

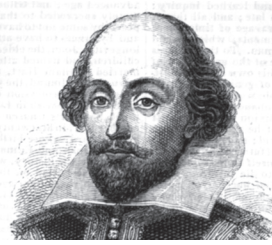
Recent Publications

S a b d a

John Keats, the English Romantic poet, once wrote that "poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject." And Emily Dickinson, the reclusive American poet, famously wrote, "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry." Though seemingly at odds, these two statements reveal the intensity of poetic creation and the effect of that intensity on the perceptive reader.

Two companion articles on poetry lead off this issue. The first is on *Letters on Poetry and Art*, in which Sri Aurobindo addresses the many aspects of poetry. In one letter Sri Aurobindo answers a question about the connection between a development in poetry and a development in Yoga: "The opening in poetry or any other part helps to prepare the general opening when it is done under the pressure of Yoga, but it is at first something special, like the opening of the subtle vision or subtle senses. It is the opening of a special capacity in the inner being."

The second is a review of *Collected Poems of Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections*, two volumes of more than 400 poems that not only reveal how Sri Aurobindo nurtured the poetic development of his disciple and but also the nature of their relationship across this special collaboration.



"Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature."



"Dante writes from the poetic intelligence with a strong intuitive force behind it."

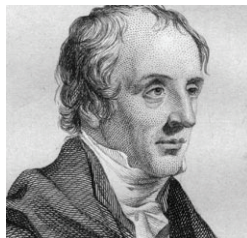
"If I had to select the line in European poetry which most suggests an almost direct descent from the overmind consciousness



there might come first Virgil's line about 'the touch of tears in mortal things'...

We might also add Wordsworth's line 'The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep.'"

— Sri Aurobindo



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In the 1930s writing poetry in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram became a means of coming into contact with the higher planes of consciousness. Several sadhaks were gripped by the muse of poetry and sent their efforts to Sri Aurobindo, who read and commented, suggested and guided, corrected and fine-tuned their poems. Letters passed to and fro, up and down the staircase of the Meditation House, where Sri Aurobindo worked late into the night, answering questions on poetic inspiration and technique, on the great poets of the world, on the role of the arts in the Integral Yoga. Letters on Poetry and Art, Volume 27 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, has recently been published in a soft cover edition (see page 15), and the first article provides an overview of the book and the distinctive quality of its contents.

Nirodbaran was among those disciples who tried their hands at writing poetry during that time. The second article takes a look at the two volumes of Collected Poems of Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections (see page 17), which chart Nirodbaran's journey from literary tyro to accomplished poet under the tutelage of Sri Aurobindo. From his early efforts to his more mature poems one can trace his progress, earning Sri Aurobindo's remark on a certain poem, "Very fine indeed, very. You have suddenly reached a remarkable maturity of the poetic power."

LETTERS ON POETRY AND ART

How does one present the essential Sri Aurobindo? Is he a mystic, a prophet, a philosopher, a revolutionary, a scholar, a sociological thinker, a political historian, or a poet and dramatist? Sri Aurobindo, as people close to him knew well, was not a man given to making claims for himself, but there is one issue over which he was quite emphatic: that he was "never, never, never a philosopher" but foremost "a poet and a politician". While some may disagree with his unusual proclamation, for indeed he was a many-faceted person, in his self-appraisal the bard within him was always to maintain the pole position. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the critic who set down the early canons of Indian English literature, writes, "Without question, Sri Aurobindo is the one uncontestably outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian literature." He is "not merely a writer who happened to write in English but really an English writer—almost as much as, say, a George Moore, a Laurence Binyon or a W. B. Yeats".

Educated in England from an early age, Sri Aurobindo spoke and wrote English as if it were his mother tongue. During his fourteen-year stay there, he studied at St. Paul's, London, and King's College, Cambridge. He mastered Latin and Greek and won prizes for his scholarship at both institutions. In his spare time, he read extensively: English and French literature, some Italian, German, and Spanish, as well as the history of ancient, mediaeval, and modern Europe. This wide-ranging reading not only exposed him to some of the best European poetry but provided the base for the literary assessments we find in his letters. His earliest recorded verse was written at nineteen and this passion for writing poetry was to stay with him for the rest of his life and deepen with passing years, resulting in a prolific output of lyrical, narrative, dramatic, and epic poetry.

About the Book

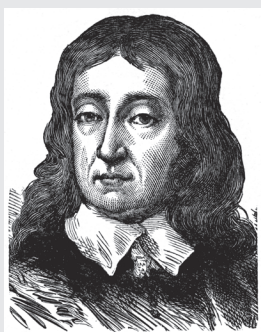
Letters on Poetry and Art contains a selection of the correspondence between Sri Aurobindo and his disciples on the subject of literature, music, painting, and other arts (with primary focus on poetry), and their unique role and relation in the practice of his Integral Yoga. The book comprises over 970 letters, excerpts, or comments written between 1929 and 1950 of which around five hundred have been published here for the first time. The bulk of these were written between 1931 and 1937, largely in response to a dozen or so correspondents.

Early Publications

Plans to publish some of these letters were mooted as early as 1933. With this end in mind some preliminary work was initiated by K. D. Sethna (one of Sri Aurobindo's erudite disciples) but not until 1949 did the letters first appear as a collection. It was published under the title *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: Third Series (On Poetry and Literature)* by Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay. Many of these letters were revisited before publication and often revised or recast as Sri Aurobindo wished to avoid making the collection appear "too scrappy or random for public interest". Around a sixth of his letters on poetry and art were published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime though selections of the letters continued to appear under various titles after his passing in 1950, including some published by his disciples K. D. Sethna and Nirodbaran Talukdar.

Dante is, I think, the perfect type of austerity in poetry, standing between the two extremes and combining the most sustained severity of expression with a precise power and fullness in the language which gives the sense of packed riches—no mere bareness anywhere. —Sri Aurobindo

The most exhaustive collections hitherto were reproduced in 1972 for Sri Aurobindo's Birth Centenary. His collected works were published as the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. About five hundred letters on poetry, literature, and art appeared in different volumes of this set, namely: *The Future Poetry*, *On Himself*, *Savitri*, and *Collected Poems*. Of interest to those historically inclined is the well-researched, concise historiography pertaining to the letters published under "Note on the Texts" at the end of this new edition.



John Milton

Sri Aurobindo on Milton and Goethe

When Milton writes

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
or describes the grandeur of the fallen archangel, there is a vital force there that is of the highest quality,—so is that of Shakespeare; so is that of many pieces of Blake. This vital energy makes the soul stir within you.

Shakespeare was a supreme poet and, one might almost say, nothing else; Goethe was by far the greater man and the greater brain, but he was a poet by choice, his mind's choice among its many high and effulgent possibilities, rather than by the very necessity of his being.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Present Edition

Even a cursory reading will impress the lay reader with the meticulousness Sri Aurobindo applied to the questions on poetry that were posed to him by the various correspondents. It is obvious that he not only probed deep into the mystical origins of poetic inspiration but delved with equal verve into the greasy-fingered mechanics of poetic techniques and expression. He took up the métier of poet, littérateur, and art critic with some gravity, for here is a set of letters on poetry, literature, and art that would excite the scholar and the aesthete within many of us.

The editors have organised the letters into three parts which we will briefly explore.

Part One: Poetry and Its Creation

The first section: The Sources of Poetry

The letters in “Poetic Creation” explain the three critical constituents that in succession steer the process of poetics. First is “the original source of inspiration” as Sri Aurobindo explains; second, “the vital force of creative beauty”; and finally, “the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet”. Poetry of the first water springs forth where, as he explains subsequently, “the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness...transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces.” Of course there are diverse ways that the creative power may choose to express itself; it need not always be a sudden inpouring of poetic impulse from above, it can equally be “a conscious labour of creation swift or slow, hampered or facile”. The section then goes on to explore the role of inspiration and its function, and the means by which its fickleness can be curbed. He also touches upon the joy, creative force, and ecstasy that the poet experiences, the “elation of the inrush and the passage” that accompanies a poetic creation.

“Sources of Inspiration” dwells upon the different antecedents of poetic inspiration. For early humanity (the Vedic Rishis, Homer, Chaucer), this inspiration was drawn from the material or physical life around them. Equally, as Sri Aurobindo explains, the inspiration can be from a vital source that thrills the vital senses and sensations (as in war poetry), and this aspect can be so overwhelmingly compelling that the mental and other elements can end up marginalised. However, in such cases the mind and the soul do not share the same satisfaction. He also defines, albeit briefly, poetry inspired by the mental and psychic regions.

Homer makes beauty out of man's outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step farther and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. —Sri Aurobindo

An influx of inspiration coming from above the mind falls into differing categories as described in the next subsection, “Overhead Poetry”. Sri Aurobindo classifies them broadly under these nomenclatures: The higher mind (“a first plane of spiritual consciousness”), the inner mind, the illumined mind (“usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase”), the intuitive mind (“it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it”), and lastly but not least the Overmind (“it brings out the truth of the Inconscient and the truth of the Superconscient and all that lies in between”). He then gives some masterly examples of what he terms Overhead Poetry.

The second section: The Poetry of the Spirit

What was briefly touched upon in the previous section under poetry inspired by the psychic and the illumined planes is further enlarged and expanded with citations in this section. A perfect example of psychic poetry in the English language that Sri Aurobindo alludes to here is a selection from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “One Word Is Too Often Profaned”. He then explains at great length the various differences and overlaps between poetry of a mystical, symbolic, allegorical, and esoteric nature. Finally, he touches upon spiritual poetry, which he defines as informed by a spiritual vision which “must never be intellectual, philosophical or abstract,” but “must always give the sense of something vivid, living and concrete, a thing of vibrant beauty or a thing of power”.

Of interest in the subsection “Poet and the Poem” are the two parts of the poetic creator—”the instrumental which lives and feels what is written...and the Seer-Creator within who is not involved but sees...and listens for the word that shall entirely express this [inner] significance”. Evaluating the relation between the personal character of a poet and its influence on his poetic expression, Sri Aurobindo quite emphatically pronounces that it is “in the inner mental personality of a man that the key to his creation must be discovered, not in ‘his’ outward mind or life”.



W. B. Yeats

Sri Aurobindo on Yeats, A. E., and Mallarmé

What Yeats expressed, he expressed with great poetical beauty, perfection and power and he has, besides, a creative imagination. A. E. had an unequalled profundity of vision and power and range in the spiritual and psychic field.

The substance of A.E.'s poetry is always very good—he is one of the two or three whose poetry comes nearest to spiritual knowledge and experience.



A. E. (George William Russell)



Stéphane Mallarmé

But consider a poet like Mallarmé. In writing his strange enigmatic profound style which turned the whole structure of French upside down he cannot have expected or cared to be read and appreciated...Yet there is no one who has had more influence on modern French poets.

There can be no more powerful, moving and formidable expression of this spiritual frustration, this chilled and sterile greatness, than the image of the frozen lake and the imprisoned Swan as developed by Mallarmé.

The third and fourth sections: Poetic Technique and Translation

Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats are the greatest sonnet writers in English. —Sri Aurobindo

Here Sri Aurobindo engages in outlining the nuts and bolts of the external poetic form: rhythm and rhythmical undertones and overtones, the different English, Greek, and Latin classical metres, metrical experiments in Bengali, various types of rhyme and poetic forms in English, such as the sonnet, ode, ballad, nursery rhymes, and folk songs.

In the subsection “Substance, Style, Diction” Sri Aurobindo examines, in the context of poetry, the fine balance between seemingly opposing elements, for example, form versus substance, richness of image versus simplicity, austerity as against exuberance, sensuousness opposed to vulgarity; then goes on to explore the grades of perfection in poetic style. Moving on to the issue of translation he opines that the “translator is not necessarily bound to the exact word and letter of the original...; he can make his own poem out of it if he likes...This is all the more legitimate since we find that literal translations more completely betray than those that are reasonably free—turning life into death and poetic power into poverty and flatness.”

Part Two: On His Own and Others' Poetry

The first section: On His Poetry and Poetic Method

Describing his process of committing poetry to paper, Sri Aurobindo states that “I receive from above my head and receive changes and corrections from above without any initiation by myself or labour of the brain. Even if I change a hundred times, the mind does not work at that, it only receives.” A receptive neutrality of the mind is a critical constant that he maintains not only for the creation of his poetry after his “retirement” in Pondicherry but for his philosophical and other writings as well, something he attributes as a logical corollary to his intense yogic practices.

True to the calling of the poet within him, his creativity brimmed over into numerous metrical experiments, some of which are known as much for their exquisite style and beauty as for their sublime mystical substance, such as “The Bird of Fire” and “The Moon of Two Hemispheres”.

Any study of Sri Aurobindo's poetry and poetic method would not be complete without touching upon his correspondence on his magnum opus *Savitri*. Spanning 1931 and 1947, these letters constitute around ten per cent of the book. *Savitri* was always a work-in-progress for Sri Aurobindo from his numerous early drafts of a narrative poem written before 1920, through his revisions in the 1930s when it was transformed into an epic, to its final form with reworked and enlarged versions of the earlier parts written before 1920 and a new section on the Yoga of Savitri. As these letters so aptly demonstrate, *Savitri* did not descend en bloc but grew through constant revisions of lines, cantos, and books and the temporary impasses that he had to overcome time and again till he found the perfection he sought. This is best expressed in a letter from October 1938:

I have not been able to make any headway with *Savitri*—owing to lack of time and also to an appalled perception of the disgraceful imperfection of all the sections after the first two. But I have tackled them again as I think I wrote to you and have pulled up the third section to a higher consistency of level; the “Worlds” have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!

The second and third sections: On Poets and Poetry and Practical Guidance for Aspiring Writers

The correspondence was not just limited to his poetic creation but flowed over into a general discussion of poets and poetics in English and other languages: Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Goethe, Homer, Horace,

Virgil, Valmiki, Vyasa, Blake, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and the list goes on to include contemporary poets of his time: Hopkins, Yeats, A. E., Mallarmé, Meredith, and others, and make compelling reading.

In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare.

—Sri Aurobindo

course available at hand, for such is the quantum of writings and examples available in both these sections. What is truly riveting though are the corrections made by Sri Aurobindo to poems written by those early disciples with a penchant for literary writing. Behind the seemingly alchemic change we see at work the hand of a seasoned craftsman who with a few masterly strokes transforms mediocre verse into inspired poetry.

Part Three: Literature, Art, Beauty and Yoga

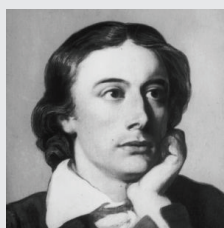
The shortest of the three parts, *Literature, Art, Beauty and Yoga* takes into its ambit the other arts, such as music, painting, and the performing arts. Although there are fewer letters here as compared to those on poetry, their substance is nevertheless as insightful. What is of particular interest perhaps is the final section where the role of arts is discussed in the context of his yoga. Replying to a letter Sri Aurobindo writes, “It is perfectly true that Music or Art are not either the first or the only thing in life for her [the Mother], – any more than Poetry or Literature are with me – the Divine, the divine consciousness, the discovery of the conditions for a divine life are and must be our one concern, with Art, Poetry or Music as parts or means only of the divine life or expression of the Divine Truth and the Divine Beauty.” The pursuit of aesthesis, far from being a distraction that steers the aspirant away from the “Path”, becomes rather a legitimate means for an integral quest of the Divine.

In Conclusion

Unlike *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo’s major work of literary criticism, where one finds a broader treatment of his view of art and life and his fully developed theory of poetics, the collection of entries in *Letters on Poetry and Art* serves much like a colloquium or seminar, with his correspondents raising questions or making their own comments on literary matters and Sri Aurobindo responding in turn. Thus the letters not only can be said to reveal his unique methodology in writing or evaluating poetry but also to encapsulate his thinking on the place and usefulness of aesthesis in man’s inner development and to represent some of his critical preferences, especially regarding poetry.

To those who love poetry and seek to unravel the enigma of the poetic process this edition of *Letters on Poetry and Art*, with the addition of much new material, comes as a boon. It not only presents in remarkable detail the external body of poetics, which by itself makes interesting reading, but more largely acquaints us with the unique role of poetry and art as vehicles for the expression of that “something” deeper or higher for which the soul of man thirsts.

For details of the book see page 15



John Keats

Sri Aurobindo on Shelley, Keats, and Blake

Shelley looked, it is true, always towards a light, a beauty, a truth behind the appearance of things, but he never got through the idealising mind to the spiritual experience. What he did get was something of the purest emotional or aesthetic feeling or purest subtle mind touch of an essence behind the appearance, an essence of ideal light, truth or beauty. It is that he expresses with a strange aerial magic or a curious supersensuously sensuous intensity in his finest lyrics.



Percy Bysshe Shelley



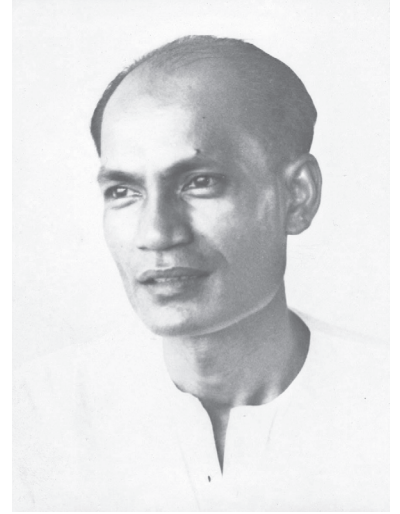
William Blake

A successful ode must be a perfect architectural design and Keats' Odes are among the best, if not the best in English poetry,...because of the perfect way in which the central thought is developed and each part related to the whole like the design of the masses in a perfect building—each taking its inevitable place in the whole.

Its [Blake's poetry] expression aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience.

COLLECTED POEMS OF NIRODBARAN WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS

I remember seeing Nirod-da for the very first time in his role of the Divine messenger. Since then almost seventy long years have gone by, but I can still recall the picture very vividly. In Dilip-da's (Dilip Kumar Roy) house around 7.30 in the morning the tea session was in full swing in the spacious hall. Everybody was sitting on the thick wall-to-wall carpet. Among those present were the poet Nishikanto, the painter-cum-tabla player Anil Kumar Bhattacharya, the famous singer Sahana Devi, the humourist par excellence Nolinikanta Sarkar, the brilliant young scholars Asit Kumar Gupta and Arindam Basu, and of course Dilip-da himself showering 'sweetness and light' with his charming personality. I don't know by what good fortune I, then a mere thirteen-year-old boy, was permitted to be there in the midst of these luminaries to savour and devour every bit of their uplifting conversation, often tinged with good, clean humour. In came Nirodbaran with a broad smile on his face and handed a sealed envelope to Dilip-da. 'Guru has sent it for you,' he said. Dilip-da got up, took the envelope, touched it to his forehead reverently and disappeared into his bedroom-cum-study. Meanwhile, Rani-di (Rani Moitra) poured a 'cuppa' for Nirod-da. Nirodbaran, being Sri Aurobindo's disciple, attendant and amanuensis for *Savitri*, was very close to the Master. So, spontaneously the conversation turned to Sri Aurobindo, everybody eager to glean, as it were, from the horse's mouth, whatever tidbits they could. Nirod-da sat down and in between sips of tea patiently answered the many questions put to him about the Master and the Mother.



Nirodbaran, 1950

After a while Dilip-da emerged from his room with Sri Aurobindo's letter in his hand and very kindly read out those portions from it which could be of general interest. I remember that he could not decipher a word succeeded by a certain preposition. Basing himself on the preposition, Asit Gupta ventured a suggestion. Dilip-da's face lit up. 'You are right', he exclaimed and, patting Asit on the back, said, 'No wonder you are a professor of English Literature!'

Gradually, as I settled in the Ashram, I saw more and more of Nirod-da. For a time I even acted as a messenger between Dilip-da and Nirod-da. Once, I remember, I got a banging from the latter for delaying the delivery of an important message from Dilip-da.

After Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi, Nirod-da started taking English and French classes in the Ashram School, where I attended his French class for a year. He joined the Playground activities too and showed a natural talent for sports, especially tennis. With regular exercise he kept himself always physically fit and even played football at the age of fifty plus. He is still remembered in the Ashram for cycling to the Sportsground every afternoon even at the age of ninety-seven!

Although I saw him and talked to him frequently in the Ashram and the school, read and enjoyed his well-known memoirs, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, *Sri Aurobindo's Humour*, and *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, for a long time I was completely unaware of another facet of his—that he was a poet of considerable merit, inspired and moulded entirely by Sri Aurobindo, starting from scratch. That was a revelation! And that revelation turned into an unbelievable wonder when I chanced upon the two beautiful and valuable volumes of the *Collected Poems of Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections*.

While turning the pages of the first volume, I was reminded of Robert Browning's memorable poem, 'Abt Vogler', in which the poet, in his avatar of the clergyman-musician Abbot Vogler, arbitrarily declares that in poetry and painting one finds only the finished product—'Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told'. Whereas when the musician extemporizes the listeners actually see the palace of music being built before them and experience 'the process so wonder-worth'! These two volumes make us realize that what Browning says is only a 'poetical truth' – true for a particular moment and a particular occasion – for in them we see with our own eyes poems in the making, 'the process so wonder-worth'!

Have you ever observed a leaf coming into existence? At first a microscopic green dot appears on a branch. Then very gradually by some miracle that green dot turns into a russet, tightly folded bud and thence into a beautiful fresh green leaf. In Nirod-da's early poems, we actually witness Sri Aurobindo's magic pen, his 'god-touch', performing that miracle.

In the poem 'The Only Craving' Nirod-da's original lines ran thus:

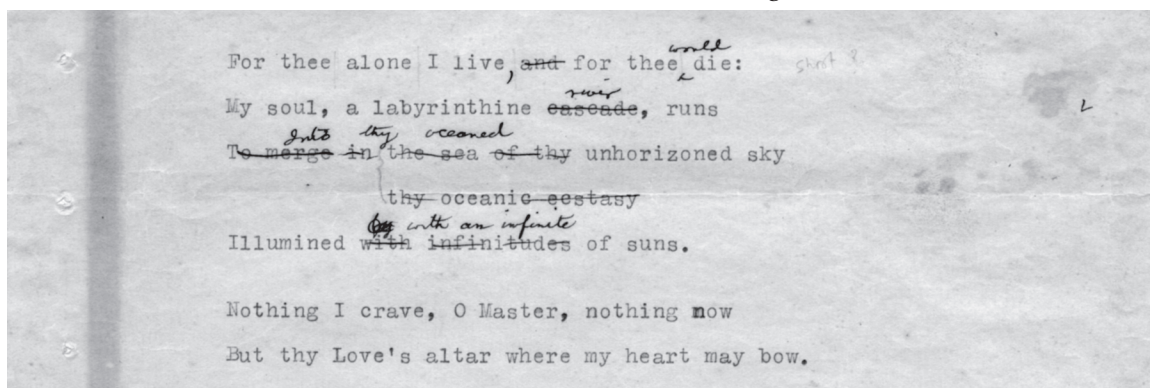
For thee alone I live and for thee I die.
My soul like a labyrinthine cascade runs
To merge in the sea of thy unhorizoned sky
Illumined by thousand resplendent suns.

Nothing I crave Beloved, nothing more
Save thy heavenly flute's soul-enthraling lore.

Sri Aurobindo commented that *a cascade is not labyrinthine and doesn't usually run into the sea. Also, 'the sea of thy sky', boldly like that, is impossible in English*, and

Illumined/ by thousand/ resplendent/ suns. *Doesn't scan*

Save thy heavenly flute's soul-enthraling lore. *Doesn't scan*
'lore' = learning, not music



Facsimile of some lines from "The Only Craving" with Sri Aurobindo's handwritten corrections

After corrections to a second draft, the final version reads:

For thee alone I live, for thee *would* die;
My soul, a labyrinthine *river*, runs
Into thy oceaned unhorizoned sky
Illumined *with an infinite* of suns.

Nothing I crave, O Master, nothing now
But thy Love's altar where my heart may bow,

(italics added, showing Sri Aurobindo's comments and corrections)

Sri Aurobindo always insisted that as a novice Nirod-da should write strictly in regular metres and not take liberties with either the rhythm or the rhyme. This discipline would train his ear and sense of rhythm and gradually he would gain ease and fluency. In Alexander Pope's words:

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance. [emphasis added]

At times Nirod-da mispronounced English words by putting the stress on the wrong syllable, thereby scanning his lines incorrectly. In his sonnet, 'Mother, I hear thy intimate silent voice', in the sixth line 'Dissolve into a transparently wide', he wrongly stressed the first syllable in the word 'transparent'. But thanks to that error, (it is an ill wind that does not blow anybody any good, as the saying goes), we get some very witty, jocular lines from Sri Aurobindo, pointing out the correct pronunciation of certain words:

It is stressed transpárent and not tránsparent. What a howler! It makes me "drop into poetry" —thus
Sir, you seem ápparárently ignorant
The párent is the trick and not parént.
And yet the stress transpires transpárently
And is appárent to both ear and eye.
So you compáre and do not cómpare things;
Your soul prepáres, not prépares heavenly wings.

I think it is in the fitness of things here to draw the reader's attention to the fact that although Nirod-da always respectfully addressed Sri Aurobindo as Guru, it did not stop him from arguing with the latter over many a minor matter; and that Sri Aurobindo always treated him as a comrade rather than as a disciple and often adopted a bantering tone in his letters.

Any would-be poet will benefit greatly by perusing these two volumes. In poem after poem, with what patient care and how meticulously has Sri Aurobindo pointed out the many technical defects which, when rectified, make all the difference to the music, vision and sense of a line! For the opening lines of 'Benighted traveller sore',

Benighted traveller sore (1), why do you (2) moan
Because a transient darkness entwines your way?
Are you in the perilous journey (3) left alone
To lurid (4) thrusts of the demon's sovereign sway?

Sri Aurobindo's comments are: (1) *What is this 'sore'? It sounds like a bear with a sore head! Benighted also sounds like an abuse.* (2) *You must make up your mind whether it is to be 'you' or 'thou'.* You start with one and go on with the other. (3) *These two anapaests come in abruptly and jerkily shaking the iambic foundation into fits.* (4) *'lurid' has too physical a sense to be applied to 'thrusts'.* And then the revised lines:

*Belated traveller, vainly dost thou mourn
Because the transient night engulfs thy way!
Thou art not on the perilous road alone
Left to some cruel demon's sovereign sway.*

(italics added, showing Sri Aurobindo's corrections)

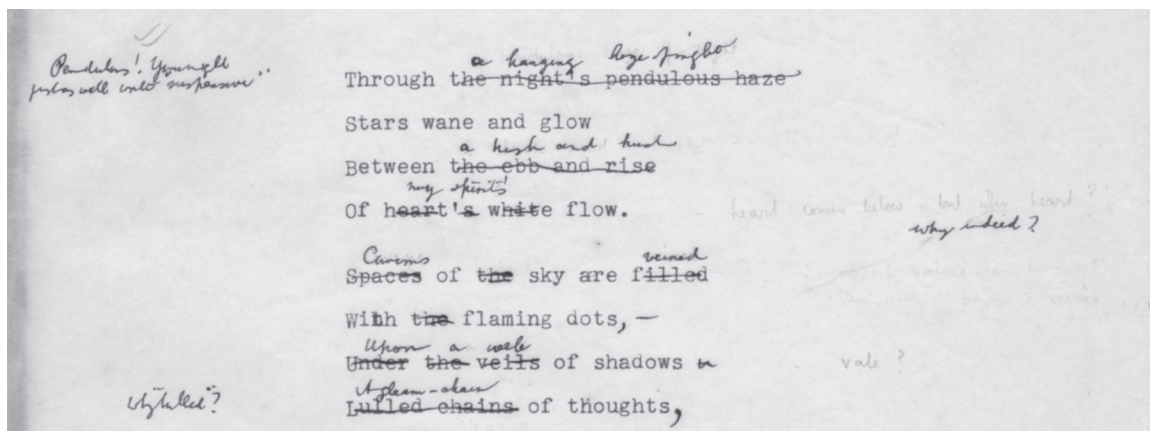
The poem beginning with the line ‘Through a hanging haze of night’ contains many interesting observations and corrections by Sri Aurobindo. Originally, this line read: ‘Through the night’s pendulous haze’. Sri Aurobindo commented: *Pendulous! You might just as well write ‘suspensive’,* and then transformed the rather clumsy line into the verse of rare beauty that it is today. In the next three lines, ‘Stars wane and glow | Between the ebb and rise | Of heart’s white flow’, we have a case where Nirod was not sure about a word he had received in inspiration and asked Sri Aurobindo for an explanation. To his marginal note ‘but why heart?’ Sri Aurobindo commented sharply with a pithy *Why indeed?* and went on to correct the lines as ‘Stars wane and glow | Between *a hush and hush* | Of *my spirit’s* flow.’

The four humdrum lines of the second stanza of this poem,

Spaces of the sky are filled
With the flaming dots, —
Under the veils of shadows
Lulled chains of thought.

he transformed, with a few deft additions and alterations, by substituting the mysterious ‘*caverns*’ for the flat and commonplace ‘spaces’, the very graphic ‘*veined*’ for the ordinary ‘filled’, the picturesque ‘*web*’ for the much-used ‘veils’ and the luminous ‘*a gleam-chain*’ for the rather dull ‘lulled chains’, into a stanza of mystery and magnificence:

*Caverns of sky are veined
With flaming dots, —
Upon a web of shadows
A gleam-chain of thoughts,*



Facsimile of the opening lines of the poem that starts “Through the hanging haze of night” with Sri Aurobindo’s handwritten comments and corrections

While correcting the third stanza,

Their dreams dim-reflected
On the ink-black night
Like wind-borne trailing echoes
From a cloud-capped height.

Sri Aurobindo thundered against the use of hackneyed words and phrases such as, ‘cloud-capped height, red rose, white lily etc.’ They ‘have been so often written that they can be written no more.’ He remoulded the stanza thus:

Or dreams dim-embroidered
 On the *black-palled* night
 Like a *wind-blown trail of* echoes
 From a *hidden* height.

On the last stanza

On my heart's streams they fall
 And weave a whorl
 Of heavenly mysteries fringed
 With gold and pearl.

Sri Aurobindo commented, 'the heart flowing or streaming is a rather forced expression—it can be used once or twice with skill but not more. Also "fall" and "whorl" sounds as if you had tried to make a rhyme and failed.' He rewrote the stanza to read:

Across my heart *they pass*
Tracing a whorl
 Of *radiant* mysteries *edged*
 With gold and pearl.

(italics added, showing Sri Aurobindo's corrections)

After making a few feeble suggestions such as 'whirl' and 'unfurl' to replace 'whorl', both of which Sri Aurobindo nullified, Nirodbaran wrote, 'The rest of the poem I leave at your mercy, Sir!' Very humorously Sri Aurobindo replied, 'I have had no mercy upon it, as you can see. I have not put double lines [*Sri Aurobindo used to draw single, double or triple vertical lines in the margin against some of the verses to indicate his appreciation.*] because it would be an encomium on my own ravages, but you can consider the lines to be there.'

To a question raised by Nirodbaran about the place of effort in writing poetry Sri Aurobindo says that with persistent effort, indomitable will, sufficient intelligence and discretion, and aesthetic sense one can become quite a good poet but never a great one. For creating great poetry **inspiration** is a must.

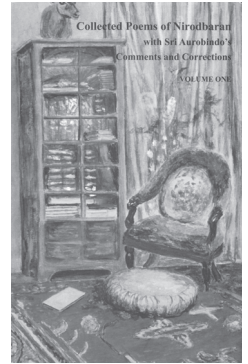
If we study the etymology of the word 'inspiration' we find that the word actually means the descent of the spirit in a person. This descent of the spirit, the divine possession, is none other than what Sri Aurobindo points out in his book *The Future Poetry* when he mentions 'the possession by the divine *enthousiasmos* of which Plato has spoken'. It is interesting to note that the English word enthusiasm has been derived from the Greek *enthousiasmos*; but unfortunately, in modern usage it has lost the original spiritual connotation.

On page sixty-nine we find Sri Aurobindo making the roles of effort and inspiration in the work of a poet very clear in an informal but picturesque manner:

When any real effect is produced, it is not because of the beating and the hammering, but because an inspiration slips down between the raising of the hammer and the falling and gets in under the cover of the beastly noise. It is when there is no need of effort that the best comes. Effort is all right but only as an excuse for inducing the Inspiration to come. If it wants to come, it comes—if it doesn't, it doesn't and one is obliged to give up after producing nothing or an inferior mind-made something. **I have had that experience often enough myself.** (emphasis added)

I feel that to some extent Sri Aurobindo had put in that last sentence to give a little encouragement to Nirodbaran and pull him out of his habitual 'slough of despond', in which he was prone to wallow, that he would never amount to much as a poet. However, I have heard from reliable sources that during the period

The cover illustration on Volume I shows the chair where Sri Aurobindo sat as he answered letters from his disciples during the 1930s.



when Sri Aurobindo's great epic *Savitri* was being composed there were days when Sri Aurobindo would dictate some two hundred lines in a few hours and Nirodbaran, his amanuensis, could not keep up with the flow; whereas there were others when the Guru and the disciple would sit in complete silence for hours with hardly any lines being written.

In this context I think it will not be inappropriate to quote those memorable verses from *Savitri* about inspiration and interpret them to see how great poetry is created:

Oft inspiration with her lightning feet,
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind
Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things.
A music spoke transcending mortal speech.
As if from a golden phial of the All-Bliss,
A joy of light, a joy of sudden sight,
A rapture of the thrilled undying Word
Poured into his heart as into an empty cup,
A repetition of God's first delight
Creating in a young and virgin Time. (emphasis added)

'Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind' is reminiscent of the yogic process of meditation where the mind has to be made completely silent, empty of all thoughts, so that higher revelations may descend into it. Once that happens, a music transcending mortal speech will speak spontaneously, translating that vision into great poetry. This is why Sri Aurobindo has often said, reminding us of the Gita's dictum, *yogah karmasu kaushalam*, that it is much easier for a yogi to become a great poet, if he sets his mind to it, than it is for an ordinary man. For the yogic discipline has already given him the ability to concentrate deeply on any given subject, establish contact with its spirit, and express its inmost truth. It is also easier for him to pull inspiration down from its subtle world, far in the unapparent.

The fantastic account of how S. T. Coleridge's famous poem 'Kubla Khan' came to be written, which the poet himself has left behind for posterity to read and muse over, will perhaps help us to understand what Sri Aurobindo means. Coleridge writes that while reading Purchas's *Pilgrimes* he had fallen asleep and he has the distinct recollection of composing two hundred to three hundred lines in his sleep, 'if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort'.

After having this glimpse into the true nature of great poetry and its ultimate source, let us get back to Nirodbaran and see how he was progressing in his endeavour to become a poet of some merit under the meticulous guidance of Sri Aurobindo. His intensive training period lasted for about four years, ending on 23 November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo had his serious accident and lengthy correspondence with the disciples had to be curtailed. But already this disciple had started writing such outstanding lines of poetry as 'The rose of silence on the turmoiled air: | *Its petals carved out of the dream of God*' [italics added], the second verse marked in the margin with two vertical lines showing Sri Aurobindo's appreciation! And these marks of distinction began to appear more and more frequently in subsequent poems until one day when Nirod-da won four marks of distinction for the phrase 'A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain'!

In the chapter designated 'The Breath of Greater Life' in *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo says that a true poet is always deeply concerned with all aspects of life, 'the life,...which the poet has to reembody in the

beauty of the word, is all life, the infinite life of the spirit thrown out in its many creations'. In Nirodbaran's poem 'Tree of Vision' we get a whiff of this breath of greater life:

Upon my tree of vision settles a Bird
From far diamond forests of the sky:
Each single branch is magically stirred
By sun-wing beats into strange ecstasy.

Spontaneously these lines evoked in my mind the Upanishadic image of the Two Birds sitting on a tree, symbolising the Jivatman and the Paramatman. After that, through subsequent images, the Tree of Vision gradually turned into the Tree of Life complete with its 'seeds of passion' drawing the 'immortal sap from the breast of earth' and growing 'to luminous fruits' and the clustered tentacles of the gnarled roots' quivered 'with the spirit-urge to a new birth'. The last stanza reaches a crescendo of splendour and music:



Aniruddha (upper right), Nirodbaran (lower left), and Arindam Basu (next to Nirodbaran) at the Lake Estate in 1970

Upon a brink of timeless thought it stands
Spreading fan-wise its boughs of emerald light
And drinks the wine of beauty from gold hands
That hold the inverted cup of the Infinite.

11.4.1941

In *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo discusses the movement of poetry in general and traces the development of English poetry in particular, and concludes that the poetry of the future will be spiritual in nature, based on the poets' visions of hitherto unexplored planes of existence, consciousness, and bliss. Although he himself is far too modest to say so, it is common knowledge that his magnum opus *Savitri* and a considerable number of his shorter poems and sonnets possess

the mantric quality, which is the hallmark of the poetry of the future. In the best works of some of his disciples, such as Amalkiran, Nishikanto, Arjava, and Harindranath Chatterjee, Sri Aurobindo has pointed out this trend, which he calls overhead poetry, that is, poetry written with the higher mind, illumined mind or intuitive mind. In some of Nirodbaran's poems too, this overhead poetry is palpably present. To illustrate this point I shall quote a few lines from the poem 'Home of All Felicity' which begins with the line 'I read life's mystery sculptured in thy Face,' and ends with the superb stanza:

And life with golden wings of vision sail
Across the spirit's unnavigated seas
Dropping this weary earth like a crumpled veil
Upon a shore of sombre memories.

Against each verse of this poem Sri Aurobindo had put three marks of distinction and against the last two verses he had put four. A poet from whose pen flowed poems of this excellence has surely found his place 'among the sons of light'!

— Aniruddha Sircar

Aniruddha-da (Babu-da) settled in the Ashram in 1946, completed his schooling at the SAICE in 1955, and has since been teaching English at the Ashram school.

For details of these two volumes see page 17

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

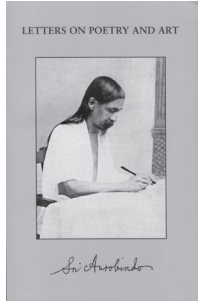
Sri Aurobindo

Letters on Poetry and Art

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

769 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-098-9, Rs 390



Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This collection of letters, written by Sri Aurobindo in answer to questions from members of his ashram, covers poetry and other forms of literature, art, aesthetics, and the relation of all these to the practice of yoga. The letters are organised by subjects such as the sources of poetry, poetic technique, comments on his

own and others' poetry, practical guidance for aspiring writers, and the appreciation of all forms of art. The book incorporates material from volumes of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library: *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*; *Letters on Savitri*; *Collected Poems*; and *On Himself*, and also contains around five hundred letters that have not appeared in any previous collection published under his name.

See article on page 2

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Pathways to the Future

42 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-377-1, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Times of Transition

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-376-4, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Yoga of the Body

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-374-0, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

The True Aim of Life - 2

Publisher: The Resurgent India Trust, Jhunjhunu

110 pp, ISBN 978-81-903276-1-9, Rs 65

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These extracts from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother highlight the aim of the Integral Yoga, the process

of its *sadhana*, including how to overcome difficulties along the way, and definitions of some important terms specific to its practice.

A Vedic Index

Meaning and explanation of some important Vedic symbols, words, images, and concepts in the words of Sri Aurobindo

— Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo

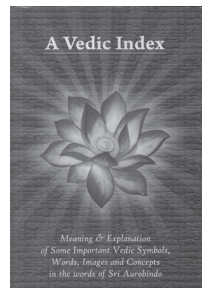
Publisher: The Resurgent India Trust, Jhunjhunu

174 pp, ISBN 978-81-931830-0-7, Rs 235

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Beginning with *Aditi* and ending with *Yuga* this glossary of Vedic terms, symbols, and concepts has been compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo, drawn primarily from *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. Some entries contain multiple extracts; some quote just a line or two, others a full paragraph. Sri Aurobindo considered the Veda not only to be the fount of Indian civilisation but also seminal to the world's spirituality, to its various religions, to the development of its thought.



Other Authors and Miscellaneous

Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Yoga

— Promode Kumar Sen

Publisher: Indus Source, Mumbai

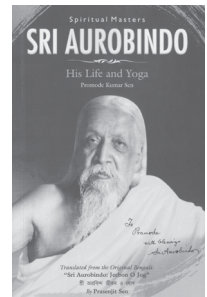
240 pp, ISBN 978-81-88569-71-7,

Rs 295

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book is the English translation of the Bengali biography *Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* written in 1939. The author explained that he undertook this work to give an indication of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual stature, because at the time many of his countrymen did not understand why Sri Aurobindo had retired from politics and immersed himself in *sadhana* at Pondicherry. The author hoped his readers would become aware that through the Integral Yoga lay the path to man's highest realisations, and to that end devoted eight chapters to an exposition of Sri Aurobindo's thought. A revised edition, published in 1952, included additional material written after the conclusion of World War II and an epilogue written after Sri Aurobindo's passing.



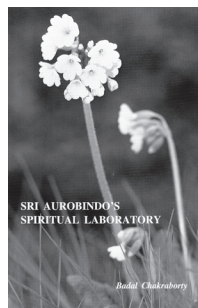
Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual Laboratory

— Badal Chakraborty

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Bharat Ashram, Dogachia

62 pp, Rs 80

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover



The author spent his formative years from 1944 to 1958 at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This brief account conveys his understanding and his experience of the purpose and goal of the Ashram as a spiritual laboratory where everyone had the freedom to progress and seek self-perfection. Blending personal recollection with an exposition of the ideals and vision of Sri Aurobindo

and the Mother, his book urges a continued effort to work for the transformation of human nature.

Srimad Bhagavatam: At Each Step a Luminous World

— Prema Nandakumar

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

251 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-335-1, Rs 375

Size: 16x25 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Drawing on Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the significance of the Puranas, the author wrote a series of articles on the Bhagavata Purana that was originally published serially in the journal *Mother India*. Taking up the legends in this most popular of the Puranas, she looks at the way they have inspired Indian philosophy, literature, and culture, making the ancient spiritual truths of the *rishis* appealing to the mind of a whole people. Varaha, Vamana-Trivikrama, Rishabha, and Rama, four incarnations of Vishnu, are studied in separate sections; five chapters are devoted to Krishna. The stories of several devotees (the child Dhruva, the sinner Ajamila, the *rakshasa* Prahlad, the elephant Gajendra, and King Ambarisha) are included to illustrate how each individual can attain the Divine.

See review on page 20

Essays on Sri Aurobindo

— Edited by Aparajita Mukhopadhyay

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata, and Suryodaya Books, New Delhi

287 pp, ISBN 978-81-925702-8-0, Rs 990

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Hard Cover

In an effort to present some aspects of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy and vision for the future, the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies at Jadavpur University has collected eleven papers on various subjects. These include a look at Sri Aurobindo's theory of the evolution of consciousness, a comparison between the standpoints of

quantum mechanics and spiritual experience as to the creation of the world, essays on *The Life Divine*, and a study of Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics as expressed in *Savitri*. Other essays provide an analysis of the philosophical similarities between Sri Aurobindo and Heraclitus, a critical appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's political theory, and a look at his seminal thoughts on education.

See review on page 19

Sri Aurobindo and European Philosophy

— Wilfried Huchzermeyer

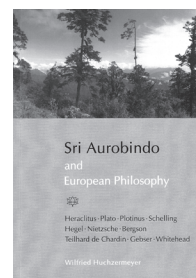
Publisher: PRISMA, Auroville

193 pp, ISBN 978-81-928152-9-9, Rs 399

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The primary focus of this study is to show how closely Sri Aurobindo's thought is related to European philosophy. The author maintains that Sri Aurobindo's own inner experience and spiritual perception presented a deeper understanding and a larger vision of the basic thought of some Western philosophers: Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Teilhard de Chardin, Gebser, and Whitehead. The final two chapters comprise Sri Aurobindo's 1915 essay *Evolution* and a look at how the philosophers discussed in the book are represented in an analysis of modern theories of evolution.



Excellence in Professional Work

A Consciousness Approach

— M. S. Srinivasan

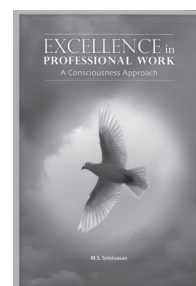
Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

116 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-367-2, Rs 220

Size: 16x23 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Based on the premise that excellence in professional work is the external result of the effective use of inner faculties in our consciousness, this book attempts a practical approach to developing these inner abilities. The strategies and methods outlined here can be practised individually or applied to a collective endeavour. Drawing on many of the precepts of the Integral Yoga, the author discusses such inner faculties as concentration, mindfulness, analytical intelligence, pragmatic intelligence, emotional intelligence, will and vital-force, imagination, and intuition, and suggests how they can be developed to improve workplace performance.



The English of Savitri: Part 2 (Book Three – The Book of the Divine Mother)

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri

— Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

272 pp, ISBN 978-93-82474-07-4, Rs 450

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Like the first book in this series, this one is also based on transcripts of classes held at Savitri Bhavan. The author's aim in those classes was to read the poetry as correctly as possible, according to the natural rhythms of English speech, to gain a basic understanding of the vocabulary, sentence structure, and imagery used by Sri Aurobindo, and thereby gain a better understanding and appreciation of the poem. This volume covers the four cantos of Book Three, The Book of the Divine Mother. As the previous volume covered Book One and this one resumes with Book Three, a brief summary of Book Two is given in an introductory section to provide some continuity to the series.

Collected Poems of Nirodbaran

with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections

— Nirodbaran

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

Volume I: 638 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-084-2, Rs 400

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Volume II: 707 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-085-9, Rs 440

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

The more than four hundred poems included in two volumes were written between 1936 and 1944 and demonstrate the sure development of Nirodbaran's poetic artistry under the meticulous guidance of Sri Aurobindo. While some of the poems have appeared previously, more than two hundred are published here for the first time. The numbered poems are presented in chronological order, with the original poem accompanied by Sri Aurobindo's corrections and comments followed by the final, revised version. These volumes trace the growth of a poet, reveal how writing poetry became a form of *sadhana*, and provide a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's emphatic mastery of poetic feeling and technique.

See review on page 8

The Path of Later On (DVD) (ENGLISH/FRENCH)

— A short film based on a story by the Mother

Publisher: Nava Vihan, Pondicherry

Rs 130

Written by the Mother as a school essay in 1893, this simple story of a young student points to the moral lesson

of heeding one's inner voice and choosing the right path, and never postponing that choice for a later time. The DVD presents two sixteen-minute film versions of the story, one in French and the other in English, each set to music, told by a narrator, and illustrated with a series of black-and-white sketches. The printed text, in French and in English, is included in the DVD case.

OTHER LANGUAGES

ARABIC

Anthology from the Mother in Arabic : Bilingual Edition

— Compiled from the works of the Mother

ISBN 978-0-69254-743-4

Rs 750

FRENCH

Journal du Yoga

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Aurohasha, Auroville

Livre I (1909 - début 1914)

554 pp, ISBN 978-81-902032-3-4, Rs 1250

Size: 16x24 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Glossaire

289 pp, ISBN 978-81-902032-4-1, Rs 610

Size: 16x24 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Entre 1909 et 1927, Sri Aurobindo a noté ses expériences yogiques, réunies en deux volumes dans ce *Journal du Yoga*. Ces notations sont assez régulières entre 1912 et 1920, et nous en trouvons un petit nombre en 1909, 1911 et 1927. Ce Journal comporte des notations complémentaires, notamment les descriptions des sept *chatusthayas* (groupes de quatre éléments) qui constituent la base du yoga que Sri Aurobindo pratiquait à cette époque.

La terminologie spéciale employée par Sri Aurobindo puise dans le sanskrit et dans d'autres langues. Un glossaire provisoire fait l'objet d'un volume séparé.

Vers une psychologie intégrale

Introduction à la pensée psychologique de Sri Aurobindo

— par A.S. Dalal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

523 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-048-4, Rs 400

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Une anthologie des textes de Sri Aurobindo qui traitent de la psychologie dans le sens le plus large du terme : la découverte de notre vrai moi, dans toutes ses dimensions, individuelles et collectives, pour jeter les bases d'une psychologie spirituelle intégrale. Présenté et commenté par A.S. Dalal.

Le Sentier de Tout-à-l'heure (DVD) (FRENCH/ENGLISH)
Rs 130

Ecrit par la Mère en 1893 quand elle était âgée de 15 ans, ce devoir de classe devient sous sa plume une invitation à écouter notre voix intérieure et à choisir le vrai but de notre vie, sans remettre la décision au lendemain. Ce DVD présente deux narrations de cette histoire, en français et en anglais (chacune d'une durée de 16 minutes) illustrée par une série de croquis en noir et blanc avec accompagnement musical. Le texte imprimé dans les deux langues est inclus dans le coffret.

GERMAN

Ewige Jugend — Compilation Rs 150
Veda-Weisheit — Nishtha Muller Rs 600

ITALIAN

L'enigma di questo mondo — Sri Aurobindo Rs 120
Colloqui Serali con Sri Aurobindo
— Recorded by A. B. Purani Rs 650

SPANISH

Una Juventud Eterna — The Mother Rs 700
ISBN 978-84-936142-9-4
Palabras de la Madre: Tomo V — The Mother Rs 970
ISBN 978-84-933818-5-1
Palabras de la Madre: Tomo VI — The Mother Rs 950

BENGALI

Sahana Devi : Nirvachita Rachanasangraha
— Edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya hc Rs 500
ISBN 978-93-84101-20-6
Sri Aurobinder 'Bhagabat Jeeban'
— Narendranath Dashgupta Rs 60
ISBN 978-81-9316-247-7

GUJARATI

Purnayoganavaneet — A. B. Purani Rs 125

HINDI

Prashna aur Uttar 1950-51 — The Mother Rs 270
ISBN 978-93-5210-042-2
Sri Aravindkrita Muktidata Perseus: Ek Adhyayan
— Amrita Bharati hc Rs 850
ISBN 978-81-89600-45-7
Bharat Evam Uski Sanskriti Ki Mahanata
— Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and
the Mother hc Rs 450
ISBN 978-81-903276-9-5
Jeevan ka Saccha Lakshya - 2 — Compilation Rs 80
ISBN 978-81-931830-2-1
Auroville: Sakar Hota Hua Ek Swapna — Alain G.
Rs 180

ORIYA

Maankara Aau Ketoti Uttara (CWM VOL 17)
— The Mother hc Rs 265
ISBN 978-93-5210-091-0
Khadya (41 pp) — Compiled from the works of
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother Rs 25

TAMIL

Durgai Thudhi — Sri Aurobindo Rs 8
IS BN 978-81-7058-901-3

TELUGU

Divyajeevanam: Chivari Adhyayalalo rendintipai
Sri Mata Vyakhyanamulu — The Mother Rs 120
Shri Champaklal — Edited by M. P. Pandit Rs 30

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BOOK REVIEWS

Essays on Sri Aurobindo

— Edited by Aparajita Mukhopadhyay

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata,
and Suryodaya Books, New Delhi

287 pp, ISBN 978-81-925702-8-0, Rs 990

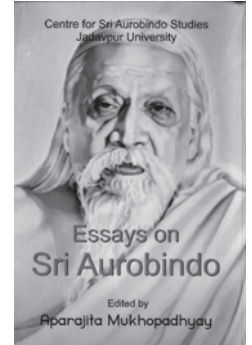
Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Aparajita Mukhopadhyay of the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies at Jadavpur University has done a commendable job in weaving a garland of essays on various perspectives of Sri Aurobindo's thought. The diversity of topics brings a freshness, more so, as often the same theme is approached in different ways. Perhaps the most significant motif is how different authors have approached Sri Aurobindo's concern for finding a justifiable link between the One and the Many, the Unity and the Multiplicity. Indeed this problem has plagued the Indian psyche for thousands of years. Swami Vivekananda had even commented that it had been unsolved through millenniums, and that the concept of Maya was not a solution as it represented a statement of facts and was more descriptive than explanatory. R. C. Pradhan uses the logic of the Infinite to trace how Sri Aurobindo takes an integral approach to preserve both unity and diversity in the creative Real-Idea of the Supermind. S. E. Bhelke demonstrates how Sri Aurobindo uses the logic of opposition and the concept of negation to transcend unilayered structures so that oppositions and incompatibilities thought to be otherwise inconsistent could be integral parts of the same unitary reality. Dilip Kumar Roy in a scholarly yet lucid exposition shows how Heraclitus, the legendary Greek thinker, considered both unity and multiplicity to be real and eternally co-existent, a view in consonance with the Aurobindonian paradigm. Ulrich Mohrhoff mixes style and precision to explain how form and its structure change to formlessness, paving the way for the quantum world to understand the timeless, unlimited dimension of reality at an omnipresent point from where again one can trace the coming into being of form. Just as Ulrich analyzes the state of formlessness, Raghunath Ghosh traces how the state of deathlessness in Sri Aurobindo's 'overhead poetry' can be used as a starting point to explain the harmony between the ultimate One and the cosmic divergent.

Besides the relation between the One and the Many, the relation of Ananda (Bliss) and Evil in Sri Aurobindo's synthetic exposition has also been explored in this collection from various standpoints. In a significant contribution, Stephen Phillips differentiates between moral evils and natural evils (disease, old age and death) and suggests that like moral evils, natural evils are also the result of our deeds. It is not clear why Phillips excludes natural catastrophes but even within the Aurobindonian framework everything need not be accounted for on the basis of Karma. Certain calamities happen when the lower nature, both in the individual and in the terrestrial manifestation, offers resistance to descending higher powers. Phillips believes that the intrinsic Bliss of the Brahman should not be simplistically equated with the instrumental delight in the 'inessential self-manifestation' though he does not clarify why the 'finite' manifestation can be 'inessential' in the Aurobindonian rubric. After all, it has been acknowledged that the instrumental delight very often represents a deviation and distortion of the original intrinsic Bliss, and it is from that imperfect (which probably Phillips calls inessential) matrix that the trajectory to the source has to be traced back. Indrani Sanyal deals with similar issues in an exposition of Sri Aurobindo's teachings to show how Evil manifests from the Divine Matrix without having fundamentality or eternity yet having a meaning in the evolutionary scheme.

Another important theme that has been approached from different perspectives, though not as exhaustively as other themes, is the relation between the individual and the collectivity. This is welcome as Sri Aurobindo's social perspective has not been studied to the same extent as his metaphysics. It is joyful to read Susmita Bhattacharya's journey from the myth as a bonding factor in Sartre to the fraternity based on the ego-surpassing soul-camaraderie visualized by Sri Aurobindo. Asok Mukhopadhyay has contributed a piece on understanding Sri Aurobindo's concept of Sanatana Dharma that leads from nationalism to internationalism, but a more detailed understanding



of how individualism and collectivism is dealt with in *The Ideal of Human Unity* would have added more value to this essay. Indeed, the psychological impasse between the individual and the collectivity is more basic in Sri Aurobindo's political thought than the concern with clans and tribes, which Mukhopadhyay believes was the prime motivator of Sri Aurobindo's political thinking. Similarly, Bijayananda Kar's scholarly article on spiritual humanism is a powerful essay, but could have been enriched with an appreciation of the psychological insights in Sri Aurobindo's thought that actually preceded the transpersonal perspective in contemporary psychology, where mystical experience has been given due importance. Kar is concerned that even if a mystical experience is accepted to be genuine, the universality of the content cannot be rationally justified. This issue has already been taken up by contemporary consciousness-researchers studying intersubjectivity with transpersonal technology. Besides, it is important to understand Sri

Aurobindo's description of how intuition per se performs the role of critical reason in a higher denouement.

Anirban Ganguly, an alumnus of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, has written a seminal essay on Sri Aurobindo's early thoughts on education that gives illuminating insights into how Sri Aurobindo was preparing himself to lay the foundations of his later work.

The most important contribution of this collection of essays lies in its heuristic value, for it raises many insightful queries that call for multifaceted research.

— Dr Soumitra Basu

Dr Basu is a psychiatrist exploring the consciousness paradigm of health, psychology, and psychotherapy from the integral perspective of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Srimad Bhagavatam: At Each Step a Luminous World

— Prema Nandakumar

Publisher: AuroPublications, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

251 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-335-1, Rs 375

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Smt. Prema Nandakumar needs no introduction to the discerning reader. Her prodigious output on various themes spiritual, religious, and literary vouches for her erudition and the monumental research which is at the root of many of her works. She deserves kudos for reigniting the dying embers of Puranic lore and literature in India, and her book *Srimad Bhagavatam: At Each Step a Luminous World* bears ample testimony to all that I have said about her at the outset. In this work the author has referenced Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the significance of the Puranas—that the Puranic religions are really only a new form, altered in temperament and style and expanded, of the truth of India's ancient spirituality and philosophy and socio-religious culture. He said that “it is only in an understanding of the turn of the Indian religious imagination and of the place of these writings in the evolution of the culture that we can seize their sense”. [CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 372]

The Puranas have been with us for centuries and have influenced and moulded the Hindu mind and ethos, a fact which can't be wished away. Prahlada, Dhruva, and

a host of other devotees are household names, and the story of Gajendra Moksha is always held up as an example of the Lord's saving grace when a Bhakta surrenders absolutely to him. The modern educated mind may berate the Puranas as a bunch of myths and legends fit only for bedtime stories for credulous children and devoid of any historical veracity, but Sri Aurobindo offers another view. He once explained to a disciple that while the stories of Krishna's life are a mixture of facts, tradition, and psychic experience, what is important is their truth on the psychic and spiritual plane. He added that:

The Bhagavata is a book of religion, it is not history. Even the Mahabharata is not history. It is poetry, legend and tradition all woven into poetry, all arranged round certain facts. [A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, 2007, pp. 381–2]

The Vishnu Purana throws light on the incarnations of Vishnu and the Bhagavata Purana draws its inspiration from the Vishnu Purana. It contains the sagas of great devotees like Prahlada, Ambarisha, and Dhruva and of the avatars or manifestations of Lord Vishnu as Varaha, Vamana, and Krishna, who occupies the most spectacular, central place of all. As for the Vishnu



Purana, Sri Aurobindo particularly appreciated its poetic excellence:

In the Vishnu Purana all these aspects are very finely described. The Vishnu Purana is the only Purana I have carefully read through. I wonder how it has escaped general notice that it is also magnificent poetry. [Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 163]

It is India which gave to the world the God-lover, and the renaissance of Hinduism is greatly attributed to the Bhakti movement, spearheaded in the South by the Vaishnavite Alvars (immersed in the Lord) and the Shaivite Nayanmars. Their soulful hymns are sung even today in temples and households. The author has drawn extensively and heavily on the Alvars' contribution to the proliferation of Bhakti or devotion to the Lord which has echoed in other parts of India, both North and South, giving a cultural, spiritual, and religious solidarity to the Bharatavarsha that is India today. Bhakti is the mainstay of the Bhagavata and is the theme that runs through all the chapters of this eminently readable book. In the scheme of Vaishnavism the Yoga of Divine Love or Bhakti Yoga supersedes the other two yogas, Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga, because of its efficacy and comparative ease, although it is also to be understood that Karma or right action offered to the Lord as an act of love, adoration, and devotion engenders Jnana or Knowledge of the Divine. Bhakti unites Bhagavan, the Lord, and Bhakta, the devotee, and they merge to become one in the supreme integral realization of the Divine.

The question before us is how we should evaluate this book. Is it old wine in a new bottle or does it break completely new ground? There is no gainsaying the fact that 'Purana' means old, but though old is not always gold, in this case the Bhagavata Purana has golden nuggets that Smt. Prema Nandakumar ferrets out and presents with such erudition and passion that the details overwhelm us with the nuances of Bhakti Yoga. That, I say, is the welcome 'new' in this book. She makes full use of her Vaishnavite background and the spiritual ambience of Srirangam, her hometown which is called 'Bhooloka Vaikuntam', Vishnu's abode on earth, to buttress her exuberant expatiations of the poetic outpourings of the Alvars. Her exposition of the Bhakti cult is punctuated by these soulful hymns and adds a valuable dimension to this book. Bhakti is not old; it is an eternal spring of Divine nectar, a nectar partaken of by devotees of the Lord all over India from the Puranic age to present times. Meera, Tukaram, Surdas, and Purandaradasa are all historical figures, and their

musical outpourings have been preserved and propagated by modern classical singers, thus enriching our already rich culture.

The author has highlighted the story of Parikshit to whom we owe the Bhagavata Purana. Parikshit was the lone survivor of the vengeful Ashwatthama's massacre of the Pandava scions during one fatal night. Cursed by the son of Sage Shamika for insulting his father, Parikshit is given only seven more days of earthly life at the end of which the great serpent king Taksha will kill him. Sage Shuka, who is the narrator of the Bhagavata, then expounds the glory of the Lord, his incarnations, his ananta lila and his vouchsafing of the divine bliss of the divine union to his devotees like Prahlada and Dhruva. Parikshit, thus illumined by Sage Shuka's discourse, attains the Brahmic state of bliss and, fully resigned to his fate, succumbs to Taksha's fatal bite.

There is a great tradition in India of the repetition of the Lord's name, nama japa, and the singing of the Lord's name, nama sankeertanam. Thyagaraja, one of the renowned trinity of Carnatic music, talks in his compositions about the taraka nama as a saviour name (for him it is Rama Nama). There has even been a dispute as to whether nama is greater than nami (bearer of the nama) or vice versa. The name of the Lord is the Lord himself and all the power of the Lord resides in it; hence the nama japa, which leads to Moksha or Mukti, is itself japa yoga. The author has devoted one chapter to this subject, in which she weaves a wonderful tapestry of Nama, the eternal Name. Purandaradasa, in one of his Kannada compositions, urges man to constantly utter the name of the Lord (Nama mantrava japiso, manuja). The Bhagavata, while taking up a variety of incidents to show us the potent efficacy of devotion, uses the story of Ajamila to exemplify the redeeming power of the Lord that saves even sinners from perdition.

Ajamila, despite his high born Brahmin birth, fell into bad ways and became corrupted. He doted on his last son, Narayana, and on his deathbed called out to him even as the messengers of Death, Yama, came to take his life. But the mere utterance of the word 'Narayana' was enough to summon the emissaries of Lord Vishnu, and the arguments and counter-arguments about who should have the custody of Ajamila were settled when Vishnu's emissaries proclaimed that a sinner who utters the name of Narayana is absolved of all his sins and earns temporary relief from death. All these exchanges between the two camps serve to open Ajamila's eyes.

Shunning his wasteful life of sin and atoning for his past misdeeds, the penitent Ajamila meditates on the Lord, gives up his body, and attains Mukti. The main point to be noted is the superiority of Bhakti over Mukti. While Mukti erases sins Bhakti not only erases sin but effectively destroys the very sinful tendencies.

The author has dwelt beautifully on the birth of Krishna, his divine life and his divine lilas in Brindavan, his passage from Brajkishore, “beloved of Vraja”, to his ascendancy as King of Dwaraka, and his elimination of Jarasandha, Shisupala, and other evil forces ranged against him to prevent the establishment of Dharma. We can remember with hope and joy his assurance in the Gita:

*Paritranaya sadhunam vinashayacha dushkritam,
dharmasansthanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.*

The Bhagavata is essentially devotional literature whose protagonist is Lord Vishnu with his avatars. I will wind up the review with some observations on Krishna in Brindavan. Krishna’s life and exploits in Brindavan have seeped into the Indian consciousness, giving birth to wonderful poetic literature in Sanskrit and other languages of India. Shri Krishna is the eternal Nayaka, the Lord, the manamohana and the jaganmohana whose dance of bliss with all the souls as gopis is the Divine Rasa Lila, eternally taking place in the eternal Brindavan. All the souls as the eternal portions, amsha sanatana, of the Lord, are the gopis and consorts of the Lord, and Radha of Brindavan is “the personification of the absolute love for the Divine, total and integral in all parts of the being from the highest spiritual to the physical, bringing the absolute self-giving and total consecration of all the being and calling down into the body and the most material Nature the supreme Ananda”. [CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 494]

Every page of this book is flavoured with Bhakti and takes one to a meditative poise away from the unholy chatter of the monkey mind.*

— K. Balasubramaniam
Since 1972 Bala-bhai has been teaching English, Mathematics, and Numerical Analysis at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

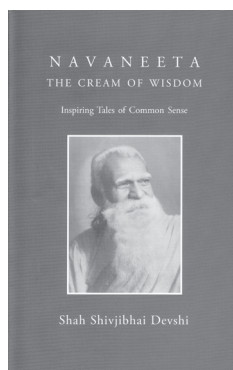
* “Monkey mind” is a Buddhist term used to describe a restless and agitated mind.

Navaneeta – The Cream of Wisdom *Inspiring Tales of Common Sense*

— Narrator: Shah Shivjibhai Devshi; Writer: Pujalal
Publisher: Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry
117 pp, ISBN 978-81-86413-58-6, Rs 70

Size: 14x22 cm

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In an age dominated by weighty, intellectual books, it becalms the mind and soothes the soul to read a book of simple stories and anecdotes from a spiritual seeker. Such a collection is *Navaneeta, The Cream of Wisdom*. And the seeker of truth is Shivjibhai Devshi.

A seeker of truth exerts a kind of magnetism. People flock to him, trying to glean wisdom, hoping to get some explanation to the riddle that is life or some guidance to seek peace and happiness. A social activist and a spiritual seeker, Shivjibhai travelled about the country sharing tales, anecdotes and parables extolling a life of simplicity, common sense, compassion and sadhana. To all those who approached him, he said, “*Sadā maganmein rahenā*”—“Always live drowned in bliss.”

Shivjibhai’s stories were recorded in Gujarati by the poet Pujalal. In this new edition, they have been edited and translated by Sunjoy Bhatt. Explaining the genesis of this edition, the editor writes, “Pujalalji’s luxuriant multi-limbed Gujarati of the 1940s overwhelmed me, but the ageless spirit and message of the stories were too inspiring not to be shared with others.” And wherever apt, the editor has added quotations from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at the end of the stories.

The tales range from personal anecdotes and stories about nature and animals, to tales based on human emotions and even follies, to stories centred on sadhana and spiritual seeking. Thus the anecdotes of dogs, simple creatures tormented by street urchins, and the story of a magnificent *vad*, or banyan tree that protected all with benevolence, bring us closer to nature and teach us to appreciate its simplicity and beauty and to be compassionate to all living beings. In an anecdote titled “The Silent Mentor”, Shivjibhai, with his long beard and flowing white hair, piques the curiosity of Nasarvan. The young man brands him as a madman when he sees him writing the words “The mango-tree, a silent mentor”, which might seem to anyone the eccentricity of a

madman. Later in the story, Shivjibhai explains how the mango tree has fulfilled the purpose of its existence by providing shelter and fruits and asks, “How many of us have manifested the flowers and fruits latent in the seed of divinity that is embedded in our innermost being?”

The stories composing “On Humanity” revolve around common sense and foolishness, such as that of a Brahmin who missed out on the king’s charity owing to his laziness. There is also a story of two friends who purchase from the same stock of betel nuts; while one curses the nuts and suffers after eating them, the other relishes the nuts and thus benefits. Isn’t it true that “we are ourselves the creators of our joys and sorrows”? There are also anecdotes about the Swaraj movement and the urgent need for action rather than words.

In the penultimate set of stories, “On Sadhana”, a particularly memorable one is the story of a maharaja who truly imbibed his guru’s mantra, “This day too shall pass”. When his kingdom was invaded and he was captured by the enemy, instead of being “darkened by fear and despair, his face was lit with a gentle smile”. The conqueror, on seeing that nothing could truly vanquish this king, restored to him his kingdom. And then there is the story of Queen Tarangini who proved the power of her *tapascharya* to her husband, King Chandravadan, by lifting a buffalo onto her shoulders and climbing the stairs to his dais, even as the strongest of wrestlers in the kingdom failed, and declared that “without a steady and intense sadhana there is no Siddhi”. Other stories revolve around spiritual teachers and how ordinary people, blinded by their own arrogance, at first doubt them but are ultimately uplifted and have their eyes opened by the grace and benevolence of these wise souls.

These are but some of the many wondrous stories. The translator has done a magnificent job of bringing them to life with a rich, varied prose that readers can at once relate to and revel in. These simple stories go straight to the heart, bring a smile to one’s face and remain in the psyche long after one has closed the book. They are at once pearls of wisdom and lessons that open our eyes to worlds beyond our ken.

— Meera Guthi

Meera is an alumna of SAICE. She has published stories for children and adults as well as journalistic features in various newspapers and magazines. She currently teaches at SAICE, helping students discover the wonder of the written word by exploring literature and honing their own skills as writers.

The Vedic Age

In the Light of Sri Aurobindo

— Chandra Prakash Khetan

Publisher: The Resurgent India Trust, Jhunjhunu

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ISBN 978-81-903276-8-8, Rs 375 (Soft Cover)

Sri Aurobindo, while writing on Sanatana Dharma, says: “I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijnate sarvam vijnatam*. I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism,—but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.” (CWSA, *Essays Divine and Human*, Vol. 12, p. 62)

Indeed, the Veda is the spiritual cradle of Indian culture. The spiritual and cultural history of India begins with the Veda. As Sri Aurobindo reiterates, “There is no part of the spirituality, of the world’s religion, of the world’s thought which would be what it is today, if the Veda had not existed.” (*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, 1977, Vol. 1, Number 1, p. 31)

Unfortunately, this treasure of India has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by most of the academic community in the West and even in India. While interpreting the Vedas and endeavouring to map out the history of the Vedic age, most scholars view the Vedas as depicting a series of events. The Western mind has been intent on discovering the historical and sociological references, the custom and convention of the Veda. There was not the least attempt to unravel its symbolic or psychological significance. As a result, the true sense of the Vedic expression remained neglected.

In India, after Swami Dayananda Saraswati, it was predominantly Sri Aurobindo who provided a right direction to enter into the secret chamber of the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo was a *Rishi* who by the power of his Yoga could see the reality behind the Vedic mantras. In the course of his interpretation of the Veda, he offered his own luminous perceptions to dispel any obscurity of

symbolism and clear any ambiguity of phrase. The result is *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, two major contributions of Sri Aurobindo that facilitate the study of the Vedas with an aim to understand the deep psychological and numinous sense of their contents. There have been very few attempts to lay out a study of



the Vedas in the light of Sri Aurobindo's insight, and in this context, *The Vedic Age—In the Light of Sri Aurobindo*, written, compiled and edited by Chandra Prakash Khetan, needs sincere attention and study.

The contents of this book are distributed over four parts. In the first part, titled "Introduction", the author clarifies that the approach taken here to rediscover the history of the Vedic age is "for a profound understanding of the true law and aim of the individual and the collective existence". After examining the materialistic, ascetic and integral spiritual approaches to individual and collective existence, the author provides evidence that the study of the Vedas and the history of the Vedic age must be pursued in the light of an integral spiritual ideal which aims at seeing behind the appearances "the progressive manifestation of the spirit in the terrestrial nature". This certainly was the preoccupation of the seers and sages of the Vedic age. In the next section of the first part of the book the author discusses the gross misconception and misinterpretation of the Vedas by Europeans, which gave birth to the Aryan Invasion Theory that harmed the integrity and well-being of India. In the third and the fourth sections of this part, a sound introduction to the Vedas and the Upanishads is provided by liberally quoting from the writings of Sri Aurobindo. After engaging readers in a discussion on the history of the Veda and the secret of the persistent Vedism of Indian thought and spirituality, the author ends the first part by discussing the misrepresentation of Vedic truth by modern Vedic scholarship, and the misinterpretation of the life and times of the Vedic people.

The second part of the book, comprised of eight chapters, provides a detailed discussion of Sri Aurobindo's profound interpretation of the Veda based on his own deep and vast spiritual experience and knowledge, and solidly supported by philological and

historical considerations. While this is the main focus of this part of the book, the author does not spare any issues related to the interpretation of the Veda: the need for recovering the truth of the Veda; the problem in finding out the secret of the Veda and its discovery by Sri Aurobindo; the historical background of how the Veda suffered the mutilation of its sense; interpretations of the Veda by Yaska, Sayana and Swami Dayananda; the problem of Vedic interpretation and the necessary processes suggested by Sri Aurobindo for the validation of Vedic truth; the interpretation of Vedic symbolism arising directly from the language of the Veda and passing through philological, psychological and historical tests; and the doctrine of the mystics that recognizes a timelessness behind all things that is not conquerable by the pursuit of the mind.

In the third part, titled "The History of the Vedic Age", the Vedas from the perspectives of modern European and Indian historians are presented. The author also discusses the mistakes committed by traditional Indian interpreters like Sayana as well as the ones committed by Occidental scholars. A broad overview of Indian history highlights the central motives and distinctive characteristics of Indian civilization and culture—an ingrained spirituality, a prolific creativeness, a strong intellectuality, and the tendency to seek out the profoundest depths and highest pinnacles of philosophic thought or spiritual experience.

The last part of the book contains two appendices: quotes from Sri Aurobindo's writings on the origins of Aryan speech and a refined note on Vedic literature.

This volume is very well presented, and renders a much-needed clarity with regard to not just a study of the Veda but also to a balanced evaluation of Indian culture and civilization. An index of important keywords might have added even more to its presentation, but as a whole, this book provides a strong foundation for taking up a study of the Veda and the history of the Vedic age in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

— Sampadananda Mishra
Sampad is presently working at the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. As part of his work he is exploring, through his research, the many wonders and splendours of Sanskrit and sharing these with others through his workshops, lectures, and writings.