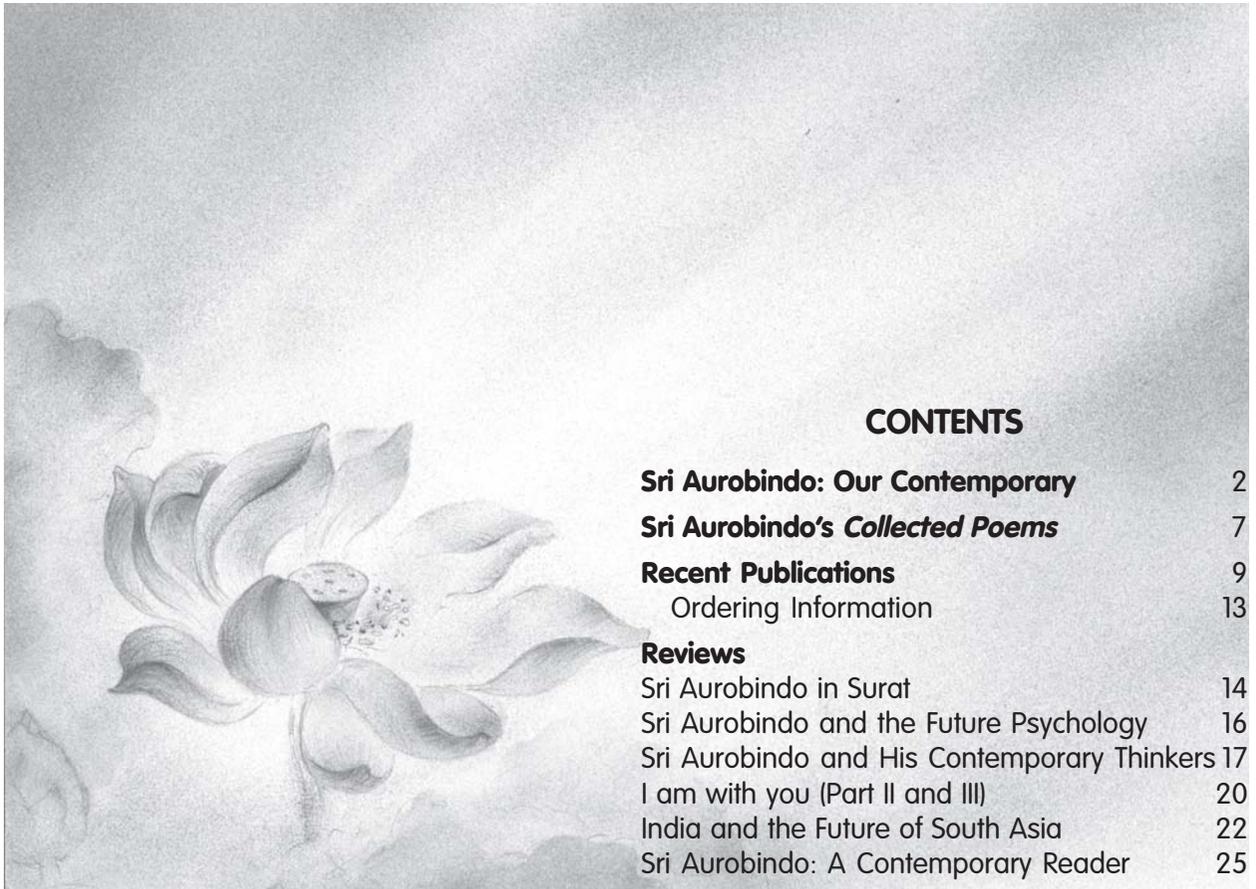


Recent Publications

Sabta

Much has been written about the theory and practice of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga as well as his philosophical and metaphysical thought as expressed in *The Life Divine* and other works. His place as an original and profound thinker in these areas is recognised by contemporary critics and an enlightened readership. But there are other aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought that have not perhaps received the same level of attention in the wider circle of scholarship and modern studies.

In this issue we are offered glimpses into his other fields of work and expression through articles and book reviews that highlight his poetry, his role as a politician and a leader of the nationalist movement, his views on psychology and their impact on the future of that discipline, his contributions to the cultural, political, and social renaissance movement in India, and his far-reaching and astute vision in international affairs.



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Sri Aurobindo: Our Contemporary

Readers of Sri Aurobindo often underline his contribution to nationalism and the freedom struggle. Or they may focus on his philosophy of conscious evolution and the future of man. Few see the contemporariness of Sri Aurobindo.

Politics and Yoga

Sri Aurobindo's life history makes it clear that he had an abiding interest in political questions. He was born during the height of the British Empire. While many ambitious men of his times made a pact with their rulers for worldly advancements, Sri Aurobindo steadfastly fought for a free India. His political career began early. In England, he joined the Indian Majlis and a new secret society called the "Lotus and Dagger".

In Baroda, upon his return to India in 1893, Sri Aurobindo evinced little interest in administrative matters or in advancing his career. He was more drawn to education. He sought out avenues to educate himself in Indian languages and scriptures so that he could play an effective role for India's freedom. He also initiated measures to start a revolutionary movement for the overthrow of British rule. He took up Yoga not so much for spiritual reasons as traditionally envisaged but essentially to make himself a better instrument.

Sri Aurobindo's departure for Bengal, his principalship of the National College, and his involvement in the *Bande Mataram* movement—all form part of the same goal. His historic acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case appeared, for a while, to mark the end of his political career. But as we have seen, it would not be irrevocably so.

Some critics and observers have divided Sri Aurobindo's career into two phases: the nationalistic,

up to 1910, and the post-1910 Pondicherry days. There is truth and justification in making such a distinction. From a spiritual point of view, by his own declaration, the Alipore experience proved to be a watershed event: 1910 marks a radical break with the past. In Pondicherry, in a state of political exile, he plunged into a phase of intense *sadhana*.

But Sri Aurobindo remained steadfast in his concern for India and the welfare of mankind. The amelioration of the socio-political conditions of the vast majority of his countrymen continued to be of vital importance to him. His conversations with Subramania Bharati and other nationalists always focused on questions of India's future. He maintained a low profile in Pondicherry, partly because he was a political exile in French India and did not wish to embarrass his hosts. But it is also true that politics of the conventional kind had ceased to interest him.

Years before the discovery of the Nazi concentration camps and the Holocaust, Sri Aurobindo considered Hitler's rise to power as the greatest threat to the future of mankind.

From 1920 onwards, in numerous letters, Sri Aurobindo made his political position clear to his admirers. His spirituality, he said, was life-affirming and did not rule out action in the world. In fact, the more he advanced in his spiritual thinking and realization, the more he found himself distanced from the politics practiced in British India. His letters to Baptista and Dr. Moonje make this very clear.

World Affairs

Beginning in the 1930s, Sri Aurobindo evinced keener interest in world affairs. Linked with this was his concern for India's future. He expressed grave concern through poetry, prose, letters and conversations about the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. Years before the discovery of the Nazi concentration camps and the Holocaust, he considered Hitler's rise to power as the greatest threat to the future of mankind.

Talks with Sri Aurobindo, recorded by a close attendant and disciple, Nirodbaran, shows Sri Aurobindo as one of the few nationalists who preferred to support Britain and the allied powers against the menace of Nazism. Through his initiative, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram contributed financially to the war effort. He also issued public and private messages supporting the Allies.

Sri Aurobindo's public support of the Cripps Proposals and the Wavell Plan must be seen in the same light, i.e., to preserve the unity and integrity of India and its composite culture with diverse religious groups. The telegrams and the emissaries that he sent to national leaders during this time confirm his dedication to the nation's cause. Of the major leaders of the Congress Party, C. Rajagopalachari was one of the few who accepted Sri Aurobindo's line of thinking on this subject. Today many historians believe that the rejection of the Cripps Proposals by the Congress leadership, including Gandhi, may have been a political mistake.

The five "dreams" Sri Aurobindo mentioned in his Independence Day Message on 15 August 1947, broadcast from the All India Radio, Tiruchirapalli, show that he saw nationalism and internationalism, the freedom of India and the liberation of Asia, as complementary to each other. In his message during the Korean War, in 1950, he cautioned the world against the spread of Bolshevik communism of the Stalinist kind. For all their flaws, he preferred western democracies over totalitarian systems of the fascist or communistic kind. Freedom, he thought, is essential to human progress and cannot be bartered for any benefit of the individual or the collectivity.

Before he passed away in 1950, Sri Aurobindo revised *The Ideal of Human Unity* and added a postscript chapter. Here he made an assessment of the world, especially the United Nations, the monopolistic nature of the Security Council, the Cold War and the future of ideological systems such as capitalism, communism and socialism. He also reviewed the possibility of the emergence of new forms of socialism including the cooperative kind.

Students of international relations may find his analysis amazingly incisive and, as events would prove, prophetic. He predicted, on the basis of his analysis, that communism as an ideology would not remain a monolith, and that other forms of socialism, including the cooperative kind, may be possible in future. His vision of the new international order is little known to people outside his circle of admirers. This is one area where scholars might fruitfully benefit from reading Sri Aurobindo.

II

The Crisis of Contemporary Culture

For our purpose, we need to focus attention on some of the larger issues in today's world by looking into four major areas for the crisis of our contemporary culture:

1. The Tyranny of the State Idea
2. Religion vs. Secular Modernity
3. The Problem of Self-Determination
4. Identity Politics in a Multicultural Society

Each of these is related to the other, and yet separately, each poses a challenge to our thinking. What insights does Sri Aurobindo offer for the resolution of these crises?

Our understanding of the relationship between the individual self and collective entities is deeply flawed. It is based on shallow principles, founded on exigencies and expediencies rather than resting on deeper psychological factors.

The Tyranny of the State Idea

If we look at the past century, we are bound to notice that amidst the upheavals that mankind experienced, such as the horror of the two World Wars and the threat of nuclear destruction brought

on by the Cold War, there has been a continued tyranny of the State in various forms and political guises, democratic or totalitarian. What accounts for the persistence of this State idea? What is this entity called the State that a chosen few can manipulate and mete out unimaginable cruelties to entire populations that shock our collective conscience? What is the alternative to this rapacious State?

Given the unfolding of cataclysmic events following the rise of fascism and totalitarianism soon after Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* in 1918, his views turned out to be prophetic. His diagnosis remains relevant in the context of the experiments that have taken place in the socialistic or liberal democracies following his passing, as in the Gulag Archipelago or the emergence of American domination. The embroilment of the State in all aspects of the citizen's life is a ubiquitous feature of late capitalism. As Sri Aurobindo argues, such aberrations occur because our understanding of the relationship between the individual self and collective entities is deeply flawed. It is based on shallow principles, founded on exigencies and expediencies rather than resting on deeper psychological factors.

Religion vs. Secular Modernity

There are a number of contentious issues that are in the forefront of contemporary discourse in India: nationalism and religion are two of them. Sri Aurobindo has positions on both of them. As discerning critics such as K. N. Panikkar, Amartya Sen, Sugata Bose, Ayesha Jalal and Peter Heehs have shown, Sri Aurobindo decisively rules out Hindu majoritarianism and the tyranny of the so-called elite.

In an essay that makes a sharp attack on the caste system in India, Sri Aurobindo says, “birth, family custom and remnants, deformations, new accretions of meaningless or fanciful religious sign and ritual, the very scarecrow and caricature of the old profound symbolism, became the riveting links of the system of caste ...”.

The same idea regarding the baneful effects of caste

stratification is reiterated in many of Sri Aurobindo's writings. His essay entitled “The Unhindu Spirit of Caste Rigidity” from the volume *Sri Aurobindo on Nationalism* may be cited as a typical example. In fact, it may be said that Sri Aurobindo is firm in supporting the emergence of secular modernity vis-à-vis the narrow religiosity of the past. If there is a conflict between the two, he seems to side with modernity rather than religiosity. This becomes clear when we read Chapter XIII of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, appropriately entitled “The Formation of the Nation Unit—The Three Stages”, which traces the history of religion and nationhood in the East and West. He gives concrete reasons as to why the Indian experience, despite its initial success, became deeply flawed. This, he argues, is chiefly due to caste stratification and the tyranny of the upper castes based on a hereditary principle.

Spirituality, the Answer

What then are our options? If secular modernity is limited in approach and conception, and traditional religion is seen as deeply flawed, especially in its interpretation of the socio-cultural roles of the various castes and groups and in its rigid interpretation of ethical codes and moral doctrines, then what could be Sri Aurobindo's answer?

I see Sri Aurobindo's answer as of crucial importance. For, the ability to create an alternate ideology that combines the achievements of both religion and secular modernity, while avoiding the inherent limitations of both, is the paramount need of the hour. “Where then are we to find,” asks Sri Aurobindo, “the ‘harmonizing’ principle?” And thus, as Sri Aurobindo sees it, it is only spirituality that could be complementary to secular modernity. In spirituality and not in religion we can find the completeness to the vision of secular modernity.

The Problem of Self-Determination

To a critical observer of present culture, nothing is more troubling than the ongoing problem of self-determination. As the historian Embree points out, there is a ceaseless conflict today between the nation and groups of people. From Kashmir to Jaffna,

Chechnya to Sudan, we witness a clash among groups of citizenry, and their opposition to the sovereign states they reside in. What then is self-determination, the desire for individuals and groups to decide their destiny? Sri Aurobindo wrote a chapter called “Self-Determination” in his book *War and Self-Determination*, a collection of essays that first appeared in the philosophical quarterly *Arya* between 1916 and 1920. This chapter is to be read along with the one called “Diversity in Oneness” from *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Here we can clearly see Sri Aurobindo’s theorization of the concept of self-determination.

Sri Aurobindo concludes that the right approach would be to start the “self-determination of the free individual within the free collectivity in which he lives”, “because so only can we be sure of a healthy growth of freedom and because too the unity to be arrived at is that of individuals growing freely towards perfection and not of human machines working in regulated unison or of souls suppressed, mutilated and cut into one or more fixed geometrical patterns.”

Identity Politics in a Multicultural Society

The problem of self-determination in the contemporary world is also seen in the form of what is known as identity politics. Democratic societies in the contemporary world that are wedded to pluralistic or multicultural ideals promote various identity formations, based on gender, caste, class and race.

In the U.S. there is an attempt to move from the ideals of the melting pot to those of the salad bowl or the mosaic in the form of hyphenated identities such as the Hispanic, Native, Korean, South Asian or Japanese American. Similarly, in recent times Indian polity has witnessed caste-based mobilization and identity formation based on different language-

groups and ethnic communities. While all these may fulfill legitimate democratic aspirations, they also lead frequently to internal conflicts, fractured polity and civil strife.

The problem of multiculturalism also extends to the domain of the emerging international order. We see facets of this order in the form of what has come to be known as globalization, thanks to the rise of the unipolar world. We witness the leveling of all differences in the form of economic and cultural homogenization. National sovereignty resting on the claims of groups of nations to decide their own destinies is unfortunately giving way to unilateralism by international political forces and agencies. In this way internationalism militates against national and regional aspirations and becomes anti-democratic.

Assuredly, there is recognition of the problem in all these areas by leading cultural critics and political theorists today. Yet our efforts seem to swing inexorably in a pendulum-like manner, from optimism to despair. It is here that we may consider the answer Sri Aurobindo provides. As he writes insightfully, “The right idea of self-determination makes a clean sweep of these confusions. It makes it clear that liberty should proceed by the development of the law of one’s own being determined from within, evolving out of oneself and not determined from outside by the idea and will of another.”

The Saving Factor

To sum up, I have attempted here to identify some of the outstanding problems of contemporary society and culture. In these areas we find legitimate human aspirations for greater diversity but we seem to lack a principle for greater cohesion. Sri Aurobindo suggests that such a principle could in fact rest on deeper psychological and spiritual factors that transcend the human ego. That is where true mutuality would be possible. His philosophy of

creative evolution gives us the assurance of such a vision. His idea of the spiritual view of life gives us valuable guidelines. From this vision we can retrieve insights for the right governance of our individual and collective life. Ultimately, that remains both a hope and a challenge to our current thinking.

III

Unique Contemporary Thinker

There are several factors that make Sri Aurobindo a unique contemporary thinker. First, his approach is based on wide reading, considerable travel prior to his arrival at Pondicherry, participation in mass political movements and association with a wide cross section of public figures and personalities. He lived through momentous events such as the two World Wars, the partition of India and Indian Independence, and the onsets of the Cold War and the Korean War. The impressions that the events left on his consciousness invariably shape his writings and make them authentic. He engaged with the issues of his times and was deeply concerned with the fate of India and the world. We simply have to read the letters he wrote regarding the rise of fascism in Europe, the bane of imperialism and the horror of other events on the world stage. Similarly, we see his opposition to tyranny of all kinds, his recognition of freedom as the cornerstone of all progress.

Secondly, we see Sri Aurobindo as an outstanding political thinker of great depth, sweep and understanding—and, above all, modesty. There are no facile statements, no hasty generalizations, no easy condemnations or denunciations. The approach

throughout is dignified. Respect is constantly shown to the rival point of view before summing up or offering his own for consideration. Arguments are systematically developed before arriving at conclusions. The imagination is supremely dialogic, exploratory and open-ended. The tone is decisive regarding the basic truths and postulates. Possibilities of the political kind are always indicated or hinted at. The attempt throughout is to demonstrate and persuade rather than to affirm or preach.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo's social and international vision forms an integral part of his overall philosophy of life. Although his analyses of socio-political issues can stand by themselves, they are not divorced from his treatment of metaphysics and yoga. It is clear that no real social or political change is possible in the world without a fundamental transformation of human nature from within by the process of yoga. Sri Aurobindo's vision of man's evolutionary growth into a higher consciousness that then shapes and determines his material world is at the base of his thoughtful engagement with social, political and cultural affairs. It is hoped that interested readers will turn to the original works of Sri Aurobindo and take up further reading for pleasure and profit.

— Sachidananda Mohanty

Dr Mohanty is Professor and Head of the English Department at the University of Hyderabad. His latest work is Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader. He has received a number of national and international awards and is widely published. He had his early education at the SAICE, Pondicherry.

The nation-unit is not formed and does not exist merely for the sake of existing; its purpose is to provide a larger mould of human aggregation in which the race, and not only classes and individuals, may move towards its full human development. So long as this labour of formation continues, this larger development may be held back and authority and order be accepted as the first consideration, but not when the aggregate is sure of its existence and feels the need of an inner expansion. Then the old bonds have to be burst; the means of formation have to be discarded as obstacles to growth. Liberty then becomes the watchword of the race.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*

Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems*

Sri Aurobindo considered himself to be firstly a poet, but ironically this aspect of his life remains the least known. Of all his poetic creations the most widely read is *Savitri*, but since that falls in the category of *mantric* utterance and not mere poetical composition I will leave it out of this discussion. I will only take up the volume *Collected Poems* and try to understand why it remains relatively unknown, even among his disciples.

Poetry is truly a complete expression of beauty because it combines many different kinds of beauty: the beauty of sounds, of images, of thought, of emotions and of expression. And yet, unfortunately, for most people in India the word "poetry" conjures up only images of their school life. Those images often have in the background the voice of an unkind teacher or the stress of having to struggle with incomprehensible or archaic words. Most people think that one bids goodbye to poetry when one steps out of the student life. This may be why poems don't usually form a part of our general reading.

A combination of factors has made the poems of Sri Aurobindo so little appreciated. Firstly, among his followers, especially the Indians, there are very few who are familiar with the subtleties of English poetry. Secondly, even among those few who do take pleasure in reading poetry, an even smaller number would turn to the poems gathered in *Collected Poems*, as they don't belong to the kind of poetry which the modern reader is used to. Then for those who do not know much about Sri Aurobindo the reputation of his prose works as being rather difficult to understand without close study may lead them to assume the poetry of this yogi must be incomprehensible to the common man. There may also be a certain impression in their minds that he probably wrote poetry as a pastime after he had become a yogi.

We have to keep in mind when we turn the pages of the *Collected Poems* that we are looking at the work of someone who started writing at the end of the 19th century, and that too in England. If we overlook his background we will miss the most important point. Sri Aurobindo was brought up in England from his early childhood. He not only went to St. Paul's, one of the best schools in England, but also studied at King's College, Cambridge. Therefore, his early poetry cannot strictly be considered as the work of an Indian. He grew up the way an English boy would have grown up, and for him English was the normal language of communication. At Cambridge he studied Classical Greek and Latin, both prose and poetry, and was trained to translate those texts into English and vice versa. He was accustomed to a very high form of expression – in prose as well as in poetry – before he returned to India. That was what entirely occupied him during the last years of his stay in England.

*One can open Collected Poems
and have the sensation of being
in a secret garden; there is so
much to discover silently.*

English poetry was a natural part of his education and therefore helped to form his mental make-up. In the late 19th century, a school like St. Paul's taught Greek and Latin from the lowest level of classes, and the entire focus was on literature. Although mathematics was a subject, science did not figure in the curriculum. Education for the upper classes in England was structured around acquiring general culture, and this is why poetry was given a place of great importance at school level and was also commonly studied at colleges. It was an age when science, commerce and technology were generally considered to be inferior to literature. Having studied poetry so thoroughly, it was a natural step for Sri Aurobindo to compose his own poems.

Another point to remember when we read his poetry is that his style belongs to an age when poetry had quite another definition from what it has today. The poetry of the late-Victorian age had its own ideals and its own pace. This style disappeared from the

scene of world literature after the two World Wars. What happened to poetry is more or less what happened to art in general. The First World War brought about a certain breakdown of sensibilities, and by the end of the Second World War the entire mindscape of the world had changed. In the field of art there was a deliberate move away from realism and from the way artists had expressed themselves earlier; the stress was on the individual and not on the collective. Poems in our modern world are like the paintings of our times. They are abstract and stay away from anything that confines the flow of expression. Neither poets nor artists aim primarily for beauty in their creations. The main point is an idea, a feeling, an impression. In the same manner that an artist no longer needs to acquire a refined skill after long years of training – in fact he need not even know how to draw – the poet too has no qualms about not knowing how to align words with stressed and unstressed syllables or not understanding metre and rhyme.

Sri Aurobindo did not write poetry to pass time on a Sunday afternoon. His works are the creations of a master poet who expects his readers to know the background of what he is saying. This again becomes a common stumbling block. Even if a person had the inclination to read a sonnet or a long narrative poem, he would still find it hard to understand not only the vocabulary but also the allusions and references to Greek or Indian mythology, which often form a backdrop to Sri Aurobindo's poems. These literary and cultural references were once common knowledge to the educated person but do not generally form part of the intellectual development of modern man. In other words, one needs a certain amount of preparation about the context before one can take pleasure in reading some of the poems. And that preparation must also include a familiarity with his yoga in order to grasp the meaning of many of his later poems, including most of the sonnets.

The most fascinating thing about these poems is that they were written not only in different places but also during the various phases of a life that changed dramatically through the decades. His earliest poems

are dated 1890–1892. This corresponds to Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge years when he was leading the life of a student, seeking knowledge and preparing for examinations. The next phase of his poetical creation is set in Baroda when he was teaching at the college and could devote some time to poetry. Some of the poems were written in the middle of the revolutionary movement in Calcutta; one poem was even written in Alipore jail. The rest were composed in Pondicherry from his yogic heights and while he was engaged in an intense inner activity. In fact, Sri Aurobindo started writing poetry when he was a young boy and continued to do so until the last year of his life.

The early poems are touched with the influence of the poets he read and admired, but he soon developed his own unmistakable style. One can open *Collected Poems* and have the sensation of being in a secret garden; there is so much to discover silently. The early poems are rich in imagery and emotion and can be enjoyed for their visual delight. The sonnets, particularly the later ones, are almost all surprisingly written in the first person singular. The word "I" comes back again and again. Yes, these deeply personal lines are written by the author of the supremely impersonal *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. The most attractive pieces, within easy grasp of the reader, are the narrative poems such as "Chitrangada", "Uloupie", "Love and Death" and "Urvasie". The incomplete epic poem "Ilion" can be enjoyed, even if one isn't familiar with the story of the Trojan war, for the sheer beauty of the lines, even taken a few at a time. The same can be said about "Ahana", in that individual lines can be enjoyed for their own beauty if read a few at a time, even if the meaning of the whole is difficult to grasp.

We could continue to look for less evident reasons as to why so enjoyable a book has remained so little known. As is often the case when we are seeking something sincerely, we are always guided to the answer. Here is a paragraph I stumbled upon in "The Poet and the Critic" from *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, where Sri Aurobindo answers that very question:

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader

— Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty

Publisher: Routledge, New Delhi

235 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-46093-4, Rs 275

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Choosing his selections from five works by Sri Aurobindo – *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *War and Self-Determination*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* – the editor of this compilation presents aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s vision for the future of humanity in the context of the “crisis of contemporary culture”. Part I is a long essay by the editor which introduces the four major areas of concern to be examined: the tyranny of the State idea, religion versus secular modernity, the problem of self-determination, and identity politics in a multicultural society. Each chapter in Part II is dedicated to one of Sri Aurobindo’s works and begins with an editor’s prologue, which provides an overview of the work in the context of the discussion. The book underlines Sri Aurobindo’s role as a cultural critic who applied his yogic understanding to the arena of contemporary society and politics. His views on these topics, mostly written for the monthly review *Arya* in the early years of the twentieth century, have a continuing relevance for today’s social discourses.

see review on page 25

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine

Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Nirvana and Beyond

72 pp., ISBN 978-81-7060-273-6, Rs 25

Right Spirit in Work

56 pp., ISBN 978-81-7060-271-2, Rs 15

What are we Seeking in Life and the Key for it

44 pp., ISBN 978-81-7060-270-5, Rs 15

It is possible that the general atmosphere of the later Victorian decline, if decline it was, may have helped to mould my work and undoubtedly it dates and carries the stamp of the time in which it was written. It is a misfortune of my poetry from the point of view of recognition that the earlier work forming the bulk of the *Collected Poems* belongs to the past and has little chance of recognition now that the aesthetic atmosphere has so violently changed, while the later mystical work and *Savitri* belong to the future and will possibly have to wait for recognition of any merit they have for another strong change.

4th May 1947

Just as the World Wars changed the “aesthetic atmosphere” perhaps some other event or a development in the human consciousness will bring about the other change of which Sri Aurobindo speaks so that his mystical works as well as *Savitri* will find recognition and appreciation from the general reader. But fortunately we who know him don’t have to wait for such a day. We can open the *Collected Poems* and take delight in the many-coloured emotions, in full bloom here, of one whose high thoughts we usually have to grapple with. Perhaps knowing his feelings through his poetry may help us to understand his thoughts better. Perhaps our knowledge of Sri Aurobindo the philosopher may remain incomplete without our knowledge of Sri Aurobindo the poet.

— Sunayana Panda

Sunayana Panda, who holds an MA in English Literature, was a student at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. She is on the editorial team of The Golden Chain, the alumni journal of the SAICE, and has been actively involved in the staging of many of Sri Aurobindo’s literary works.

Other Authors

I am with you (Part II and III)

Remembrance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

— Kailas Jhaveri

Publisher: Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry

679 pp., ISBN 978-81-86413-43-2, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

A chronicle of the author's life and work in the Ashram, this book continues the story begun in Part I, which was published in 2004 and related how she came into contact with the works of Sri Aurobindo while a student in Mumbai and then spent ten years in the U.S.A. This volume begins with Part II which details her close contact with the Mother between 1964 and 1973 and the various work she undertook, particularly for the project of Auroville in its earliest stages and with Richard Pearson on the spiritual significance of flowers. Part III follows her life after 1973, including her travels within India and abroad to speak about the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The book is enhanced by more than forty pages of facsimiles of the Mother's letters to her.

see review on page 20

Sri Aurobindo in Surat

— Narrated by Hiranmayi

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre, Surat

208 pp., Rs 175

Size: 20x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Published to commemorate the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's 1907 visit to Surat for the All India Annual Convention of the then Indian National Congress, the book acquaints the reader with the major political players of the day and the issues of contention between the Moderates and the Nationalists. Using the words of Sri Aurobindo, convention participants, and observers, as well as facsimile copies of Indian newspaper reports, the author unfolds the dramatic events before and during the convention, when all efforts at compromise and reconciliation between the two groups failed, leading to the climactic moment when the convention dissolved in an uproar of charged emotions. Sri Aurobindo's leadership in awakening the country to the demand for *swaraj* is the primary focus of this narrative retelling of the Surat Congress Convention.

see review on page 14

Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

— Photographs by Gangaram Malwade

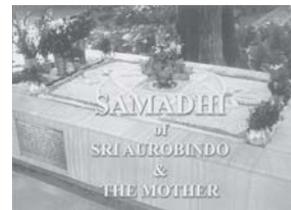
Publisher: Department of Physical Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

122 pp., Rs 450

Size: 30x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

These 111 photographs of the Samadhi, seven inches by ten inches in size, taken at different times of the day and from different angles, have been collected and printed on art paper in this volume. They evoke the presence of this sacred place with its atmosphere of deep peace and serenity. Many of the photographs capture the beauty of the floral decorations and designs that are created twice daily on the Samadhi. A short introduction records how the care of the Samadhi and its environs developed from December 1950 to the present and includes many of the Mother's instructions on how things were to be kept and arranged.



A Garland of Adoration

— Krishna Chakravarti

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Chittagong

160 pp., Rs 90

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book is a collection of articles, mostly in English but also in Bengali, that appeared in journals such as *Mother India* and *Srinwantu*. In these the author, who has lived in the Ashram since 1956, expresses her adoration of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, muses on various themes inspired by their vision, and fondly reminisces about old disciples such as Amrita-da, Dyumanbhai, Millie-di, and many others.

Truth: Nothing Else Than

— A. K. Ray

Publisher: Srinwantu, Kolkata

187 pp., Rs 75

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

A mathematician and a poet, the author of this collection of philosophical essays explores some of the profoundest questions man can ask himself about the creation and the nature of the Absolute as the creator. He adds interest and depth to his own observations by

examining the thought of Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, and Whitehead, all eminent philosophers and some also known as mathematicians and logicians, but it is in Sri Aurobindo's philosophical thought that he finds the widest perspective and most comprehensive view of life. Additional essays include "Entering the Hall of Logic", which delves into the philosophy of logic as it relates to thought and language, and "Into Language: An Introspection", which provides a brief philosophical look at grammar.

Sri Aurobindo and His Contemporary Thinkers

— Articles by various authors

Publisher: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi in

Association with Jadavpur University, Kolkata

349 pp., ISBN 978-81-246-0428-1, Rs 600

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

The authors represented in this interdisciplinary study are all concerned with the personalities, ideas, movements, and contributions of some of the most prominent leaders of what has come to be known as the Renaissance in India, that period from the latter half of the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, which is marked by the reawakening of a national spirit in search of its past. By analysing the social, cultural, and political background of the period and comparing the contributions made by Sri Aurobindo and others such as Vivekananda, Tagore, Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Raja Rammohan Roy, and Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya to the freedom movement and the rejuvenation of India's heritage, a clear distinction is drawn regarding Sri Aurobindo's unique role in this renaissance movement.

see review on page 17

Sri Aurobindo and the Future Psychology

Supplement to A Greater Psychology

— A. S. Dalal with contributions by Brant Cortright,

Michael Miovic, Alok Pandey

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry

408 pp., ISBN 978-81-7058-869-6, Rs 125

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Described by its author as a supplement to his earlier book *A Greater Psychology*, this collection of essays, which brings together both new and previously published articles, continues to examine and elucidate the psychological writings of Sri Aurobindo anthologised in that previous work. Here the author presents Sri Aurobindo's

thoughts on such topics as the relationship between yoga and psychology, the concept of the unconscious in psychology, the relation between such terms as "person" and "personality" in the integration of the being, an integral view of cosmic consciousness, and the concept of the psychic being as a major contribution made by yogic experience to psychological thought and spiritual practice. The book also includes contributions by three experienced practitioners who have attempted to apply Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought in their clinical work.

see review on page 16

Sri Aurobindo: The Poet of Nature & Other Writings on Savitri

— Asoka K. Ganguli

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry

407 pp., ISBN 978-81-901891-6-3, Rs 350

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

A former teacher of English literature at university and post-graduate levels, the author of this critical study presents several important aspects of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual poetry in his epic *Savitri*. In the first section the author highlights the often-neglected subject of Sri Aurobindo as a poet of Nature. He points out how Sri Aurobindo's concept of Nature differs from that of other poets and then shows the workings of Nature in Inconscience, in Ignorance, and in the Transcendental plane as portrayed in *Savitri*. The second section deals with how Sri Aurobindo uses imagery, similes, and metaphors, while in the third section he explains Sri Aurobindo's new concept and vision of Death. The final section describes the treatment of science and evolution in *Savitri* as representative of Sri Aurobindo's embrace of all aspects of knowledge and thought in his integrated vision of life and spirit.

Devotion: An anthology of spiritual poems

— Selected by Lloyd Hofman and Vignan Agni

Publisher: Integral Enterprise (IntEnt), Auroville

338 pp., Rs 400

Size: 16x24 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Since the early 1930s sadhaks of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram took to writing poetry as a means of opening themselves to the higher planes of consciousness. Many of these poems were sent to Sri Aurobindo for comments and corrections, and several disciples achieved remarkable success in their efforts. This compilation of spiritual poems

by devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother reaches back to those early days of the Ashram but also includes more recent poems written by people living in Auroville and elsewhere in the world. The common theme is the devotional nature of the poetry, whether by established poets or those who show promise or merit in their inspiration and poetic execution. Included at the end are a few extracts from Sri Aurobindo's book *The Future Poetry*.

The Horizon (Diganta)

— Nishikanta

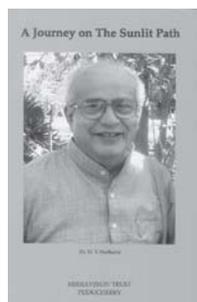
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Sthan, Kolkata

71 pp., Rs 80

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Readers of *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* will be familiar with the many references there to Nishikanta's development as a poet in Bengali and in English. Sri Aurobindo once called him "a *Brahmaputra* of inspiration" and remarked that "he got a touch here which brought out in him some powerful force of vital vision and word". This English translation of *Diganta*, Nishikanta's book of seventy-three poems in Bengali, has been published to commemorate his birth centenary. Most of these poems deal with his inner experiences as a sadhak and a poet, but an appendix has been added to include "Integral India", written on August 15, 1947, and inspired by Sri Aurobindo's message on that occasion.



A Journey on the Sunlit Path

— Edited by R. Ranganath

Publisher: Mirravision Trust,
Pondicherry

192 pp., Rs 200

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Widely-known and appreciated for his study camps, seminars, and lectures on the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Dr M V Nadkarni is remembered by family, friends, and admirers in this commemorative volume. His sessions on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* garnered special praise for their clarity and their ability to draw the listener into the unique beauty of the poetry. The book begins with a few of Dr Nadkarni's articles on *Savitri*, which are then followed by a stream of testaments by people who shared the common experience of being inspired, guided, encouraged, befriended, and enlightened by a man who dedicated his

life to spreading a passionate interest in the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

OTHER LANGUAGES

CATALAN

Savitri : Una Llegendà i un Símbol :

Primera Part - Llibre Primer :

El Llibre Dels Començaments — Sri Aurobindo

ISBN 978-84-932357-3-4

Rs 470

ITALIAN

Educare Se Stessi

— La Madre

Publisher: Domani, Pondicherry

54 pp., ISBN 978-81-7058-874-0, Rs 60

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

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Publisher: Miranda Vannucci, Italy

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Oltre la specie umana : La vita e l'opera di Sri Aurobindo e della Madre — Georges Van Vrekhem Rs 2400
ISBN 978-88-7310-030-0

Savitri di Sri Aurobindo : L'epopea della vittoria sulla morte — Tommaso Iorco Rs 760

Ilio : La Caduta di Troia — Sri Aurobindo Rs 900
ISBN 978-88-901049-5-4

RUSSIAN

Savitri : Legenda i Simbol — Sri Aurobindo
Kniga 1 Pesnj 3 (Selections) Rs 35
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SLOVENIAN

Joga Spanja in Sanj : Šola sadhane, ki jo izvajamo v casu nocnega pocitka — Compilation
ISBN 978-961-246-093-8 sc Rs 800
ISBN 978-961-246-094-5 hc Rs 950

SPANISH

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(Tomo I) ISBN 978-84-935352-3-0 Rs 690
(Tomo II) ISBN 978-84-935352-4-7 Rs 690

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BOOK REVIEWS

CELEBRATING THE EVENT THAT WAS PRELUDE TO SWARAJ

Sri Aurobindo in Surat

— Narrated by Hiranmayi

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre, Surat

208 pp., Rs 175

Size: 20x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



An objective study of the history of the Indian National Congress will show that its 23rd session at Surat in 1907 marked its real turn towards the goal of the freedom of the country. It appears surprising to us today

that the illustrious leaders of the Congress could stomach till that day a threat by Lord Elgin, the Viceroy of India from 1894 to 1899, declaring “India was conquered by the sword and by the sword it shall be held” or the observation by another Viceroy, Lord Curzon, that “Indeed, truth has never been an Indian ideal!”

However, a radical change was brewing in the political weather of the middle of the first decade of the 20th century. With Sri Aurobindo coming over to Kolkata and giving a vibrant voice to the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, the weather was marked by gathering clouds that burst into a storm at Surat.

The backdrop, in brief, was this: Leaders such as Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Khaparde, Khare and Lala Lajpat Rai were keen to see that the resolutions adopted at the 22nd session of the Congress at Kolkata in 1906 were endorsed at the 23rd session scheduled to be held at Nagpur. But the conservatives, who were still of the view that “we cannot afford to flout the Government at this stage”, managed to change the venue to Surat, their stronghold, and also chose the passive leader Rash Behari Ghose to preside over it instead of Lala Lajpat Rai. The proposed agenda excluded any reference to the inspiring Kolkata call.

Tilak and other Nationalist leaders, on reaching Surat, mobilized the opinions of the delegates to demand reiteration of the Kolkata resolutions. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the historian of the Congress, writes, “Attempts were made by Lokamanya Tilak, through

intermediaries, to bring about a compromise but these failed, and his effort to meet Mr. Malvi, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, met with no better success.”

The session began on 26 December 2007 before a gathering ten thousand strong. Rash Behari Ghose was proposed for the chair, but the moment the great orator of Bengal, S.N. Bannerji, stood up to second the proposal, the unexpected happened. Let us turn to the inimitable narrative left by Henry W. Nevinson, the correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*:

Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment’s pause ... the whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi (Chairman of the Reception Committee) still half in the chair, rang his brass Benares bell and rang in vain. Surendranath sprang upon the very table itself. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again he shouted, unheard as silence.... Again the Chairman rang his Benares bell, and rang in vain. In an inaudible voice, like a sob, he declared the sitting suspended.

A gloomy day passed, marked by ominous whispers in an atmosphere tense and awesome. The session resumed the next day. As soon as Dr. Ghose occupied the Chair, a determined Tilak who had served notice for an amendment stood up in order to move it. “You cannot move an adjournment of the Congress. I declare you out of order,” warned Malvi.” “I wish to move an amendment to the election of President, and you are not in the Chair,” Tilak answered. “I declare you out of order!” cried Dr. Ghosh. “But you have not been elected! I appeal to the delegates,” snubbed Tilak.

Let us turn to Nevinson again:

Uproar drowned the rest. With folded arms Mr. Tilak faced the audience. On either side of him young Moderates sprang to their feet, wildly gesticulating vengeance. Shaking their fists and yelling to the air, they clamoured to hurl him down the steps of the platform. Behind him Dr. Ghose mounted the table and ringing an unheard

bell, harangued the storm in shrill, agitated, unintelligible denunciations.... But Mr. Tilak stood there with folded arms, defiant, calling on violence to do its worst, calling on the violence to move him, for he would move for nothing else in hell or heaven. In front, the white-clad audience roared like the tumultuous sea.

Suddenly something flew through the air – a shoe! – Maharatta shoe! Reddish leather, pointed toe, sole studded with lead. It struck Surendranath Banerjee on the cheek; it cannoned off upon Sir Pheroza Shah Mehta. It flew, it fell, and, as at a given signal white waves of turbaned men surged up the escarpment of the platform. Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they came, striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs standing upon the green baize table, I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos.

Like Goethe at the battle of Valmy, I could have said, “Today marks the beginning of a new era, and you can say that you were present at it.”

Beginning of a new era indeed! *The Bengalee* of Surendranath Banerjee bore this headline: “The Congress is Dead — Long Live the Congress!”

Dr. Ghose’s presidential address remained unread. Though the next day two different conferences were held, the Nationalists commanded the crowd. Observes Nevinson, “Grave and silent – I think without saying a single word – Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the chair and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side.”

This first great Congress split was strictly ideological, resulting in the concept of Swaraj sinking into the nation’s psyche. It was Sri Aurobindo who was behind the significant turn.

As we know, India for Sri Aurobindo was not a mere geographical or even historical subcontinent, but a

consciousness. Its freedom was indispensable for the unfoldment of human destiny. Soon, after his incarceration in the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case, he was to plunge into the hitherto unfathomed mysteries of creation and evolution and devote himself to discovering the way for the other freedom—humanity’s freedom from its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo was the master brain behind this auspicious break up of the Congress but for which there would have been a Congress without any thrust for freedom

The first great Congress split at Surat was strictly ideological, resulting in the concept of Swaraj sinking into the nation's psyche. It was Sri Aurobindo who was behind the significant turn.

—an unimaginable spectre. By then he had become immensely popular because of the Government’s vain effort to punish him for his articles in the *Bande Mataram*, inspiring Tagore to

come out with his immortal tribute “Aurobindo, Rabindranath salutes thee./ Friend, O my country’s friend, O voice-incarnate, free, of India’s soul.”

Here is a glimpse of his travel from Kolkata to Surat, as narrated by Barindra Kumar Ghose:

The train started in the midst of deafening cries of “Bande Mataram” and the whole thousand-mile route from Kharagpur to Surat was a triumphal journey of lights, crowds, and continued cheering....

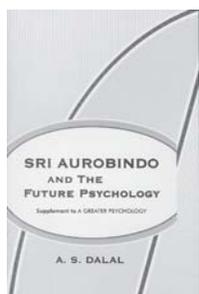
Aurobindo, the new idol of the nation, was hardly known then by his face, and at every small and big station a frantic crowd rushed about in the platform looking for him in the first and second class carriages, while all the time Aurobindo sat unobserved in a third class compartment.

Sri Aurobindo in Surat, compiled by Hiranmayi, is a highly valuable narrative of this historic event and other events relevant to it, enriched with records left by Nevinson, Barindra Kumar Ghose, K. M. Munshi and others. It reproduces reports and comments from the newspapers of the day and several documents containing the attitudes of the Moderates vis-à-vis the Nationalists, among other facts that help us to develop an insight into the spirit of the time. This compilation, which was released during the centenary celebration of Sri Aurobindo’s visit

to Surat – efficiently organized by the Sri Aurobindo Centre in Surat, a branch of the Sri Aurobindo Society – deserves commendation, and we congratulate the compiler and her able associates. No wonder there are some proof-related errors that would of course be eliminated in the next edition, for it had to be ready by an unalterable date.

— Manoj Das

Shri Manoj Das is a well-known writer. A Padma awardee, he is also a recipient of the Saraswati Samman and Sahitya Akademi awards.



Sri Aurobindo and the Future Psychology
Supplement to A Greater Psychology

— A. S. Dalal with contributions by
Brant Cortright, Michael Miovic,
Alok Pandey
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo
International Centre of Education,
Pondicherry

408 pp., ISBN 978-81-7058-869-6, Rs 125

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Dr. A. S. Dalal is well known for the compilations he has made from the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Making compilations is not as easy as it looks. One has to find the right balance between one's desire to be comprehensive and the need to avoid duplication; one has to include enough context to do justice to the complexity and subtleties of the original text, and yet avoid leading the reader away from the exact topic in which he is interested; and, most difficult of all, one has to take great care that in one's selection of certain pieces and the rejection of others, one does not create a skewed or distorted picture of the original. The major works of Sri Aurobindo are for many beginners on the path of Yoga rather daunting, and in the Mother's Collected Works one may need to read through a lot of material before one finds exactly what one is looking for. So there is a legitimate need for compilations, and amongst the many disciples who have tried their hand at putting them

together, Dr. Dalal stands out by the exemplary conscientiousness with which he has taken up this work. His books have not only introduced innumerable newcomers to the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but they continue to guide and inspire even those who are quite familiar with the original texts, but who still enjoy seeing all they have written on a certain topic together in one place.

What is much less well known is that Dr. Dalal has also written over the years quite a large number of carefully crafted articles dealing with a wide range of psychological topics. The essays collected in this book are, like his compilations, in a class by themselves. While many authors who write about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are eager to show off the brilliance of their own ideas, or at least the flourish of their own style and enthusiasm, Dr. Dalal does nothing of the sort. He limits himself with an

The many comparisons show, beyond a shadow of doubt, how far Sri Aurobindo's work exceeds that of these founding fathers of modern psychology in terms of subtlety, profundity, comprehensiveness and even intellectual coherence.

admirable discipline to the rendering of Sri Aurobindo's ideas, using here and there texts by the Mother to further clarify difficult issues. Some of these articles deal exclusively with Sri Aurobindo's own thought, but in most of them he compares Sri Aurobindo's ideas to a small number of prominent Western writers: William James and Sigmund Freud, who were elder to Sri Aurobindo, Carl Jung and Roberto Assagioli, who were somewhat younger, and Ken Wilber, who is our own contemporary. One chapter is dedicated to a comparison with R. H. Bucke, who wrote the 1901 classic text *Cosmic Consciousness*, and another to Daniel C. Dennet, who defends one of the most extreme forms of physicalist thought.

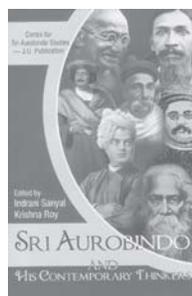
I must admit that I'm a bit ambivalent about these comparisons. Modern psychology is a highly complex field in which thousands of authors debate their findings and opinions in a variety of specialised sub-fields. William James, Freud and Jung, though undoubtedly great thinkers in their day, do not occupy any longer a prominent place in these discussions, and their strong

presence in some chapters gives, for those familiar with the present “scene”, a somewhat dated feel to the book. This is a pity because the book purports, and rightly so, to deal with the future of psychology. There is of course also a sense in which these comparisons do help. They show, beyond a shadow of doubt, how far Sri Aurobindo’s work goes beyond that of these founding fathers of modern psychology in terms of subtlety, profundity, comprehensiveness and even intellectual coherence. The lack of connection with the present discussion in psychology is, moreover, compensated for, at least to some extent, by the three guest-contributors. Brant Cortright lays a connection with psychotherapeutic practice in the USA, Michael Miovic connects Sri Aurobindo’s ideas to recent developments in integral and transpersonal psychology, and Alok Pandey shows how he applies Sri Aurobindo’s thought in his own psychiatric practice in India.

The greatest asset of this book remains, however, that one can simply trust it. Dr. Dalal is here, as in his compilations, admirably conscientious, and one would be hard-pressed to find any serious error or misleading remark in any of these chapters. This crucial quality alone makes *Sri Aurobindo and the Future Psychology* a book one can unhesitatingly recommend to anybody interested in the psychological aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s work. In fact the only sentence in the book that made me feel uneasy occurs in the Preface. It reads, “One is apt to get a better and more comprehensive understanding of Sri Aurobindo through a study of his works by subjects rather than by reading them from cover to cover.” This goes, for me at least, one step too far. By immersing oneself in the original works, one gets a sense of the depth, comprehensiveness and majesty of Sri Aurobindo’s being that no compilation or third-person essay can ever convey. We must hope that these essays, like Dr. Dalal’s compilations, will not only provide the reader with a reliable intellectual introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s psychological thought, but that they will also guide him towards the indescribable privilege of reading the original works “from cover to cover”.

— Matthijs Cornelissen

Dr Cornelissen is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library and teaches Psychological Aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s Work at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.



Sri Aurobindo and His Contemporary Thinkers

— Articles by various authors
 Publisher: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd.,
 New Delhi in Association with
 Jadavpur University, Kolkata
 349 pp., ISBN 978-81-246-0428-1,
 Rs 600
 Size: 14x22 cm
 Binding: Hard Cover

Following the publication of *Understanding Thoughts of Sri Aurobindo*, Indrani Sanyal and Krishna Roy of the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Calcutta, have compiled a set of eighteen scholarly essays on Sri Aurobindo and his contemporaries in the ideational context of what has been called the Bengal Renaissance. Sri Aurobindo’s physical involvement in the politics and culture of early Bengal nationalism was of relatively short duration (1905–1910), albeit an intense and all-sided participation which internalized the entire regional history of the movement and left a powerful creative impress in the milieu of its time and space. Moreover, the discursive background of this involvement continued to develop organically and find voice throughout his life in his subjective articulation just as his own situated contribution continued to resonate in later Indian nationalism. Thus this collection of considered, interpretive contemplations fills an important need in our historical understanding. But more importantly, it is the post-colonial legacy of these engagements which draws us today by its fertile and future-gazing content, inviting reflection not merely on India’s but also the world’s regeneration at a time of global ferment.

The term “Bengal Renaissance” was a form of self-inscription devised within this milieu itself, and used to refer to its own historicity, with its beginnings in the late 18th century and extending into the second decade of the 20th century. In this self-identification is carried the sense of a rebirth and a historical reference to the 15th and 16th century European movement of the same name, marked by its all-round creative reconstruction, leading to a “new birth,” or what may arguably be thought of as the seeds of modernity. The term is omnipresent in this volume, explicitly referenced in many of its essays and forming the subject of consideration in at least four of its essays—those by D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Rakhil Nath, Dilip Kumar Roy and Dilip Kumar Chatterjee. Of these, Rakhil Chandra Nath traces the historiography of the term in the context of Bengal nationalism, drawing out its many divergent

interpretations and valuations. Here we realize that the genealogy of this “renaissance” itself is in question, symptomatic of the variety of trajectories encompassed within it. Is it Rammohun Roy, the Brahma Samaj and the post-Enlightenment reformist tradition which stand at the head of this body of critique and creation or is it Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra, the polarity of indigenous spiritual and religious awakening? Again, is there any reality of resemblance with the Italian origins of the Renaissance in medieval Europe or is the use of the term here an inflated romantic misnomer? This question also comes up in the other essays on this subject. Marxist criticisms of this “renaissance” being a bourgeois hot-house flower with little or no popular involvement due to its cultural investment in the language of the colonial masters, its economic collusion with the same colonial powers and the Hindu communal potential of exclusionary violence it is supposed to carry are traced in some detail. I may say here that more recent, left-oriented critiques of this period or its figures have attempted more complex and nuanced approaches, seeing them on the one hand, in Gramscian power terms, as constituting a middle ground of autonomy from colonial culture and elitism over subaltern culture so as to wrest national power from the colonizer and rule the subaltern; and on the other hand, as initiating a critique of modernity with far-reaching post-modern and post-colonial possibilities. Rakhal Nath ends his essay by pointing to the widespread creative critique and rethinking of Indian culture initiated during this period, and the lasting effects of this initiative, much in need of our consideration and continuation today. In this, and in the other essays in this volume, Sri Aurobindo’s views on the term “renaissance” in the context of Bengal are invoked, where he demonstrates the presence of three successive strands or movements within it—(1) a reception of European thought and societal forms and a comparative evaluation and in some cases, rejection of old or effete Indian forms based on these; (2) a movement of assimilation characterized by a reaction of Indian cultural forms stressing both the spirit and letter of tradition and criticizing the foreign culture; and (3) a “new creation” characterized by a full emergence of the Indian spirit adapting the modern forms creatively to its purposes and

nature. This scope of the “renaissance” sets the tone which pervades the essays in the volume, exemplifying the powerfully creative spiritual turn given to the forms and structures of a variety of modern disciplines originating in post-Renaissance and post-Enlightenment Europe. Among these essays on the Bengal Renaissance, it is particularly refreshing to come across Dilip Kumar Chatterjee’s paper on Sri Aurobindo and Ireland where an alternate derivation of the term “renaissance” is drawn out, based on Sri Aurobindo’s own proclivities and pronouncements, and at the same time, drawing the discussion out of its provincial Bengal reference and relating it to a trans-national context.

Sri Aurobindo’s involvement in the cultural and revolutionary politics of the time touched on the wide gamut of thought and life-activities constituting the ferment of the movement, and the remaining essays in the volume touch on all these areas, either through a comparative consideration of his ideas with those of other contemporaries or through a consideration of examples

Indian nationalism is seen as having its basis in a protean and integral spirituality adapting itself to an illimitable variety of social forms and inviting us today to embrace it, just as Sri Aurobindo's generation did in its time and place.

which left their related legacies. The various disciplines in question include philosophy, politics, aesthetics, literature, history, social thought and education. The issue introduced earlier – of the reformist and revivalist poles of the discourse, characterized by Rammohun Roy and Vivekananda

respectively – are addressed in two essays by Krishna Roy (Rammohun Roy on women’s liberation) and Tirthanath Bandyopadhyay (renaissance aspects of Vivekananda). Here we find how these so-called poles intersect and overlap—the non-sectarian spiritual humanism of Vivekananda and the universalist emancipatory Hinduism of Rammohun. As something of a companion piece to the article on Rammohun Roy and women’s liberation is Madhumita Chattopadhyay’s finely crafted essay “Outlook Towards Women: Influence of Indian Renaissance.”

“Sri Aurobindo’s contemporaries” in this powerfully creative period interacted together in a participatory culture through life-contacts and episodes, bringing into manifestation the ideas being discussed in this book. Some of these contemporaries include Rabindranath Tagore, who

was senior by about ten years to Sri Aurobindo, and Satis Chandra Mukherjee, who was associated with both Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath in the effort at developing a national education, which would yield the National College, whose first principal was Sri Aurobindo, whose first day of operation was 15th August 1906, Sri Aurobindo's birthday, and which houses the centre which has published this present volume. Two essays, one by Rama Prasad De (on Satis Chandra) and one by Amal Kumar De, deal with this saga of education in nationalist Bengal and Sri Aurobindo's part in it. Unfortunately, only a few essays here give us a taste of the lived culture of these contemporaries and their interactions, Rama Prasad De's paper being exemplary in this account. It is hoped that more writing of this kind emerges, so that a sense of the collective and participatory reality of the Bengal Renaissance becomes more palpable as a form of *communitas*.

Kireet Joshi's essay "Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Nationalism, Internationalism and Contemporary Crisis" opens the volume and, as may be expected from Prof. Joshi, sets the reflective tone for the reader. Nationalism has become a much-criticized term in contemporary scholarship, and Prof. Joshi's laying out of Sri Aurobindo's views on this subject disabuses the reader of any misgivings regarding sectarian and chauvinistic or racial/religious/ethnic forms of nationalism on the one hand, and the administrative artificiality of the nation-state on the other. Nationalism, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is shown to be a force of creative culture, drawing on a lived and constantly renewed interpretive history, uniting a people. Indian nationalism is seen as having its basis in a protean and integral spirituality adapting itself to an illimitable variety of social forms and inviting us today to embrace it, just as Sri Aurobindo's generation did in its time and place. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo's notion of a progressive social history is brought out by the essay, in which nationalism is a fluid form, constituted from below by communitarian individual choices based in spiritual fraternity, in relation with wider trans-national realities, and expanding towards an internationalism, based on a "universal religion of humanity." However, this is neither a religion with coded forms of sectarian practice nor

humanitarianism. It is a rich unity in diversity founded on human identity through the perception and realization of the soul.

Drawing on similar sources, Indrani Sanyal discusses the philosophies of history developed by Sri Aurobindo and by Pramath Nath Mukhopadhyaya. A philosophy of

history is a teleological theory, and the development of such theories in the Bengal Renaissance is perhaps predictable, given its character of resistance to the teleology of civilizational progress based in the Enlightenment and coded into colonialism. In the philosophies of history of both these figures, Indian spiritual ideas are invoked to provide a universal

significance to world temporality. Dr. Sanyal first touches on several examples of philosophy of history developed in the West, including those of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Herbert Spenser. Dr. Sanyal shows how, in *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo adapts the teleological ideas of another German thinker, Lamprecht, in presenting an interpretation of history as developing through symbolic, typical-conventional, individualist and subjective phases. Sri Aurobindo's adaptation here is also an original interpretation of the *yugas* of Puranic theory. Similarly, she discusses the ideas of Pramath Mukhopadhyaya, showing his historicism to rest on a successive passage of the universal soul or *atman* through the four *purusharthas* of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. In this, he develops the idea of the philosopher of history, *itihasa*vid, arriving at the subjective and experiential knowledge of history through identification in consciousness with the universal self, *Vaishvanara*, drawing on the yogic idea of *Vaishvanaravidya* from the *Chandogya Upanishad*.

Sri Aurobindo's own views on creative culture, particularly poetry and its future, in the light of the spiritual remolding of language is brought out in a lucid essay on the significance of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in the Indian Renaissance by Supriyo Bhattacharya. Here Dr. Bhattacharya quotes Sri Aurobindo to show how the rich tradition of Bengali spiritual literature is brought to bear on the lived subjective experiences of modern reality by Rabindranath in his poetry. He also shows how Rabindranath draws subtly from European poetic forms but subjects these to the intonations and meanings of the

Sri Aurobindo's own views on creative culture, particularly poetry and its future, in the light of the spiritual remoulding of language is brought out in a lucid essay on the significance of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in the Indian Renaissance.

Indian spirit. In a similar vein, an essay on the little-known philosopher Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya by Tara Chatterjea and one on the famous philosopher of aesthetics, Acharya Brojendranath Seal by Sudhir Kumar Nandi, bring out the intensive hermeneutic engagement between Indian and Western philosophy in their works and the brilliant, original conclusions they arrive at through this engagement.

A final issue of interest in the volume concerns the political views of Sri Aurobindo vis-à-vis his contemporaries, predecessors and successors. An essay on Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo by Manjula Bose, two on Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo by Sushmita Bhowmik and Sujata Mukherjee and one on Sri Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhale by Aparna Banerjee make up this strand. It is well known that both Rabindranath and Gandhi were not too enamored of the recognition of violence by Sri Aurobindo as a legitimate means of political action. What is less well known is the fact that Sri Aurobindo also actively wrote on and promoted the doctrine of passive resistance, boycott and *swadeshi*, which would become the cornerstones of Gandhian activism. In this, we see once more the unattached flexibility of spiritual transcendence and utilization of opposites being demonstrated by Sri Aurobindo as against the rigidity of mental ethics. Each of these essays opens up the tricky issues involved in the arguments between their protagonists and does an admirable job of commentary and interpretation.

All in all, this is a most valuable work of scholarship and a timely intervention to the contemporary Indian and global impasse of thought and culture. The ideas and figures it introduces invite us to further study and a continuation of the creative and hermeneutic exchange which they opened up more than a century ago.

— Debashish Banerji

Debashish Banerji has a doctorate in Art History, and teaches courses in South Asian, East Asian, and Islamic Art History in Los Angeles, USA. He also teaches online courses in Indian Philosophy and is Director of the International Centre for Integral Studies at New Delhi.

I am with you (Part II and III)

Remembrance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

— Kailas Jhaveri

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Binding: Soft Cover



“Kailas” stands for the meeting point of the earth and heaven, for here atop this mountain peak the great and beneficent god Siva sports in his solitude. So do we find the same with Kailas-behen, her book a living testimony of how human nature can be touched and raised up by the loving hand of Grace. This book, divided into Parts II and III, is a continuation of her previous work, Part I, which dealt with her life before coming to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, her rich and affluent life in America, the dream destination of many a modern youth. But here we find a pilgrim soul leaving the affluence and the comforts it provides to pursue another dream and secure for herself another wealth than what the world can offer. It is the wealth of the Spirit that she seeks, to participate in the Divine action upon earth under the direct guidance of the Mother. The book is the story of the author pursuing this divine dream first in some quiet corner of Pondicherry in modest surroundings and next stepping out into the world at large as a messenger and communicant of the dream Divine.

We can clearly see from the beautiful account of the author's relationship with the Mother that there is no artificial division in the eyes of the Divine between the mundane material and the sublime spiritual.

The first part of the book (Part II) deals with her life at Pondicherry, her aspirations and her struggles; and through all this we see the hand of the Divine Mother leading and carrying her through everything. This part of the book is representative of the Divine dealings with our humanity and reveals to us a glimpse of Her ways and Her workings in and through the uniqueness of each nature. It shows us practically what the mind can never otherwise grasp: the

mysterious alchemic touch of Divine Love and how it transforms our life. It starts with a touching account of how, when she expressed her wish to come and settle down in the Ashram, the Mother reminded her of the difficult life here compared to the American comforts that the aspirant Kailas must have been used to. The disciple's reply is truly inspiring, a cry from the very depths of her soul:

Are all the American comforts much to give up when I consider in balance the perfume of Your living presence and the touch of the Earth, sanctified by my Gurus, the Divine Mother and the Lord incarnate—the earth where “enchanted from the fragrance of the flowers leaps every moment to remember and the joy recalled in the song of every bird” would thrill my being with joy? ...

I will leave this rich land of comfort with a salute of gratitude for all the charm she has added to my life with her luxuriantly beautiful forms, enriching my life. I will leave her not out of any disappointment or disgust, but because the time has come when I must embrace the loving dust of my Mother's Land, where the Sun shines with all its Splendour and Glory, the Land that can grow and blossom, flower and fulfil my soul. I know I will be happy anywhere and under all circumstances where You place me, because You will be with me everywhere.

The second section (Part III) deals with the Mother's Presence and Her continuing action after what we ignorantly call Her passing. Passing out of our limited human sight, yes, but not out of our hearts and the inner chambers of life where the visible and the tangible meets the invisible and the unknown. We see in this latter part how the Mother continues to guide all who are open and call Her for help not only in matters spiritual but also in matters mundane. For as we can clearly see from the beautiful account of the author's relationship with the Mother, there is no such artificial division in the eyes of the Divine between the mundane material and the sublime spiritual. All is Her glory and Her marvel and Her grace, and to the heart that can hear, the tiniest grain of sand is an occasion for Her worship and bears the stamp of Her message. The Mother, as recounted in this book, knows and receives not only our inmost thoughts, feelings and aspirations but also, depending upon our attitude, our external work and outward actions. Not only does She take charge of our spiritual life but also the material aspects

of our existence. All this comes out so beautifully and with such a force of simplicity in this book, which is written in a very direct, almost a conversational style.

What makes the book even more interesting and in certain respects an important document are some of the author's deep reflections and compilations on relevant issues such as the reshaping of humanity, religion and spirituality, human unity, India – including the 1971 war –, education, and the Integral Yoga. Especially important are some of her writings on Auroville and education that have the stamp of the Mother's approval and appreciation. They are like divine documents, and we are very thankful to Kailas for sharing with us some of these priceless treasures. This brings a collective dimension to the book and gives it a universal appeal and an enduring value that goes beyond her individual life. It becomes not only the story of an individual soul helped by the Divine on its unique journey but also the story of humanity on its collective march, with the Divine intervening at crucial steps to lead it towards its inevitable future. There is, for example, a behind-the-scenes account of the beginnings of Auroville, and later on Dr Adishesiah's 1969 radio interview on Auroville. Kailas recounts that after listening to a tape of the interview, the Mother commented: “A very powerful being came down and tied Auroville to the ground. It was needed and he did it. Now, Auroville will be a reality and the world will see it.”

The title *I am with you* becomes thereby not only the Divine assurance for one person but for all who struggle and hope and aspire to make this earth a better place. Thus everyone can find something of interest for himself, something inspiring, even something that meets his unique need in this book.

The book is reasonably priced at Rs 250 considering that it runs to more than 600 pages, which are neatly presented. It also contains photographs of some of the cards painted by the author and sent to the Mother or received by Her, adding an artistic and colourful dimension. It is also worthwhile to mention the Mother's work on flowers with Richard Pearson, as this section will delight and enlighten those interested in learning how flowers can help us on the path of Yoga, turning “the razor's edge” into a delightful journey, the path of joy and smiles. It brings home the point that the Divine communicates to us in thousands of ways if we care to listen.

In addition to some compilations from Sri Aurobindo's writings, there are several beautiful and inspiring talks by

the author such as “Man,—Slave or Free?”, “Relevance of Sri Aurobindo to the Modern World”, and others on issues of general interest. Also included are detailed travelogues of her visits to the USA and Europe and finally, as icing on the cake, some of her poems. Indeed, this account of the long and winding journey of her life culminates with these inspired lines from one of her poems:

*As I sip drop by drop,
lighter than air am I lifted
to Thy home of Bliss,
where a thousand resplendent suns
blossom like lotuses of variant hues,
awaiting Thy command to new-create
Thy worlds of Truth, Beauty and Bliss.*

*Thou art seated there, Mother supreme,
With Thy radiant majesty divine,
Wisdom piercing through lustrous eyes
and Love through every breath of Thine,
weaving with soft delicate fingers
Thy perfections of Beauty and
splendours of Love, Truth and Delight!*

*Spontaneously my being sings:
'Victory to Thee, O Mother Divine!
And Glory to Thee, Sri Aurobindo!
Salutations to the Lord Supreme!'*

— 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.

The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilisation. It is the turn which this aim imposes on all the rich and luxuriant variety of its forms and rhythms that gives to it its unique character. For even what it has in common with other cultures gets from that turn a stamp of striking originality and solitary greatness. A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life, but it even tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*

India and the Future of South Asia

— Kosha Shah

Publisher: Auroville Arts, Auroville

84 pp., Rs 80

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



This slim book *India and the Future of South Asia* is interesting for three important reasons. First, it reminds those who study political science

and international relations that Sri Aurobindo is not just a spiritual writer but a great visionary with brilliant insights on international relations and politics. His major works *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *War and Self-Determination*, along with letters and conversations, form the primary sources for the passages quoted here and show us how keen and futuristic his approach was.

Second, it demonstrates the existence of a vision based not on the ordinary reactive intellect of a purely surface understanding but drawn from planes of consciousness existing above the mind. In reference to the rejection by Indian leaders of advice given by Sri Aurobindo on the Cripps proposals, the author quotes an observation by K. M. Munshi:

He [Sri Aurobindo] spoke again when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his first proposal. He said, “India should accept it.” We rejected the advice ... but today we realize that if the first proposal had been accepted, there would have been no partition, no refugees, and no Kashmir problem.

This example bears testimony to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual genius and vision, which embraced all aspects of life. This kind of perspective is still an enigma for the scientific temper of an industrial society or the self-aggrandizing life of a consumer society. It is inspiring to read this book, nicely compiled and annotated by Kosha Shah, because it reveals in full measure the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the world situation, the nature of political power, regional equations and the predominant role which Asia has to play on the world stage. Books like this will certainly remove from the general mindset the impression that spirituality is something divorced from life and its day-to-day problems.

Third, the author brings out one of the core teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—that man must learn not to live in the outermost reality of his external self but move to a deeper reality within; to find, and unite with, his psychic being, whose innate nature expresses only unity and peace, equality and brotherhood. Political powers and international organizations around the world claim to work for peace, equality and brotherhood, but unfortunately we see no real changes or results, as they focus only on reconstructing again and again the external measures and ignore the need for a complete change of consciousness and a new orientation.

Had additional passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother echoing these ideas been included here it could have brought their teachings more fully alive to the reader. However, we do find Sri Aurobindo's words from *The Human Cycle* on the practical method of achieving this unity and peace, equality and brotherhood, which are basic constitutional norms in legal systems around the world, although not yet fully understood and practiced. This selection from *The Human Cycle* finds an echo in one of Sri Aurobindo's "five dreams", the dream of "a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind", that he recorded in his Independence Day message, with which this book begins. By the way, the author's choice to bring the voice of Sri Aurobindo proclaiming his dreams is grand and adds vibrancy to the whole book. In all five dreams India's role is important, but especially the last two highlight India's spiritual gift to the world and her leadership in the spiritual evolution "which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness".

Reading the first chapter along with the third, fourth and fifth gives us a clear understanding of what South Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent are in their culture, civilization, religion and polity, all invariably mixed with a spiritual essence at the core. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who made spirituality life-affirming and life-motivating, gave humanity a new hope and faith in the resurgence of life. They expressed clearly that the apparent sordid state of the world we are seeing now is only a transitional phase. It is evidence of the churning that takes place as the earth prepares for the emergence of a new mould as its next step in the evolution. The present transition is towards the spirit of oneness and the dream of a perfect society. The author echoes these ideas of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that the political world that is currently caught up in this state of transition is only a part of this collective universal churning. This will

manifest a new international order of peace and unity among all the nations and especially those in South Asia, as this new spiritual wave in its movement around the world takes its birth from this region. This role for the South Asian region in general and India in particular gives added meaning to the Mother's map of true India that also includes Pakistan, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka. The picture on page 16 of the Mother seated before this map along with the then Indian leaders evokes something deep and convincing that cannot be explained in words. Also the three quotations from Volume Thirteen of the Collected Works of the Mother which appear next to the title page make the reader feel a force of spiritual assurance like that of the Pythia over the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

Political powers and international organizations claim to work for peace, equality and brotherhood, but they focus only on external measures and ignore the need for a complete change of consciousness and a new orientation.

Chapter Six deals with conceptual ideas about the federal system, nationalism and statehood. Sri Aurobindo's views are self-sufficient and self-explanatory and to put them into practice is the only real solution. Sri Aurobindo's endorsement of Tagore's suggestion of a federal system for India recounted on page 45 is relevant even today when we see how unstructured federal and constitutional powers can be usurped for the personal gain of political leaders and bureaucrats.

The author has explained on page 10 that her aim is not to get into every detail of each problem this region is currently facing but only to make a connection between the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the present situation. In the later chapters, however, she does present her own political analysis and suggested solutions. Some readers may not agree with her interpretations and conclusions, but given the new line of development in the field of writing on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which is an application of their vision to today's practical problems, one has to appreciate what she has written about regional groupings such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the South Asian Confederation. The book is not the usual rendering and

interpretation of their teachings or a bare compilation. For example, Sri Aurobindo's simple description of the principle of self-determination found on page 43, which is the basis for any confederation, grouping or association in the assertion of its rights, is something yet to be found in international legal and political literature. It is noteworthy to see how the author has made use of this description in her analysis of the EU, ASEAN, AFTA and SAARC. But it remains to be seen how her application of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual dream, the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and India's return to her great role in the progress of human civilization, through these confederations and cooperative efforts would come true.

India and her contribution to the future of South Asia figure prominently in the present system of international relations. The world has recognized the role of South Asia and India in particular not just in terms of political power and economic strength but very much in terms of social, cultural and psychological developments, which have their roots in a spiritual culture that is native to the soil of India. The last few lines by the author in the concluding chapter give the reader a real challenge:

Perhaps in this world of today when money rules, this may seem out of touch with reality. But there is another reality growing behind what we see on the surface. If we can make an effort to understand that, then we can bring both of these together. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given a glimpse of what humanity is moving towards. If we can take their hints and act consciously, then inevitably our way forward will be not only easier but it will also be a fuller progress.

The annexure provides an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo's *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, and a short bibliography supplies notes for further research. This book is a must for students of political science and international studies, legal pundits and historians.

— K. Parameswaran

K. Parameswaran holds a Masters degree in International and Constitutional Law and a doctorate in International Law. He taught International Law and Relations, Constitutional Jurisprudence, and Administrative Law at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels at various universities, including the National Law School of India University, Bangalore.

The elimination of war is one of the cherished ideals and expectations of the age. But what lies at the root of this desire? A greater unity of heart, sympathy, understanding between men and nations, a settled will to get rid of national hatreds, greeds, ambitions, all the fertile seeds of strife and war? ... But of this deeper thing there may be something in sentiment, but there is still very little in action and dominant motive. For the masses of men the idea is rather to labour and produce and amass at ease and in security without the disturbance of war; for the statesmen and governing classes the idea is to have peace and security for the maintenance of past acquisitions and an untroubled domination and exploitation of the world by the great highly organized imperial and industrial nations without the perturbing appearance if new unsatisfied hungers and the peril of violent unrests, revolts, revolutions. War, it was hoped at one time, would eliminate itself by becoming impossible, but that delightfully easy solution no longer commands credit... War and violent revolution can be eliminated, if we will, though not without immense difficulty, but on the condition that we get rid of the inner causes of war and the constantly accumulating Karma of successful injustice of which violent revolutions are the natural reactions.

Sri Aurobindo, *War and Self-Determination*
Foreword, written in 1920

* * * * *

The individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being.... They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge – the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter – can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*

Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader

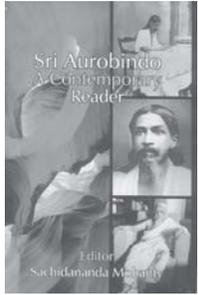
— Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty

Publisher: Routledge, New Delhi

235 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-46093-4, Rs 275

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover



The book edited by Professor Sachidananda Mohanty is indeed a distinctive contribution to the field, enhancing our understanding of the scholarship represented in the multifaceted nature of Sri Aurobindo's system of ideas and thoughts. Sri Aurobindo is mostly known for his contribution to yoga and philosophy. His theory of evolution and the details he worked out in *The Life Divine* are recognized as a seminal contribution to the development of contemporary Indian metaphysics. Similarly, it is felt that Sri Aurobindo's work on the synthesis of yoga which gives rise to the idea of an integral yoga – a system that he developed – and his interpretations of the Gita, the Upanishads and other Indian texts singularly point out the creative and original nature of his work. Sri Aurobindo is thus regarded as one of the foremost and creative thinkers of contemporary Indian philosophy. Accordingly, various studies and anthologies have come out covering these aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought. But there is a strange anomaly or a bias that is noticed here. It is reflected in our approach to Sri Aurobindo where we mostly emphasize these two aspects, namely, yoga and philosophy. In the process, we tend to ignore the many-sided nature of Sri Aurobindo's thought and neglect to appreciate his contributions in other areas, thus missing the holistic, integral nature of his writings.

It is in relation to this one-sided approach that Prof. Mohanty's book assumes its significance. The book is a compilation from Sri Aurobindo's extraordinarily rich writings on issues relating to social, political and cultural matters. There are not many studies available addressing these aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought. Prof. Mohanty projects Sri Aurobindo as a cultural critic who holds a definite position on issues which assume utmost importance in our contemporary social and cultural life, such as the "conflict between the East and the West, nationalism and internationalism, religion and secularism, merit and social justice, pacifism and militancy", etc. In relation to these issues, Sri Aurobindo takes a basic stand

which emphasizes the need for accepting a schema that consists of a fourfold categorization: the individual, the community, the nation and the world. All our social and political problems must be placed within this arena of a fourfold categorization so that we can see how conflicts and diversities found at the individual level have their bearing on the other three levels. The categories involved, though historically seen as mutually conflicting, are not really so. They will not be in conflict, Sri Aurobindo observes, only if we can integrate or harmonize them. Harmony is a positive notion and it is achieved not by denying the differences but by accepting them as an essential part of communitarian living. If this is not recognized then we will inevitably fall under the tyranny of the almighty state where individuals will be seen as mere shadows. Differences and diversities are thus recognized as important components without which human society would become grossly totalitarian. But

According to Sri Aurobindo the notion of liberty becomes a doctrine of competitive individualism when approached purely from the standpoint of ego.

the very logic of societal growth demands the transcendence of the diversities and differences exhibited in society. The unification that will be achieved, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, should not be an outcome based on mere consensus. It is not an outcome at which we arrive through some mechanical principles. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the right kind of unification, understood in the sense of harmony, is possible only through our spiritual endeavour.

In all of his works relating to social and political matters, Sri Aurobindo unhesitatingly puts forward the idea of a spiritual goal to be the one which alone can provide a solution to the problems arising out of our disharmonious social existence and conflicting social order. In *The Ideal of Human Unity* he puts man at the centre of the onward march of society. While talking about the religion of humanity, he says that social ideals like liberty, equality and fraternity will turn out to be "unreal" if sought to be "achieved through the external machinery of society". As long as man is under the grip of ego, whether in the form of the individual ego or the communal ego, these goals or ideals, though political

and economic in nature, cannot be achieved. According to Sri Aurobindo the notion of liberty becomes a doctrine of competitive individualism when approached purely from the standpoint of ego. Similarly, the notion of equality becomes mechanical and coercive. Equality is achieved mechanically by denying “the variations of Nature”. This results in coercion. In Sri Aurobindo’s analysis, unless these notions are based on brotherhood failure is inevitable. But the notion of brotherhood should not be seen as something which is externally available. It is, on the other hand, a part of the internal nature of man or as Sri Aurobindo says, “It exists only in the soul.”

In *War and Self-Determination* Sri Aurobindo makes a similar claim when he says that freedom is the ultimate basis of all our existence—political, moral and spiritual. It is the way one uses freedom that becomes crucial to our life and society. No external system, be it economic or political, can ensure freedom in its real sense. It is claimed, for example, that capitalism as an economic system ensures freedom. But does it really do so? A capitalist may talk about freedom in relation to a certain market mechanism which aims at maximizing profit. A ruthless profit motive thus comes to define freedom, but only at the cost of suppressing labour. Sri Aurobindo thus argues that freedom cannot be ensured externally because the locus of freedom lies in the agent itself. Freedom has to be internally realized. It is this internal notion of freedom that Sri Aurobindo characterizes as the idea of self-determination, an idea he uses to analyze the causes that lead to the outbreak of war. It is a wrong understanding of liberty or the principle of self-determination that is ultimately responsible for war.

His book *The Human Cycle* argues for the attainment of the same goal involving the autonomy of man—the unfolding of the real self. In this light, Sri Aurobindo examines the various theories such as individualism, social democracy, proletariat totalitarianism, fascism, communism, etc. The common denominator of all these otherwise different doctrines is the belief in the supremacy of Reason. Modern civilization, based on the triumph of Reason, can therefore be termed a mental civilization. But identifying such a mental civilization as the final stage of human progress is a mistake as it is only one stage in the continuing evolution of man. Humanity’s ultimate destiny lies in a spiritual transformation where man is seen, to put it in Sri Aurobindo’s words, as “a social being incarnated for a divine fulfillment upon earth”.

Prof. Mohanty’s work gives an excellent account of all these aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s social and political thought. But at the same time he very rightly holds that there is an underlying principle which defines the very core of all of Sri Aurobindo’s works, be they social, political, metaphysical or literary. His compilation helps to give us a total picture of Sri Aurobindo by drawing our attention to his deep involvement in the social and cultural history of mankind.

In the introduction to the book the author, after giving a short biographical sketch of Sri Aurobindo, goes into the details of the thematic background that constitutes his thought. A substantial part of the introduction thus deals with issues which are of utmost contemporary relevance. These issues are essentially concerned with Sri Aurobindo’s response to the crisis of contemporary culture. The issues Prof. Mohanty identifies for discussion are the tyranny of the state idea, religion versus secular modernity, the problem of self-determination, and identity politics in a multicultural society. These are not mere theoretical or conceptual issues. They indicate the four dominant areas of our social and political life which, in Prof. Mohanty’s reading, contribute to defining culture. He very effectively brings out the significance of Sri Aurobindo’s stand on each of these issues and the solutions that he offered. This account shows that Sri Aurobindo’s deep concern for the spiritual upliftment of mankind is not other-worldly. It is, on the other hand, encompassing in nature, going into the minute details of our cultural existence. Sri Aurobindo’s solution to overcome the tyranny of the state cannot be brushed aside as merely spiritual. True, at the ultimate level it is spiritual, but Sri Aurobindo arrives at this on the basis of an analysis that involves the relationship between the state and individual. The tyranny of the state exists due to the lack of a harmonious relationship between the state and individual. This is an issue which has been addressed by such political thinkers as Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. Marx resolves this issue by suggesting the withering away of the state, whereas Mill, in spite of his best efforts, could not find a resolution; the relationship between the state and the individual remains problematic in his treatise *On Liberty*. Sri Aurobindo perceives this relationship from a completely different perspective. It has been so far seen from a purely practical point of view, suggesting various adjustments through the introduction of rules and regulations. But such measures do not have any lasting value because they do not rest on any foundation. The only way this relationship can work, Sri Aurobindo asserts,

is if it is based on deeper psychological and spiritual understanding.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's stand on religion versus secular modernity is highly revealing. There is a belief in some quarters that Sri Aurobindo was a religious Hindu nationalist. Leftist intellectuals used it against Sri Aurobindo in order to reject him whereas rightists used it in order to consolidate their position on communalism. Prof. Mohanty has admirably shown how both are profoundly wrong by dispelling the myth that Sri Aurobindo was a religious Hindu nationalist. The textual evidence gives a completely different picture. Sri Aurobindo's writing rules out the possibility of Hindu nationalism being established in the present time (*On Nationalism*, pp.483–84). But questions invariably come up: "Where does the fault lie? How does this myth arise?" The fault lies in our misunderstanding of Sri Aurobindo's use of the terms religion and spirituality. Sri Aurobindo rejects institutional religion because of its dogma and narrow sectarian attitude. Hence, it is not religion but spirituality that he talks about. Spirituality is universal in man and thus it is beyond any dogma or creed. It expresses human essence. It is an alternative stand—an alternative to both religion and secular modernity.

Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical thought and social and cultural thought cannot be viewed as forming two different strands. His idea of the evolutionary growth of man becomes the guiding principle of his engagement with social and cultural matters.

Prof. Mohanty's compilation is based on four principal texts of Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *War and Self-Determination* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. His careful selections from these books bring out the essential core of Sri Aurobindo's thought as expressed in each. Further, each text forms a separate chapter introduced by the editor's brief but scholarly commentary. These commentaries are helpful because they provide direction to readers on how to approach the excerpts. I would like to specially mention Prof. Mohanty's idea of including selections from Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundations of*

Indian Culture. It is a book which shows that for Sri Aurobindo an essential point of reference is India, since India ideally represents a culture that celebrates harmony, a culture which expresses "a natural harmony, of spirit, mind and body". In his Independence Day message, Sri Aurobindo says that among his five "dreams" one is that India will be the centre presiding over the spiritual upliftment of humanity. Thus Prof. Mohanty's inclusion of Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundations of Indian Culture* is significant and very thoughtful. As he characteristically puts it in his editorial comment, "If there was one concept central to Sri Aurobindo, it would, undoubtedly, be 'India'."

The last chapter deals with Sri Aurobindo's stand on various political issues, such as urging the Congress leadership to accept the Cripps Mission and avoid partition, the Wavell Plan, making a contribution to the Allied War Fund to symbolically register protest against Nazism, predicting Chinese aggression against India in the year 1962, etc. These materials have been selected from *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* and reveal a new dimension of Sri Aurobindo's life and thought. It is amazing to see that, sitting in a remote corner of India and living in total seclusion from the rest of the world, Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied with the pressing political problems of the day. The subject that came to the forefront of his concern was, of course, India—the future of India. Here also is another example of Sri Aurobindo's uniqueness. He approached these political problems not as a strategist but as a visionary. As many people are unaware of the documents in the *Autobiographical Notes* book and their immense historical value, Prof. Mohanty did a great service by including these selections.

To sum up, there are three dominant features that may be mentioned as the chief characteristics of this study. Firstly, the study undertaken in this work expresses the holistic nature of Sri Aurobindo's thought. Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical thought and social and cultural thought cannot be viewed as forming two different strands. Sri Aurobindo's idea of the evolutionary growth of man becomes the guiding principle of Sri Aurobindo's engagement with social and cultural matters. That is why we find that for Sri Aurobindo no social change is possible unless there is a radical transformation of human nature, expressing what he calls the true subjectivity. Prof. Mohanty's book is notable attempt as it seeks to uphold this holistic perspective at the centre of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

Secondly, the book dispels the myth of a widespread belief among historians and social scientists that Sri Aurobindo was a religious Hindu nationalist. One will find from Sri Aurobindo's writing itself the non-Hindu character of his nationalism, which cannot be confined to a sectarian goal. His nationalism, on the other hand, merges with internationalism or universalism. This is possible only on the basis of spirituality which is distinct from religion in any form.

Thirdly, the book seeks to overcome the barrier – the barrier of indifference – shown by the academic community towards Sri Aurobindo's thought. This indifference arises from gross misconceptions that people have about Sri Aurobindo. Prof. Mohanty's book succeeds in removing these misconceptions by showing how Sri Aurobindo's analysis of society and culture can be enormously significant to the contemporary mind.

— Amitabha Das Gupta

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John F. Kennedy comments on Sri Aurobindo's political insight

There is a fascinating example of Sri Aurobindo's visionary genius in the realm of international affairs included near the end of Mohanty's book. It records how Sri Aurobindo's insight in 1950 on the Korean conflict foretold the possibility and consequences of China's aggression against India in 1962.

On June 28, 1950, Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to K. D. Sethna, editor of *Mother India*, in reply to his question on the conflict in Korea, describing the situation there as "the first move in the Communist plan of campaign to dominate and take possession first of these northern parts and then of South East Asia as a preliminary to their manoeuvres with regard to the rest of the continent—in passing, Tibet as a gate opening to India." Some months later, in the wake of China's invasion of Tibet in October 1950, Sethna wrote an editorial "The Truth About Tibet" which elaborated on the views expressed in Sri Aurobindo's earlier letter to him.

Years later, in 1962, the Chinese aggression against India created international concern. In March 1963,

Sudhir Ghosh, an Indian emissary of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, had a meeting with President Kennedy in Washington D.C. and shared with him a letter from Nehru dated January 5, 1963, "on the problem posed by the military power of Communist China". He also showed the president the following excerpt from that *Mother India* editorial dated November 11, 1950, referring to it as "the last testament of Sri Aurobindo". Though this was not written by Sri Aurobindo himself, it is clear from the full content of his letter to K. D. Sethna on the Korean War that the editorial represented his general views on the subject. In an interview several years ago, Sethna confirmed that Sri Aurobindo had read and approved the editorial.

The basic significance of Mao's Tibetan adventure is to advance China's frontiers right down to India and stand poised there to strike at the right moment and with the right strategy—unless India precipitately declares herself on the side of the Russian bloc. But to go over to Mao and Stalin in order to avert their wrath is not in any sense a saving gesture. It is a gesture spelling the utmost ruin to all our ideals and aspirations. Really the gesture that can save is to take a firm line with China, denounce openly her nefarious intentions, stand without reservation by the U.S.A. and make every possible arrangement consonant with our own self-respect to facilitate an American intervention in our favour and, what is of still greater moment, an American prevention of Mao's evil designs on India. Militarily, China is almost ten times as strong as we are, but India as the spearhead of an American defence of democracy can easily halt Mao's mechanised millions. And the hour is upon us of constituting ourselves such a spearhead and saving not only our own dear country but also all South East Asia whose bulwark we are. We must burn it into our minds that the primary motive of Mao's attack on Tibet is to threaten India as soon as possible.

To quote from Sudhir Ghosh's own account:

The President read the words of Sri Aurobindo's last testament several times over and said: "Surely there is a typing mistake here. The date must have been 1960, not 1950. You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation, sitting in one corner of India, said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?"