

# Recent Publications S a b d a

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Yama and Nachiketa, at Sankara  
Mutt, Rameshwaram



The Upaniṣads figure prominently in this issue beginning with an essay that traces Sri Aurobindo's engagement with these ancient scriptures from as early as 1900. Some years later, his commentaries and translations were first published in the monthly journal *Arya*, but his interpretations and understanding of their significance continued to grow.

Later in the newsletter, a review of a recent publication, *Time-Steps of the Cosmic Horse: The Contemplative Philosophy of the Great Forest (Bṛhadāraṇyaka) Upaniṣad*, substantially adds to our insights into and appreciation of the Upaniṣads.

# Sri Aurobindo on the Upaniṣads

Sri Aurobindo's encounter with the Upaniṣads goes back to his days as a student of the Classics at Cambridge University, but his serious engagement with them began while at Baroda at the turn of the century. Around 1900 he began preparing a manuscript of translations titled "The Upaniṣads rendered into simple and rhythmic English," in which he translated a number of the major Upaniṣads, such as the Īśa, the Kena, the Kaṭha, the Muṇḍaka, the Praśna and the Māṇḍūkya. Between 1902 and 1906, before his move from Baroda to Bengal to devote himself entirely to political activism for national independence, he began translating some of the larger and earlier Upaniṣads, the Taittirīya, Aitareya, early portions of the Chāndogya and a later Upaniṣad, the Śvetāśvatara and to write essays on the philosophy of the Upaniṣads. The last includes an unfinished set of seven essays titled *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (2001a, 345–399). Given their early origin in Sri Aurobindo's life, much before his systematic turn to yoga and major spiritual experiences leading to his life work, they are remarkable in their encapsulation of metaphysical ideas pointing towards the coherence and orientation of his later understanding and expression. It is a Vedānta Darshan in the Indian philosophical tradition, a complete framework of terms, relations and reasoning. Brahman, Ātman and Māyā, Vidyā and Avidyā, the gradations of consciousness from material through subtle and causal to spiritual and the statuses of Brahman related to these, Virāt of jāgrat, the waking condition, Hiraṇyagarbha of svapna, the dream condition, Prājña of suṣupti or avyakta, the unmanifest seed state of the cosmos and Parābrahman of turiya, the Source or Subject opening to its Unknowable infinity are discussed and related. Though lacking in his later emphasis on vijñāna or Supermind (here discussed as the state of Prājña of suṣupti) as the goal of a yoga fulfilling the telos of our age, it nevertheless provides the schematic of his Vedantic understanding, which with variations of nuance and emphasis, he was to describe for the rest of his life. Particularly remarkable is his treatment of Māyā in the figure, not of a meaningless illusion-maker but of a Creative Consciousness with its analogue in Shakespeare (386–391).

## Philosophy of the Upanishads

To arrive at this operation of Māyā, he sketches out the process by which Brahman, as unqualified Absolute, qualifies itself. Brahman, Conscious Being, for whom Bliss is the intrinsic experience of its absolute freedom, becomes conscious of itself as having the qualities of Being, Consciousness and Bliss (Saccidānanda) (366). This consciousness or qualifying self-regard is the action of Māyā. The subjective qualities of Being, Consciousness and Bliss have their natural objective counterparts, declared at the start

of the second chapter (Brahmānanda Valli) of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad as Satyam, Jñānam and Anantam, or Truth, Knowledge and Infinity (371). To be conscious of oneself as having qualities is to qualify oneself, a step that immediately brings into existence the absence of these qualities as the dark inverse of the qualified Being. Māyā is the power of the Absolute Brahman that qualifies it as the luminous shadow of self-consciousness, Saguna Brahman, casting thereby within it the dark shadow of its opposite, Avidyā, Ignorance, marked by multiplicity, transience, unconsciousness, suffering and mortality. Thus the phenomenal reality produced by Māyā may be thought of as a dualistic illusion within the Absolute; yet its figures and their interactions in space and time are significant truths of the Absolute and hence creative works just like the universes created by a Shakespeare. Here, though Sri Aurobindo raises the question of teleology, he justifiably discards necessity (374–375), since the Absolute acts by free choice and cannot be bound by necessity. He invokes the cycle of manifestation and return (374) and indicates an individual goal of jīvanmukti (365), but does not hold out a terrestrial fulfillment through a realization of the truth of both Vidyā and Avidyā and the transformation of the Avidyā into a manifestation of Vidyā in the becoming of the multiplicity, as he does in his later interpretation of the Īśa Upaniṣad (2003, 3–94) and more substantially as a cosmic telos in *The Life Divine* (2005). Along with many of the terms and inflections he will continue to use later, it is interesting to see Sri Aurobindo introduce the modes of knowledge (jñāna) which he discusses more extensively in his final commentary on the Kena Upaniṣad (2001a, 54–62) and to a lesser extent in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1999). This is what he has to say here about these modes:

The word *Jnāna* as a philosophic term has an especial connotation. It is distinguished from *samjñāna* which is awareness by contact; from *ājnāna* which is perception by receptive and central Will and implies a command from the brain; from *prajñāna* which is Wisdom, teleological will or knowledge with a purpose; and from *vijñāna* or knowledge by discrimination. *Jnāna* is knowledge direct and without the use of a medium. Brahman is absolute *Jnāna*, direct & self-existent, without beginning, middle or end, in which the Knower is also the Knowledge and the Known. (2001a, 371)

In his later writings, vijñāna is no longer “knowledge by discrimination” but comprehensive knowledge, knowledge at once of the whole and its parts, both as a mode of knowledge and a plane of consciousness, identified by him with what he came to call Supermind, saw as the next stage of nature’s evolution and its descent into physical consciousness the goal of his own yoga.

### **New Vedantic Vision**

From 1906 to 1912 there seems to be a hiatus in Sri Aurobindo’s writings on the Upaniṣads. These are the intense years of his nationalist activity and his early radical

spiritual experiences, culminating in his year of incarceration at Alipur jail between 1908 and 1909 and subsequent departure to Chandernagore and thence to Pondicherry. During the year in the jail his consciousness and understanding underwent a radical change. The Upaniṣads played no small part in this, both as means to the change and as result of the change. In his *Karakahini (Tales of Prison Life)*, Sri Aurobindo describes how he practiced one-pointed meditation on a mahāvākya (great saying) from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad: *sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma*, leading to the perception of Brahman everywhere and in all things. This phase in the jail also resulted in spiritual experiences that showed him his future work and the principal lines to its accomplishment. The experiences he received included the knowledge of the causal (kāraṇa) aspect of the cosmos (jagat) or vijñāna of the Upaniṣads as the next rung in evolution to be manifest on earth; and intermediate planes of cosmic mind leading to this consciousness. He gave the name Supermind to this causal plane and identified it in a chapter title in *The Synthesis of Yoga* by a Upaniṣadic Sanskrit and a Presocratic Greek name, Vijñāna or Gnosis (1999, 475). He also received the lines of his future work (karma) through a command (ādeśa) as yoga (which he sometimes referred to as dharma—his own yoga and that of his disciples), sāhitya (literature comprising philosophy, poetry, interpretation of traditional texts and philological exegesis), kṛti (politics, including national and world conditions) and samāja (society, the formation of a spiritual society, practically, his ashram) (2001b, 311). Thus this period gave him a new understanding of the Upaniṣads and their interpretation. It also gave him an understanding of the esoteric spiritual meanings of the Vedas and the relations of meaning between the Vedas and the Upaniṣads.

After his release from the jail, he spent about half a year in Calcutta continuing his political work, giving talks and publishing a journal titled *Karmayogin*. In this journal between 1909 and 1910, he published his translations of the Kena, Kaṭha, Īśa and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads which he had translated earlier. However, he began his writings on his revised understanding of the Upaniṣads from around 1912, after his departure to Pondicherry and gaining some sense of stability in his life there. Around 1912, he translated the first few sections of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, and began writing incomplete commentaries on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Īśa and Kena Upaniṣads. In 1914, after the visit of Paul Richard and the Mother, the journal *Arya* was launched, in which revised translations of the Kena, Īśa and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads were carried along with his commentaries on the Kena and Īśa Upaniṣads and a chapter on the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. All these works bear the impress and emphases of his revised understanding. Significantly, the Īśa Upaniṣad seems to have grown substantially in importance for him during this period, with several drafts for commentaries on this work penned between 1912 and 1914, before the publication of its final translation and interpretation in the *Arya* in 1914. One of the last of these commentaries (towards which he made three incomplete drafts), written between 1913 and 1914, prior to the final version, was titled

*The Life Divine* (2003, 361–590). He abandoned this version and wrote the independent magnum opus of his philosophy with the same title in the *Arya*, starting August 1914.

## Historical Insight

In considering the pre-*Arya* works of this period, an unfinished chapter on the Chāndogya Upaniṣad titled Satyakama Jabala is interesting for a variety of reasons, an important one being an indication of chronology that Sri Aurobindo gives us in it (2001a, 263–265). This is not an absolute historical chronology but what may be called a relative chronology, partly founded in traditional mythic history and partly in relative diachronic history. He identifies the Chāndogya as probably the earliest extant Upaniṣad based on



Ghora Angirasa taught the sacrificial nature of human life to Krishna, and he was freed from all desire.—Chāndogya Upaniṣad

the observation that “it speaks of Krishna, son of Devaki, and Dhritarashtra Vaichitravirya in a tone that would justify us in assuming that it regarded them not as ancient and far-off names but as men who had walked the earth in living memory” (263). He then indicates that the Upaniṣads represent a move from the “old ritualistic *karma* to the freedom of the *jnanamarga*.” The Dvāpara yuga, whose end was the Mahābhārata, is seen by him as marked by codified rituals.

This would make the Chāndogya an early Kaliyuga text. Sri Aurobindo follows this with a flash of insight pertaining to his understanding of the yugas as a relative time-structure. A fuller development of this theory of yugas as a time-structure can be found in *The Human Cycle* (1997, 7–14). Each yuga (or each quarter of any time-cycle) represents an order of containment (dharma). In the first quarter (satya yuga) this law is in the hearts of all beings and unfolds spontaneously; in the next quarter (treta yuga), the law is upheld by the hero and king; in the third quarter (dvāpara yuga), the law becomes codified and is upheld by the law books (dharma śāstras), rituals and social conventions and in the last quarter (kali yuga), all conventions are broken, the law books become confused and are challenged and individuals need to discover the law for themselves through yoga (2001a, 263–264). Sri Aurobindo assigns an avatar of Viṣṇu to each of these time-divisions. The Satya is the heliocentric age of Viṣṇu himself, residing in the hearts of all creatures; in the Treta, Viṣṇu descends as the hero and/or king Rāma of the Axe or Rāma the ethical king; in the



Dvāpara Viṣṇu descends as Vyāsa, “the codifier and systematiser of knowledge;” and at the head of the Kali, Viṣṇu descends as Kṛṣṇa to “break down the strong formations of the Dwapara” (264). He concludes with a revolutionary insight into the truth of our age (the Kali yuga): “It is the work of the Kali Yuga to destroy everything by questioning everything in order to establish after a struggle between the forces of purity and impurity a new harmony of life and knowledge in another Satyayuga” (264). In this context the jñānamārga of the Upaniṣads represent a means for the individual discovery of the law of truth (satya-dharma).

Apropos historical dating, the end of the Mahābhārata war and the start of the Kali yuga is traditionally placed at 3102 BCE. But archeological knowledge of the state of social organization at that time makes this very improbable. Modern historical reckoning places the war around 10<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads are dated to 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad is surmised by internal evidence to have been composed in the Kuru-Pāñchāla region (where the Kurukṣetra war occurred) while the Bṛhadāraṇyaka is supposed to have been composed in Kośalā, a further Eastern region of the Gangetic plain, to which the Aryan social and ritual structures spread later. Thus, Sri Aurobindo’s relative temporal conjectures about the Chāndogya Upaniṣad match interestingly with modern historical and geographical estimates.

### **The Arya Texts**

From 1914 to 1920, Sri Aurobindo wrote all his major works, serialized in the *Arya*. As mentioned earlier, this included translations of the Īśa, Kena and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads and commentaries on the Īśa and Kena Upaniṣad. It also included *The Life Divine*, a work laying out his philosophical vision and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, a text developing the methods and theory for four lines of praxis towards the achievement of his vision. In the *Synthesis*, Sri Aurobindo points out how philosophical theory is meant to be realized in experience, hence is accompanied by a theory of praxis (1999, 375). Traditionally, these two are known as darśana and yoga and accompany each other like the two wings of a bird. If *The Life Divine* is a work of darśana, *The Synthesis of Yoga* is its accompanying work of yoga. In a similar sense, one may say that Sri Aurobindo’s commentary on the Īśa Upaniṣad is a darśana while that on the Kena Upaniṣad is a yoga. We have noted how *The Life Divine* was the title of the penultimate version of the commentary on the Īśa Upaniṣad, prior to the *Arya* texts, where this title became a stand-alone discussion of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophical vision while the Īśa Upaniṣad received an interpretation in its own name. Within *The Life Divine*, all chapters start with one or more quotes from a traditional text, with the predominant number of such quotes being from the principal Upaniṣads. The substance of the chapters of both *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* draw to a large extent on the Veda, Upaniṣads and Gita (which identifies itself as belonging to the lineage of the Upaniṣads). For all these reasons, a scholar of Sri Aurobindo’s

works like Haridas Chaudhuri may be justified in identifying Sri Aurobindo's vision as a Vedānta darśana and in naming it Pūrṇādvaita Vedānta, Integral Nondualism (Chaudhuri 1974).

### Transcendence, Immanence and the Integral

One may note at first the central core of identity between the Īśa Upaniṣad and *The Life Divine*. The Īśa Upaniṣad shares with several other Upaniṣads, such as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Kaṭha, Muṇḍaka and Śvetāśvatara, a vision of a transcendent and immanent Whole (pūrṇa) which needs to be united (yoga) in the individual. The Muṇḍaka (III.1–3) and Śvetāśvatara (IV.6–7) describe this through an image of two birds which Sri Aurobindo translates:

1. Two birds, beautiful of wing, close companions, cling to one common tree: of the two one eats the sweet fruit of the tree, the other eats not but watches his fellow.
2. The soul is the bird that sits immersed on the one common tree; but because he is not lord he is bewildered and has sorrow. But when he sees that other who is the Lord and beloved, he knows that all is His greatness and his sorrow passes away from him.
3. When, a seer, he sees the Golden-hued, the maker, the Lord, the Spirit who is the source of Brahman, then he becomes the knower and shakes from his wings sin and virtue; pure of all stain he reaches the supreme identity. (2001a, 142).



Jīva and Īśvara

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo quotes a version of this same image from the Rig Veda (Rig Veda I. 164, 20, 21, in Sri Aurobindo 2005, 380). What Sri Aurobindo translates as “soul” in stanza 2 and “Spirit” in stanza 3 is Puruṣa in both cases. In stanza 2 it is the Puruṣa that eats the fruit, is “not lord” (anīśa) and has sorrow. In stanza 3, this Puruṣa sees the other bird, golden-hued, the lord, who is also referred to as Puruṣa. Upon seeing it, it is liberated and “reaches the supreme identity.” The Gīta, a later text, develops special terminology to distinguish between these Puruṣas. According to it, there are three Puruṣas involved, that are in fact the one Puruṣa

divided into three seemingly separate Puruṣas by the act of Māyā (Bhagavad Gīta XV.16; Sri Aurobindo 1999, 378-379). In the Gīta's terminology these are the kṣara or mutable Puruṣa, the akṣara or immutable Puruṣa and the puruṣottama or supreme Puruṣa. The kṣara Puruṣa is absorbed in the experiences of life; it passes through the states of happiness and sorrow that belong to the bounded instruments of body, life and mind. The akṣara Puruṣa is free of these experiences, not partaking of them and remaining aloof

and unchanging. When the kṣara Puruṣa recognizes that the akṣara is its own liberated unchanging status, it is freed. However, it then has a choice of remaining aloof from life's experiences or enjoying them in freedom, without being absorbed by them. This it can do by realizing itself to be one with the third supreme Puruṣa, who is simultaneously both the free unchanging Puruṣa and the mutable Puruṣa becoming what it experiences in life.

The Īśa Upaniṣad presents this doubleness in the image of the lord (Īśa) who resides in the becoming of the mutating multiplicity (Isha U 1 in Sri Aurobindo 2003, 5). At the same time it is the same lord who is the one unchanging Being, outside all becoming. The multiplicity and its becoming is identified as Avidyā or Ignorance, since it is a phenomenal seeming of Māyā's action (2003, 51–52). Yet it is the lord who resides in this multiplicity, meaning the phenomenal seeming is not an illusion but a choice of experience of the lord (Isha U 8 in Sri Aurobindo 2003, 7). The One immutable Being outside the becoming is identified as Vidyā since it is a self-absorbed exclusivity without the seeming of multiplicity or transience (2003, 52). Yet the Upaniṣad names the experience of Avidyā as a darkness and that of the Vidyā as a greater darkness, because both are exclusivities that see each other as contradictions (Isha U 9 in 2003, 8, 53). “Knowing both as one” is its desired goal, by which one crosses over death and enjoys immortality (Isha U 14 in 2003, 9), in other words, experiences the immutable in all the mutations of the becoming. However, this “knowing both as one” requires an overcoming of the dividing law of Māyā (2003, 51–56). This is realized in a consciousness at present alien to earthly experience (2005, 662–682), the state of vijñāna, the comprehensive knowledge in which the One and the Many are known together as one, pluralism = monism (1999, 414–418).

### **Conscious Evolution and the Supermind**

The implications of this are developed philosophically in *The Life Divine* as a goal of conscious evolution and the next stage in the evolution of consciousness (2005, 880–921). As a project of integral knowledge, the central question of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad is invoked by Sri Aurobindo as his problematic: *Kasmin vijñāte sarvam idaṁ vijñātāṁ bhavātīti*—Knowing what, does all here become known (2001, 131; 1999, 374)? The use of the term vijñāna in this question should be noted in its importance for Sri Aurobindo, for vijñāna is the integral knowledge, the knowledge of the whole and its parts. Though the Upaniṣads are not explicit about evolution, Sri Aurobindo derives it from key texts. He makes central use of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad's second and third chapters (Brahmānanda Valli and Bhṛgu Valli) where a Russian doll-like model of successively encapsulated selves (ātma) and persons (Puruṣa) are described. Within the physical (annamaya) self and person is the vital (prāṇamaya) self and person; within the vital is the mental (manomaya); within the mental is the supramental (vijñānamaya); and within the supramental is the bliss (ānandamaya) self and person. Sri Aurobindo sees these encapsulated discontinuous forms or modes of being to be evolutionary emergences—



the evolution of life in matter, of mind in life, and yet to come, the evolution of supermind in mind and of the being of bliss in supermind (2005, 266–275). Matter, life and mind that have evolved so far comprise the Avidyā (Ignorance) marked by an absorption in the separative phenomenal experience of Māyā; the emergence to come, Supermind, will establish a rung of experience in the cosmos which is free of the separative absorption and knows itself to be one in the many (2005, 277–279).

### **A Praxis of the Faculties**

Another schema of evolution is given in the Aitareya Upaniṣad (2001a, 197–202). Here a transcendental Self (ātman) gathers a Person (Puruṣa) out of the qualitative ocean of Being and by force of concentration produces cosmic faculties of experience in Puruṣa. The five faculties of experience that repeat in several Upaniṣads and are identified with the gods are sight (dṛṣṭi), hearing (śruti), thought (manah), breath (prāṇah) and speech (vāk). These disengage themselves from the cosmic and integral Puruṣa and fall into the “lower waters” of the Inconscient. In their disengagement and fall, they also acquire a sense of lack, of hunger and thirst, and seek for an adequate creature that can house them. They find a succession of creatures inadequate till the human is brought to them. This they find suitable for their collective habitation and take their positions in the human. Once they establish themselves the self (ātman) also establishes itself in the human. This parable indicates the evolution of nature (prakṛti) through faculties of experience. The human is the nature-form in which the faculties find an adequate container for their integrated experiencing, potentially leading back to the integral Person from which they fell. The entry of self into the human indicates a stage of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have called a “reversal of consciousness,” the evolution of person (Puruṣa) taking up the evolution of nature (Prakṛti).

The Kena Upaniṣad makes these five faculties the center of its attention and Sri Aurobindo, in his commentary (2001a, 3–98) makes this a means to highlight a theory and praxis towards Supermind. The individual faculties have hidden behind them and are the self-multiplication of the universal faculties of the supramental Puruṣa. They are instruments of its experience and knowledge, its integral knowledge (vijñāna) through its cognitive knowledge (prajñāna), sense knowledge (samjñāna) and volitional knowledge (ājñāna). We see here a return to the forms of knowledge introduced in the early work *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, but with a new comprehensive significance. None of the faculties can grasp Supermind as their object, since Supermind is the Subject of which they are the objective instruments. Yet, opening to this intuition, they become sites of a working whereby their functioning is transformed and used by Supermind for its self-experience. The last section of the Upaniṣad features a parable of the gods, where they are each visited by their incomprehensible source and made to endure a sublime experience which enters memory and calls forth a repetitive working leading to

transformation. The gods are the cosmic sources of the faculties, but even these, under the action of Māyā, are bound to their independent and qualified functions. The transformation of the individual faculties is backgrounded by the transformation of the cosmic faculties, the gods behind the individual faculties. This is the conscious evolution of yoga of nature, but when this reaches a pitch or critical point of completeness, the self (ātman) awakens and recognizes its identity with the supramental Self. The Kena Upaniṣad could, in this sense, be thought of as a praxeology of the Aitareya Upaniṣad and it is the interest in this praxical aspect that draws Sri Aurobindo's attention in his commentary.

—Debashish Banerji

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# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## ENGLISH

### **Sri Aurobindo: A Visionary Among World Thinkers**

*Comparative Studies in Select Concepts from Sri Aurobindo and World Thinkers*

—Essays by various authors, ed. V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

387 pp, Rs 750, ISBN: 978-93-85391-41-5

Dimensions: 16 x 24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Contemporary scholars compare Sri Aurobindo's perspective on a range of concepts and ideas with noted philosophical and contemplative thinkers from both India and the West. The leadoff essay by Nolini Kanta Gupta sets the high tone of this collection by setting out the ideal of Sri Aurobindo "to divinise the human, immortalise the mortal, spiritualise the material". Five essays compare Sri Aurobindo's ideas with other Indian thinkers on subjects such as spiritual awakening and enlightenment and interpretations of Advaita. The remaining essays examine comparisons with Western philosophers including Heraclitus, Gebser, Hegel, and Chalmers; psychologists Freud and Csikszentmihalyi; revolutionaries Marx and Gramsci; and educationists and linguists Steiner, Montessori, and Bakhtin. In the wideness and depth of these reflections one recognises Sri Aurobindo's power to reveal, "to the eye of vision and the heart of faith", the promise of this highest ideal for our future.

*previously introduced in February 2025 issue  
See review on page 15*

### **Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 11**

Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection  
(Chapters 8–18)

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

433 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-45-3

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The previous volume in this series showed how the psychology of self-perfection applies to the instrumentation of the being, its purification in preparation for the liberation of the Spirit and the Nature, which is where Volume Eleven begins. The liberation of the soul into the limitless Spirit demands freedom from the first two "master-knots of the lower nature": desire and ego. The liberation of the Nature exacts freedom from the second two: the dual action of Nature and the rule of the three *gunas*. Subsequent chapters delineate the elements of perfection starting from a basic equality of the soul mounting to an ideal action of the Divine through the perfected being. Along with an integral equality comes the requisite raising of the capacities of the actions of the mind, life, and body to a divine level. In the final chapters the author speaks of the Divine Shakti and how faith in the action of the Shakti is the most essential element in helping to perfect the instrumental being.

*previously introduced in February 2025 issue  
See review on page 19*

### **Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 12**

Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection  
(Chapters 19–25)

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

450 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-47-7

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

In this, the final volume of his commentary on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the author attempts to help readers understand the last, gloriously complex six chapters of the book. He begins with some characteristics of the supermind: it is a knowledge by identity and oneness; it is total, encompassing the transcendent, the universal, and the individual simultaneously;

there is no division between truth and will or between the idea and its execution, because it is both the knower and the known. When the powers of the supermind descend, they begin to operate with different capacities, retaining their essence and character but diluted from their supramental fullness. Chapters on the gradations of the supermind, the supramental thought and knowledge, its instruments, and the supramental sense and time vision seek to characterise a greater perfection that comes by the gradual descent of more and more of the supramental light and energy into the whole mental being, lifting the intuition and its powers towards their source in the supramental nature.

*previously introduced in February 2025 issue  
See review on page 19*

### **Lexicon of an Infinite Mind**

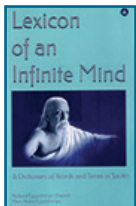
*A Dictionary of Words and Terms in Savitri*

—Richard Eggenberger (Narad), Mary Helen Eggenberger

Publisher: Yogi Impressions Books Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai

457 pp, Rs 599, ISBN: 978-93-94515-24-6

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



The first list of words and terms to be defined in this lexicon was compiled in 1998 and further revisions and additions continued throughout the next decades. The compilers aspired to be as inclusive as possible to assist all

readers of *Savitri*, especially those who were not native English speakers. Their criteria were to first select the terms which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother clearly explain in their writings and then to use free-source internet dictionaries as well as public domain dictionaries as references for defining standard and unique words. In some cases, they used their own definitions. Where appropriate, the compilers have included substantial quotations from the works of Sri Aurobindo to provide as much clarity as possible

for words having discrete meanings in the Integral Yoga.

### **The Sublime Guides**

*Writings on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*

—Manoj Das

Publisher: Overman Foundation, Kolkata

209 pp, Rs 350, ISBN: 978-81-967004-9-2

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

*The Sublime Guides* is a collection of writings by Manoj Das on the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This anthology includes articles originally serialised in *The Sunday Standard* in 1972, alongside other essays and articles that appeared in newspapers and periodicals such as *The Hindu*, *The Heritage*, and a few others. The initial articles highlight the impact of Sri Aurobindo's remarkable contribution to and early leadership of India's freedom struggle. Given their publication history across several decades there is naturally a repetition of many of the themes and facts in the accounts of Sri Aurobindo's political life, his sadhana in Pondicherry, the arrival of the Mother, and the formation and purpose of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The book ends with a summary of Sri Aurobindo's life and work and his vision for the future taken from the preface of the booklet published by NCERT containing the first Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture, given by Manoj Das in 2008.

*See review on page 23.*

### **Time-Steps of The Cosmic Horse**

*The Contemplative Philosophy of the Great Forest (Bṛhadāraṇyaka) Upaniṣad*

—Debashish Banerji

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

335 pp, Rs 1100, ISBN: 978-81-246-1228-6

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

*Time-Steps of the Cosmic Horse* is a sustained contemplation on the first chapter of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the earliest text in

its genre, inaugurating the entire history of Indian philosophy. The author's approach avoids the ideological, constricted interpretation of the traditional Vedantins, rather viewing this Upanishad's countercultural, rhetorical style of thought as creating a space of "unmediated relationship and identity" between the individual and the One. In this approach he finds a deeper consonance with the vision of Sri Aurobindo, insisting on a true and complete self-knowing in the Supreme Reality.

*See review on page 26.*

### Poetry of the Future

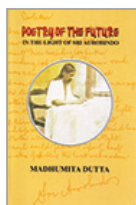
*In the Light of Sri Aurobindo*

—Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Overman Foundation, Kolkata

352 pp, Rs 550, ISBN: 978-81-967004-5-4

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



The study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Future Poetry* and his theory of poetics is the subject of this scholarly work, which grew out of a series of talks on the book, streamed on YouTube. The author reflects on Sri Aurobindo as both

critic and philosopher and focuses on the book's exploration of what would be the ideal spirit of poetry. Part One considers how Sri Aurobindo defines and comments on the essential aspects of poetry and his theory of mantric poetry. Part Two is a lengthy analysis of the character and the evolution of English poetry. In Part Three we find the high philosophy that grounds the poetry of the future, the philosophy of Poetic Truth, which Sri Aurobindo describes in discourses on "The Five Suns of Poetry". The future poetry will demand a new manner of speech capable of holding and expressing the direct self-experience of the soul.

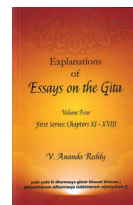
### Explanations of *Essays on the Gita*: Volume Four

*First Series: Chapters XI - XVIII*

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry  
258 pp, Rs 375, ISBN: 978-93-85391-50-7  
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

In these talks delivered in 2010 and 2011, the author examines Chapters Eleven to Eighteen of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*. The first three chapters on "Works and Sacrifice", "The Significance of Sacrifice" and "The Lord of Sacrifice" explore the concepts of *yagna*, *karma*, and Brahman (sacrifice, work, and the Absolute). The remaining chapters examine the principle of divine works to be done not for the sake of the world but for a spiritual unity with the Divine; the Gita's introduction of the concept of the Avatar through Sri Krishna, giving rise to the devotional aspect of yoga; and the process of avatarhood representing the divine descent into a human vessel for the work of overseeing the dual process of inner individual progress and outer collective advancement in the spiritual evolution of consciousness here on earth. Last is the injunction for the divine worker to live in a state of equality, free of any attachment to works, free from the egoism of the doer, free from even the desire to serve.



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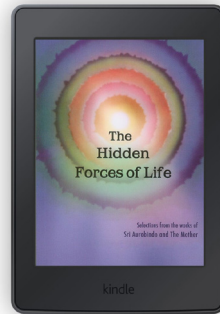
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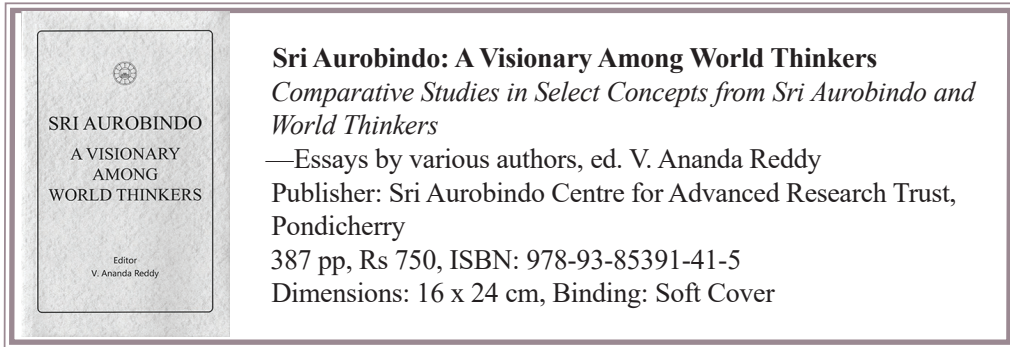
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# BOOK REVIEWS



To commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) V. Ananda Reddy has brought together an eclectic group of scholars for this volume of comparative essays. The book is structured into two sections, one dealing with Indian and one with Western thinkers, ranging from spiritual figures and philosophers to revolutionaries and psychologists to educationists and linguists.

After an introductory reprint of “The Ideal of Sri Aurobindo” from the Collected Works of the renowned disciple Nolini Kanta Gupta, the first chapter, by Dr Prema Nandakumar, deals with the Tamil “writer, poet and activist” Subramania Bharati. It leaves one wondering what additional insightful writing and commentary Bharati might have produced if he had stayed with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry after their initial discussions of scripture and conversations while walking on the beach shortly after Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry. Next, Dominique Schmidt discusses Jiddu Krishnamurti’s “observer” as it related to Sri Aurobindo’s Purusha as well as each of their respective perspectives on practical and visionary aspects of spirituality. Dr Pariksith Singh elucidates the concept of Advaita from both the great bhakta Ramanujacharya’s and the Integral Yoga’s perspectives. Then we are taken through major concepts of the intricate philosophy of aesthetics credited to Acharya Abhinavagupta by Dr Shruti Bidwaiker – from *pratibha* or genius, to *dhvani* or suggestion, to Poetic Vision or *drishti* – and the different inspirational sources of, forms of expression for and ways of experiencing poetry from the Acharya’s and Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoints. Finally, to conclude the section on comparative studies on Indian thinkers, Dr Reddy goes through arguments for different interpretations of Advaita as illusionist or realistic in relation to Adi Shankaracharya and Sri Aurobindo, taking us through experiential, philosophical and logical arguments for Brahman as perceiver, perceived, and double, dual or individual consciousness, as well as relating to imagination, illusion and suffering.

Richard Hartz takes us on a journey back in time to the ancient Greeks with the first chapter of section two on Western thinkers as he looks at Heraclitus, whom he sees as representing a transition from the symbolic and mystical to the more rational phases in Western culture, paralleling developments in the East with a focus on symbols, seemingly obscure riddles, the elements, especially fire, the contemplation of questions of oneness and multiplicity, war, reason and finally “The Kingdom of the Child”, which Sri Aurobindo interprets as follows:

Force by itself can only produce a balance of forces, the strife that is justice; in that strife there takes place a constant exchange and, once this need of exchange is seen, there arises the possibility of modifying and replacing war by reason as the determinant principle of the exchange.... From exchange we can rise to the highest possible idea of interchange, a mutual dependency of self-giving as the hidden secret of life; from that can grow the power of Love replacing strife and exceeding the cold balance of reason. There is the gate of the divine ecstasy. Heraclitus could not see it, and yet his one saying about the kingdom of the child touches, almost reaches the heart of the secret. (CWSA 13: 253)

The Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1905–1973), explored in this essay by Dr Vladimir Yatsenko, developed evolving structures of collective consciousness he called the Archaic, Magic, Mythical, Mental and Integral. Dr Yatsenko relates these both to the social psychology of *The Human Cycle* and the Vedic Yugas, concluding the chapter with the last Hymn of the Rig Veda as a representation of the Integral structure of collective consciousness:

*Sam gamacchadhvam*, come together (magic structure), *sam vadadhvam*, speak together (mythical structure), *sam vo manāmsi jānatām*, may your thoughts know together (mental structure), *devā bhāgam yathā pūrve sañjānānā upāsate*, as the first gods who sat together agreeing on the portion of the work/sacrifice they should take on in the creation.

Dr Martha Orton explores Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s (1881–1955) ideas of oneness and the omnipresent divine, the evolution of biology and consciousness, as well as the pursuit of knowledge and the value of offering in humanity’s progress towards union with the Divine. While Sri Aurobindo introduced the vision of the Supramental, Teilhard envisioned what he called the Ultra-Human evolving towards spiritual transformation: “The only air which Reflection can breathe must, of vital necessity, be that of a psychically and physically convergent Universe. There must be some peak, some revelation, some vivifying transformation at the end of the journey.” (from Chapter 21 of *The Future of Mankind* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

In the chapter on the German philosopher G.W.F.Hegel (1770–1831) Prof. Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra points out that the total obedience to the state as the ultimate authority advocated by Hegel played a role in later justifications for committing atrocities and genocide in Nazi Germany. He contrasts Hegel’s mental construct of the state and its

artificial organisation with Sri Aurobindo's Nation Soul, which will express itself in free societies that consciously and harmoniously grow towards higher forms of union. In the last chapter on Western philosophers Prof. Sreekala Nair examines the Australian philosopher of consciousness David Chalmers' (1966–) arguments for solving “the hard problem of consciousness” or the question of how the brain generates coherent subjective experiences typical for humans. Of course, as she quotes him, Sri Aurobindo approached this riddle of the origin of consciousness from the opposite end: “But such an explanation...becomes absurd if we try to explain by it thought and will, the imagination of the poet, the attention of the scientist, the reasoning of the philosopher.... no mere mechanism of grey stuff of brain can explain these things...” (CWSA 12: 275)

Next, Dr Soumitra Basu takes us on a trip into the sub- and inconscient, contrasting Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) psychoanalytical terminology and framework with that of Integral Yoga Psychology and its subliminal, supraconscious and transformative processes. Larry Seidnitz, PhD, continues this line of inquiry by relating instructions and experiences of Karma Yoga to the psychological research into the concept of flow by the Hungarian-American Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced “me high, cheek sent me high”, 1934–2021), finding similarities and differences as well as complementary aspects in the two approaches to consciousness and work.

The section on revolutionaries kicks off with a bang in a first paragraph packed with sentences such as “Man has enjoyed himself too little and wasted a large part of the treasure trove of life on frills, foibles, follies, on superficial conflicts, on suicidal swagger and puerile megalomania” in a chapter on Sri Aurobindo and Karl Marx (1818–1883) by Dr Charan Singh Kedarkhandi, who draws parallels between their visions of ideal future societies and the radical inner and outer changes they respectively proposed to realise these ideals. Dr Madhumita Dutta introduces us to another Marxist philosopher, the Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), who, she finds, shares ideas with Sri Aurobindo's thought on the role of culture, education – especially for those with a lower socio-economic status –, and especially freedom and the possibility to discover and pursue one's inner higher ideals:

Freedom is not utopia, because it is a basic aspiration; the whole history of mankind consists of struggles and efforts to create social institutions capable of ensuring a maximum of freedom. (*The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings*, 2014, 51)

To know oneself means to be oneself, to be master of oneself, to distinguish oneself, to free oneself from a state of chaos, to exist as an element of order... but of one's own order and one's own discipline in striving for an ideal. (*Ibid.*, 59)

Dr Dutta also reflects on the challenges inherent in comparative studies of this kind, writing that “of course, here I am being neither judgemental or exhaustive in my study, which is a bit constrained, nor is it my intention to compare the merits of one to the advantage of the other”, which can be seen as an exemplary attitude towards comparative scholarly work.

In the final part of the book on educationists and linguists, Dr Chhalamayi Reddy reviews the Austrian Rudolf Steiner's (1861–1925) approach to education and finds that in comparison to Integral Education Steiner “came up with similar principles underlying the development of a child which he explains in detail in his presentation of Anthroposophy or Spiritual Science”. This seems even more true for Maria Montessori (1870–1952), one of the first female physicians of Italy and an educational reformer. Dr Beloo Mehra assesses her “Montessori Method” to be “a truly progressive education” due to “its close alignment with Integral Education as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother”, especially when it comes to the perception of the child, its capacity for silence and self-discovery, the role of freedom in ideal learning environments and the teacher's role to model and facilitate inner growth. The collection of studies is concluded by Prof. Lakshmi Bandlamudi's exploration of the tragic life story and fragmentary literary works on language and literature produced by a “giant in literary theory”, the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1957) who lived “under the dictatorship of Stalin”. She explores Bakhtin's philosophical, linguistic and aesthetic concepts such as Dialogue, Answerability and more in comparison to Sri Aurobindo's works. She finds that both “Sri Aurobindo and Mikhail Bakhtin had very little appetite for ugly polemics and angry rhetoric, as they rarely are effective corrective measures for combating falsehood” and that although “almost all the members of his [Bakhtin's] study circle were shot to death” both their writings are a testament to the power of inner realities and their literary expressions, concluding that “what mattered to Sri Aurobindo and Mikhail Bakhtin was Interior Truth and Internal Freedom.”

In reading this book one can be reminded of a conversation between the Mother and a disciple in which she states that

a book [...] to write a kind of dialogue to introduce Sri Aurobindo's ideas—it's a good idea—like the conversations in *Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté* by Jules Romain. He wants to do it, and I told him it was an excellent idea. And not only one type—he should take all types of people who for the moment are closed to this vision of life, from the Catholic, the fervent believer, right to the utmost materialist, men of science, etc. It could be very interesting.<sup>1</sup>

While Romain's epic novel wasn't an academic scholarly work like the book reviewed here, similarly to his literary panorama of 20th century collective life presented through the lenses of different archetypal fictional characters representative of attitudes and beliefs of their time, “A Visionary” achieves a kind of intellectual dialogue between Sri Aurobindo and “World Thinkers” in a way that the Mother might have likewise given her blessings to.

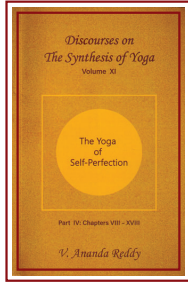
—Matthias Pommerening

*Matthias, a psychologist, is a frequent contributor of book reviews for Recent Publication.*

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1. Talk of 8 November 1960.





### **Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 11**

Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection (Chapters 8–18)

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research

Trust, Pondicherry

433 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-45-3

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

### **Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 12**

Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection (Chapters 9–25)

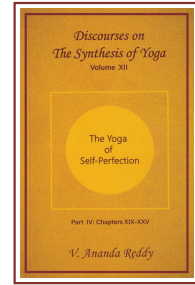
—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research

Trust, Pondicherry

450 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-47-7

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



In the final two volumes of his twelve-part series on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Dr Ananda Reddy leads us through the last chapters of the Yoga of Self-Perfection. Dr Reddy takes up these chapters sequentially, explaining and elaborating on each in simple and relatable language. As the director of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR), Dr Reddy brings both academic depth and lived familiarity with the Integral Yoga. His decades of immersion in integral yoga allow him to bridge the gap between scholarly interpretation and practice. These discourses, spoken in a voice that is personal, direct, and accessible, are a compilation of his talks that took place in Pondicherry between February 2011 and September 2011. The eleventh and twelfth volumes of *Discourses on The Synthesis of Yoga* deal with Chapters 8–18 and Chapters 19–25 respectively.

The Yoga of Self-Perfection is central to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. The importance of working on oneself, detecting imperfections, and refining and sublimating every part of the being to the highest conceivable level is the defining principle of the Yoga of Self-Perfection, in contrast to the traditions that teach detaching oneself from these parts of the being. As Sri Aurobindo wrote, “But to dwell there permanently on this last and highest summit of the created and creative being is in the end the supreme ideal for our evolving human consciousness when it seeks not self-annulment but self-perfection.”<sup>1</sup>

1. CWSA 21:130. [The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, vol 21, p. 130]

The sequence of the chapters in Part IV of the *Synthesis* gives us a broad overview of the inner logic that underlies the development of its ideas. We first gain insight into self-perfection in the light of integrality. We then examine the varied workings of the mind, life, and body, the Divine instruments in nature, followed by the purification of their alloyed substance, and the liberation of both nature and spirit, which compose our individuality. The beginning of this process is marked by establishing equality in the being, which serves as the foundation upon which one may build the edifice of our self-perfected being. Once the base is established, the Shakti can destroy, mould, and reshape the nature—hers is the power of transformation. Finally, the levels of ascension beyond the mind begin, starting from the intuitive mind, leading towards the higher supramental ranges beyond.

Dr Reddy conveys complex philosophical concepts with clarity and ease, using simple language and everyday examples to make them accessible to those new to Sri Aurobindo's thought. He draws parallels from other philosophical traditions and cites from other works of Sri Aurobindo to reiterate his points and broaden the scope of his discourse. For example, he quotes this passage from *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo:

The Mahashakti, the universal Mother, works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made; her presence fills and supports them with the divine spirit and the divine all-sustaining force and delight without which they could not exist.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Reddy's mention of this passage in the context of the supramental time vision is an interesting choice. The connection may not be apparent; yet drawing attention to this excerpt sheds new light on the contents of the chapter and allows the reader to make associations between *The Synthesis of Yoga* and other texts. It is this breadth and depth of familiarity with the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works that enrich these lectures.

In Volume XI of *Discourses on The Synthesis of Yoga*, Dr Ananda Reddy offers an alternative reading of pranic energy, drawing extensively from Sri Aurobindo's *Yogic Sadhan* to illuminate the chapter "The Power of the Instruments". While one may appreciate the clarity and intensity of certain passages, it is important to recall Sri Aurobindo's own explicit caveat: "There is no necessity of following the methods suggested in that book unless one finds them suggestive or helpful as a preliminary orientation of the consciousness—e.g. in the upbuilding of an inner Will etc."<sup>3</sup>

The issue is not with referencing *Yogic Sadhan* as a secondary source but with the unqualified way in which it is presented. Dr Reddy quotes passages and discusses them as if they were direct and definitive teachings of Sri Aurobindo, even urging readers to reread them several

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2. CWSA 32: 15.

3. CWSA 35: 82.

times. Yet Sri Aurobindo himself clearly stated: “As to *Yogic Sadhan*, it is *not my* composition nor its contents the essence of my Yoga....”<sup>4</sup> But nowhere in this section is the reader alerted to the provisional or non-canonical status of *Yogic Sadhan*. This text emerged during a period of automatic writing and reflects a markedly different tone and conceptual vocabulary than Sri Aurobindo’s later, consciously formulated works. Distinguishing between experimental and definitive writings is important, as its absence could inadvertently affect both the clarity of academic engagement and the reader’s understanding of our Master’s works.

That said, one can appreciate the depth of Dr Reddy’s work most fully in reference to the final chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, where the vision expands into progressively higher planes of consciousness. The subject matter here transcends the mundane planes in which the human mind dwells and explores the vistas beyond, one plane after another. And yet Ananda Reddy expresses these lofty ideas with ease. For example, this is how he writes about supramental sight:

So this is what is wonderful: the truth of the material object is not erased or obliterated by the Supermind. It only adds to the object a supra-physical truth. The supramental sight for example, removes the falsehood of matter. Thus, objects like a house, a stone, or a tree remain the same. Only the ‘layer’ of false matter is removed by the supramental sight. Once that false layer is removed, we can see matter in its sublime truth, as Sat. The supramental sight sees everything as Brahman. Therefore, if we have a supramental being, whether in a hundred years, two hundred years, or three hundred years, they will not transform a building into a golden edifice by merely touching it. Instead, the supramental being removes the physical limitation and perceives beyond it.<sup>5</sup>

One must remember that these discourses are not traditional commentaries. The transcribed talks maintain a conversational tone, which are both their strength and their limitation. On the one hand, the informal cadence makes complex themes, such as the emergence of the Supramental or the integrality of faculties, more approachable. On the other hand, the casual structure sometimes leads to redundancy and missed opportunities for deeper textual engagement. Dr Reddy often explains what Sri Aurobindo says, but rarely interrogates how or why he says it. This choice is perhaps intentional. The discourses are not meant to be a critical apparatus but a pedagogical bridge. For newcomers, they might remain too abstract; for seasoned readers, too simplistic. The books are going to be most helpful to readers familiar with Sri Aurobindo but seeking a deeper understanding or clarification.

*The Synthesis of Yoga* first appeared serially in the monthly review *Arya* between August 1914 and January 1921. It was left incomplete when the journal ceased publication. Even though Sri Aurobindo later revised parts of the sections pertaining to the Yogas of Works

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4. Ibid., 78.

5. *Discourses on The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. XII, 326.

and Knowledge, the concluding chapters of the treatise remained unchanged. We encounter striking differences, for example, in how he articulated the supramental principle in *The Synthesis of Yoga* compared to *The Life Divine*—a masterwork extensively revised with insights gleaned from further spiritual experiences and renewed understanding. His ultimate vision articulated in *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* goes a step further, with the introduction of the Mind of Light as an intermediary stage in evolution. Studying his descriptions of the Supermind across these texts offers a more complete understanding of this teleological concept, as his ascent to higher and higher planes of consciousness led to more and more sophisticated formulations of his system of yoga.

Sri Aurobindo says, “For we have called this state of consciousness the Supermind; but the word is ambiguous since it may be taken in the sense of mind itself supereminent and lifted above ordinary mentality but not radically changed, or on the contrary it may bear the sense of all that is beyond mind and therefore assume a too extensive comprehensiveness which would bring in even the Ineffable itself. A subsidiary description is required which will more accurately limit its significance.”<sup>6</sup>

In the final chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo elaborates on the terms Supramental Sense, Supramental Reason and Supramental Vision. Yet we do not see these terms used in the way they have been here in his later writings. The concept of the Mind of Light, a term he coined much later, finds no mention or equivalent here. In the chapter “Supermind and Mind of Light” in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Sri Aurobindo writes,

There is a further limitation or change of characteristic action at each step downwards from Overmind to Intuition, from Intuition to Illumined Mind, from Illumined Mind to what I have called the Higher Mind: the Mind of Light is a transitional passage by which we can pass from supermind and superhumanity to an illumined humanity.<sup>7</sup>

The Mind of Light marks the threshold between the higher regions and the world of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo says, “In the order of the evolutionary descent we stand in the Mind of Light on that border and a step downward can carry us beyond it into the beginnings of an ignorance... On the other hand, in the ascending order of the evolution we reach a transition in which we see the light, are turned towards it, reflect it in our consciousness and one further step carries us into the domain of the Light.”<sup>8</sup>

Though a comparison with other later writings would have been of considerable value in acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, Dr Reddy’s books represent

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6. CWSA 21: 132.

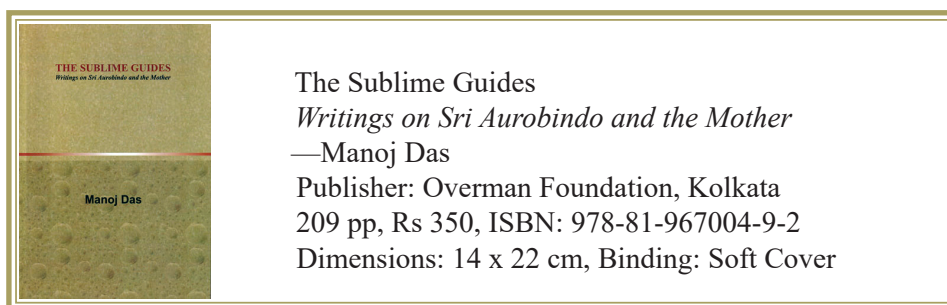
7. CWSA 13: 590.

8. Ibid., 590–91.

a useful resource for scholars and all those curious to know more about Sri Aurobindo's principal work on yoga. They contribute significantly by simplifying, organising and lending this serious philosophical work a conversational tone without undermining its depth or gravity, accompanied by insights from the author's years of deep engagement with the teachings. These volumes are a thought-provoking and enriching read for those interested in understanding the practice of yoga as they embark on their own journey of self-perfection. They will undoubtedly stimulate further inquiry into these topics in Sri Aurobindo's other writings, such as *The Life Divine*, *Letters on Yoga* and *Record of Yoga*. Dr Ananda Reddy's extensive work across the twelve volumes in this series forms a helpful accompaniment to the study of *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

—Kaninika Majumdar

*Kaninika is a recent graduate of SAICE keen on pursuing further studies in art and philosophy. She is currently collaborating on a project for the Archives and Research Library of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.*



The idea to publish this book goes back decades to the birth centenary year of Sri Aurobindo in 1972. It was then that Manoj Das wished to gather all his writings on Sri Aurobindo, but due to a change in his residence, he seemed to have misplaced most of them. In 2023, more than fifty years later, Anurag Banerjee, the compiler of this book, by a sheer stroke of luck managed to collect all the missing articles, thus bringing *The Sublime Guides* to life, although Manoj Das was no longer in his body to witness it. Most of the articles produced in this book were written and published in the year 1972; a select few were published thereafter.

The book begins with a series of articles on Sri Aurobindo's early life and his contribution to India's freedom struggle. It first presents Sri Aurobindo as a patriot and a prophet of nationalism. However, even through his early life and political career, the vast intelligence and the sublime vision behind all his actions is evident to readers.

In February 1893, when the anglicised Aurobindo Ghose returned to India, a vast calm descended upon him as soon as he set his foot on Indian soil. He immediately recognised



India not as a piece of land but as the power, the godhead — Mother India. Indignant in the face of India's acquiescence to British rule, he determined to work for the freedom of India. In a letter to his wife, Sri Aurobindo writes, "...while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter — a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers—I look upon my country as the Mother...What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood?... I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race." (Letter of 30 August 1905 written to his wife Mrinalini Devi in Bengali.) In one of his articles, Manoj Das concludes, "This dormant truth, resurrected by the golden touch of his own sincerity, became a mighty and unifying emotion."

One of the most striking features of Sri Aurobindo's personality in these initial chapters is his heroic courage. In the words of Henry W. Nevinson, the British war correspondent, "Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent of men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who act their dreams, indifferent to the means." Sri Aurobindo was the first among the nationalist leaders to demand complete independence (*poorna swaraj*), and soon after, the entire nation was reverberating with the rallying chant of *Bande Mataram*. Lord Minto, the then Governor-General of India, remarked, "There is no doubt at all that we are confronted by a revolutionary movement the object of which is to drive us out of India by means of intimidation... The worse of it is that young men are being drawn into the plot all over the country... He (Sri Aurobindo) is the most dangerous man we have to deal with at present."

Another aspect of Sri Aurobindo's personality that touches the reader's mind is that he did not act from an ordinary plane of consciousness. Behind all his actions we see a steadfast spiritual force that persisted until the desired outcome was realised. In his words, "Very few people knew that it was I who gave the order that led to the breakup of the congress... Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known." Much later, in reply to a question by a disciple, Sri Aurobindo said, "History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain." All principles enunciated by him, such as *swadeshi*, boycott, and non-cooperation, remained steadfastly prominent in the achievement of Indian Independence.

When one looks at the early life of Sri Aurobindo, one can see the fulfilment of the promise that Lord Krishna makes to humanity in this celebrated verse from the Bhagavad Gita:

*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata  
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham*  
Whenever there is a decline in *dharma* (righteousness)  
and an increase in *adharma* (unrighteousness), at that time, I manifest myself.

However, to re-establish *dharma* was not the only goal; Sri Aurobindo had another purpose to serve, and this purpose acquired a clear vision after his arrest in the Alipore Bomb trial. Shortly after his release from Alipore Jail, Sri Aurobindo retired from active politics and took

up residence in Pondicherry, then part of French India. In his seer-vision he had already seen India's independence as inevitable. He was called now to a very different work, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Sri Aurobindo's life and mankind's destiny. In this context Manoj Das writes, "Sri Aurobindo had not rejected life; far from that, it was in quest of – and with certainty of – a greater life on earth for man that he had retired from politics. He knew that he was destined to pave the way for the advent of the era of Supermind. It required a mighty effort, a Yoga of tremendous concentration."

An account of Sri Aurobindo's life after coming to Pondicherry would be incomplete without mention of the Mother. In a chapter titled "The Mother Taught the Yoga of Evolution" the author shares some of the Mother's early spiritual experiences, her coming to Pondicherry, and the role she was destined to play in the yoga of transformation. After her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo, she was convinced her place of work was near him. When in 1968, for the occasion of her ninetieth birthday, the Mother was asked by All India Radio for reminiscences of her life in India, she prepared this declaration: "I came to India to meet Sri Aurobindo, I remained in India to live with Sri Aurobindo, when he left his body, I continued to live here in order to do his work which is by serving the Truth and enlightening humanity to hasten the rule of the Divine's Love upon earth."

Often while writing about the nationalist leader Aurobindo Ghose, the author subtly highlights the visionary master who would later be known as Sri Aurobindo. For example:

Once a fighter on the arena of India's struggle for freedom, Sri Aurobindo entered the real *kurushetra* of his life where he fought his battle supreme from the day he dedicated himself to the yoga of transformation.

His encounters in the realm of consciousness and his bringing down the supramental force upon the earth, which alone can work out the transformation envisaged by him, are matters beyond the scope of documentation.

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An eternal perfection was moulding us into its own image, he said, and all life was yoga, every experience contributing to our Godward growth.

Towards the end, we have a summary of Sri Aurobindo's life and work and his vision for the future taken from the preface of the booklet published by NCERT containing the first Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture, given by Manoj Das in 2008. Here, the author discusses the nature of the evolutionary crisis that currently confronts us and the importance of Integral Education, with its focus on the development of consciousness as one of the effective means to overcome this crisis.

In the concluding chapters, Manoj Das describes his vision of the Mother's supernal beauty that he experienced during her darshan on 21 February 1963, followed by a brief summary of her life, and the concrete shape she gave to life and activities at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Under her care and guidance, the Ashram became a home to those aspiring souls who wished to dedicate their lives to the realisation of the ideal of the Integral Yoga.

The Mother once said, “What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world’s history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.” Several articles in this book hint at the nature of this direct action, much to the reader’s delight.

—Bijal Gala

*Bijal holds a Master’s Degree in Business Management and has over twelve years of corporate work experience across diverse industries. She currently volunteers at SABDA and the Physical Education Department at the Ashram.*

Time-Steps of the Cosmic Horse

*The Contemplative Philosophy of the Great Forest (Bṛhadāranyaka) Upaniṣad*

—Debashish Banerji

Publisher: Nalanda International, Los Angeles, USA, and

D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India

335 pp, Rs 1100, ISBN: 978-81-246-1228-6

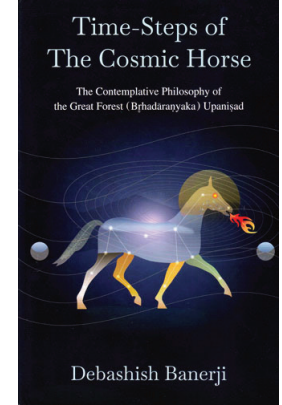
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

The book under review is a translation of and commentary on the ancient Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. It covers the first two adhyāyas or chapters, which together make up the Madhu Kāṇḍa or the first Book of the Upaniṣad. Sri Aurobindo has said of this Upaniṣad that it is “at once the most obscure and the profoundest of the Upanishads...If its ideas are remote from us, its language is still more remote...it has preferred to couch its ideas in a highly figurative and symbolical language.” [CWSA 18: 273]

The book consists of a Preface, followed by a 36-page introduction. Then follows the main body of the work: six chapters, each beginning with a translation of the Sanskrit text and followed by a detailed commentary on that section. There is a very useful appendix which gives the relevant Sanskrit text, both in Devanagari and in transliteration, plus the translation. The book concludes with a bibliography and an index.

The Preface gives a timeline of Dr Banerji’s engagement with the Upaniṣads generally, and with the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad in particular. It was mostly through the writings of Sri Aurobindo that the author was moved to give several series of lectures, which resulted in two books on the Upaniṣads: *Meditations on the Īśa Upaniṣad* (2020) and the present work, *Time-Steps of the Cosmic Horse*, subtitled *The Contemplative Philosophy of the Great Forest (Bṛhadāranyaka) Upaniṣad* (2024).

The substantial introduction outlines many aspects of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, indicating the author's approach to it. This Upaniṣad has its origins in the *Āraṇyakas* or "forest texts". The author suggests that the *Āraṇyakas* represent "a counterculture seeking for freedom and unmediated access to truth" at a time when the Vedas had become "the foundation for a ritually ordered symbolic society". They were "'forest texts' (*Āraṇyakas*) or texts of contemplative insights belonging to 'the outside' of the ritual system", traditionally attributed to the Sage Yājñavalkya, who, it seems, moved between the quiet surroundings of his forest ashram and the court of King Janaka, his patron. "The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* also features prominently the courtly caste of *kṣatriyas* as beings of wisdom, often with knowledge of *Brahman* not available to many *brāhmaṇas*, who are stuck in conventional or rote learning." Some scholars are of the view that "the Upaniṣads were reform literature composed by *kṣatriyas* seeking to overcome the priestly hegemony of the *Brāhmaṇas*." The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is among the earliest texts to introduce the terms *Brahman* and *ātman*. "*Brahman*, a principle and a Being, the only Being there is, one without a second (*ekamevādvitīyam*) and *ātman*, self, individual yet not separate from *Brahman*.... To realize one's *ātman* is to realize *Brahman* as oneself."



One section of the introduction is titled "Reinterpreting the Veda". It refers to the traditional view of the Vedas, "normalized by the fourteenth-century scholar, Sāyaṇācārya, as well as the modern Western view, following his lead," which viewed the Vedic hymns in a mostly ritualistic sense. However, even Sāyaṇa's ritualistic interpretation could not conceal totally the remnants of "the old spiritual, philosophic or psychological interpretations of the *Sruti*" (CWSA 15:21). Sri Aurobindo has called Sāyaṇa's work "indispensable", even while finally leaving it behind in his reinterpretation of the Veda.

Dr Banerji points out that "to the Vedic poets, the two primary animals of domestication, the cow and the horse, took on the highest significance, the cow as a symbol of Knowledge and the horse as a symbol of Power. If Aditi the Mother of the solar gods is seen as a Cow, the Horse is related to war and sacrifice. In ritual terms, the Horse was associated with kingship and coronation, specifically the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice for establishing emperors (*cakravartins*). It is this sacrificial Horse of the *Aśvamedha* ritual that opens the first *adhyāya* of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

The author draws an interesting comparison to the *Puruṣa Sūktam* (Rig Veda X.90) "according to which a multi-limbed 'Person' (*Puruṣa*) is born as the cosmos and allows itself to be sacrificed by the gods, its parts making up the constituents of the cosmos.... In the Veda, the sacrifice is that of *Puruṣa*, what seems to be a hyper-anthropic Person. In fact, the only specifically anthropic sign about *Puruṣa* is the mention of "arms" (*bāhu*), implying a

standing two-footed creature, rather than the forelegs and hind legs (together generalized as limbs, *aṅga*) of a four-footed creature such as a horse, as in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.”

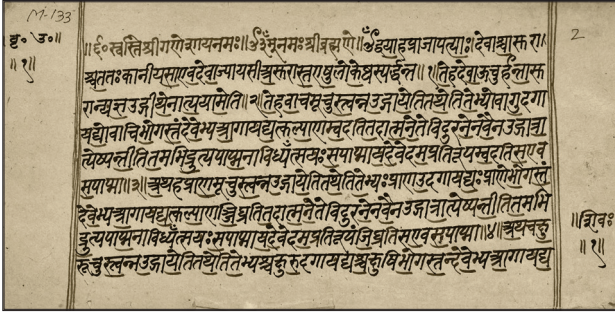
There are striking correspondences between the various parts of the Upanishadic Horse and the Puruṣa of the Veda, which the author investigates in some detail. He also draws attention to several other themes from the Veda which appear in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

Another section of the introduction is titled “The Three” and explains that “the cosmological equivalence of the three gods (Sun, Wind and Fire at the macrocosmic level) and the three faculties (sight, breath and speech at the microcosmic) pervades the first chapter (*adhyāya*) of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. We also see a privileging of breath *prāṇa*...an indication of the relationship of this text with the kṣatriya, since the Wind God (*Vāyu*) and its microcosmic counterpart *prāṇa* (Life-force) represent the energetic element among the three sets of correspondences. Sun-sight, the element of Illumination and Wisdom, could be considered primary to the brāhmaṇa; Wind-breath, element of Energy and Strength, primary to the kṣatriya, Fire-speech, element of Aspiration and Circulation, in its collective or universal aspect, primary to the vaiśya.”

In this long passage the author states that his interpretation of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* has running through it “the historical conjecture that the Upaniṣads represent a revision of the ideas of the Veda through the foregrounding of unmediated relationality between the individual and absolute conscious Being. This is announced eponymously in its self-identification as *upaniṣad* (sitting-close) in contradistinction to Veda (knowledge), through the revision of the term *Brahman* to mean absolute reality and through the invention of the term *ātman*, meaning Self... The central message is one of the self of each individual being a self-presentation of absolute Being in its self-becoming. In its origins, this is likely to have been a minor movement,”... but nonetheless “a cultural expression designed to resist and escape the hegemonic capture of the state apparatus. The importance of the politics of language to this cultural milieu can be understood by analogy to our time, when the word ‘science’, literally meaning knowledge, has totalized the entire field of knowing, both in content and method. The term *veda* applied to the Saṃhitās and ritual texts (Brāhmaṇas) structuring and defining Vedic society and also meaning ‘knowledge’ should be seen as playing a very similar, if not identical role to the society named after it by the eighth century BCE. It defines a social ontology determined by a certain epistemology which is its scriptural bedrock translated into static form through the assignment of hereditary and hierarchic symbolic roles and dynamic form through operational ritual conventions among these roles. Within this society, a literary movement naming itself *Upaniṣad* and extending a teaching of universal fundamental identity with conscious truth is clearly revolutionary.”

The author mentions some of the principal schools of Vedānta in India and discusses the interpretations of Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānuja. He also refers to the work of Sri Aurobindo





Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, verses 1.3.1 to 1.3.4  
Original work by Sarah Welch, 2018

this plane of consciousness, which he identified as *vijñāna* in the Upaniṣads, became the central teaching of Sri Aurobindo's *yoga*".

Concerning the question of absolute meaning versus interpretation, the author holds that "the hermeneutic search for an absolute truth through academic method is spurious and hides the fascist aim of subjecting infinite and essential multiplicity to an exclusive interpretation." The Īśa Upaniṣad itself gives a warning of this in the ninth verse:

*tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ.*

This is translated by Sri Aurobindo as "they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone". Instead of this exclusive interpretation, the author takes a position which "affirms a plurality of interpretations for any object of enquiry". What he calls the "hermeneutics of immanence" "rests on a close reading of the text along with an interpretation of the cultural history of the work, in engagement with a paradoxical goal of becoming towards a plane in which absolute monism and radical pluralism coexist as one without erasing or subordinating the other".

One can sense the author's appreciation for the Sanskrit language and what he calls "the cunning style of language of the Upaniṣads" with its many devices and figures of speech. "Literary choices, such as a flexible use of metaphor, paradox, polysemy, puns, puzzles, gnomic parables and the use of the syntax-free property of Sanskrit" necessarily give rise to a contemplative approach to the original text, from which follows space for multiple interpretations, intuitions and revelations of its original sense.

The work has its origins in a series of lectures, and the text occasionally reads as though proofreading for the book was not very thorough. It seems to suffer from a lack of commas, or else, commas put in the wrong place, giving rise to ambiguities and the need to re-read sentences. At the beginning of the introduction, there is some confusion between the terms *Adhyāya* meaning chapter, and *Brāhmaṇa* meaning section. After several occurrences, this

on the Upaniṣads, most notably, the full translations and extensive commentaries on the Īśa Upaniṣad and Kena Upaniṣad. According to Dr Banerji, the central vision of the Īśa Upaniṣad as seen by Sri Aurobindo "may be summarized as defining a goal of becoming as identification in consciousness (*yoga*) with a plane in which absolute monism and infinite pluralism coexist without erasing or subordinating the other. Attainment of

gets permanently corrected. Creditably, not a single error appears in the Sanskrit, neither in the Devanāgarī nor in the transliteration. The addition of reference numbers at the head of each page of the appendix would significantly improve the usability of the book. Some sections (Brāhmaṇas) of the Upaniṣad contain many verses, and it sometimes requires considerable thumbing of pages back and forth to find one's bearings. Improved referencing in the main part of the book would be useful also.

According to the cover notes, this is not a work of explanation but a contemplative approach towards cosmic and nondual self-realization. For students of philosophy and for those interested in the Upaniṣads, there is a wealth of insightful material here that could seed further enquiry. In terms of the detailed analysis of the symbology and the interesting sidelights on the Upaniṣad itself, *The Time-Steps of the Cosmic Horse* represents a valuable research and a significant aid to the study of this most ancient Upaniṣad.

—Bryce Grinlington

*Bryce worked as an electrical engineer in Australia before coming to India. At the Sri Aurobindo Ashram He has worked at the Archives and Research Library, and at present teaches music at SAICE.*

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*In the following essay, Ritaja Mishra, a final-year student of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education who is interested in writing and Indian culture, attempts to weave together traditional literary and cultural depictions of Sri Krishna with insights found in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.*

## The Eternal Lover

### *Sri Aurobindo on Krishna*

*The boy with the flute is Sri Krishna, the Lord descended into the world-play from the divine Ananda; his flute is the music of the call which seeks to transform the lower ignorant play of mortal life and bring into it and establish in its place the lila of his divine Ananda. (30: 156)<sup>1</sup>*

om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya



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1. References from CWSA are given in parentheses with volume and page number. Other references are cited in footnotes.

Deep within the heart of the *bhakta* a flame of devotion is kindled. It rises, drawn by the eternal delight from which it was first lit. For all was born of delight and love, and so it is through delight and love alone that the Creator longs for His creations to return to Him. This magnetic pull is the devotion through which one comes to know Him.

Whether as the playful child of Vṛndāvana, the flute player beneath the kadamba tree, the skillful butter thief, the cowherd, the mischievous friend, the wise charioteer, or the eternal lover, He is never distant or beyond reach. Instead, He brings Himself close to the aspiring soul, takes on its nature, and lights the path for its return to Him.

Krishna, dark as the rain-laden monsoon sky, is draped in yellow silk and crowned with a peacock feather. His eyes are like lotus petals, and a serene yet mischievous smile lingers over His flute. His delicate hands are the same that steal butter, that slay demons to liberate their souls, that protect all creation.

He is “the immanent and universal Divine who is the supreme power of attraction.”<sup>2</sup> Every aspect of His being is complete, luminous, and beautiful. Upon coming into contact with Him, the flame of Ananda is kindled in every soul. “Everything about the Lord of sweetness is sweet,”<sup>3</sup> sings Vallabhacharya to capture the beauty of Krishna. Sri Aurobindo says that the devotee adores Him for no other reason than that He is utterly lovable. (29: 491)

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, often referred to as the incarnation of Vāsudeva<sup>4</sup> in the form of a book, reveals that even those who approach the Lord with desire, fear, or anger, ultimately attain Him. For their hearts remain absorbed in Him and their minds fixed upon Him. “*Man-manā bhava*,”<sup>5</sup> Krishna reveals in the Gita, “Become my-minded, devoted to Me, to Me do sacrifice and adoration; infallibly, thou shalt come to Me, for dear to me art thou. Abandoning all laws of conduct seek refuge in Me alone. I will release thee from all sin; do not grieve.” (19: 37) Such is the grace of Sri Krishna.

Every soul that comes into contact with Him expresses love in its unique way, revealing the countless ways to connect with the Divine. Sri Aurobindo lays out a gradation in the soul’s relationship with the Divine. The bond between Arjuna and Krishna is one of brotherhood, in which both their souls rejoice in mutual self-giving. The gopis are helpless before His charm and the sweetness of His flute. Even when He steals butter, breaks their pots, or hides their clothes as they bathe, they yearn to move closer to Him. Deeper still is the love between Yashoda and Krishna, where beneath all the playfulness rests a calmness.

“But the highest and the greatest relation is that which starts from none of the ordinary religious motives, but is rather of the very essence of Yoga, springs from the very nature of

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2. CWM 8: 222.

3. Vallabhacharya, Madhurāṣṭakam.

4. The Divine who dwells in all.

5. Bhagavad Gita, 9.34.

love itself; it is the passion of the Lover and the Beloved.... Here the one thing asked for is love, the one thing feared is the loss of love, the one sorrow is the sorrow of separation of love.” (24: 569) This is the love that manifests in the bond between Radha and Krishna. “Radha 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.” (29: 494) In her, devotion is not restless or demanding, it dwells instead in a total peace. She surrenders all her thoughts, emotions, sensations, and every cell of her body to Him, and prays, “I am absolutely and altogether Thine, Thine without reserve. What Thou wilt of me, that I shall be.” (32: 647) “Krishna with Radha is the symbol of the Divine Love.” (30: 157) “And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss, | The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one.” (34: 525)

Radha’s love manifested in various other *bhaktas*, who, like her, wanted to experience the Ananda of unifying with the Divine. In Bengal, a rich tradition sings of this longing. Poets like Bidyapati and Chandidas poured out the soul’s desire for God in their verses that spoke of Radha’s love, Krishna’s beauty, and the enchantment of His flute. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, one of the most prominent voices of Vaishnavism, danced and sang in divine ecstasy. Mirabai gave up her crown to lose herself in His love and to sing His name with every breath. There is a story in Odisha that Lord Jagannath guided Jayadeva’s pen to compose the Gita Govinda, a hymn that celebrates the eternal love of the Divine cowherd for His beloved.

“Krishna is the Eternal’s Personality of Ananda; because [of] him all creation is possible, because of his play, because of his delight, because of his sweetness.” (12: 208) Sri Aurobindo recognises Krishna as an Avatar through whom the Divine descends into the world. Since ancient times, India has regarded all existence as a manifestation of the Divine. Every soul, in some way, is a spark of the Infinite descended into the finite. While most are unaware of the Divine residing within them, the Avatar is attuned to His presence.

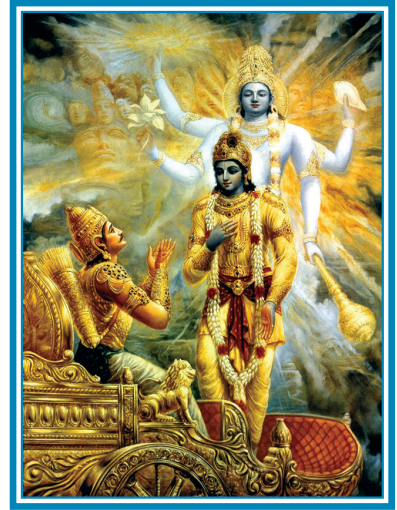
To describe the work of the Avatar, Sri Aurobindo gives the image of a ladder, in which each step is a stage in the evolution of consciousness. At every turning point in time, at every moment of crisis, the Divine descends to help mankind take the next step. He takes form as the fish, then becomes the amphibian to bridge water and land. He rises fully onto land as the Varāha (boar). He bursts forth from the pillar as the fierce Narasimha, revealing that He is present in all things and answers the call of His devotee at all times. Next, He takes the form of a dwarf, and gradually unfolds within Him the *rājasic* and *sāttvic* forces, and finally transcends all qualities and becomes the Nirguṇa.

To Arjuna, who questions the significance and proof of His divine birth, Krishna affirms, “For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of

the Right I am born from age to age.”<sup>6</sup> This is His promise. This is His love.

He then reveals Himself in His fullest glory and stands on the field of dharma, at Kurukshetra, as the Viśvarūpa (the universal form). It is a vision beyond all visions, radiant, golden and vast. Gentle and terrible, beautiful and fearsome, He is all gods, all beings and all things. His arms stretch across the skies, His eyes are suns, His breath the winds. He declares Himself as time, as death, as the immeasurable. He holds the lotus in one hand and the flaming Sudarśana Cakra (discus of Lord Vishnu) in the other. He creates, He protects, He destroys.

Before this mighty form, Arjuna trembles and bows in complete surrender.



When Krishna says that He descends to establish dharma, many believe His purpose was only to defeat Duryodhana and bring victory to the Pandavas. This definition of dharma takes away the spiritual depth of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, because this was only the outer aspect of His work.

The inner side of His work was to reveal to man his divine nature so that he “shall be liberated out of ego into infinity and universality, out of birth into immortality.” So that His creations may take refuge from “the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine.” (19: 175–76) Dharma is the law that shapes our nature, governs how we live and act in the world to support both our individual and collective journeys toward the Divine.

Thus, in the Gita, Krishna manifests as the Divine teacher and “the symbol of the divine dealings with humanity.” (19: 18) He is “the God in man who moves our whole world of action, by and for whom all our humanity exists and struggles and labours, towards whom all human life travels and progresses”. (19: 19) The Bhagavad Gita “is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience”. (19: 9)

Even if we are unaware of Him, He is always conscious of us. He does not leave the earth until the work of transformation is complete, until matter fuses with Him, until His love rules the world. He remains, and delights in becoming one with His creation. And so, it is impossible to put a halt to His work. “He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work

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6. Bhagavad Gita, 4.8.



in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being.”<sup>7</sup> Sri Krishna was born in a prison, and Sri Aurobindo was sent to one. Yet the metal bars and chains could never confine the awakening of their spirit. The Mother explains that Krishna is always remembered as a child because He “is in constant progression. To the extent that the world is perfected, his play is also perfected—what was the play of yesterday will no longer be the play of tomorrow; his play will become more and more harmonious, benign and joyful to the extent that the world becomes capable of responding to it and enjoying it with the Divine.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet, at times, because Krishna’s stories belong to a distant past and have come down to us only through poetry and literature, they are often dismissed as mere myths. Sri Aurobindo, with gentle irony, points out that “There are four very great events in history, the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion, (for before there was only meditation and worship), Christ from his cross humanised Europe, the colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.” (12: 427) What Krishna brought down upon earth was a path of complete consecration to the Divine, one that requires no rigid methods but only a will to merge into Him. Sri Aurobindo emphasises that Krishna is not merely a historical figure but “as a godhead is the Lord of Ananda, Love and Bhakti”. (28: 460)

He appears to His devotee in two worlds. In one, He comes as the beautiful Bālagopāla, or “delight-consciousness”, drawing the devotee’s heart through love. In the other, He places the devotee on the battlefield, becomes the teacher, and through every sword, arrow, and wound, guides him to become His instrument and walk the path of works to fulfill His purpose. “I should think it was the Kurukshetra Krishna,”<sup>9</sup> remarked Sri Aurobindo when asked which aspect of Krishna had appeared to guide him in fulfilling the Divine work.

“What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?” Sri Aurobindo restlessly asked Him as he was being arrested. Then, from within, a voice spoke to him, “Wait and see.” He surrendered to know what the Lord had to say to him, to learn what he had to do. “I have another thing for you to do and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.” Then Krishna placed the Gita in his hands. Sri Aurobindo further revealed during his Uttarpara speech that “I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His

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7. CWM 3: 179.

8. CWM 15: 14.

9. Talks with disciples, 17 January 1939.

work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands....” (8: 5–6)

Sri Aurobindo no longer felt imprisoned by the high walls of the prison, for it was Vāsudeva who surrounded him. He saw Him in the trees around, in the bars of his cell, in the prisoners, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers and the dacoits. “Now do you fear?” Krishna asked Sri Aurobindo and then assured, “My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my hands. It is not for you. It was not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is only a means for my work and nothing more.” (8: 7)

Sri Aurobindo recounts that as the Divine voice guided him from place to place, from task to task, a calmness grew within him. He realised it was no longer he who acted, but the Divine was working through him and guiding him to fulfill His work.

In a 1920 letter to his brother Barin, Sri Aurobindo shared that the “Guru of the world” had revealed to him the complete path of his Yoga. He noted that without rising to the supramental level, the world’s deepest truths would remain hidden.<sup>10</sup> The realisation of the Supermind, this was the summit of Sri Aurobindo’s *sādhana*. Man’s ignorance creates a gulf between him and the Divine. It is the descent of the Supermind that will lift the veil of ignorance and enable one to see all beings and forms as expressions of the Divine.

However, between the mind and the Supermind lie several planes, the highest of which is the overmind, the plane of the gods. “The Overmind has to be reached and brought down before the Supermind descent is at all possible—for the Overmind is the passage through which one passes from mind to Supermind.” (28: 155)

In 1926, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother intensified Their *tapasya* for the manifestation of the supramental consciousness, for which the Mother would regularly encounter gods such as Shiva, Lakshmi, and Krishna, and ask them to descend into the body and assist in bringing the overmind into matter. However, She noticed that they were content where they were and, unwilling to unite with the Supreme, refused to help. “Except for Krishna,” She added, “With my own eyes I saw Krishna, who had always been in rapport with Sri Aurobindo, consent to come down into his body.”<sup>11</sup> After this, Sri Aurobindo gradually handed over all the outer work of the Ashram to the Mother, as he needed to concentrate more deeply and could no longer meet the disciples regularly. This day, therefore, is also regarded as the founding day of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

A.B. Purani, one of the disciples present during the meditation on 24 November 1926, felt “an oceanic flood of Light rushing down from above.”<sup>12</sup> The Mother points out that although

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10. Bengali Writings (translated into English), 359.

11. Talk of 2 August 1961.

12. Purani, A.B. *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 210–217.

the descent of Krishna made no personal difference to Sri Aurobindo, it signified that the Supreme from the past merged into the new creation, so that He could actively participate in the work of transformation. She later referred to this event as “the Day of Victory”.

Of this descent Sri Aurobindo wrote in October 1935, “It [24 November 1926] was the descent of Krishna into the physical.” (35: 273) “Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.” (35: 272)

Finally, the Siddhi day confirmed that all paths leading to Sri Krishna opened further towards Sri Aurobindo. To the *sādhaks* who had been devoted to Krishna before coming to the Ashram and wondered if their *bhakti* for Krishna stood in the way of their *sāadhanā* here, Sri Aurobindo reassured, “If we consider the large and indeed predominant part he played in my own sadhana, it would be strange if the part he has in your sadhana could be considered objectionable.... If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to him, you give yourself to me.” (35: 431) Sri Aurobindo made himself a conscious instrument to help mankind take its next step towards the Divine.

This is the journey of the flame of devotion in the *bhakta*. Hearing the music of the Divine flute echoing from the dense forests, it is drawn by the sweetness, and glows brighter with every step. Time passes but the *bhakta* cannot find Him, nor can he turn back. His ignorance, his lower nature, the pull of the world, its comforts and attachments, are all too weak before the magical thread that binds his soul to the Divine. At times, the soul grows tired. Frustrated, it questions the journey, calls the flute an illusion, and wonders if there is anything at all hidden in the heart of the forest. But the Divine only draws the thread tighter. Slowly, gently, He removes the thick cloak of the material nature. He patiently stands by the Yamunā, beneath the kadamba tree, feet crossed, smiling. He waits until the devotee, in all sincerity, surrenders, reaches out, finds His hand, and dances with Him in Ananda.

What the devotee once called suffering was His Lila all along, to guide his soul back to the Divine presence he carries within. Before the magical, diamond-blue light of Sri Krishna, the devotee stands still. The flame within him burns in silence, then fades, its wisp of smoke rises and merges into the Divine.

*tvadīyam vastu govinda tubhyam eva samarpaye.*

O Govinda, this belongs to You, I offer it back to You alone.

—Ritaja Mishra