

Recent Publications

Saba

*Keep faith quietude openness to divine power.
Ashirvada.*

Keep faith quietude openness to divine power. Ashirvada.

This message, with the facsimile of Sri Aurobindo's handwriting, is one of the previously unpublished items which appear in the recently released independent book *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, the latest volume to come out as part of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. In this issue we highlight this important work, which includes letters and messages selected from Sri Aurobindo's extensive correspondence with members of the Ashram and disciples living outside the Ashram between November 1926 and November 1950.

The books in our review section are wide-ranging: essays on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, a study of his early diaries in which he recorded the progress of his experiences and experiments in yoga, a collection of articles on educational theory and

practice, essays and reflections based on a study of the Mother's prayers and meditations, and a prison narrative by Barindra Kumar Ghose.

CONTENTS

A Magnificent Compendium:	
<i>Letters on Himself and the Ashram</i>	2
Recent Publications	7
Ordering Information	10
Reviews	
The Tale of My Exile	11
In the Mother's Light	13
Sri Aurobindo: The Poet, <i>Yogi</i> and Philosopher	15
Education: Philosophy and Practice	17
Seven Quartets of Becoming	19

A MAGNIFICENT COMPENDIUM

Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Himself and the Ashram

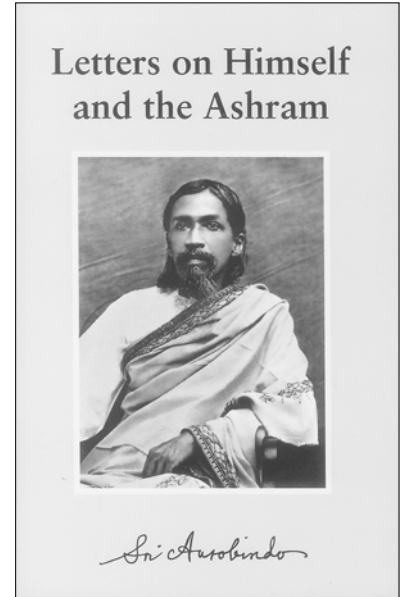
At the end of his fourteen-year sojourn in England, it was on 6 February 1893 that Sri Aurobindo, aged 21, set foot on the soil of India at Mumbai and reported for work at the Secretariat of the Baroda administration on the 8th of the same month. We see that the very next month he began translating Vyasa's Mahabharata into English. This writer wondered when he had the time to master the ancient Sanskrit well enough to take up such an epic task. While answering a query on learning languages he casually replied that he learnt Sanskrit by reading the Naladamayanti episode in the Mahabharata "with minute care several times". I do not know if the statement solves the mystery, but it certainly tells us what reading with "minute care" could achieve. It is a different question how many scholars could exercise such minute care that must include an uncanny capacity for concentration, learning at one go what would probably require a hundred rounds ordinarily.

The 35th volume of Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works, entitled *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, which has lately been made available as an independent book, satisfies innumerable curiosities of those interested in his life and Yoga as well as his comments and asides on men, matters, issues and contemporary situations. This is a comprehensive compilation of letters selected from a vast epistolary range of the Master's replies to seekers both in and outside the Ashram, spread over the period beginning November 1926 and running up to November 1950. But the letters also contain much information on the pre-1926 phases of Sri Aurobindo's life.

The content is arranged in five parts and each part is divided into several sections for the reader to conveniently locate the information he is looking for, a valuable aid for a seeker from both factual and intellectual points of view. Part One of the volume contains remarks made by him on his life and works, his contemporaries and contemporary events.

Many of these letters on himself were written in reply to specific questions put to him or by way of removing misconceptions about his life, his Yoga and his writings. Part Two, comprised of letters on his own sadhana both before and after coming to Pondicherry, devotes one section to "Sadhana in Pondicherry, 1910–1950", with subsections on the early years from 1910–1926, the Realisation of 24 November 1926, the sadhana during 1927–1929, general observations on the sadhana of the 1930s, the Supramental Yoga and other spiritual paths, as well as his observations on the state of his sadhana during 1931–1947. Part Three includes letters on the question of avatarhood and his role as a spiritual leader and guide and Part Four on his ashram and the sadhana practised there, concluding with a short section on the Ashram and the outside world. Part Five comprises mantras and messages written by Sri Aurobindo for the benefit of his disciples.

Many of these letters – but not all – had been published earlier in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and the Mother* (1953), *Letters on Yoga* (1970), and *On Himself: Compiled from Notes and Letters* (1972). Unless further research brings something more to light, we can be reasonably certain that this compilation and the volume published earlier entitled *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, when taken together, place before us all the biographical and historical source materials Sri Aurobindo cared to write.



About *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*

IN THE FIRST HALF of this new volume, Sri Aurobindo speaks about his own life and work and *sadhana*; in the second half he tells his disciples how to practise his Yoga while living in the Ashram. There are 845 pages of letters, arranged by subject in groups, with the letters in each group placed in chronological order.

What makes this book special? First, about one third of the letters are “new”—new in the sense that they were not published in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, the original set of his collected works issued around 1972. In the forty years since then, many new letters have come to light and are presented here.

Second, whenever possible and appropriate, the question or comment of the disciple is given along with Sri Aurobindo’s reply. Knowing the context of the letter often helps one to understand the reply more clearly and deeply. It also makes the reading more enjoyable. Through the question-and-answer exchanges we catch a glimpse of the relationship between Guru and disciple. We see the Master at work, dealing with each disciple differently, guiding each in his own way through the vicissitudes of *sadhana*. To the naive young Nagin Doshi, Sri Aurobindo gives simple, straightforward instruction. To the troubled Dilip Kumar Roy, he offers detailed explanation, sympathetic understanding and the affection a father would bestow on his son. With the doubt-ridden Nirodbaran, he indulges in jousting and jesting in an effort to puncture Nirod’s tough hide with a heavy dose of common sense, all in a friendly, playful way.

For these reasons and others, this volume is well worth reading. For students of Sri Aurobindo, the book is a goldmine of authentic information about his life and work; for lovers of Sri Aurobindo, it is a way to grow closer to him. In these letters he has shared his wisdom with us and shown his concern for us, that we may better be able to follow his path and find the Divine.

Bob Zwicker
Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research Library

Profound wisdom is interspersed with matter-of-fact information, and often such diversities are aligned and buoyed up by exquisite jolts of witticism. An example: someone wrote to Sri Aurobindo about an item of news emanating from London and published in *The Hindu* that a deputation was on its way from London to Pondicherry to ask Sri Aurobindo “to take the helm of politics as a successor to Gandhi”. The report further said that Sri Aurobindo knew 35 languages and had written 500 books. And this was what Sri Aurobindo wrote to his correspondent on 2 September 1934:

I have read the wonderful screed from London. Truly I am more marvellous than I thought, 35 languages and 500 books! As to the seven pilgrims, they must be the men of the Gita’s type, *nishkama-karmis*, to be prepared to come all these thousands of miles for nothing.

At times profundity smiles as sound common sense: “Can a Muthu or a sadhak ever be a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised?” is a question to which the answer is, “What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu!”

There are chance revelations of things one would not ordinarily know, the reason behind his giving any message, for example. Upon a request from the editor of *Mother India* (then published from Mumbai and, though reflecting Sri Aurobindo's views on different issues, not a journal of the Ashram) for a message on the occasion of his birthday in 1949, he wrote:

I have been trying to get you informed without success about the impossibility of your getting your expected Message from me for the 15th August. I had and have no intention of writing a Message for my birthday this year. *It is psychologically impossible for me to manufacture one to command; an inspiration would have to come* and it is highly improbable that any will come in this short space of time; I myself have no impulse towards it. [Italics are the reviewer's.]

While the light he throws on the terminology used in his writings is an invaluable aid to the readers of his works on Yoga, his observations on spiritual figures in India, European writers on occultism, public figures in India and Europe, as well as on Indian affairs and the world situation in the 1930s and 1940s give us a new insight into recent history and some of those who played important roles in it. Hauntingly unforgettable is his answer to a question put to him in 1935 if in his scheme of things he definitely saw a free India: "That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her independence?...Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous."

Invaluable guidelines for the inmates of the Ashram include: "It is not necessary to answer everything that appears in the newspapers. Nor is it necessary to take the outside public into confidence as to what is or is not going on in the Ashram."

In response to an inmate's complaint that some neighbourhood boys were creating a nuisance by systematically jeering and throwing things in the vicinity of the Ashram, he wrote: "It is in the nature of things that the ignorance and smallness of these low minds should push them to these petty manifestations of malevolence and ill-will. The best thing is to remain unmoved."

Last but not least, the volume is a guide to the analysis and solution of several practical problems one encounters in the course of one's sadhana. What could be of interest to a wider readership are extracts from his explanations of lights, visions and dreams, and also his comments on the traditional recitation of mantras and of mantras in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

This writer has never known any other volume containing topics so diverse in their range and yet making such absorbing reading. Indeed, a compendium that cannot but develop our insight and widen our perception of the occult as well the apparent.

— Manoj Das

Shri Manoj Das is a well-known writer. Awarded the Padma Shri for his distinguished contribution to literature, he is also the recipient of the Saraswati Samman and Sahitya Akademi awards.

See page 7 for more information on the book.



A view of the Meditation House in the early 1930s.
Sri Aurobindo lived in his rooms on the upper floor for twenty-three years.

From *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, page 274:

Sadhana on the Physical Level

Last night during my meditation I saw a cat – probably one of the Mother’s cats, the one which sleeps on the staircase – come and enter the room where I was meditating. But I at once opened my eyes. Would you very kindly let me know the meaning of this cat and why I opened my eyes.

If it is the cat Bushy, she has some strange connection with the siddhi in the physical consciousness. It was she who ushered us into our present house running before us into each room. The change to this house marked the change from the sadhana on the vital to the sadhana on the physical level.¹ 7 July 1936

¹ Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved into 28 rue François Martin, the “Meditation House”, on 7 February 1927.—Ed.

Selections from *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*

From The Realisation of January 1908

Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being—the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana,—but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, "It should be easy for you as you are a poet."

18 November 1936

*

I don't understand why Lele told you that because you are a poet, sadhana will be easy for you through poetry, or why you quote it either. Poetry is itself such a hard job and sadhana through poetry—well, the less said the better! Or perhaps he saw within your soul the Sri Aurobindo of future Supramental glory?

Because I told him I wanted to do Yoga in order to get a new inner Yogic consciousness for life and action, not for leaving life. So he said that. A poet writes from an inner source, not from the external mind, he is moved by inspiration to write, i.e. he writes what a greater Power writes through him. So the Yogi Karmachari has to act from an inner source, to derive his thoughts and movements from that, to be inspired and impelled by a greater Power which acts through him. 23 May 1938

* * * * *

Work and Sadhana

We cannot approve of your idea—there are already enough intellectuals in the Asram and the room-keeping intellectual is not a type whose undue propagation we are disposed to encourage. Outside work is just what is necessary to keep the equilibrium of the nature and you certainly need it for that purpose. Also your presence in the D.R. [*Dining Room*] is indispensable. For the rest instead of getting vexed with X or Y you should seek the cause of these things in yourself—that is always the true rule for a sadhak. You are sometimes at your best and then things go on very well; but sometimes you are not at all at your best and then these misunderstandings arise. The remedy therefore is to be at your best always—not to be in your room always, but to be in your best and therefore your true self always. 15 May 1934

* * * * *

A mantra written by Sri Aurobindo

Let my Peace be always with you. Let
^{your} ~~the~~ mind be calm and open; ^{let your} ~~the~~ vital nature
be calm and ^{responsive} ~~open~~; let your
physical consciousness be
a quiet and exact instrument, calm in
action and in silence. Let there be ^{my} Light
and ^{Power and} Peace upon ~~these~~ you; let there be
^{Power and} ever ^{Light and} Peace.

Let my Peace be always with you. Let your mind be calm and open; let your vital nature be calm and responsive; let your physical consciousness be a quiet and exact instrument; calm in action and in silence. Let there be my Light and Power and Peace upon you; let there be ever Power and Light and Peace.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Letters on Himself and the Ashram

Selected Letters on His Outer and Inner Life, His Path of Yoga and the Practice of Yoga in His Ashram

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

858 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-952-5, Rs 280

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book brings together letters written by Sri Aurobindo between 1926 and 1950 that fall into four broad subject areas: his outer life, his writings, his contemporaries, and contemporary events; his inner life before and after his arrival in Pondicherry; his role as a spiritual leader and guide; and his ashram and the *sadhana* practised there. The fifth part of the book contains mantras and messages Sri Aurobindo wrote for the benefit of his disciples.

Many of the letters appeared earlier in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953) and *On Himself: Compiled from Notes and Letters* (1972). The volume also contains a fairly large number of letters formerly included in *Letters on Yoga* (1970), a few letters from *Letters on the Mother*, and many newly selected items from the 1926–1950 corpus of letters. Whenever possible, the letters are framed contextually and historically by including the question or comment of the correspondent and the date of the letter. Together with the documents published in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, these letters constitute nearly all the surviving biographical and historical source materials that Sri Aurobindo wrote.

See article on page 2



To Be a True Leader

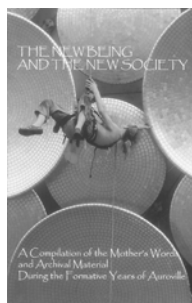
— Selections from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

39 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-318-4, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



The New Being and the New Society

— A Compilation of the Mother's Words and Archival Material during the Formative Years of Auroville

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo

International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville

180 pp, Rs 200

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

During the early years of Auroville, which was founded in 1968, the Mother was engaged in many aspects of the town's development. The aim of this book is to present a historical view, through the collection and grouping of documents, notes, conversations, messages, and reports, either in the Mother's words or from disciples who worked closely with her on the project. Among the themes explored are the Mother's guidelines for work, economic activities to support the township, the organisation of life in Auroville – internal and external –, and the relationship with the local villagers. Some archival material is published here for the first time.

Deliberations on The Life Divine: Volume II (Book I: Chapters VII-XII)

Chapterwise Summary Talks

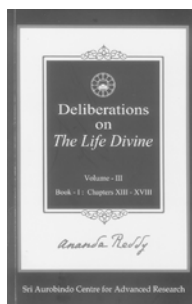
— Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

179 pp, ISBN 978-81-901891-9-4, Rs 225

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



This book is a transcribed and edited version of talks delivered by the author on chapters seven to twelve of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. Dr Reddy's approach is to

explain the main philosophical arguments presented by Sri Aurobindo, using simple language and illustrative instances. This volume includes a look at the problems of pain, suffering, and evil as explained by Sri Aurobindo in his chapters on "Delight of Existence". The author has kept intact the direct, expository tone of the talks, making this an easily approachable book. Each chapter studies the main arguments in brief and is followed by lecture notes that encapsulate the contents in outline form.

Deliberations on *The Life Divine*: Volume III (Book I: Chapters XIII-XVIII)

Chapterwise Summary Talks

— Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

160 pp, ISBN 979-81-901891-0-0, Rs 205

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book is a transcribed and edited version of talks delivered by the author on chapters thirteen to eighteen of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. Using simple language and illustrations from everyday life, Dr Reddy introduces the main philosophical arguments presented by Sri Aurobindo in these chapters, which deal with such ideas and concepts as *maya*, the supramental consciousness, and the divine soul. The author has kept intact the direct, expository tone of the talks, making this an easily approachable book. Each chapter studies the main arguments in brief and is followed by lecture notes that encapsulate the contents in outline form.

Journey to Oneness

— Martha S. G. Orton

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

92 pp, ISBN 979-81-901891-1-7, Rs 230

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This short work begins with the philosophical basis for understanding the concept of Oneness, explained by Sri Aurobindo as the inherent reality of the universe, first expressed in the Vedas as the truth of Brahman. It goes on to discuss Sri Aurobindo's explanation of how humanity derived its sense of separateness and how it can move from this false perception to a truer knowledge of reality through the evolution of consciousness. The gradual unification of the being around the psychic and the growing sense of oneness with the Divine are dual movements in the spiritual journey that moves forward on the path best suited to each individual's nature.

In the Mother's Light

— Rishabhchand

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

383 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-913-6, Rs 220

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The essays and reflections collected in this volume trace the broad outlines of the Mother's spiritual

experiences, primarily through a deep reading and study of her *Prayers and Meditations*. The author writes about her mission on earth to prepare humanity for the fulfilment of its highest aspirations and a complete identification with the Divine consciousness. Essays on such subjects as the psychic being, sincerity, service, and yogic action look at some of the basic concepts of the Integral Yoga in the light of the Mother's words and experiences, and five essays towards the end of the book emphasise the convergence of vision existing between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother even before they first met in 1914. The book was first published in 1951 and revised and enlarged in 1967.

See review on page 12

Seven Quartets of Becoming

A Transformative Yoga Psychology Based on the Diaries of Sri Aurobindo

— Debashish Banerji

Publisher: Nalanda International, Los Angeles, USA, and D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India

441 pp, ISBN 978-81-246-0626-1, Rs 580

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Soon after his arrival in Pondichery in 1910, Sri Aurobindo began a diary in which he recorded the progress of his experiences and experiments in yoga in terms of seven lines of transformative practice, which he called the *sapta chatustaya* (loosely translated as the Seven Quartets). The diaries, written for his personal use and often in a type of shorthand following his own classification, were published many years later in two volumes as *Record of Yoga*. Banerji outlines the system comprising these seven aspects of yogic practice – peace, power, knowledge, body, being, action, and integration –, pointing out correlations and elaborations in some of Sri Aurobindo's later writings, such as *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Mother*, and his last written prose work, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. He also brings into focus modern streams of psychological philosophy and firmly situates the system presented in the Seven Quartets as a transformational yoga psychology.

See review on page 18

Anandamath

— Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

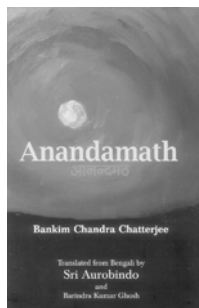
Publisher: Ashir Prakashan, Saharanpur

203 pp, ISBN 978-81-85289-13-7, Rs 200

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The famous Bengali novel *Anandamath* was first published in 1882. It is set in Bengal during the famine



of 1770 and tells the story of an armed band of *Sannyasis* who lead a rebellion against the British East India Company. The book later became a symbol for the struggle for independence and its well-known hymn *Bande Mataram* a rallying cry for the freedom movement. Bankim's writing was much admired by Sri Aurobindo, and his translation

of the Prologue and the first thirteen chapters of Part I of *Anandamath* first appeared in the *Karmayogin*. The rest of the work was translated by his brother Barindra. This book is a reprint of an earlier edition which contained both their translations.

From the Near to the Far

Essays in Response to some Aurobindonian Concepts and Creative Modes

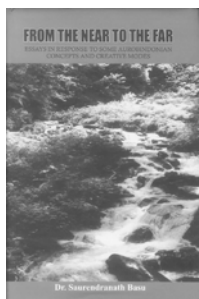
— Dr Saurendranath Basu

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Education Centre, Habra

194 pp, Rs 250

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Hard Cover



The essays in this collection deal with a range of subjects, including studies on Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* and his long poem *Ilion*, and related literary themes, mostly concerned with poetry. Several comparative essays are devoted to

the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore; others touch upon the spiritual vision of Tagore, Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo. A few essays are concerned with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of aesthetics as well as the integration of education and spirituality as fundamental to the evolution of consciousness.

The Mother: Terrace Darshan 1965–1973 (DVD)

— Photographer: Sudha Sundaram

Publisher: Sudha Sundaram, Pondicherry

Rs 300

Size: 14x12 cm

Binding: CD



This DVD presentation includes 106 photographs of the Mother taken during her Terrace Darshans from 1965 to 1973,

accompanied by the Mother's organ music and several of her readings from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. When the Mother gave Darshan from the terrace on the second floor, photographs were taken from a vantage point atop a building just across the road. Prints were made from the entire set of negatives and sent to the Mother, who then chose the photographs she approved for distribution.

OTHER LANGUAGES

GERMAN

Unsterbliche Weisheit aus alten Zeiten in Mythen, Märchen, ägyptischen Bildern und im Thomasevangelium — Medhananda

Rs 250

ISBN 978-81-86413-48-7

Sri Aurobindo Kam Zu Mir — Dilip Kumar Roy

Rs 1250

ISBN 978-3-922800-19-4

RUSSIAN

Kak Pobeditj Zhelanie — Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Rs 90

ISBN 978-5-7938-0057-0

Vzroslenie c Materiyyu — Tara Jauhar

Rs 200

ISBN 978-81-88847-33-4

SPANISH

La Vida Divina - Libro III (Fundación Centro Sri Aurobindo) : El conocimiento integral y el renacimiento — Sri Aurobindo

Rs 1300

ISBN 978-84-935352-8-5

Ensayos sobre la Gita (Libro Primero)

— Sri Aurobindo

Rs 750

ISBN 978-84-936142-5-6

TURKISH

Yeryüzünde Süpraakısal Tezahür ve On Üç Siir
— Sri Aurobindo

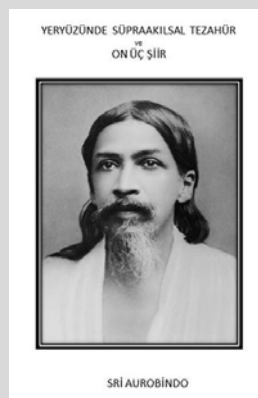
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry

114 pp, ISBN 979-81-7058-013-2, Rs 375

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

*The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth
and thirteen poems.*



BENGALI

Sri Aurobindo Charitamrita : Shri Anirbaner bhumika
saha — Raghunandan Das Rs 70

Matri Anweshane — Sushil Chandra Barman Roy
hc Rs 170

Antaranga — Samir Kanta Gupta Rs 75

Sadhan Path — Debabrata Majumdar Rs 5
ISBN 978-81-7060-319-1

Alaksher Teerbhumi : Sri Aurobindo-Srimar Bhabana o
Srishtir Kichhu Anusanga — Saurendranath Basu
hc Rs 250

Mahabiswer Mahabismay Rabindranath O Sri Aurobindo
— Dr Jaganmay Bandyopadhyay hc Rs 100

GUJARATI

Jeevant Vachano — Compiled from the works of Sri
Aurobindo and the Mother Rs 120

Sri Aravindana Sannidhyaman Baar Varsh — Nirodbaran
Rs 120

HINDI

Prarthana Diary : Sri Ma ki “Prarthana aur Dhyān” se anudit
aur sankalit Rs 100

Yogasiddhi ke Char Sadhan — Sri Aurobindo Rs 30
ISBN 978-81-89576-33-2

Vyaktitva Vikas aur Srimad Bhagavadgita : Sri Aravind
ke alok mein — Dr Suresh Chandra Sharma Rs 25
ISBN 978-81-7060-324-5

ORIYA

Samarpana O Bhagabatkripa — Compiled from the works
of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother Rs 20

ISBN 978-81-7060-314-6

TAMIL

Savitri Enum Gnana Ragasiyam — Annai Ohm
Bhavadarini hc Rs 350

ISBN 978-81-8201-109-0

TELUGU

Paratparam — Conversations with the Mother; recollected
by Mona Sarkar Rs 80

ORDERING INFORMATION FOR BOOKS

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

In India: Place your order through our website as indicated above. Alternatively, to calculate the order value manually, add on 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs 30 towards postage and forwarding. Payment can be made by bank draft favouring SABDA payable at Pondicherry, money order, or credit card online via our website, on receipt of which the books will be sent by registered post/courier.

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

**SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry 605 002, India**

Tel. +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656

Fax +91 413 222 3328

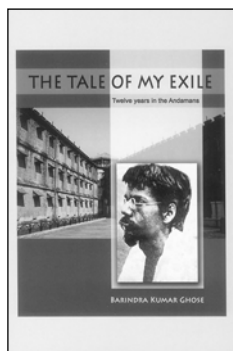
Email mail@sabda.in

Web <http://www.sabda.in>

BOOK REVIEWS

The Tale of My Exile *Twelve Years in the Andamans*

— Barindra Kumar Ghose
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo
Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry
143 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-
991-4, Rs 95
Size: 12x18 cm
Binding: Soft Cover



Barindra Ghose's *The Tale of My Exile* describes his prison experience as a revolutionary who plotted to overthrow British rule in India. Barin was one of the chief accused in the Alipore Bomb Case, the 1908 cause célèbre which marked both the peak and the collapse of the first and most radical wave of the Indian freedom struggle. This phase lasted from 1905 to 1908 and was a most fecund seedtime in the growth of the sense of a national identity in the Indian people. It was during this period that the Indian elephant first roused itself to face the British lion and trumpeted abroad its claim to freedom and self-determination. Also at this time, the methods of non-cooperation, boycott and *swadeshi*, later used so successfully to dynamise the Indian masses and accelerate the freedom process, were first introduced and put into practice. The book sheds light on the sacrifices made by these young revolutionaries, and our thanks are due to Sachidananda Mohanty, who wrote the introduction, for unearthing this book and getting it reprinted.

The tale begins at Alipore Jail. After a whole year as an undertrial prisoner Barin had been convicted and given the death penalty. He chose to appeal and the sentence was commuted to transportation for life. The curtain rises on 11 December 1909, the day on which Barin and six fellow-offenders began their journey from the Alipore Jail in Calcutta to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans. The unfailing optimism of youth, ignorance of the terrors awaiting them, relief at being united with their friends and the excitement of novel circumstances make for a heady mix: the mood of the prisoners is extraordinarily upbeat. The prospect of leaving their homeland for an unknown island from which they may never return does not deflate them. To see them carry on, laughing, singing and chatting, anybody would think they were off on a pleasure jaunt.

The second chapter is a physical description of the Andamans. This is possibly to share with us their wild beauty, but mainly gives a concrete feel of the place, which was important in Barin's context. For most people, the Andamans were a remote, almost mythical spot beyond the Black Waters, of which nothing was known apart from sinister rumours which circulated periodically.

The next chapter introduces us to the prison and the typical sequences in a convict's life. After fifteen days in quarantine the prisoners enter the prison and are allotted work, varying in difficulty depending on each one's physical condition. Once the prison part of their sentence is served, they are sent out to the different settlements on the island and given work there. They are assigned responsibilities and positions in the prison if the officials consider them fit.

In the fourth chapter, the description of the idyllic surroundings of Port Blair Harbour as Barin's ship comes into port charms us, and we are lulled into forgetting the cruel circumstances, until he pulls us back into reality by describing the grim Cellular Jail. The building and the security arrangements are described in some detail, as also the process of becoming an inmate. Chapter Five deals with incidents in the jail and the eccentricities and perversions of convict officials, particularly those of Khoyedad Khan, who was the Petty Officer put in charge of Barin's group.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight describe a strike by the prisoners to protest against the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the authorities. These three chapters and the eleventh are described as "Upen's story" by Barin, in a footnote on page 68. At this point one wonders how the original book was put together, as there are many overlaps between the material presented in Upen's story and the rest of the book. The similarities between Chapter Nine and Chapter Eleven are striking. Both of them present lists of grievances that detail how the prisoners got a particularly bad deal in the Andamans. The style of the chapters forming Upen's story is noticeably different. Has *The Tale of My Exile* been compiled from two distinct sources with no attempt at making the work seamless? The publisher's note, preface and introduction are silent about this. They only say that

the book first appeared in Bengali, and then this translation was published in 1922.

Barin acknowledges his debt to Upendranath Bannerjee in the opening chapter, saying he will be guided by him when his own memory falters, and his readers are “requested to consider this tale of the Andamans as the joint utterance of two tongues”. But this statement and the footnote mentioned above are not sufficient to explain why Chapters Six, Seven and Eight are written from Upen’s point of view rather than Barin’s. Indeed, the style of these chapters is so different as to stand apart even in translation. This naturally brings us to the question of whether the translations were done separately, possibly by different translators. For one thing, this would explain the mystery of why Jagannath is spelt correctly in Chapter Six but in an anglicized version in Chapter One. In the circumstances, one can only hope that future editions will carry more information regarding its compilation.

Chapters Nine and Ten carry the social message. Here Barin describes and analyses the prison system and points out its flaws. According to his observation, fifteen percent of those convicted are innocent, and seventy-five percent are casual criminals, that is to say first-timer offenders, often victims of circumstance. Only ten percent are hardened criminals. To allow these to mix with the rest is disastrous, causing a systematic and inevitable spreading of corruption and degeneracy. Barin enumerates the worst aspects of prison life at the Cellular Jail:

1. There is the contagion of company and example.
2. Incapacity to do hard labour makes one dependent on the tougher, more experienced convicts.
3. Prison rules based on brutality break one’s morale and make one vulnerable.
4. Addictions compromise one’s position.
5. Forced celibacy can turn one into a brute.
6. Want of a religious life makes one desolate.
7. There is no incentive for healthy habits.
8. Sometimes the terms of punishment are limitless, thereby becoming meaningless.
9. The jail officials are heartless.
10. Port Blair is the home of diseases. Unhygienic surroundings added to unhygienic lifestyles make a deadly combination.

The Tale of My Exile is largely impersonal reportage and social commentary laced with doses of satirical

humour. But the last chapter is an exception. It is personal, introspective, revelatory. First, Barin shares his feelings at being condemned to death. His intense love for life makes him pray to God to spare him. But at the same time a part of him is utterly calm and quietly content. He describes his own being as one house where a sombre funeral and a joyous festivity are taking place at the same time. The psychological position of ideological prisoners is complex. The suffering is very real and possibly more acutely felt on account of the heightened sensitivity characteristic of this type. But the experience is nuanced by the fact of self-infliction; it is something that the person knew all along to be a possible, even a likely outcome of his course of action, something that promotes his cause. “A pain that we invited on ourselves, however lacerating, could not naturally overwhelm us.”

Of all the privations of prison life, Barin experienced want of company as the greatest. It was indeed a refinement of cruelty to lodge a group of friends close to one another, make them walk together, eat together, work together, and yet order them not to communicate with one another. Letter-writing also was severely controlled. Convicts were allowed to write home and to receive news from home only once a year. Their access to books was limited. In spite of such circumstances, Barin’s soul did not cower, his spirit did not flag. The last paragraph of the book brings out very clearly the firmly rooted poise and deep, calm introspection of this beloved son of Mother India:

And yet our delight was not small even in the midst of such sorrows. For it is a thing that belongs to one’s own self. One may gather it as much as one likes from the inexhaustible fund that is within and drink of it to one’s heart’s content. Not that, however, the lashes of sorrow were an illusion to us. Even the Maya of Vedanta did not always explain them away, so often had they a solemn ring of reality about them. But a tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storm and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the supreme realities.

— Sunam Mukherjee
Sunam reads proof at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.

In the Mother's Light

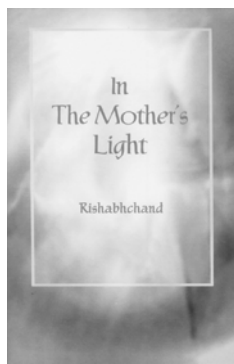
— Rishabhchand

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Publication Department,
Pondicherry

383 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-913-6, Rs 220

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



Our secular lives and the society we live in always seem to be alternating between high points of achievement and precipitous decline. The ideologies that have guided us so far have had limited success and have subsequently either had to alter course or have been completely rejected and replaced by new theories. It is becoming increasingly clear that it is not forms of government, economic models, ethical and moral rules of conduct, not even policies of sustainable development that are going to solve the problems of this planet. No one knows for sure where we are headed. Religion provides us with partial answers but leaves many questions unaddressed.

What happens to our souls once they have merged with the Divine, what becomes of our terrestrial life and the world that we live in? What should be the ultimate goal of the individual and the ideal of humanity? What is the purpose and meaning of our existence? These and other related questions, and specifically why human nature needs a radical change, and how we can bring this about by turning to the spiritual wisdom of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, are what Rishabhchand explores in minute detail in *In the Mother's Light*, a collection of essays first published in 1951, and later revised and enlarged in 1967.

A practical handbook, it can serve as a reference manual for neophytes as well as advanced *sadhaks*. Practitioners of the Integral Yoga will find both the format and the content of the book extremely useful, specifically the detailed table of contents as well as the exhaustive and insightful analyses of the Mother's spiritual experiences as recorded in *Prayers and Meditations*, her personal diary comprising 350 prayers written between November 1912 and October 1937. The concepts and nuances of each topic in the book are first delineated in lucid discourses based on the experiences and teachings of the Mother, supported in

many instances with short, interesting anecdotes, then weighed and counterweighed against their opposing arguments with references to both Indian and Western thought, and finally concluded with a recapitulation of the salient points.

Through in-depth reflections on such subjects as peace, love, self-surrender, sincerity, asceticism, the mind, the utility and the limitations of reason, dreams, the conquest of desire, yogic action, money and its proper use, the nature and true instrumentality of the body, and divine union, one discovers three main themes resonating throughout the book:

- a) The very defects of human nature are actually pointers to that which needs to be changed for the evolution of an ideal state of human perfection in all aspects of mind, life and body;
- b) The Mother's role on earth as a representative of the Supreme, the interface between the two apparently unbridgeable dualities of Truth and Ignorance, the catalyst that will accelerate man's discovery of his true mission and purpose on earth; and
- c) The Mother's yoga aims not only at realising the psychic or the Divine within oneself, at establishing contact with the Supreme Being at the highest level, but also in bringing down that consciousness here on earth, transforming life and matter and qualifying our thoughts and activities with the Divine Presence.

The author points out that the atavistic tendencies in man's nature as well as the "forces of resistance" were designed by Providence to help him understand what needs to be changed and guide him to a higher life.

The author explains that the progress of man, spectacular in its material achievements, has, however, not met with similar success insofar as his nature is concerned, because he still remains a welter of contradictions and disparate elements. While he strives for peace and harmony and to express all that is noble within himself, his penchant for greed, cruelty and perversity pulls him in the opposite direction. He is like Sisyphus, the Greek mythological character who

is forever doomed to roll a huge rock to the top of a hill only to see it falling back down from its own weight. The author, however, points out that these atavistic tendencies in man's nature as well as the "forces of resistance" were designed by Providence to help him understand what needs to be changed and guide him to a higher life. There are several essays that enumerate and deal with the nature of these defects, their origins, their deceptive forms and disguises, how they need to be tackled in order to transform them into positive energies, and finally psychological pitfalls that one can expect to encounter during this long and arduous process.

At this point the author makes the practical observation that the difficulty man faces because of his inherent contradictory nature is rendered even more intractable because defects once eliminated from the conscious nature often rise up from the subconscious and the inconscient, two lower levels of awareness dealt with at length in the book, to hound him again and again, leading to a regression. The only method that the individual has at his disposal is a sincerity of aspiration and an integral self-surrender to the Divine Mother who has come down on earth as a representative from the Supreme to lift not only a few select souls but all of humanity out of its present predicament. In some moving passages of her prayers, we read how her presence on earth is revealed to her as a necessity not for herself but for humanity. She had from a very early age already established a deep connection with the highest consciousness, but her endeavour and the dedication of her entire life, like that of Sri Aurobindo, has been to bring that consciousness down to this earth for the benefit of all.

The author reiterates again and again that this unique aspect of the Mother's as well as Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the Integral Yoga, is something that has not been attempted by anyone else. Although, as he points out, there is mention of it in the concept of the Chatushpada Brahman of the Upanishads, no such endeavour has been postulated by any other school of thought, much less recorded by mystics or saints in any part of the globe. To realise the Divine Consciousness at the highest possible level has been the goal set by many spiritual seekers and religions, often to the detriment and neglect of the secular life. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, however, have raised the bar, arguing for the inevitability of divinising life and matter,

transforming the very cells of our body and creating the passage to a new species that will be "what man is to the animal". Anything else remains unsatisfactory and incomplete.

The last five chapters of this book deal with an interesting and unique insight from the author. He points out that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had always shared this same goal of a divine life here on earth, even before their meeting on 29 March 1914. He quotes extensively from their writings prior to their meeting to illustrate his point under four headings: 1) The Divine Union, 2) Physical Transformation through service in an integral surrender, 3) Conquest of the Subconscious and the Inconscient, and 4) The Divine Manifestation and the Divine Life.

The book is a testimony to the erudition and scholarship of the author and is recommended to all who have chosen to lead a higher life in the Light of the Mother.

— Gautam Chatterjee

Gautam, who studied at SAICE and earned a master's degree from the Institut Universitaire d'Études du Développement in Geneva, has worked as an interior designer, furniture maker and builder for the last twenty years. Interested in history, economics, sociology, metaphysics, and the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he also teaches history at SAICE.

The legendary Radha is the very personification of an absolute and integral love for the Divine....Indian tradition records no more unreserved and joyous self-giving, nor is there any parallel to it to be found in the spiritual traditions of the world. But it was a love that bore no cross except that of the Lover's playful self-hiding; it had not to burn, bright and steady, in the congealed darkness and bleak blasts of the Inconscient. It did not, besides, incarnate any specific Will of the Divine to a New Manifestation or a New Creation. It was not charged with a world-mission, or called upon to a supreme holocaust. The Mother's *Radha's Prayer* reveals the same psychic texture, an identical integrality of self-offering, but with a remarkable difference. Her love is the supernal self-Force of the Divine, redemptive and creative; it bears in itself the world-transforming fiat of the Absolute.

In the Mother's Light, p. 330

Sri Aurobindo: The Poet, Yogi and Philosopher

— Essays by Arabinda Basu

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies,
Kolkata, in collaboration with Maha Bodhi Book
Agency

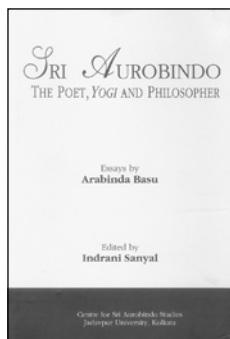
322 pp, ISBN 978-93-80336-19-0, Rs 650

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

We are fortunate indeed to have in print the collection of these essays on Sri Aurobindo by nonagenarian philosopher Arabinda Basu, for which we have the editor, Dr. Indrani Sanyal, and the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, to thank. A professor at the Benares Hindu University from the 1940s, Basu belongs to the great first wave of modern Indian philosophy, when the discipline was in its formative phase in the academy. He was also a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and had the privilege of corresponding directly with the Master on matters of his philosophy. Through the decades, Basu has introduced numerous students to the spiritual philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and is considered one of its foremost exponents. Given this fact, a volume such as this, containing twenty-four essays on Sri Aurobindo and his teaching, particularly his philosophy, is a rare legacy for posterity. These essays span an undisclosed period of time, and are, in some cases, records of talks. Dating these essays would have been very helpful, since their historicity would have given the reader a sense of change or development in ideas or nuances, and a sense of the era in which they were written. As such, this lack of location and temporality makes the essays lose some concreteness, though their content is no less valuable for that.

Sri Aurobindo repeated on occasion that he was not a philosopher by birth or training, but rather a poet and politician. But he attributed his “becoming” a philosopher to yoga: (1) to yogic experience and expression “in terms of the intellect” of the “relations and sequences” of this experience “so that all unites logically together”; and (2) to his conviction that “a yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything.” Basu is careful to point this out, as is Sanyal in her editorial essay. According to Basu, the derivation of philosophy from yogic experience is the hallmark of Indian philosophy, and distinguishes it from its occidental counterpart. It thus characterizes Sri Aurobindo as a



philosopher in the Indian sense of *darshana* and makes him a *darshanika*. In the book’s first essay, the only one dated (2005), “Sri Aurobindo and Philosophy,” Basu locates Sri Aurobindo squarely and exclusively in the tradition of Indian philosophy and takes issue with those who think of him as having consciously

effected a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought. This does not mean that his philosophy excludes the standpoints introduced by Western philosophers. According to Basu, its amazing comprehensiveness is no less Indian, since “Indian philosophy is basically synthetic in nature.” Of course, Sri Aurobindo himself, expressing his intent in writing the *Arya*, wrote that it was “an approach to the highest reconciling truth from the point of view of the Indian mentality and Indian spiritual experience, and Western knowledge has been viewed from that standpoint.”

One may be justified in distinguishing the tradition of Indian *darshana* from Western philosophy through its basis in spiritual experience, but a trenchant divide between the two traditions in an era of planetary integration has its own problems. The development of the discipline of Indian philosophy, in entering the modern knowledge academy, and in addressing international language speakers, finds itself needing, even imperceptibly, to engage dialogically with the framework, methodologies, concerns and content of an existing international discourse, a process which inevitably draws the discipline out of its traditional enclosure into a global becoming. Such a “translation” may be read into Sri Aurobindo’s own writing. Though Basu addresses Sri Aurobindo’s readings into and comments on Western philosophers in this first essay, an eye towards convergent lines or homologous orientations might have helped in the furtherance of such understanding. For example, though Basu acknowledges Sri Aurobindo’s commentary on Heraclitus, he omits Nietzsche from the Western thinkers addressed by Sri Aurobindo. In his essay on the Superman, Sri Aurobindo acknowledges Nietzsche as the originator of this idea in our times. In the commentary on Heraclitus, Sri Aurobindo praises Nietzsche for bringing back into modern philosophy some of the “old dynamism and practical force” of

ancient Greek thinkers and sees his kinship with Heraclitus. Several lineages of modern and contemporary philosophy have acknowledged these contributions of Nietzsche and envision him at the head of new philosophies of human becoming and experience. I am thinking of existentialism, phenomenology, ontology and post-structuralism. Most of these lineages also recognize the kinship Nietzsche bore to Heraclitus and the pre-Socratic Greek thinkers, who spoke in an enigmatic intuitive tongue on the profundities of existence and experience.

The heart of the book is a clear exposition of Sri Aurobindo's own philosophy, with its complex relationship of terms.

This is approached in a number of essays but most comprehensively in the book's longest essay, titled "The Integral Brahman." The Vedantic basis of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is brought out here along with important additions from

later traditions. Distinctions such as that between Vidya (Knowledge) and Avidya (Ignorance); Brahman, Atman, Purusha and Ishwara and their respective executive counterparts, Maya, Prakriti and Shakti; Sacchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), Vijnana (Supermind) and the Vidya-Avidya plane of consciousness (Overmind); the psychic entity and the psychic being, involution and evolution are drawn with sure unambiguity, and the relationships of all these under various circumstances spelled out.

Aside from this, a number of essays constellate Sri Aurobindo's philosophical concepts (or "experience-concepts" as Basu calls them, adopting Sri Aurobindo's terminology from *The Life Divine*) with those belonging to different traditions of India. In this area of comparative Indian philosophy, too, the book excels. What is the relationship of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy to the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Gita, Sankhya, Buddhism, the later schools of Vedantic interpretation such as Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita of various persuasions, Tantra or Saiva Siddhanta, particularly that of the Kashmir Pratyabhijna school? If you would like answers to any of these or similar questions, these essays will provide clear distinctions and pointers for further research.

From these essays one also gets a sense of the vast and teeming forest of Indian philosophy and its development through the ages. One sees, for example, how the concept of Purusha changes, extends itself and evolves through the millennia, and how Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the relative truth of each of these states of consciousness, developing them further, as with the *chaitya purusha* or psychic being, and relating them to each other in an integral cosmology and teleology. In a most interesting essay titled "The Infinite Zero," Basu draws out the primordial relationship between *Sat* and *Asat* in the Upanishads, loosely translated as Being and Non-Being, and shows that this relationship was affirmed by Sri Aurobindo,

who equated the Buddhist *Shunya* with the transcendence of *Sat*. In a hermeneutic act of constructive theology, Basu uses these grounds to see Sri Aurobindo's spiritual realization as including Madhyamika Buddhism, with its equation of Nirvana and

Samsara, and on this basis as well as his will for world transformation, considers Sri Aurobindo a Bodhisattva, in the highest sense of that term.

Another high point in this comparative philosophy is Basu's relating of the three poises of Supermind to the three later Vedantic philosophies, Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita. Though Sri Aurobindo writes of this in *The Life Divine*, Basu's treatment elaborates Sri Aurobindo's ideas and we are led to see why the integral consciousness of Supermind is necessary for humanity to rise into Truth, beyond dissenting pluralities. So long as we dwell within Mind, the Truth can express itself variously in our experience, depending on the status of Supermind reflected in the mind. Such experiences will seem to possess the self-evidence of Truth, yet will be varied and yield exclusive descriptions of noumenon and phenomema and their mutual relationship. This is the foundation of our religious strife, from which we cannot have release except by entry into an integral consciousness, in which all these experiences are seen as simultaneous self-descriptions of Reality, related in specific ways to form possibilities of cosmos.

Developing Sri Aurobindo's affinities, Basu shows the closeness of his philosophy to the Gita and the Tantric Shaivism of the Kashmir Trika or Pratyabhijna school. Yet he also shows how Sri Aurobindo surpasses their conceptions—mainly through the ideas of the cosmic evolution of consciousness, and the descent of Supermind, leading to the divine transformation of mind, life and body in the individual and the manifestation of a new supramental species and a divine life on earth.

Though Basu is not given to flights of poetic fancy in his writing, it cannot be called dry. At its best, there is a high beauty of intuitive economy that aids the concentration of the mind on the world of spiritual ideas. In keeping with Sri Aurobindo's self-understanding as a poet, the essays are richly illustrated with lines of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, most frequently from *Savitri*. All in all, this is a rich harvest of experience-concepts, inviting us to meditate on the transcendent, cosmic and personal psychologies of the Integral Yoga in their highest, deepest and broadest interrelations.

— Debashish Banerji

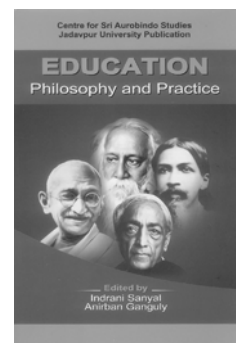
Debashish Banerji is the Dean of Academic Affairs at the University of Philosophical Research, Los Angeles. He has a doctorate in Indian Art History and teaches courses in South Asian, East Asian, and Islamic Art History at several institutions. He is the author of The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore.

To enter into the cosmic consciousness is to have the all-vision of the Divine and to evaluate everything in the light of the Infinite and the One. Ignorance appears as a special action of the divine Knowledge, strength as putting forth of the divine Force and weakness as its withdrawal, joy as mastering of divine delight and grief as failure to bear its intensity, struggle as balancing of forces and values in the divine harmony.

Sri Aurobindo: The Poet, Yogi and Philosopher,
p. 140

Education: Philosophy and Practice

— Articles by various authors
Publisher: Decent Books,
New Delhi, in association
with Centre for Sri
Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata
347 pp, ISBN 978-81-86921-
56-2, Rs 900
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Hard Cover



The importance of education can never be overstated, for the future of not just individuals but entire nations rests on this one principle before all others. While it is true that other factors may make a country rise from one level to another, to sustain itself at that level would prove almost impossible were it not backed with a history, a culture, a confidence in one's identity and roots, and above all, a pride that unifies all who belong to that nation. This would be possible only via a democratic, flexible, all-encompassing form of education, which looks to the future but stems from the depth of the race consciousness, becoming at once familiar, encouraging, visionary. Anything that pursues this line of thought is welcome, and so *Education: Philosophy and Practice* is a useful addition to this library of anthologies, books and treatises which deal with the past, present and future of education.

That education in general, and Indian education in particular, is flawed is an understatement. But what is important is that like all imperfections, this too can be worked upon diligently, not only by a band of educators, but by every individual. For education cannot have a boundary drawn around it—it is limitless and the ways to approach it are infinite. It has no beginning and no end which is why they say it starts even as the child waits patiently in the womb. Every moment thereafter is a moment of learning, imparted by parents, friends, teachers, society, circumstance. Each lesson can be milked to the full and goes into the making of the ideal student—a student not of this subject or that, but a student of life.

And that is why Sri Aurobindo's integral approach is so endearing, for there is no facet of an individual's being that can escape being bathed in the rich and bright luminescence of knowledge. Education for most means a mental process and progress, but for him education applies to the physical just as much, for the body is the

instrument with which that very mind would move forward. Not stopping there, true education has a further role to play—that of the illumination of the soul. It is not a new idea but perhaps it has been forgotten over time. Our ancients were well aware of it, and the twelve years spent at the feet of a *guru* passed not just in reciting *shlokas* but in the awakening of the psychic being and the airing of the soul; this led to the final culmination of finding one's true purpose, one's true work. All of education is directed to this one end. And while the *guru/shishya* tradition may have slipped into the shadows, the idea of self-illumination is eternal and waiting to be rediscovered and pursued in earnest once more.

But perhaps this is still too abstract for the common perception. In the meanwhile, we could try and remedy the wrongs which stare us in the face—the overburdened child, the confusion of language, the loss of culture and context, the lack of idealism, the paucity of values, the short-sighted vision, the blinkered understanding of what it means to be educated. What happened to ideas of shaping the personality, forming the individual, creating the instrument for the future? Old-fashioned, you may say, but redundant? Surely not.

And so, here to remind us of how education permeates every level of existence are twelve academics reflecting on the philosophy and practice of education from multiple standpoints: the relevance of the ideas of those such as Sri Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurti, Tagore's hopes and dreams to bring a resurgence in India, the Gandhian idea of aesthetics, the connection between education and violence, a looking back at the educational agenda laid down by the Nationalists, and a glance into the future, keeping realism and contemporary life well within view. The importance of a book such as this lies in providing that nudge to move, to shake off the lethargy, to make the change. However, one wonders if, like some other books on education, this too will become just another addition to a shelf full of similar works. While it presents invaluable ideas, rich with possibilities and seeped with wisdom, it is pedagogic in nature and by that definition, closes its doors to a younger audience, who although idealistic and in search of change, nevertheless speak and understand a different language. Manoj Das, one of the contributors, was perhaps aware of this, and his anecdotal and perceptive essay will undoubtedly leave younger readers with much to think about and respond to. The other essays

are a mixed bunch, some far too esoteric, others lucid in prose and interesting for the personalities they portray, but falling short of landing a transformative punch, so to speak. Strangely, the anthology doesn't include Swami Vivekananda, who not only worked on this theme for much of his life but also connected with the youth in ways that others had not.

At some point, and through some twist in the fate of this country, we not only forgot but simply obliterated a way of life from our consciousness. A country that for centuries had visitors from afar coming in search of instruction, knowledge, wisdom, is today reduced to a nut-and-bolt factory, churning out poor copies of some global mould. We puff up our chests and speak of universities like Nalanda and Taxila, without once reflecting that we failed to keep Nalanda and Taxila alive; our pride in India's wisdom is meaningless if it is merely hitchhiking on a former glory.

Of late, it almost seems as if we are running short of time—time to make the necessary corrections or fill in the many gaps or undo the mistakes that we have felt crop up in our lifetime. There is a sense of doom or dread that it is already too late and the newer generations will not be able to even connect with ideas such as those presented in the book, let alone implement or practise them; that it is far easier to let things move along as they are than to do a U-turn, for such is the fast pace of life. Yes indeed, 'change' goes hand in hand with courage, patience, determination and faith, and perhaps it is only prudent to accept that not all are up to the task. When one can see the obvious failings of a system and also have the good fortune of not just theoretical remedies but those that have been tried and tested, however many centuries ago, then there really is no excuse to remain willingly blind or resistant. If you as a reader, as an educator, as a parent, as a student, have at one time or another felt the immense thirst for something more than what was doled out in our schools and colleges, then it becomes imperative to act upon it, in whatever capacity possible. Books like *Education: Philosophy and Practice* can serve to encourage you to bring back that light and glory that once made us proud.

— Shonar

Shonar writes on all kinds of subjects, from music, travel, and environment to films and cultural and social issues. She is currently living in Pondicherry and working as a researcher, writer, editor—and full-time cat-sitter.

Seven Quartets of Becoming

A Transformative Yoga Psychology Based on the Diaries of Sri Aurobindo

— Debashish Banerji

Publisher: Nalanda International, Los Angeles, USA, and D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India

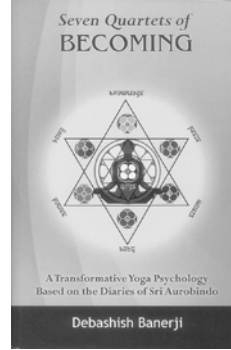
Size: 14x21 cm; 441 pp

ISBN 978-81-246-0626-1, Rs 580 Soft Cover

ISBN 978-81-246-0623-0, Rs 800 Hard Cover

This is a difficult book, but one well worth the effort of reading. It has three main aims, all complex and deep: the first is to present the aims and nature of Sri Aurobindo's yoga as described in his *Record of Yoga*, his yogic diary; the second is to examine his Integral Yoga in the wider context of Indian yogas and spiritual philosophies; and the third is to examine certain facets of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in relation to the concepts articulated by various Western philosophers. There is no doubt that the author has an excellent grasp of all three of these difficult subjects. Viewing the work from what I might claim to be a fairly strong grounding in Sri Aurobindo's thought, but not quite as strong in Western philosophy, I would say that the author was quite successful with the first and second aims, but less so with the third. I often had difficulty following the author's comparisons with Western philosophical and psychological concepts, in part because there were just so many different philosophers and philosophies discussed in relation to such a wide assortment of ideas that it was hard to get an overall perspective on all this material, and in part because the descriptions of Western philosophical concepts seemed highly abstract and condensed. In contrast, I found the parts describing the concepts in the *Record of Yoga* much more accessible, and though the language used to describe them may also be difficult for readers less acquainted with them, these concepts are presented more leisurely, with fuller explanations, and so they are easier to digest. In addition, the structure of the Integral Yoga described in the *Record of Yoga* is nicely organized into "seven quartets," and this structure helps in comprehending it overall and in relating the parts to each other. The author has capitalized on this guiding structure by including helpful tables that summarize and organize the ideas.

Let me elaborate a bit more on each of the three main aims of the book. The *Record of Yoga* was Sri Aurobindo's diary of his yoga that he wrote primarily between 1912 and 1920. The manuscripts that comprise



the *Record of Yoga* were found relatively recently and first published as a book in 2001. These personal diary notes were presented in a difficult form with much Sanskrit terminology, brief notes on various experiences, and sometimes more systematic reviews of his ongoing progress in the various aspects of his *sadhana*. Some other

writings which helped to describe the overall structure of his *sadhana* were included as an Introduction to the *Record of Yoga*. In the present book, the first aim has been to present the overall structure of this yoga, a concise yet accessible explanation of the 28 parts of the seven quartets, some of which are further elaborated into additional components. The seven quartets are the quartets of Perfection, Peace, Power, Knowledge, the Body, Being, and Action, which are well described in a chapter devoted to each. There follows an important chapter called "Attitudes of Self-Discipline," which discusses major threads running through many of the quartets and integrating them, attitudes such as aspiration, sincerity, purification, equality, constant remembrance and surrender. Another chapter enlarges upon the quartet of pure Being and its relation to Knowledge, discussing concepts such as Brahman, the one and the many, the personal and the impersonal, and the Master of the Yoga. The final chapter elaborates further on the quartets of action, power and enjoyment, all of which are connected to the life-affirming nature of the yoga.

The Synthesis of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo's main formal text on the Integral Yoga, is organized and formulated quite differently from the *Record of Yoga*. Though most of the components of the seven quartets appear there, they are presented in a different language and organizational structure. Some of these components are also elaborated in Sri Aurobindo's other works, and the author refers to these works as he discusses and explains the system of yogic practice found in these early diaries of Sri Aurobindo. In summary, this book successfully renders the main concepts of the *Record of Yoga* accessible and understandable, and thus gives a useful new perspective on the Integral Yoga.

The second stated aim was to place Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in the wider context of Indian Yoga.

This seemed to me a minor endeavor of the book, with relatively few pages devoted to it, and yet I was struck at times with new insights about the Integral Yoga's relation with the other Indian yogas and philosophies.

For example, the first chapter describes Sri Aurobindo's yoga in relation to Vedanta, Samkhya, Tantra and Patanjali's Yoga and illuminates these relations with its twin goals of *mukti* (liberation) and *bhukti* (enjoyment). These two goals are found again and again in the structure of the seven quartets, and in several of the quartets two aspects are focused on *mukti*, and two aspects are focused on *bhukti*, the latter being associated with the acceptance and divinization of earthly life. The book also covers many of the central concepts of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy as described in *The Life Divine*; it is not focused exclusively on yoga or yogic practice. These philosophical concepts, which are not merely concepts but spiritual experiences or potentially verifiable experiential realities, are also illuminated in many of the comparisons with the Western philosophies. At some points in my reading I was struck more profoundly than ever with how new and radically different Sri Aurobindo's teaching is from the traditional yogas which tend to focus exclusively on *mukti*, or spiritual liberation.

The third aim of the book focuses on showing how Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga compares with and relates to various Western philosophies, especially those of Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, with a special emphasis on the last, who articulated many concepts similar to those of Sri Aurobindo. While it was obvious that the author has a close familiarity with these writings and is facile at extracting their primary ideas and comparing them and locating them in the development of

philosophical thought, it seemed to me that he assumes too much from the reader in this respect. Although the introduction to the book provides a brief introduction to these philosophers and their related conceptions, I

felt that there was a vast reservoir of knowledge hidden below and behind his various assertions about their philosophies which remained unarticulated and thus might often leave readers like myself scratching their heads. There is also a specific style of language and terminology used in these discourses in which the author is clearly expert, but which is a bit daunting to take in alongside the complexity of

terms and conceptions articulated in the *Record of Yoga*. Still, I would not say that this material was completely intractable; I did learn useful things about these philosophies, and, even more importantly, was struck by their profundity and the similarities that many of them have to Sri Aurobindo's views on various matters. In addition, it is quite likely that many readers would have had a better preparation in Western philosophy than I, and with a good introductory background in these philosophies might find these comparisons more illuminating. I do believe that this third aim of the book is an important and necessary one, for it relates Sri Aurobindo's thought and yoga to present-day ideas and philosophies, and thus to modern humanity's self-conception and its conception of the world and its future. It is to be hoped that in future works the author might articulate these relations of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga to Western philosophy in a more elaborated manner, more accessible to lay readers.

— Larry Seidlitz

Larry was formerly a research psychologist in the U.S.A.; he now works at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry facilitating online courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings.