out in 2013.

NEW TITLES ON SRI AUROBINDO'S *SAVITRI* A REVIEW OF SIX BOOKS

Several new books have been published on Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* that can help us develop a deeper understanding of his masterpiece. The present review examines volumes 4 and 5 of *The English of Savitri*, by Shraddhavan; *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Apocalyptic Literature*, by Dr Madhumati M. Kulkarni; and volumes 2, 3, and 4 of *Meditations on Savitri*, paintings by Huta under the Mother's guidance. The two authors and the artist each take a different approach in shedding light on the poem, and in that sense their works may be said to be complementary.

Shraddhavan's *The English of Savitri* focuses on the text and elucidates its significance by considering the meaning of the words and lines, as well as the images and historical allusions that it evokes. I have previously reviewed volume 3 of *The English of Savitri* in the May 2018 issue of this newsletter, and since volumes 4 and 5 follow the same format, the present review will be more general and focus on the strengths and limitations of the author's approach and the main themes in the portions of the poem dealt with in these volumes; the reader is referred to the earlier review for other considerations.

Shraddhavan's series of books is based on her lectures at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville, which are

oriented towards participants for whom English may be a second language. As Auroville is an international township, and because reading and understanding *Savitri* is important to people worldwide, this emphasis on elucidating the language is both vital and widely appreciated. At the same time, it must be noted that the English used in *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo is often difficult to understand even for native English speakers, partly because his vocabulary is so rich and extensive, and partly because he extends the meanings and suggestions of words and lines by drawing on a wide range of myths, historical and literary antecedents, and symbols from various times and cultures. Shraddhavan's books help to illumine these meanings and suggestions, and provide other contextual perspectives. Simply put, *Savitri* is a difficult poem, or perhaps more accurately, the significances it can reveal become increasingly deep and full with continued study and reflection.

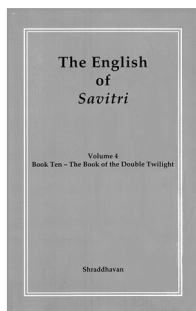
A limitation of Shraddhavan's approach is that by focusing on the language of the text it often leaves unexplored the wider possibilities of interpretation, suggestion, and connection with other ideas. This seems to be a deliberate choice by the author rather than an oversight, but it nevertheless is worthy of consideration. For example, significant concepts and formulations in Sri Aurobindo's prose works, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, and *The Secret of the Veda*, all have extensive connections with words, lines, and passages in *Savitri*, but except sometimes in a general way these connections are not examined in this approach. Similarly, the poem bears on other philosophies and perspectives of life and reality, but these connections are usually discussed only when they are explicit in the text itself. In addition, the poem often elicits more idiosyncratic insights, reflections, intuitions, observations, and feelings in the individual reader, which may also be revealing and significant if shared with others, but these are typically overpassed with

the focus on the more concrete and universal. For example, the author frequently discusses particular lines in terms of the story-line of the poem – for instance, as pertaining to one of the characters or their actions – though the lines also appear to carry universal significances and pertain to the human condition in general, or to experiences that readers may encounter in their own lives. In one way, these omissions are a strength of the approach taken, for the examination of such angles is more subjective, speculative, and open to disagreement, but nevertheless such approaches to the poem also have legitimacy and are potential sources of illumination, appreciation, and delight. One book or series of books cannot exhaust the illimitable significances that are revealed or suggested in *Savitri*, and each line of approach has its merits and limitations.

An apparent anomaly in this series of books is that the various volumes do not proceed through the poem in the same order as the poem. Volume 1 focused on Book One of the poem, but Volume 2 focused on Book Three rather than the long Book Two, though it included a brief synopsis of Book Two. Volume 3 in the series covered Book Seven and provided only brief summaries of Books Four, Five, Six, and Eight. Volume 4, one of the two volumes being reviewed here, covers Book Ten, *The Book of the Double Twilight*, and provides a brief summary of Book Nine. Volume 5, the other volume being reviewed here, returns to Book Two, *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, and covers its first four cantos, while providing brief summaries of Cantos V–XV. It appears that the order of the volumes in the series was followed partly for the practical convenience of the author and partly to concentrate the earlier volumes on the relatively more important parts of the poem.

Volume 4, covering Book Ten, examines Savitri's confrontation with the God of Death in her endeavour to rescue Satyavan from his control. It consists of four cantos, and

The English of *Savitri*—Volume 4
Book Ten: *The Book of the Double Twilight*
*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri**
 —Shraddhavan
 Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
 334 pp, Rs 550, ISBN: 978-93-82474-18-0
 Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



Shraddhavan takes us through them passage by passage, explaining unusual words and phrases, and elaborating on their significances. In her Foreword, Shraddhavan explains that the Mother took a special interest in Book Ten and translated much of it into

French, mainly as a personal study and reflection. One reason for its importance, as Shraddhavan explains, is that “we feel most acutely that through the words of Savitri in her debate with Death Sri Aurobindo is giving us his answers to our own doubts and disbeliefs”. Much of the book centres on this debate, in which Death gives voice to humanity's doubts about true love, true knowledge, lasting happiness, and high spiritual ideals. Savitri in her replies provides convincing arguments for the truth of humanity's higher spiritual destiny. As such, Book Ten gives a strong, logical, and convincing basis for the pursuit of the spiritual life and its highest aims, and Shraddhavan's commentary clarifies it for us.

Volume 5 covers the first four cantos of Book Two, *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*. Shraddhavan in her Introduction helps put the Book into the overall context of the epic, and gives a brief synopsis of the entire journey of the *rishi* King Aswapati through the realms of consciousness that is made in its fifteen cantos. In addition, Cantos I and II also provide a general context to help the reader understand the nature of this hierarchy of inner worlds through which Aswapati journeys throughout the Book. These

The English of *Savitri*—Volume 5

Book Two: *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*

Part One: Cantos I–IV

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

—Shraddhavan

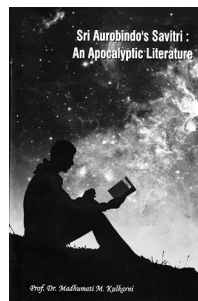
Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

301 pp, Rs 550, ISBN: 978-93-82474-27-2

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

are planes and worlds and kingdoms of the occult existence hidden behind our own physical world but which are intertwined with it and in constant interaction with it. Canto III renders an overall view of the entire series of worlds of the Life principle, consisting of numerous kingdoms, and Canto IV describes in detail the lowest of these, *The Kingdoms of the Little Life*. These being occult worlds based on different principles than our physical earth, Shraddhavan's commentary helps us decipher their often unusual and symbolic nuances. The higher realms of Life and Mind and Soul and Spirit are described in the later cantos of Book Two and we look forward to Shraddhavan's elaboration of these in future volumes of the series.

The next book in our review, *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Apocalyptic Literature* by Dr Madhumati K. Kulkarni, takes a quite different approach. As it is based on the author's research for a PhD degree, it follows the scholarly approach of presenting a thesis or elaborate hypothesis regarding the poem, and then examines the evidence in the poem supporting the thesis. Her thesis is that the poem represents an example of "apocalyptic literature", though with a uniquely Indian twist. After the first chapter which gives an overview of the life of Sri Aurobindo and the significance of *Savitri* as viewed by the Mother (and noted by a disciple), the second chapter elaborates on the meaning and nature of apocalyptic literature as described in several dictionaries and encyclopedias, and summarises how *Savitri* accords with most of the



characteristics of this genre. It may be noted that while these defining characteristics are numerous and varied, the author concentrates her analysis of the book as a whole on the characteristic of "revelation", both in terms of the revelation of spiritual knowledge and also in terms of an unfolding of divinity in the world through the process of involution-evolution, and in the individual through the process of yoga. The third chapter provides a context for understanding the poem by summarising Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy and yoga. We may briefly note that this analysis examines his philosophy in the broader context of Vedanta, Tantrism, evolutionary theory, and occultism, and, with the exception of a few of its assertions, it seemed to me generally valid and illuminating.

Chapters 4–9 examine the concept of "revelation" as expressed in different contexts that are depicted in the poem. For example, Chapters 4 and 5 look at the revelatory nature of the human being and human life as they are described in the poem, emphasising and illustrating how the Divine is secretly involved and immanent within us, and how it is progressively evolving and becoming revealed in the course of time. Chapters 6–9 respectively examine the different levels and powers of physical and subtle physical matter; of the vital planes of existence; of the mental planes of existence; and of the higher planes of the spiritual consciousness. These chapters focus on descriptions of these planes of existence as described in Book Two, *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, and how they progressively reveal more and more of the Divine. The short concluding chapter offers a general appreciation of *Savitri*,

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*: An Apocalyptic Literature

— Dr Madhumati M. Kulkarni

Publisher: Academy of Comparative Philosophy
and Religion, Belgaum

370 pp, Rs 575

ISBN: 978-81-93953-80-8

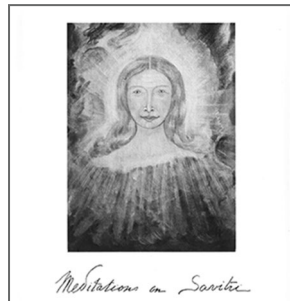
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

and considers the limitations of elucidating its significance in a doctoral thesis focused mainly on the theme of revelation through the evolution of consciousness.

In summary we may say that the book presents a novel and interesting view of *Savitri* in the context of apocalyptic literature, presents an interesting overview of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, and presents an interesting overview of the levels of consciousness and their unfolding in the course of evolution as depicted in the poem. The writing is generally clear and lucid, though there are occasional typos. There is perhaps an overreliance on dictionary and encyclopedia definitions and quotations, though they do provide a solid anchor for the arguments that are made. Sometimes the latter chapters of the book emphasise a prose summary of the poem's depiction of the levels of consciousness, peppered with brief quotations of pregnant phrases, but these summaries are occasionally relieved by an original insight or interesting connection of ideas.

Meditations on Savitri, volumes 2–4, paintings by Huta under the Mother's guidance, represent another avenue of approach to appreciating Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece. These art books are presented in first-class form, entirely appropriate to the greatness of their artwork and their subject matter. As mentioned in the Publisher's Note and Introduction, the series of books presents the 472 paintings made by Huta under the Mother's guidance and inspiration illustrating selected passages from *Savitri*.

Volumes 1–4 present the entire series of paintings, each covering an entire page, with the associated passage of text printed on the opposite facing page. Volume 1 in the series, published earlier, covered Book One of the poem; Volumes 2–4 cover Books Two–Twelve. A projected Volume 5 will present the Mother's rough sketches that Huta used as guides for her work. The quality art paper, the



Meditations on Savitri—II

Books Two and Three

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother's Guidance
 Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
 258 pp, Rs 1250, ISBN: 978-81-87372-38-7
 Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Meditations on Savitri—III

Book Four to Book Seven

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother's Guidance
 Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
 282 pp, Rs 1250, ISBN: 978-81-87372-39-4
 Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Meditations on Savitri—IV

Book Eight to Book Twelve

—Paintings by Huta under the Mother's Guidance
 Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
 225 pp, Rs 1250, ISBN: 978-81-87372-40-0
 Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

reproduction of the paintings' colours, the violet-coloured text, the white hard cover with sleeve graced with one of the paintings, the quotations from the Mother in her own handwriting on the cover and in the introductory pages, all beautifully meld into a fine presentation. The paintings themselves are extraordinary and varied in style. The quotes from the Mother printed in the Introduction best convey their nature: "We shall collaborate to do nice things and express in painting a higher world and consciousness", and "We are going towards a painting that will be able to express the supramental truth of things".

These books lead to another dimension of understanding Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece.

—Larry Seidlitz

Larry Seidlitz, PhD, is a psychologist and scholar focusing on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He is presently associated with the Indian Psychology Institute (IPI) and with the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR),

where he facilitates online courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings. He edits *Collaboration*, a USA-based journal on the Integral Yoga, has authored the books *Transforming Lives* and *Integral Yoga at Work*, and recently edited *Invitation to Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*, a book based on a series of talks given by M.V.Nadkarni.

Sri Aurobindo's Commentaries on Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna

Their Role in the Evolution of Humanity

—Wilfried Huchzermeyer

Publisher: Prisma, Auroville, in collaboration with

Verlag W. Huchzermeyer, Germany

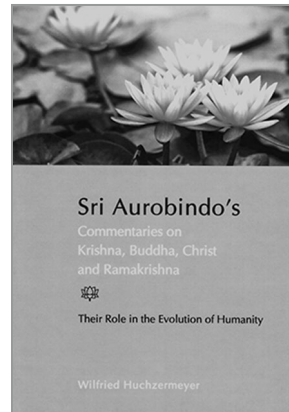
115 pp, Rs 300, ISBN: 978-81-939500-0-5

Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This short book is about an issue that has interested many: what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the previous Avatars, and especially about the most recent ones that have still a considerable influence on human thought. Wilfried Huchzermeyer looked in great detail at everything Sri Aurobindo wrote on Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Sri Ramakrishna. He dealt with this job with the same mental discipline and even-handedness that he had used so successfully in his book comparing Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on the evolution of consciousness with those of some European philosophers.[†]

Interestingly, it was this very even-handedness that gave me at my first reading of the book, the impression that he had not given enough attention to Sri Krishna. Sri Aurobindo did not only devote a whole book to the explanation of the Gita which is in the end all about Krishna's life and teachings, but he expressed on many occasions to what extent he felt personally close to him, loved him, and identified with him. In comparison, the Buddha and Christ remained at least to some

extent "others" for Sri Aurobindo: he highly respected them, no doubt, but he also stressed much more often that they lived in different times and cultures and had a different work to do. When I felt this apparent lack of balance, I checked how much space each of these three world-famous figures had been given in the book,



and I realised that it was near identical: each one got exactly thirty-five pages plus or minus hardly a few lines! For good order, Sri Ramakrishna did get much less space, but this was inevitable simply because

Sri Aurobindo mentioned him so rarely, though always with the greatest respect. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo called Ramakrishna a spiritual giant, and he considered himself as coming from his "lineage".

As a whole, the book does not make easy reading, as the author makes no attempts at simplifying Sri Aurobindo's sometimes complex and many-facetted thoughts. Instead he tries to discover what it actually was that made Sri Aurobindo say sometimes radically opposite things about the same historical figure. Huchzermeyer does this by going, separately for each Avatar, through all of Sri Aurobindo's books in which they are mentioned. This approach, all by itself, already provides a certain historical and cultural context for each statement. Beyond that, Huchzermeyer goes out of his way wherever needed to find the missing links. With Krishna and Ramakrishna this is relatively straightforward. Sri Aurobindo saw Krishna as the embodiment of the Divine in the previous stage of the evolution of consciousness. In Sri Ramakrishna he recognised one human

[†] *Sri Aurobindo and European Philosophy*, reviewed in the December 2016 issue of *Recent Publications*.

being who managed in quick succession to realise the Truths brought by all major religions in the modern world. In both cases, he saw his own work as the next step in a continuum. With Buddha and Christ, on the other hand, he had actual differences, which he sometimes ascribed to errors made by their followers, sometimes to the fact that they lived in different times with different needs.

The main difference he has with Buddha's teachings is the Buddhist stress on a road to freedom from suffering which involves an inner change but leaves the world as it is. This separation of spirituality from daily life and the formation of monastic orders imply a hierarchical divide between religious and mundane activities, which does not go well with Sri Aurobindo's ideal of a total transformation of life in all its aspects. Regarding the teachings of Christ, Sri Aurobindo considered Christianity's ethical ideals unrealistic because they did not accord with the workings of nature. But here too, Sri Aurobindo fully acknowledges that this stress may have been needed for Christ to pursue his role in the "humanisation of Europe".

A welcome element of the book is that it includes short sections about the Mother's

connection with these three Avatars. Here Huchzermeyer gives bits of biographical detail about the way the Mother came into contact with them, how this affected her, and in the end, of course, what she wrote about them.

A lesser detail that helps to make the book a good read are the brief sidetracks with interesting statements by Sri Aurobindo from his early works or letters. One even smaller thing that still may deserve a special mention in the days of Google and mechanically made indexes, is that Huchzermeyer does include passages where their names are not explicitly mentioned, like the famous passage from *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo writes about Christ's cross without calling him by name.

As a whole, the book impresses by its friendly, respectful atmosphere, which the author maintains throughout, while engaging, at the same time, in detailed, sophisticated mental reasoning. This makes the book a little treasure for all those who appreciate serious scholarship delivered with modesty and candour.

—Matthijs Cornelissen

Dr Cornelissen teaches Psychological Aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Work at the SAICE and is the founder-director of the Indian Psychology Institute.

I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness—if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no way and no possibility of following, that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, —there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood—there is then no reason in it, no necessity for it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

—Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 28:476