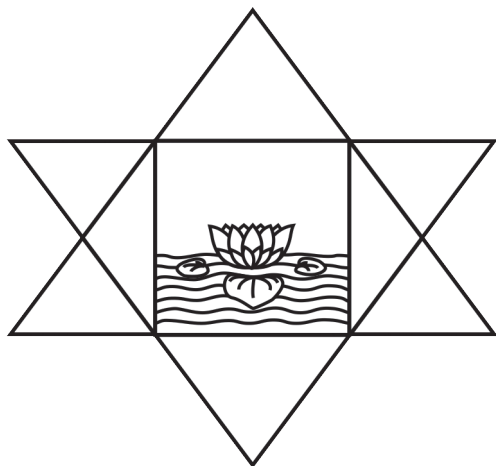


# Recent Publications

## Sabbā



### SRI AUROBINDO'S SYMBOL

The descending triangle represents Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The ascending triangle represents the aspiring answer from matter under the form of life, light and love.

The junction of both—the central square—is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme—the lotus.

The water—inside the square—represents the multiplicity, the creation.

To celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo we have an article that turns our attention to the divine and human aspects of the Avatar, how they interact and express themselves in the life of Sri Aurobindo, and the implications of that interaction for us who try to follow Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

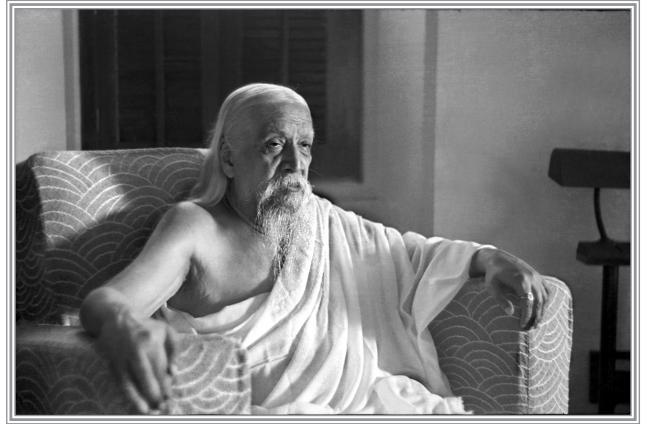
A new volume of *Talks by Nirodbaran* (August 1970–March 1971) continues its portrayal of the Ashram atmosphere during Sri Aurobindo's time. Nirod-da also invited several of his fellow *sadhaks* to speak, and together their reminiscences draw a vivid picture of Sri Aurobindo's interaction with his disciples.

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## Sri Aurobindo: Human and Divine

SRI AUROBINDO is truly an exceptional Avatar, a marvel of marvels. On this 150th anniversary of his birth, it is appropriate that we contemplate this extraordinary Grace bestowed on us by the Divine in the life of Sri Aurobindo. It is true that the phenomenon of Avatarhood is itself a kind of unfathomable mystery, and to understand its expression in the life of Sri Aurobindo is beyond the scope of



human comprehension. The attempt to describe it is a kind of fool's errand, but we are fortunate that Sri Aurobindo himself has shed so much light on the subject in both his prose and poetic writings. We can therefore select some jewels from his treasure chest and hold them up to the light and see what images they project, and what story they tell.

We find that when these jewels are brought out, they have many facets, that is, there are many ways to approach the subject. In recent months I wrote two other articles on the subject in commemoration of this special anniversary that highlighted other facets: "Sri Aurobindo's Avatarhood" (*Sraddha*, November 2021) and "Insights into Avatarhood in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*" (presently available as a talk on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)). In the present article I focus on the divine and human aspects of the Avatar, their interaction and their expression in the life of Sri Aurobindo, and the lessons and implications of their interaction for us who try to follow Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

We can begin by noting the basic distinction of the divine and human sides of Avatarhood expressed in this letter by Sri Aurobindo:

There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature, under the conditions of Nature, and it uses it according to the rules of the game — though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. If Avatarhood is only a flashing miracle, then I have no use for it. If it is a coherent part of the arrangement of the omnipresent Divine in Nature, then I can understand and accept it. (CWSA 28: 472–73)

The distinction and bifurcation between the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality on the outside is essential; it is what constitutes the human and divine aspects of Avatarhood and gives to each a substantive reality and importance. It is

this which gives Avatarhood its significance, its fundamental purpose and rationale, and without it would be only “a flashing miracle”. We may also highlight here the important descriptors given for these two aspects, that the Divine Consciousness behind is “omnipotent”, and the instrumental part is a “personality” that is put forth in Nature and used by the omnipotent Consciousness. “Personality” would seem to signify the Avatar’s distinctive and delimited human person that interacts with the world and us, together with its human physical constitution, its life force and vital nature, its unique character and qualities, its thoughts and feelings, and its physical actions. All of this surface personality is formed by Nature, “under the conditions of Nature”, and is “used” by the omnipotent Divine Consciousness for its divine purposes. We are given the tantalising suggestion that one of these divine purposes may sometimes be to change the rules of Nature.

We should note that this distinction between the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality in front is similar and related to the distinction between the inner subliminal being and the outer personality of ordinary human beings. Like the Avatar, our outer being is formed principally by Nature’s evolutionary process with its inconscient basis, and our inner subliminal being is formed principally by the descent of the higher parts of the being from above. This quote from *The Life Divine* describes this:

For the evolution proceeded in the past by the upsurging, at each critical stage, of a concealed Power from its involution in the Inconscience, but also by a descent from above, from its own plane, of that Power already self-realised in its own higher natural province. In all these previous stages there has been a division between surface self and consciousness and subliminal self and consciousness; the surface was formed mainly under the push of the upsurging force from below, by the Inconscient developing a slowly emergent formulation of a concealed force of the spirit, the subliminal partly in this way but mainly by a simultaneous influx of the largeness of the same force from above: a mental or a vital being descended into the subliminal parts and formed from its secret station there a mental or a vital personality on the surface. (CWSA 22: 1002–03)

Our innermost self, our psychic being, is also divine in its essence, though it is representative of an individual aspect of the Divine that has descended into the manifestation, rather than a descent of the central Divine Being as in the case of the Avatar. In both the ordinary human being and the Avatar the outer personality has been built up in the course of the evolution and has subconscious and inconscient roots. In both, this outer personality develops through the course of many lives and expresses the inner being to the extent it can based on its stage of development and to the extent that the inner being can impress its influence on it. During that process of evolution over lifetimes, various parts of the personality are organized and refined and developed by the hidden, occult influence of the psychic being. For each new earthly life, the psychic being selects various personalities and tendencies that have been built up or acquired in previous lives, as well as other personalities and tendencies from the universal Nature, and constructs a new outer personality that is

suitable for the next phase of its evolution, which the psychic being again strives to organize and elaborate further. These processes are discussed in this interesting letter:

Each being in a new birth prepares a new mind, life and body — otherwise John Smith would always be John Smith and would have no chance of being Piyush Kanti Ghose. Of course inside there are old personalities contributing to the new lila — but I am speaking of the new visible personality, the outer man, mental, vital, physical. It is the psychic being that keeps the link from birth to birth and makes all the manifestations of the same person. It is therefore to be expected that the Avatar should take on a new personality each time, a personality suited for the new times, work, surroundings. In my own view of things, however, the new personality has a series of non-Avatar births behind him, births in which the intermediate evolution has been followed and assisted from age to age. (CWSA 28: 472)

In the last sentence above, Sri Aurobindo seems to suggest that the outer personality of the Avatar is developed based on the previous development of personalities in previous non-Avatar lives, a succession of lives, however, that have been associated with a single psychic being. Moreover, these earlier lives may be of Vibhutis, which are special descents of a power of the Divine into a human being to assist the general evolution, but not a descent of the central consciousness of the Divine. This possibility is made more explicit in this brief letter:

The Avatar is necessary when a special work is to be done and in crises of the evolution. The Avatar is a special manifestation, while for the rest of the time it is the Divine working within the ordinary human limits as a Vibhuti. (CWSA 28: 485)

We get a clearer distinction between the Avatar and the Vibhuti in this letter:

An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence. A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity. This is the distinction we can gather from the Gita which is the main authority on this subject. (CWSA 28: 485)

In addition to clarifying the distinction, the letter gives the defining characteristics of the Avatar, someone who is “conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life action”, and who “feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence”. The Vibhuti, in contrast, would normally not be conscious in this way, though he may embody an exceptional power of the Divine.

Despite the Avatar having the consciousness of the Divine within, it does not mean that there is no struggle in the outer parts of the consciousness. In fact, the consciousness

of the Divine within may take time and effort to realize. Sri Aurobindo said that he had no spirituality in him before taking up yoga (CWSA 35: 374–75), which according to his own statement was around 1904, when he would have been about 32 years old. It is true, however, that once he started yoga he made rapid progress. Even then, however, there was



effort and struggle. He says in a letter dated 1935, “My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle,—the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character” (CWSA 35: 44). Another letter from the same period adds another dimension to this battle: “For me the path of Yoga has always been a battle as well as a journey, a thing of ups and downs, of light followed by darkness followed by a greater light...” (CWSA 35: 372). Indeed, he has made it clear in various statements and in his poetry that the difficulties and sufferings he faced were far greater than ordinary people: “I have borne every attack which human beings have borne, otherwise I would be unable to assure anybody ‘This too can be conquered.’ At least I would have no right to say so” (CWSA 35: 418).

And the development of his consciousness did not happen by itself. He says,

Practically what I know is that I had not all the powers necessary when I started, I had to develop them by yoga, at least many of them which were not in existence in me when I began, and those which were there I had to train to a higher degree. My own idea of the matter is that the Avatar’s life and action are not miracles and if they were, his existence would be perfectly useless, a mere superfluous freak of Nature. He accepts the terrestrial conditions, he uses means, he shows the way to humanity as well as helps it. Otherwise what is the use of him and why is he here? (CWSA 35: 413)

He also says,

I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence, even if greater in degree, that there is behind others — and it is to awaken that that he is there. (CWSA 28: 478)

We have touched upon the purposes of Avatarhood in some of the passages above, but it will be useful to flesh this out a bit more to get a better perspective on the nature of Avatarhood.

...this Divine Consciousness behind the apparent personality is concerned with only two



things in a fundamental way — the Truth above and here below the Lila and the purpose of the incarnation or manifestation and it does what is necessary for that in the way its greater than human consciousness sees to be the necessary and intended way. (CWSA 28: 475)



By ‘Lila’ is meant the play of the Divine in Nature, or in Sri Aurobindo words, “a play of the divine Being with the conditions of cosmic existence in this world of an inferior Nature” (CWSA 22: 700). It generally refers to the action of the world-existence viewed as a play of the Divine, and that “play” is governed by “the rules of the game”. Thus, we can say that the Avatar takes birth in the world to play a role in this play, and in doing so acts according to the rules of Nature. But the passage also suggests that there is a specific purpose for each divine incarnation, and each Avatar is concerned with fulfilling that specific purpose which could vary across Avatars; one supposes there could be several specific purposes an Avatar comes to fulfil, though perhaps one that is central. Its main purpose, however, would typically involve making fundamental changes in the earth-existence that could

not be otherwise accomplished. Sri Aurobindo also suggests there is a general purpose for Avatarhood when he says “that the Avatar is one who comes to open comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness” (CWSA 28: 476).

In some writings Sri Aurobindo suggests there is an ascending series of steps of the evolving consciousness on earth, and that Avatars come to lead the evolution to the next higher step. For example, there is this passage from a longer letter about Avatarhood:

No, certainly not — an Avatar is not at all bound to be a spiritual prophet — he is never in fact merely a prophet, he is a realiser, an establisher — not of outward things only, though he does realise something in the outward also, but, as I have said, of something essential and radical needed for the terrestrial evolution which is the evolution of the embodied spirit through successive stages towards the Divine. (CWSA 28: 491)

In this and other letters, Sri Aurobindo describes a number of Avatars and the particular stages of the evolution that they were primarily concerned with reaching and establishing for humanity. We understand, of course, that for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the main mission was to establish the decisive next step in the evolution, a being with a divine supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo said that the primary objective was “to establish the principle of the supramental consciousness in the earth-evolution. If that is done all that is needed will be evolved by the supramental Power itself” (CWSA 28: 289). The Mother declared that work was achieved in the supramental descent of 29 February 1956, but for seventeen more years, the Mother continued the work of preparing her body to receive the supramental consciousness. She later declared that on 1 January 1969 another milestone was achieved, the descent of the Superman consciousness, the arrival in the earth-consciousness of a new intermediate being between the human and the future supramental being. She described this consciousness as “the Absolute: absolute Knowledge, absolute Will, absolute Power” (CWM 11: 158), accompanied by a divine compassion. She felt it guiding her in her work of transforming the body consciousness, and it was also working on the world conditions. At times she was identified with it, even with her body, and she said that it was also seeking other human instruments in which to manifest. Thus, from their own statements, it is clear that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother succeeded in the work that they came to do, though its outward effects may take some more time to become apparent.

This lays a foundation for an understanding of the human and divine aspects of Avatarhood. We see that the human part is crucial because that is the part composed of Nature which the Divine Consciousness behind is changing and elevating to a higher functioning. The Divine Consciousness behind can work on the material of Nature, of its outer personality to bring out its higher possibilities, a higher consciousness or even a higher type of being. At the same time, it can work on the general earth conditions, prevent catastrophe, put its weight behind progressive social change, present a new spiritual teaching that inspires and elevates human civilization, interact with other human beings, infuse its consciousness into them, and personally guide them to the higher consciousness that it intends to establish. The fact of the omnipotent Divine Consciousness behind is also critical. Sri Aurobindo says, “he becomes human in order to show humanity how to become Divine. But that cannot be if there is only a weakling without any divine Presence within or divine Force behind him—he has to be strong in order to put his strength into all who are willing to receive it” (CWSA 28: 473).

We may conclude by briefly noting and amplifying a central lesson of the divine and human aspects of the Avatar for us aspiring human beings. We too have our divine and human, our inner and outer parts of our being. The outer nature is

undergoing a process of evolution in which it is becoming progressively more pliant and expressive of the inmost psychic being, the divine element within us. Normally people are still centered in their outer consciousness, but in *sadhana* there needs to be a shift of this position, we need to go within and become centered in the inner parts of our being and particularly in our psychic being. From that inner poise we can more effectively work on the outer parts of our nature to align them with the psychic being. From within we can more easily open to the Consciousness and Force of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who still live in the subtle dimensions of our inner consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo says, “Learn to live within, to act always from within, from constant inner communion with the Mother. It may be difficult at first to do it always and completely, but it can be done if one sticks to it—and it is at that price, by learning to do that that one can have the siddhi in the Yoga” (CWSA 30: 227). The work of changing the outer parts of the nature will still remain, but by living within we can be unaffected by their defects and limitations, and calmly proceed in the work of changing them with the light and power of the Divine. Even Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to work on the outer parts of their being to open them to the Divine influx, to discipline them, to elevate and refine them, and ultimately to transform them. The aim of the Integral Yoga is to integrate the divine in us with all the parts of our outer nature and to transform the latter in the Light and Power of the divine supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo encourages us: “If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness” (CWSA 35: 402).

—Larry Seidlitz

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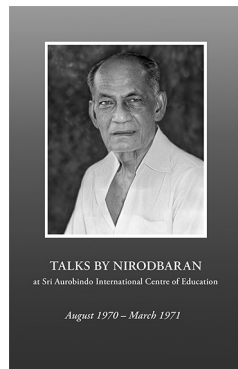
## Talks by Nirodbaran (August 1970–March 1971)

—Edited by Sunayana and Maurice

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

289 pp, Rs 260, ISBN: 978-93-5210-239-6

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



We owe the delights of this book to an unnamed teacher who persuaded Nirodbaran to give a series of talks to the students at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) some years prior to Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary in 1972. Nirodbaran was an attendant of Sri Aurobindo for twelve years and enjoyed a lively correspondence with him for even longer. The intent of the talks was to help the students become more familiar with Sri Aurobindo before the coming centenary celebrations. Whatever the intent, as word of mouth spread, the result was an ever larger audience from week to week. Students, teachers, members of the Ashram, all crowded into the Hall of Harmony to learn from Nirodbaran, and some of his guest speakers, about some aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life and character.

Instead of a traditional book review, we offer a sampling of the content.

While relating examples of Sri Aurobindo's intervention to prevent the rain from spoiling a concreting at Golconde or a harvesting of crops at an Ashram farm, Nirod-da tells the following instance of Sri Aurobindo's action, during the Second World War:

At the beginning of the War the French and the English armies of about 80,000 had to retreat from the French soil with their back to the sea. They were caught – particularly the French regiment. They were bombarded from above, pounded from the front by guns and they were pushed back to the sea – a most critical situation. The German aeroplanes dropping bombs from above, the Allied aeroplanes were not sufficient to counter their attacks, so there was, as you see, nemesis. The warships were waiting to take them up, but they were trapped. 80,000 along the coast, it would not be easy!

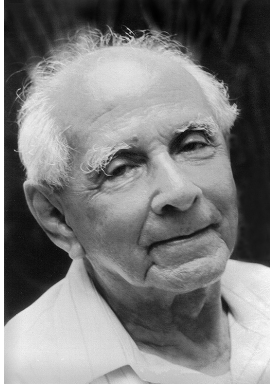
But what happened? Lo and behold, all of a sudden the whole sky was covered with a thick fog. So the German aeroplanes lost their targets and taking advantage of this fog-screen as it were, the ships rescued the major part of the army. It had been a bright Indian summer day and there was no question of any fog coming up, and the German bombardment was making merry of it, as you can understand, a good feast! So from where did the fog come all of a sudden?

I remember even today Sri Aurobindo coming in after his bath, going towards his bed. He had not yet gone there, just halfway to it, when this news came. He smiled and said, "Yes, they said there was a fog." (*Laughter*) Very modestly he said, "There was a fog."

And later he wrote to Nirod-da:

I have always said that the spiritual force I have been putting on human affairs such as the War, is not the supramental but the Overmind force, and that when it acts in the

material world, is so inextricably mixed up in the tangle of the lower world forces that its results, however strong or however adequate to the immediate object, must necessarily be partial. That is why I am getting a birthday present of a free India on August 15, but complicated by its being presented in two packets as two free Indias: this is the generosity I could have done without, one free India would have been enough for me if offered as an unbroken whole. (*Laughter*)



Amal Kiran is the first guest speaker to appear in this volume. He recounts his initial contact with *Savitri*:

The very first time that I heard of *Savitri* from Sri Aurobindo was in connection with the mention of a ray. While critically commenting on a poem of mine, he referred to “the Ray from the transcendent penetrating through the mind’s passive neutral reflection of the supreme quietude of the silent Brahman”. To illustrate the point he cited two lines of poetry:

Piercing the limitless Unknowable.

Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.

The reverberations of these lines shook me so much that I asked Sri Aurobindo where they had come from. The reply was: “*Savitri*”.

Amal began to badger Sri Aurobindo for an example in English of poetry inspired by the Overmind. Sri Aurobindo replied:

I have to say Good Heavens again. Because difficult metres can be illustrated on demand, which is a matter of metrical skill, how does it follow that one can produce poetry from any blessed plane on demand? It would be easier to furnish you with hundreds of lines already written, out of which you could select for yourself anything Overmindish if it exists (which I doubt) rather than produce 8 lines of warranted Overmind manufacture to order. All I can do is to give you from time to time some lines from *Savitri*, on condition you keep them to yourself for the present. It may be a poor substitute for the Overmental, but if you like the sample, the opening lines, I can give you more hereafter – and occasionally better.

And then with an “e.g.” there followed in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand 16 lines of the very first canto of *Savitri* as it stood then.

It was the hour before the Gods awake . . . .

Below the quotation were the words:

There! Promise fulfilled for a wonder.

This day was October 25, 1936 – I would say one of the most important days, if not the most important, of my life here. But the matter of keeping *Savitri* a secret was a difficult job. In those days Nolini was Sri Aurobindo’s postman. He used to bring the letters for everyone. We used to wait for him in the morning. And he knew that some special correspondence was going on between Sri Aurobindo and me, because the Mother might have been giving him the folded letters to put into the envelopes. Each time he handed me my letter he lifted his eyebrows. (*Laughter*) I looked very innocent (*Laughter*) and took it and waited for him to go away (*Laughter*) before opening it. He would hesitate for a minute or two and then go away. (*Laughter*) It

happened like that three or four days, and then it got on my nerves. (*Laughter*)

So I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

What should I do? I think Nolini is going to ask me. (*Laughter*)

Then Sri Aurobindo very blandly replied,

Let us hope he won't. (*Laughter*)

But still the silent inquisition of the lifted eyebrows did not cease!

Then I wrote in desperation to Sri Aurobindo:

I am sure it is going to happen now. Please tell me what to do. Can I take him into the secret or not? (*Laughter*)

Then Sri Aurobindo said:

All right but only him. (*Laughter*)

So this secret remained a secret between Nolini and me for 10 years. Only in 1946, when I began to write a book on Sri Aurobindo's poetry, I divulged *Savitri* to the world, with Sri Aurobindo's approval. *Savitri* came out in excerpts for the first time in that book of mine, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. Afterwards the Ashram published it in fascicles and then as a volume.



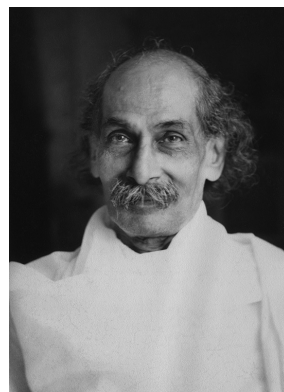
Nolini-da began his talk of 23 December 1970 with some advice for the students who were about to study Sri Aurobindo in their classes:

I learned that you want to know something about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from me. But then there are three lines of approach: you want to know about them, know of them or know them. Of course, the last is the best. Indeed if you want to know something you must become it. Becoming gives the knowledge. Becoming Sri Aurobindo and the Mother means what? Becoming a portion of them, a part and parcel of their consciousness – that is what we are here for. And if you can do that, you know enough.

He continues a bit later, ending with his own experience of being taught by Sri Aurobindo:

In your external expression you may be very poor – that is to say from the standard of the outside world you may cut a very poor figure. For example you may get low marks – but that is not the sign of the Truth that we acquire here. You acquire it even without your knowing it. When you are in the swimming pool you are soaked all through, aren't you? You can't do without it. So here also, even without your knowing it, you are soaked with the inner consciousness of your soul. It is a very precious thing – the only precious thing in the world. And through that, you see, if you study, you learn. If you approach that way, you will get another taste, another interest in things.

When I was reading with Sri Aurobindo, he didn't lay much stress upon the grammar of the language – just the most elementary grammar that was necessary. He used to put me in contact with the life, the living personality of the poet – what he was, what he represented in his consciousness. That was the central theme because a great poet has a status of consciousness. In order to understand him properly, you must understand his consciousness, must become identified with his being.



Amrita also used to say the same thing, because he was learning Gita from Sri Aurobindo. He could feel the spirit of Krishna and the spirit of Arjuna throughout, the relation and atmosphere they created. It is not the mere lesson, the teaching that's important – that is secondary. But the person is the primary thing. And the person in the book or outside, you can approach only through your soul or Love. The soul alone can love.



The final guest speaker is Surendra Mohan Ghose, a politician who was involved in the freedom movement and knew those who were associated with Sri Aurobindo at that time. After he came away to Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo relied on him for news about the political situation in Bengal and in the country generally, as well as in the international arena. Here he explains several of his discussions with Sri Aurobindo on politics.

As my friend Nirod has told you – I had the unique privilege to see Sri Aurobindo, discuss politics with him. It was my only interest on which I had to pledge everything. That was also his command, so he had also some responsibility towards me.

...

I shall not be able to narrate to you everything in sequence. But I can tell you some things – Sri Aurobindo's advice, directions, instructions – as they come to my mind, I shall disclose them to you.

The order in which I used to see him was like this. On the first day, Nolini-da used to take me at 11 o'clock, without anybody knowing it, quietly, to Sri Aurobindo's room.... The room was the same – the big chair in a corner where he used to sit, and I would sit at his feet. I would tell him about the international situation in the light of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, what was going on in the world and what was expected of it. And he would ask me questions now and then. If I knew the answer I told him, otherwise I said I didn't know. For two hours daily from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock I was with him. And at the end, every day, on every occasion, his reply was, "I shall give you an answer tomorrow, after consulting the Mother." I came away.

The next day, he would give me the reply to the question I had raised, and then we spoke about our all-India or internal politics. Sometimes he used to ask about some of the leaders he knew – "What is he doing? What is his activity?" and other such questions. Then again, he would give me the same reply to my questions – "I shall reply to your questions after consulting the Mother."

On the third day after giving the reply I spoke to him as President of Bengal Congress, undivided and afterwards partitioned, and of Bengal affairs.

And on the 4th day, it was Yoga, sadhana and philosophy. I asked him the questions I had. On the 5th day after receiving his blessings I used to leave.

...

One day he told me in connection with the international situation, after consulting the Mother, that he was going to give me the reply. He told me, "Look here, before the Second



World War, the stability, the sense of security all over the world depended on the British Empire. It was the force around which the world security was moving. As a result of the Second World War, the Empire is in the process of liquidation and it is fast liquidating. The whole world will be free. A vacuum in the international leadership has been created. That makes all the difference in studying the international situation with old ideas, because the latter are no longer there. We are not aware that, now that the Empire has gone, nothing else has come up to replace it and everybody is free.”

He reminded me of this situation in October 1950 – my last darshan. This really helped me a great deal to understand the situation then and even today.

...

Similarly, in politics – now I come back to my subject – what we see on the surface is one thing, but the eternal man in every one of us and the Divine Grace that comes down to help are constantly working. That is the basis on which the whole of *The Ideal of Human Unity* is written. It is the secret hand of the Divine working through us, without letting us feel that we are being used as instruments in our activities by somebody outside ourselves. It is without our knowledge that the secret hand works through us. That is how Sri Aurobindo saw the working of it, trying to shape the destiny of mankind towards a certain inevitable goal – which is the ultimate realisation of our inherent unity. It is to be discovered.

Today the urge is there, but in our mind, in the intellect the resistance is also there, so the secret hand works in such a manner that we feel that whatever we wanted is being done. I shall give you an example from *The Ideal of Human Unity*. After the Versailles Treaty, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “You have concluded this Treaty to curb Prussian militarism. But instead what will happen?” How that secret hand was working from behind he could see. He could also see all these trends and interpreted them in terms of political forces, social forces, economic, psychological forces and then he was drawing the irresistible conclusion of all these forces that, instead of curbing Prussian militarism, the whole of Europe would come under the heels of Prussian militarism. And how right he was, you have seen.

He developed this point further. In those perilous days the British people who were resisting India’s freedom and independence realised that the granting of autonomy and independence to India, instead of weakening their imperial power, would be a pillar of strength to save Democracy in this world.

...

Now the next point is the Russia-China rift – my last interview with Sri Aurobindo – October 1950. I met him, as usual, and on the last day he asked me, “You didn’t ask me anything about China.” And really I hadn’t mentioned anything about China. It was in turmoil, the communists were coming to power, Mao Tsetung [Zedong] and Chiang Kai-shek were being driven out. I could not make up my mind about the importance of what was going on there. So I told him, “Sir, I couldn’t make up my mind about it.”

He said, “No, no, keep a very keen, careful eye over China. There are certain forces which might divide China and Russia. Keep a keen eye. There are still very subtle forces at work and if they come to the surface, China will be disintegrated one day.



# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## ENGLISH

### WORKS OF THE MOTHER

#### The Virtues

*A Tale for Young and Old*

—The Mother

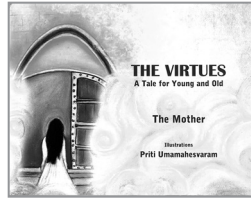
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch

20 pp, Rs 50, ISBN: 978-81-952762-02

Size: 23 x 18 cm,

Binding: Soft Cover

With colour illustrations by Priti Umamaheswaram, this story written by the Mother in 1904 tells the tale of ten richly dressed goddesses gathered at a palace, the palace of Truth. The goddesses represent the virtues of sincerity, humility, courage, prudence, charity, justice, kindness, patience, gentleness, and solicitude. Suddenly, an uninvited stranger appears at the gate of the palace, adorned only in a simple white dress. She stuns the others by announcing her name: an often-overlooked virtue that encompasses all the others.



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

#### The Newness of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga

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

—Compiled by A.S. Dalal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

150 pp, Rs 75, ISBN: 978-93-5210-232-7

Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This compilation aims to highlight those elements of Sri Aurobindo's teachings and his method of Integral Yoga that set him apart from traditional paths; the "newness [of the Integral Yoga] is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of

its method". These elements include his integral view of Reality that focuses on the ultimate divinisation of mind, life, and matter, his concept of an evolution of consciousness, and what the compiler terms his integral scheme of psychology, which deals with the planes of consciousness in the cosmos and the corresponding parts of the human being. His method of Yoga goes beyond the aim of personal freedom to a radical and complete change of consciousness leading towards a supramental consciousness, combines all methods of *sadhana*, and outlines a path toward self-perfection that will determine the next cycle of humanity and a new world.

*See review on page 17*

#### With Goodwill...

Reprint from All India Magazine booklet

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

50 pp, Rs 60, ISBN: 978-81-7060-429-7

Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

### OTHER AUTHORS

#### Talks by Nirodbaran (August 1970–March 1971)

—Edited by Sunayana and Maurice

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

289 pp, Rs 260, ISBN: 978-93-5210-239-6

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 August 1970 and March 1971, 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 '40s. 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 9*

### **The English of *Savitri*, Volume 9**

#### **Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, Cantos Ten and Eleven**

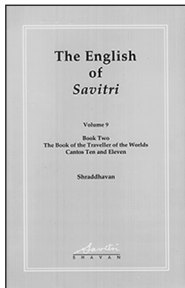
*Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri**

—Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

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

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



Volume Nine in this series on *The English of *Savitri** explores Cantos Ten and Eleven of Book Two. It tells of King Aswapati's entry into the realms of Mind, described in two long cantos entitled respectively "The Kingdoms

and Godheads of the Little Mind" and "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind". The former canto focuses on picturing the lower planes of mind up to the plane of the reasoning mind, while the latter deals with the higher planes that cannot be circumscribed by mere human thought.

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

### **Sri Aurobindo & the Literary Renaissance of India**

—Pariksith Singh, MD

Publisher: BluOne Ink LLP, Noida

411 pp, Rs 995, ISBN: 978-81-949547-8-1

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

This book about the impact of Sri Aurobindo's life and work on the literary renaissance of India examines not only Sri Aurobindo the poet and playwright, the aphorist, translator, and prose writer, but also Sri Aurobindo the philosopher and visionary. In a series of short essays the author shows how Sri Aurobindo synthesised India's ancient philosophy and spirituality, sciences, arts, culture, nationalism, *dharma*, languages, and linguistics by introducing new lines of development and thought that helped awaken India to her destiny.

Divided into eight sections, each one dwelling on a different aspect of Sri Aurobindo's contributions to India and Indian writing, the book covers his philosophy, poetry and drama, aphorisms, translations of texts from Indian languages to English, literary criticism, quantitative metre in his poetical works, the example set by his prose writing, and his influence on the Indian literary awakening.

*See review on page 19*

### **A Torch in the Dark**

*An Experiential & Integral Guide to our Growth*

—James Anderson

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

241 pp, Rs 400, ISBN: 978-81-7060-423-5

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This book records the author's practical approach to applying some of the key concepts of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the practice of their Integral Yoga. He explores the process of inner change in learning to quiet the mind, to deal with emotions, and to stay absorbed in the present. He tackles how to overcome difficulties such as dismantling desire, finding a way out of pain, dealing with illness,

forsaking fear, lifting depression, dislodging bad habits, and understanding the nature of love and attachment. He draws on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as an inspiration and guide through the process of inner change in real-life situations.

*See review on page 22*

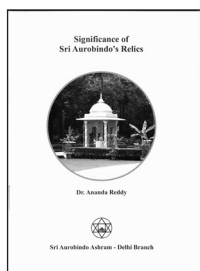
### Significance of Sri Aurobindo's Relics

—Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch

30 pp, Rs 30, ISBN: 978-81-937314-0-6

Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



Based on a talk given in 2017 on the 60th anniversary of the enshrinement of Sri Aurobindo's relics at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch, this booklet explores the significance of the avatarhood of Sri Aurobindo and the philosophical

importance of his relics. The author urges devotees not to make a ritual out of relics worship but to understand their essential meaning as a transformative force with the power to act on Matter and on human consciousness.

### BENGALI

Dhyan O Anushasan—Pavitra

ISBN: 978-93-5210-224-2, Rs 26

Savitri-Prasanga—Anirban

ISBN: 978-81-931625-6-9, Rs 600

### GUJARATI

Sri Aravindarachita THE MOTHER:

Ek Adhyayan—Makarand Brahma, Rs 20

Yogasamanvaya Volume 1—Sri Aravind

ISBN: 978-93-5210-203-7, Rs 460

Savitri Shabdarnut-12—Shraddhavan, Rs 240

### ORIYA

Savitri (Padyanuvad) PT 1—Sri Aurobindo

(ORI/ENG) ISBN: 978-93-5210-229-7

Rs 500

### TAMIL

Sri Annaiyai Udan Azhaithu Sellungal

—Rajnikant J. Mehta, ISBN: 978-81-7060-

426-6, Rs 98

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## **The Newness of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga**

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

—Compiled by A.S.Dalal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

150 pp, Rs 75, ISBN: 978-93-5210-232-7

Size: 12 x 18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The blurb on the back cover of *The Newness of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga* summarises its contents and delineates its main ideas. Expanding Sri Aurobindo's statement that the newness of his yoga lay "in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method" it says:

Its aim is not a departure out of this world, but a change of life and existence. Its standpoint is not the achievement of an individual realisation, but a universal achievement for the earth-consciousness. Its method is synthetic and integral, for it seeks a total change of the consciousness and nature.

The fourth chapter of the book talks about the aim, while Chapters 1, 2, and 3 present the standpoint, and Chapter 5 describes the method. These five chapters make up the main body of the book, while the last two compare the Integral Yoga to other paths (6) and offer glimpses of the future of mankind (7). Finally, the addendum reveals the Mother's perception of that future as it unfolded itself in the twenty years following Sri Aurobindo's passing.

While Sri Aurobindo calls his yoga integral because it takes up the essence and many processes of the previous yogas of India such as the Vedantic and the Tantric, his departure from those sources lies in his view that

the world is not either the creation of Maya or only a play, *līlā*, of the Divine, or

a cycle of births in the ignorance from which we have to escape, but a field of manifestation in which there is a progressive evolution of the soul and the nature in Matter and from Matter through Life and Mind to what is beyond Mind till it reaches the complete revelation of Sachchidananda in life. (CWSA 29: 445)

A more glorious affirmation of life on earth would be hard to come by. Sri Aurobindo has come up with much more than another approach to yoga—he has given a new sense to life itself: for him, life is a means for a spiritual evolution, a

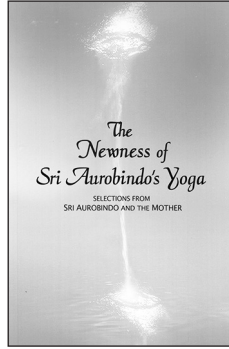
series of ascents from the physical being and consciousness to the vital, the being dominated by the life-self, thence to the mental being realised in the fully developed man and thence into the perfect consciousness which is beyond the mental, into the Supramental consciousness and the Supramental being, the Truth-Consciousness which is the integral consciousness of the spiritual being (Ibid., 396).

Within this general scheme of evolutionary progress the potential role of mankind is a game changer for

while the former steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. (CWSA 36: 547)

This is the significance of man: through methodical effort towards self-perfection, known as yoga in Indic culture, the human being can become a conscious participant in the evolution from mind to what is beyond, named supramental consciousness by Sri Aurobindo. Here is his epigram on evolution:

The human being on earth is God playing at humanity in a world of matter under the conditions of a hampered density with the ulterior intention of imposing law of spirit on matter and nature of deity upon human nature. Evolution is nothing but the progressive unfolding of Spirit out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being. (CWSA 12: 334)



of the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, tamas, so that the true stability of Light, Power, Ananda may establish itself in a body growing always more divine; surrender of oneself and all one is and has and every plane of the consciousness

As to ways and means and the division of labour in the terrestrial enterprise:

In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action but he is veiled by his Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower nature.

In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda, acting upon the adhara and, when it is opened to her, pouring into it with these divine forces that makes the Sadhana possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the Sadhaka remains necessary.

The personal effort required is a triple labour of aspiration, rejection and surrender,—

an aspiration vigilant, constant, unceasing—the mind's will, the heart's seeking, the assent of the vital being, the will to open and make plastic the physical consciousness and nature;

rejection of the movements of the lower nature—rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind,—rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth, so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being,—rejection

and every movement to the Divine and the Shakti.

\*

In proportion as the surrender and self-consecration progress the Sadhaka becomes conscious of the Divine Shakti doing the Sadhana, pouring into him more and more of herself, founding in him the freedom and perfection of the Divine Nature. The more this conscious process replaces his own effort, the more rapid and true becomes his progress. But it cannot completely replace the necessity of personal effort until the surrender and consecration are pure and complete from top to bottom. (CWSA 32: 6–7)

*The Newness of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga* is a neat little volume: apart from its intriguing cover of two luminous ellipses with variously gaseous nimbi in vertical interaction, it contains everything a reader could wish for—an introduction which is impressively compact for the ground that it covers, a glossary defining Sanskrit and Aurobindonian terms, and an addendum with the Mother's reportage on the first manifestations of the new world posited by Sri Aurobindo as the future.

—Sunam Mukherjee

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



## Sri Aurobindo & the Literary Renaissance of India

—Pariksith Singh, MD

Publisher: BluOne Ink LLP, Noida

411 pp, Rs 995, ISBN: 978-81-949547-8-1

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

In his new book Pariksith Singh takes the reader on a tour de force through Sri Aurobindo's literature, by means of comparison with European philosophy and poetry and a consideration of Sri Aurobindo's writings' relevance in their historical and evolving cultural contexts, especially India's.

The Mother suggested that Sri Aurobindo's vision should be presented in relation to other schools of thought. Naturally, Dr Singh did not aim for exhaustive comparative explorations. Rather the author shares his love and appreciation for, of course, Sri Aurobindo's thought and literary contributions, but also poetry and philosophy in general. By keeping most of these compact personal studies to only a few pages the book can appeal to long-time aficionados of these subject matters who would like to pick up on a detail or perspective they might not have contemplated yet themselves—or to simply join Singh in his contagiously enthusiastic and joyous revelling in a variety of expertly crafted wordsmithery and showcased peak performances of intellectual athleticism.

Equally, the book can serve as a first introduction to both various Western schools of ontology, epistemology, axiology, etc., as well as provide an entry into Sri Aurobindo's approaches to these and, by extension, to Indian visions of being, reality and their purposes. Here also Singh doesn't claim objectivity but transparently shares his subjective interpretations and experiences. Especially the intimate inner states that the author tries to convey, for example, when sharing inner experiences invoked by poems in

the context of his own inner life, make for a uniquely engaging reading experience.

### On Philosophy

In the first part of the book Singh focuses on European philosophy and begins his comparative exploration with the German philosopher Wittgenstein, who the author considers to have ended where Sri Aurobindo began. This presents a recurring perspective and theme in Singh's reflections on Western philosophy. According to Singh, Wittgenstein heavily critiqued reliance on the rational mind, its systems of logic and language to attempt to solve their inherent problems. Instead, Wittgenstein asked his students to "see" rather than think, which Singh sees as a first incomplete step in the West towards the source of higher knowledge, *vidya*, long known in the East: Yogic Vision. Similarly, the German philosopher Husserl is considered as "one of the bridges" from West to East as he at least admitted the study of intentional awareness as useful for inquiry—yet he didn't actually apply this insight thoroughly enough. Kant gets a corresponding treatment, as he acknowledged the limits of the mind but didn't go beyond through the silence and emphasised rationalised duty without a higher guidance as posited in Karmayoga. This corresponds with Singh's assessment of Sartre and other existentialist philosophers who caught on to the essential truth of consciousness and being but didn't dare or lacked the systematic and disciplined approach Eastern traditions utilise in their deeper, wider and higher inner explorations.

In Singh's book Schopenhauer's saving grace from total entrapment within these Western blinders seems to have been that he had at least read the Upanishads. Reflecting on Nietzsche, Singh points out that Sri Aurobindo's supramental evolution is all-encompassing

and harmoniously unifying, thereby distinguishing it from the brute legacy of Nietzsche's ideas of cyclic evolution towards his "vitalistic Superman". Singh acknowledges Spinoza's contribution to the cultural evolution of thought and society in the West, although to the author it was only Sri Aurobindo who finally brought about the supreme reconciliation to the apparent contradictions between monism, the absolute, matter and life, themes the Western philosopher struggled with. Hegel's inspired ideas of a "world evolving in a dialectic of thesis and antithesis" left it to Sri Aurobindo to actually "complete the dialectic loop in practice and reality", and in the conclusion to Singh's analysis of Derrida's ideas, Sri Aurobindo would have earned the Western philosopher's highest title—"the truest incorruptible". Heidegger, as well, failed to apply his deep intellectual ponderings on the nature of being and succumbed to Nazism, while Sri Aurobindo's suprarational faculties allowed him to see through their falsehoods.

Maybe the most appreciative treatment by Singh of any modern Western thinker is received by Aldous Huxley, who he considers to have had genuine spiritual experiences. Here the means by which they were arrived at are critiqued by the author, albeit in a very measured and balanced way. Yet of course for Singh yoga comes out on top as the supreme and safest road towards higher knowledge.

The last modern Western philosopher Singh considers is Martin Buber. Here the deliberations on relationality, the 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relationships within ourselves, with each other, in society and even with the divine, include a refreshingly critical take on the "clinical" state of clinical practice within what Singh calls "our allopathic military-industrial complex".

Finally, the ancient Greeks, explored in their philosophies by Singh through what remains to history of Parmenides, Heraclitus and Plato, are considered to have come closest to Sri Aurobindo's vision and Indian thought, be it by their almost Vedantic considerations of oneness, stillness and perfection, their contemplation of the cyclic nature of reality, of the soul, of worlds of perfect form or ideal societies. Yet again, of course, Sri Aurobindo's integrality and his rediscovery of the Rishi's secrets completes their intellectual endeavours and promises the eventual manifestation of a perfected collective and physical body.

### On Poetry

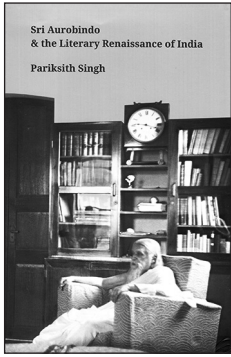
In Pariksith Singh's reappraisal of Sri Aurobindo's poetry he reflects on three aspects in particular. According to the author, Sri Aurobindo the poet's most important contributions to Indian English literature consist in his introduction of Indian symbolism into English – even more powerfully than others such as Rabindranath Tagore –, his attempt at writing in novel metres and, of course, Sri Aurobindo gifting us the first Indian epic originally written in English while retaining a mantric quality and achieving "something new", a "new kind of word music". The innovative way in which Singh balances an expert's scholarly inquiry with intimate psychological reflection might be best exemplified with these short passages on page 189, following an exploration of the metres in "Rose of God":

So much for the technique. The line I love the most is this:

*Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!*"

[...] The next line which hits me in the solar plexus is this one:

*Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous Hour."*



Singh further examines several of Sri Aurobindo's poems in the trademark personal and intimate style of his book, while reminding readers of his broad literary interests by associating the Master's poems with history's greats in English language poetry.

To this effect Singh for example takes "A God's Labour" and shares inner experiences he had while contemplating the poem, points out the autobiographical significance of certain lines, and presents a poem by Shelley for comparison in terms of the subtle vibrations experienced. Sri Aurobindo's "Descent" gets a similar treatment.

The author takes another approach by analysing the structure of Sri Aurobindo's "Nirvana" (he proceeds similarly with "Jivanmukta") and the perceptions of its intended effects to convey the unconveyable, yet finally recommends the reader to just "return to the perfection of this sonnet and let its sounds reverberate through one's inner worlds like a veritable mantra".

Further, Sri Aurobindo's "Despair on the Staircase" gets a mention as possibly the first Indian surrealist poem. As for the sonnet, his "The Self's Infinity" is a welcome evolution of this poetic form. Since its inception 600 years ago in Italy it has been used primarily as a vehicle for mental-emotional expression, but Sri Aurobindo adapted the sonnet form to impart his experiences in the realm of the spirit.

The poems "Shiva", "An Image" and *Ilion* present opportunities to comment on the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's theory on quantitative metre while the "The Divine Hearing" gives Singh an opportunity to share his personal views on the universality of

spirituality and the power of its expression in verse. Singh tracks Sri Aurobindo's literary evolution by detecting a foreshadowing of *Savitri* in "In the Moonlight", and finds evidence for his mastery over and innovative use of metre in the hendecasyllables of "Thought the Paraclete". Sri Aurobindo's poems *Urvashi* and "The Vigil of Thaliard" are commented on in the context of Romantic poetry and his development as a writer. Singh's appreciation for Sri Aurobindo's patriotic Indian poetry is made clear by comparing his "Baji Prabhou" with "Vande Mataram" and by stating that it "should have been one of the national poems of India".

Singh dedicates deserved longer chapters to comparisons of Sri Aurobindo and such giants of literature as Shakespeare, Herbert, Yeats and Tagore, as well as Milton, with the latter one focusing mostly on *Paradise Lost* and *Savitri* as well as the question "if a new rhythm can be created". In "Savitri as Play" Singh contemplates the staging of *Savitri* for audiences, which reminds this reviewer of his hope that he'll get to one day see millions of dollars spent not on glitzy digital performance installations but on inspired line-by-line visualisations of Sri Aurobindo's epic mantric poem. Singh closes his reflections on poetry by tracing a preliminary understanding of poetry as the consciousness-altering use of sculptured symbols in Western thought, presenting Sri Aurobindo's definition of mantra and finally his personal hope for a collective resurgence of this conscious engagement with the beauty and power of language.

### On Sri Aurobindo's works and some thoughts on critical comparisons

The third part of the book comprises essays on selected writings of Sri Aurobindo, their relevance in historical, contemporary literary and (cross-)cultural discourse and their future

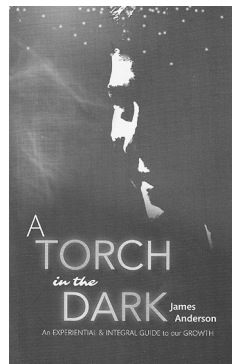
implications. To this reviewer Singh sharing his joy of reading Sri Aurobindo's Aphorisms while contextualising his 'micro-models of empirical inquiry' (as John Stuart Mill described aphorisms) in the lineages of *sutras* "from Confucius to Twitter"<sup>1</sup> stood out. Singh deems Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* "perhaps the best interpretation of this ancient scripture in modern times". He adds that Swami Prabhupada called the essays "masterly", and Swami Paramahansa Yogananda apparently considered *Essays on the Gita* the best exposition of the scripture in English. It's good to know that, although the latter's books seem to have been more in demand than Sri Aurobindo's (at least in the West), he himself must have read at least that one.

The subject matter here is comparison and evaluation of success and popularity of scripture, literature, thought, poetry and their commentaries. Equanimous, detached, informed, discerning critique and discourse as well as expression of inner and vital movements and states associated with writings and their authors certainly have their right value and place. One might also consider the perspective that spirituality ideally goes beyond attitudes and mindsets of competition. Embodied, lived integral spirituality can do so without falling prey to one-sided oversimplifications that everything is always equal, there are no differences in quality of various kinds and authentic hierarchy shouldn't or doesn't actually exist.

—Matthias Pommerening

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

1 Andrew Hui, *A Theory of Aphorism—From Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton University Press, 2019).



**A Torch in the Dark**  
*An Experiential & Integral Guide to our Growth*  
 —James Anderson  
 Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry  
 241 pp, Rs 400,  
 ISBN: 978-81-7060-423-5  
 Size: 14 x 22 cm,  
 Binding: Soft Cover

James Anderson's *A Torch in the Dark: An Experiential & Integral Guide to our Growth* is a rolling, riveting story of a spiritual aspirant, or *sadhak*, who has been a practitioner since 1999 of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. As is evident from a reading of this book, he comes across as having a natural capacity for this Yoga, so much so that it seems that his progress as a practitioner is informed by almost every technique of the many that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother teach. Though it at first feels quite impossible to review the book in its fullness, there is nevertheless a continuity in it that gives a hold for a reviewer to accomplish his task.

It is not uncommon that few turn to spirituality for the sake of spirituality, rather than for the sheer adventure of it. Many people get caught up in it only when faced with adversity. True to this adage, Anderson came to this Yoga after being afflicted with a severe, life-threatening disease at the threshold of manhood, aged twenty-one years. For sixteen years after tragedy struck, however, Anderson coasted along the well-trodden grooves of ordinary life until he came to Pondicherry in 1999. There has been no turning back for him since then.

The Integral Yoga is one that offers almost every aspirant a unique entry point to the Path that leads him or her to a true spiritual life. Accordingly, the 'Torch' that finds mention in



the title is nothing but one's consciousness, which Anderson uses with telling effect to progress towards identifying and overcoming the obstacles he encounters in his *sadhana*. Despite what the subtitle seems to suggest, Anderson's tone throughout the book is a convivial sharing with both fellow-*sadhaks* and casual readers of his experiences in his practice. Even where he addresses his reader directly, apparently advising this or that step on the Path, the clear sense is there that it is his enthusiasm to share with one and all what has clearly worked for him. The numerous instances where he highlights the various routes to the goal of this Yoga makes this point forcefully. In the very first chapter, for example, he speaks of every life being an offering and celebration, and of each journey having a unique unfolding.

Anderson divides his book into four parts, each one expatiating on one or more themes of his *sadhana*: Initiation, Changing our

Nature, Enhancing Capacities, and Overcoming Difficulties. A single thread runs in continuous fashion through these four parts: his consciousness and how he uses it to progress on his Path. It is not entirely a personal story, however, for he never loses sight of the larger implications of this Yoga for humanity—he is clearly seized with a sense of the importance of this Yoga to 'real-world' problems such as the current Covid-19 pandemic or environmental degradation, to mention just two instances.

In the very beginning, Anderson relates that his personal *sadhana* began with taming his vital, which was all awry as most of ours are. His description of the futility of trying to work on the vital through the mental being strikes a chord with the reader, especially when the latter happens to be a *sadhak* too. The

pointlessness of using the mind – especially when it is itself yet untrained – to make demands on the vital dawned early on Anderson, and sounds familiar to anyone who has ever sincerely attempted self-improvement whether in the ordinary life or in spiritual practice. It is eminently clear here that it was only after he discovered his consciousness as a vehicle of progress that he got a secure purchase on his Way. Once he learned to concentrate in the heart with a still mind, he says, the process of the purification of the vital began to get underway.

Throughout the book, Anderson speaks of the mental, vital, and physical beings, the psychic being, other parts and planes of the being, and of course consciousness. At first blush there is

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an appearance of disorderliness in the random mention of these essential aspects of an individual's make-up, but read in the context of his growing spiritual

practice, we find that his discussion of them sits perfectly well. Besides, there is a handy definition of terms at the end of the book for casual readers who are not familiar with the standard terms in Integral Psychology and Philosophy.

In any event, Anderson relates that one of the first injunctions that he received from the Mother was to find his psychic being. For those on this side of the Yoga, this is no surprise since it is a well-established fact that this is the safest and surest way to progress in the Integral Yoga. Ascents and descents he speaks of later in the book—the ascending movement of aspiration towards the Divine, and the consequent descent of the Divine Grace, both equally important for inner growth and progress. But he takes cognisance of the



Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's warning that these movements occur safely only after one's psychic being is sufficiently in command over the surface nature. Pithily put, Anderson implies that what is known in this Yoga as the psychic transformation is the safest prelude for further progress on the Path in most cases, even though the ascending and descending movements can and do often accompany the process of psychic transformation.

Anderson goes into some depth on the issue of detaching oneself from surface activities and watching them from inside, a technique that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo strongly recommend to *sadhaks*. Anderson quotes liberally from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to demonstrate that our surface lives are tied in numberless knots around our ego, the entity that falsely makes us think that we are distinct beings separated from the rest of the universe. Although the ego has an important and necessary function in the formation of the individual, it becomes a millstone round the *sadhak's* neck as soon as he enters the Path. For this ego has to be sundered by a slow and sometimes painful process once one's spiritual journey starts. Surrender to the Divine is necessary for this process, and true surrender is extremely difficult, as Anderson points out; it is often the work of a lifetime.

As it was a physical disability that turned Anderson to Yoga, the reader is right to anticipate a full quantum of material on illness and Yoga. This he obligingly provides in the third part of his book, *Enhancing Capacities*. He goes into some detail about the 'cocoon' around the body that protects against illness, and how to strengthen and cultivate it as taught by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In line with the founders of the Integral Yoga, Anderson lays great emphasis on the truth that the destructive power of fear tears this protective cocoon, and in one voice with them

urges us to reject fear in all its forms.

Every Yoga is full of pitfalls, and this Yoga is no exception. Accordingly, Anderson too writes on some of the pitfalls to beware of, and how to avoid them. For example, in the section on love and attachment, he distinguishes their characteristics, showing how love, which is divine in origin, is not just superior to attachment, but necessary to cultivate the right frame of mind and heart for the *sadhana*.

In telling the story of how he came to this *sadhana* and in writing his 'report card' until the time of this book's publication, *A Torch in the Dark* provides an engaging read for anyone casting about for something above the humdrum whirr of the ordinary life. And in particular, it is a worthwhile read for fellow-practitioners, just to compare notes if for nothing else. No doubt new spiritual aspirants will find this book doubly worthwhile because it clues them into what lies in store for them if they choose to plunge into this Yoga.

—Sivakumar Elambooranan

*Sivakumar was an academic philosopher who has now turned to writing. After living abroad for some years, he has settled in his native Pondicherry, where he is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.*

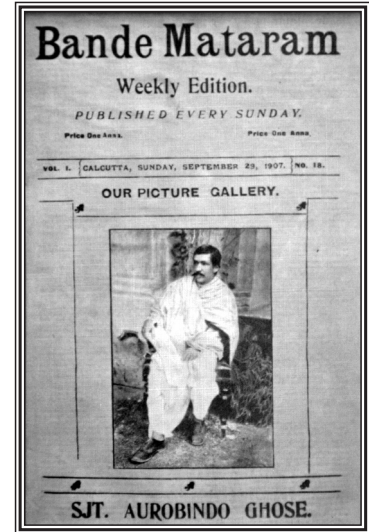
## A Cross-cultural Perspective on Armed Conflict: Sri Aurobindo and Saint Augustine

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SRI AUROBINDO was deeply opposed to the bourgeois mentality that rests content with the world. This was true during his days as a freedom fighter and his later days as a spiritual master. In his early days, as the chief editor of the revolutionary newspaper, *Bande Mataram*, he explored the issue in the unpublished essay, “The Bourgeois and the Samurai.” Therein he considered how the “man of good sense and enlightenment, the man of moderation, the man of peace and orderliness” can be transformed into “the heroes, the martyrs, . . . geniuses, the men of exaggerated virtue, exaggerated ability” (CWSA 7: 1093–94). Much later, in *Savitri*, he criticized the one who “lives content with the common and the known,” who “shrinks from adventure, blinks at glorious hope, | Preferring a safe foothold upon things | To the dangerous joy of wideness and of height” (CWSA 33: 246).

During his political days, Sri Aurobindo worked, through his editorials, to instill in his fellow Indians revolutionary ideals which would transform the bourgeois into men like the samurai. He thus discussed justifications of violence in *Bande Mataram*. Some of his most significant writing on the topic is in “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance.” Passive resistance should be used when it can be effective against the oppressor. However, if it is not effective, or if the situation of the oppressed is dire, or if the oppressor responds with violence, then violence may be called for. What justifies the transition from passive resistance to active resistance, to violence? “Liberty is the life-breath of a nation; and when the life is attacked, . . . , any and every means of self-preservation becomes right and justifiable,—just as it is lawful for a man who is being strangled to rid himself of the pressure on his throat by any means in his power” (CWSA 6: 278).

A bourgeois spirituality might oppose such an escalation from passive resistance to active resistance. For instance, referring to the Indian people, the Indian bourgeois might object that “the violent and frequently bloody methods followed by other nations are not suited to a gentle, spiritual and law-abiding people” (CWSA 6: 236). However, in his early work (circa 1902), “Notes on the Mahabharata,” Sri Aurobindo drew attention to Sanjaya’s embassy to the Pandavas before the great war at Kurukshetra. Sanjaya tried to dissuade the Pandavas from fighting by praising their gentleness and honesty. However, Sri Aurobindo wrote that this argument “is skilfully aimed at the most subtle weakness of the human heart,



representing the abandonment of justice & their duty as a holy act of self-abnegation and its pursuit as no better than wholesale murder and parricide” (CWSA 1: 327).

Later, in “Passive Resistance,” Sri Aurobindo considered Krishna’s famous reprimand of Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Arjuna was reluctant to fight, expressing regret over having to kill his kinsmen on the battlefield, and Krishna accused him of cowardice. Sri Aurobindo wrote, “The morality of war is different from the morality of peace. To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Srikrishna addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal civil slaughter on the field of Kurukshetra” (CWSA 6: 278; see also *ibid.*, 294).

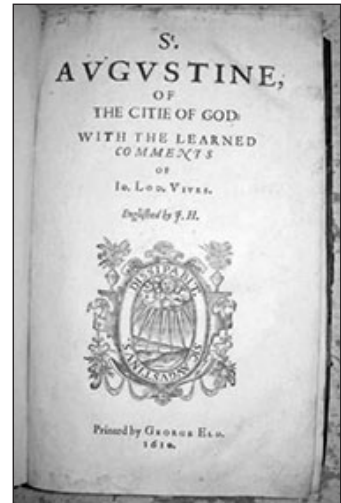
Against the escalation to active resistance, one might consider India’s classic norm of *ahimsa*. With that religious norm in mind, some of the Indian bourgeois argued that Indians should seek “regeneration through religion” for “only when we have become religiously and morally fit, can we hope to be politically free” (CWSA 6: 237). However, Sri Aurobindo pointed out in “Many Delusions” that *ahimsa* belongs to the *dharma* of the *brahmins*, whose ultimate aim is release from the world. The *dharma* of the *kshatriyas*, who are the ones directly responsible for governing the world, is different from that of the *brahmins*, for it includes protecting “his weak and suffering countrymen against the oppressor and [to] welcome death in a just and righteous battle” (CWSA 6: 238). Furthermore, in another editorial, “The Writing on the Wall,” Sri Aurobindo pointed out that “the fertilising river rolls down stones, breaks through the impediments, rends asunder the surface of the earth before it bears on its bosom the argosies and crowns the bordering lands with plenty.” Hence, “If climbing up the heights of glory is your ambition learn to encounter difficulties and dangers manfully” (CWSA 6: 248).

After settling in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo avoided any evident political activity. Involvement could embroil the Ashram in politics and he did not want to jeopardize the work of bringing about the descent of the supramental into the earth consciousness. Yet, during World War II he was gravely concerned about the menace of the Axis powers and its threat to human spiritual evolution. He thus spoke out in support of the Allied powers and contributed some funds to the war cause. Also, in an unpublished essay he wrote that

There remains the objection that all War is evil and no war can be supported; soul-force or some kind of spiritual or ethical force is the only force that should be used . . . But this kind of resistance though it has been used in the past with some effect by individuals or on a limited scale, cannot stop the invasion of a foreign army, least of all a Nazi army, or expel it, once it is inside and in possession; it can at most be used as a means of opposition to an already established oppressive rule. . . . War is physically an evil, a calamity; morally it has been like most human institutions a mixture, in most but not all cases a mixture of some good and much evil: but it is sometimes necessary to face it rather than invite or undergo a worse evil, a greater calamity (CWSA 36: 461).

Justifying violence in the face of religious ideals is a classic issue. Many religions teach peace and harmony as ideals, but life is filled with strife. Sometimes one might feel that a violent response is called for. How does one justify that response in the face of the harmonious ideals of one's religion? Sri Aurobindo considered the issue in the early twentieth century. In a very different time and place, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) considered the same issue. He was a key architect of Christianity's classic "just war theory." He formulated this theory during the era in which Christianity and the Roman Empire were wedding each other. That raised for Christians the issue of participating in the violence of the state, most especially in terms of fighting against foreign invaders.

As a religious man and as a philosopher, Saint Augustine valued peace. He wrote in his great work, *The City of God*, that "peace is a good so great, that even in this earthly and mortal life there is no word we hear with such pleasure, nothing we desire with such zest, or find to be more thoroughly gratifying" (19.11).<sup>1</sup> Peace is a great value, but in order to maintain it war is sometimes necessary: "Peace is not sought for the purpose of stirring up war, but war is waged for the purpose of securing peace" (*Letters* 189).<sup>2</sup> Also, "The natural order which seeks the peace of mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable, and that the soldiers should perform their military duties in behalf of the peace and safety of the community" (*Reply to Faustus* 22.75). Thus, just as practical concerns are at the heart of Sri Aurobindo's considerations of armed conflict, they are also at the heart of Saint Augustine's considerations.



*The City of God*, 1610 edition

Not only do practical considerations form the hearts of the respective arguments of Sri Aurobindo and Saint Augustine, but they also both addressed religious scruples against violence. As seen above, the former believed that "the morality of war is different from the morality of peace" (CWSA 6: 278). He thus called out religious and/or moral protests against violence, in a context of individual, group, or national self-defense as cowardice masked as virtue. Saint Augustine essentially stated the same: "What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling" (*Reply* 22.74). Furthermore, in that statement he was making a point similar to Sri Aurobindo in "Writing on the Wall." He was trying to bring

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *The City of God* and *Reply to Faustus* are taken from P. Schaff, ed., *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers of the Christian Church*, vols. 2, 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Parsons, trans., *Saint Augustine: Letters*, in Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., *The Fathers of the church: A new translation*, vol. 30 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1955).

his readers to look death in the face, to realize that sometimes the sacrifice of life, whether of oneself or another, is necessary for the sake of something greater.

Saint Augustine addressed religious scruples in a further way. Whereas Sri Aurobindo's religious context included the classic norm of *ahimsa*, Saint Augustine's context included Jesus Christ's famous teaching of turning the other cheek. Sri Aurobindo addressed *ahimsa* by pointing out that historically it applied in specific situations, not across the board (CWSA 6: 237–38). Saint Augustine addressed Christ's dictum by arguing that it need not always be taken literally: "What is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition. The sacred seat of virtue is the heart, and such were the hearts of our fathers, the righteous men of old" (*Reply* 22.76).

It is intriguing to see Sri Aurobindo and Saint Augustine, men of very different lands, religions, historical eras, and political situations taking such parallel approaches. Beyond what has been covered herein there are even more similarities. However, there are also differences and points where the parallels break down. The most significant difference concerns religious pluralism, for Augustine argued for the use of force not only in defense of the state but in matters of religious belief. As mentioned above, he lived in the fourth century, when Christianity and the Roman Empire were becoming wedded together. During that era severe legal restrictions were placed on other religions and on dissenting elements within Christianity itself.

Whereas Saint Augustine's targets were both political and religious, Sri Aurobindo's target was political, it was British rule. In contrast to Saint Augustine, who desired a religiously homogenous Roman Empire, Sri Aurobindo envisioned a free, independent India as a land of diverse religions, each contributing to the greater whole: "It will be a union of different nationalities, each preserving its own specific elements both of organisation and ideal, each communicating to the others what they lack in either thought or character, and all moving towards one universal end . . . The Mahomedan, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Christian in India will not have to cease to be Mahomedan, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian in any sense of the term" (CWSA 6: 169).

—Edward T. Ulrich

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