

Recent Publications

Sabta

In Egyptian mythology, the phoenix was a sacred bird that lived for hundreds of years, died in the fire it lighted itself, and rose out of the ashes in a new incarnation, in an unending cycle. It has since become a symbol of immortality, renewal, and hope for the future. An image of the phoenix appears on the cover of *The Advent*, an Ashram journal dedicated since its debut in 1944 to expounding Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future. In this issue we present a brief look at how the publication has evolved over the decades.

Continuing with the historical perspective, we also offer a review by Krishnaprem of Sri Aurobindo's 1933 work *The Riddle of This World*. The review, which Sri Aurobindo had read and commented on, appeared in the May 1934 issue of *The Aryan Path*, a theosophical journal published from Bombay.



Seventy Years Since the Advent The Globalisation of Mankind

On Sri Aurobindo's *The Riddle of This World*

Recent Publications

Ordering Information

CONTENTS

2	Reviews	
4	A Unique Little Girl	15
5	Steps to Freedom and Mastery	16
5	Sri Aurobindo: Saga of a Great Indian Sage	18
12	Seed of Grandeur	19
14		

Our lead article in this issue looks into the history of *The Advent*, recognising its past editors and contributors, and the value of this long-running journal to the exposition of Sri Aurobindo's vision. Samir Kanta Gupta served as its editor for about two decades, until his recent passing in June 2013. Known in the Ashram as Ranju-da, he became an Ashramite in 1943 at the age of twenty-one. A scholar in Bengali, English, and French, he was an author and translator, his numerous writings in Bengali and English appearing in a wide variety of journals and magazines. *Leading Lights* and *Songs of Chandidasa* are his notable works in English. *The Advent's* new editor is Prabir Kanta Gupta (Robi), Samir Kanta's youngest brother.

Seventy Years Since the Advent

During the 1940s, several journals and magazines dedicated to the vision and teaching of Sri Aurobindo made their debut. One of these was *The Advent*, scheduled to appear on the eve of the four Darshans. It was given its name by the Mother, and the first issue appeared on the 21st of February 1944 under the editorship of Nolini Kanta Gupta. The quarterly would complete its seventieth year of publication in February 2014.

The journal was first printed in Madras (Chennai). Mr. Anantharaman, a devotee, and his assistant personally brought the copies to Pondicherry when they came here for the four Darshans.

When the young Madhav Pandit joined the Ashram in 1939, coming straight after finishing his college studies, he was assigned the work of assisting Nolini Kanta Gupta, the Secretary of the Ashram, in his manifold responsibilities. Madhav worked under Nolini Kanta's guidance at the latter's office and, when *The Advent* was launched, naturally worked for the publication. Nolini Kanta's son Samir Kanta Gupta came as well, after completing his studies, and joined his father's staff. The two became Nolini Kanta's main assistants, and their association with the journal continued throughout their lifetimes. After Nolini Kanta left his body in 1984, Madhav Pandit took up the editorial reins. After his passing in 1993, Rajen Ganguli, who was the journal's manager, became the editor for a while until Samir Kanta Gupta was vested with that responsibility. Thus was the editorial continuity of the journal maintained. A significant fact is that, in its early stage, the articles to be published in *The Advent* were first read out to Sri Aurobindo for his approval.

That was also the time when the journal carried some of Sri Aurobindo's own writings, such as the revised chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1946–8) and some cantos of *Savitri* (1946–7). The avowed objective of *The Advent*, whose cover carried the symbolic image of a phoenix, was the "Exposition of Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Future", and past contributors included such well-known scholars as Indra Sen, Sisir Kumar Maitra, Rishabhchand, and T. V. Kapali Sastry.

The vast scope of Sri Aurobindo's vision made it possible for scholars to reflect on several branches of knowledge in that light. A glance through any issue of the journal will reveal the nature and focus of the essays, which aimed at making Sri Aurobindo's thought on various issues accessible to a wider audience. Two articles – Sisir Kumar Maitra's "Is Sri Aurobindo a Mystic?" (August 1946) and Indra Sen's "East-West Synthesis in Sri Aurobindo" (November 1954) – exemplify the content of this journal.

Maitra's was a scholarly exposition of the doctrine of mysticism compared to mystic experience per se. Delving into literatures on this lore, Maitra showed that Sri Aurobindo was beyond both the traditional concept of mysticism and the recorded mystic experiences; his attempt was to bring down the Divine itself

upon terra firma. Mysticism, Maitra explained, was the attempt to explain to the cognising mind the realities of the experiences of a sublime order not grasped by the senses. But the range of possibilities went beyond that. Expounding the Aurobindonian philosophy as it applied to mystic experience and mysticism, Maitra's essay offered a fresh perspective on realities which were normally beyond man's intellectual perception.

The other article referred to, by Indra Sen, focused on a different aspect of Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future. It explored the idea that Sri Aurobindo's thought was an original synthesis of the most important aspirations of the cultures of the East and the West. In his own life and in his work, he showed the way to an integral culture of man – not merely by an intellectual synthesis, but by a yogic one – that would eventually lead to a supranational integration of the world. The context of this supranational integration was his yoga. The integration would encompass all levels of the manifestation—integration of the individual, integration of the individual with the collectivity to which he belonged, integration of the collectivities themselves, and finally integration of the Creation with the Transcendent, which manifests everything cognisable as a minuscule portion of Itself.

Indra Sen's article speaks of a limited integration, a cultural synthesis, visualising a culture that is inclusive of its civilisational, political, and other aspects. In Aurobindonian philosophy, this synthesis could be achieved only after the individual succeeded in integrating herself. Indra Sen's article convincingly disentangled some complex strands of Aurobindonian thought and lucidly presented what was directly relevant to East-West cultural synthesis. We find here a demonstration of the rich possibilities in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy—the possibility of the unification of the human race in terms of culture.

While *The Advent* made its mark with high-quality articles, it was beset with the problem of a paucity of funds. Rajen Ganguli, who later acted as the manager of *The Advent* between 1984 and 1994, sought the Mother's permission to raise funds for the journal by allowing space for advertisements, a practice that had been thus far avoided. With the Mother's sanction, Ganguli travelled to a few cities and talked to business houses and other organisations. His effort was successful enough to keep the journal going—a possibility that would not have come to fruition had the Mother not permitted enlisting the cooperation of “business” activities in the Ashram's scholarly ventures.

Those who had been in touch with Ganguli remember him fondly as a man with a spontaneous sense of humour and humility. When he was the manager, Madhav Pandit was the editor of the journal. Ganguli used to refer to Madhav as *pundit manush* (Bengali for “learned man”) and himself as *apundit manush* (literally, Bengali for “non-learned”!).

It is no wonder that the journal should bear the stamp of the taste and preference of each of its editors without, of course, straying from its central motive. During Samir Kanta's editorship, its pages were open to varieties that occasionally included short stories. His own editorial observations and reviews extended wide enough to embrace topics as diverse as “Value Education”, “The Price for being Great”, “Animals no mere Soulless Brutes”, “Violence—its Roots and Remedy”, and “Laughter the Best Medicine”. (Some of his sketches and comments till 1997 are compiled in the volume entitled *Leading Lights*.)

There are not many journals of the nature of *The Advent* to tide over seven decades of vicissitudes. Surely, under its new editor, Prabir Kanta, it will continue to play a special role.

Excerpt from *Leading Lights* by Samir Kanta Gupta:

The Globalisation of Mankind

The theory that mankind originally lived at a particular location, spoke a common language, observed more or less similar rites and rituals, sported a kindred behavior and then, due to the pressure of practical existence, migrated to various corners of the world, cannot be dismissed summarily as myth or *maya* against a strong linguistic evidence supporting it. Whatever the merits and demerits of the case the central fact remains that mankind dispersed to distant and diverse zones of the globe and developed in course of time peculiar characteristics—ethnic, linguistic and cultural, with the prospect of a far-reaching variegated development.

That may be a telescopic view of the remotest part of man's endeavour for group survival. Today the expanding mass of mankind exists – in distinct blocks, the geographical continents, – Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Australia and Antarctica. Each has its regional stamp and character. This has been shaped by the dominant and more vibrant component nations existing within its peripheries: the Egyptian mystic tradition in Africa, the Chinese and Indian spiritual genius in Asia, the Celtic, Teutonic and Slav strains together with the Greek culture that swamped nearby areas in Europe, the vigorous states in South America deserve a special mention....

The march of a country to its unified nationhood is a fascinating story. England, France, Germany, Italy depict it in bold relief. The emergence of India as a nation at a comparatively later stage is a unique phenomenon in the course of world history. Though most nations in modern times have streamlined their existence to a monotonous tune, India is still a symphony of colours and tunes, an extravaganza of a simple and rural people still unspoiled by civilisation in far-flung corners of the land.

Today mankind has settled down in continental blocks—one separated from the other by natural and physical barriers. Though the constituents of a continent is generally the nations, it has not the same distinct collective identity as that of a nation, which possess a soul expressing through its vibrant arts and culture, its hopes and aspirations, its efforts for a continuous self-creation and self-manifestation. Yet a continent may draw life and light from a nation held within its ambit.

...continental co-existence has been more an eluding chimera than a beneficial reality. In truth, continents, egged by their predominant constituents, have fought devastating wars bringing misery in their trail for the vast masses of mankind. Neither a faith in a particular religion nor a scientific education could hold them together in a harmonious living together. The ideal of one world was fated to be a still-born child. It could not be otherwise. For, it was only a mental and ideal conception with no soul to enthuse it. As a consequence all fanfare about a citizen of the world and a federation of mankind ended in mouthing hollow words. One world could not come about by mechanical means—political covenants, economic postures. It has to come through something deeper, by the help of a spiritual nissus.

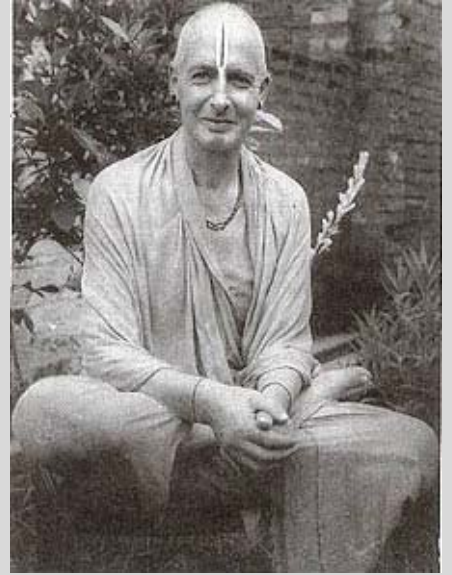
The solution to the problem of unity – local, national or global – rests with man himself as an individual being. Man normally lives in a limited field a limited life. His emancipation into a larger life and greater existence is the *sine qua non*. It is not mental and even ethical excellence that will give him the necessary leverage to widen himself, to look beyond the blind and sectarian moorings.... Only the soul of man is limitless. The soul's consciousness is global.

Therefore a regeneration of the whole of human kind is urgently called for. A new programme based upon educative soul culture and self-realisation on the widest scale has to be adopted with UNESCO's approbation and assistance. It should draw the attention of WHO, as the programme of reconstituting the individual being is of vital importance for [the] health and sanity of the entire human race.... With a global consciousness widely perceived and established man would have a better chance to create a congenial world where men, nations and continents would forge a common bond of deep love and amity and frictions and discords which are the creations of the mind and the vital and the offshoots of base passions would be a debris of the past and cast them away on its forward journey by the roadside.

On Sri Aurobindo's *The Riddle of This World*

The Riddle of This World, published in 1933, was the first of four small books of Sri Aurobindo's letters brought out during his lifetime. The others were *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936), and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). The books were compiled by Nolini Kanta Gupta and Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts of most of the letters in these books.

The following review of *The Riddle of This World* was written by Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon) shortly after its publication. Nixon, who was born in Cheltenham, England in 1898, served as a fighter pilot in World War I, then studied philosophy and took an honours degree in English literature at King's College, Cambridge, where he became very interested in Buddhism and Theosophy. He was keen to come to India in search of a spiritual teacher, but he had neither the money for the passage nor any means to support himself once he arrived there. Through his contacts with the Theosophical movement he succeeded in getting an appointment as a Reader in English at the new university at Lucknow and came to India in 1921. He was housed temporarily with Vice-Chancellor Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti and his wife Monica. Dr Chakravarti was a prominent Theosophist. Monica, a cultured and sophisticated woman, became more and more immersed in her spiritual quest and eventually took the vows of *sannyasa* under the name Yashoda Ma. Nixon became her first disciple and took his monastic vows as Krishnaprem. In 1929 they founded the Ashram of Uttar Brindaban at Mirtola in the Kumaon Himalayas. Krishnaprem spoke Hindi and Bengali fluently, knew Sanskrit, and wrote several commentaries on the Upanishads and the Gita. He was thought to be the first European to embrace Vaishnavism in India.



Krishnaprem

While still in Lucknow, Krishnaprem had become good friends with Dilip Kumar Roy, an early disciple of Sri Aurobindo, and they began a correspondence that lasted until Krishnaprem's death in 1965. For several years in the mid-1930s, Krishnaprem's letters to Dilip were shown to Sri Aurobindo, and Sri Aurobindo's replies were sent to Krishnaprem through Dilip. This review appeared as an appendix in Dilip's book *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem* along with this extract from a letter written by Krishnaprem to Dilip:

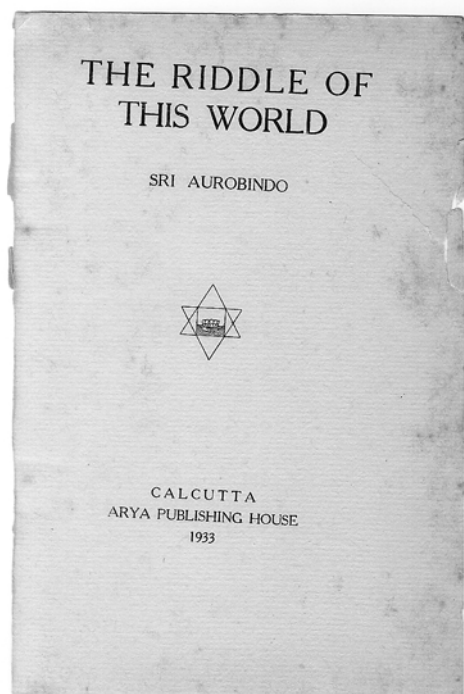
I am glad to learn that Sri Aurobindo found my review of *The Riddle of This World* satisfactory. I tried as far as possible to give the reader an account of what he would find in the book and not merely to use it as a peg on which to hang my own virtuosity *a la* Macaulay. I think at least that it should serve to indicate to all who care for such things that here is a book not to be missed.

In light of Sri Aurobindo's favourable reaction to Krishnaprem's review of his book, we thought our readers would find it interesting to read the entire review.

A MODERN YOGA

(On Sri Aurobindo's *The Riddle of this World*)

A new work from the pen of Sri Aurobindo is an event of the first magnitude for the world of *sadhakas* and, indeed, for all who are interested in the spiritual quest. It is now many years since his monumental *Essays on the Gita* threw out its magnificent challenge to sterile intellectualism and narrow orthodoxy alike, and there will be many who will have been eagerly awaiting further hints on the system of *yoga* which was implicit in that work. The present volume is a collection of writings dealing with problems and difficulties raised for the most part by some of those who are aspiring to lead the spiritual life under his guidance and consequently has for *sadhakas*, an even greater interest than works addressed primarily to an outside public.



This was the edition that Krishnaprem reviewed in the May 1934 issue of *The Aryan Path*.

To avoid possible misunderstandings it is perhaps as well to add that the *yoga* treated in this book has nothing in common with the so-called '*yoga*' which, I am told, is having quite a vogue in the sillier circles of the West and which concerns itself with such things as standing on one's head and breathing rhythmically, psychic trivialities or ridiculous 'concentration' on health, wealth and happiness. It deals with the high spiritual quest that even so long ago as the time of Yajnavalkya, was *anuh pantha vitatah purano*, "the ancient narrow Path that stretches far away".

There is perhaps no one writing in India whose words on this subject will be listened to with more respect than Sri Aurobindo and that for two very good reasons. First, his powerful and keen intellect, and secondly, his prolonged and arduous *sadhana*, a *sadhana* which, I understand, he is still pursuing, unlike so many half-baked '*jivanmuktas*' who immediately their *sadhana* begins to bear fruit, lay it aside and at once "assume the God" and rest on their laurels.

This book, moreover, is clearly based on the author's own experience. There has been a deal too much unscrupulous talk about *yoga*. Popular *sannyasis* and others have eloquently expounded the various *yoga* systems as if they were full-blown adepts in them, whereas it is to be feared that too often they were merely quoting modernised versions of the technicalities contained in the classic texts of the subject, and were quite innocent of experience of any but the most minor various states they discoursed on so eloquently.

It is time, however, to turn to the book itself and for the benefit of any who may be unfamiliar with the writer's previous books, it may be briefly stated that the central method of this *yoga* is an integral and comprehensive offering of the whole nature to the Divine Reality. The technical methods of the classic *yogas* are not rejected but are all subordinated to this central "*samarpan*" which is, as it were, their soul and must include our whole being, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. There is to be no ascetic dualism but an ascent which springs from the whole nature. Rejecting the selfish desire to "live one's own life", the aspirant bends all his powers, purified by the discipline of the *yoga*, to a winged ascent to the one Divine Reality and to a poised waiting at the feet of that Reality.

At this point, the point at which many mystics stop, the second movement of this *yoga* commences. The *Sadbhaka*, emptied of self but filled with the Light and Power of the Divine according to the level to which he has been able to rise, now seeks to retrace his steps and to descend again to the lower world bringing down with him as much as he can hold of the Light and Power with which he has been filled, thus transforming his lower nature and ultimately making of it a centre in this lower world through which can take place the manifestation of a diviner reality than has heretofore been possible. Thus there is a two-fold movement; an ascent *to* the Divine and a descent *with* the Divine; an ascent to the “kingdom of Heaven” and a building of that kingdom of heaven here on this earth, no mere shaking off the dust of this world in “a flight of the Alone to the Alone,” but an attempt to transmute, to divinise life here by providing channels and centres of manifestation for that spiritual Reality which is, even now, the very basis of this and all other worlds but is hampered and clogged in expression by the “*tamasic*” inertness of the world of matter and the inharmonious self-seeking of the world of mind.

Here is no pseudo-science, no obsolete psychology, no fantastic cosmology. Though I, at least, am in no way prepared to admit that the old systems represent merely "the childish lisplings of humanity" or whatever the silly phrase was, yet it must be admitted that they have long ceased to be understood by the majority.... In this system a new terminology has been forged, which, abandoning the conceptions of the ancient seers, is yet more easily intelligible to the mind trained in modern ways of thought.

This, and nothing less than this, is the aim of this *yoga*. Soul, mind and body all must be transmuted. The soul must no longer remain a pale starved shadow resembling the “strengthless head of the dead” of Homer but must become a vivid and radiant existence, a centre pulsating with Divine Light and energy, dominating and using the mind and body. The mind too, must no longer remain a mere analytic machine classifying and analysing the elements of existence, revelling in its proud independence. Instead, it must realise its subordination to the soul and assume its proper function, that of the formative power, that which impresses with form, not merely the raw material of the world but also the formless (in the sense of transcending form) truth of the soul.

Even the body, the “despised and rejected” of so many mystics, must cease to be the “Brother Ass” of St. Francis and become a harmonious vehicle of the Divine Life in the same way that a block of marble from being a lump of dead matter, becomes a radiant expression of the sculptor’s idea.

Such, at any rate, is the heart of this *yoga* as far as it has been understood by the present writer and it will be seen that, even in this brief and inadequate expression, it is no narrow or unworthy ideal, no mere salvation-seeking, but a noble attempt to “remould things nearer to – not the heart’s – but the Divine Desire” and it is one which should commend itself to the attention of all those whose eyes are not utterly blinded by the follies of materialism.

Nor need the so-called “intellectual” turn up his nose in scorn. Here is no pseudo-science, no obsolete psychology, no fantastic cosmology. Though I, at least, am in no way prepared to admit that the old systems represent merely “the childish lisplings of humanity” or whatever the silly phrase was, yet it must be admitted that they have long ceased to be understood by the majority including, it is to be feared, many of their orthodox commentators, who manage sometimes to shed more darkness upon light than light upon darkness. In this system a new terminology has been forged, which, abandoning the conceptions of

the ancient seers, is yet more easily intelligible to the mind trained in modern ways of thought. In this connection it might be suggested that the value of a second edition of the book would be greatly enhanced if an appendix were added giving terms used, such as 'vital', 'psychic', 'supermind' and others which are all used in a highly technical sense which has to be gathered from somewhat inadequate data as the book proceeds.

One of the outstanding features of the book is its clear differentiation between the spiritual experience of *yoga* and the merely intellectual concepts of idealistic philosophy or the emotional intuitions of poetry. Intellectual philosophising about the Absolute Reality, however loftily 'idealistic' it may be, still remains purely speculative. "It cannot give the decisive experience or the spiritual certitude for which the soul is seeking." The intuitions of the poet, too, shot through as they sometimes are with spiritual light, are too vague and evanescent to be of practical use. They are like delicate plants that branch out in beautiful shapes beneath the surface of a lake which collapse into a sloppy shapeless mass when you take them out of the water for examination.

The spiritual life leads to something sometimes more than these, more certain than the speculations of the intellect, more definite than the intuitions of the poet and this certainty, this definiteness, can only be had by the discipline of *yoga* (whether in this or in some other form) and that too, when carried out under the guidance of a competent and experienced teacher.

It is characteristic of this age of popular education that many people suppose that anything can be learnt by a patient study of books. But there are some things which can never be learnt in this manner and *yoga* (in any form) is one of them. *Yoga* is the art of the soul and it can never be learnt without the living contact with a master. All attempts to practice *yoga* without a *guru*, and a real *guru* at that, end either in disappointed failure, trivial psychism, ill-health or madness. The present writer has seen cases of all of the above occurring to uninstructed or ill-instructed would-be *yogis*.

Excerpt from *The Riddle of This World*

It is not to be denied, no spiritual experience will deny that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world, strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering, evil. Indeed this perception is in a way almost the starting-point of the spiritual urge—except for the few to whom the greater experience comes spontaneously without being forced to seek it by the strong or overwhelming, the afflicting and detaching sense of the Shadow overhanging the whole range of this manifested existence. But still the question remains whether this is indeed, as is contended, the essential character of all manifestation or so long at least as there is a physical world it must be of this nature, so that the desire of birth, the will to manifest or create has to be regarded as the original sin and withdrawal from birth or manifestation as the sole possible way of salvation. For those who perceive it so or with some kindred look—and these have been the majority—there are well-known ways of issue, a straight-cut to spiritual deliverance. But equally it may not be so but only seem so to our ignorance or to a partial knowledge—the imperfection, the evil, the suffering may be a besetting circumstance or a dolorous passage, but not the very condition of manifestation, not the very essence of birth in Nature. And if so, the highest wisdom will lie not in escape, but in the urge towards a victory here, in a consenting association with the Will behind the world, in a discovery of the spiritual gate to perfection which will be at the same time an opening for the entire descent of the Divine Light, Knowledge, Power, Beatitude.

June 1933

Some of the dangers and difficulties that occur on the path are discussed in the chapter on “The Intermediate Zone” in this book. A perusal of this chapter will enable the reader to understand how it is that there are so many “*Avatars*” and “*Jivanmuktas*” roaming about the world nowadays and so many prophets with “divine inspiration” seeking to save our souls though their own seem to the outer eye as much in need of salvation as ours. The prevalence of such people, by no means *all* charlatans, is often a ground of skepticism to the superficial, but it is, in reality, an inevitable phenomenon, always liable to occur to those who essay the mystic path without adequate guidance.

In this sphere, as in others, Sri Aurobindo has useful advice to offer. Unlike the generalities and hair-raising creepy occultisms with which so many writers warn us of “dwellers on the threshold” and other ‘dangers’ in a manner which is as delightfully romantic as it is inadequate and vague, he gives us advice which is clear

The book is characterised by the clear definiteness of thought that real experience gives. Many have got into the way of supposing that the word ‘mystical’ is synonymous with the word ‘vague’ and that all spiritual writings will have an elusive dreamy texture, a sort of Celtic twilight which conceals more than it reveals.... Such readers will find that the life of the spirit can be written about with a concrete clarity which will surprise them.

and definite, that is to say, as definite as it could be expected to be in a realm which he well describes as one of “half-lights and tempting, but often mixed and misleading experiences”.

In fact, all through, the book is characterised by the clear definiteness of thought that real experience gives. Many have got into the way of supposing that the word ‘mystical’ is synonymous with the word ‘vague’ and that all spiritual writings will have an elusive dreamy texture, a sort of Celtic twilight which conceals more than it reveals, and, though rich in the suggestion of infinite possibilities, is apt to be poor in definite content and disappointing in realisation. Such readers will find that the life of the spirit can be written about with a concrete clarity which will surprise them, a clarity of thought and expression which, while it too often crystallises into a sterile dogma at the hands of subsequent generations, is yet clearly visible in the writings of many of the great mystics.

The concluding section of the book contains a gallant attempt to give some explanation of the origin of the cosmos. Though the author frankly admits that the answer to this age-old question, one, it may be noted, on which the Buddha forbade his followers to speculate, is one to which no adequate answer can be given on the plane of the human intellect, yet, for those who will not be content with the wise silence of the Buddha, he attempts to indicate a view which, if it cannot be the whole truth, will yet serve as some sort of a prop to those whose minds cannot stand alone but demand some answer at least to the great question as to why this cosmic process with all its misery emerged from out of the blissful splendour which lies beyond the flaming ramparts of the world.

Let us, however, turn away from the contemplation of the ultimate insolubility back to the *yoga* which, with its double movement, stands before us like a challenge. Are we going to remain in our own selfish littlenesses, for ever chasing the tail of our own desires or are we going to lose ourselves that we may find them again in selfless cooperation with the one Divine reality which rules us all, mystic and materialistic alike? And it is just here that it seems to me misunderstanding may creep in. A great and sympathetic Western writer has described Sri Aurobindo as believing that “humanity is going to enlarge its domain by the acquisition of a new knowledge, new powers, new capabilities which will lead to as great a revolution in human life as did the physical science in the nineteenth century.”

Now this seems to me a misrepresentation of the true *yoga*, a misrepresentation which is as dangerous as it is slight. The *yoga* is not something to increase the vital well-being and cultural development of humanity as such, something like eugenics or the wireless. Another book issued by Sri Aurobindo School emphatically states that this *yoga* is not for the service of humanity but for the service of the Divine. Any view that places the emphasis on a mere humanity is then clearly wrong, for it is the service of the Divine Reality and its manifestation in humanity and elsewhere that is the heart of the *yoga*; and this difference, slight or even purely verbal as it may seem to humanist moderns, is yet of profound significance and makes all the difference between the high spiritual endeavour of the ancient East and the ephemeral humanist progress of the modern West. Not that such 'progress' is in any way to be deprecated in itself but it is a phenomenon belonging to a far lower level than this or any other *yoga*.

I have one slight criticism to make and that is that Sri Aurobindo does something less than justice to the Buddhist *yoga*. There are one or two references in the book and in all of them it appears to be considered that Buddhism was nothing but a system that taught world-negation and escape into a transcendental region beyond the cosmic process. No doubt this is true of certain Buddhist schools but it is by no means true of all. The extremely influential *Mahayana* schools or at least some of them, taught the nobler *Bodhisattva* doctrine and rejecting what they termed "the *Nirvana* of the *Arhats*" held that *Nirvana* and *Samsara* are one and the same reality which they termed '*bhuta tathata*'. Ashvaghosha, perhaps the greatest of all Buddhist philosophers, expressly preaches that enlightenment has two aspects which he terms '*prajna*' and '*achintya karma*'. The first may be regarded as the centripetal force leading to realisation of the Unity and the latter is the inconceivable actions of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and may be considered as a centrifugal force working for the spiritual welfare of all beings.

This is no isolated passage either, as in the famous *Lankavatara Sutra* the Buddha is represented as saying: "Self-realisation and purity—this is My own stage.... Its rays of light move forward like a mass of fire; they who are bright-coloured, charming and auspicious transform the triple world. *Some worlds are being transformed, while others have already been transformed.*" I do not propose to discuss here the question as to how far this doctrine is equivalent to the "double movement" of Sri Aurobindo's *yoga* but it must, I think, certainly be admitted that the escape from the cosmic process by no means constituted the sole message of Buddhism.

To return to the *yoga*, it may be of interest to enumerate the qualifications which are necessary for one who aspires to tread this path. They are nowhere set forth in a definite list but from a study of the book it

Excerpt from *The Riddle of This World*

It is not by "thinking out" the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge—the Knowledge by which we become what we know. To pass from the external to a direct and intimate inner consciousness; to widen consciousness out of the limits of the ego and the body; to heighten it by an inner will and aspiration and opening to the Light till it passes in its ascent beyond Mind; to bring down a descent of the supramental Divine through self-giving and surrender with a consequent transformation of mind, life and body—this is the *integral* way to the Truth.¹ It is this that we call the Truth here and aim at in our Yoga.

¹ I have said that the idea of the Supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature.

June 15, 1930

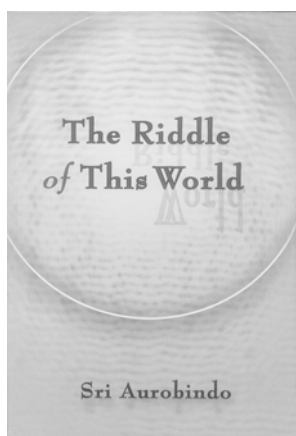
becomes clear that they do not differ essentially from those demanded by the masters of old. “A central sincerity”, “a fundamental humility”, the ability to do all work in “a spirit of acceptance, discipline and surrender”, not with personal demands and conditions but with a vigilant conscious submission to control and guidance, a calm equanimity and a faith that “in spite of our errors and weaknesses and in spite of any immediate appearance of failure, the Divine will is leading us, through every circumstance, towards the final Realisation.” Above all, transmuting all by its constant presence, must be a burning aspiration towards the Divine and a desire to offer oneself and all that one has for the Divine service, quite irrespective of what part one may be called upon to play in the *Divine Lila*.

Clearly, the *yoga* is no child’s play, no passing amusement for those in search of a new sensation. It is the age-old spiritual path, the ‘Great Work’ of the alchemists, the transmutation of the whole character, and this can never be an easy task for although the actual transmutation is and can only be accomplished by the Divine grace, yet the preliminary drudgery, the preparing of the vessel for that Grace must be accomplished by one’s own efforts.

Perhaps there will be some whose first question will be whether this *yoga* is a *jnana yoga*, a *bhakti yoga* or a *karma yoga*. I wish such lovers of classification and levels to find out for themselves the answer to this question from the book itself or from the following few remarks. Here is *jnana*, for it teaches the way to attainment of the highest knowledge, the knowledge that there is nothing but the One divine Reality, the “*sarvam khalwidam Brahma*” of the Upanishads; here is *bhakti* for it sets forth the necessity for unchanging love of and self-surrender to the Lord, the *atma-nivedana* which is the culminating stage of the nine-fold *bhakti* of the *Srimad Bhagawat*; and here is *karma* for it expounds the unattached skill in action, the ‘*karmasu kaushalam*’ of the Gita.

Beyond all classifications stands the One, the Supreme, the Stainless Eternal, changeless amidst His own eternal change, effulgent amidst His own dark shadows. All paths are His paths and this book stands as one more testimony that, even in this age of dark materialism, the ancient razor-edged Path is open for those who have the courage to walk therein: *téna dbeerà apiyanti Brahmaividah Swargam lôkamita úrdhwam vimuktâ*: Thereby the calm wise who know the Brahman, released, come unto the high Heaven-world beyond.

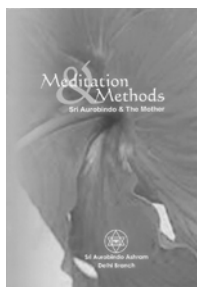
— Krishnaprem



The Riddle of This World is now in the ninth impression (2013) of its sixth edition (1973), a fact which only supports Krishnaprem’s statement that “to all who care for such things here is a book not to be missed.”

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH



Meditation and Methods

— Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch Trust, New Delhi
28 pp, ISBN 978-81-8884750-1, Rs 25

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The short selections included in this compilation are primarily concerned with the practical advice on meditation and concentration given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in their communications with disciples. Topics include the object of meditation and its role in one's *sadhana*, the best way to still the mind, the concentration of the whole being in an attitude of love and devotion, and the progressive dynamic meditation which has the power to transform the being. The booklet was first published in 1957 and was compiled by Dr Indra Sen.

Sri Aurobindo: Saga of a Great Indian Sage

— Wilfried Huchzermeyer

Publisher: D. K. Printworld, New Delhi

Size: 14x22 cm, 335 pp

Soft Cover, ISBN 978-81-246-0706-0, Rs 495

Hard Cover, ISBN 978-81-246-0702-2, Rs 800

This biography of Sri Aurobindo examines all aspects of his life: his education and early political activities as well as the work he undertook after his arrival in Pondicherry. A brief introduction to Sri Aurobindo's main prose works, a description of his collaboration with the Mother, and an analysis of certain aspects of the Second World War are treated in various chapters. The author draws on the work of previous biographers as well as evaluating the most recent sources available, including the volumes of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* that contain previously unpublished material. The book includes twenty-six pages of photographs. The author has also written a short biography of the Mother.

See review on page 18

A Unique Little Girl

— Pournaprema

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

37 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-801-6, Rs 125

Size: 23x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Compiled of anecdotes culled from notes she made during her conversations with the Mother, this book by Pournapréma, the Mother's granddaughter, reveals many stories from the Mother's childhood, her life in Paris as a young woman, her stays in Algeria with the occultists Max and Alma Théon, and the journey that led her to stay with Sri Aurobindo in India. Originally these anecdotes were recounted to Ashram schoolchildren in 1978, and the story-telling narrative style combined with the many photographs, sketches, and paintings, will engage readers of all ages.

See review on page 15



The Last Abode of Sri Aurobindo in Kolkatta

— Trija Roy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Kolkatta

40 pp, Rs 20

Size: 11x14 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

From the time of his acquittal in the Alipore bomb trial and his release from jail to his departure for Chandernagore nine months later, Sri Aurobindo stayed in his maternal uncle's house at 6 College Square. This booklet provides some glimpses into Sri Aurobindo's life while he stayed there and highlights some important landmarks during this time: he edited the journals *Karmayogin* (English) and *Dharma* (Bengali), published two Bengali writings *Durga Stotra* (*Hymn to Durga*) and *Karakahini* (*Tales of Prison Life*), gave political speeches, and attended the Hooghly Conference as the leader of the Nationalist Party.

Deliberations on *The Life Divine*: Volume IV (Book I: Chapters XIX-XXIII)

Chapterwise Summary Talks

— Ananda Reddy

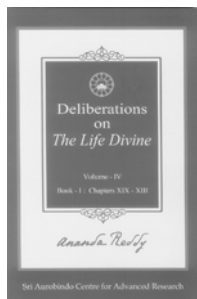
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

174 pp, ISBN 979-81-901891-3-1, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This fourth volume of Dr Reddy's transcribed and edited talks on Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* addresses chapters nineteen to twenty-three. Using simple language and illustrations from everyday life, Dr Reddy introduces the main philosophical arguments presented in these chapters, which deal with such concepts as the nature of the cosmic life-energy and the play of universal life-force, the limitations imposed by death, desire, and incapacity, the mind's dilemma, and the double soul in man. The author



has kept intact the direct, expository tone of the talks, making this an easily approachable book. Each chapter studies the main arguments in brief and is followed by lecture notes that encapsulate the contents in outline form.

Seed of Grandeur

Commentary on Sri Aurobindo's 'Thought the Paraclete', 'Rose of God' and Savitri

— S. K. Sarma

Publisher: Maruthi Publications, Guntur

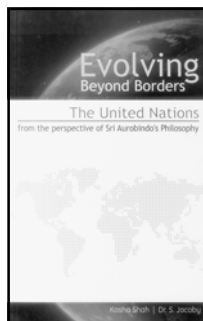
340 pp, Rs 210

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

After a short introductory note that traces the development of Sri Aurobindo's philosophic thought and provides a structure for his commentary, the author begins with two of Sri Aurobindo's short poems, "Thought the Paraclete" and "Rose of God", which he finds of special interest to those who wish to study the epic *Savitri*. The rest of the work is devoted to Book One of *Savitri*, where each of the five Cantos is first introduced and then annotated by lines and passages. Notes on the text, a bibliography, and a perspective on literary criticism of Sri Aurobindo's poetry round off the book, which is a revised and enlarged edition of the author's original 1972 work.

See review on page 19



**Evolving Beyond Borders
*The United Nations from the
Perspective of Sri Aurobindo's
Philosophy***

— Kosha Shah and Dr S. Jacoby

Publisher: Readworthy

Publications, New Delhi

212 pp, ISBN 978-93-5018-358-8,

Rs 495

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Sri Aurobindo has written on the League of Nations and on the United Nations in its early stages in the light of man's progress towards a greater human unity, not as prescriptions for an efficient world organisation. Basing their research on this same view, the authors look at Sri Aurobindo's social and political vision for humanity on the one hand and on the other examine the evolution of the United Nations and some of its special agencies, its role in war and peace, its stance on the question of self-determination, and the challenge represented by the power of economic interests. A special reference is made to the European Union and its struggle to rise above national ideals and interests.

OTHER LANGUAGES

ARABIC

Selections from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Arabic
ISBN 978-0-89744-951-9 Rs 650

DUTCH

Sri Aurobindo of het avontuur van het bewustzijn
— Satprem Rs 1300
ISBN 978-90-70549-25-1

FRENCH

Le Vent du Silence — Prithvisingh Nahar Rs 150
Traduits de l'anglais par Guy Gervais, ces poèmes écrits par l'un des proches disciples de Sri Aurobindo portent le message lumineux d'une âme totalement dévouée à ses Maîtres.

GERMAN

Mutter und Ich — M. P. Pandit Rs 300
Die Praxis des Integralen Yoga — M. P. Pandit Rs 200

BENGALI

Srimayer kichu Patrottar — The Mother	Rs 260
Nolini Kanta Gupter Rachanavali (dosh khande upalabdha) — Nolini Kanta Gupta	Rs 1250
Sri Aurobinder “Savitri” — Nolini Kanta Gupta	Rs 50
Maru Golap — Gouranga Nath Bandyopadhyay	
ISBN 978-81-89468-92-7	hc Rs 50
Kalidasa — Sri Aurobindo	Rs 75

GUJARATI

Savitri Shabdarnut - 2 — Shraddhavan	Rs 70
Savitri: Angrejimanthi Gujarati Shabdakosh	Rs 150
Auroville - Ek Parichay	Rs 55

HINDI

Bharatavarsh ka Punarjagaran — Sri Aurobindo	Rs 50
ISBN 979-81-7058-045-3	
Prashna aur Uttar 1954 — The Mother	Rs 270
ISBN 979-81-7058-006-4	
Ma Tumne Aisa Kaha Tha... — Compiled by Huta D. Hindocha	Rs 200
ISBN 978-81-87372-32-5	

MARATHI

Char Tapasya va Char Mukti — The Mother	Rs 45
ISBN 979-81-7058-011-8	
Srimatajinchhi va Sri Aravindanchhi Uttaren — Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother	Rs 70
ISBN 979-81-7058-022-4	

TELUGU

Andariki Sri Aravinda Jeevitamu — Nirodbaran	Rs 140
ISBN 978-81-7058-973-0	
Sri Aravindula Savitri — K. Bhaskara Rao	Rs 225

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BOOK REVIEWS

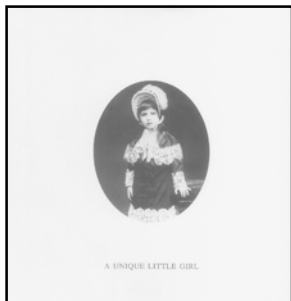
A Unique Little Girl

— Pournaprema

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

37 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-801-6, Rs 125



Size: 23x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Biographies of the Mother and reminiscences by disciples about their contact with her are numerous and always fascinating because the Mother's personality and

her way of working for this earth are riveting in their power and grace. This slim volume, *A Unique Little Girl*, by the Mother's granddaughter Pournaprema, is unique among such biographical accounts. Drawn from notes she had made during conversations with the Mother, these stories and anecdotes were recounted to the Ashram schoolchildren in 1978, just five years after the Mother had left her body. Originally published in French under the title *Une drôle de petite fille*, this English translation brings to a wider audience a charming and intimate narrative that will appeal to readers of all ages.

In the initial pages, family details provide the background of Mirra Alfassa's childhood. Mirra's mother, who was born in Egypt, and her father, who came from Turkey, were both from families of bankers. Mirra and her older brother, Mattéo, were raised in a staunchly materialist home. Although the family had lived in wealth and comfort, a turn in their fortunes soon left them nearly ruined financially. Amid these unusual circumstances Mirra and Mattéo had many of the expected childhood experiences, but always with a marked difference. Clearly a wider and higher consciousness was at play in their development, and each anecdote brings this to light.

In addition to her school subjects, Mirra studied music and painting, and became adept in both these arts. She married the painter Henri Morisset, and the book has reproductions of several of his paintings and sketches with the Mother, and often their son, André, as subjects.



The Mother and André in a study for *La Reprimande* by Henri Morisset, 1905

As Pournaprema's narrative progresses, we read about the Mother's group of spiritual seekers in Paris, her two visits to Tlemcen in Algeria, where she studied occultism with Max Théon and his wife, her first journey to India aboard a Japanese ship, and her meeting with Sri Aurobindo:

She went to the rue François Martin, went up the little staircase of the house which is now the Guest House at the corner of the Playground, and for the first time saw Him whom in her childhood visions she used to call "Krishna". Sri Aurobindo was waiting for her; it was the 29th of March 1914.

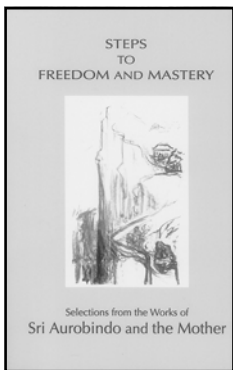
She rented a house close by—now it has become the Archives office. From its roof terrace she could see Sri Aurobindo in the evenings during sunset, walking in the veranda of his house.

After spending about a year in Pondicherry, the Mother had to return to France due to the outbreak of the First World War. From France she then travelled to Japan in 1916, and the book recounts her voyage, going around the Cape of Good Hope instead of passing through the Suez Canal, which was closed because of the war. After four years in Japan, she returned to India, to Sri Aurobindo, and, as Pournaprema ends her story:

And little by little
 She became Mā,
 She became Douce Mère.



Portrait of Pournaprema in 1970 by the Mother



Steps to Freedom and Mastery

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
 Department, Pondicherry
 181 pp, ISBN 979-81-7058-023-1, Rs 70
 Size: 14x22 cm
 Binding: Soft Cover

The perennial thirst of man is freedom; and for some whose natures are enterprising and attuned to advancement, that need for freedom becomes a quest for self-mastery. What is man trying to be free of? This is a subject dealt with by philosophy and yoga from their embryonic beginnings to present times.

This book, *Steps to Freedom and Mastery* by Dr A. S. Dalal, is a compilation from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. To understand and profit from a book of this genre it is good to recapitulate as far as possible Sri Aurobindo's philosophical journey that, beginning with spiritual experiences of lore, paves the way for his revolutionary theory of the yoga of transformation.

Sri Aurobindo is a Vedantist in a very broad sense; as an *Acharya*, when he establishes his philosophy in *The Life Divine*, every chapter is based on a *sloka* from the Vedas or the Upanishads. But Sri Aurobindo is not a

Vedantist in the orthodox sense of the word, as he takes the quintessence of every path that leads to God-realisation or any major school of ideas that takes humanity closer to the truth, irrespective of whether they are based on Vedantic text or not, to arrive at a more catholic truth that answers man's every query.

According to traditional Indian schools of thought, man's soul or the individual God in him is caught in a net of *karma*. This net consists of *Sanchita Karma*, *Kriyamana Karma*, and *Prarabdha Karma*. That which we know as fate or destiny is the *prarabdha* aspect, that portion of *Sanchita Karma* that influences the current incarnation. Man's perennial thirst for freedom is nothing but the perpetual effort of the soul to escape this net and unite with its origin, whether that is described as a being or a non-being or a field of energy that is the cause of this universe.

The orthodox schools of yoga or philosophy teach man to escape this net of *karma*, but Sri Aurobindo and the Mother developed the pioneering system of Integral Yoga. Their Yoga not only shows man the way through the net back to his origin, but makes him work on the very substance of the net in which he is caught and change it to a luminous substance.

This great and difficult endeavour is only possible by uniting our will with that of the Creatrix of the universe, which in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is embodied by the Mother. It is only she who knows the path that a soul

will take to return to its origin. Therefore, they have not prescribed ONE demarcated path for every soul but have embraced the whole spectrum of human quest and realisation.

This thought brings us back to the book under review. The number of paths being unimaginably vast, such a meaningful compilation of this kind is of great worth. The passages will help many people to see their own paths more clearly and help them understand their efforts towards freedom and mastery. The book begins by informing us about the general state of being of a human, or the ordinary human existence. We are introduced then to the idea of becoming conscious of this state in ourselves and of the basic configuration of our being. Next, through a brief passage from the Mother, we understand that the feeling of the worthlessness of all one sees and does can be the igniting spark towards understanding oneself and life. Becoming conscious of oneself leads to being conscious of the need for freedom and for some mastery too. Then the book takes up the purification of the being, which is a step towards mastery. At this point questions might arise such as “Why purification?” For freedom and mastery one needs to be purified of what?

Purification means getting rid of undesirable elements, thereby leaving a substance more homogeneous and less dense. In our context it means rejecting all activities that prevent the will of man from moving towards God-realisation and mastery. As a result, it is nothing but making the net of *karma* that imprisons man less

dense and more homogeneous, allowing him to move towards his aim.

The subsequent passages lead us to an understanding of detachment from all one does, which is the first state of freedom. At this stage in one’s spiritual practice one may choose to delimit one’s area of action, a process which facilitates detachment from action. Having achieved that state of freedom, that point where the net of *karma* has no hold on the seeker, one chooses to take a step further on the journey, towards mastery. Eventually there comes a point in the spiritual practice when one is ready to act in an even larger state of freedom, eliminating all delimitations. This brings us to the next chapter that concerns the abolition of the ego. Absolute mastery can be achieved only through this liberation and a radical transformation of the nature. This, in other words, means a new birth of the individual.

The last observation I would like to make to readers is that the editor has presented each subject from several different angles or perspectives, which makes the book purposeful for people at varied stages in their lives, and which serves to highlight the integral approach of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

— Shyama Prasad

After completing her studies at SAICE Shyama joined the Ashram, where she works at the Dining Room. She enjoys theatre, dance, music, drawing, and writing, and has written articles for the SAICE alumni journal, The Golden Chain.

Excerpt from the book:

The mental being within watches, observes and passes judgment on all that happens in you. The psychic does not watch and observe in this way like a witness, but it feels and knows spontaneously in a much more direct and luminous way, by the very purity of its own nature and the divine instinct within it, and so, whenever it comes to the front it reveals at once what are the right and what are the wrong movements in your nature....

It is by the growth of the psychic element in one’s nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one’s central being above. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature, it is then that one has a real, a spiritual as opposed to a partial and merely mental or moral self-mastery.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo: Saga of a Great Indian Sage

— Wilfried Huchzermeyer

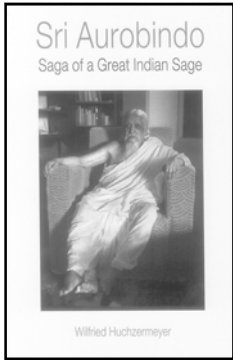
Publisher: D. K. Printworld, New Delhi

Size: 14x22 cm, 335 pp

Soft Cover, ISBN 978-81-246-0706-0, Rs 495

Hard Cover, ISBN 978-81-246-0702-2, Rs 800

Since the publication of the first biography of Sri Aurobindo in English in 1911, a handsome mass of works on the subject has come up despite the formidable difficulty caused by the fact that Sri Aurobindo's was a life the true significance of which could not be measured by events marking the surface of his physical existence.



But we know that he lived a life exciting and absorbingly interesting even when it is surveyed on its surface, till his coming over to Pondicherry in early 1910.

The chronology of events in the earlier phase of his life that can be recounted may appear insignificant to Sri Aurobindo himself and even to those who have some idea about the stupendous spiritual work in which he remained engrossed at Pondicherry, but in terms of India's history, the evolution of its political destiny in particular, they are simply indispensable. Many more documented facts on the ideas, activities and influence of Sri Aurobindo during the time of his brief sojourn in politics and their later impact have surfaced since the birth centenary of Sri Aurobindo in 1972.

Sri Aurobindo: Saga of a Great Indian Sage by Wilfried Huchzermeyer, a scholar of Indology, philosophy and comparative religion, is a refreshing addition to the series of studies on the life of Sri Aurobindo. He has tried to do justice to both the phases of Sri Aurobindo's life, the account of the later phase being naturally based on whatever little of it had been articulated or noted down by the Master or the Mother.

Each biographer worth that designation approaches his subject from a particular point of view, be it pronounced or unpronounced. Huchzermeyer too seems to have launched his work with a particular point of view as one would surmise from his Preface:

A long time ago while staying in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I happened to overhear a *sadhak* introducing a visitor on the basics of Integral Yoga. After a while I caught the sentence, "Sri Aurobindo's standpoint is Indian, but his viewpoint is Western."

This aphorism, enriched by a little play on words, outlines in an original way Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy. We envisage him standing firmly on the soil of Indian tradition, but enlarging his perspective with his dynamic and evolutionary approach and his full acceptance of life and matter. We would have to add that he has also rediscovered and revitalized some aspects of the Indian tradition, especially the ancient Vedic culture.

Notwithstanding any particular point of view, we see the author working out a narrative that is at once well documented and easy to read. The work may not justify the author's statement, "I intend to present Sri Aurobindo's life comprehensively and in detail," but he has done pleasant justice to each phase and aspect of Sri Aurobindo's life, citing such facts that are representative of them and passing from one to the next in a natural and instinctively sound glide.

The work is presented in seventeen chapters – the last one being on Auroville – and each chapter has several sections. For example, Chapter Thirteen entitled "The Second World War" has a section on Winston Churchill. It contains the Mother's explanation to a *sadhak* who is baffled by Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's occult support to Churchill, who had openly said that he had no intention of liquidating the British empire, meaning he was not for India's freedom. As reported by Nirodbaran in his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, the Mother explained:

But leave all that to the Divine. Churchill is a human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature. Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently.

This is to illustrate the author's way of picking salient quotes to highlight some of Sri Aurobindo's actions at a supraphysical plane, though for the sake of the physical plane.

The work contains, the seventeen chapters apart, more than forty photographs and also several appendices, consisting of Sri Aurobindo's comments on India, observations about Sri Aurobindo by a few renowned

personages, the meaning of the symbols of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and a precise chronology of events in the life of Sri Aurobindo. Also included are a glossary of important Sanskrit terms as well as a few English words “newly introduced by Sri Aurobindo” in the context of his yoga and a list of Sri Aurobindo’s works and some of the important books and journals relevant to this colossal subject.

Without a doubt Huchzermeyer’s work is an excellent introduction to the life and vision of the Master. It should come as a bonanza for beginners.

— Manoj Das

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

Excerpt from Chapter Thirteen “The Second World War”:

We had already mentioned that from Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoint Hitler was possessed of an asuric power. There are some reports about his behaviour which might be interpreted as evidence for this judgement. Thus Manchester [William Manchester, the American author and historian] notes that the diary of German Colonel-General Jodl was full of phrases

describing Hitler’s loss of self-control, his terror that he might lose his gamble, how he was always trembling on the verge of hysteria and sometimes plunged into it.

Sri Aurobindo, who had no access to such sources at this time, all the more so since Hitler’s weaknesses were kept hidden by his attendants as much as possible, wrote a poem in October 1939 titled “The Dwarf Napoleon” in which he analyses the dictator’s nature and his possession with an amazing insight:

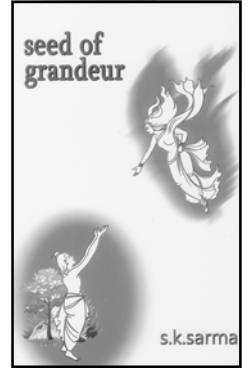
In his high villa on the fatal hill
Alone he listens to that sovereign Voice,
Dictator of his action’s sudden choice,
The tiger leap of a demoniac skill.
An energy his body cannot invest, —
Too small and human for that dreadful guest,
A tortured channel, not a happy vessel, —
Drives him to think and act and cry and wrestle.

Seed of Grandeur

Commentary on Sri Aurobindo's 'Thought the Paraclete', 'Rose of God' and Savitri

— S. K. Sarma

Publisher: Maruthi Publications, Guntur
340 pp, Rs 210
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover



It took quite some time for Indian academicians to digest the fact that Indians could write excellent English. In the 1960s Professor Srinivasa Iyengar was able to introduce a paper on Indian writing in English in Andhra University for the Honours Course in English literature—the first university to do so. The syllabus was the next problem. Fiction could be canvassed easily but there was a hitch with poetry. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry was not easily accepted. “It is difficult to understand.” “How to teach mystic poetry?” “How to interpret in an Indian classroom a poem like ‘Thought the Paraclete’?” Fortunately, Prof. Iyengar himself held the classes in Andhra University, so the foundation for studying Sri Aurobindo in the confines of academia was laid well. When Prof. Iyengar retired, it became necessary for others to take up the subject. His students, such as L. S. R. Krishna Sastri and the author of this book, Krishna Sarma, continued the task. As the latter confesses, it was not easy and for him it was but an “occupational hazard”.

The hazard was transformed into substantial work when he brought out a slim book on the three prescribed poems in the syllabus: “Rose of God”, “Thought the Paraclete” and “The Symbol Dawn”. It was, of course, tailored to suit the students and was welcomed eagerly. Fortunately, coming from an academic background, and being a very serious student of English literature and Indian philosophy, Prof. Krishna Sarma had himself sowed the seeds of expansion in the *Seed of Grandeur* (1972). Andhra Pradesh has a rare closeness with Sri Aurobindo. In 1948 the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University, Dr C. R. Reddy, who was a great admirer of the Mahayogi, was able to persuade Sri Aurobindo to accept the institution’s National Prize in Humanities, the only award he accepted in his earthly life. The message he gave to the University at that time is now a historic document.

However, the academic world has been hesitant in enlarging its approaches to Sri Aurobindo. As Krishna Sarma confesses in his recent work, “Many of the University Departments have de-emphasized Sri Aurobindo.” This has been a blessing in disguise for Sarma, as there is now no need to worry about post-graduate syllabus students. After breezing through the two short poems, he takes up the inner spaces of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophical thought for study as found in Book One of *Savitri*. After an introduction positing the argument in the canto, he deals with the verse paragraphs and explains them.

Admittedly it is difficult to convey the Aurobindonian philosophy as pellets of logic, using the critical tools of the West. Sri Aurobindo himself was not in favour of being dubbed a philosopher. He was right, for he comes in the tradition of Indian seekers who recorded what they “saw” (*darshana*). Indian philosophical thought opens with the Upanishads but they are not mere logical statements. With Sri Aurobindo also, his personal experience controls, however remotely, the logical progression of his philosophical ideas. He had had advaitic experiences but had no serpent-and-the-rope problem in connecting man, Nature and God in his writings. Dr. Sarma confesses:

My problem was, I was not trying to seek my Self. I was trying to apprehend the concept through my reasoning powers. For, I was trying to approach the world of *advaita* through my mind, and *advaita* insists that mind be deactivated.

Those of us who have known Dr. Sarma and his humility for decades, ever since we were students in the 1950s, get an accurate picture here of this intense scholar who keeps his tools of Reason razor-sharp. He finds in Sri Aurobindo’s approach a qualified monism, not unlike the one posited by Sri Ramanuja which speaks of creation as a *leela-vibhuti*. As Sarma puts it:

God, in a playful mood, seeking company, activates Prakriti with the urge to create, and he himself gets caught in the coils of the laws native to the lower Nature, the iron laws of Time, Nescience and Death, necessitating a retrieval or redemption, a return to the source from which this ‘fallen’ self has strayed, and necessitating

the descent of Supramental Illumination, Savitri, to lift up the aspiring Satyavan to return to the felicity of Bliss and Divine Existence.

With this statement in hand, it becomes a self-realising journey to go through the rest of the volume. *Seed of Grandeur* is verily an anxious and friendly teacher by our side. Dialectical terminology is kept to a minimum. After all, as Sri Aurobindo said: “Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar.” Logic grows sterile in the presence of the Delight of Existence!

I wish this volume, which has an excellent illumination cover of *Savitri* reaching out to Satyavan, had been more reader-friendly in its print format. Well, there will always be the next edition for such a systematic and satisfying study of the first 3120 lines of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*.

— Prema Nandakumar
Dr Prema Nandakumar is a well-known writer and literary critic. Her biography of the Mother, The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram (National Book Trust) ran into several editions.

Excerpt from the book:

[Sri Aurobindo] presented the tale [of Savitri and Satyavan] not so much as a romantic tale as a vehicle to carry the yogic experiences, which, he believed, would help one to rise to higher planes of existence. In addition, he found a convenient parallel between life–death–life and wakefulness–sleep–wakefulness, as well as day–night–day. The movement from the moments of utter darkness through various gradations of dawn into the full effulgence of the day, the movement of a sleeper’s consciousness from inertness to wakefulness, and the movement of the spiritually inert soul through various gradations (as experienced in yoga) to supramental illumination, are paralleled on the poetic plane, particularly in the opening canto of the poem, which he significantly called “The Symbol Dawn”.