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# Recent Publications

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Both of the lead articles in this issue are concerned with history, although their arenas of action differ widely. In the course of the evening talks that Sri Aurobindo and his attendants had between 1938 and 1943, the Second World War was a constant theme. Sri Aurobindo's comments showed not only a grasp of world politics but also a striking insight into military affairs. He was able to see the immediate and long-term consequences of strategic war moves to such an extent that a disciple once asked him if he had ever used the military genius he seemed to have. Sri Aurobindo's reply was "Not in this life." Our lead article brings to light the war's little-known Norwegian campaign and Sri Aurobindo's insights on its conduct and importance.

The second article tells the story behind a collection of dragon-themed embroideries commissioned by the Mother in 1947 for Sri Aurobindo's birthday. The account, prepared by the Ashram Archives Lab, details recent conservation efforts on these pieces and brings to light a piece of Ashram history, illustrated with some images of arresting beauty.

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# WORLD WAR II—NARVIK, THE NORWEGIAN CAMPAIGN, AND WINSTON CHURCHILL

**8 APRIL 1940.** The British were very pleased with themselves; the Royal Navy had successfully mined the approach waters to Narvik, a small mining port town in northern Norway two hundred kilometres inside the Arctic Circle. By blocking it, the Allies hoped to throttle the iron ore supply from Sweden to Germany and thereby stall the Nazi war industry. While they were happily preening themselves over the success of this operation (Operation Wilfred), the Germans had already embarked (on 6 April) from the port at Wesermünde with a large invasion fleet that converged on strategic south Norwegian ports and on Narvik.

In the early hours of 9 April 1940, General Ismay, Chief of Staff of the British Forces, was rudely woken from his sleep by a call from the War Cabinet Office; with stealth and blistering speed and force, the Nazi army, air force, and navy had quickly outmanoeuvred neutral Norway's small, ill-equipped army. With the same ruthless speed and suddenness, German troops captured Bergen, Trondheim, and, in the first offensive use of parachutists in history, the airport at Stravanger. By 2 p.m., Oslo, about 1500 kilometres south of Narvik, was occupied by a few hundred lightly armed troops flown in by transport aircraft. They missed by a whisker the chance to take captive the Norwegian royal family, imprison the members of Parliament, and seize the national treasury. Louis Spears, a major general in the British army, compared the impact of this offensive (Operation Weserübung) on the Allies to "live shells exploding at a picnic".[Shakespeare, 67] Thus, with the onset of the Norwegian campaign, the "phoney war"<sup>1</sup> came to a close and the real war began in right earnest.

Keenly following the war in the European theatre from a remote corner of the world was Sri Aurobindo, recuperating from an injury to his leg that had sustained a fracture in 1938. Living in seclusion since 1926, he kept abreast of the war on a daily basis—his source of information, daily newspapers and BBC news bulletins over a crackling shortwave radio, which "he used to listen to...three or four times a day".[Nirodbaran, *Talks*, Preface] He was among the first to recognise the evil genius behind Hitler. Once an ardent revolutionary at the helm of a protracted independence movement to rid India of British colonial rule, he unequivocally sided with the British against Nazi Germany and the Axis powers.

Around him, monitoring and aiding in his recovery, was a coterie of doctors/disciples who spent some hours with him every morning and evening between the years 1938 and 1943. Because of their presence, an untrammelled causerie that touched upon a wide number of topics began spontaneously. "Reminiscences, stories, talks on art and culture, on world-problems and spiritual life poured down in abundant streams from an otherwise silent and reticent" Sri Aurobindo. "One of the most exciting and significant features of our talks was in connection with the last World War [WWII]." [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, Preface] These free-ranging, informal discussions were recorded and later published under the titles *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by Nirodbaran Talukdar, and *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by A. B. Purani.

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1. Phoney war is the name given to the period of time in World War II from September 1939 to April 1940 when, after the *blitzkrieg* against Poland in September 1939, seemingly nothing happened.

The views of Sri Aurobindo recorded in these two books are by no means his studied outlook on war or war strategy. The talks were not a regular affair or at least not recorded regularly and were hampered by rapid changes in topic, rendering them often sketchy. Yet, going through them, especially with regard to World War II, Nirodbaran remarked that Sri Aurobindo had a “deep grasp of world politics and... [a] penetrating insight into military affairs” [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, Preface], often revealing an understanding and foresight that belied the meagre external news and reports at his disposal. Below is a brief outline of the Norwegian campaign and its importance taken from various sources, interspersed with Sri Aurobindo’s remarks based on the news reports he received.

On the evening of 9 April, when Sri Aurobindo was informed that Germany had invaded Denmark and was asked by the others what the motive might be, he replied, not knowing that the Nazis had simultaneously attacked Norway, “because they can control the Baltic and the North Sea from there and attack Norway and Sweden”. Responding to a disciple’s remark that the German troop concentration indicated a planned invasion, Sri Aurobindo said, “Yes. The Germans have the power to foresee and act accordingly, while the British act from hour to hour.” [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, 598]

Going through the narrative of that turbulent era, we notice the German “power to foresee” amply substantiated. Germany had been planning an attack on Norway from October 1939, but it really got a shot in the arm only after the *Altmark* incident<sup>2</sup> in February 1940. For Hitler, the attack on the *Altmark* and the death of German sailors was a “stab in the gut”, and wrenched his focus back to Scandinavia. He postponed his plans to attack France and veered his focus purposefully to Norway and Denmark. Hitler quickly appointed General von Falkenhorst as Commander-in-Chief of



2. The incident took place on 16–17 February 1940 in what were, at that time, neutral Norwegian waters. British naval forces attacked the German ship *Altmark* and freed all the Allied prisoners, killing eight German seamen and wounding ten others. Germany claimed that the attack was a grave violation of international law and of Norwegian neutrality.



Operation Weserübung to attack and occupy Norway. Hitler told him there was no time to lose and it was imperative to get there before the Allies. "I cannot and I will not begin the offensive in the West before this affair has been settled." [Shakespeare, 51]

On 10 April, when Sri Aurobindo was informed that Germany had collected all its navy, merchant ships, and trawlers to carry its army to Norway, and that they were being fired upon by the British navy, he said: "If the whole German fleet is out and gets attacked and intercepted by England, then it will be Germany that will have to turn back. Hitherto the German navy has not proved itself superior to the British navy. But it depends on what proportion of the [British] navy is there. If it is only a part or they have to collect it from various places, then it would be difficult for them.... If they had possessed foresight, they would have gathered their fleet nearby. It seems they knew that Germany thought of making some such move." [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, 599]

The foresight that Sri Aurobindo clearly identified in the Germans was sadly lacking in the British. Quite often when credible intelligence was provided, it was simply consigned to the wastepaper basket by those at the helm of British Military Intelligence. Indeed, on 1 April 1940, the Swedish Foreign Office informed *The Daily Telegraph's* correspondent in Stockholm that the Germans were going to attack Norway, intelligence that the journalist instantly passed on to the British. [Amery, 592] This was repudiated summarily as were other critical inputs from intelligence sources. Flying over the Baltic ports, RAF planes, returning from leaflet drops on 6 April 1940, "found forts, docks, everywhere brilliantly illumined in order to enable the work of embarkation to proceed at full speed. What an opportunity for damaging the German expedition [against Norway] at the outset." [Shakespeare, 63] But the accuracy of the intelligence was more than matched by the lethargy at the Admiralty to assess it correctly and to act upon it quickly.



Ships sunk in Narvik harbour, 1940

Even Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, had summarily dismissed intelligence reports. He failed to envisage the German response to Operation Wilfred, and "personally doubted whether the Germans would land a force in Scandinavia." [Shakespeare, 63] The British naval attaché in Denmark reported seeing "German warships *Gneisenau* or *Blücher* with cruisers and three destroyers" and remarked on "their probable Norwegian destination". [Haarr, *The German Invasion of Norway*, 49] But Churchill remarked, "I don't think so". [Denham, 4] At that time it was simply inconceivable to the British that Germany would invade Norway. And this imprudence was to eventually cost them the Norwegian campaign.



## FIXATION ON NARVIK

Nowhere did the lack of British military competence stand in stark contrast as in its single-minded insistence on pursuing the capture of Narvik. To a comment that the British seem to be landing troops at Narvik, Sri Aurobindo remarked with his customary aloofness, “That won’t help much because it is far off and there is no proper transport facility for mechanised units. If they can capture one of the ports [Bergen, Trondheim], then it will be very easy for them [the British].” Commenting on Operation Weserübung, Sri Aurobindo said, “It is a very well arranged coup by the Germans” and warned that “Once [the Germans] have occupied the main ports and landed troops, it will be difficult to turn them out.”[Nirodbaran, *Talks*, 604] Instead of focussing on a rapid counter-attack to dislodge the shaky German hold on the main ports of Bergen and Trondheim, Churchill succumbed to his obsession to capture Narvik. Time and again during the Norway Debate,<sup>3</sup> politicians stood up and demanded to know why Churchill had attached undue importance to this ore-town and questioned his unflagging enthusiasm for seizing it. Geographically and from military or political standpoints, Narvik was a dead end. “Narvik was really a name on the map, the place itself of little use to anyone.” [Haarr, *The Battle of Norway*, 200]

Churchill justified his fixation on Narvik by resorting to the line of thinking he had espoused in the memorandum he had circulated to the War Cabinet in 1939, namely that if Germany could be cut off from all Swedish ore supplies her war-making capacity would suffer a major blow “without any serious sacrifice of life”. [Shakespeare, 42–3] Once the Germans had taken Narvik, the sensible thing would have been to leave them there, surmised Geirr Haarr, Norway’s leading authority on the campaign, countering Churchill’s view. “The British have stopped the iron ore. The Germans cannot be reinforced by sea, and their airlift capacity is miniscule. But Churchill is hooked on the north, obsessed. He used all arguments for an attack, and shelved all those against.” [Shakespeare, 34]

Churchill’s strategy to mine Narvik harbour was also to provoke Germany into reacting and invading Norway, giving Britain “the opportunity to take what we wanted, and this, with our sea power we could do”. [Bell, 174] Yet, when Germany did attack, instead of sending the British navy to attack Stravanger and Bergen as planned, Churchill, without consulting anyone, did the opposite, and aborted the very operation (operation R.4) meant to wrest these vital ports from the precarious grip of the Nazi war machine.

## A FAULTY STRATEGY

Following the campaign from Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo commented, “I can’t understand the moves of the British. As soon as they heard of the German occupation, they could have occupied Bergen. Bergen would have been far away from Oslo and yet within striking distance. If Germany had six destroyers, they could have brought twenty. Even if a great part of their fleet was lost, they would have gained a lot.” [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, 605–6] One can never truly gauge what might have transpired had the British troops attacked Bergen, Stravanger, and Trondheim on 9 April, as was the plan, with adequate support of the world’s most powerful navy of the day. The war might have followed an entirely different course. After his seventeen-year study of the Norwegian campaign, Haarr held the view that “it would have meant hard fighting and probably more destruction in Norway...but it would

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3. The Norway Debate in the British House of Commons on 7 and 8 May 1940 was primarily about the progress of the Norwegian campaign, but it quickly brought to a head widespread dissatisfaction with the overall conduct of the war by the Conservative-dominated National Government led by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

have meant no attack on the Western Front on 10 May”[Shakespeare, 81], pinning down the German army to Norway and to the Franco-German border, and significantly increasing the likelihood of a truce and an early end to the war.

In the face of strong opposition from other members of the War Cabinet, Churchill dug in his heels regarding Narvik. For the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, Norway ended at Trondheim, and was “the only thing that mattered in Scandinavian eyes”. Besides, there was pressure from both French Prime Minister Daladier who said, “Trondheim is now the vital point”, and Admiral Evans, the British officer in command of a naval air squadron active during the Norwegian campaign, who insisted, “Most urgent that Trondheim be captured forthwith”. [Shakespeare, 84–6] But Churchill only promised Halifax that British troops would advance on Trondheim once the operation in Narvik was wound up. Under his direction, in what is known as the second battle of Narvik, on 13 April the battleship *Warspite* sailed with nine destroyers to Vestfjorden (the Norwegian Sea area off the northwestern



Norwegian soldiers defending Narvik, 1940

coast of Norway) at the entrance to the port town, and without much fuss sank eight German destroyers that had ferried troops to Narvik. Ten biplanes – Swordfish from the carrier *Furious* – swooped down on the harbour and bombed it without loss of aircraft.

After this successful bombardment, instead of completing the operation and firmly securing Narvik, Churchill diverted the rear half of

the convoy bound for Narvik – carrying three territorial battalions plus supplies for the troops at Narvik – to Namsos for attacking Trondheim. This turnabout decision eventually imperilled both operations. Narvik remained untaken to the end of the campaign and the attack on Trondheim through Namsos and Andalsnes failed miserably.

## OPERATION RUPERT

The devastating combination of heavy snow, and lack of men, equipment, and air cover, coupled with lack of planning and poor overall organisation, which had proved so lethal in operations to capture Trondheim were to plague yet another of Churchill’s initiatives, Operation Rupert, to finally capture Narvik. Stemming more from a need to ward off the ghosts of Gallipoli and to prop up his reputation than from any serious strategic concerns, Operation Rupert turned into a British rout rivalling perhaps those at Namsos and Andalsnes.

Operation Rupert is a dismal tale of conflict between two commanding officers, Major General Pierse Mackesy and the Earl of Cork and Orrery, one of the many First World War veterans hauled out of retirement. Cork was said to have boasted that in the first twenty-four hours he could have seized Narvik with his bare hands. Peeved by his strength being halved by Churchill’s sudden decision to divert the 146th Infantry Brigade to Namsos, Mackesy felt it would be sheer folly to attempt any landing at Narvik until he had the required men and equipment first, plus intelligence concerning the enemy’s strength. The War Office had assured Mackesy that there would be no snow at Narvik in mid-April, yet snow lay five feet to the waterline, and continuous blizzards rendered visibility “seldom

greater than two cables”<sup>4</sup> The British forces were critically handicapped by lack of skis, sledges, and snowshoes. Mackesy cabled the War Office that “my forces are probably inferior to the enemy...Offensive operation without artillery must be ruled out.” And later in a joint communiqué with a reluctant Cork, “Until snow melts...operations on any scale... cannot take place.”[Shakespeare, 123]

This is not what Churchill wished to hear. While Mackesy continued to report that chances of a successful landing from destroyers were nonexistent, and any from open boats would involve annihilation of soldiers under his command, Churchill, instead of heeding Mackesy’s solid advice, surreptitiously called up Cork and used “the apparent lack of harmony” as an excuse to put Cork in charge of the operation. In a startling instruction, he telegraphed Cork not to hesitate to relieve Mackesy or place him under arrest if he “appears to be spreading a bad spirit through the higher ranks of the land force.”[Shakespeare, 126]

With the man of his choice in position, the seizure of Narvik appeared imminent, but Churchill’s eager hopes were shattered almost immediately. Going ashore personally to test the snow with a party of Royal Marines, the diminutive Cork sank up to his waist and had to be hauled up, losing his precious monocle in the process. Cork chose 24 April to attack Narvik and commenced naval bombardment at around 7 a.m. in heavy snowfall, but had to abort it very soon. The bombardment was unsatisfactory, but the real reason was that the naval staff in that howling gale could not guarantee that the landing craft would ever reach the shore.



The Earl of Cork

Much like the miracle at Dunkirk, when, under cover of a heavy fog, Allied troops were whisked away under the very nose of the Nazi war machine while the formidable German army looked on, and looked rather foolish too, letting the enemy slip through its fingers, Narvik had its own, perhaps lesser-known, miracle during the disembarkation of Allied forces. As the British forces were clambering down from their ships, little did they know that their every move was being closely monitored by six U-boats lurking in the still, dark waters of Vestfjorden. It was a perfect *mise en scène* for a dramatic German victory. Peering through his periscope, the commander of U47, who six months earlier had sunk the battleship HMS *Royal Oak*, was amazed to see “a wall of ships”. The weather was good, the distance 700 yards, and the target impossible to miss. Aiming at two cruisers and two large transport ships, he fired four torpedoes. He waited for the imminent explosion—but nothing happened. He reloaded, navigated closer, and fired another four torpedoes. Again nothing happened. He fired a total of ten torpedoes at sitting-duck targets, all of which either malfunctioned, exploded prematurely, or failed to detonate. Similar failures were reported by the captains of U38, U46, U48, U49, and U65. The reasons for these failures were never explained satisfactorily.



Major General  
Pierse Mackesy

4. one cable = one tenth of a nautical mile / approximately 183 metres



In due course, the Allies were also forced to a strategic retreat from both Andalsnes and Namsos. Nor could they have lasted much longer: ill-equipped, poorly trained, without a proper plan or strategy in an alien terrain pitted against intensely unfavourable weather and a well-equipped, formidable, battle-hardened enemy. The central factors which led to these setbacks were the disastrous decisions taken in succession by the British Cabinet's military co-ordination committee, its inability to organise and mount a professional military attack, and its schoolboyish bravado that resulted in the loss of over six thousand lives. And Churchill was its chief protagonist.

## CHURCHILL'S APPOINTED HOUR

People often see a Divine intervention in Churchill's ascendancy to the British Prime Ministership. Lord Hailsham, who participated in the Norway Debate, spoke of his belief that "the one time in which I think I can see the finger of God in contemporary history is Churchill's arrival at the precise moment of 1940." Churchill himself was also an obdurate believer in his own destiny. "The old man [God] up there intended me where I am at this time," he said with some emotion to the wife of Lord Halifax.[Shakespeare, 41] In a different vein, Sri Aurobindo, responding to a comment from his circle of attendants that the British cannot be defeated, firmly asserted how Churchill and the Allies were rescued by a power far greater than their own: "That is nonsense. They were saved by the Divine intervention in this War. They would have been smashed if Hitler invaded at the right time, just after the fall of France." [Nirodbaran, *Talks*, 998]

Sri Aurobindo considered all the British MPs of the ruling Conservative Party to be "imbeciles" except Churchill and Hore-Belisha, "men who can do something". But Churchill had a chequered record, and a number of the MPs had serious reservations about his ability to lead, largely based on his performance as Britain's Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War. Churchill made the fateful decision to attack Turkey on its Dardanelles coast, specifically at Gallipoli. The eight-and-a-half-month-long battle involved a total of about a million men on both sides, half of whom were killed or wounded. The failed campaign led to the humiliation of the British. Churchill was of course dismissed from his cabinet post, excluded from the War Council; an outcaste, he was allowed no hand in the further conduct and administration of that war. In a true sense, Britain neither forgot nor forgave Churchill for this. All his later heroics would not wipe clean the slate of collective memory; even in his heyday Churchill was to live tormented under the shadows of Gallipoli and the purple weal of ignominy still raw on his soul.<sup>5</sup>

In Norway too, if ever one had to pin the responsibility for the Allied demise, it would narrow down quickly to just one person—Winston Churchill. Yet the axe fell on the political career of another, Neville Chamberlain, who had to take the blame and resign from the Prime Ministership. Had the Allies under Churchill's leadership managed to wrest Trondheim and Bergen from the Germans, perhaps no Divine intervention would have been deemed necessary. There is enough research today to speculate that Hitler might have had second thoughts about attacking Belgium and France without first securing the Nordic states. It is even possible that the duration of the war may have been shortened significantly; Sri Aurobindo made a number of references to predictions that the war would come to an end in 1940 itself. With Denmark's and Norway's capitulation and Sweden's collaboration with the Nazis, the Baltic Sea became a sanctuary for the German *Kriegsmarine* from where U-boats

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5. "Tormented by the parallels [between Gallipoli and the Norwegian campaign], Churchill claimed to have 'pondered a good deal upon the lessons of the Dardanelles'. He flinched at whispers that the 'iron of Dardanelles had entered into my soul.'" [Shakespeare, 124]

destroyed around 14.1 million tons of shipping. This accounted for 70% of all Allied shipping losses in all theatres of the war and to all hostile action.[uboot.net] Airfields in Denmark and Norway made England more vulnerable to German air attacks. The loss of Norway proved indeed to be more than a little expensive for the British. Alfred Rosenberg, head of Nazi Germany's Foreign Policy Office, saw



Churchill and Chamberlain  
in 1939

Norway under the Germans as invaluable in a siege of Great Britain and a subsequent launch pad for an invasion of the Island Nation. [Shakespeare, 46]

Had those torpedoes found their mark in the still, dark waters of Vestfjorden that fateful April day, the loss of men and ships would have seriously dispirited the Allied forces being routed on every war front, and possibly veered the course of the entire war, increasing the likelihood of a humiliating peace treaty with Germany, if not an outright invasion and eventual occupation of Britain. Significantly, such a disastrous close to the Norwegian campaign might have ended Churchill's political career and made his calamitous campaign in Gallipoli look like child's play in comparison. Never a serious contender to Chamberlain, the possibility of his ever becoming the Prime Minister of a coalition government could have been virtually ruled out.

This leads us to a wider examination of Churchill's character. Aside from his personal peccadilloes and his tendency to use his position to help meet his overwhelming debts, he openly held racist views, proclaiming in 1937 that "I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people..."[bbc/news] Churchill is known to have advocated the use of chemical weapons, primarily against Kurds and Afghans, writing in 1919: "I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes."[Ibid.] In 1943, India, then still a British possession, experienced a British-induced famine in Bengal during which over four million people died. Madhusree Mukerjee, author of *Churchill's Secret War*, said that Churchill insisted that India continue to export rice to fuel the war effort, while the War Cabinet ordered that 170,000 tons of Australian wheat bypass a starving India to be stored for feeding European civilians after they had been liberated.[Ibid.] "It's one of the worst blots on his record," says historian Richard Toye, "It clearly is the case that it was difficult for people to get him to take the issue seriously."[Ibid.]

So what did the Divine see in him?

The Second World War was being waged, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "in defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity".[CWSA, vol. 35, 453] "There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people...do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the

threatened reign of the Asura.”[Ibid. 211–12] The conflict and Churchill’s character and actions have to be seen and interpreted in this larger contextual framework if we are to ever unravel the hidden significance of this war.

When Nirodbaran poured out his angst to the Mother and told her “...what baffles me is that Churchill, whom you and Sri Aurobindo have chosen as your direct instrument, wants today India’s help for his own country’s existence; and yet says that His Majesty’s government has no intention of liquidating its Empire,” she replied, “Churchill is a human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature. Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently. All concentration must be now to help the Allies for the victory that is ultimately assured, but there must be no looseness, not the slightest opening to the Asuras.” The Mother continued: “After the battle is won, if Churchill’s soul can remain still in front and he continues to be guided by the Divine, he will go very fast in the line of evolution. But generally on earth it doesn’t happen like that. His human mind and vital will take the lead after the crisis is over, and then he will come down to the level of the ordinary human being, though of a higher order.”[Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years*, 123]

Sri Aurobindo once described Napoleon as “one of the mightiest of vibhutis”, a manifestation “of divine power presided over by a spirit commissioned for [a] purpose”. He went on to add that the phenomenon that was Napoleon has to be “understood and known, not blamed or praised.” For Napoleon had another aspect to his nature: “He was a Rakshasa of the pure type, colossal in his force and attainment. He came into the world with a tremendous appetite for power and possession and, like Ravana, he tried to swallow the whole earth in order to glut his supernatural hunger. Whatever came in his way he took as his own, ideas, men, women, fame, honours, armies, kingdoms; and he was not scrupulous as to his right of possession. His nature was his right; its need his justification. The attitude may be expressed in some such words as these, ‘Others may not have the right to do these things, but I am Napoleon.’”[CWSA, vol. 1, 518–20]

Churchill was not Napoleon. He was cut from a more modest template, but was seized upon by a Force that lifted him for those few stupendous years of glory above the ruling cackle of British politicians too feeble and self-centred to see the coming storm. To an extent, he did display many of Napoleon’s tendencies, albeit less forcefully. And when he had outlived his occult usefulness with the Divine afflatus spent, we see him, in the events that followed the war, morphed back into the commonplace politician that he was. But there is no denying that behind his many glaring shortcomings, we see, in those historically crucial years, at least four cardinal attributes which made him the “right man at the right place”.<sup>6</sup> First, very early on, against the prevailing intellectual climate, he assessed Nazism to be something repugnant and regressive; the British defeat, he wrote, “would mean an age of barbaric violence, and would be fatal not only to ourselves, but also to the independent life of every small country in Europe.”<sup>7</sup>[Shakespeare, 43] Second, his stubborn refusal, unlike Chamberlain or Lord Halifax, to negotiate any peace terms with Hitler or to follow a strategy of appeasement.<sup>8</sup> Making an impassioned appeal to the members of the outer cabinet in his historic speech – “If this long

6. Attributed to the historian Philip Ziegler. [Shakespeare, 43]

7. At the time, the United States and Japan had not yet joined the conflict.

8. “Halifax,” argued his biographer Andrew Roberts, “wasn’t a craven defeatist. He simply did not understand that by late May of 1940 there was very little that Britain and France could offer Hitler that he was not already in a position to seize. Churchill, on the other hand, recognised that, at the very least, Britain had to maneuver into a better bargaining position.”  
[<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/25/arts/rethinking-negotiation-with-hitler.html>]





island story of ours is to end at last, let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground” – he scuttled moves for any entente with the Germans and enthused all present for Britain to fight on against Hitler whatever be the odds. [pressreader.com] Third, while the mainstay of Chamberlain’s war strategy was based upon economic blockade and negotiation, Churchill insisted on engaging the Nazi war machine as early as possible, hoping to tempt Germany into some rash action that might allow Britain to use its sea power to secure an early victory. There is adequate evidence today to suggest that Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement would have in all probability floundered; while putting on a show of active engagement, Hitler would have

eventually taken over Europe, salami-slicing a bit at a time, knowing well that the frigid leaders of democratic Europe would do nothing more alarming than threaten serious consequences. Fourth, unlike other British politicians of his day, he was an orator par excellence and innately gifted to gauge the pulse of the people, carry them with him and inspire the iconic British bulldog determination to “defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny...we shall not flag or fail... We shall go on to the end.”

Were we to consider him a Divine instrument commissioned for a purpose, and not sit in judgment on the high horse of ethics and moralism, we would perhaps see not an advocate of poison gas nor the perpetrator of the Bengal Famine, but a man on whose shoulders, when the great night of time descended, rested the fate of the whole world; a man whose lone unbending will stood steadfast against the deep insidious menace of Nazism and saved humanity from a dark *asuric* cataclysm.

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- *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2010)



Readers may recall that on the Siddhi Day, 24 November 1926, a black silk curtain with three dragons in gold was hung on the wall of the verandah for the evening meditation. The tail of one dragon reached up to the mouth of the other and the three of them covered the curtain from end to end.

A. B. Purani records in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* that they came to know later about a Chinese prophecy that says the Truth will manifest itself on earth when the three dragons (representing the worlds of earth, mind, and sky) meet.



## A World of Resplendent Dragons





# THE MOTHER'S DRAGONS

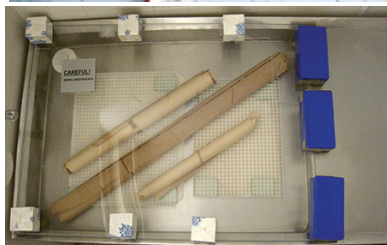
In September 2007, the Embroidery Department asked the Archives Conservation Lab to help reorganise, repair, and rehouse its collection of patterns made for the Mother during the 1940s. Among these patterns, in particular, are seventeen sketches of dragons in various sizes. Drawn primarily in graphite and black India ink, most of the dragon patterns had been sketched on large sheets of brown packing paper. Without exception, they were in a poor condition, having spent years folded or rolled up in over-stuffed trunks. The project to preserve these historical drawings took about seven years.



The dragon patterns were sketched by Sanjivan, one of the Ashram's artists. The Mother gave him a small card with a drawing of a Chinese dragon and explained to him what she wanted, often indicating the colour. Sanjivan confidently drew the designs on large sheets of kraft paper on the floor of the corridor upstairs in the main Ashram building. The Mother occasionally passed by to observe



what he was doing. The sinuous patterns were then traced onto silk or satin, and finally embroidered with silk thread or gold and silver *zari* by young Ashram *sadhikas*.<sup>1</sup> Sanjivan said that the Mother's way of teaching was not just through practical guidance, but rather she could create with her advice the consciousness to understand and execute the work vividly and successfully.



Pattern pieces being sorted (above) and in the humidification chamber

We learned that the Mother commissioned this set of dragons for 15 August 1947 to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday and the independence of India.<sup>2</sup> The embroideries were to adorn the walls, lintels and tables of Sri Aurobindo's rooms. The meticulousness of these embroideries is astonishing, their beauty inspiring. When one looks at the dragons in their exquisite splendour, one feels they are playful. As one examines the superb skillfulness of this embroidery work, one perceives an act of love.

A dragon pattern before and after mending





The conservation project began by placing the dragon patterns in a humidification chamber to allow the brittle paper to relax so it could be flattened under weights. Then each pattern was pieced together. Some were so fragmented it was a challenge to match the correct snout or claw with the right dragon.

Each fragment was cleaned with finely grated Staedtler eraser crumbs and a soft brush. Then the pieces were joined together with small “band-aids” of Japanese paper and wheat starch paste or methyl cellulose adhesive. Once assembled, the pattern was supported with larger strips of Japanese paper on both sides. Lining was not an option because the moisture it introduces was found to alter the colour of the inks and the paper. Heat-set mending tissue, activated with heat, did not adhere well because of ingrained soiling of the paper.

When the mending was completed, each pattern was interleaved with imported acid-free buffered interleaving paper and rolled onto a long tube for support. The roll storage tubes for this project are made from unbleached kraft fibers, have a neutral pH and are generally used to store photographic paper. A layer of acid-free buffered paper<sup>3</sup> was wrapped around the tube before rolling up the pattern, then covered with a soft muslin cloth and finally a thicker cloth for additional protection against dust and abrasion. A tracing of the pattern and a treatment report were stored inside the center of the tube.<sup>4</sup> The patterns are presently housed in the Ashram cold storage room for long-term preservation.



The five dragons pattern representing the five elements embroidered with gold and silver *zari* on satin

One of the first dragons to be completed was a wall hanging for Sri Aurobindo's room. The pattern portrays five dragons which represent the five elements: earth, water, fire, ether, and air. In a letter to a friend written in 1943, Sanjivan referred to this piece. “I was busy,” he wrote, “with the design of a 6’ x 8’ curtain. The subject was five dragons with the sun at the centre and a border of flames along the upper three sides. I finished the design at around 2:30 at night and gave it to the Mother this morning. The Mother very happily said that she will get this ‘magnificent design’ embroidered with silver and gold threads.”<sup>5</sup>

The design was embroidered by Vasudha, utilising a stitch called “couching” or laid stitching which involves two sets of threads, the set that is being *laid* onto the surface of the fabric and the set that attaches the laid threads. As pure gold thread from Surat was used, each dragon is seen in a scintillating aura of gilded glory. “Magnificent it was, when the work was finished!” exclaimed Sanjivan.<sup>6</sup> This piece, as well as a few others, formed “the dragon's corner” at the Exhibition of Embroideries, Laces and Fans displayed at the Ashram Exhibition Hall from February 20 to 23, 1956. In her

book *The Story of a Soul*, Huta recollected: “I was really fascinated seeing an incredible set of six pieces made of heavy white satin—the enormous dragons designed by Sanjivan had been embroidered in gold and silver thread by Vasudha and other sadhikas for the Mother’s couch and its accessories. In China the dragon is considered to be Spiritual Strength.... The Mother had sat on the couch only once—for a while on the Independence Day of India, 15th August 1947. This was ultra symbolic, for she embodied the true soul of our country—Mother India.”<sup>7</sup>

A *sadhika* recollected that Mother gave them only one month to complete the set. They worked day and night, resting and taking just a bit to eat in between. Once when they were feeling tired and the work slowed down, Mother came and sat down among them and told them that they must make friends with the thread. “Years ago”, another narrated, “we used to embroider the bedcovers and curtains for Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the room which is now the *Bulletin* Office. We sat on the floor around a wooden frame onto which the cloth was stretched for embroidering. There was no fixed time; we worked for hours. We had no watches to distract us. The Mother used to come down to this room with a tray of glasses filled with juice. She would smile and say, ‘Put your needles down, *mes petites*, and relax your eyes. They need rest.’ Then we would drink the juice brought by our Sweet Mother while she appreciated our work; sometimes she even guided us.”<sup>8</sup>



*Sadhikas at work on an embroidery frame*

Contemplating this collection, one is struck with wonder at its beauty. The skill and devotion with which the embroideries were done makes them unique masterpieces. Like the patterns, the seventeen dragon embroideries have been carefully interleaved and individually rehoused for long-term storage. When Sanjivan first saw one of the embroidered dragons, he commented to a friend that it had been “done so well, it had such a gorgeous look”; it was “a piece worth showing to the whole world”.

—Archives Conservation Lab

<sup>1</sup> *Zari*, or *zari* work as it is known, is an intricate art of weaving threads made of fine gold or silver. Those responsible for sewing the dragon embroideries were Vasudha, Tara, Monghi, Minou, Annasouya, Bela, Lila, and Nirmala.

<sup>2</sup> Taraben’s recollection, confirmed by the Embroidery Department and Gautam Chawalla.

<sup>3</sup> Made from 100% cotton rag at the Ashram Handmade Paper Factory.

<sup>4</sup> Tracing the dragon patterns was so absorbing that we developed a kind of “dragon fever” whereby we couldn’t wait to begin each sitting and eagerly looked forward to the next. Dominant was the quiet atmosphere and a deep satisfaction after the completion of each dragon. Those involved in the tracing, which took about three years, were Maya, Mallika, Vilas, Barbie, Bimla, Mahesh, Koki and Nomi.

<sup>5</sup> A copy of this letter was printed in *Srinvantu* (date and issue unknown).

<sup>6</sup> Bela-di mentioned that silver and red threads were used to make the flames, silver thread to make the clouds, and gold thread to make the dragons.

<sup>7</sup> Huta. *The Story of a Soul*, Vol. 2, Part 1 (Pondicherry: The Havyavahana Trust, 2009) p.50.

<sup>8</sup> Taraben’s recollection, as recounted by Sunandaben and others.

Note: Our gratitude to Vilas for her remarkable skill in providing information from innumerable sources.

# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## ENGLISH

*Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*

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

### Religion and Spirituality

49 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7060-403-7, Rs 60  
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

*Other Authors*

### Talks by Nirodbaran

*December 1969–July 1970*

—Edited by Sunayana and Maurice  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication  
Department, Pondicherry  
267 pp, ISBN: 978-93-5210-152-8, Rs 210  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Prior to Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary in 1972, Nirodbaran gave a series of talks to the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Approximately 150 talks were tape-recorded and transcribed and are now being published in book form. In this volume, comprised of talks delivered between December 1969 and July 1970, Nirodbaran shares his reminiscences and those of fellow *sadhaks*, describing Ashram life during the 1920s and relating incidents from Sri Aurobindo's life during the 1930s and 1940s. He also quotes extensively from his own correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. Full of the humour that characterised his long relationship with the Master, these talks provide an intimate view of Ashram life in those decades.

*See review on page 21*

### My Savitri Work with the Mother

—Huta  
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry  
268 pp, ISBN: 978-81-87372-27-1, Rs 520  
Size: 19 x 25 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

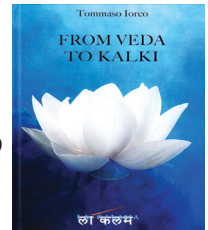
This book tells the story of how Huta came to the Ashram and began her work with the Mother. It presents a detailed account of how the Mother prepared and encouraged her to learn painting and helped her to create two series of paintings: the 472 pictures comprising *Meditations on Savitri* and

the 116 pictures that accompanied the Mother's comments titled *About Savitri*. During their meetings, where the Mother revealed her visions for each painting by drawing sketches and explaining which colours should be used, the unique importance of *Savitri* and the Mother's own experiences connected to the poem come clearly into view. The book is also a representation of Huta's *sadhana*, her struggles and her progress, and the solicitude and grace showered on her by the Mother.

*See review on page 23*

### From Veda to Kalki

—Tommaso Iorco  
Publisher: La Calama Editrice  
di Cellai Leonardo, Italy  
624 pp, ISBN: 978-88-99708-00-9  
Rs 2000, Size: 15 x 21cm  
Binding: Hard Cover



Largely basing his overview of the Indian spiritual tradition on his own study of the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the author takes a wide-ranging look at the cultural and spiritual wealth that is found in Indian thought and life. Drawing on both Western and Eastern literary and cultural sources, the book affords a unique perspective on its subject. By way of introduction, the author first addresses a few misconceptions that seem still to plague a true understanding of India's history and development such as the spurious theory of an Aryan invasion. He follows with chapters on the Vedic Rishis, the Upanishads, Samkhya, Yoga, the Gita, Vedanta, Puranas, Tantra, the Buddha, and Modern India—Towards Apocalypse that lead up to the final long chapter on Sri Aurobindo's life and work and his evolutionary vision that finally unites spirit and matter in a transformed life on earth.

### An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming

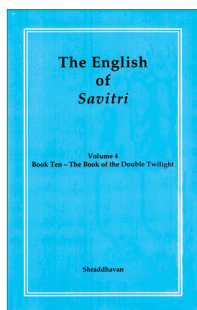
*Accompany children and adolescents with kindness and discernment*

—Fabrice Dini  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Institute  
of Educational Research and Fabrice Dini  
311 pp, ISBN: 978-2-940422-62-3, Rs 950  
Size: 21 x 21 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



Described by the author as a practical guide for parents and teachers, this book presents a holistic approach to education inspired by the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It encompasses various aspects including physical education, refinement of the senses, knowledge and mastery over emotions, training of mental faculties, building up of character strengths, cultivation of a sense of ethics, and the development of an inner awareness and mindfulness. Enhanced by numerous diagrams, tables, and colour illustrations, the book is aimed at teachers, presenting a variety of interactive exercises and activities, from discussions and games to breathing techniques and meditation methods simplified for adolescents and children. It includes sections on the role of the adult and importance of teaching by example, and the future of education in a rapidly changing world. The text is supplemented with statistics and findings from modern-day research as well as quotes, anecdotes, and case studies that add a depth of detail designed to encourage and support teachers to provide children with a well-rounded approach to learning.

*See review on page 27*



**The English of Savitri: Part 4  
(Book Ten – The Book of the  
Double Twilight)**

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

—Shradhdhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan,  
Auroville

334 pp, ISBN: 978-93-82474-18-0  
Rs 550, 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 Three, "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.

**Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies**  
*Vedanta as Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo*

—Arun Chatterjee

Publisher: Lotus Press, USA

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

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

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

*See review on page 25*

*(previously introduced in the April 2018 issue)*

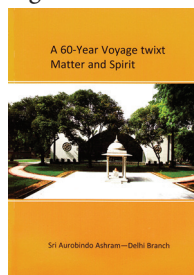
**A 60-Year Voyage twixt Matter and Spirit: Sri  
Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch**

Publisher: Matri Store, New Delhi

107 pp, ISBN: 978-81-88847-78-5, Rs 150

Size: 18 x 24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This handbook of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch, liberally illustrated with photographs, is a guide to all facets of life at the Ashram. It first



introduces Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their teachings, and the naissance and growth of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. There follows a detailed history of how the Delhi Branch began and expanded into today's multifaceted organisation that

includes the Mother's International School, Matri Kala Mandir, mirambika Free Progress School, vocational training programs, Tapaysa Guest House,

as well as the facilities in Nainital and Talla Ramgarh, where youth camps, adventure camps, and study camps are regularly held, and the Kechla Project for tribal development in a remote area of Odisha.

### **The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds (Part 1)**

*Talks on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri (Book Two)*

—M. P. Pandit

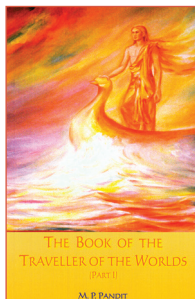
Publisher: Dipti Publications,

Pondicherry

325 pp, ISBN: 978-81-7509-137-5

Rs 240, Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



These talks, which cover the first half of the second book of *Savitri*, were given between August 1992 and January 1993. Aswapati, having achieved his own spiritual self-fulfilment as an individual, realises that the imperfect world around him has a higher destiny and undertakes a journey to discover all the planes of consciousness. In this commentary on the first six cantos of the *Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, Aswapati, now acting as a representative of the entire human race, explores first the subtle-physical worlds of beauty and form and then the occult workings of the life force in the lower vital worlds. In Canto Six he ascends to a higher vital world, but his soul instinctively asks for a deeper joy than the “Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life” can offer.

### **What is the Matrimandir—the most mysterious monument of modern times?**

—Edited by Iris Gaartz

Publisher: PRISMA, Auroville

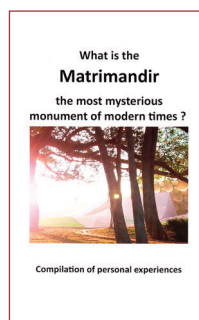
300 pp, ISBN: 978-81-933675-2-0

Rs 450, Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The first thirty pages of this book describe some aspects of the Matrimandir, such as the names the Mother gave for the

four pillars: North—Mahakali; South—Maheshwari; East—Mahalakshmi; and West—Mahasaraswati. This is followed by some colour photographs of the symbols on each of the four entrances, the inner chamber, the lotus pond, and the meditation rooms under the petals named for the twelve attributes of the Mother. The rest of the book is a series of



interviews with Aurovilians and others about their own experiences of the Matrimandir and what it means to them.

### **The Origin of Ignorance and the Problem of Error, Falsehood, Evil and Suffering**

— Compiled by Vivek Prasad

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo

Divine Life Trust, Jhunjhunu

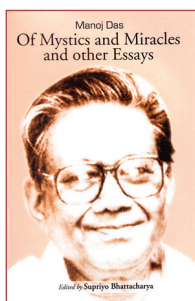
208 pp, ISBN: 978-81-86549-05-6

Rs 180, Size: 14 x 21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



A compilation of extracts drawn primarily from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* and his *Letters on Yoga*, with a few extracts from the Mother's writings, this book is based on a series of study classes conducted at the Sri Aurobindo Divine Life Education Centre. The extracts are interspersed with comments and discussions from the classes. The selections are organised by theme: the origin and nature of ignorance and its remedy; the problems of error, falsehood, and evil, the powers behind their workings, and their remedies.



### **Of Mystics and Miracles and other Essays**

— Manoj Das

Publisher: Sagnik Books,

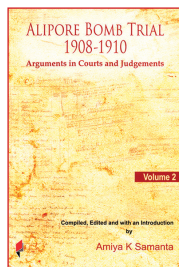
Kolkata

376 pp, ISBN: 978-93-84101-39-8

Rs 600, Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This collection of articles and transcribed talks by the creative writer Manoj Das offers the reader the opportunity to explore a different aspect of his writing. Solicited to speak by various institutions or organisations or asked to write by editors on any number of topics, the author shares his insights and perceptions on literature and education, mysticism and yoga, mythology and legends, social issues of the day, and some thoughtful pieces on a few great writers and Indian revolutionaries. Every essay evidences something of his style as a storyteller, and throughout these pages runs the stream of Sri Aurobindo's thought and the influence it had on the author's life and development.



## Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 (Volume 2)

*Arguments in Courts and Judgements*

—Compiled, Edited and with an

Introduction by Amiya K Samanta

Publisher: Frontpage, Kolkata

470 pp, ISBN: 978-93-81043-27-1

Rs 1495, Size: 15 x 23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

The second of two volumes bringing to light all the unpublished documents related to the Alipore Bomb Trial, this book deals with the arguments presented in the Sessions Court and the High Court and the judgements rendered in both. In the Introduction, the editor revisits justice in colonial India, beginning with the East India Company's efforts to protect colonial race relations. He argues that the bloodshed of the 1857 uprising made the British realise that a new and fair system of justice had to be implemented to quell the stirrings of a widespread revolt and cement the balance of power in favour of the colonial regime. The arguments and judgements presented demonstrate how far the principles of fair and impartial justice were actually adhered to. The epilogue details the British Government's efforts to muzzle and condemn Sri Aurobindo and summarises the aftermath of the Alipore Bomb Trial in terms of how the authorities moved to tackle what they viewed as the problem of revolutionary terrorism.

## Auroville: The City the Earth Needs

*A Pictorial Album*

Publisher: Chandernagore

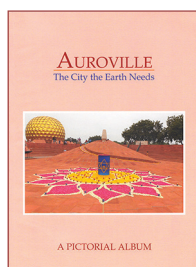
Barasat Gate Cultural

Association, Chandernagore

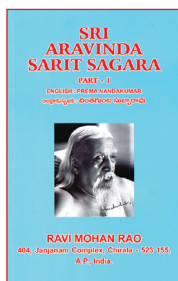
84 pp, Rs 250, Size: 18 x 25 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

A collection of photographs and texts was displayed at the Ashram's Exhibition Hall to mark Auroville's fiftieth anniversary in 2018. This book presents a selection of those photos and texts commemorating the founding of Auroville in February 1968 and the laying of the foundation stone for the Matrimandir in 1971. In the second part of the book, there are colour photographs of the flowers associated with the twelve Matrimandir gardens, the children of Auroville, and the Golden Jubilee celebrations, concluding with some experiences



at the Matrimandir recorded by Champaklal and Nirodbaran.



## Sri Aravinda Sarit Sagara-Part I

— Prema Nandakumar

Publisher: Ravi Mohan Rao, Chirala

620 pp, Rs 300, Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In Part I of this bilingual volume the author has written an introductory essay on the life and work of Sri Aurobindo followed by sets of three

essays on themes central to each of the first fifteen volumes of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (1972). A Telegu translation of these essays appears in the second half of the book. Apparently, Part II will cover the second fifteen volumes. Although the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) edition of Sri Aurobindo's writings is now out of print, these essays can be read profitably for the relevant volumes that form part of the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, which includes all of the works published in the SABCL and around 3000 pages of previously unpublished material.

## K. D. Sethna

— P. Raja

Publisher: Sahitya Akademi,

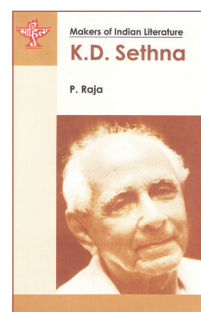
New Delhi

77 pp, ISBN: 978-81-260-5283-7

Rs 50, Size: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The author, a long-time associate of K. D. Sethna, writes of Sethna's life and work with humour and evident affection. Sethna's early interest in literature blossomed when he joined the Ashram and he wrote on subjects as varied as ancient Indian history, comparative mythology, Christology, overhead poetry, international affairs, philosophy, mysticism, spiritual and scientific thought, modern physics and biology, and studies on Blake and Shakespeare. He matured into a fine poet under Sri Aurobindo's mentorship and had an extended correspondence with him on his epic poem *Savitri*. Author of more than fifty books, including *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, he was also the editor of the *Mother India* journal from its inception in 1949 until his passing.



## **BENGALI**

Savitri-Satyavan (Prem)—Kanupriyo Chattopadhyay,  
sc Rs 30

Nirodbaran: Sadhak O Kabi—eds. Arabinda Basu  
and Romen Sengupta, sc Rs 50

## **GUJARATI**

Divya Jeevan - Volume I—Sri Aravind, sc Rs 225

Savitri Shabdamrut - 8—Shraddhavan, sc Rs 200

## **HINDI**

Rashtriya Shiksha ke Aayam va Shikshan-Paddhati  
—Sri Aravind, sc Rs 65

Kahaniyan: Srma Dwara Kathit—Abha Pande dwara  
sankalit, sc Rs 130

## **ITALIAN**

L'Eterna Giovinezza—La Madre, sc Rs 120

## **KANNADA**

Sri Aravinda Makaranda—Dr R. S. Mugali, sc Rs 125

## **MARATHI**

Auroville: Srimatajinchhi Sankalpana ani Vartaman  
Swaroop—Edited by Sanjeevan Karyalaya, sc  
Rs 50

## **TAMIL**

Savitri: Oru Aganda Parvai—M. P. Pandit, sc Rs 100

## **TELUGU**

Maharushivaryulu Sri Aravindulu—Ganne Shripati  
Naidu, sc Rs 20

Sri Aravinda Sarit Sagara (Part 1)—Prema Nandakumar  
sc Rs 300

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### **Donations to Sri Aurobindo Ashram**

We are sharing the following that may be of interest to our readers. This is for informational purposes only and is not intended to solicit donations.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust has received many requests to set up a facility to receive donations online. This has now been implemented. Those wishing to make a donation to the Ashram may do so from anywhere in the world by visiting <https://donations.sriaurobindoashram.org>, filling in the form, and proceeding to pay by any of the online or offline methods listed. The site and payment gateway are secure, and data privacy is respected. Additional features and payment options will be added in due course.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Talks by Nirodbaran

December 1969–July 1970

—Edited by Sunayana and Maurice

In the years leading up to 1972, Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary, Nirodbaran gave a series of 150 talks at the Ashram School. These were given at a teacher's request as a way to prepare the students for the centenary. To depict Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and the Ashram as it slowly grew around them in as much detail as possible Nirod quotes extensively from various printed, manuscript, and oral sources. To better understand the impact of the talks it should be remembered that in 1969 the humorous letters in Nirod's correspondence and his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* had not yet been published. Few had any idea of the witty and fun-loving side of Sri Aurobindo, how close he could come to a disciple. Nor did they know much about Sri Aurobindo as a person, his routine, his habits, his way of being. Nirod's observations and the extracts he read out came as a revelation to his audience. No wonder that more and more gathered to listen to him.

His other sources were A. B. Purani, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Dinendranath Roy, Brahmashri Subbarao, Narayan Prasad, Sudhir Sarkar, Sahana Devi, Champaklal Purani, and Jyotindranath Das. Of these the last three are particularly remarkable because they first appeared before the public eye in the context of these talks.

Sahana Devi was in Pondicherry since 1928. Apart from her reminiscences of those early years, she had an extensive correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, mostly in Bengali. As she was a multifaceted artist – a singer, a composer, a dancer, and a fine hand at embroidery – many of Sri Aurobindo's letters to her contain explanations of the creative process. In response to Sahana's observation that her singing had by far surpassed her usual capacities, he says: "When one has made oneself a channel, the Force is not necessarily bound by the limitations or disabilities of the instrument,

it can disregard them and act in its own power." Elsewhere, he deciphers the creative high to help her understand it:

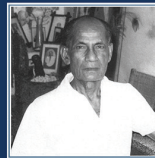
The Ananda of creation is not the pleasure of the ego in having personally done well and being somebody, that is something extraneous which attaches itself to the joy of work and creation. The Ananda comes from the inrush of a greater Power,...the thrill of being possessed and used by it, the 'avesh', the exaltation of the uplifting of the consciousness, its illumination and its heightened and heightened action.

To Nirod goes the credit for translating these letters and sharing them with an audience many years before they saw the light of print.

Finding very little information on the period between 1926 and 1933, Nirod interviews his friend Jyotindranath Das who first came to the Ashram in July 1927, then came back for good in 1928. The result is a rare glimpse of the day-to-day life in that still very young ashram, where *sadhaks* living inside the main compound had the

privilege of taking their dish of food daily to the Mother for her blessings and the *samadhi* area was occupied by a thatched shed used as a kitchen in which *sadhaks* took turns to cook for the group.

Champaklal first came to Pondicherry in 1921, then came back to stay in 1923. At a



TALKS BY NIRODBARAN  
at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education  
December 1969 – July 1970

time when "the way of life among those who were around Sri Aurobindo was neither meditation nor work" and "when service was not at all thought of seriously", Champaklal, very soon after his arrival, asked to be allowed to wash Sri Aurobindo's *dhoti*. Thus, in this ashram, he was the pioneer of service to the guru. His proposal also set the blueprint for the rest of his lifelong association with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as he remained in their personal service. For Nirod he proved to be an invaluable resource, not only through his personal recollections and correspondence, but also as

a touchstone to verify any incident concerning them. Indeed, he took the trouble of listening to the recorded tapes of Nirod's talks, and repeatedly we find the latter correcting something he had said in an earlier session in the light of Champaklal's meticulous precisions.

To give readers a proper taste of the delights that await them in *Talks by Nirodbaran*, let us look at the talk of 12 June 1970 titled "Sri Aurobindo, the perfect gentleman". Nirod begins by defining the term, using J. H. Newman's essay on the subject. The gentleman is always considerate, never petty. "He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles." He proceeds to hold every stage of Sri Aurobindo's life up against this definition.

Since very little is known of Sri Aurobindo as a boy, Nirod, his compass ever aligned to true North, chooses to produce the Mother's testimonial. Looking in 1956 at a painting of Sri Aurobindo as a boy by Promode Chatterjee, she remarked: "You have caught something of the spontaneity and freshness of the nature and something candid with which he came into this world. His inner being was on the surface. He knew nothing of this world."

Next comes the period in England, during which Sri Aurobindo and his brothers suddenly found themselves penniless as funds from home stopped. According to Nirod, Sri Aurobindo "took it calmly, quietly, in spite of two or three hard years.... But, as he has written to me, poverty was no terror for him, nor an incentive." When his tutor at Cambridge wrote his father that Sri Aurobindo may be called to court for his debts, the latter wrote to his son asking him not to be extravagant. Reminiscing about this to Nirod and others, Sri Aurobindo "said to us, smiling, 'When we had not even one sufficient meal a day, where was the question of being extravagant?' But he had no feeling of resentment or bitterness towards his father. Whenever he spoke of him it was always with affection and tenderness."

Then we come to Baroda, where "Sri Aurobindo left behind a reputation of fair play, sincerity, honesty. He was loved by his students and all those who came in contact with him, though he wasn't

a social man at all. He had a few chosen friends, lived a very simple life, and yet he could command the respect and honour of almost all the people there, high or low, with whom he came in touch or who heard his name."

Calcutta. Even when he got into politics, "[in] all the political disputes and negotiations...there was never a tinge of meanness, of duplicity or crookedness that is so common, even so much courted by the politicians. Thus he acquired the esteem of all and sundry, friends and foes. The young students loved him, the young revolutionaries adored him, and all the others respected him for his integrity, for his sincerity, for his self-sacrifice."

Finally, the Pondicherry period. Readers of Sri Aurobindo's correspondence "must have noticed with what great patience and indulgence he has again and again written about the same subjects, to so many people in different ways, without the least annoyance or displeasure." In 1938, when Sri Aurobindo broke his femur and was confined to bed, Nirodbaran, as an attendant, observed first hand his self-effacing nature:

Whenever he needed anything, he would look this way, that way, to see if the attendant was free or engaged. After being sure that he was free, he would say, "Could I have this? Could I have that?" Always in a mild and detached tone.

Nirod also noticed that "his whole programme was made in such a way as to suit that of the Mother", so that "the Mother should not be kept waiting under any circumstance."

Example by example, Nirod justifies his thesis. And his conclusion is:

Now, if I have been able, by all these instances, to prove to you that Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman, I'll be satisfied. If you demur to the common appellation 'gentleman', let us call him 'a Supramental perfect gentleman'. But the one impression that he has left with us is that he was Shiva. He had a magnanimity such as the verse in *Savitri* suggests: "A magnanimity as of sea or sky | Enveloped with its greatness all that came."

Indifferent as it were to everything that was going on in the world, his gaze fixed far away

and yet in his cosmic consciousness supporting all things and each one of us—that is the impression that always floats before my eyes whenever I think of Sri Aurobindo.

Two puzzles come for free with every copy of *Talks by Nirodbaran*. Of the 150 talks given by him, only 26 have been printed in this volume, the talks he gave between December 1969 and July 1970. In the absence of any explanation by the editors one can only hope that the remaining talks will be published soon. Secondly, a book that eminently deserves a detailed Contents has been provided with none at all.

The talks are rambling, optimistic, and liberally spiced with anecdote and humour. The speaker, by his own confession, is given to digression, but most of his digressions enrich us, adding to our understanding of the space and time he has set out to depict, complementing our vision through new approaches. The experience leaves us grateful and inspired, moved by the manifold marvel of compassion embodied by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

—Sunam Mukherjee

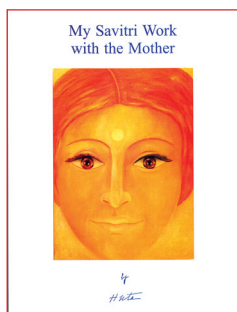
*Sunam reads proof at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.*

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## My Savitri Work with the Mother

—Huta

When the Mother met Huta for the first time in 1955, she saw in her a rising flame of aspiration for realising the Divine. She would later explain to Huta that her soul had not gone through the process of evolution of the earth because it had come down straight from the Supreme and would “go back purely to the Supreme”. This book is the detailed story of the eighteen-year period during which the Mother prepared her instrument, “Huta—the Offered One”, to create the *Savitri* paintings and many other visionary works of art.



The Mother often brought up the topic of painting while speaking with Huta. And in order to add the élan necessary for her to take up art seriously, the Mother gave a demonstration with oil colours, urging her to try her hand first in painting flowers and then to executing the more hazardous work of painting a white object over a white background. Later, the Mother gave her the firm assurance: “I have now filled your hands with consciousness, light, force and skill.”

In mid-1958, Huta needed treatment for an enlarged liver and had to leave for Kenya where her family lived. On her return to Pondicherry four months later, she conveyed to the Mother her wish to express Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* in paintings. But deeming that she was not mature enough for such an august task, the Mother proposed that she should go to London for study and acquire some self-confidence.

My first contact with Huta-ben took place during the second half of 1956. She was always clad in a white sari, which enhanced the fairness of her skin. The gold-rimmed spectacles that she wore not only brightened her face, but also lent a fairy-like look to it. Being quite a young child then, I loved very much to be hugged and carried in her arms. But receiving foreign chocolates from her was an even bigger attraction! This evening ritual near Dyuman-bhai’s room went on merrily twice a week for a couple of years. But alas, after getting admission in group A5 in 1958, my intimacy with the chocolate-giver ended abruptly. And simultaneously, she vanished from the Ashram. It was much later that I heard about her relocation to a far-off city called London, of which I had not heard before.

Meanwhile, reaching London on New Year’s Day in 1959, she joined courses in embroidery, typewriting, and the fine arts, studying male and female nude figures and even painting them from life. Huta left London in mid-1960 and flew back to East Africa, where she faced tremendous pressure from her family to get married. But she bravely stood her ground and persuaded her father to send her back to Pondicherry. For she knew within herself that whatever she had learnt in her art courses would be invaluable for her future work in the Sri

Aurobindo Ashram. Upon her return, the Mother observed happily that the flame of aspiration in her had now grown larger than before.

One day, the Mother said, “You know, I had a great wish to express through paintings the visions I had seen from 1904 onwards, but I had no time.” Then she added, “Here in the Ashram I encouraged several people before you were born but without avail. Now you will fulfil my wish.” Later Huta discovered that the artists the Mother had approached during the 1930s were Sanjiban, Anil Kumar, Jayantilal, Krishnalal, and Nishi Kanto.

In October 1961, the Mother finally started the work of painting *Savitri* through Huta. Now, for the first time since her arrival at the Ashram, Huta’s life assumed some regularity. The painting work continued for several years, richly rewarding her with spiritual experiences and lofty visions, while at the same time she gathered the knowledge in painting that she had much aspired for. At last, after five and half years of arduous labour, the 460 paintings were finished, and the Mother decided to hold an exhibition in February 1967.

But the display of the *Savitri* paintings was not free of controversies, even though Huta does not mention them in her book. First of all, the lack of any artistic style engendered a lot of criticism. In fact, one of the English teachers of the SAICE freely went around airing his view that they were chocolate box paintings! Then, cramming the entire Exhibition Hall with those 460 paintings displayed in two rows across every wall was excessive, making it difficult for the onlooker to focus his attention on any individual art work. Added to that, Satyavan’s tight-fitting trousers, Aswapati’s red dhoti, and covering the head of the queen mother were a few oddities that ruffled some sensibilities. Moreover, certain features in each series, such as the interactions between Savitri and Satyavan, Aswapati’s meditation, and the forest scenes, were too similar to one another. But now, half a century later, it transpires from the book under review that the moving force, the inspiration behind these artistic decisions that raised such a critical reaction was the Mother herself, and Huta had practically no say in the matter.

Another striking observation that the scope of the book does not allow for was the apparent lack of enthusiasm for the audio-visual presentation of Huta’s paintings accompanied by Sunil’s music, exclusively composed for each painting. The presentation was scheduled for 1968, a leap year with the added importance of the inauguration of Auroville scheduled for 28 February. The seven evenings between the Darshan Day and the 28th were reserved for these special programmes at the Playground. Despite the feverish expectation of a massive turnout, only about 200 people, mostly from the Ashram, attended the shows regularly. One notable attendee from among the visitors was my father, who had the distinction of having read *Savitri* sixteen times, with notes.

However subdued the people’s reactions were, the spiritual impact of the audio-visual presentation was stupendous! The atmosphere was set by the first slide itself, where a meditative, half-open eye over a deep greenish globe ushered in the mystic line, “It was the hour before the Gods awake.” Added to that mysterious visual impact, the gong-like chimes of the accompanying music wove pure magic. I remember passing those seven days in a kind of intense spiritual daze.

Just as I began a friendship with Sunil-da following the *Savitri* audio-visual show, I also renewed my old amity with Huta-ben and began visiting her regularly. She was amazed when she saw my paintings and lavished effusive praise. “If only I had your talent!” she would say. One day, she suddenly brought up the topic of Auroville—more particularly, the Matrimandir. She explained that the Mother had appointed her the guardian of the Matrimandir, further confiding in me that “I have plans for decorating the walls of the Matrimandir with life-size reproductions of my *Savitri* paintings. And for doing that I will need your help. If you consent to do it, I shall speak to the Mother and obtain her permission.” Being a lad of barely fifteen at the time, I felt extremely flattered and gave my consent at once.

Slowly, Huta-ben revealed to me some of the spiritual experiences she underwent while executing the *Savitri* paintings. I clearly remember



her mentioning the incident, described on page 164, involving the fearful python that she had painted one evening. And at one stage the inspiration for painting was so strong that she completed as many as eleven paintings in a single night. Although at times nerve-shattering, the experience did leave a feeling of fulfilment in her.

In *My Savitri Work with the Mother*, Huta's style of narration is somewhat slow, erratic, and repetitive. On the other hand, her use of the English language is quite effective and crisp. In fact, some of her remarks about herself are replete with touches of humour, candidness, and irony. And her boldness in narrating her failures and drawbacks will surprise the reader much. For example, she overwhelmingly admits the Mother's rejection of many paintings, and also that the most unnerving factor in her life was the inferiority complex that she suffered from, especially making her feel inadequate in front of people she considered to be intelligent.

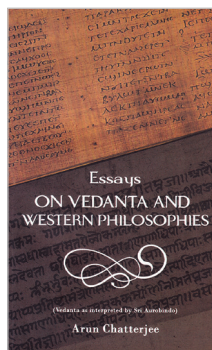
For lovers of *Savitri* this book offers many hitherto unpublished messages of the Mother on the subject. There is also much advice about the right attitude to adopt for doing selfless work.

—Arun Mitra

*Arup, an alumnus of the SAICE, is the author of Uttara Yogi, a historical novel based on the pre-Pondicherry life of Sri Aurobindo. He learned art under the Mother's guidance and later taught it for sixteen years at the Lycée Français de Pondichéry.*

## Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies *Vedanta as Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo*

—Arun Chatterjee



Today, an increasing number of people adulate Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as religious icons, to be worshipped in photographs and treated as two more of the myriad gods and avatars of Hinduism. A devotional attitude, of course, is not

excluded by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, but an exclusive devotionalism without understanding the life mission of these figures and the goals of human transformation they strove for and taught, is not what either of them supported. Repeatedly, in the writings and sayings of both, one encounters the warning against turning them or their teaching into yet another religion. On the other hand, those who have delved into the spiritual philosophy of these teachers or tried to discuss them have sometimes lost themselves in an ocean-in-a-teacup of cultic jargon and hair-splitting, reminiscent of Christian apologetics. The importance of a spiritual philosophy (*darshan* in the Indian tradition) is to provide a structural framework and goals for practice (*yoga*). Without a comparative context for orientation, it is easy to miss the wood for the trees or to believe one wood to be the only forest there is. Under these circumstances, Arun Chatterjee's *Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies* serves a salutary function in offering a concise, comparative guidebook to the global terrain of spiritual philosophy closely related to that of Sri Aurobindo, so that a general reader may form a clearer understanding of the theoretical and praxical options of the broader field and the specificity of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's goals, methods and vocabularies based on these.

To orient the reader to approach the domain appropriate to Sri Aurobindo's works, the author begins with a chapter distinguishing religion, philosophy and spirituality. He points out the overlapping nature of these categories, but also draws attention to what characterizes each. As he explains, religion serves a mainly social function, binding a people through cultural practices to a theological framework. Spirituality emphasizes a path of subjective practice leading to the experience of cosmic and/or transcendental forms of consciousness. Philosophy privileges rational contemplation and critical judgment leading to classificatory structures relating the human to the cosmos and, perhaps, something

beyond it. Each can operate with the others, or independently of the others, or against the others. The author clarifies how Sri Aurobindo's teaching is a spiritual philosophy and not a religion. He ends the chapter by pointing out how, in our times, there is a growing global trend towards what is being called a "spiritual but not religious" stance.

This chapter is followed by one in which Sri Aurobindo's views are contextualized within the Vedantic tradition. This chapter deals with two aspects, those of reality and the self. In discussing reality, it introduces the three major schools of Vedantic interpretation, Advaita of Shankara, Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja, and Dvaita of Madhavacharya, and shows how Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy posits a consciousness which integrates these understandings, and how he interprets the Upanishads to demonstrate this. In dealing with the self, the chapter introduces the views on the self (*atman*) in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. A fully developed metaphysics from these sources includes a supreme Self (*paramatman*), a universal self, the one Self of all beings of the cosmos (*atman*), and its individual poise that remains outside time and space and presides over the cosmic becoming of the individual (*jivatman*). The author distinguishes these spiritual "selves" from the ego (*ahamkara*). The Upanishads and the Gita also speak of an "inner atman" (*antaratman*) which enters the manifestation. The author does not refer to this specifically, but introduces the idea of the soul (*purusha*), pointing to the Gita's distinction of a status of soul that remains unchanging outside the manifestation (*akshara*) from a status that changes with the fluctuations of nature (*kshara*). He also introduces the Sankhya distinction of soul and nature (*purusha* and *prakriti*). Sri Aurobindo's interpretation and contribution to this theory of the self and the soul are then discussed. The author brings out effectively Sri Aurobindo's finely developed notion of the individual soul in the becoming (psychic being)

and his special contribution of an evolutionary component to the individual and cosmic becoming.

This treatment of an Indian metaphysical context is followed by a consideration of two Western philosophers, one of the 17th century, Baruch Spinoza, and the other straddling the 18th and 19th centuries, Arthur Schopenhauer. The choice of these philosophers follows their similarities with or interests in Indian philosophy. Spinoza was a Dutch Jew who lived in the thick of what has been called the Enlightenment, and may be said to have contributed in a special way to it. As the author points out, he stands apart from other Western philosophers due to his uncompromising substance monism. This means that reality is a single substance, in contradistinction to the Cartesian theory that Matter and Spirit (God) are radically different. This is fundamentally consonant with Vedanta's notion of Brahman, which may appear in different forms, but is the only thing there is. The author draws this parallel while also pointing to some differences between Spinoza and Vedanta, particularly the absence of a reciprocal emotional relationship between the human and the divine. The chapter on Schopenhauer introduces him as the first European philosopher to draw explicitly on Indian philosophy. This is mostly true, though it needs to be pointed out that Indology was well established in Germany at this time, mainly in Philology. Though Kant believed that reality in itself could never be known, Schopenhauer, who was deeply influenced by Kant, held that Will was the foundation of reality and was present in all beings, who could thus intuit and experience reality-in-itself. He held that the willed renunciation of the action of will could help the human to transcend the field of contested wills and achieve peace. His take-away from the Upanishads could thus be called world-renouncing in a way similar to Shankara's Advaita. It is difficult to do justice in such a short scope to complex philosophers like Spinoza and Schopenhauer, but the author

touches on germane aspects of their philosophy. One wishes, though, that the modern and contemporary legacies of these philosophers had been touched on as well; for example, Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche, and the latter's traces in Sri Aurobindo, or Spinoza's influence on Gilles Deleuze as a contemporary philosopher of cosmogenetic individuation.

These chapters are followed by one on rebirth and immortality and another on determinism and free will. Both of these are excellent exercises in comparative philosophy, marshalling a variety of views from world traditions to engage their considerations. The first brings its discussions to a focus in the metaphysical justification of rebirth in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary cosmology, while the second deals with the conditions for freedom in Vedanta and Sri Aurobindo as well as views on the topic by Western thinkers, including the modern existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre. Next comes an interesting comparative study on Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism and Vedanta. The book ends with an Appendix on the place of Bhakti in Sri Aurobindo's yoga, written by the author's father and translated by the author.

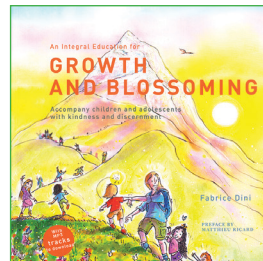
Given that the author is not a trained professional philosopher, the accuracy, clarity and economy of his introductions are remarkable. The result is a slim, readable volume that covers a large amount of ground, and one that many should find rewarding in providing a broad contextual understanding to spiritual philosophy and the ideas of Sri Aurobindo.

—Debashish Banerji

*Debashish is the Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophy and Culture and the Doshi Professor of Asian Art at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.*

## An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming

— Fabrice Dini



*An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming* lays out a program for linking child psychology and education through a series of activities that are geared towards

helping a child learn, change, and grow in a healthy environment. This impressive work is full of treasures and precious initiatives that catalyse the process of an integral education. The activities, which contribute to a child's overall development by imparting nuggets of academic knowledge, by fostering fundamental values, and by building up emotional intelligence, are simple to execute and easy to absorb. Importantly, they are also fun: Dini believes that we should let children be children and tap into their youthful enthusiasm and energy in order to teach.

As a mother and teacher of children across several age groups myself, I was pleased to discover this like-minded view on encouraging games, laughter, and reflection rather than suppressing them in a classroom context. Dini focuses on hands-on projects and creative work that bridge the divide between academic disciplines and spiritual and psychological growth. For example: "Study the evolution of a quality across the centuries or through historical characters, explore what qualities were present at different times of the evolution of humans or the country". These types of lessons have the potential to cultivate multiple aspects of a child's spirit and mind, rather than forcing the acquisition of empty facts and figures at the expense of real critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness. And this is what makes the book so interesting—the child's natural curiosity and playfulness are channelled and transformed into extraordinary instruments of education: wonder becomes knowledge, as the author so beautifully puts it. I am keen to implement these sorts of lessons in my own classroom.

Crucially, Dini's holistic approach to education seeks to bring out the different forms of intelligence inherent in all children. He stresses his firm conviction that every child is naturally gifted, each in his or her own way. Each child has "the potential to flourish while offering the world the best in her/him, and becoming an enlightened, supportive, caring, and dynamic human being, thus contributing to the well-being of all". At the core of Dini's theory of education and his slate of developmental activities is the notion that children are vibrant beings whose potential is waiting to be realised, as opposed to immature participants in a system that instructs, admonishes, and tests.

Another idea that is convincingly conveyed in Dini's research on integral education is the importance of soft skills, such as the sense of communication, the ability to work in a team, leadership, integrity and ethics, the ability to learn new things, creativity, and the capacity to reason and problem solve. Soft skills are important—in the classroom and later in life. During group meetings, when an observation about a certain subject is brought up, often the immediate reactions that burst forth are criticisms and judgmental viewpoints. Such responses speak to an absence of teamwork and communication. In the ensuing chaos, positive change and progress are often shunted aside. Without the ability to adopt a global approach to problems and to listen effectively to one another, we fail to advance or manoeuvre improvement. Today's students are tomorrow's teachers, leaders, and global actors, and if we can consciously get away from this "academics only" perception and focus knowingly on these soft skills that Dini mentions, we will certainly create a better place in which to live and work.

Dini also refers to recent studies indicating the negative impact of performance ratings on the motivation of staff in multinational companies. These researches show that competence-based examinations do not work. He concludes: "It is therefore surprising that we impose upon children

a system that is ineffective and too violent for adults!" Dini adds that "although evaluations are useful for students to become aware of their progress, in no case do they define the value of an individual", suggesting a need to drastically reconfigure the way our modern, mainstream system of education measures a child's intellectual or social capacity.

In 1962, the Mother had already spoken about this deeper dimension regarding tests, a discernment that we have to understand as teachers and parents:

Tests may be useful in giving you the academic worth of a child, but not his real worth. As for the real worth of a child, something else is to be found, but that will be for later on, and will be of a different nature. I am not opposing real worth to academic worth; they can coexist in the same individual, but it is a rather rare phenomenon which produces exceptional types of people. [CWM vol. 12, p. 324]

She further explained in July 1967:

Naturally the teacher has to test the student to know if he or she has learnt something and has made progress. But this test must be individual and adapted to each student, not the same mechanical test for all of them. It must be a spontaneous and unexpected test leaving no room for pretence and insincerity. Naturally, this is much more difficult for the teacher but so much more living and interesting also. [Ibid. 201]

Two concepts that I have always perceived as priorities in early education are very well illustrated and explained in this thoughtful work, namely transmission of human values in a natural manner, and reinforcement of constant generosity and understanding. This book will prove its worth to educators time and again.

—Shoma Dutta

*Shoma completed her Higher Studies at SAICE, and a Masters in French Literature and an Executive Masters in Political Science in France, where she worked in policy implementation. In 2014, she relocated to Pondicherry and rejoined SAICE as a teacher.*