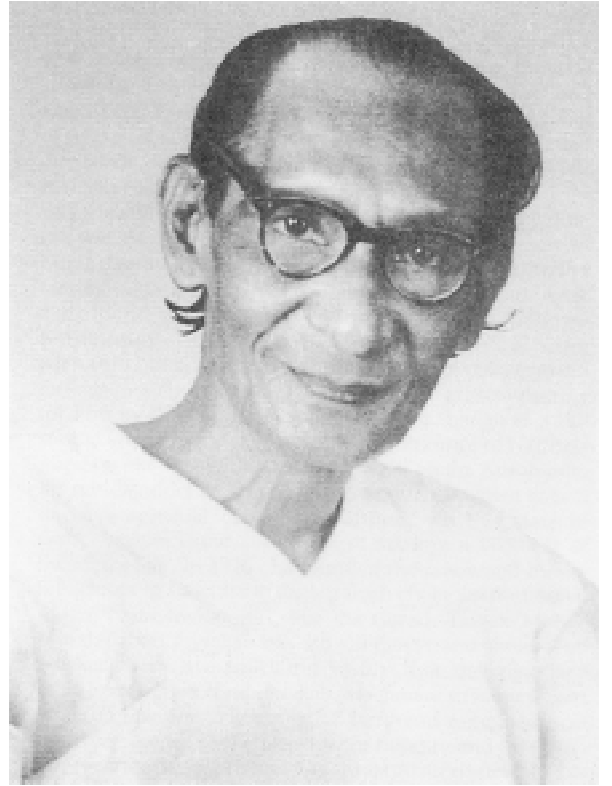


Recent Publications

Sabta

Over a span of ten years, from 1960 to 1970, Rishabhchand wrote chapter by chapter the story of Sri Aurobindo's life. He was a dedicated *sadhak* and an erudite author, whose own life was anything but ordinary. We bring you here a glimpse into that life and how the biography came to be written.



Rishabhchand

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RISHABHCHAND

The Many-Faceted Life of a Biographer

Not many people have heard of Rishabhchand, and since he passed away thirty-six years ago, even those who knew him are now few in number. His name remains unknown to the younger generations because he was totally self-effacing. He never sought any attention, any social group or even any appreciation of the work he did. Even though he is the author of several books there is almost no published material about him. The only source of information is the booklet brought out by his family members on the occasion of his birth centenary in the year 2000.

There are many interesting aspects to his life, but the one fact that stands out in clear prominence is that he is the author of a biography of Sri Aurobindo. Before we speak of this biography let us first throw a glance on the events in his life that led him up to the moment when he undertook this work. Rishabhchand Samsukha was born on 3rd December 1900 at Jiaganj in West Bengal. He came from a Jain family, and his father was known for his writings on the Jain religion. As he grew up he developed a love for reading, especially English poetry. He studied at the Presidency College at Kolkata, but as it was a British institution, he left to finish his studies at Krishnanath College in Berhampur, before joining the non-cooperation movement.

Rishabhchand had that rare quality of mental sincerity, and his inner being was fully surrendered to the Mother.

It was in this spirit of non-cooperation that in 1926 he started a business dealing with hand-woven Indian silk from the various textile centers in his area. Even in the field of business he maintained his innate sense of honesty and clarity. Thanks to his hard work and integrity his business grew and eventually became the reputed establishment, Indian Silk House, continuing even today to be very well known.

Although he was from a family in which Jainism was not only practised but also the philosophy behind this path was known thoroughly, somehow Rishabhchand felt dissatisfied by what it had to offer and was inwardly seeking a more comprehensive philosophy of life. At some point in his search he came across the book *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo. That was the turning point, and he was drawn more and more towards his ultimate Guru.

For seven years he worked untiringly to develop the business and to look after his wife and children, leading the life of a householder. Then he decided to leave everything and settle down at the Ashram in 1931. Once he joined the Ashram he never went back. His sense of organisation and his skill in dealing with workers were put to good use when the Mother gave him the responsibility of looking after the House Maintenance Service and later of the Furniture Department also.

It is not generally known that he was the first person from the Jain community to join the Ashram. Many others, who were close to him and turned to him for guidance, eventually followed his example and came to live in the Ashram. In a way he opened the door for the others who came after him. He continued till the end of his life to be a guide and an elder brother to all those who needed help to better understand Sri Aurobindo's thoughts. Through letters he was also in touch with people living in the outside world who had an inner aspiration to follow Sri Aurobindo's path.

Rishabhchand began writing on the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and *The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo* was published in 1953. Perhaps he got the idea of writing an entire book on this subject since he was often explaining the fine points of Sri Aurobindo's writings to so many. This book turned out to be an answer to the real need of people all over the world and served not only as an introduction to the major works of Sri Aurobindo but also as a guide to those who wanted to put this new philosophy into practice. It is not at all surprising that this book was reprinted several times and continues to be available today.

In 1960 he started writing the biography of Sri Aurobindo. People often wonder why he took the trouble of writing it when such a good book as A. B. Purani's *Life of Sri Aurobindo* already existed. There was also *Sri Aurobindo On Himself* for those who wanted to know more about the subject, in the Master's own words. The truth is that this was not a personal project initiated by him. The Mother herself

had asked him to write about the life of Sri Aurobindo, making it clear that she wanted him to focus on the external aspect of his life only. She wanted it to be serialised in the *Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*.

Knowing his background it is easy to see why she chose him for this work. Firstly, having studied English literature he had a mastery over the language and a fine style in his expression. Secondly, having been a part of the non-cooperation movement in Bengal he knew thoroughly the context in which Sri Aurobindo had worked to awaken his countrymen to the very idea of wanting to be free. When Sri Aurobindo left Bengal in 1910 Rishabhchand was a ten-year-old boy. In the decade that followed the air was still vibrant with the energy unleashed by that revolutionary movement. All this Rishabhchand knew first hand. But there was probably another reason, too, for which he was the right person for this work. Rishabhchand had that rare quality of mental sincerity, and his inner being was fully surrendered to the Mother. He was the kind of man who would know where to draw the line between Sri Aurobindo's political work and his personal life. A lesser person may have felt tempted to digress and include details about his family or his home life, which are of no importance to one who wants to know about the Master's work, be it political or spiritual. Rishabhchand's sensibility allowed him to see this fine line and keep the irrelevant out of the picture.

The interesting point to note is that this work was not conceived as a book at the time it was written. The first chapter came out in the August 1960 issue of the *Bulletin* under the title "Sri Aurobindo – His Life and His Work". As we know, the *Bulletin* is a bilingual journal and every page written in English has its French translation on the facing page. In order to get the French version to accompany Rishabhchand's text, the Mother sent a copy of his manuscript for translation to her son André Morisset, who was in France. The Mother not only asked the author to write this text but she also followed its progress closely. She went through the first chapter before it was printed and asked Nolini Kanta Gupta, her secretary, to read the subsequent chapters before publication. She was ready to answer any question or clarify any doubt that Rishabhchand had. Not only that, she also provided him with an assistant -

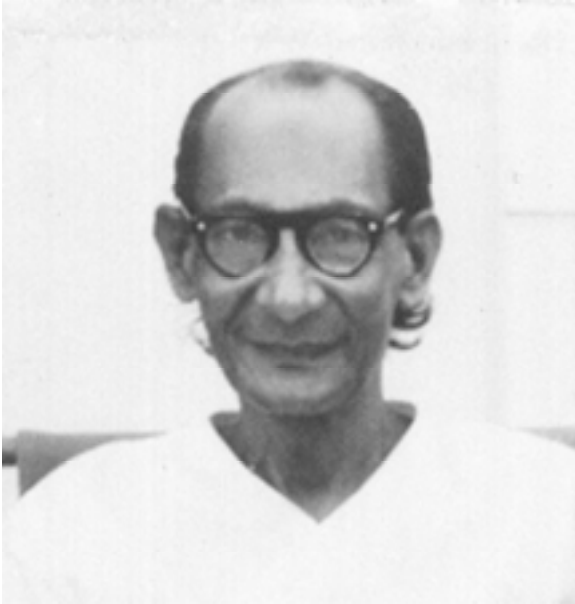


With his daughter-in-law and granddaughters

Tarun Banerjee - who had just finished his studies at the Centre of Education.

Sri Aurobindo has himself written that his life had not been on the surface for people to see. For some people that has translated itself into a general impression that we should not even try to know what he did before coming to Pondicherry. However, the Mother wanted this biography to be written, and in retrospect we can try to understand why. The most important events of Sri Aurobindo's outer life were those connected with the Freedom Movement. Today, a hundred years after the Alipore Bomb Case trial, what is so astonishing is that the common man in India has little or no idea of Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the revolution that not only brought liberation to India but also united the millions who had remained for centuries isolated and unconnected.

The Mother may have foreseen that the leaders of the country would leave him out of this glorious achievement and that he would find scant mention in the history books which are used to teach the subject to the children of our country. Perhaps she had also foreseen that he would be misunderstood by many of his own countrymen. Some of his contemporaries believed that he “fled” the scene of action to “hide” in Pondicherry, and that the fate of the country did not interest him after that. This could be one of the reasons for their ignoring his advice to accept the Cripps proposal. The misconception in the minds of those leaders has percolated down to our times. The Mother may have felt, a decade after the Master left his body, that a record of his great work in the political field had to be written and preserved for posterity.



It was because the Mother asked him to do this work that Rishabhchand did his own research, gathering material from newspapers and journals. People also wrote to him from West Bengal, giving him the information he needed. The Mother had instructed him to tell the story of Sri Aurobindo's life as much as possible in his own words. Not only the facts had to be checked and recorded faithfully but the tone had to be high and inspiring.

Readers who go through this thought-provoking volume may imagine that Rishabhchand left

everything and sat down to write the chapters which were being serialised. In reality, as a sincere practitioner of the Integral Yoga he continued to look after the Furniture Department during the day and in the evening took up his pen to set into words the unique life of his Guru. He spent his morning hours thinking of nails and screws, of inches and feet, of paint and sandpaper, of tackling the problems of the lazy worker and the dissatisfied sadhak whose furniture was being repaired or replaced. When the sun had set and the sky deepened into night he sat in his room above the Furniture Department and now his mind sifted through newspaper articles and reports, weighed one word against another, examined punctuation and syntax, and looked into the past to pick out the images that had created history.

When the first chapter came out in the *Bulletin* in August 1960 there was an introductory note:

We begin to publish serially, from this number, the story of Sri Aurobindo's life – the external history of it; for that also is of considerable interest and will be appreciated by many who do not know much of it. The writer is a disciple, he has consulted all available sources and his narration is expected to be as accurate and authentic as possible.

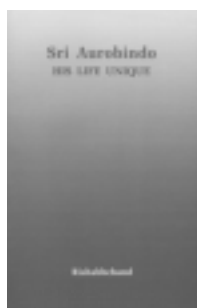
– Editor's note

The last installment was printed in the February 1971 issue of the *Bulletin*. Even though a simultaneous French translation had come out in the *Bulletin* a new French adaptation was done by Archaka in 1978. For French readers who are not too familiar with the Indian Freedom Movement this book came as a great help to understand Sri Aurobindo in the historical and social context in which he had lived and worked. It was only in 1981, eleven years after the author had passed away, that *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique* was published in book form. In a single volume it covers the Master's life from his birth to the early beginnings of the Ashram.

Rishabhchand's life was rich in experience: he had lived in the disciplined world of Jainism, deeply loved English poetry, joined the revolution for Independence, delighted in the beauty of fine silks, marched through the maze of business and commerce, been encircled by the living warmth of home and family, and then cast it all away to follow

the path of yoga, leading an austere outer life but an abundant inner one. Out of the wealth of all those experiences was formed the mind and the heart and the inner voice which would one day be chosen by the Divine Mother to tell this unique story, of Sri Aurobindo's life and the birth of modern India.

— Sunayana Panda



Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique

— Rishabhchand
 Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Publication Department,
 Pondicherry
 427 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-621-6,
 Rs 125
 Size: 14x22 cm,
 Binding: Soft Cover

This biography of Sri Aurobindo was serialised in the Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education from 1960 to 1971, and thus carries the Mother's "seal and sanction". It tells the story of Sri Aurobindo's life from his birth to the earliest days of the Ashram. Regarding the works of Rishabhchand, the publisher's note states: "One cannot fail to perceive in them an unusual harmony of the intellect's clear thinking, intuition's deep penetration and the spirit's permeating suffusion. They stand out impressively against the background of innate humility and colour gracefully the flow of his style and language."

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo

— Rishabhchand
 Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department,
 Pondicherry
 473 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-633-X, Rs 140
 Size: 12x18 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The author states in the preface to the first edition, "An attempt has been made in this book to present the fundamentals of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo against the background of the spiritual heritage of India and the incipient, but insistent and irresistible urge in humanity towards a harmonious perfection and fulfilment in life."

All components of the Integral Yoga are discussed in detail, from the "bases and preliminaries" and "the triple poise of the Mother to whom the aspirant has to surrender" to the integral liberation and transformation.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Sri Aurobindo

**Nationalism, Religion, and Beyond
 Writings on Politics, Society, and Culture**

— Edited by Peter Heehs
 Publisher: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., Chennai
 364 pp., ISBN: 81-7824-139-0, Rs 650 Hard Cover
 Binding: Hard Cover

Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively on political, social and cultural theory. His contributions to these fields are not always given the attention they deserve by contemporary thinkers. There are two main reasons for this. First, his political, social and cultural writings are scattered through six or seven volumes of his complete works. Secondly, the political and cultural worlds have changed greatly since he wrote. The editor of this anthology overcomes the first problem by selecting representative passages from the entire body of Sri Aurobindo's works. He deals with the second by providing historical background, and by relating Sri Aurobindo's ideas to those of modern thinkers.

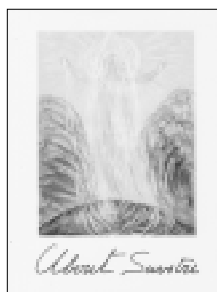
see review on page 13

The Mother

About Savitri: With some paintings (Volume IV)

— Paintings by Huta with passages from *Savitri* and explanations by the Mother
 Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry
 74 pp., ISBN: 81-87372-09-5, Rs 250
 Binding: Soft Cover

In 1968 the Mother commenced her work on *Savitri* with Huta. The Mother read out passages from *Savitri* 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*. In 1972 Huta offered to the Mother copies of *About Savitri*, Part One (now out of print), consisting of Book One Canto One. The Mother's message for the book was: "Savitri – The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision."



Part Two of *About Savitri* consisting of Book One Canto Two was published in 2000 (also now out of print), while Part Three with Book One Canto Three was issued in 2005.

Here is Part Four of *About Savitri* consisting of Book One Canto Four (unfinished), with the Mother's explanations on the passages, and including 18 paintings by Huta inspired and approved by the Mother.

Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine

Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Life Has a Purpose

47 pp., ISBN: 81-7060-244-0, Rs 15

Mahasaraswati

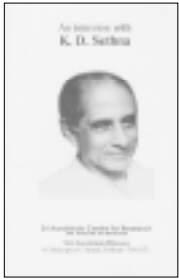
Mahasaraswati Aspect of the Mother

40 pp., ISBN: 81-7060-248-3, Rs 15

Money-Power and Prosperity

40 pp., ISBN: 81-7060-246-7, Rs 15

Other Authors



An interview with K. D. Sethna

— Compiled and Edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research on Social Sciences, Kolkata
24 pp., Rs 15

Binding: Soft Cover

In this interview of May 2003 K. D. Sethna talks about philosophy, poetry and his personal experiences. An article by Sethna, “Poetry and the

Poet: A Self-Searching Introduction” is also included.

This booklet aims to “quench the intellectual thirst” of those eager to know Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the perception of one who was in intimate contact with them.

Glimpses of Vedic Literature

— Kireet Joshi

Publisher: Standard Publishers (India), New Delhi
253 pp., ISBN: 81-87471-26-3, Rs 495 Hard Cover

Binding: Hard Cover

Written as an introductory outline of the development of Vedic literature from the Vedic Samhitas and continuing through the Upanishads, *Glimpses of Vedic Literature* provides the beginning student with the necessary tools to understand this complex literary treasure and its continuing influence on the Indian spirit and culture. The later chapters highlight Sri Aurobindo’s discoveries which unlocked the mysteries and secrets of the Vedas and explained their relevance to modern man and to the future of humanity through the practice of Yoga. Looking at the problems of the current age, the author finds psychological applications from Vedic literature to guide us forward.

see review on page 18



Death, Dying and Beyond

— Alok Pandey

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry
327 pp., ISBN: 81-7060-237-8, Rs 225

Binding: Soft Cover

Man’s paradoxical relation to death is that he sees the fact of death all around him, yet lives as if he were immortal. He may struggle to understand, wandering from the material scientist to the mystic in search of the secret meaning of death. In this book the author examines the complex questions on the nature of death, and follows Sri Aurobindo’s deeper vision behind the veil of death to find the answers to some of the most perplexing ethical and existential problems related to death, dying and the beyond.

To Love Man (Manush Bhajan)

— Nolini Kanta Gupta

Publisher: Smt. Maya Chattopadhyay, Kolkata
12 pp., Rs 20

Binding: Soft Cover

This is an English translation of Nolini Kanta Gupta’s Bengali article “Manush Bhajan”, in which he elaborates on how “it is more difficult to love man than to love the Divine.”

Among the Great

— Dilip Kumar Roy

Publisher: Hari Krishna Mandir, Pune
282 pp., Rs 200

Binding: Soft Cover

This book brings together the author’s records of his conversations and correspondence with Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore, and most of all Sri Aurobindo. His aim was to elicit the views of eminent personalities on various aspects of life, from the role of art and science to social equality and moving on to spirituality. All five figures “are men of profound insight” who have “wrestled with the central problems of life and reached decisive certainties”.

Dilip Kumar Roy was an eminent musician and writer. This book was first published in 1945. This new edition includes for the first time an account of the author’s meeting with Bertrand Russell in 1953.



Sri Aurobindo – Max Muller – Subhas Chandra

— Amalendu De

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research on Social Sciences, Kolkata

52 pp., Rs 20

Binding: Soft Cover

The first of two articles in this booklet presents Sri Aurobindo's observations on the works of the Vedic Scholar Max Muller. The second is about Subhas Chandra Bose's "adoration" of Sri Aurobindo as a "spiritual Guru", and their perceptions on the contemporary political situation.

**With Aurobindo in Baroda**

— Dinendra Kumar Roy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

66 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-830-8, Rs 28

Binding: Soft Cover

This is the first English translation of the author's memoir of the two years he spent in Baroda with Sri Aurobindo, living in his house and teaching him Bengali. From 1898 to 1900 or 1901,

Roy had the opportunity to observe Sri Aurobindo closely and he describes many charming incidents that reveal Sri Aurobindo's generous and compassionate nature, his intense concentration, his "liquid and soft" laughter, and his complete lack of ambition or selfishness. "As I became acquainted with his nature," he writes, "I realized that Sri Aurobindo was not of this world. He who has spent even a few days with Aurobindo can never forget him for the rest of his life."

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee*"a pure and manly life"*

— Manoj Das Gupta

Publisher: New House, Kolkata

63 pp., Rs 50

Binding: Soft Cover

Based on a talk given at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education on the occasion of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's birth centenary, this book highlights his

major contributions to Indian education and politics. Later known as "the lion of the Parliament", Mookerjee was an ardent son of India who led a courageous crusade against the partition of Bengal. The Mother chose him as chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention in 1951, where he concluded his speech with a call for India to fulfill her destiny and for the world to heed the voice of Sri Aurobindo and his message for the future of humanity.

The Truth of Life

— Barindra Kumar Ghosh

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research on Social Sciences, Kolkata

32 pp., Rs 20

Binding: Soft Cover

Barindra Kumar Ghosh, younger brother of Sri Aurobindo, was a leader of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. He spent ten years in prison in the Andamans, and later lived for six years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram before settling in Bengal. He was involved in various literary activities in different languages, much of which has recently come to light. This booklet is a compilation of some of his articles on a variety of themes revolving around India, her destiny, and the evolution of man.

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis

— Miranda Vannucci

Publisher: Miranda Vannucci, Italy

143 pp., Rs 450

Binding: Soft Cover

Comprised of reports given at four sessions of an Italian group studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, this book seeks to provide a practical link between psychoanalysis and the practice of the integral yoga. The author points out the many common points she discovered while practising the two disciplines; for example, how psychoanalysis can activate what Sri Aurobindo calls the Interior Witness and help in purifying the mind, the vital and the body. The basic theoretical principles of psychoanalysis are interspersed with excerpts from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to explain and amplify the author's premise.

OTHER LANGUAGES**GERMAN****Strahlen des Lichts**

— Sri Aurobindo / Die Mutter

272 pp., ISBN: 3-901226-36-2

Rs 270

Diese lichtvolle Auswahl von Gedanken der Begründer des Integralen Yoga sind wertvolle Begleiter auf dem Lebensweg im allgemeinen, besonders aber für den ganzheitlichen integralen Yoga-Weg, der zum supramentalen Wahrheitsbewusstsein führt.

RUSSIAN

Savitri: Legenda i Simbol : Kniga 4 Pesnj 1:

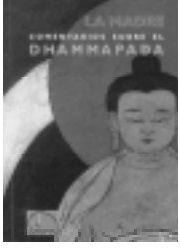
Rozhdenie Plameni

Rs 190

— Sri Aurobindo, Translation and Commentary by

Dmitry Melgunov

ISBN: 5-98865-008-2

SPANISH

- La gran aventura: Un diario para todos los tiempos Rs 700
— Passages from Conversations and Writings of the Mother
ISBN: 958-33-7857-7
Comentarios sobre el Dhammapada
— The Mother Rs 500
ISBN: 958-33-8886-6

ITALIAN

- Il Segreto dei Veda : Volume secondo
— Sri Aurobindo Rs 500
ISBN: 88-901049-2-9
Crescere Dentro Rs 800
— Compilation
ISBN: 88-88508-05-8
Su La Depressione Rs 50
— Compilation
ISBN: 81-7058-805-7

BENGALI

- Sri Mayer Jeeban Katha
— Nirodbaran Rs 75
Sri Aurobindo Laho Pranam
— Krishna Chakrabarty Rs 70
Sri Aurobindo Ashram Jeeban Katha
— Narayan Prasad hc Rs 140

**HINDI**

- Prithvi par Atimanas ki Abhivyakti Rs 50
ISBN: 81-7058-815-4 — Sri Aurobindo
Divya Avataran — Edited by Vimla Gupta Rs 120
Sri Aravind ka Purnayoga — Narayan Prasad Rs 18
Sri Aravind aur Atimanas ka Agaman hc Rs 100
— Gopal Bhattacharjee
Sri Ma ko Sath Rakhna : Sri Mataji ki Premswaroop
Upasthiti ke Anubhav — Rajnikant J. Mehta Rs 30
Devshishu ke Nirmata Mata-Pita — Jyoti Thanki Rs 40
Sarvangee Shikshan — Jyoti Thanki Rs 40

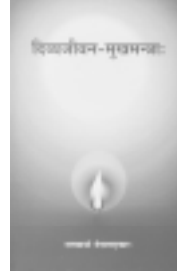
ORIYA

- Agnimantramala — Sri Aurobindo Rs 100
ISBN: 81-7058-800-6
Purnayoga: Vastava Digidarshana (Part 1) Rs 70
ISBN: 81-7058-785-9 — Compilation

SANSKRIT

- Divyajeevana-Mukhamantrah**
— Jagannath Vedalankar
118 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-814-6
Rs 60

Word meanings and explanations of the opening mantras of every chapter in *The Life Divine* by Sri Aurobindo.

**TAMIL**

- Annaiyin Arul Mozhigal — The Mother
Annaiyin Nool Thoguthi - 15 (Bagam - 1) Rs 155
ISBN: 81-7058-810-3
Annaiyin Nool Thoguthi - 15 (Bagam - 2) Rs 80
ISBN: 81-7058-811-1
Panasakthiyum Subikshamum — Compilation Rs 15
ISBN: 81-7060-247-5

TELUGU

- Mother Mantralu — The Mother Rs 5
Sri Aravindula Savitri — M.P. Pandit Rs 40

ORDERING INFORMATION FOR BOOKS**In India**

- To calculate the total amount to be paid, add on 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs 30 towards postage and packing. For example, for books worth Rs 240, the total amount to be remitted is Rs 240 + Rs 12 + Rs 30 = Rs 282. This formula applies to books only and not to CDs and cassettes.
- Payments can be made online, or by bank draft or money order to: SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002.
- Books are sent by registered post or courier immediately on receipt of the order and payment.

Overseas

Please visit our website or contact us for information on mailing options and charges, and payment methods.

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Pondicherry 605 002, India

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Fax +91 413 222 3328

Email sabda@sriaurobindoashram.org

Web <http://sabda.sriaurobindoashram.org>

BOOK REVIEWS
K. D. Sethna**An Introduction through Interaction**

— P. Raja; Published by Busy Bee Books, Pondicherry; 124 pp., Rs 100

The interviewer is half the age of the person who is being interviewed. A centenarian who spans all of the twentieth century, K. D. Sethna answers P. Raja's questions with a sprightliness that never flags. It must have been a joy for Raja, as in all the sessions Sethna would have lighted up the atmosphere with his smiles and humour. Nowhere an *apasruti* either. For, in him we have the Pure Ray, Amal Kiran. He is like the Vedic Cow, *Go*, who is not only pure but also illumines the spaces. That is exactly what happens in this volume prepared with love and care by the well-known poet and scholar, P. Raja.

Through the sessions, several subjects are placed on the cards. Naturally poetry leads, for Sethna is a poet and the disciple of Sri Aurobindo. The volume opens with a characteristic statement from Sethna to a group of university students of English poetry, though I am not sure how much of the prosodic diction used by the speaker would be understood by the students of today:

We cannot be quite the same in metre... The metre of all of you may be said to be spondaic; your feet fall with equal stress on the ground. Mine do not because of a limp in one of them. Moreover, I use a stick to help me walk better. So my metre is two slacks and one stress; I am an anapestic fellow.

That is our Amal Kiran. He brims with scholarship and wears it so lightly as well. One who can direct laughter at himself to flash multi-hued shafts of delight. We who have known this style in his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo are not surprised at all. It is natural to enter the Delight of Existence when in the presence of the Clear Ray.

How a Parsi from Bombay became a disciple of Sri Aurobindo by looking at a headline in an old newspaper that had been used to wrap up a shoebox is now one of those imponderables of mystic romance. But then, the



transformatory touch is so fiery that a very mundane shoebox can help the leap into the unknown. Since then, Amal Kiran has never wavered in his allegiance to Sri Aurobindo. He has been verily a Yamuna in spate for more than seven decades. His works (fifty-one published books, innumerable articles, editorial writings, and a mass of precious manuscripts waiting to be published) tingle with poetry, shudder with scholarship and firmly reject the hassles of superiority reflexes.

This is the reason why he draws the youth to his side and never seems to lose his temper or patience. P. Raja is able to sound almost cheeky questioning the elder poet-scholar: "Where do you stand now after several years of spirituality or aspiration for spirituality?" "How do you like to be remembered?" "What is your opinion of Sri Aurobindo as a man?"

Amal Kiran is unflappable. About Sri Aurobindo, then:

Man? The man and the superman were so inter-mixed that it is difficult to disentangle the mere man. If by 'man' we mean somebody who responds to us, who tries to understand us, and not merely from a height but also by some kind of sympathy with our own level, he is superb. The human side of him is quite evident. The way he dealt with all my questions, yogic as well as literary shows a great compassion.

So we adventure into the inner spaces of Amal Kiran, as a student of literature, as an explorer of spirituality, and as a measuring rod of human character. There are some words which have obviously been erased from his dictionary. Like 'bitterness', 'hate', 'jealousy' and 'inanity'. Never a dry phrase, nowhere a ridiculous statement. P. Raja's challenges are met with rational perspicacity. Is poetry spontaneous (Keats) or is it preceded by intense pain (Mayakovsky)? Does Amal Kiran cry, have nightmares, dreams? Was he teased for his polio? Did his father beat him?

But the answer flows forth placidly, to the point. No woolliness at all. There is a long remembrance of things past about childhood, boyhood and early youth; the coming to the Ashram, the love from the Mother and the Master, the publications of books. Amal Kiran readily crystallizes what he wishes to say and hence this slender book performs the work of a massive autobiographical document. Personally speaking as a recipient of Amal Kiran's

We adventure into the inner spaces of Amal Kiran as an explorer of spirituality.

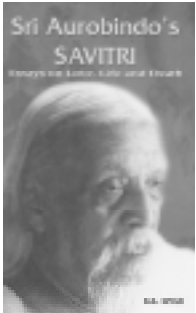
love and a reviewer soon to cross the half-century mark, I was all joy when I read his definition of a perfect reviewer:

He should have a sharp mind, grasp what the book has to say, weigh properly in the balance of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. And he should consider particular cases. If the book is the first product of a budding and hopeful author, he can be kind to it, even while finding fault.

Thank you Amal-da for having always been the guiding spirit of our generation. And thank you, Raja, for this gift which we will cherish in our personal bookshelves.

— 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) has gone into several editions.



Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* Essays on Love, Life and Death

— Dr R. K. Singh; Published by Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly; 176 pp., Rs 250

Dr R. K. Singh has been reading *Savitri* minutely for over two decades. His first book *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic*, published in 1984, was an exceptional study. I am happy to see his continued interest in the poem and the maturity achieved by him in the last twenty- one years. While his insight has grown deeper, his language has become sharper with an inspired glow frequently giving force to his logic.

Dr Singh knows how to focus on the exact literary merits of *Savitri*:

It is the mythic mode through which Sri Aurobindo projects his concept of knowledge and growth of inner consciousness, spiritual realisation, the passage from inconscience to superconscience, and expression of soul-perception and soul-vision. In *Savitri* myth is symbolized in mystical knowledge, spiritual philosophy, experience and meaning of life. The epic turns out to be the poet-philosopher's mystical system, a synthesis of yogic rituals, spiritual doctrine and mythical allusions, creating his concept of cosmic evolution.

Dr Singh also writes in clear terms about the onward and return passages in *Savitri*, which contain the essence of a new view of spirituality, that is, the idea of bringing down the supreme Light to change this earth-Nature.

In Chapter Two, we have a competent summary of the philosophy of conscious self-finding and Chapter Three is a remarkable interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's poetics. In the next chapter there is an original presentation of the "mythical construction of Death" in *Savitri*. "The death

of Satyavan is very much like the death of Osiris: in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* a reference is made to any man of good repute becoming an Osiris 'by being purified of all uncleanness and undergoing a mock death'."

While the comparison with Emily Dickinson in the sixth chapter is a bit academically stylized or far-fetched, the tracing of the Romantic and Classical traditions indicates the deep scholarship of Dr Singh. The book is a remarkable study in comparative literature, especially the two final chapters "The Epic Tradition and *Savitri*" and "The Texture of *Savitri*".

— Dr Goutam Ghosal

Dr Ghosal received a D.Litt. for his study on Sri Aurobindo's prose style. He teaches at Visva-Bharati and resides in Santiniketan.

Savitri's spiritual experience is a blend of the poetic and philosophic, the emotional and the rational, just as Sri Aurobindo is a poet-seer whose feelings and experiences are real to him.... Far from trying to set his philosophic system to verse rhythm of Savitri, he constructs his quest for the kingdom of heaven on earth through the mass of sublime inspirations of thought and image, through the archetypal symbols that epic lives as spiritual poetry. The whole verbal structure reveals, not a philosophic truth as such but an intuitive truth of God, Nature and man, an inner view which stimulates inner vision and enriches the actuality of outer life.

*Sri Aurobindo's Savitri:
Essays on Love, Life and Death*

Of Past Dawns and Future Noons

Towards a resurgent India

— Shonar; Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry with UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd.; 535 pp., Rs 595



There have been many books written on India and many more are yet to be written. And even after all the books have been written there would still remain something unsaid about the inexpressible Mystery and the inexhaustible fount called India. There is indeed no field of human activity wherein the Indian spirit

did not leave its distinct stamp, — and yet one that is difficult to define in a nation that in its complexity is truly a miniature world. Naturally, it is no easy task to write a book on India; yet the author succeeds admirably. The result is not merely a book but a work of artistry, a rich tapestry of thoughts and feelings, a weaving together of the spirit and the form through a rare combination of sight and insight, wherein the soul of India fuses intimately with its intricate forms, creating in the mind of the readers a living presence of this great and ancient mother:

I am the One. I drop from above the clouds, into the glaciers. I melt and flow down the sinews of the broad shoulders that surround you. I plunge on all sides and drench the soil beneath you. I enter your fields and sit in the midst of the sunflowers. I enter your home and wink at your children. I move on to the valleys and plains, coursing snakelike through woods and sand... When you're hopelessly lost, I shine the torch into the side lanes....

I am the Man in the mirror. I make beauty Beautiful. I make perfection Perfect. I make man Divine. You become Me. I am the One... I am One.

And her mystery:

Diverse we are, but it is diversity which overflows from within its own connotation, begging for a new word for it feels too small and too inadequate in the Indian context. Languages, dialects, customs, festivals, dress, codes, cuisine, conduct,

religion, philosophies, art, craft, literature, politics — there is nothing that is the same and certainly nothing that can be held together by singing a national anthem. There has to be something more, something deeper...

The book is full of such wonderful passages, exquisite in beauty of style and delightful in substance. As the author herself admits, she is not so much a writer as an inspired soul who has felt the touch of the goddess called India throb within her heart. And inspired indeed she is, for how else can one bring the soul of India close and real to us, shining through the forms and formulas she has evolved over the ages? We begin to discover through the soul of India our own soul, the soul of Vastness, the soul of Beauty, the soul of Love.

What we live in and are surrounded by has more impact on our lives than we can imagine. Beauty is a force and has its own power... It will shape [man's] thoughts, his perceptions, his attitudes, his gratitude. It is that which man must aspire for if he is to step out from the suffocation and into the open lands. But beauty is not enough on its own, by its own. It must also give birth to the awareness of the 'something' that lies beyond. Without that insight, it lacks life and vigour; without life, it ceases to convey the message of its own purpose.

A sense of this beauty is what the ancients had, something which even lingered in our medieval vestiges, but unfortunately has suffered a blow in modern times.

Through these experiences we begin to discover another India behind the visible and the sensible India that we encounter in everyday life. Engrossed as we are in our own grossness we fail to fully feel and see. The book revives this lost feeling and sight as a sacred memory that refuses to die and lingers within our very bodies. The author fills our lungs with the fresh air of that memory and revives us in another world and another life, the life of our true Indian-ness.

This book is a rare combination of authentic information and deep insights in beautifully written, inspired prose.

The mother of rivers, the holy Ganga, dark and calm, barely utters a murmur as she swims past. Dawn, in a meditative poise, pauses before her descent. Agni, rests in earthen cups like open palms, supplicating the heavens above.

...The first of the flames is set adrift on the lap of the mother, dancing to the tune of its silent prayer. A day in the life of ancient Kashi. A day in the life of the thousands who live by the side of the holiest river. A day in the life of the millions who live in the ancient land of Bharata.

As one reads through the book, one gets the image of a great goddess grown greater by the touch of earth; whose love flows in its sacred rivers and whose calm strength resides on its high mountain peaks; whose unparalleled wisdom has been uttered through many immortal lips; and whose splendour and many-sided creativity can still be seen in its forms. As the author removes layer upon layer of dust from the deathless soul of India, we also begin to see an ageless face lit up by a timeless light, whose charm and grace is comparable only to her sweetness and warmth; whose wisdom and deep love yet can save the world from the darkness of blind commercialism and economic barbarism and all other "isms" that threaten to divide, defile and destroy the unity called earth. This is the dawn that Mother India holds back in the secret folds of her unfathomable heart, the dawn that shall and must arrive sooner rather than later, the dawn that the world awaits and hopes and prays for and that now sleeps in the silent spaces of our soul. It is this dawn that one begins to glimpse through the pages of this wonderful book:

And with that secret tucked safely in his heart, the Indian tackles his existence, learning as much as is allowed, enduring as much as he's capable, aspiring as much as he can. Death is only the beginning of a new birth and he takes the thread from where he left off, knitting away his own evolutionary garb, to be donned when it all ends, in the golden kingdom of heaven on earth. But before such a time arrives, there is still lots to be done, many feats to be accomplished, for it is becoming increasingly evident that this Existence as it exists, is not, and cannot be, the full story of Man's evolution, but, in fact, the first stumbling step of an infant. Brahman is not something for the abstract school of thought but a reality that is to be transformed into a living truth, such that a time will come when one would

not club the Divine and God and Supreme into Unknowns Anonymous; no more karma or dharma to be had for all would be resplendent of Him; there will be no such word left in the dictionary as Mystery and all Earth would say 'He am I.'

Set in twenty inviting chapters, this inspired and inspiring book draws information liberally from several resources, including the author's personal visits and direct familiarity with the topics covered. It is a rare combination of authentic information and deep insights in beautifully written, inspired prose that at several places verges on poetry. The cover painting of the golden figure looking majestically eastwards invokes a golden dawn that would fill every corner of darkness with the Light, whose symbol is the sun, and that seeks to express through the ages the Light that hides within India's bosom, the Light this book serves well to release through the power of words!

Through the chapters the author leads us from one door to another, giving us one glimpse after another into the many-tiered mystery mansion called India. She leads us to the threshold of the mystery and our hearts leap up in anticipation. But as the veil lifts a little and we stand wonder-struck at the ageless Beauty hiding behind the mask of age, the scene changes to yet another door and yet another wonder. These brief glimpses may signify the obvious constraints in a subject as vast as this. Or perhaps it is the sign of a great artist that he suggests but never imposes; leads us to the door but leaves us free to enter or not; gives us a glimpse of the eternal essence but lets our mind fill in the details; gives us luminous leads but does not deny us the joy of our efforts lest we lose the full delight of the journey. In short, the author initiates us into the mystery but leaves us to explore it fully and in all its depth.

Indeed this is not a book to be read and finished but a book that we would love to possess and gift to all who love and care to know about Indian-ness and India.

— Dr Alok Pandey
Dr Pandey, psychiatrist and philosopher, is a seeker on the path of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. He writes and lectures extensively on varied issues of life and yoga.

INDIA AS A SYNTHESIS OF CULTURES

Nationalism, Religion, and Beyond

Writings on Politics, Society, and Culture

— Edited by Peter Heehs; Published by Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., Chennai; 364 pp., Rs 650 (hard cover)



Peter Heehs was the first member of the Ashram whom I could meet and talk to personally. This was in 1998 while he was attending a conference on South Asia held in Prague, Czech Republic. I travelled there from neighbouring Slovakia. By then I was already aware of Heehs's books published by Oxford University Press. Well-researched,

factual and dispassionate, yet immensely readable, they help make Sri Aurobindo's thought more accessible to academic audiences. Heehs has understood and mastered the art of writing for this difficult and demanding group of readers. First and most important, he respects their right to learn about Sri Aurobindo without being pushed, directly or indirectly, out of their current and often secular world-views. Sri Aurobindo has a lot to offer even when measured by purely objective and scientific standards of achievement.

In an extensive introductory essay Heehs situates Sri Aurobindo's thought in the general trends of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and relates it to contemporary social and cultural theory.

Academics tend to see each book as a sort of argument. In order that they should perceive it as *valid*, the book must satisfy certain professional criteria. Externally, nothing can impair its message more than a sloppy production with typographical errors, or clumsy style betraying the author's insufficient command over the language. But "internal validity" is even more important. With regard to anthologies, academics are prone to ask a whole set of inquisitive questions: Is the editor impartial? Is his selection of material truly representative and well-balanced? Are his claims justified in the light of the objective, primary evidence that he can muster in favour of his proposition? What exactly is he trying to prove?

Heehs's present anthology of selections from Sri Aurobindo's writings published by Permanent Black, an

associate of Orient Longman, is aimed at well-educated and critically-minded people both in India and abroad. For many of them this would be the first detailed encounter with Sri Aurobindo's writings, and the selection of texts is therefore meant to be representative: the earliest piece is dated 1893, the latest 1949. The book is arranged in six thematic parts which are roughly chronological: (1) Cultural Nationalism, (2) Political Nationalism, (3) Religion, (4) Religion and Nationalism, (5) Beyond Nationalism, and (6) Beyond Religion. Within the general framework of "politics, society, culture" it also briefly deals with the related aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought. The problem of society can hardly be divorced from the problem of the individual, or culture from that through which it tries to reach beyond itself: religion and spirituality.

It is a commonplace among critics that the very act of compiling is interpretive. In this sense, compilations consisting only of the compiled material without a word from the editor are not necessarily objective, but merely hide the editor's personal views without eliminating them. The established "standards of the profession" therefore require that the editor clearly explain his approach and criteria for selection. This and much more Heehs does in an extensive introductory essay where he first situates Sri Aurobindo's thought in the general trends of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and then explains its relevance for the present-day readers by relating it to contemporary social and cultural theory. For the rest of the anthology he then steps back and lets Sri Aurobindo "speak for himself". To illustrate the general drift of the anthology and its relevance even for the ultra-modern, non-religious mentality of today, we quote two substantial extracts from the first part, "Cultural Nationalism":

No, it is not in the stress of an intolerant patriotism that I turn an eye of disparagement upon Europe. The immediate past of these Western peoples I can admire more than I admire the immediate past of our Indian nations. It is their present that shocks my aspirations for humanity. Europe is full of the noise and the apparel of life, of its luxurious trappings, of a myriad-footed material clang and tread, but of that which supports life she is growing more and more empty. When they had less information, her people had wiser and stronger souls. They had a literature, a creative intellectual force, a belief, a religion good or bad, a light that led onwards, a fixed path. Now they have only hungers, imaginations, sentiments & passions....

They criticise everything subtly rather than well, but can create nothing—except machines. They have organised society with astonishing success and found the very best way to spread comfort and kill their souls.... A thousand newspapers vulgarise knowledge, debase aesthetical appreciation, democratise success and make impossible all that was once unusual & noble.... The very churches & chapels are now only the theatres of a habitual stage performance of portentous & unnecessary dullness. With the exception of a small minority full of a grotesque, superficial but genuine passion, nobody believes, nobody feels; opinion, convention, preference and habit are alive and call themselves religion, but the heart that loves God is not to be found. Only a few of the undeveloped are really religious, the castbacks and atavists of this European evolution.

For more than half a century the whole of Europe has not been able to produce a single poet of even secondary magnificence. One no longer looks for Shakespeare or Dante to return, but even Wordsworth or Racine have also become impossible. Hugo's flawed opulence, Whitman's formless plenty, Tennyson's sugared emptiness seem to have been the last poetic speech of modern Europe.... Of all literary forms the novel only has still some genius and even that is perishing of the modern curse of overproduction.

Learning and scholarship are unendingly active over the dead corpse of creative power as in Alexandria and with the later Romans before the great darkness. Eccentricity and the hunting after novelty & paradox play in it over an ostentatious precision and accuracy. Yesterday's opinion is today exploded & discarded, new fireworks of theory, generalisation and speculation take the place of the old, and to this pyrotechnic rushing in a circle they give the name of progress....

The moral nerve is equally relaxed. Immorality which does not know how to enjoy, impotence and dullness of the capacity for enjoyment masquerading as virtue, decorum and prudery covering a cesspool, the coarseness, appetite and rapid satiety of the imperial Romans combining in various proportions or associating on various terms with the euprepeia & looseness of the Greeks. But the Pagan virility whether united to Roman coarseness or Greek brilliance is only to be seen in a few extraordinary individuals.... In a word, the whole of Europe is now a magnified Alexandria, brilliant forms with a perishing soul, feverish activity in imitation of the forms of health with no capital but the energy of the

sickbed. One has to concede however that it is not altogether sterile, for all Europe and America pullulate with ever multiplying machinery.

1910 (published posthumously)

Almost a century has passed since, and is it less true of Europe today than of Europe then? Two years later, when Sri Aurobindo turned towards India in the same context, his eye was equally sharp and language equally acute:

Few societies have been so tamasic, so full of inertia and contentment in increasing narrowness as Indian society in later times; few have been so eager to preserve themselves in inertia. Few therefore have attached so great an importance to authority. Every detail of our life has been fixed for us by Shashtra and custom, every detail of our thought by Scripture and its commentators,—but much oftener by the commentators than by Scripture. Only in one field, that of individual spiritual experience, have we cherished the ancient freedom and originality out of which our past greatness sprang; it is from some new movement in this inexhaustible source that every fresh impulse and rejuvenated strength has arisen. Otherwise we should long ago have been in the grave where dead nations lie, with Greece and Rome of the Caesars, with Esarhaddon and the Chosroes. You will often hear it said that it was the forms of Hinduism which have given us so much national vitality. I think rather it was its spirit. I am inclined to give more credit for the secular miracle of our national survival to Shankara, Ramanuja, Nanak & Kabir, Guru Govind, Chaitanya, Ramdas & Tukaram than to Raghunandan and the Pandits of Nadiya & Bhatpara.

The result of this well-meaning bondage has been an increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect, once the most gigantic and original in the world. Hence a certain incapacity, atrophy, impotence have marked our later activities even at their best. The most striking instance is our continued helplessness in the face of the new conditions and new knowledge imposed on us by recent European contact. We have tried to assimilate, we have tried to reject, we have tried to select; but we have not been able to do any of these things successfully. Successful assimilation depends on mastery; but we have not mastered European conditions and knowledge, rather we have been seized, subjected and enslaved by them. Successful rejection is possible only if we have intelligent possession of that which we wish to keep. Our rejection too must be an intelligent rejection; we must reject because

we have understood, not because we have failed to understand. But our Hinduism, our old culture are precisely the possessions we have cherished with the least intelligence; throughout the whole range of our life we do things without knowing why we do them, we believe things without knowing why we believe them, we assert things without knowing what right we have to assert them,—or, at most, it is because some book or some Brahmin enjoins it, because Shankara thinks it, or because someone has so interpreted something that he asserts to be a fundamental Scripture of our religion. Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived....

We preserve indeed a certain ingenuity and subtlety; we can imitate with an appearance of brightness; we can play plausibly, even brilliantly with the minutiae of a subject; but we fail to think usefully, we fail to master the life and heart of things. Yet it is only by mastering the life and heart of things that we can hope, as a nation, to survive.

How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity? By reversing, for a time at least, the process by which we lost it, by liberating our minds in all subjects from the thralldom to authority. That is not what reformers and the Anglicised require of us. They ask us, indeed, to abandon authority, to revolt against custom and superstition, to have free and enlightened minds. But they mean by these sounding recommendations that we should renounce the authority of Sayana for the authority of Max Muller, the Monism of Shankara for the Monism of Haeckel, the written Shastra for the unwritten law of European social opinion, the dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits for the dogmatism of European scientists, thinkers and scholars. Such a foolish exchange of servitude can receive the assent of no self-respecting mind. Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to be free,—in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe....

We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if

Heehs has carefully selected passages which stand as mini-arguments on their own, yet mutually support and throw light on each other, woven into the larger argument of the section.

we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by becoming partisans but know before we take our line. Our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything.... The necessity of such a process not for India, but for all humanity has been recognised by leading European thinkers. It was what Carlyle meant when he spoke of swallowing all formulas. It was the process by which Goethe helped to reinvigorate European thinking. But in Europe the stream is

running dry before it has reached its sea. Europe has for some time ceased to produce original thinkers, though it still produces original mechanicians.... Europe is becoming stereotyped and unprogressive; she is fruitful only of new & ever multiplying luxuries and of feverish, fiery & ineffective changes in her political and social machinery. China, Japan and the Mussulman States are sliding into a blind European imitateness. In India alone there is self-contained, dormant, the energy and the invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world's fetters.

circa 1912 (published posthumously)

It is not easy to grasp the full depth and wideness of Sri Aurobindo's thought—not only for the public at large, but even for his admirers and followers. Dazzled by the light and vividness of his main propositions, we often fail to perceive the subtler shades of meaning in his complex arguments. Thus the piece about Europe might seem, at first glance, to justify and indirectly advocate a wholesale rejection of everything coming from the West as incurably infected with a mortal disease. Yet in the second piece written two years later he recommends the typically "European" process of free and original thinking as part of the remedy for India. What he really fights and detests is the cheap superficial imitation and uncritical acceptance of the results of European thought, since that would be the very antipode of original thinking.

But if neither Europe nor traditional India can satisfy him, what else remains, what else can be attempted? Where is he trying to point by alluding to India's "invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world's fetters"? Some – taking their cue from the many places in Sri Aurobindo's writings where he expresses his genuine admiration for the rich and flexible culture of ancient India as opposed to the

increasingly narrow and rigid developments of later Brahmanism and Hinduism – would say that he is pointing to the rejuvenated “older & mightier Vedanta” which does not reject the world. After all, it was the Isha Upanishad that gave Sri Aurobindo the first glimpse of spiritual awakening, and provided him with the basis for his own system of world- and life-affirming spirituality. It can hardly be a coincidence that his *magnum opus* of spiritual practice is called *The Synthesis of Yoga*, or the institution he founded an *ashram*. External forms of devotion witnessed in the Ashram also trace their roots mostly to Indian tradition. No wonder many people find such an interpretation convincing. In this view, India needs to reconstruct the simpler, adaptable Vedantism of the Upanishadic times with its plastic social framework, and so reunited, vigorously “push out” of its social body first the decadent European materialism, promptly followed by whichever other systems of faith happen to be lumped with it as unwelcome intruders on the sacred Indian soil. Yet the fact remains that Sri Aurobindo has explicitly spoken and written to the contrary—not once, but many times. The social and cultural forms of the Upanishadic Vedantism simply cannot be revived. Readers of the anthology will find the reasons explained by Sri Aurobindo himself, and we assure them that those pieces are as powerful and penetrating as the ones we have already quoted. Here is what Sri Aurobindo thinks of the approaches that we have previously referred to as “pushing out”:

We do not believe that by multiplying new sects limited within the narrower and inferior ideas of religion imported from the West or by creating organisations for the perpetuation of the mere dress and body of Hinduism we can recover our spiritual health, energy and greatness. The world moves through an indispensable interregnum of free thought and materialism to a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life free from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One. The religion which embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, is that to which the World-Spirit moves. In our own, which is the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge,—that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life, which is not a social framework but the spirit of a

past and future social evolution, which rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced turning it to the soul's uses, in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion. This *sanatana dharma* has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling. It is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world's Scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of Karmayoga.

June 1909

Nothing and nobody then needs to be “pushed out” in order that India may realise her fullness of being. Rather the opposite—at least in Sri Aurobindo's view. He indeed speaks of Hinduism as superior to other religions but applies this attribute to a “wider Hinduism” of which the Bible and the Koran are valid scriptures and of which, therefore, Christians and Muslims are already legitimate members. Moreover, he praises this “wider Hinduism” for a virtue precisely opposite to that of “pushing out”: the inexhaustible capacity to absorb, to reject nothing but to test and experience everything, and to turn it to the soul's uses. To sum up, in Sri Aurobindo's words of September 1906, “Devotion to one's own ideals and institutions, with toleration and respect for the ideals and institutions of other sections of the community, and an ardent love and affection for the common civic life and ideal of all—these are what must be cultivated by us now, for the building up of the real Indian nation. To try to build it up in any other way will be impossible.”

Throughout the anthology, Heehs remains focused on the needs of readers who may view the claims of spirituality with scepticism. Therefore, as in his other books, Heehs distances himself from his subject and accepts scepticism as his starting point. Aware that his readers need to know not only *what* Sri Aurobindo had said but also *why*, he has carefully selected passages which stand as mini-arguments on their own, yet mutually support and throw light on each other, woven into the larger argument of the chapter or section. Thus the anthology takes on a whole new quality—as if the pieces, from such diverse periods, were meant to form a single book. Overall, Heehs has managed to prove beyond reasonable doubt that, however sceptical our initial approach, so long as it remains fundamentally unbiased, Sri Aurobindo will always break through as a unique and original thinker with something to offer to all,

not just to those with overt spiritual inclinations. And if secularists cannot accept him *in toto*, yet they will surely enjoy his thought-provoking analyses of the burning social, political and cultural issues of the day. For his ideas have withstood the test of time; even after a century they resonate in us more deeply than many contemporary theories.

To conclude, I would not be surprised if the anthology were to become a highly-valued possession not only of academic institutions and scholars, but of all who are serious in their intent to study and understand Sri Aurobindo. It has every chance of becoming a “standard”

one-volume reference to Sri Aurobindo’s social and political thought. With a protective hard cover and 360 pages tightly packed with riveting material, it is certainly worth its price. Given its indisputable qualities, we can only wish it the best of luck on its way to readers.

— Marcel Kvassay

Marcel qualified as an electrical engineer and a teacher from Slovak Technical University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He spent several years working for Oxford University Press in the area of English Language Teaching. In August 2002 he came to Pondicherry and since then has worked at SABDA. This review is written in his personal capacity.

Principles and Goals of Integral Education

as propounded by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

and the experiment at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry

— Jugal Kishore Mukherjee; Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department

144 pp., Rs 75

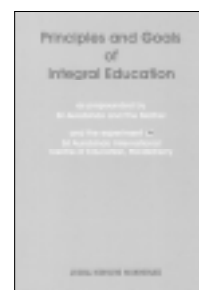
Why another book on integral education, you may ask. What does it provide that cannot be found in the existing literature on the subject? The answer, simply put, is the wisdom of a senior, experienced teacher-scholar. For over half a century Jugal-da has played a leading role in the experiment in integral education, and was guided by the Mother in the initial stages of this attempt. To quote Vijay Poddar who has written the foreword to this book: “Jugal-da brings to his writings and presentation the aspiration and luminosity of a spiritual seeker, the heart of a devotee and the clear analytical mind of a scientist.”

Intellectuals and educationists interested in an overview of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s ideas on education will find a concise, accurate summary in this book. Sifting through their many works, Jugal-da has gleaned seven principles “that the Master-Yogi has recommended for making education luminous and efficient” and “eleven well-defined goals that an educationist should keep in view while seeking to discharge his responsibility towards his students”. For those interested in the implementation of these principles and the practical functioning of the

Intellectuals and educationists interested in an overview of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s ideas on education will find a concise, accurate summary in this book.

Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) Jugal-da has dwelt on the method of teaching, the free progress system, the various subjects of study and the question of certificates, providing the historical background needed to put the functioning of the SAICE in the right perspective. However, the perceptive reader will not fail to note that the primary thrust of Jugal-da’s concern is the future of the SAICE. As one of a rapidly dwindling generation of old-timers, one who has led the free progress system at the higher course level of the SAICE since its inception, his apprehension is not unfounded. As he points out in his preface, “the fact cannot be denied that with the inexorable passage of time many of these Mother-trained early teachers have either retired from active service in the ‘Centre’ or quit their bodies altogether. There is a big void created as a result. And this almost irreparable void is in the very nature of things going to increase with the passage of time. What to do about this matter?”

There is another, deeper and subtler cause for concern. It stems from a prevalent tendency to take some of the Mother’s instructions as absolute, even excluding all her other instructions. But her way of working was different. She gave everyone as free a hand as possible to discover



and express the Truth in his own way. The following excerpts from her writings quoted in the book highlight this:

It is not through uniformity that you obtain unity.... It is mental logic that demands sameness. In practice, each one must find and apply his own method, that which he understands and feels. It is only in this way that education can be effective.

I have read with satisfaction what you say about your work and I approve of it for your own work.

But you must understand that other teachers can conceive their own work differently and be equally right.

Even when the Mother was physically present to sort things out, the problems were intractable enough. Concerning the issuing of certificates she once wrote:

Truly speaking, I have no opinion. According to the truth-vision, everything is still terribly mixed... and so long as decisions are made and action is carried out according to opinions, it will always be like that....

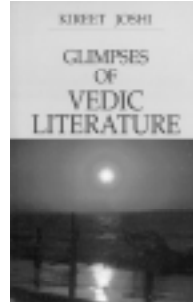
So, in the present state of things, it is impossible to say: this is true and this is false, this leads us away from the goal, this leads us nearer to the goal.

Today the risk of the freedom being consciously or unconsciously misused is even greater. In Jugal-da's words, "Many among these novice teachers may not have studied with meditative attention the numerous writings of the Mother on every necessary aspect of education. Each one tries to follow his own ad hoc method. The result cannot but be confusion leading us slowly but surely away from all that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted to be done through their International University Centre."

"What to do about this matter?" This book is Jugal-da's answer to his own question. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo's ideas and writings on education are to be found in their many volumes; not only has Jugal-da collected the relevant passages, but he has also been forthright in sharing his experience, warning the aspirant students and teachers against possible errors, and organising the often apparently contradictory material in a manner conducive to a synthesis which facilitates the perception of the truth. The book is what Jugal-da calls his "labour of love", the baton passed on to the future generation, to "fight successfully the great battle of the future".

— Shanti Ramanathan

Shanti, a former student of the SAICE, teaches Mathematics at the Higher Course of the SAICE.



Glimpses of Vedic Literature

— Kireet Joshi; Published by Standard Publishers (India), New Delhi; 253 pp., Rs 495 (hard cover)

The book under review is a compilation of original texts selected from the vast Vedic literature, particularly from the Mantras, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. However, the book is not strictly a compilation. As the author claims in his Introduction, it contains a series of "notes", the aim of which is to "provide some basic information about the Vedas". It is meant for those "who have heard of the Veda but have practically no idea of the Vedic literature and its contents".

In India the study of the Vedas is considered to be very important, but most people know nothing about them. Many have heard of the Vedas, but they make no attempts to read and understand them. One reason is that they do not have a book on the Vedas which would meet their demands. Indeed scholars have been trying to produce such a book in India, but the outcome has been quite unsatisfactory. The books are either too simple or too complex in the matter of selection and presentation of the original texts. On the contrary, the present book is definitely an exception, for Kireet Joshi has excelled in his methods of selection and presentation.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I includes all the texts selected from the Mantras to the Upanishads. Now and then the author intervenes with comments which make the selections more illuminating. The selections from the Rig Veda open with the Gayatri Mantra composed by Vishvamitra, one of the great Vedic Rishis, and close with two mantras by the seer Aghamarshana. Each of the other three Vedas is represented by appropriate mantras: Yajur Veda by six verses, each of which closes with the prayer "May that mind of mine be filled with Good Will"; the Sama Veda by ten verses which "form some of the sublimest prayers of the Veda"; and the Atharva Veda by a few verses taken from the Prithivi Sukta.

Chapter Ten introduces the Brahmanas, literary commentaries on the mantras of the Veda. These are mainly concerned with "the explication of rituals", using parables and legends for this purpose. Our attention is drawn to some of them — the stories of King Harischandra of

Ikshvaku dynasty, Rishi Aitareya and Manu. The Aranyakas, as presented in Chapter 12, “form a natural transition to the Upanishads”, and lay down many courses of meditation for the seeker.

The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is ... not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race.

— Sri Aurobindo

The book now turns to the Upanishads. Here some of the famous narratives are given, such as those connected with Satyakama Jabali (Chhandogya Upanishad), Narada (Ibid.), Svetaketu (Ibid.), Nachiketas (Katha Upanishad), Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad), and the Yaksha and the gods (Kena Upanishad). In addition to these narratives, the teachings of the Isha and Kena are briefly discussed. Part I closes with detailed accounts of four important Upanishads — Katha, Taittiriya, Mandukya and Mundaka — and suitable passages from Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

Part I is replete with words, phrases, passages, and interpretations taken from a common source and this is none other than Sri Aurobindo. Kireet Joshi’s discussions in this part are lively and accurate because they all proceed from this single source. It is but natural, then, that Part II is devoted to Sri Aurobindo’s monumental contributions to the study of the Veda.

In seven chapters from “The Veda in the Light of Sri Aurobindo” to “Yoga and Knowledge”, Kireet Joshi discusses all important aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s studies. He gives a brilliant account of Sri Aurobindo’s psychological theory put forward in the book *The Secret of the Veda* and helps us to note the exact contribution of this study of the Veda. Speaking about the translations of the Agni Suktas, he says that they establish Sri Aurobindo’s psychological theory “on a very secure foundation”. He points out that Sri Aurobindo’s other important works on the Upanishads and the Gita prove that they are deeply influenced by the original ideas of the Veda. Further, he says that the profound yogic teachings of the Veda have been very clearly unveiled by Sri Aurobindo’s interpretations. A system of Yoga founded upon them can successfully reproduce even now the original experiences of the great Rishis. And Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga has shown to us that these experiences form the foundations necessary for the future development of humanity. In this connection, a passage from Sri Aurobindo reproduced in this book assumes importance: “The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is ... not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race.”

Kireet Joshi’s book on the Vedic Literature will be happily welcomed by both laymen and students in India and other countries.

— N. Jayashanmugam

Prof. Jayashanmugam is a retired professor of Philosophy, Annamalai University.

At this critical hour, we have started knocking at the doors of past experience and future possibilities. But we are still circumscribed in our search by our familiar categories of thought, and we may be surprised if we are suddenly asked to look for solutions or helpful clues in the Veda, which is the most ancient available record of human experience...reflecting a mentality quite different from ours.

And yet, if we consider the Veda dispassionately, applying strict methods of research and interpretation, as has been done by Sri Aurobindo in his *The Secret of the Veda*, we may find in that ancient record a profound book of wisdom, directly relevant to the central issues of our age.... Veda is, in the first place, a book of consummate poetry, lyric in intensity and epic in elevation, surcharged with the force of the rhythmic word, expressing high substance of thought and experience in inevitable style.... Secondly, Veda is an exploration of the human life at all three levels of experience, - at the most material level, at the intermediate vital and mental level, and at the highest level of spiritual and supramental domains. And, thirdly, the Veda provides well-defined and articulated methods of exploration and discoveries, as also appropriate methods of confirmation and verification. The Veda contains thus a science, and, as in all true science, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the things.

Glimpses of Vedic Literature, pp.198-99

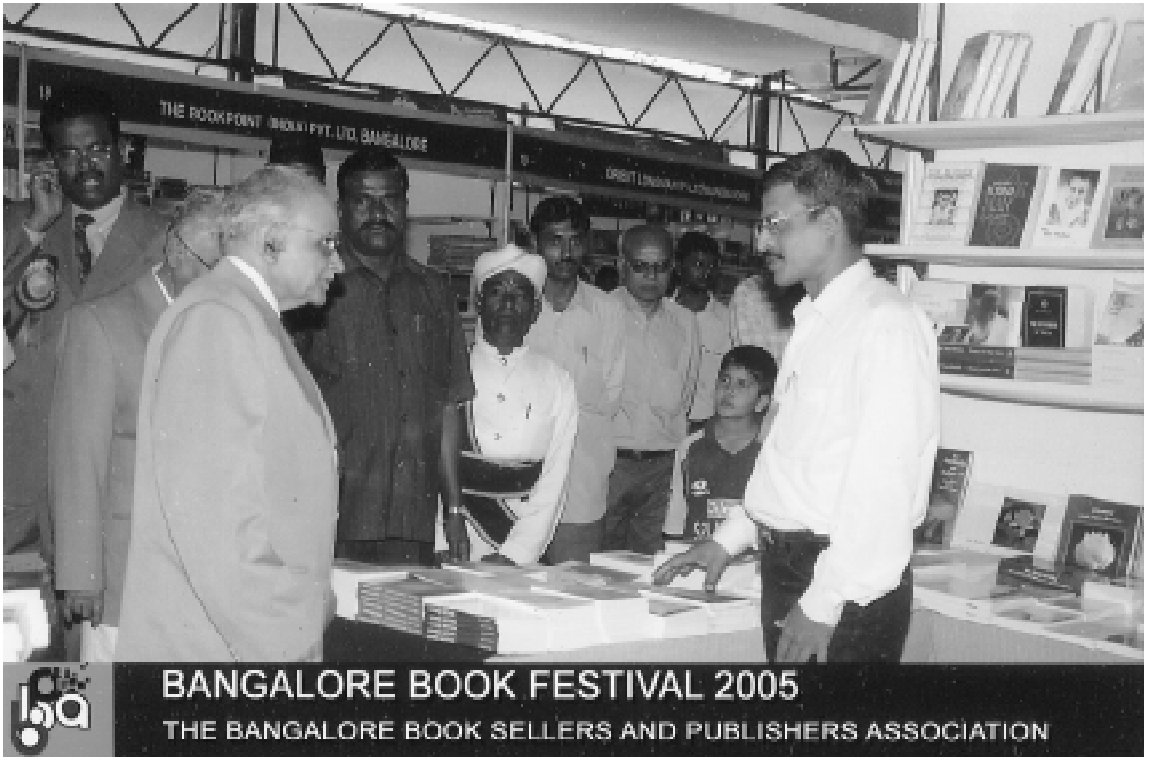
RECORD OF YOGA

Provisional glossary on the internet

Record of Yoga is the diary of Sri Aurobindo's yogic experiences between 1909 and 1927. In this, Sri Aurobindo used a special terminology with words from Sanskrit and other languages, as well as abbreviations and symbols. Readers of the *Record of Yoga* have been keenly awaiting the publication of a glossary of these special terms to facilitate their understanding of the text. While a print version of the glossary will be issued sometime in the future, a provisional version has now been made available online on the Archival Research page of the Ashram's website:

<http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/research/archives.php>

Readers might also be interested in the *Documents in the Life of Sri Aurobindo*, an extensive online collection of historical documents, available via the same page.



Shri T. N. Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka, at the SABDA stall during the Bangalore Book Festival, November 2005