

Recent Publications

Sabbha



“There are only two powers in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.” —Napoleon Bonaparte

The year 2015 marks the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo and the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. In our lead article, Sri Aurobindo’s insights into Napoleon’s instrumentality and his role as defender of the ideals of the French Revolution are presented within a historical context.

In one of his poems, Sri Aurobindo has captured the character of the man and his mission for the future of humanity:

Napoleon’s mind was swift and bold and vast,
His heart was calm and stormy like the sea,
His will dynamic in its grip and clasp.
His eye could hold a world within its grasp
And see the great and small things sovereignly.
A movement of gigantic depth and scope,
He seized and gave coherence to its hope.

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Napoleon and the French Revolution

The year 2015 marks the bicentenary of the battle of Waterloo, in which Napoleon's army was defeated, a defining moment in European and world history. As he strode across Europe, Napoleon built an empire, which vanished after his defeat at Waterloo, but more importantly, in Sri Aurobindo's assessment, he built a temporary structure upon which the ideals of the French Revolution "might rest until the world was fit to understand them better and really fulfil them." [CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 512] In his essays on the French Revolution and Napoleon written while at Chandernagore just prior to coming to Pondicherry, as well as in the later works *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo wrote about how the Revolution changed the face of Europe. The subject also arose in several conversations with his disciples, which have been recounted in the memoirs of A. B. Purani and Nirodbaran. In this article, we draw on Sri Aurobindo's insights while describing the historical context of events.

Prior to the battle of Waterloo, Napoleon had already been deposed from his long-held position as Emperor of France. After military defeats in Russia and Germany, Napoleon had been confined to the island of Elba by the reinstated Bourbon monarchy. But on 27 February 1815, he escaped, and with a contingent of just 1000 men he retook Paris and resumed control of France. Within three months he gathered an army of more than 300,000. In Belgium lay a force of British, Dutch, and Prussian troops who were awaiting Austrian and Russian reinforcements before invading France. Napoleon decided to strike before these reinforcements came.

By 15 June, Napoleon had rapidly and secretly massed a force of 124,000 French troops, mostly experienced veterans, in proximity to Waterloo to attack the unsuspecting enemy. The Anglo-Dutch army had 93,000 troops under Wellington on the west, and the Prussian army had 116,000 troops under Blücher on the east.¹ Napoleon would strike from the south between them at a strategic point, drive them apart, and separately crush them, with a contingent under Marshal Ney attacking Wellington on the west, and a contingent under Marshal Grouchy attacking Blücher on the east. Another contingent of reserves under the command of Napoleon would remain in the centre and be used on either side



Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo

"Sirs, if it were not for that one red spot [the British Isles] I would have conquered the world!!!"

as might become necessary. Preliminary battles were fought on 16 June at Ligny on the east, and Quatre Bras on the west, but during the course of the 17th both Blücher's and Wellington's armies were able to retreat to the north. In effect, the French failed to drive a decisive wedge between the opposing armies, and Wellington's and Blücher's retreating armies succeeded in joining up further north to defeat Napoleon near Waterloo on 18 June. The French lost 40,000 men. Wellington lost over 15,000 men, and Blücher 7000. Some 45,000 soldiers lay dead or wounded in an area of three square miles. France's imperial rule under Napoleon was over.

Napoleon's perhaps inappropriate choice of Grouchy as a commander and Soult as his chief of staff may have contributed to the French defeat. Critical orders from Napoleon were misinterpreted or ignored. Moreover, the number of French troops was minimal: if Napoleon had gathered 25,000 more before attacking, the battle may well have gone differently. Napoleon himself was ill during the battle and this may have affected his decision-making. Whatever factors were at play, in the end the allied Anglo-Dutch and Prussians armies proved the superior force on the battlefield.

The battle of Waterloo signified the end of the Napoleonic era. However, by then the French Revolutionary ideals, which Napoleon had earlier defended in France itself and helped to spread throughout Europe by his many military campaigns, had been securely established in the social and political landscape of Europe.

The French Revolution was inspired in part by the American Revolution, and by various French philosophers and writers, especially Rousseau. Rousseau had declared the ultimate sovereignty of the people to be inalienable, and all governments not established on this basis as usurpations. Whereas the Americans were the first to establish modern democracy, the French were the first to make it a militant creed. Thus the French Revolution, particularly under Napoleon, became intertwined with military expansion and the toppling of monarchies throughout Europe. While there were certainly contradictions in this endeavour, as Napoleon himself became a de facto monarch, he nevertheless was seen as the champion of the Revolution.

Sri Aurobindo, who was very well read in the field of European history, has drawn attention to the impact of four of the principal figures of the Revolution in his succinct observation: "Mirabeau initiated, Danton inspired, Robespierre slew, Napoleon fulfilled." Mirabeau was an early leader in the Revolution, a successful orator, a moderate, and an able politician who consolidated the National Assembly in 1789 giving representation to the



"To conquer [our enemies] we must dare, and dare again, and dare forever; and thus will France be saved."
—Georges Danton

people. An aristocrat himself, he favoured a constitutional monarchy, a position that eventually became untenable. Sri Aurobindo said that he "was a meeting-place of two ages. He had the passions of the past, not its courtly restraint; the turbulence, genius, impetuosity of the future, not its steady attachment to

ideas." Danton was another leader, one who pressed for a more radical agenda and the end of the monarchy. About him, Sri Aurobindo said, "The energy of Danton lay dormant, indolent, scattering itself in stupendous oratory, satisfied with feelings and phrases. But each time it stirred, it convulsed events and sent a shock of primal elemental force rushing through the consciousness of the French nation." Regarding Robespierre, the principal leader of the most radical and violent wing of the Revolution, Sri Aurobindo said that "He believed in the Revolution, he believed in certain ideas, he believed in himself as their spokesman and executor; he came to believe in his mission to slay the enemies of the idea and make an end. And whatever he believed, he believed implicitly,

unflinching, invincibly and pursued it with a rigid fidelity." As for Napoleon, Sri Aurobindo said he took upon himself the functions of the others, and in that role he was "the despot of liberty, the imperial protector of equality, the unprincipled organiser of great principles....The fury of Kali became in him self-centred,



"To administer is to govern: to govern is to reign. That is the essence of the problem." —Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau



“The government of the revolution is liberty’s despotism against tyranny.”
—Maximilien Robespierre

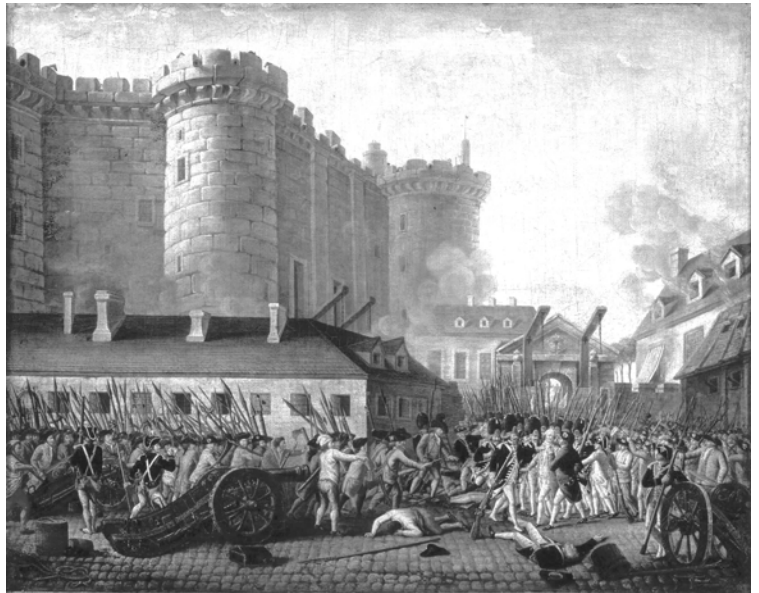
capable, full of organised thought and activity, but nonetheless impetuous, colossal, violent, devastating.” [Ibid, pp. 513–17]

In addition to greater democracy, the Revolution established in Europe and elsewhere the principles of socialism and nationalism. While a socialist classless society remained a distant dream, socialist ideals such as universal free education and the idea that the State is responsible for the provision of jobs or support for the unemployed became for the first time realities. Although not one of the Revolution’s ideals, nationalism rose throughout Europe, and the nation-state replaced territorial dominions. Nationalism arose in France itself as it and its revolutionary ideals were attacked from outside, and it arose throughout Europe in reaction to Napoleon’s foreign wars and conquests. Sri Aurobindo compared the action of the French Revolution to the death-dance of Kali, and said that “It was only when She found that She was trampling on Mahadeva, God expressed in the principle of Nationalism, that She remembered Herself, flung aside Napoleon...and settled down quietly to her

work of perfecting nationality as the outer shell within which brotherhood may be securely and largely organised.” [Ibid, p. 513]

Sri Aurobindo described the principal gains of the French Revolution as follows:

The dominant idea of the French Revolution was the formula of the free and sovereign people and, in spite of the cosmopolitan element introduced into the revolutionary formula by the ideal of fraternity, this idea became in fact the assertion of the free, independent, democratically self-governed nation.... the principal gifts of the French Revolution must remain and be universalised as permanent acquisitions, indispensable elements in the future order of the world,—national self-consciousness and self-government, freedom and enlightenment for the people and so much social equality and justice at least as is indispensable to political liberty; for with any form of fixed and rigid inequality democratic self-government is incompatible. [CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 344–45]



The storming of the Bastille

The start of the Revolution itself can be dated with the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, in which the populace in Paris attacked a fortress prison which also contained an arms depot. The uprising occurred partly in reaction to the severe economic crisis facing the country due to its regressive tax system and to the dismissal of the finance minister, Jacques Necker, who was sympathetic to the common people. Paris became the scene of a general riot. The National Guard, sympathetic to the people, joined them. The royalist army,

fearing a bloodbath and defections in their own ranks, withdrew. The successful insurrection in Paris quickly spread throughout France.

During its first years, before the rise of Napoleon, the Revolution put France into a state of a creative crisis. There was a scarcity of food and the treasury was empty. To help relieve this situation, on 2 November 1789, it was decreed that all of the Catholic Church's properties, comprising about a fifth of the country, would be taken over and put at the disposal of the nation. The Constitution of 1791 laid down many of the Revolution's principles, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the benefits won by the abolition of feudalism, and the prohibition of religious vows and industrial guilds (corporations). The country was reorganised under various regional and municipal authorities.

The National Convention election of 1792 highlighted the struggle between two revolutionary parties, the Girondists who were champions of the rights of property, and the Jacobins, who tended more in the direction of Socialism. The Jacobin party won, and there arose as its arm in 1793 the Committee of Public Safety, headed by Robespierre. The Committee extended control over the ministers and administrative bodies, the judges, the generals, and the commissioners of the republic, whom it appointed, purged, or dismissed at will. The authority of the committee rested on its ruthless use of force, the guillotine its favourite tool. It launched the Reign of Terror, in which tens of thousands were summarily executed on the flimsiest of evidence for being out of sympathy with the Revolution. Louis XVI, the former monarch of France, was executed in January 1793. Even leaders of the Revolution, such as Danton, who wished to curtail the violence, were guillotined. There were mass executions in towns which resisted the Revolution. When the bloodletting had culminated and finally exhausted itself in July 1794, Robespierre himself came under the guillotine.

Napoleon, Sri Aurobindo said, saved the Revolution, and organised it as far as was possible for the time. He was a vibhuti. The vibhuti "comes for work, to help man on his way, the world in its evolution. Napoleon was one of the mightiest of vibhutis, one of the most dominant." [CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 520]

They are manifestations of Nature, of divine power presided over by a spirit commissioned for the purpose, and that spirit is an emanation from the Almighty, who accepts human strength and weakness but is not bound by them. They are above morality and ordinarily without a conscience, acting according to their own nature. For they are not men developing upwards from the animal to the divine and struggling against their lower natures, but beings already fulfilled and satisfied with themselves. [Ibid, p. 518]

Like Bhishma of the Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo said, "He [Napoleon] had the same sovran, irresistible, world-possessing grasp of war, politics, government, legislation, society; the same masterly handling of masses and amazing glut for details. He had the iron brain that nothing fatigues, the faultless memory that loses nothing, the clear insight that puts everything in its place with spontaneous accuracy." [Ibid, p. 520]



Napoleon Crossing the Alps by Jacques-Louis David

Napoleon was born on 15 August 1769. He studied at the École Militaire in Paris during 1784–85, and left as a commissioned artillery officer. When the Revolution came in 1789, he accepted it with an open mind, but kept a detached judgement. After successfully putting down a siege in the French town of Toulon, where counterrevolutionaries had handed over the French naval base to an Anglo-Spanish fleet, he was promoted to general of a brigade in Italy. In 1795 he was called back to Paris where there was another serious insurrection, and in less than a day it was quelled. He was then promoted to Commander in Chief of the Army of Italy, which “consisted of 30,000 starving soldiers”. In fourteen months he conquered a large part of Italy, pillaging as he went, thus costing the French Treasury nothing. His conquests led to the Treaty of Campo Formio of 1797, in which the Holy Roman Emperor Francis II ceded to France most of his territories in Italy and in both Belgium and along the left bank of the Rhine, significantly expanding French control, navigation, and commerce in Europe.

Following the Treaty of Campo Formio, France’s main opponent was England, which had a vastly superior navy, so Napoleon planned to attack it indirectly by conquering Egypt and thus disrupt its trade routes with India. Despite military victories in Egypt and Damascus, however, a naval defeat in the Mediterranean by the British, bubonic plague, and continued uprisings of the local population frustrated his aims.

He returned to Paris just as it was in a crisis of discontent, disorder, and financial difficulty. Several members of the Directory which was ruling France believed that a coup d’état by a military dictator was needed to save the Revolution, and Napoleon was sought out. The coup d’état was staged on 9 November 1799, and Napoleon, at the age of 30, was elected as the chief of three Consuls who would rule France. In 1802 his powers were increased and he became “consul for life” and in 1804 he proclaimed himself Emperor of France. Regarding this later usurpation of power, Sri Aurobindo has said, “If instead of proclaiming himself Emperor he had remained the First Consul, he would have met with better success.” [Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 166] Elsewhere he wrote that “when a man who has carried out a great work is destroyed, it is for the egoism by which he has misused the force within that the force itself breaks him to pieces, as it broke Napoleon.” [CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 32]

Napoleon quickly restored order by adopting the strong points of the old monarchical system and rejecting the weaknesses of the revolutionary democracy. He wiped out the last of the Jacobins and reopened the churches and ended religious persecution (while retaining control over Church properties). He organised the finances of the country. In 1807, he set up a committee of lawyers to formulate a code of civil and criminal law in light of Roman principles and French tradition. The Napoleonic Code logically and concisely laid out not only a code of law for France, but was a framework into which the laws of many other countries were later fitted.

After the Treaty of Campo Formio, Napoleon faced and defeated a succession of coalitions of military forces allied against him. Soon a second coalition of England, Austria, Russia, and others formed to contain and reverse France’s acquisitions in Italy and Central Europe. Napoleon defeated them and with the Treaty of Lunéville in 1801 further expanded his empire. Next, a third coalition, made up of the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, England, and Russia, culminated in France’s victory over a combined Austrian-Russian force under Tsar Alexander I at Austerlitz in 1805, which marked the end of the Holy Roman Empire. Then Prussia, concerned over the increase of French power in Central Europe, went to war with France in 1806. The fourth coalition made up of Prussia and Russia was defeated in 1807. In the same year France invaded Spain and Portugal, leading to a protracted six-year war that ultimately resulted in failure. In 1809 Napoleon fought another war with the Austrians and allied forces in central Europe which he won, ending the fifth coalition. By 1811, Napoleon ruled over 70 million people across an empire that dominated Europe in a

way not seen since the Roman Empire.

To enforce his blockade of European ports from British trade, part of his strategy to subjugate England, Napoleon launched an invasion of Russia in 1812 that ended in a catastrophic failure for the French. In 1813, Prussia and Austria joined Russian forces in a sixth coalition and, by October 1813, a large Allied army defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. The next year, the Allies invaded France and captured Paris, forcing Napoleon to abdicate in April 1814. He was exiled to the island of Elba. The Bourbons were restored to power and the French lost most of the territories they had conquered since the beginning of the Revolution.



The Retreat of the French after the Battle of Leipzig. Painting by François-Louis Couché

Sri Aurobindo has explained:

The aggression of France upon Europe was necessary for self-defence, for Europe did not mean to tolerate the Revolution. She had to be taught that the Revolution meant not anarchy, but a reorganisation so much mightier than the old that a single country so reorganised could conquer united Europe. That task Napoleon did effectively. It has been said that his foreign policy failed, because he left France smaller than he found it. That is true. But it was not Napoleon's mission to aggrandise France geographically. He did not come for France, but for humanity, and even in his failure he served God and prepared the future. The balance of Europe had to be disturbed in order to prepare new combinations and his gigantic operation disturbed it fatally. He roused the spirit of Nationalism in Italy, in Germany, in Poland, while he established the tendency towards the formation of great Empires; and it is the harmonized fulfilment of Nationalism and Empire that is the future. He compelled Europe to accept the necessity of reorganisation political and social. [CWSA, Vol.1, p .521]

In talks with his attendants in the 1940s, Sri Aurobindo discussed Napoleon's successes:

He gave peace and order, stable government and security to France. He was not only one of the conquerors but also one of the greatest administrators and organisers the world has seen. If it had not been for him, the whole idea of the French Revolution would have been crushed by the European Powers. It was he who stabilised the ideas of the Revolution. [Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 196]

Besides being a legislator he established the bases of social laws, administration and finance which are followed even today. He is not only the greatest military genius in history but one of the greatest men, with manifold capacities. [Purani, *Evening Talks*, p. 957]

The social laws introduced by Napoleon have continued till this day. It was he who made for the first time all men equal before the Law. The Code Napoleon bridged the gulf between the rich and the poor. This kind of equality seems very natural now, but when he introduced it, it was something revolutionary. The laws he laid down still hold. What he established may not have been democracy in the sense of government by the masses, but it was democracy in the sense of government by the middle class, the bourgeoisie. [Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 168]

In an essay written in 1910, Sri Aurobindo explained the deeper significance of Napoleon's defeats at the hands of the sixth coalition at Leipzig and the seventh coalition at Waterloo:

The *punya* of overthrowing Napoleon was divided between England, Germany and Russia. He had to be overthrown, because, though he prepared the future and destroyed the past, he misused the present. To save the present from his violent hands was the work of his enemies, and this merit gave to these three countries a great immediate development and the possession of the nineteenth century. England and Germany went farthest because they acted most wholeheartedly and as nations, not as Governments. In Russia it was the Government that acted, but with the help of the people. On the other hand, the countries sympathetic to Napoleon, Italy, Ireland, Poland, or those which acted weakly or falsely, such as Spain and Austria, have declined, suffered, struggled and, even when partially successful, could not attain their fulfilment. But the *punya* is now exhausted. The future with which the victorious nations made a temporary compromise, the future which Napoleon saved and protected, demands possession, and those who can reorganise themselves most swiftly and perfectly under its pressure, will inherit the twentieth century; those who deny it will perish. That is the reason why Socialism is most insistent now in England, Germany & Russia; but in all these countries it is faced by an obstinate and unprincipled opposition. The early decades of the twentieth century will select the chosen nations of the future.

There remains the question of Nationalism and Empire; it is put to all these nations, but chiefly to England. It is put to her in Ireland, in Egypt, in India. She has the best opportunity of harmonising the conflicting claims of Nationalism and Empire. In fighting Nationalism she is fighting against her own chance of a future, and her temporary victory over Indian Nationalism is the one thing her guardian spirits have most to fear. For the recoil will be as tremendous as the recoil that overthrew Napoleon. The delusion that the despotic possession of India is indispensable to her retention of Empire, may be her undoing. It is indispensable to her, if she meditates, like Napoleon, the conquest of Asia and of the world; it is not necessary to her imperial self-fulfilment, for even without India she would possess an Empire greater than the Roman. Her true position in India is that of a trustee and temporary guardian; her only wise and righteous policy the devolution of her trust upon her ward with a view to alliance, not ownership. The opportunity of which Napoleon dreamed, a great Indian Empire, has been conceded to her and not to Napoleon. But that opportunity is a two edged weapon which, if misused, is likely to turn upon and slay the wielder. [CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 521-2]



Photograph of Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. Hero of Waterloo, later Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, he was hailed on his death in 1852 as the "last great Englishman" by Alfred Lord Tennyson. While there are several portraits and engravings of the "Iron Duke", this daguerreotype, taken in 1844 when he was 75 years old, seems to be the only photograph.

The successful reconciliation between nation and empire remained one of the foremost challenges of the era. Of course, England eventually capitulated in India, and thus saved herself. In more contemporary times, organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the African Union, each in their own way, represent positive steps in the endeavour to reconcile the urge for nationalism with an international spirit and outlook, a movement Sri Aurobindo encouraged in his message on the occasion of India's independence in 1947. Ultimately, within such shifting and uneasy structures and facing difficult challenges, a true brotherhood of humanity must develop.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

The Mother

The Path of Later On

— A Story by The Mother; Illustrations by Ruchi Mhasane

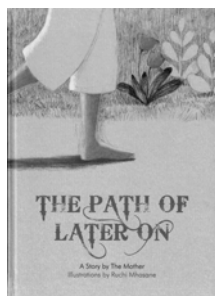
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville

37 pp, ISBN 978-93-82474-01-2, Rs 690

Size: 19x27 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Written by the Mother as a school essay in 1893, this simple story of a young student points to the moral lesson of heeding one's inner voice and choosing the right path, and never postponing that choice for a later time. The story has been illustrated as a picture book for children.



About Savitri: With some paintings (Part One)

— Paintings by Huta with passages from *Savitri* and explanations by the Mother

Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry

127 pp, ISBN 978-81-87372-15-8, Rs 350

Size: 19x25 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In 1968 the Mother began her work on *Savitri* with Huta. The Mother read out passages from the poem and then, after a deep contemplation, gave her comments, which were tape-recorded and later transcribed by Huta. The Mother named the work *About Savitri*, and later gave a message for the book: “*Savitri*—The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision”. Each passage from the poem is followed by the Mother's explanation and Huta's painting, inspired and approved by the Mother. Part One covers Book One, Canto One and includes thirty-two paintings. This is a new edition of the book which was first published in 1972.



Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Mantra: Rhythmic Word of the Infinite

42 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-372-6, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Tantra: The Worship of Shakti

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-373-3, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The Way of Gratitude

41 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-370-2, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The Greatness of India and its Culture

In the Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

— Compiled by Chandra Prakash Khetan

Publisher: The Resurgent India Trust, Jhunjhunu

411 pp, Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

ISBN 978-81-903276-5-7, Rs 350

Binding: Hard Cover

ISBN 978-81-903276-7-1, Rs 450

This compilation addresses a number of aspects of Indian civilisation and culture, from its essential spirit to its best accomplishments, and measures its power of survival, renewal, and adaptation to the ever-changing needs of its peoples. The passages examine the spirit and forms of Indian religion and culture and how it was characteristic of the race to apply these ideals to everyday life. The extracts also consider the ancient Indian spirit and the Aryan system of education, the value of Indian art and literature, the true nature of Indian polity, the power of the *sanatana dharma* in India's history and development, and India's mission in the world.



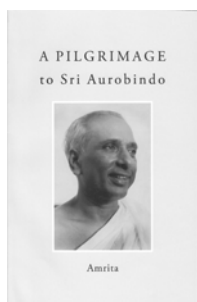
Other Authors and Miscellaneous

A Pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo

— Amrita

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

69 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-036-1, Rs 60



Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These reminiscences tell the story of how Amrita, at the age of fifteen, conceived a great desire to meet Sri Aurobindo and pursued this dream for more than three years until he finally met his Master in 1913. Amrita writes of his early life in his village, his days as a

student in Pondicherry, his contact with the poet Subramania Bharati, his efforts to meet Sri Aurobindo, his studies in Madras, and his gradual initiation to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. This brief narrative, written in 1962 in Tamil, was translated into English in 1969 and published under the title *Old Long Since* as part of the larger book *Reminiscences*. In this book, the English translation of Amrita's memoir is being published for the first time as an independent book.

Reminiscences

— Nolini Kanta Gupta

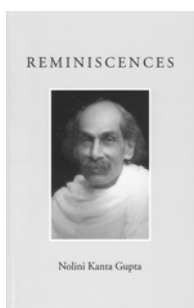
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

145 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-015-6, Rs 90

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In these reminiscences Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates events from his student years, the time he spent as a revolutionary and as a prisoner in Alipore Jail, the early years in Pondicherry with Sri Aurobindo, life during the two World Wars, and his years as both a young footballer and an elderly athlete. The book also includes some early memories of the Mother. As most of the recollections were originally talks given by Nolini in Bengali to his classes, they reflect the intimacy and charm of his relation with the students. These memoirs first appeared in English in 1969 along with the reminiscences of two other early disciples, K. Amrita and Suresh Chakravarti. In this edition only Nolini's memoirs have been included.



Matrimandir and the Park of Unity

— Ireno Guerci

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville

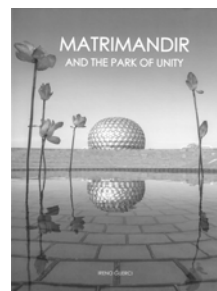
127 pp, Rs 1200

Size: 22x28 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

In this book of colour photographs, the Matrimandir and its surroundings are portrayed in many modes. The first section, "The Place", evokes the beauty and many moods of the area through some dramatic pictures.

The next section, "The Work", shows different aspects of work, from the construction stages to painting, cleaning and polishing, landscaping and planting, and maintaining the golden disks. The final section, "The People", features the residents of Auroville, many of them children, as they celebrate, meditate, and interact with the Matrimandir and its gardens. An introduction provides a brief history of the Matrimandir, beginning with the Mother's conception and her vision of the Matrimandir as "the central cohesive force" for the growth of Auroville.



Deliberations on *The Life Divine*: Volume V (Book I: Chapters XXIV-XXVIII) Chapterwise Summary Talks

— Ananda Reddy

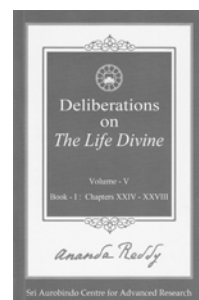
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

150 pp, ISBN 978-93-85391-05-7, Rs 300

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This fifth volume of Dr Reddy's transcribed and edited talks on Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* addresses the final five chapters of Book One: Omnipresent Reality and the Universe. In an effort to reach out to those less familiar with philosophic complexities, Dr Reddy uses simple language and examples to introduce the main philosophical arguments presented in these chapters. Subjects considered include the exact nature and origin of Matter, the unity of Spirit and Matter, the principles that govern the destiny of this creation, and the higher ranges of consciousness and their relation to each other. Each chapter studies the main arguments in brief and is followed by lecture notes that encapsulate the contents in outline form.



The Philosophy of Evolution

— Rod Hemsell

Publisher: University of Human Unity, Auroville
346 pp, Rs 350

Size: 15x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Comprising the transcriptions of two lecture series given at the University of Human Unity in Auroville, this book aims at discovering a philosophy of evolution that can help to show the way towards a more unified and enlightened civilisation. Part One, titled “Darwin and Sri Aurobindo”, uses Sri Aurobindo’s perspectives to provide a general context and background for an introduction to the subject of evolution from both the scientific and philosophical points of view. Part Two, titled “Mind and Supermind”, attempts to define mind, the limitations of mind, and the rationale for a theory of evolution beyond mind, based primarily on Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, but including the views of important philosophical thinkers, classical and modern.

See review on page 19

Sri Aurobindo and the Logic of the Infinite

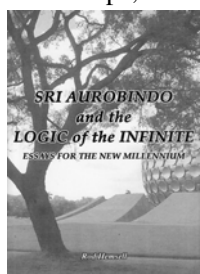
Essays for the New Millennium

— Rod Hemsell

Publisher: University of Human Unity, Auroville
319 pp, Rs 325

Size: 15x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

This collection of essays, many of which were originally presented as lectures, readings, and workshops, attempts to examine the writings of Sri



Aurobindo in the context of philosophy and to present the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in relation to topical subjects and concerns. It is the author’s conviction that only through the radical transformations – individual and collective – proposed by them that pressing global concerns such

as war, poverty, exhaustion of natural resources, and the destruction of the biosphere will be effectively addressed. Ranging across diverse subjects, there are also essays on Auroville, spirituality in healing, Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, and the work of supramental transformation done by the Mother.

The Inner World of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

A firsthand account of an unprecedented spiritual adventure in the modern era

— Kush Sen

Publisher: Kush Sen, Pondicherry

161 pp, Rs 65

Size: 12x18 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

A collection of essays written mostly over a span of twenty years, this book looks at certain aspects of Sri



Aurobindo’s philosophy and Integral Yoga and provides a personal perspective on spiritual practice in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Topics include the meaning of the terms spirituality, yoga, and surrender in Sri Aurobindo’s lexicon, the role of the Divine Mother in the supramental transformation, and the special

character and purpose of the Ashram. The essays in the final section attempt to examine and explain the hidden, complex inner dynamics of *sadhana* as practised individually and collectively in the Ashram.

The Vedic Age

In the Light of Sri Aurobindo

— Chandra Prakash Khetan

Publisher: The Resurgent India Trust, Jhunjhunu
470 pp, Size: 14x22 cm

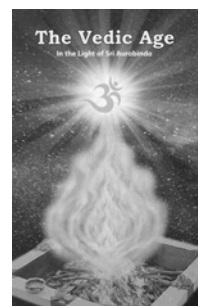
Binding: Soft Cover

ISBN 978-81-903276-8-8, Rs 375

Binding: Hard Cover

ISBN 978-81-903276-6-4, Rs 475

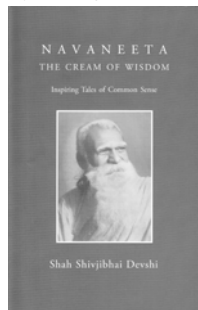
Closely following and liberally quoting Sri Aurobindo's views, the author adopts an integral approach to his study of the Veda and the Vedic Age. In the first part he lays bare the misconceived Aryan invasion theory and traces the roots of Indian thought and civilisation back to the Vedas and the profound philosophy of the Upanishads. A long second section presents Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Veda. The third part examines the Veda through the eyes of historians, both Indian and European, and concludes with a chapter on the history of the Vedic Age in the light of Sri Aurobindo, who asserted the influence of the Veda on the modern world's spirituality, religion, and thought.



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

— Narrator: Shah Shivjibhai Devshi; Writer: Pujalal
Publisher: Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry
117 pp, ISBN 978-81-86413-58-6, Rs 70
Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Navaneeta is a collection of twenty-eight tales narrated by Shivjibhai Devshi, transcribed by the poet Pujalal,



and translated here from Gujarati into English by the editor. These stories take the form of parables, allegories, and anecdotes arising from Shivjibhai's own experiences. They teach the wisdom of a life lived in simplicity and freedom with compassion and joy. Pujalal met the author during the latter's nine-month stay in the Ashram in 1932 and in

1944 took up the work of writing down the stories. The translator/editor has organised the tales into three sections—on nature and animals, on humanity, and on *sadhana*, and added apt quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Yaroslava's Flowers

— Story by Noel Parent; Illustrated by Pankhuri Singh;
Designed by Krupa Jhaveri
Publisher: Noel Parent, Auroville
48 pp, ISBN 978-0-9889769-2-4, Rs 400
Size: 26x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

This children's picture book, with many full-page colour illustrations, tells the story of a little girl who is given a bag of magic seeds by the Flower Spirit. Each flower seed has a power to grant the spiritual quality that the Mother has identified—Protection, Generosity, Divine Grace, and Eternal Smile, for example. She plants the seeds wherever she finds people and places that need to be awakened to new life. Along the way, she discovers more about herself and how she can help to make the future brighter through her love of flowers.

Glimpses of Wonder

Children in Auroville Creating Worlds on Sand

— Aikya
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville
123 pp, Rs 750
Size: 21x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

The World Game, also known as Sandplay, is an educational tool used in Auroville since the late 1960s whereby children can creatively explore their thoughts,

feelings, and imagination in an effort "to know oneself", a core principle of learning. In this book the author describes her approach to using the World Game in Auroville. Children are given a box of sand and free access to unusual and appealing objects. Music, flowering gardens, paintings, and the quietly observant presence of the facilitator contribute to creating a concentrated atmosphere in which the child can tell his story or express her dreams. The book includes quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, pictures of the children and their creations, their individual stories, and guiding steps for implementing the World Game.

Savitri: A Study in Style and Symbolism

— Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan
232 pp, ISBN 978-93-80761-38-1, Rs 200
Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Centred on Sri Aurobindo's vision of the gnostic being as the next stage in the evolutionary journey of man, and the poetry of the Spirit as the future poetry, this book deals primarily with the symbolic significance and stylistic features of his epic poem *Savitri*. Chapters explore in depth the symbolism of the yogas of Aswapati and Savitri, man's eternal quest for immortality symbolised by the transformation of Death, and the poetic style of Sri Aurobindo. The author also attempts to answer various criticisms of the poem, discusses the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's language and style to his subject matter, and concludes with her thoughts on the poem's message for the world today.

See review on page 21

In Awareness

— Sundaram

Publisher: Sri Aravind Krupa Trust, Ahmedabad
445 pp, Rs 400
Size: 14x22 cm, Binding: Hard Cover

These musings, poems, and essays by Sundaram, a well-known Gujarati poet and a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1945 until his passing in 1991, represent in English some of the different facets of his writings. The first, long section comprises pithy expressions of some inner musings and insights, presented in a journal format covering ten years. The second part, "Vijaya Poems", is a collection of English poems written for Ashram students and teachers. Parts Three and Four are English translations of some of Sundaram's Gujarati poems. The final section contains eight essays, including a long piece, "Sri Aurobindo: The Poet".

See review on page 17

Love and Death (DVD) Rs 200
— A narrative poem by Sri Aurobindo; film based on the paintings by Priti Ghosh
Publisher: Priti Ghosh, Pondicherry

OTHER LANGUAGES

FRENCH

Les Fleurs et leurs Messages — The Mother Rs 325
ISBN 978-93-5210-081-1

GERMAN

Ewige Jugend — Compiled from the works of the Mother Rs 150

HEBREW

Savitri: The Book of Beginnings
— Compiled by Itzhak Bar Yona hc Rs 580

ITALIAN

I miei ricordi — Nolini Kanta Gupta Rs 500
ISBN 978-93-5210-088-0

ASSAMESE

Maa — Sri Aurobindo Rs 25
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Prarthana aru Mantra — Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother hc Rs 70

BENGALI

Nari Prasange Srma — Compilation (The Mother) Rs 35
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ISBN 978-81-87372-33-2
Parama Janani — Conversations with the Mother; recollected by Mona Sarkar Rs 140
Upendranath Bandyopadhyay Rachana Sangrah ISBN 978-93-84101-12-1 hc Rs 400

GUJARATI

Phoolonan Adhyatmik Rahasyo — Sri Mataji hc Rs 1200
Phoolonan Adhyatmik Rahasyo — Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and other sources Rs 140
Savitri Shabdamrut : 5 — Shraddhavan Rs 120
Prakash Panthe — Morli Pandya hc Rs 200

HINDI

Prashna aur Uttar 1957-58 — The Mother Rs 250
ISBN 978-93-5210-028-6

ORIYA

Srimaanka Dibya Sannidhyare — Shobha Mitra Rs 200

TAMIL

Sri Aravindar-Sri Annaiyin Ponmozhiyal
— Edited by Gandhimathi Krishnan hc Rs 100
Arul Thanthai Sri Aravindar — D. Thiruvallavan Rs 75

TELUGU

Jyothirmayee — Compiled from the works of the Mother Rs 100
Amrutha Dhara — Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo Rs 120

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BOOK REVIEWS

Introduction to the Gita

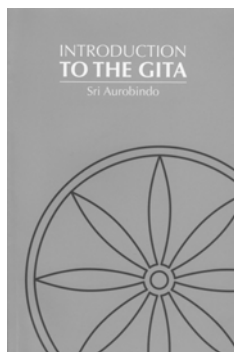
—Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Dept.

111 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-978-5, Rs 70

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



Introduction to the Gita, the English rendering of the Bengali work *Gitar Bhumika*, is the earliest exposition of the Gita by Sri Aurobindo, written in 1909. After his acquittal in the Alipore bomb case, he was released from jail on 6 May 1909. It is amazing that as early as 19 June, he had mustered the resources as well as the necessary logistics to launch the first issue of the English weekly *Karmayogin*. What is even more amazing, he was on tour till the 26th of the month, visiting Faridpur, Khulna and Barisal, and attending a conference at Jhalakati in East Bengal. He had already begun contributing instalments of his *Karakahini* (*Tales of Prison Life*) to the Bengali monthly *Suprabhat* in May itself. Also on 19 June the first issue of the Bengali weekly *Dharma* was issued. He must have had at his disposal assistants able enough to execute his schemes. Even so, the fact that he wrote practically the entire contents of both periodicals, including *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* for the English publication and *Gitar Bhumika* for the Bengali one, was a phenomenal exercise, to say the least.

This reviewer must confess that once having read *Essays on the Gita*, he had assumed, not very consciously though, that nothing more could be expected from an incomplete earlier series on the subject that was Sri Aurobindo's *Gitar Bhumika*. But on reading the latter he realised how gravely wrong he was. This short treatise on the great scripture seemed charged by a certain extraordinary power of conviction that Sri Aurobindo had freshly received from its very source, Sri Krishna, while in solitary confinement at Alipore Jail.

Gitar Bhumika can be looked upon as a preamble to *Essays on the Gita* so far as Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the supreme secret of the Gita was concerned. We need not delve into that profundity here. But explaining briefly the import of "The Speaker" (Lord Krishna), "The Listener" (the hero Arjuna) and "The Circumstance" in

which the dialogue took place, the wide perspective Sri Aurobindo creates, in a simple style, immensely helps the reader to appreciate the significance of the Gita's message. For example, he explains the reason for Krishna's choice of Arjuna from among his illustrious contemporaries as the worthy recipient of his revelations. Arjuna was not the greatest among the great of his time; so far as spiritual knowledge was concerned Vyasa excelled all. Bhishma no doubt was the wisest person, speaking pragmatically; Dhritarashtra and Vidura were superior to all the others in their thirst for wisdom. None could surpass Yudhishthira in honesty and moral qualities; nobody was greater than Uddhava or Akrura when it came to devotion to Krishna; it was Karna who surpassed all in valour and other heroic qualities. But Arjuna was the one who was totally open to Krishna's guidance; he alone had the capacity for acting as an instrument of the Divine, totally and unconditionally.

The treatise focuses several sidelights on issues historical. That was a time when the subtle unity of India was preserved through all the rulers accepting the suzerainty of one emperor. The tradition was considered sacred. It would not allow an emperor's descendant to succeed him to the position. Instead, the position was transferred to another, one who commanded the trust and respect of all the princes, and their allegiance would be confirmed by their attending the Rajasuya Yajna performed by the aspirant to that position. That explains why the Chedi prince Shishupala, terribly inimical towards the Pandavas, felt obliged to attend the ceremony convened to anoint Yudhishthira with that crowning imperial glory.

Sri Aurobindo further observes that the great Kurukshetra war took place 5000 years ago*, but the first attack by foreigners on India was possible only 2500 years later and that too extended only up to the river Sindhu. What could have kept the invaders at bay till then? It was the heroic Kshatriya power, supported by the Brahma power that surged forth with the victory of the Pandavas— an achievement that was Arjuna's.

*In a 1902 essay on the Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo wrote that "it is now known beyond reasonable doubt that the Mahabharata war was fought out in or about 1190 B.C." [CWSA, Vol. I, p. 344]. Evidently, in both cases he wrote based on the information available to him at the time.—Ed.

Gitar Bhumika was serialised in the *Dharma* till February 1910 and was discontinued, as was the publication of the journal, when Sri Aurobindo left Kolkata abruptly. Its English translation, the work under notice, was published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Kolkata, in 1967. It did not carry the translator's name. Though reasonably well done, the translation requires some revision. For example, on page 4, the Sanskrit *gahanā* is closer in the context to "deep" or "mysterious" than to "thick". On page 16 "Though you are infinite, we shall not allow you to be finite" should read "Since you are infinite, we shall not allow you to be finite."

— Manoj Das

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.

The English of Savitri

—Shraddhavan

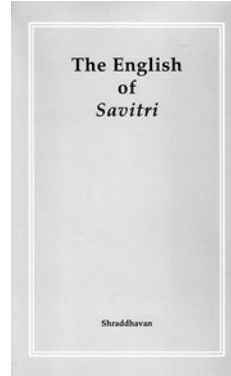
Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
512 pp, ISBN 978-93-82474-00-5, Rs 500
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Hard Cover

Sri Aurobindo's chef-d'oeuvre *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, the longest epic in the English language at almost twenty-four thousand lines, is a gold mine of spiritual truths. Itself a masterpiece, it has been a fount of inspiration for other creative artistic forms, in music, painting, drama, and dance. For example, the Mother guided and inspired the budding artist Huta to make paintings according to her instructions, illustrating selected passages from the epic. Then when Huta recorded the Mother's readings of those passages, the recordings were given by the Mother to musician Sunil Bhattacharya who at her request composed a large body of compositions to accompany them. Dramatic recitations and presentations of the poem were often staged at the Ashram Theatre under the direct guidance and supervision of the Mother. Later attempts were made by others also. Dance was represented primarily by Rolf Gelewski, a German dancer from Brazil much admired by the Mother, and later by the late Veenapani Chawla and her troupe, whose performances were much

appreciated by the media and by audiences in India's metropolitan cities. In addition, a large number of writers have made inspired attempts to fathom the mystery and plumb the depths of this epic of sublime beauty. It has been looked at and analysed from many different standpoints and angles, and no doubt such efforts will continue and increase in the future.

Now we have a book which focuses particularly on the language of *Savitri*. The author has been inspired to assist non-native English readers towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of the glories of Sri Aurobindo's poetic utterance. This aspect of the poem has not been explored so systematically by other writers and its appearance in print is most timely. Its usefulness and value will be evident to any serious student of the epic.

Although the poem has not yet gained the worldwide admiration it deserves, a few discerning poetry-lovers have acknowledged it as not only the longest but more importantly the greatest poem in English. It reaches unprecedented heights of poetic expression, and it breaks new ground in distilling the essence of the spiritual knowledge and wisdom first expressed by the Vedic and Upanishadic seers in Sanskrit and making it accessible in one of the global languages of our modern age.



Sri Aurobindo's English is British English, since he was educated in England and spent his formative years in that country. English has spread its wings all over the world—there is a United States version, an Australian variant, and even an Indian form, and all of them are substantially divergent from a literary point of view. Moreover, non-native English readers, even if fairly conversant with the English language, are quite likely to miss the exact shade of meaning of some words and the local connotations of others. Sri Aurobindo's language is complex, idiomatic, and requires a more detailed knowledge of the English language than a mere working acquaintance affords. *Savitri* also contains allusions not only to Vedic or traditional Indian symbols and imagery, but also to the Classical Greek and Latin literature of which Sri Aurobindo was such an eminent scholar, and to many other literary and cultural sources that are not familiar to the average reader. Here this new book steps

in with its very precise help, and by casting some light on these difficulties it is bound to prove its value.

Its author, Shraddhavan, is English by birth and education. A poetry-lover from childhood, she completed her studies in English language and literature at Bristol University in the early 1960s, when the English faculty there was considered one of the best in the country. But she has been living in Auroville for more than forty years and has steeped herself in the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Her Sanskrit name was given to her by the Mother in 1972.

Since November 1995, when Nirodbaran—Sri Aurobindo’s close disciple and his scribe during the later stages of the composition of his epic – laid the foundation stone of the Savitri Bhavan complex in Auroville, Shraddhavan has been increasingly involved in its activities and in studying the poem. Savitri Bhavan was launched with the idea of gathering all available materials and offering activities which would assist a deeper understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo’s visionary epic. Over the years it has grown into a complex organisation supporting a wide variety of activities including lectures, exhibitions, publications, research, and reference assistance to scholars and students from around the world. Her book has grown out of a series of weekly classes held at the request of Aurovilians from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds who wanted assistance in gaining an understanding of this poem, which the Mother has termed “the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision”. It is intended to be the first of a series.

Apart from the importance and encouragement given to the Savitri Bhavan project by Nirodbaran in its earlier years, Shraddhavan acknowledges her great debt to Amal Kiran, who was her mentor from 1971 onwards. Amal was the confidential recipient of passages from the poem even as it was being written by Sri Aurobindo, and was among the first to start assisting aspiring readers by sharing his poetic insights into its complexities.

In 2001 Huta entrusted to the Bhavan the care of all the paintings relating to *Savitri* which she had created under the Mother’s guidance and inspiration from 1961 to 1970, along with related materials. The greatly admired speaker on *Savitri* Dr. M. V. Nadkarni also associated himself closely with the Bhavan from 1998 onwards, as did other distinguished *Savitri*-lovers and scholars, such as Dr. Prema Nandakumar and Dr. Alok Pandey.

Benefitting from all these sources, Shraddhavan not only explains the more uncommon words and usages but also unravels the metaphors and the similes which abound in Sri Aurobindo’s writing, often woven into the text in a way that a casual reader might miss. In this sense the book actually goes beyond the mere “English” of the poem.

By its spiritual grandeur *Savitri* attracts scholars like nectar draws in bees. There is so much interest in it worldwide that many translations have been and are being attempted, not only in Indian languages but also in foreign tongues. Translations are always a tricky matter and a proper understanding of the spirit of the poem is absolutely necessary for a satisfactory result. In this field too, the present book will prove itself invaluable to translators.

To illustrate our point, we may look at a few examples from the book. Many words have several diverse meanings, and for a proper understanding the right meaning has to be applied in the context of the poem. Such words as *grain*, *mould*, *suffer*, *august*, *audience*, etc. are used by Sri Aurobindo in unfamiliar ways which need to be understood correctly in order to gain access to the poet’s meaning and intention. This book explains these usages in detail. For example, *grain* can mean not only seed as in grains of wheat or rice; it is also applied to the lines in wood which show the way in which the tree has grown. Since carpenters find it easier to cut wood along the grain and more difficult against it, we have the expression “it goes against the grain” to refer to something that we feel unwilling or reluctant to do. The grain of a tree also indicates the path travelled by the sap from the roots up through to the leaves. Knowing this gives a deeper shade of meaning to the line in Book One, Canto One of *Savitri*: “Earth’s grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears”. Similarly, we find the word *august* used by Sri Aurobindo in the poem several times not to indicate the eighth month of the year, but as an adjective. The month of August was named after the first Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, because it was his birth month. He was given the name Augustus when he was made emperor because of his majestic imperial character and bearing. The Latin word *augustus* meant majestic, and it is in this sense that Sri Aurobindo uses *august* as an adjective. The word *mould* usually signifies a hollow container into which liquid metal or wax is poured to give it a shape. Sri Aurobindo uses the word in this sense in many places in the poem, but once or twice, as Shraddhavan points out at one point in her book, we may understand it in its

other sense, of rich fertile soil or a fine fungal growth. The word *economy* is often understood in a financial context, but Sri Aurobindo also uses it to mean the order and balance of forces in the creation, as in the lines: “In the stark economy of cosmic life | Each creature to its appointed task and place | Is bound by his nature’s form, his spirit’s force.”

Similarly, the words *steep*, *audience*, *suffer*, *reach* and many others have several meanings, and the right meaning has to be taken in the context of the poem. Also, Sri Aurobindo makes use of the full richness of the English language, often using words which were no longer common currency. He introduces several words from French and other languages, as well as making some coinages of his own. Another problem posed by the English language is that poets may use nouns as verbs and vice versa, which can be confusing for anyone unfamiliar with this practice: *abode* is not always a house or residence but can be the past tense of the verb *abide*. In one place Sri Aurobindo uses the noun *cathedral* as a verb—a trap which has entangled several unwary translators. Is it then not obvious that we have need of this English scholar to steer us safely through these treacherous linguistic waters? All the words listed and discussed here appear in the poem and have been explained fully by the author.

The publication of this book has been made possible by the members of the Sri Aurobindo Centre on Bell Street, London, in memory of Dhirubhai Shah and Marguerite Smithwhite. Those who benefit from reading this book to reach a deeper understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo’s visionary masterpiece owe them a debt of gratitude for their generosity. *The English of Savitri* is a valuable addition to the growing literature on *Savitri*, and it is our hope that further volumes will be brought out soon.

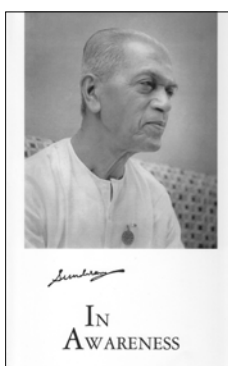
— Ranganath Raghavan

Ranganath came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1945 at the age of six. After completing his studies in the Ashram School, he joined the Ashram Press, as directed by the Mother, and worked there for forty years. At present he teaches at SAICE and also works in the Archives and Research Library.

In Awareness

—Sundaram

Publisher: Sri Aravind Krupa Trust, Ahmedabad



445 pp, Rs 400

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This volume of 445 pages containing various examples of Sundaram-bhai’s creation appears huge, yet it represents only a part of his entire life’s literary work. I had of course known of him since my schooldays and was familiar

with his poetry, but this volume has revealed so much more.

My first glimpse of Sundaram-bhai came in November 1951 in the Ashram Dining Room when a friend pointed him out, saying, “That is the well-known, famous poet Sundaram.” I was surprised. I had expected all the hallmarks of a “poet’s look”, but saw no long flowing hair, no unkempt, crumpled dress, not even the characteristic bag dangling from his shoulder. But, yes, the eyes at once reminded me of a line from his poem, “Where are you hidden in the temple?” Yes, I remember his eyes always, as if searching, looking for something.

Other features of his personality were his soft smile and his meticulous way of handling material objects. For example, he was always neatly dressed in well-ironed white Ashram shirt and pyjamas and carrying a cloth bag. When taking his meals in the Ashram Dining Room, he first selected a table, placed his bag there, went to wash his hands, quietly waited his turn at the counter, and gave his trademark smile to the ladies serving there. He placed his plate on the table very carefully, fetched a glass of water, settled down on the stool, turned his plate the way he wanted his food placed before him, closed his eyes in a silent prayer of offering, picked up his spoon, and began to eat. There was no hurry or sharp movement of any sort; everything was done in a quiet harmony.

We can see this trend evidenced in full flow in the first section of this volume. In few but significant words he expresses his radiant thoughts, mentioning the date and even the time of writing—5.15 night, 1.52 night, 2.41 night. Whatever the time of day or night, he must be fully aware of not only the time but also the experiences around which he has woven such lines as

All that is beautiful on earth, I love.
And all that is still not beautiful,
I shall beautify with my love,
With my deep transforming love.

The fourth and last section gives us some autobiographical statements, completing the sketch of the journey of a sensitive village boy through the richly kaleidoscopic outer world into the invisible world of subtle bounties opened to him by Sri Aurobindo.

Before closing, I would like to add some touching incidents from his life. In 1967 he was travelling in Gujarat to procure a piece of land on which to build a city meant for spiritual aspirants dedicated to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo. There was a place where Sundaram-bhai and other followers of Sri Aurobindo had planned to hold a camp. This place required cleaning before the meeting could take place, but as there were no cleaners available and no one else ready to help, Ambupremi from the Baroda centre and Sundaram-bhai began cleaning the filth. Sundaram-bhai remarked that work for the Divine, small or large, crude or refined, was equal in his eyes.

Even before he joined the Ashram, his love of beauty was evident in all his works as well as in his life. While in Ahmedabad, he had started reading *The Life Divine*, published earlier in instalments in the *Arya*. Another person who joined this weekly reading described how Sundaram-bhai would gently pluck roses from his garden, clean and arrange them very quietly and lovingly, place them before Sri Aurobindo's photograph, light an incense stick, and settle down to read, study, and meditate.

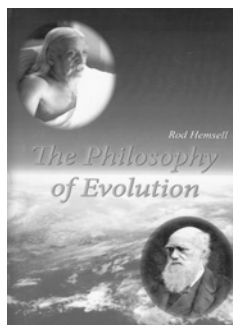
— Sunanda Poddar

Sunanda came to stay in the Ashram in 1951, when she was sixteen. She began working at SABDA while still a student at SAICE and continued until 1994. In 1952 she also began her work of telling and writing stories for children. She has been looking after Sri Smriti museum since its inception in 1989.

The Philosophy of Evolution

—Rod Hemsell

Publisher: University of Human Unity, Auroville



346 pp, Rs 350

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Since its genesis in 2008, the University of Human Unity has been pursuing its mission to “explore new approaches to knowledge and new ways of being, self-educational methods and learning modalities which may lead us to a new perspective and expression, a deeper understanding and a truer force of consciousness that is manifesting in Auroville and the world.” Rod Hemsell, who lived in Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1968-1983, and again from 2005-2015, was integral to the university's creation and has been lecturing on philosophy and poetry since its inception. Many of these courses, which also include important lectures concerning *Savitri* and Sri Aurobindo's poetry in general, have been recorded and transcribed and are available to registered users at the university's website.

The Philosophy of Evolution, published by the University of Human Unity, is comprised of two sections titled “Darwin and Sri Aurobindo” and “Mind and Supermind,” and includes three appendices with an assortment of illustrations corresponding to important evolutionary ideas. The text is taken from transcriptions of two of the university's courses and intentionally maintains “the rather informal and loosely structured style of the spoken lectures.” This book provides an illuminating resource for readers of Sri Aurobindo who might not have read philosophers of evolution who were his contemporaries (such as Ernst Haeckel, Henri Bergson, and Alfred North Whitehead), and vividly portrays Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the ongoing development of evolutionary theory in general. However, *The Philosophy of Evolution* distinguishes itself from most books that are simply about philosophy. For, while we are given an introduction to the subject of evolution from a scientific and philosophic point of view, we are encouraged to use this information to, ourselves, think philosophically.

Towards the end of the preface for *The Philosophy of Evolution* we are introduced to the aim of philosophy which, according to the esteemed twentieth-century

philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, is “disclosure” or the seeing and revealing of the truth of things. In Part One we are told that “philosophy is the critical examination of the grounds for fundamental beliefs and analysis of the basic concepts employed in their expression.” And again, through Whitehead, we are invited to participate in philosophy by recognizing that the “assemblage of philosophic ideas is more than a specialist’s study. It moulds our type of civilization.”

These definitions and axioms prepare us for a wide-ranging introduction to the development of evolutionary thought. These definitions grow in importance as we come to recognize a distinction between philosophers of Nature such as Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, and intuitive and visionary philosophers such as Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo. It has long been understood that the pursuit of knowledge has focused on two separate fields of inquiry: the mind or spirit, approached mystically and philosophically; and matter, approached scientifically or practically. In *The Philosophy of Evolution* we are being asked to recognize Sri Aurobindo’s assertion that these two streams “must converge,” and to participate in the creative emergence of new values for civilization that their philosophic synthesis entails.

Scientists and philosophers of Nature have done a brilliant job of discovering and cataloging the processes of matter, life, and (to some extent) mind. This accumulated knowledge of beings, and the abstract concepts formulated by the rational mind, have assisted us tremendously in the development of technology and in constructing a scientific view of reality. But in reviewing the development of evolutionary thought, we also come to see, along with Bergson, Heidegger, and Sri Aurobindo, that this scientific view is abstract and representational, and that it is essentially a frame, “what is, a pictographic frame, or a verbal frame, or a systematic frame.” Consequently, we learn that the project of philosophy in the twentieth century “has been to define this frame and its limits, the limitations of this human understanding, and the importance of turning it all upside down and reconnecting with the experiential reality.”

In these lectures we are asked to appreciate the fact that throughout his writing career Sri Aurobindo “devoted a tremendous amount of energy to the question of evolution.” We are encouraged to see that evolution is “not just a concept...it’s an approach to understanding

existence. It is a framework for grasping the true meaning of reality, for learning to think correctly, to be conscious on all the levels of our consciousness in a focused, intentional way.”

It is this framework which allows us to see the origins of matter, life, and mind within consciousness itself. Once we have discovered these levels of consciousness, the evolutionary approach allows us to put these levels in contact with one another. The ancient concept of sacrifice then “means putting these levels in contact with each other and allowing them to ignite new potentials.”

Through surveying the development of the philosophy of mind we can arrive at the limits of the mind and its knowledge, and we can intuit the emergence of another level of consciousness that is capable of knowing reality, not through the construction of representations, but by identity. Sri Aurobindo called this consciousness beyond mind, “supermind,” and said that in order for this new level of consciousness to descend, it is necessary for the mind to “abdicate.”

With his synthesis of evolutionary theory and spirituality, Sri Aurobindo distinguished himself from others in both philosophy and Yoga. We are offered many times throughout these lectures the proposition that “a philosophy of evolution can emerge in which a philosophic understanding and intention discovers the way to an active participation in the creative evolution of consciousness and becomes the basis of a more meaningful and enlightened civilization.” These lectures provide just enough scientific information to help us think philosophically about evolution. We are reminded of the importance of value and meaning in the creative expression of philosophy. With the evolutionary synthesis of Sri Aurobindo and the future it portends, we are called to recognize the tremendous value in the practice of Yoga and its potential to liberate us from the limits imposed upon our experience of reality by the habits of the mind.

Everything is a sacrifice. Agni, the Vedic fire. All energy transformations are sacrifices. One bit of energy serves the being of another through its own dissipation. Existence is a universal sacrifice. The supreme sacrifice has the intention to bring out of nothingness the divine. The supreme sacrifice is the entry of the absolute divine into the absolute nihil for the purpose of the evolution back, through the eons of suffering, through sacrifice, to the ultimate sacrifice of bowing at the feet of the divine herself in an act of complete

self-immolation. Emptiness and compassion. That's the spiritual aspect of knowing things universally. It's a function of the higher mind which it is our task to enter, as a bridge to supermind. ["Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Supermind," *The Philosophy of Evolution*, p. 283]

— Scott Traffas

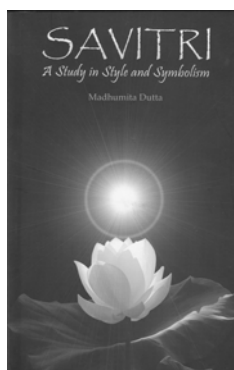
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Savitri: A Study in Style and Symbolism

— Madhumita Dutta

Publisher: Avenel Press, Burdwan
232 pp, ISBN 978-93-80761-38-1, Rs 200
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

"*Savitri*, the poem, the word of Sri Aurobindo is the cosmic Answer to the cosmic Question," said Nolini Kanta Gupta. This epic poem of Sri Aurobindo has invited the attention of many scholars. *Savitri* is that Word of the seer-poet which inspires scholars and devotees alike. Sri Aurobindo calls it "A Legend and a Symbol", which gives us a stronger ground to delve into its symbolism. It is a modern epic, written for present-day humanity, and as "future poetry" it presents the possibilities of writing mantric poetry.



Savitri: A Study in Style and Symbolism by Dr. Madhumita Dutta is a scholarly exploration of the symbolism and style of this magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo. The themes in the book are well researched. All the proofs and arguments amply support the thesis put forth by the author. It is commendable that the author has taken pains to unveil as many levels and shades of symbolic meaning as may be found in the epic and would be relevant to our understanding.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the epic and then delves deeper into its symbolic and stylistic nuances. It is divided into seven systematic chapters

which though suitably connected can be read independently as well. For a new reader, the elaborate introduction to *Savitri* given in this book is of considerable help. At once we get the source, the genesis, and a history of the development of the poem.

The author humbly submits in the very opening sentence that the wide range of its subject matter and the complexity of its themes, added to the poet's own yogic experience and spiritual vision, perhaps place the poem beyond the grasp of any of the usual rules of poetic appreciation. She writes: "Of all the works of Sri Aurobindo, his epic *Savitri* is perhaps the most difficult to comprehend and virtually impossible to assess on general principles of criticism," but, she adds, "It is rewarding to read *Savitri* and get into the spirit of its mantric poetry." (p. 11)

Although the book carries the subtitle "A Study in Style and Symbolism", the major part of the work is devoted to symbolism. The two chapters "Symbol of the Two Voyages" and "Love and Death: Symbolism of Transformation" cover the whole range of symbolism on various levels in *Savitri*. In the first of these chapters, Dr. Dutta specifies the nature of the two voyages and then sets out to explore their symbolic significance: "In fact, these are two stages of a single yogic journey; one is the preparation, and the other, the completion of the Yoga, through which all the depths and heights of consciousness are explored" (48). The author has established, with quotations and instances from the text, Aswapati's symbolism as representative of the aspiration of the whole of humanity and also of the individual. "Aswapati represents mankind, carrying in his heart the desire of the entire human race for ultimate liberty" (52). He is a prototype of the intermediary race envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. While explaining the symbolism of Aswapati, the author has discussed all the stages of his yoga and simultaneously established it as Sri Aurobindo's own experience and experiments in yoga and poetry. The book establishes philosophically how Aswapati's is a quest for immortality and his yoga is the fulfillment of all the ancient yogas.

Dr. Dutta keeps a wonderful link all through the different chapters of how *Savitri*'s and Aswapati's yogas are complementary to each other. His yoga is "a precursor and also a pre-requisite for the appearance of the supramental race, of which *Savitri* is the symbol" (53). While discussing *Savitri*'s yoga and its symbolism, she writes: "*Savitri*'s Yoga is the culmination of the Yoga begun

by Aswapati". Savitri stands for the "Divine illuminator, creator and sustainer of the universe"; hers is "a 'divine birth', an answer to Earth's prayer" (88–9).

The entire journey of Savitri from her foreknowledge of the impending doom to her *tapasya* to conquer and transform death is well charted out by the author and leads us to the next chapter "Love and Death". When Nolini Kanta Gupta commented that *Savitri* is the cosmic Answer to the cosmic Question, it is not only in the aspiration of Aswapati and the descent of Savitri that it is cosmic. It presents the age-old search of mankind for immortality. In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo establishes that Divine Love is the only answer to this question of the search for immortality. In this chapter, the symbolism of Satyavan has been explored: "Satyavan symbolizes man in his present state of evolution—subject to the laws of mortality, in the grip of ignorance and death" (111). We find a telling analysis of the relation between Savitri and Satyavan:

Her mission is to retrieve the soul of Satyavan, for it is only with him that the task of Transformation can be accomplished, together with him can she bear the 'ancient Mother's load'. Savitri and Satyavan symbolize the divine principles of the universe in their feminine and masculine aspects, they are the 'twin-souls' who are essentially one." (117)

The author has established the complementarity of the yogas of Aswapati and Savitri and the symbolic significance of the *purusha* and *prakriti* principles joining together as Satyavan and Savitri to accomplish the work of transformation. In almost a hundred pages the reader gets the gist, the symbolism, the story of Savitri, supported with lines from the epic.

In the chapter dedicated to stylistic analysis, Dr. Dutta has taken pains to analyze all the stylistic devices employed by Sri Aurobindo in the epic. "Sri Aurobindo himself alludes to four different kinds of style (in *The*

Future Poetry)—the adequate style, the rhetorical, the illuminative and the revelatory or intuitive style. Almost all these varieties of styles are employed in *Savitri*." (152). It is quite interesting to see the impact of repetition and alliteration, and the use of metaphors and similes, rhetoric and lyrics, mystic and symbolic devices, and, at places, a simple, unadorned style of writing. Many thanks to the author for including this chapter and giving us a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's adept use of stylistic devices. A student of literature, linguistics and stylistics will appreciate how the book brings out the symbolic and structural beauty of the epic.

The last two chapters deal with the criticism aimed at *Savitri* and at its relevance today. Dr. Dutta has tried to prove how such criticism is based on an incomplete understanding of the poem. She explains that "Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* appears at a critical phase in man's evolutionary journey of which it is a profound exposition" (210). And she concludes: "In *Savitri*, the poet is the seer, who lived out the philosophy of the Scriptures, confirmed their truths and made them accessible and applicable to modern times. It is in these perspectives that we may assert both the *need* and *possibility* of an epic like *Savitri* today."

Surely, the value of well-researched books like this one is that they can help us move a little closer to the spirit of *Savitri*. With such help we can perhaps come to more fully understand the truth of what the Mother said of *Savitri*—that it is "the Supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision".

— Shruti Bidwaikar

Shruti is a faculty member at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research. She did her doctorate on Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics and is actively involved in reading, researching, and editing study material related to the thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Excerpt from the book:

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is a hymn to Immortality, a triumph chant of the highest aspiration of man since he was upon earth — the aspiration to conquer Death. The epic details, in psychic-spiritual terms, the journey through the inner and the higher worlds of consciousness, the obscure regions of the subconscious realms to the luminous regions of the superconscious, which when reached, makes possible the Divine descent and the supreme transformation of Man. The new creation is the result of the earth-soul's aspiration for the Truth of the Superconscious planes; it is an answer to the eternal, ageless quest of man for Immortality. Aswapati and Savitri together perform the Yajna, the soul's eternal sacrifice, to establish the law of Truth and the reign of Righteousness finally upon earth, achieving the holy union of Heaven and Earth, of Spirit and Matter.

Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India

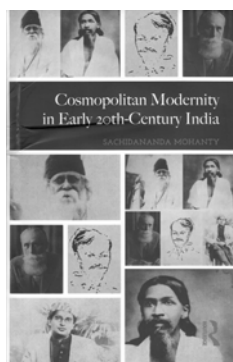
—Sachidananda Mohanty

Publisher: Taylor and Francis Books India, Pvt., Ltd.

174 pp, ISBN: 978-1-138-85933-3, Rs 360

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



The book under review certainly deserves to be recognized as a distinctive study on cosmopolitan modernity. It is distinctive in more than one way. First, it makes a new attempt to understand the meaning and significance of modernity. Modernity does not mean only the revival of reason and rationality associated with progress, the rise of technology, and the formation of nation-states. At its core, it is essentially characterized by a cosmopolitan thinking. Second, the idea of cosmopolitan modernity, instead of being discussed as an abstract topic of philosophical/literary discourse, has been explored in relation to some seminal thinkers whose works and lives exemplify the best of cosmopolitan thinking. They are the true representatives of cosmopolitan modernity. But who are these thinkers, the living testimonies of cosmopolitan modernity? This is where the author has done a tremendously important job. Except for one or two, the thinkers discussed in the book are no longer known figures. Historically, they probably never were well known because their contributions in promoting the culture of cosmopolitanism remained unrecognized, or undervalued as the author puts it. The great merit of this book is that it has brought these forgotten historical figures into the limelight with a detailed study, supported by archival materials, of their works and lives. This, indeed, is a noteworthy intellectual service that expands our horizon of thinking, since it enables us to see how these men approached the world without consideration of boundaries or borders. To see the totality expressed by the world is possible only when we believe that there is an essential unity of mankind. The key to this idea, as the book claims, is the cosmopolitan self that all these thinkers possessed.

The book begins by giving a theoretical explanation of cosmopolitanism. This helps readers to have a clear idea of what cosmopolitanism means, which subsequently enables them to form an idea of what

constitutes cosmopolitanism in practice. Cosmopolitanism, although it can signify a wide variety of views in moral and social-political philosophy, has at its core the idea that all human beings should belong to a kind of universal community of world citizens that dispenses with national exclusivity and gender-, racial- or class-based thinking. It is both a way of thinking and a form of practice. The author has made amply clear the need for taking into account both theory and practice in the context of cosmopolitanism. The reason is that the lack of coordination between the two may lead to a lopsided, superficial, elitist view of cosmopolitanism. The six thinkers discussed in this book must be thus viewed as illustrations of cosmopolitanism in its full sense, a sense in which both theory and practice are combined in the best possible way.

The author clears some of the misconceptions associated with cosmopolitanism. First of all, it should not be identified with globalization. If the two are not distinguished, cosmopolitanism will then mean cultural globalization, which the author finds highly problematic on the ground that the true meaning of cosmopolitanism will be lost. Cosmopolitanism is focused on certain segments of society, namely, on the cultural profile of the metropolis. However, it is holistic in nature and thus makes room for all sections of people and social groups, including various ethnic communities and marginalized groups. In this effort, cosmopolitanism never takes tradition and modernity to be mutually exclusive but views them as complementary, thus allowing assimilation and integration between the two. All these internal dynamics as nurtured within the conceptual fabric of cosmopolitanism, as the author argues, allow the idea of a new form and a new conception of citizenship. He calls it cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship, as evident from the author's account, becomes the key expression of cosmopolitan thinking. But what is meant by cultural citizenship and how does it relate to cosmopolitan thinking? I think the author's explanation here is innovative since it attempts to understand cosmopolitanism without resorting to clichés. The best way to understand the term cultural citizenship will be to see it, as the author suggests, in the multicultural context of societies. The two notions which are central to multiculturalism are equality and difference. The notion of cultural citizenship does not deny the differences existing among various social and cultural groups, but at the same time it recognizes them as equal. Respect for others is at the base of the conviction

that there is a deep sense of identity running across different societies and cultures. This conviction becomes then the basis for our ethical engagement with the world, where the world is perceived without any form of discrimination, whether racial, gender or economic. Here, the author points out, one cannot fail to notice the component of universality that is implicit in cosmopolitan thinking. But the question here is: How do we understand universality? In this context, the author has made a correct assessment of the nature of universality involved in this cosmopolitan discourse. The notion of universality should not be understood in abstract Kantian terms. Its significance must be seen in relation to particulars. How would the universal demands of cosmopolitanism be contextualized in relation to particulars? That is, how could universality

Excerpt from the book:

At a time when travel was difficult and involved voyages across the wide and inhospitable seas, journey into the interiors of the land mass was arduous, disease and pestilence were rampant, robbers and highwaymen ruled the roost, and sponsored travel was practically nonexistent, especially for non-commercial purposes, it is amazing to see individuals across cultural and political barriers, travelling across continents in order to forge cosmopolitan ties. Unlike the travels of Christopher Columbus or Vasco da Gama, the cosmopolitan travelers that I foreground in this narrative, were guided by a mission of understanding rather than appropriation. They differed from the European Enlightenment in their attempt to understand the 'other'. They did not consider the 'other' as their polar opposites who needed to be 'educated' and 'civilized'. In fact, all of them discarded anthropocentrism, and insularity in social and cultural living. They saw hybridity, interstices and liminality as virtues much before such terms were valorized in the academia. Certainly, they were not perfect beings with readymade answers, but were genuine seekers and wayfarers who made a life-long struggle to find answers to the questions central to culture across the world.

recognize multiplicity? The author rules out cultural relativism as an alternative since it may lead to parochialism. He has tried to answer this question in the light of tradition and modernity. Cosmopolitanism is an attitude of mind that embraces both tradition and modernity. It is a world view that subscribes to modernity, not without tradition but with an enriched tradition. In the author's language, the "cosmopolitan self combines both tradition and modernity". One may claim that the six thinkers that he has discussed in this study have uniquely synthesized both tradition and modernity within the fold of cosmopolitanism. The essence of cosmopolitan modernity in both its theory and practice subscribes to an inclusive view of life and culture.

The subjects of the book approached the world from their own standpoints, through their diverse interests. James Cousins was an Irish writer who came to India in the year 1915 and worked closely with Annie Besant because he was deeply inspired by Indian spirituality and Theosophy. Paul Richard was a French mystic, a man deeply committed to the spiritual unity of the world in terms of race, culture and religion. In 1914 he collaborated with Sri Aurobindo to initiate the philosophical journal *Arya*. Dilip Kumar Roy was a legendary musician who turned towards yoga and spirituality and became a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Ananda Coomaraswamy was an eminent art critic and art historian who believed that art could bring nations together. Taraknath Das was an exiled Indian revolutionary with a larger vision of the world. And finally, there is Rabindranath Tagore, poet, educationist, world traveller, and Indian nationalist, who championed the East-West dialogue. The most admirable part of the book shows how the issue of cosmopolitanism has been approached by these thinkers in such diverse fields as poetry, art, mysticism, music, and even revolutionary praxis. All committed to a cosmopolitan approach, their methods were as different as their interests and inclinations. In both theory and practice, they exemplified cosmopolitan modernity in early twentieth-century India.

— Amitabha Dasgupta

Amitabha Dasgupta is a former professor of philosophy at the University of Hyderabad.