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# Recent Publications

## S a b d a

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On 24 April 2020 we marked the centenary of the Mother's final arrival at Pondicherry, an occasion she once characterised as "the tangible sign of the sure Victory over the adverse forces". Our lead article examines how this decisive event led to the fulfillment of a fundamental condition related to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's common work, the descent and manifestation of the Supermind.

During a talk on 17 March 1951, the Mother described how on her return from Japan in 1920, while still at sea, she had all of a sudden felt the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo at a distance of two nautical miles from Pondicherry. She said that "the physical quality of the atmosphere, of the air, changed so much that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo."



### CONTENTS

The Mother's Final Arrival 2

RECENT PUBLICATIONS 11  
Ordering Information 14

BOOK REVIEWS

Invitation to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* 14  
Meditations on the Īśa Upaniṣad 16  
Work as Sadhana Under the Mother's  
Guidance 19  
Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on Reality  
and Other Essays 22

A view of the old pier at the port of Pondicherry

The Mother would have disembarked from her ship and taken a launch boat to shore.

# The Mother's Final Arrival



2020 IS THE CENTENARY of the Mother's final arrival to Pondicherry, and justifiably a year of thanksgiving for that reason. The Mother's final arrival was the decisive event that fulfilled a prime condition related to Sri Aurobindo's and her common work, the descent and manifestation of the Supermind. This condition was the establishment of the Purusha-Shakti pair through which the desired consciousness could be both realized and manifested. 1920-1926 saw the progressive transition leading to this establishment, achieving an archetypal status of the Ishwara-Shakti couple on November 24, 1926. Already, in November 1924, apropos of a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy on the subject of marriage, Sri Aurobindo had the following conversation with a disciple:

*Disciple:* Is the Shakti necessary for the Supramental Yoga?

*Sri Aurobindo:* The Shakti is not necessary for the yoga: without the Shakti full knowledge, consciousness, power and Ananda can be attained. But if these elements are to be brought to and manifested in life then the Shakti is necessary. If there is no Shakti then he cannot bring down the Knowledge, Power, Ananda, etc. that are in him into life. He can, in that case, only prepare the way for the work to be done at a future time (Purani 1982: pg. 125).

In May 1926, he was more explicit:

In my own case it [the coming together of him and Mirra, the Mother] was a necessary condition for the work that I had to do. If I had to do my own transformation, or give a new yoga, or a new ideal to a select few people who came in my personal contact, I could have done that without having any Shakti. But for the work I had to do it was necessary that the two sides must come together. By the coming together of the Mother and myself certain conditions are created which make it easy for you achieve the transformation. You can take advantage of those conditions (Purani: pg. 324).

We know the Mother's confirmation of this much later (1957) in her famous statement "Without Him I exist not, without me he is unmanifest" (2004: pg. 32). She has also described how this relation was effected in practice: "... as a matter of fact, as long as Sri Aurobindo was in his body, it was he who did the sadhana, and I received the effects. These effects were automatically established in the outer being, but he was the one doing it, not I— I was merely the bridge between his sadhana and the world" (from a talk by the Mother on 10 October 1958).

In a more practical vein, his brother, Barin, had written in a letter: "Sri Aurobindo once said to me that he doubted if there was in the past any figure embodying so great a Yogic power [as the Mother]. He added that he had done ten years' Yoga by one year's contact with her."<sup>1</sup> What Sri Aurobindo might have meant by this is the progress he had sought through the years 1910 to 1920 in Pondicherry, after his departure from Bengal. In these years he was engaged in intense sadhana, as described in another letter to Barin, written around the time of the Mother's final arrival (c. April

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1 From an article on the Mother by Barindra Ghosh written in Bengali and published in the magazine *Khulnabasi* on the occasion of the Mother's birthday on 21 February 1940. See <https://www.arianuova.org/en/various-writers-on-sri-aurobindo?id=162> (last accessed 5/13/2020).

1920): “The indwelling Guru of the world indicated my path to me completely, its full theory, the ten limbs of the body of the yoga. These ten years he has been making me develop it in experience; it is not finished. It may take another two years...” (1991: pg. 359).

### *Supermind and Overmind*

As we know, it took the rest of his life and more; the Mother continued where he left off. In this letter, he also spells out more clearly where he had reached in his sadhana:

After fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when the process is complete, there is not the least doubt that God through me will give this supramental perfection to others with less difficulty. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for the fulfilment of my work. What is to happen will happen in God's appointed time (1991: pg. 361).

In 1927, within a year of the “Siddhi day” of 1926, Sri Aurobindo introduced a new term into his lexicon of the planes of consciousness—Overmind. It was only in 1935 that he identified the event of November 24, 1926, as the descent of the Overmind into his physical consciousness, alternatively as the descent of Krishna into his body (2011: pg. 270). When Paul and Mirra Richard had encountered Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1914, he was already clear about the goals of his yoga, it was the attainment and stabilization in waking physical consciousness of the plane of consciousness known as *Vijnana* in the Upanishads, something he had begun calling Supermind. In the letter to Barin, he had referred to this goal and its necessity:

[My yoga's] fundamental principle is to make a synthesis and unity of integral knowledge, integral works and integral devotion, and, raising this above the mental level to the supramental level of the *Vijnana*, to give it a complete perfection. The defect of the old yoga was that, knowing the mind and reason and knowing the Spirit, it remained satisfied with spiritual experience in the mind. But the mind can grasp only the fragmentary; it cannot completely seize the infinite, the undivided. The mind's way to seize it is through the trance of samadhi, the liberation of moksha, the extinction of nirvana, and so forth. It has no other way.... First one must have all sorts of partial experience on the mental level, flooding the mind with spiritual delight and illuminating it with spiritual light; afterwards one climbs upwards. Unless one makes this upward climb, this climb to the supramental level, it is not possible to know the ultimate secret of world-existence; the riddle of the world is not solved (1991: pp. 360-361).

The term Supermind is equated more explicitly with *Vijnana*, as used in the Taittiriya Upanishad (III.10) here:

The physical body, life, mind and reason, Supermind, the Bliss-existence — these are the Spirit's five levels. The higher we climb, the nearer comes a state of highest perfection of man's spiritual evolution. When we rise to the Supermind, it becomes easy to rise to the Bliss. The status of indivisible and infinite Bliss becomes firmly established — not only in the timeless Supreme Reality, but in the body, in the world, in life. Integral existence, integral consciousness, integral bliss blossom out and take form in life. This endeavour is the central clue of my yogic path, its fundamental idea (1991: pg. 361).

In 1926, when the siddhi of the Overmental descent into Sri Aurobindo's body occurred, from his and the Mother's pronouncements at that time, and prior to his coining of the term Overmind, it seems likely that he thought it was a plane of the Supermind that had descended. Around the

time of the event, it was variously described as “the descent of the Lord”, “the descent of Krishna”, “the descent of Ananda into the physical” and “the descent of Immortality.”<sup>2</sup> In the Alipore Jail, the spirit of Vivekananda had indicated to him the intermediate planes of cosmic Mind leading to the Supermind as the unfinished evolution of mentality necessary to be established through yoga to bridge the Supermind to earthly nature. He had tried to analyze and develop a cartography of these planes, but traditional Indian yoga literature had not been helpful for this and it was easy to mistake the level of Overmind for Supermind. As he wrote in a letter:

The distinction [between the Supermind and the Overmind] has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind.... In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind lights feels itself living in a surprising revelation of divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face the difficulty and to make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind—for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supramentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change. (2012: pp. 148–149).

### *The Mother's Arrival*

As we have seen in his letter to Barin, in 1920, he wrote that he was rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind. When the Mother arrived, he was in the process of transforming the Mind consciousness by the power of what he had risen into. But he was finding it very difficult. Each time he thought he had transformed the Mind, he found that it reverted back to its original consciousness. Here is how the Mother described it:

When I returned from Japan and we began to work together, Sri Aurobindo had already brought the supramental light into the mental world and was trying to transform the Mind. “It’s strange,” he said to me, “it’s an endless work! Nothing seems to get done – everything is done and then constantly has to be done all over again.” Then I gave him my personal impression, which went back to the old days with Théon: “It will be like that till we touch bottom.” So instead of continuing to work in the Mind, both of us.... descended almost immediately – it was done in a day or two – from the Mind into the Vital, and so on, quite rapidly, leaving the Mind as it was: fully in the Light but not permanently transformed (from a talk by the Mother on 7 November 1961).

The physical and vital consequences of this phase from 1920–1926 for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are well attested to by a variety of people who saw them at this stage. A. B. Purani, T. V. Kapali Shastry, V. Chidanandam, G. V. Subbarao and T. Kodandarama Rao have all expressed their surprise at the change of appearance in Sri Aurobindo, from a brown complexioned, lightly pock-marked physical personality to one whose “cheeks wore an apple-pink color and the whole body glowed with a soft creamy white light.” Similarly, the Mother manifested an unearthly youth and beauty. William

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2 Most of these descriptions come from different accounts of the oracular statement of Dorothy Hodgson (aka Datta) after the departure of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the evening gathering on November 24, 1926. For example, see Nilima Das (1978: pg. 234).

W. Pearson, a close associate of Rabindranath Tagore, who, with Tagore, had met her in Japan, could hardly recognize her in 1923. In the Mother's words:

When I began with Sri Aurobindo to descend for the yoga,...when we brought down the yoga from the Mind to the Vital, within one month – I was forty at that time, I didn't look old, I looked younger than forty, but still I was forty – after a month's yoga I looked exactly eighteen. And someone who had seen me before, who had lived with me in Japan and came here, found it difficult to recognise me (2003: pg. 303).

Similarly, Kanailal Ganguly, A.B. Purani, Champaklal, D.K. Roy and K.D. Sethna were all struck by her beauty on first encounter. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explained this phenomenon in different contexts. In the Mother's words: "After consciously identifying itself with the Divine, the entire being even in its external parts – Mental, Vital and Physical – undergoes the consequences of this identification, and a change occurs which is sometimes even perceptible in the physical appearance" (1998: pg. 43). And in A.B. Purani's record of his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, "in the course of the talk he explained to me that when the Higher Consciousness, after descending to the mental level, comes down to the Vital and even below the Vital, then a transformation takes place in the nervous and even in the physical being" (1982: pg. 20).

Thus the task of supramentalization of the Mind planes, which Sri Aurobindo sought to achieve, received a new turn after the arrival of the Mother, a turn towards the preparation of an infrastructure through a purification and partial spiritualization of the Vital and Physical planes. It is this process that led to the eventual descent of the Overmind consciousness into the physical of Sri Aurobindo in 1926.<sup>3</sup> In a later formulation of his yoga in terms of what he called "the triple transformation" (2005: pp. 922–952), this event might be considered the completion of the second phase of the integral yoga, the spiritual or overmental transformation.

The identification of this summit of Mind consciousness as a transit-station to the Supermind, was a new discovery with a number of consequences. With the secure achievement of this intermediate step, Sri Aurobindo resumed his attempt to transform the Ignorance by the Knowledge consciousness of Supermind, more specifically by trying to "supramentalise the Overmind," a task he was occupied with for the rest of his life. For this he needed to turn his exclusive attention to the steps needed, including a continuation of the work of preparing the lower universal planes, while raising his consciousness to the Supermind and transforming his personal nature down to the inconscient by its consciousness. For this, he withdrew into seclusion, ceasing from all physical interactions excepting with a few people, and three silent darshans a year, given jointly with the Mother and later extended to four. By the time of this event, there were twenty people who had come to stay with Sri Aurobindo and follow his path of yoga. With his withdrawal, he directed all these disciples to the Mother's spiritual care and put her in charge of the community.

### *The Transition*

This transition in life circumstances, from 1914 to 1926, was a momentous one, tantamount to a radical change in perception from a revolutionary and unconventional yogi with anarchistic and socialistic leanings to a world guru (*jagat guru*) and a god or avatara, forming, along with the Mother, the Ishwara-Shakti pair, in the eyes of many. What were the steps of such a transition? When Paul and Mirra Richard visited Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1914, Aurobindo lived in a house with eight

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<sup>3</sup> As is discussed later, the cosmic Mahashaktis also became manifest in the Mother at this time.

others, several of whom had accompanied him from Calcutta, and had a few regular visitors, mostly local. Money was scarce and was left out in the open and managed collectively. Provisions included just enough for light collective meals of rice and fish, tea, wine, cigars for Aurobindo and cigarettes for the others and just enough soap to be used collectively for bathing once in three or four days. All inmates shared a single tattered towel. The encounter with the Richards led to Sri Aurobindo's writing of his principal works for the journal *Arya*, which he filled single-handedly from the time the Richards left in February 1915 till their return in April 1920. This serialized journal introduced Aurobindo's ideas on yoga, philosophy, social and political thought, cultural history, literature and his interpretations of the source texts of the Indian Vedantic tradition.

By the time Paul and Mirra returned from Japan in 1920, Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary views on yoga had received some airing and his reputation as a yogi had begun to spread, leading to people visiting him with the intention of following his path. 1920 was a difficult year for the Mother, since their return precipitated a crisis in her relationship with Paul Richard, who subjected her to violent attacks before leaving for good. Shortly after his departure and after a heavy storm in November 1920, Mirra moved into the house of Sri Aurobindo and his companions, along with an English friend, Dorothy Hodgson. In 1922, she took charge of the house, organizing its living conditions, and taking control of the finances. By the summer of 1922, there were fifteen full-time residents and Sri Aurobindo, Mirra and six others moved to a new rented house on 9 rue de la Marine, where the Sri Aurobindo Ashram presently stands. The others remained in the previous house. Prior to this, Sri Aurobindo seldom volunteered any information on yoga to his companions, but post-*Arya*, with people seeking him out for his views on yoga, he began having conversations with residents and visitors two times every day, from 9 to 10:30 in the morning and again in the late afternoon. The afternoon meetings were restricted to those who were interested in practicing his yoga, but the conversation ranged over all subjects including Indian and international politics, culture, literature, personalities, philosophy and spirituality, in keeping with his view, "All Life is Yoga." The conversation lasted about half an hour and ended with a brief meditation. Sri Aurobindo often "freely cracked jokes with a hearty laugh" and treated all as equals, discouraging any signs of reverence, such as *namaskars* or *pranams*.

But something began to shift as the years moved towards 1926. We have seen his response on the matter of the Shakti in 1924, which hints towards his understanding both that Mirra was his Shakti and that he was meant to manifest the supramental consciousness through her. The need to manifest the higher consciousness necessitated a different relationship with those who came to learn from him. Around this time, Sri Aurobindo changed his stance about the democratic arrangements of his household and decided to take charge as the leader of the community. His birthdays from this point began to be celebrated as "darshans", and most accounts of meetings with him from this period are full of awe and poetic exaltation. In August 1925, he announced the possibility of an impending descent of the supramental light: "There are manifestations of it now that were not there before. The Power is working more directly on the physical plane... [But] the more the light and power are coming down, the greater the resistance" (Purani 1982: pp. 498-499).

In August 1926, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the world of the gods in his evening talks and on 6th November of that year announced:

I spoke about the world of the gods because not to speak of it would be dangerous. I spoke of it so that the mind may understand the thing if it comes down. I am trying to bring it

down into the physical, as it can be no longer delayed, and things may happen. Formerly, to speak of it would have been undesirable, but now not to speak of it might be dangerous (Purani 1982: pg. 481).

Since Sri Aurobindo had not yet coined the term Overmind and had been speaking heretofore of bringing down the Supermind, it is likely that he considered the “world of the gods” to be a zone of the Supermind, before its descent. As the Mother had been an equal participant in the descent of this world, she had used her occult knowledge and power to build the conditions for stabilizing this world in their environment once it descended, a “sort of overmental creation” in which, in her words:

[I] asked the gods to incarnate, to identify themselves with a body...Well, with my very own eyes I saw Krishna, who had always been in rapport with Sri Aurobindo, consent to come down into his body. It was on 24 November and it was the beginning of [the role of the] “Mother.” (from a talk by the Mother on 2 August 1961).

Sri Aurobindo experienced and described this event much later in his own terms, as a descent of the Overmind, also a descent of Krishna into his body. Shortly after its descent, he seems to have realized that this was not the Supermind and, though a necessity in his and the Mother’s sadhana, it did not have the power to effect the integral transformation he sought, so that a manifestation which tied it to the environment and other individuals within it, could impede the effort for progress. He asked the Mother to undo the creation and she dissolved the formation.

However, this event brought about a decisive change for both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. From 1926 to 1929, in his writings Sri Aurobindo alternated between the names Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo Ghose, finally getting rid of the surname in 1929. Similarly, from 1926, Sri Aurobindo referred in letters to the Mother as Mirra Devi, Mira Devi and Sri Mira Devi, but increasingly in speech as The Mother, a name which came to supersede the others. In 1927, he wrote a number of essays constituting an introduction to his yoga, which centered around surrender to the Divine Shakti, a theme that formed one of the seven lines of yoga (*Sapta Chatusthaya*) that he had himself followed, the *Shakti Chatusthaya*. In the last of these essays he identified four goddess emanations of the Divine Shakti—*Maheshwari*, *Mahakali*, *Mahalakshmi* and *Mahasaraswati*. These essays were published in 1928 as *The Mother* and made available to the disciples as the guidelines to be followed, accepting Mirra as the incarnation of the Divine Mother. One can see here how the Mother’s final arrival in Pondicherry in 1920 was the decisive event that led to the establishment of an Ishwara-Shakti pair that disciples could relate to as guru figures and/or as avatars or twin embodiments of a Divine Consciousness, manifesting a yoga shakti leading to the supramental realization.

### *The Mother’s Role*

Thus, we can see the crucial role played by the Mother after her final return in 1920 in the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. She gave a new turn to Sri Aurobindo’s own yoga and participated with him in the descent of the Overmind and the culmination of the second of the three transformations required in the Integral Yoga. She served as his Shakti and with the establishment of the Overmind, formed with him an Ishwara-Shakti pair that acted as a divine door to the supramental realization for their disciples. After his withdrawal, she took charge of the outer work of manifesting his yoga shakti, guiding the disciples and organizing the ashram life. And after his passing, she completed the third step of the descent and manifestation of the supramental consciousness.

Apart from all these, she had the knowledge and expressed the power to extend Sri Aurobindo's yoga into a world phenomenon. She did this through two means – (1) the projection of a personal customized emanation of herself into the atmosphere of every disciple to serve as a direct dynamic link to her at all times; and (2) through another turn given to the integral yoga – an emphasis put on the soul personality or psychic being as the leader of the human assemblage, leading it through its powers of integration of the human nature and surrender to the Divine. The first of these, a concrete formulation to the most intimate personal relation, was an occult specialization of a yogic siddhi that Sri Aurobindo referred to as *vyapti* in his *Record of Yoga*. The second, the psychic being, became a cornerstone of the Integral Yoga after the Mother's arrival and is now understood as the innermost person and central agent of the individual in their yoga. Before the Mother's first arrival, in 1914, Sri Aurobindo was following the seven lines of sadhana (*Sapta Chatusthaya*) indicated to him by "the Master of the Yoga," whom he sometimes identified with Sri Krishna. Faith (*sraddha*) and self-surrender (*atma-samarpan*), key psychic qualities, were central to this practice, especially in its line of development related to the Divine Shakti, *Shakti Chatusthaya*. So was the development of the soul forces (*viryā*) of personal psychic expression or *swadharmā*. There was also the knowledge of the soul as an immanent self (*antaratman*) and evolving reincarnating person (*kshara purusha*). But a focused attention on this "true inner person," allowing it to emerge to the surface of the individual's life and integrate and lead it towards the Divine, became a primary desideratum after the Mother's taking over the charge of the yoga.

Prior to this Sri Aurobindo had himself proceeded along several lines, chiefly by silencing the human mind and rising to a level above it in consciousness, from where he could develop a directing control over his nature, guiding the descents of the Divine Shakti so as to open up, transform and integrate the functioning of the different centers of existence. In the versions of *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine* serialized in the *Arya*, produced after the Mother's first arrival in 1914, this is still the main method referred to, though the terms "psychic entity," "psychic being" and "psychic existence" make their appearance a few times. But after the Mother's final arrival and the assumption of her control over the ashram, the psychic being began to assume central importance. Helping to open to the psychic being and bringing it to the surface also became among the chief methods of the Mother's working with the disciples. This was another means by which the integral yoga was made widely available, since the guidance of the psychic being was seen as the safest path through the vicissitudes of the yoga, a path travelled in the presence and protection of the Mother and hence termed "the sunlit path" by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In his letters to the disciples, Sri Aurobindo continued to point to both ways – opening and ascent above the mind and opening and bringing forward of the psychic being – as primary approaches to the Integral Yoga, depending on individual constitution and preference, but of these, the path of the psychic being became more widespread as a desirable approach available to all. In both cases, opening to and dependence on the Mother became the intended aim:

Concentration in the heart is one method, concentration in the head (or above) is another; both are included in this Yoga and one has to do whichever one finds easiest and most natural. The object of the concentration in the heart is to open the centre there (heart-lotus), to feel the presence of the Divine Mother in the heart and to become aware of one's soul or psychic being which is a portion of the Divine. The object of the concentration in the head is to rise to the Divine Consciousness and bring down the Light of the Mother or her Force or Ananda into all the centres. (2013: pg. 325).



### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry in 1920 led to a transition from the personal yoga of Sri Aurobindo to a world-transforming yogic action centered around the dual-guru/dual-avatara Ishwara-Shakti couple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, eventuating after the descent of the Overmind in 1926. This should give us pause to consider the cultural and ethical issues such a transition represents for modernity. Post-Enlightenment modernity is premised on the equality of all human beings, based on the definition of the human as a rational being. Though Sri Aurobindo, as a representative of Indian nationalism in his anticolonial years, challenged this definition epistemologically, he accepted the ground of equality for all humans. This, indeed, was the foundation of the democratic anarchism he followed in the small collective he formed with his companions in Pondicherry before the Mother's arrival. That Sri Aurobindo resisted the transition to a guru figure for a good while also seems evident. Modernity's fear of charismatic leaders who found their authority on non-rational sources arises from the long record of historical tragedies they have left behind, starting with Adolf Hitler in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the legacy of abuse is rampant in the modern guru industry. Certainly, the idea of a deified Ishwara-Shakti pair falls outside of modernity's norms and can only be justified by bringing in alternative and seemingly eccentric cultural standards. However, the secular modern norm is a historical happenstance reacting against the superstition and irrationality of the Dark Ages. It is possible for us today to think of a postsecular norm that manifests the suprarational. The suprarational is not the irrational, it includes and transcends reason. Among the most endearing qualities of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been their willingness to explain themselves through reason and their exceptionless empowerment of their disciples. In looking for contemporary semblances to the model they represented in western psychology, one may think of C. G. Jung's understanding of the realization of alchemy as the embodied syzygy of animus and anima archetypes. But in terms of authority, a more appropriate image may be sought in the life story of the Buddha in the earliest canons. After attaining Bodhi, when the Buddha was addressed as "friend" by his erstwhile ascetic companions, he stopped them, saying "Don't call me friend; I am fully enlightened and have reached the Deathless state, while you are still ignorant. I will teach you the Dhamma. By practicing as you're instructed you will yourselves realize the supreme goal." This is not to be taken as a statement of ego but of ontological distinction. The one (or here, two) who "has crossed beyond," if s/he is to be of help to others to cross over, needs to make this distinction.

### *Addendum:*

The celebration of 2020 as the centenary of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry received a rude blow in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. Instead of a new revelation of Grace, there was a shutdown of all activities and even the possibility of the customary physical darshan to the Mother's room. It may be instructive, at this time, to think back to the fact that the period of the Mother's final arrival was hit hard by a similar pandemic, "the Spanish Flu," arising in the midst of the First World War in 1918–19. It was an influenza that put an end to Sri Aurobindo's wife, Mrinalini, and one whose occult operations the Mother was forced to encounter and battle. These occult circumstances were related to the war and the violent deaths caused by it. Today's wars are distributed and varied, they occupy the world within and without, and are conducted by humans not merely against other humans but across the blurred lines which separate human from non-human and living from non-living in a tightly interdependent world. The climatic disorders as

well as the pandemic are the effects of this new world condition of war. In response to our wish to celebrate the centenary of the Mother's final arrival, she has reciprocated with a revelation of our inner world condition. And it is no longer as a miraculous external agent that she will battle this condition, it is through us, if we let her, or not at all. Her blessings are with us. In response to our wish to celebrate her final arrival, she reminds us of a message given in August, 1964:

The future of the earth depends on a change of consciousness. The only hope for the future is in a change of man's consciousness and the change is bound to come. But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances. So, wake up and collaborate! Blessings. (2004: pg. 60).

— Debashish Banerji

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# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## ENGLISH

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

### **The Mother's Symbol**

Reprint from *All India Magazine* booklet  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry  
58 pp, Rs 60, ISBN: 978-81-7060-417-4  
Size: 14 x 20 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

*Other Authors*

### **Meditations on Savitri—V**

#### **The Mother's Sketches**

—The Mother

Publisher: The Havyavahana  
Trust, Pondicherry  
258 pp, Rs 1250  
ISBN: 978-81-87372-38-7  
Size: 23 x 23 cm, Binding: Hard Cover



This is the fifth and final book in the *Meditations on Savitri* series and is a companion volume to the previous four. It contains facsimiles of sketches made by the Mother to guide Huta in preparing the paintings. From 1961 to 1966 the Mother and Huta meditated together on lines chosen from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, and when an image appeared to the Mother she described it to Huta with the help of a brief sketch. The sketches were made on different types and sizes of paper, using pencils, sometimes coloured, or different types of pens. On many of the sketches she also indicated what colours to use and the proportions and placement of an image. Huta then completed the work in her studio as an oil painting. The sketches are reproduced in their actual sizes and are accompanied on the opposite page by the corresponding lines from *Savitri*.



### **Meditations on the Īśa Upaniṣad**

*Tracing the Philosophical Vision of Sri Aurobindo*

—Debashish Banerji

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Samiti in collaboration  
with Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Kolkata  
142 pp, Rs 350, ISBN: 978-93-84721-47-3  
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

The author has written four meditations on the Isha Upanishad, drawing on Sri Aurobindo's commentary on this Upanishad as well as on the larger body of his other works. These meditations follow Sri Aurobindo's indication that the central idea of the Upanishad, a reconciliation and harmony of fundamental opposites, is worked out symmetrically in four successive movements of thought. The author's exposition and study of these movements reveal how centrally the Isha Upanishad accords to the philosophical vision of Sri Aurobindo and are particularly pertinent to understanding the source of inspiration for *The Life Divine*.

*See review on page 16*

### **Sri Aurobindo and India's Rebirth**

— Edited by Michel Danino

Publisher: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.,  
New Delhi  
263 pp, Rs 395, ISBN: 978-93-5304-056-7  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

A compilation of Sri Aurobindo's writings on his vision of India, the material in this book is presented chronologically from 1893 to 1950 to better show the evolution of Sri Aurobindo's thought and action concerning India's political, social, and spiritual destiny. A timeline, editorial notes, and footnotes serve to anchor the compilation in a historical context. The extracts, beginning with his revolutionary writings and proceeding with his early essays and articles, followed by the records of the evening talks

(1923–26 and 1938–40), and including letters and messages during his years in seclusion, show his care for his motherland—her liberation from colonial rule, her post-liberation reconstruction, and what he foresaw as her special place as a world leader.

### **Invitation to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri***

—M.V. Nadkarni

Publisher: Auropublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

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

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The first chapter of this book, which is based on the author's series of thirty-one talks introducing the poem, lays down a few key principles in his approach to the subject. First, that in writing *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo was leaving for posterity a verbal embodiment of his own consciousness. Then, through the poetry he was flooding the earth atmosphere with the vibrations of hope and love in an age already wallowing in nihilism, building a bridge between this world of human limitations and the future world that he was opening up. And that is why the writing of *Savitri* is a very significant event in human history. The transcribed talks cover the entire epic as well as chapters on how to read *Savitri* and comparisons with the original legend. The book concludes with a glossary of Sanskrit terms used in the poem and references for the many quotations from *Savitri* and from other texts by Sri Aurobindo cited by the author.

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

### **Work as Sadhana Under the Mother's Guidance**

—Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

196 pp, Rs 175, ISBN: 978-93-85391-12-5

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This collection of memoirs, reports, anecdotes, and personal experiences from some early members of the Ashram reflects the Mother's unique way of working with her disciples. Her care and attention to detail instilled in them the thirst for perfection, helping their consciousness to grow. In the first section, we read how, from the very beginning, work was allotted to everyone, even the youngest children, how the departments started, how everyone gave their days and nights to the Mother's work with joy and dedication. Other sections reveal the story of Golconde, the genesis of the school boardings, and the development of the different libraries of the Ashram. The material has been previously published in *Mother India* and elsewhere, but its fresh presentation here gives form to Ashram history and underscores an essential aspect of life in the Ashram even today.

*See review on page 19*

### **Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on Reality and Other Essays**

—Martha S.G. Orton

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

147 pp, Rs 175, ISBN: 978-93-85391-08-8

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

This collection of essays, previously published in several journals dedicated to Sri Aurobindo's vision, focuses on how Sri Aurobindo's view of the nature of reality is particularly relevant for understanding his yoga and his writings on the psychology of yoga, as well as his writings on social and political themes and his understanding of the evolution of consciousness. Other essays highlight the integral nature of his yoga, the synthesis of the paths of knowledge, works, and devotion, his distinct perspective on karma, how faith and the inner offering to the Divine are dynamic processes in our spiritual progress, and the crucial role of the body in the full realisation of the Integral Yoga.

*See review on page 22*

**The English of Savitri, Volume 6**  
**Book Eleven, The Book of Everlasting Day, and**  
**Book Twelve, Epilogue**

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

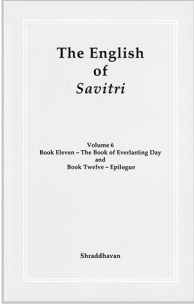
— Shradhdhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville  
270 pp, Rs 650, ISBN: 978-93-82474-29-6  
Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

Volume Six in this series on the English of *Savitri* explores the final two books of the epic. In Book Eleven, The Book of Everlasting Day, Savitri at last obtains the sanction of the Supreme Lord to her prayer for the return of Satyavan to earth, to-kening the promise of a divine life on earth. At the start of Book Twelve, Epilogue: The Return to Earth, Savitri awakens from her deep trance to find herself in the forest again,

in the late afternoon of the same day on which Death had stolen Satyavan's soul. As night falls on this momentous day, the book concludes with the promise of a greater dawn when a new world will be born.

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.



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ISBN: 978-81-7060-413-6, sc Rs 275

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## Invitation to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

—M.V. Nadkarni

Publisher: Auropublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

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

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

THIS BOOK IS AN INVITATION to the Temple of Savitri, the incarnate divine Mother in Sri Aurobindo's epic and to the magnificent worlds of consciousness revealed by Sri Aurobindo in the luminous and exquisite verses of his great epic, with the author of the book, M. V. Nadkarni, as our guide.

Dr Nadkarni needs no introduction to the disciples and devotees of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. As the blurb to the book states, Nadkarniji is "one of the most respected authorities" on *Savitri*. This book is based on edited transcripts of a series of thirty-one talks on *Savitri* given by the author and sponsored by Sri Aurobindo Society. The talks provide a broad context for understanding the deeper significance of the epic.

There cannot be a better review of the book than its brilliant preface by Dr Alok Pandey, which brings out forcefully the importance of *Savitri* and Nadkarniji's great contribution in spreading its message. Regarding *Savitri*, Dr Pandey writes, "Sri Aurobindo not only gives hope but also fills the hiatus left in our understanding by a New Light that reconciles God and World, reunites the Creation and the Creator in a happy embrace." On the work of Nadkarniji, he adds, "Being a professor of linguistics, a master [of] the English language, as well as a practitioner on the path of Integral Yoga, he was in a unique position to share the

secrets he had discovered in and through *Savitri* with all who were keen and interested.”

In his lectures, Nadkarniji raises many interesting questions and answers them with deep insight, often wit and humour, through interesting images, stories, and anecdotes. Asking the question, what is the primary purpose of reading *Savitri*, Nadkarniji says that *Savitri* is “a verbal embodiment” of Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness and “the ultimate reason for reading *Savitri* is to get for oneself [the] contact with Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness.” In a beautiful image Nadkarniji describes *Savitri* as “the Lord’s flute”; “the magic enchantment of his flute” which Sri Aurobindo has given to humanity as his gift. “Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri* out of sheer love for people like you and me who have the soul of the *gopis*,” says Nadkarniji:

If you have a heart and if you can give your heart’s adoration, here is the Lord’s flute, submit yourself to its enchantment. You don’t have to do anything at all except to keep the temple clean that the music is received, the enchantment is felt. So this is the primary purpose for which one reads *Savitri*.

Personally, for someone like me who feels a greater joy in the music and rhythm of *Savitri* than in its meaning, the image of the flute is delightful.

The true meaning of the deep and profound spiritual truths expressed in *Savitri* cannot be fully understood without one having a similar or corresponding inner experience. We may try to understand intellectually, which may give us some form of mental satisfaction, and also may be of some help in our mental development. We may try to understand intuitively by reading it with a silent mind and allowing the meaning to arise from the deeper layers of our consciousness.

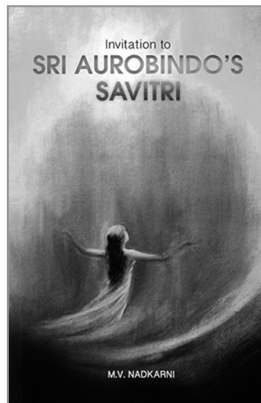
But opening to the enchantment of *Savitri*, to the “musical notes of the Lord’s flute”, is something vastly different.

One of the unique features of these talks is that Nadkarniji deftly relates the message of *Savitri* to the conditions of the present world and to the various philosophies, legends, and myths of the ancient world, sprinkled with quotes and anecdotes from Sri Aurobindo and others, which make the talks relevant, contemporary, and interesting.

The other important aspect of these talks is that Nadkarniji brings out with great clarity and force the nature of the quest of King Aswapati, which is also Sri Aurobindo’s quest. Religion, science, philosophy, and morality, for instance, working primarily at the mental level, have tried to transform humanity but all

have failed. Many great saints and avatars have come, like rays of light from the sun, to spread their light on Earth for some time and then gone back to the luminous worlds from which they came, perhaps carrying a few liberated disciples with them. But the general consciousness of humanity remains as it is—imperfect, ignorant, crude. Aswapati’s quest is to change this human condition by bringing down to earth a higher power which will uplift and transform humanity as a

whole to a higher supramental consciousness in which all the highest aspirations of humanity for truth, beauty, goodness, peace, love, harmony, unity, and perfection are realised—not as abstractions and ideas of the mind or sentiments and feelings of the heart, but as concrete experiential realities in the very substance of our consciousness; not at once or en masse or by a swift miracle, but gradually through the pioneering action of a New Race or a cluster of spiritually transformed human



beings. This central message of Sri Aurobindo revealed through *Savitri*, comes out repeatedly in Nadkarniji's talk in words charged with a luminous and striking clarity. For example, there is the following passage:

Almost all the forces of the intellect have been tried—education, science, religion, philanthropy, morality, spirituality. Spirituality gets hold of the soul within but everything else is lost. The earth is lost, the very purpose for which God built this beautiful world and the evolutionary nature invested...to create a man out of a handful of dust. What are we? We are handful of dust, but our destiny is to represent here, manifest here in this creation as God's perfection. If you want this perfection here, you need to bring a transcendental Power. That is what Aswapati finds out.

This is the great song of hope, redemption, and transformation in *Savitri*, brought out in this book by Nadkarniji in a form accessible to wider, discerning sections of humanity. I hope and pray that the book reaches a larger audience, especially young minds.

—M. S. Srinivasan

*M. S. Srinivasan is a Senior Associate at Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry involved in editing, writing, research, and the dissemination of Sri Aurobindo's thought. He is also part of the website team for SAS.*

## **Meditations on the Īśa Upaniṣad**

*Tracing the Philosophical Vision of Sri Aurobindo*

—Debashish Banerji

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Samiti in collaboration with Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Kolkata  
142 pp, Rs 350, ISBN: 978-93-84721-47-3  
Size: 14 x 21 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

THE EIGHTEEN VERSES of the Isha Upanishad are packed with an extraordinary wealth of intuitive insight into the deepest mysteries of existence. This key scripture of early Vedanta, as Debashish Banerji observes in his illuminating reflections on it, “functions as a *mantra* to wake up the secret memory of human identity with the Lord in the heart of all things, leading towards cosmic self-realization.” This being the case, it is not surprising that Sri Aurobindo drew so much upon this Upanishad in presenting his life-affirming spiritual philosophy. Indeed, his various commentaries on this short work – though he left most of them incomplete and unpublished – exceed in volume his writings on all the other Upanishads put together. His last three unfinished commentaries on the Isha before the launching of the *Arya* in August 1914 bore the title, “The Life Divine”. It was only with the first issue of that monthly journal that Sri Aurobindo adopted the title *The Life Divine* for a work of original philosophy, beginning to publish it serially along with *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda* and his final commentary on the Isha Upanishad. The book under review elucidates the meaning of the Upanishad mainly in the light of that commentary.

The introduction to these meditations is written in a more academic style than the rest of the book. It situates the Upanishads in general and the Isha in particular in the history of Indian “wisdom literature”, discussing especially how they are related to the mystical symbolism of the Vedic hymns that preceded them. Drawing parallels with ancient Greece, the author points out how Sri Aurobindo's interest in the



Upanishads resembles in some ways the interest of modern European philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Deleuze in the pre-Socratic origins of Western thought. The process of meditation is also clarified in the introduction with a quotation from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Meditation, Banerji explains, means in this context an “intensification of thought” through “a focused mental dwelling on the idea, which leads to identity”.

His own meditations on the Isha, he adds, “are offered in such a spirit”.

The rest of the book is structured according to the four “movements” into which Sri Aurobindo divided the text of the

Upanishad in the analysis he published in the *Arya*. Each of the four chapters explores one of these movements. The profundity of these meditations can be illustrated by a typical example. The following passage is a comment on the phrase at the end of the second verse, *na karma lipyate nare* (“action cleaves not to a man”):

Once again, many layers of meaning seem condensed in this fragment of a couplet. Firstly, there is something in us which is untouched by work or any action, —that is the dimension of the Lord, the Infinite potential which remains Infinite within the finitude of becoming. This remains untouched, irrespective of how much of it appears or is mobilized in the becoming. Even if an infinity of it appears, an infinity remains unmanifest. We hear once more the echo of the *Pūrṇam* verses of the preamble to this Upaniṣad. This is the unborn dimension of being within us, an inexhaustible potency that each of us carries. The entire universe carries this at its center, and each entity in the universe carries it.

*It is as a series of meditations on an inspired scripture that this book is likely to appeal most to spiritually inclined readers. But it is also a semi-academic publication which has a strongly intellectual dimension and is written in the language of contemporary thought.*

Sri Aurobindo in 1914–15. His extensive previous essays and drafts, going back almost fifteen years to when he was in Baroda, are mentioned only

Insofar as Sri Aurobindo’s engagement with the Isha Upanishad played a conspicuous role in the formulation of his philosophy, this book clarifies a major influence on his thought. In this respect it fulfils the promise of the subtitle, “Tracing the Philosophical Vision of Sri Aurobindo”. Its scope is limited, however, by the fact that it focuses mostly on the definitive commentary on this Upanishad published by

briefly. References to the Isha introduced into *The Life Divine* when Sri Aurobindo revised it in 1939–40 are also discussed, as we will see, but their significance for understanding the later development of his vision and experience is not fully brought out. These omissions need not be considered defects of the book, since it achieves admirably what it sets out to do. At the same time, it leaves room for much more work to be done. It is to be hoped that it will stimulate further research.

The evolution of Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of the Isha Upanishad from tentative essays found in notebooks he used around 1900, when he had not yet taken up Yoga, to his authoritative treatment of it in the *Arya*, is a fascinating story that remains to be told in detail; but it would require another book of a somewhat different kind. Among other things, it would involve examining the shift in Sri Aurobindo’s attitude toward Shankara that occurred from the days when he could still write deferentially that “Shankaracharya’s is an authority which no man can dare to belittle” (CWSA vol. 17, p. 201) to the ironic tone of his aphorism, written around 1913:

Three times God laughed at Shankara, first, when he returned to burn the corpse of his mother, again when he commented on the Isha Upanishad and the third time when he stormed about India preaching inaction. (CWSA vol. 2, p. 463)

After publishing his last translation and analysis of the Isha in the first year of the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo did not again comment verse by verse on the text as a whole. But its ideas continued to underlie fundamental aspects of his philosophy. The whole plan of *The Life Divine* with its two books, “Omnipresent Reality and the Universe” and “The Knowledge and the Ignorance – The Spiritual Evolution”, is clearly indebted to this Upanishad, with its opening evocation of the Lord pervading the movement of the universe and its central reconciliation of Vidya and Avidya, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the consciousness of the One and the consciousness of the Many.

*The Life Divine* in its original form appeared in the *Arya* from August 1914 to January 1919. In 1939–40, Sri Aurobindo extensively revised it. He greatly expanded Book Two, substantially rewriting many chapters and adding entirely new ones. Book One was more lightly revised, but a long chapter was added entitled “Supermind, Mind and the Overmind Maya”. The reference here to verses 15 and 16 of the Isha Upanishad, beginning “The face of Truth is hidden by a golden lid...”, is highly significant. It shows that Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of this Upanishad had continued to evolve in the twenty-five years since he commented on it in the *Arya*.

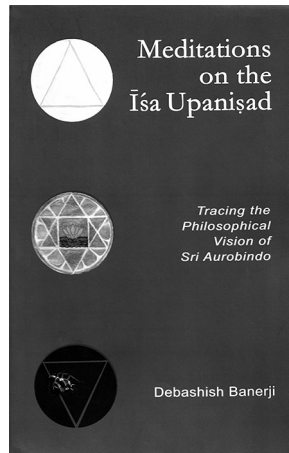
In discussing these verses, Professor Banerji makes good use of this passage from *The Life Divine*, but passes over the difference between Sri Aurobindo’s earlier explanation of the

golden lid as a “brilliant formation of concepts and percepts” preventing “self-vision and all-vision” and his later understanding of it as the veil of the Overmind covering the supramental Truth. It should be noted that during the *Arya* period Sri Aurobindo had not yet coined the word Overmind. The introduction of this term into *The Life Divine* marks one of the most important developments between the 1914–19 and 1939–40 versions. From the standpoint of tracing his philosophical vision as well as his spiritual experience, therefore, the reinterpretation of the golden lid may be taken to represent a momentous change reflecting a higher realization after Sri Aurobindo’s *siddhi* of

November 1926. But a discussion of this point would be best framed in the context of a thorough study of the revision of *The Life Divine*. That is a complex topic that could form the subject of a separate book.

*Meditations on the Īsa Upaniṣad* is sure to deepen the reader’s understanding of an essential work of the philosophical and spiritual literature of India and the world. The Sanskrit verses are printed in Devanagari with transliteration; but this is not an introduction to

the Upanishad for learning purposes and there are no word-for-word explanations. Those with sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit and some previous familiarity with the Isha may find, however, that by the end of the book they can recite it by heart even if they could not do so before. It should perhaps be mentioned in passing that Professor Banerji’s Sanskrit scholarship is not on quite the same level as his capacity for philosophical analysis. A few errors in the spelling of Sanskrit words printed in transliteration with diacritical marks may annoy the pundits, but these need not be enumerated here.



It is as a series of meditations on an inspired scripture that this book is likely to appeal most to spiritually inclined readers. But it is also a semi-academic publication which has a strongly intellectual dimension and is written in the language of contemporary thought. Such a book can be compared in certain respects with Sri Aurobindo's own writings in the context in which they originally appeared. The *Arya* described itself as a "philosophical review" and Sri Aurobindo referred to what he wrote for it as "the intellectual side of my work for the world" (CWSA vol. 36, p. 209). The importance of this aspect of his work can be appreciated if we recall his statement in the Introduction to *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

The truth is that neither the mental effort nor the spiritual impulse can suffice, divorced from each other, to overcome the immense resistance of material Nature. She demands their alliance in a complete effort before she will suffer a complete change in humanity. (CWSA vol. 23, p. 24)

The present book is a good example in our own times of the fusion of intellect and spirit that Sri Aurobindo exemplified and advocated. One would like to think that it is a harbinger of things to come.

—Richard Hartz

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

## Work as Sadhana Under the Mother's Guidance

— Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

196 pp, Rs 175, ISBN: 978-93-85391-12-5

Size: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

THROUGH THIS BOOK we get to know how the Ashram grew and developed from early times and, along with it, the importance of work as a means of sadhana for the individuals living here—the *sadbaks* and *sadhikas*, young and old. Chitra-di has made a precious collection from journals, memoirs, and reports of personal experiences of many people who have lived their lives in the Ashram. They have told of their work, which they did under the guidance of the Divine Mother, and their stories bring out their beautiful interactions with the Mother: her loving guidance and concern for the person as well as the minute sense of perfection in the execution of the work. She was Mahasaraswati incarnate as described by Sri Aurobindo:

A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives us towards the integrality of the higher nature.

It would be impossible to mention all the names of the people who have shared their treasured interactions with the Mother. I might not be able to do justice to them. Yet I am tempted to mention one particular person because I knew her quite closely. She was my teacher, gentle and loving. The advice the Mother gave her is quite similar to what the Mother told us years later. I was touched by the

frank account Suprabha-di has given about the work of teaching:

Though I was not very much interested in teaching, the Mother always encouraged me in that. She used to say that to teach others one learnt ten times more than while just studying. The Mother told us about Her stay in Japan during which [time] She used to take classes. These were so interesting that students of other classes would flock into Her class.

We too in our time have seen this aspect of the Mother, firm and compassionate. As we grew up and completed our studies in the Higher Course, some of us wanted to pursue further studies in the Advanced Course. We expressed our wish to the Mother. She agreed provided we first started to work in some Ashram Department. We were quite surprised. We thought she would be happy that we wanted to further our knowledge, our education.

The first quotation by the Mother printed in this book, “Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine”, is one we have grown up with. We saw it every day at the Dining Room. We read it automatically, every time we passed through that room. When the Mother told us that we should first start working before continuing our studies, this quotation flashed in our minds and the next time we passed by it, we paid more attention. “Work” was the key word in the quotation, and it would be the key word for our future life.

The following writing from Sri Aurobindo will give a correct insight into the importance of work in his yoga:

One cannot be said to be in the full yogic condition – for the purposes of this Yoga – if one cannot take up with willingness any work given to one as an offering to the Divine. At one time I was absolutely unfit for physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so

as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and conscious. It is the same for some here.

What a humble statement from one whose life was wholly given for the purpose of yoga! He then continues to explain:

A nature not trained to accept external work and activity becomes mentally too top-heavy, physically inert and obscure.... I am speaking of course from the point of view of the ideal—the rest depends upon the nature.

In his book of memoirs, *Champaklal Speaks*, Champaklalji notes some other examples of Sri Aurobindo's “doing physical things with care and perfection”:

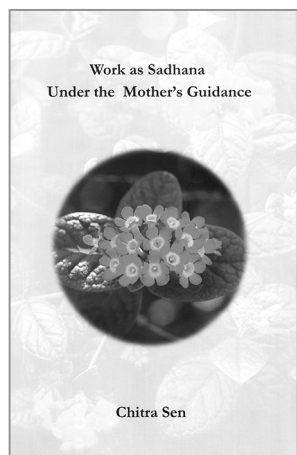
Sri Aurobindo was himself recording the reading of the electricity meter which was fitted in the bathroom upstairs....

In the Meditation House, Sri Aurobindo used to arrange one vase of roses every day and keep it on a small table in Mother's dressing room.... At nightfall he would take all the flower vases from the rooms and leave them on a table...in the passage.... Mother did not like flowers to remain in the room at night.

In this connection I will mention someone we knew closely. This person had come here at quite a young age, but as he had a cervical spine injury his physical activities were very much restricted. So he spent most of his time reading. He loved history and thus became quite proficient in the subject. It was suggested he could teach History in our school. To everybody's surprise the Mother vehemently opposed it. On the contrary, she sent him to work at Cottage Industries. The physical work there was not heavy but it helped him to regain the nervous coordination of his hand movements, and slowly his condition began to improve, as did his general health. Such wisdom and consideration was beyond our understanding. The work the Mother chose for him was salutary for his

physical well-being. Of course, later he did teach History and other subjects in our school.

As I read through the book and learnt about the different departments and how young girls were sent to work there according to their inclination and interest, I could not but think about our days—how the Mother chose different work areas for us. She sent some of us to teach. She told us that for those who could teach, it was the best means for their progress. It would be our field of growth. To someone who was scientifically minded, she pro-posed work in the Handmade Paper Unit, which, she told her, would be very interesting. She sent another girl to work in Auroville, then in its birth throes,



and explained to her with what attitude she should work there. Some other girls were sent to the Embroidery Department; another was trained to keep accounts.

In this book we get a glimpse of the various departments in the Ashram burgeoning under

the Mother's minute supervision. Of course many members did multiple jobs. They worked at the Press, taught at the school, were captains in the evening! It was the same in our time too. Our lives moved in a flow of activities dedicated to the Mother, and we were happy. We never thought work to be chores.

Even our mothers would find time to work somewhere in the Ashram. In spite of their household work, they would find time to work at some department. As a child I have seen my mother go to the Cycle Department from where filtered water was distributed. As she sat there for two hours there were times when nobody

came to take water. So she made use of that time to learn French from M. Benjamin who worked there too. My mother wanted to learn French so she would be able to read the Mother's writings in the original. The Mother kindled such aspiration in most people and encouraged them wholeheartedly.

The Mother took keen interest in sports and games and physical education. A strong physical and a healthy mind are essential for doing the sadhana:

Under the guidance of the Mother, the Ashram expanded manifold. She kept an eye on all things, big and small, important or seemingly insignificant. Nothing was left out of Her view...

In this way the Mother moulded us. Under Her care and protection, through unlimited freedom and opportunities given by Her, we, Her children, grew.

This book is not just a happy chronicle of the past to be read with fondness. No, it is very relevant to this day. As a matter of fact, the problem of explaining to people about working with the right attitude is what might have inspired Chitra-di to write this book—she is associated with the distribution of work in the Ashram for ashramites, volunteers, and visitors. Unfortunately, everybody's attitude towards work is not the same, as Chitra-di notes:

[O]ne observes differences in the actual performance. The attitude in the work varies with each individual and it is that which gives its real value to the work done.

Some people do the job because it is a routine they have to follow in order to stay here...They do their duty and expect much in return. They seem to consider their own needs only.

I have myself heard some volunteers remark, "We are not ashramites, these regulations don't apply to us!", and so they take liberties which disrupt the regular discipline of the work.

When we are allowed to serve the Mother, isn't it a grace conferred on us? By serving the Mother we are not doing a favour to the Mother or the Ashram. The gain is ours. The moment we say we want to offer our services to the Mother, no matter the intention, the Mother takes us into her arms. Her unlimited, unconditional Love and Protection bind us to her and Sri Aurobindo forever. Their grace is infinite. Need we more?

One could suggest to all those who come to work in the Ashram to read this book as a way of understanding the place and value of work here. It is a must-read book for all of us to have the right attitude in our service to the Mother.

—Krishna Dundur

*Krishna-di completed her studies at SAICE in 1965 and was made a teacher by the Mother. She continues to teach here with great pleasure. It was her privilege to have had Sri Aurobindo's Darshan and to have participated in the work of building the Samadhi.*

## Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on Reality and Other Essays

—Martha S.G. Orton

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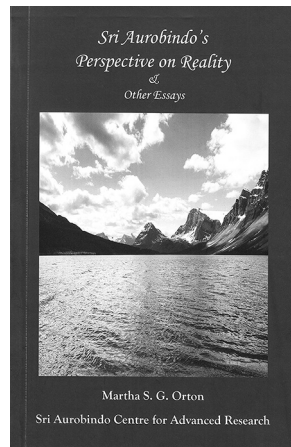
THIS SLIM BUT MEATY VOLUME by Dr Martha S. G. Orton attempts nothing less than offering a bird's eye view of the path of knowledge or *jnana* yoga as expounded by Sri Aurobindo. Practice of this *jnana* yoga is one path that can lead to a transformation of one's nature. Although this work is a collection of essays that the author contributed to several journals over the years, they are strung together in a compact arrangement, with each chapter exploring a slice of what constitutes reality in Sri Aurobindo's thought. Her purpose in exploring his perspective on reality is that "we cannot know how to approach the world without a clear sense of what is real". This work, wide in its breadth of exploratory scope as it is, covers almost every important aspect of reality in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in the first four of the twelve essays that comprise the book. The remaining eight essays deal with other aspects of the Integral Yoga and the method and practice of the yoga of knowledge.

The first four chapters expatiate on Sri Aurobindo's worldview proper. Throughout there is the sense that the reader is being taken by the hand on a tour of this worldview by one who has not only a thorough intellectual grasp of the Aurobindonian philosophy and psychology, but is also an experienced practitioner of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Thus, these chapters abound not only in information, but also in tips for those ardent to get started on their spiritual journey through knowledge, or *jnana* yoga.

The first chapter fully clarifies such concepts as Brahman and *Sachchidananda*, the involution of the Divine in matter, the purpose of the creation, and the psychic being. These explanatory notes serve as the basis of the second chapter in which there is a detailed discussion on knowledge, both discursive and spiritual, and how both have a place in this yoga even though, naturally, it is spiritual knowledge that is the highest. Chapter Three takes up where Chapter Two leaves off, discussing the obstacles in the way of mastering spiritual knowledge. These three chapters are rounded off in Chapter Four with the distinction between passive and active aspects of the path of knowledge.

Chapter Five clearly and succinctly explains Sri Aurobindo's ideas on evolution and involution, and Chapter Six, his theory of *karma* that allows ample room for free will. Throughout the first half of the book, complex, difficult-to-grasp concepts are explained with masterly ease that redounds in the attentive reader's grasp of the material dealt with. It is in the sixth chapter, however, that Dr Orton rises above herself in explicating the concept of *karma*, where she discusses ordinary ideas of *karma* as against Sri Aurobindo's.

The seventh chapter discusses the richness of the Integral Yoga. The richness is in its mutual accommodation of the three paths of the Integral Yoga, viz., the paths of knowledge, work, and love or devotion. Further, the Integral Yoga, not being a barren Himalayan-cave yoga, makes ample allowance for the appreciation of beauty in all its forms, both in the natural world and in the works of man. Importantly, as Dr Orton here points out, following any one path leads to the same results as following either of the other two.



Chapter Eight delves deep into the Aurobindonian idea of sacrifice in this yoga, emphasizing a conscious sacrifice made to the Divine with devotion. The author speaks at first of the Divine's sacrifice through the descent of the Purusha, and the answering sacrifice of the manifestation to the Divine. This leads to answers on the nature of integral offering, and how one starts on the high road to transformation.

The brief ninth chapter titled "Faith, Anxiety, and Offering" describes the mantra of the Integral Yoga, "Remember and Offer", while also pointing out some difficulties in sincerely following this mantra. In the following chapter, Dr Orton looks at the body's role in the Integral

Yoga as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. Unlike many other schools of yoga, the human body is not considered an impediment to yogic progress, but is to be seen as wholly a part of the being that must be divinized, just as other parts of the human being must be.

The final chapter on the individual and his relations with the collectivity is illustrated in the form of two beautiful stories told by Dr Orton. Essentially, the individual's first task is to find his true self – not his egoistic self, but his psychic being – and live life from that inner poise.

The value of this book lies in its dual role as both appetizer and dessert: it may profitably be read before delving into Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works; on the other hand, it proves equally useful for those who are already familiar with the original writings because it neatly wraps up in a handful of chapters a wide range of concepts spread across their many volumes. It begins with a presentation of fundamental Aurobindonian precepts and proceeds to enlighten the reader on the ideas and practices that naturally flow from those ideas.

This volume comes with a bonus that is not always found in books of a similar type, for there is a sense of the author's own thoughts and perspectives as a practitioner of the Integral Yoga that automatically seeps through to the reader in these essays. For example, she asseverates in the very first essay that without a clear idea of what reality is, we cannot know how to approach the world. This insight at once appeals to those *sadhaks* whose natures are more intellectual, who seek answers to questions of the mind before being convinced that they are moving in the right direction. Again, in explicating *karma*, there are several paragraphs that give us a window into the author's mind.

Necessarily, the material Dr Orton has to deal with is abstruse; it is to her credit that she has packaged the interrelated concepts in a progression that helps to ease the struggle in understanding them. One wishes that she would consider taking up for *karma* yoga and *bhakti* yoga what she has done for *jnana* yoga in this volume.

—Sivakumar Elambooran

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

Excerpt from *Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on Reality and Other Essays*

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It [the supermind] is all the mastery and knowledge that one could ever seek and occurs through unity with the Divine and an integral realization of Sachchidananda...[wherein] one attains oneness with all, unites one's will with the Divine's will, and realizes the Divine as oneself. Sri Aurobindo succinctly summarizes how the integral knowledge offers fulfillment: "The Knowledge brings also the Power and the Joy. 'How shall he be deluded, whence shall he have sorrow who sees everywhere the Oneness?'" Sri Aurobindo thus describes the way in which mankind's impulsion for knowledge and mastery, when carried to its conclusion in an integral spiritual knowledge and realization, leads to the fulfillment of the being and the complete and lasting solution to the problems of human life.