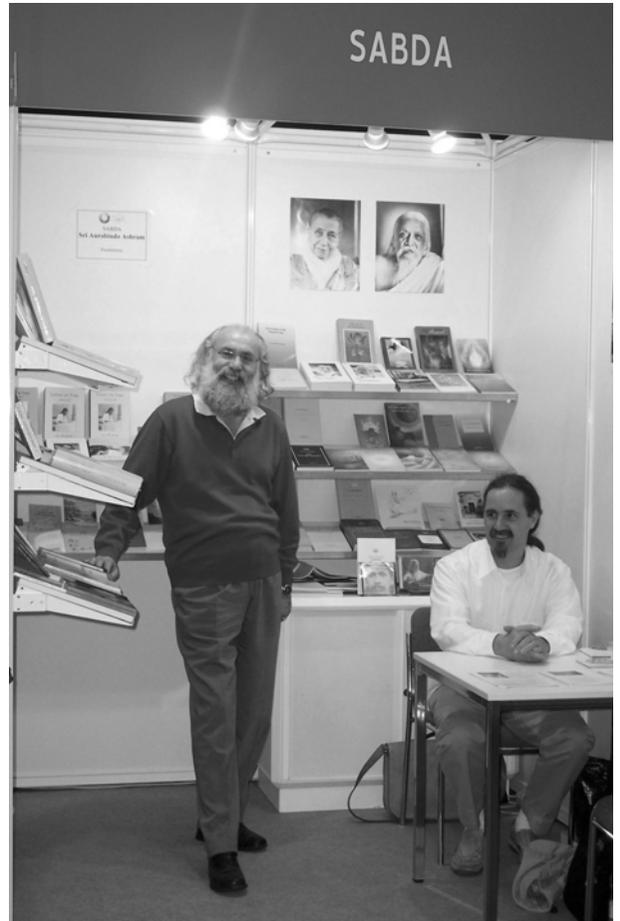


Recent Publications

SABDA



The SABDA stall at the Frankfurt Book Fair, October 2006. This year India was the Guest of Honour country at the world's largest book fair.



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COMPILATIONS: New Lights on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

What makes you pick up a compilation from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? Is it an intriguing title, or a particular subject that appeals to you, or perhaps a roadblock in your own *sadhana* that needs clarification? When you take the book home, settle in your favourite reading spot, and turn the pages in search of inspiring words or answers to prickly problems, how often do you think of the process behind the book or the admittedly daunting task of the editor who has chosen the topic and the extracts?

We are fortunate to have a wealth of talented and dedicated editors who have given us compilations ranging from the inspirational *Rays of Light* and *The Sunlit Path* to the informational *The Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, from collections devoted to the psychology of yoga as in *Growing Within* and *Our Many Selves* to compilations that highlight urgent issues in today's world as in *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education* and *On Women*. For the more ambitious readers there are in-depth compilations such as *Nationalism, Religion and Beyond: Writings on Politics, Society, and Culture* and *The Mother's Vision*, weightier volumes that address more complex themes. But in each case, an editor has laboured long and lovingly to produce the compilation you have chosen to read. Several of these editors agreed to share their insights and experience in the making of a compilation.

There are differing opinions on the inherent merit of compilations. Some people advocate we turn solely to the source material, the original works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and avoid reading a collection of extracts that have been taken out of the context of a more elaborated train of thought. Our editors agreed on the caution required for the work of selectively editing and choosing passages for a compilation, but were not deterred from the challenge. As Dr Dalal expressed it, the "out-of-context" argument only applies if the meaning of an extract is misunderstood. A thorough familiarity with the writings coupled with a mental sincerity and spirit of humility are the best safeguards when presenting a compilation of Sri Aurobindo's passages out of the contexts of their larger works. But beyond this sense of humility, they all recognised that the compilation provides a stage from which to address their intended audience, be it newcomers to the literature of yoga with basic questions on *sadhana* or perhaps a well-read, educated

public in a particular field such as mental health or social sciences, or even an audience of readers in India who may have wilfully misunderstood Sri Aurobindo's thought and need the record set straight. The compilation allows for a new context to be created, where the extracts are set in a format organised by subject, a format that can shed a more concentrated light on the subject at hand.

Let us start by going back in time to some of the very first compilations: *Bases of Yoga*, *Lights on Yoga*, and *More Lights on Yoga*. These were all published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, and he edited his own letters, deleting personal references and transforming them into essay-like answers to some of the oft-repeated questions on yoga that landed on his desk in missives from his disciples. Someone must have suggested that these small books be published with the aim to communicate to people who had very real needs regarding their *sadhana*.

Today people have the same needs, the same questions for which they are seeking answers, and this type of compilation, the practical guide to yoga, is still one effective way of opening the door to the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The hugely popular "Centenary Booklet Series" published from 1971 to 1972 dealt with yoga in everyday life. According to Vijay Poddar, it was envisioned with a three-fold purpose: to collect in a short booklet writings on one topic, to respond to an inner need of the reader, and to be within the reach of all who wished to know. The Mother's only caveat at the time of publication was that Sri Aurobindo's words must come first, then hers. The first copies were printed at Auropress, and the Mother distributed copies to those who were present in her room in the Ashram. Compiled without the aid of word processors or the Index volume of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, these compilations represented a pioneering effort.

Similarly, the format of *All India Magazine* is generally a compilation on one aspect of *sadhana*, also aimed at introducing readers to some of the major themes of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Its editor K.C. Anand candidly acknowledges that while such compilations are appealing and useful in the initial stages, they can have their limitations. Reading only a digest often imposes a mental box or square around what is expressed, creating a mental theory. Once on the path, the seeker needs to

dive into the depth and breadth of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teaching, following all the interwoven threads of knowledge and experience they bring to their writings, and let them work on him, awakening the true consciousness and helping him slowly emerge out of the mental being and its limiting theories. This is why the *AIM* booklets contain a note about the nature of compilation and refers readers to the source material.

Other compilations have more specific goals and may be addressed to a different type of audience. For example, the editor may want to establish the contemporary relevance of Sri Aurobindo's thought, such as Professor Sachidananda Mohanty, who is currently editing a new compilation on Sri Aurobindo as a cultural critic. In such a case, the introduction to the compilation becomes critical to the success of the book, not necessarily a factor in the "practical guide" compilation. Here the editorial voice may be stronger, as an "argument" is being put forward for the reader's consideration and the road map to follow the evolution of Sri Aurobindo's thought is laid out in the introduction. Or, as Dr Dalal acknowledges in many of his compilations, the editor may wish to share insights gained in professional fields like psychology or mental health in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In these instances the introduction can include background information and references to experts in the field. These compilations may go beyond the circle of devotees and adherents of the Integral Yoga to a wider, often professional audience.

Compilation readers, then, need to be as conscious as the editors were in order to follow the progression of thought developed by the choice and placing of texts. Editors may begin with the shorter and simpler extracts and follow on with longer, more complex texts; they may let an idea or thought process reveal its own growth by presenting texts in their chronological order; they may use headings to suggest to the reader how to approach

the following text; they may interrupt the chosen texts with editorial passages; or they may follow what Mohanty calls the "logic of intuition" in selecting and ordering extracts to prove an argument or shed light on a persistent misconception. The careful reader needs to follow the thread of thought and feeling, be also logically intuitive, and above all, be just as mentally sincere in considering what has been left out as well as what has been included.

All writers and editors are in the business of communicating ideas. Words and editorial devices are but the immediate means at their disposal to reach the minds, and maybe the "above-the-minds" of their readers. Bob Zwicker tries to include enough texts to cover the subject from all sides, views and angles, choosing those passages that inspire, instruct, and uplift, and is careful to avoid too much intrusion. Dr Dalal presents what he feels readers will be able to grasp and read with concentration within the covers of one book. Mohanty tries to remain in a state of inner concentration rather than an intellectual frame of mind, letting the work flow without impatience and communicating this inner receptivity to the reader. All want to ease the way into a better, deeper, truer understanding of the Integral Yoga and the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In some way or other they have taken to heart the Mother's advice that "it is not by books that Sri Aurobindo ought to be studied but by subjects—what he has said on the Divine, on

Unity, on religion, on evolution, on education, on self-perfection, on supermind, etc., etc." [CWM: 12, 208]

Whether you are already a confirmed reader of compilations or one of the sceptics of this genre, this backstage view of a compiler's work invites you, at least, to a more thoughtful way of reading them.

We acknowledge with thanks the contributions of the editors who were interviewed for this article:

Dr A.S. Dalal, K.C. Anand, Vijay Poddar, Sachidananda Mohanty, Bob Zwicker, Raman Reddy and Peter Heehs.



RECENT PUBLICATIONS
ENGLISH***Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*****Reprint from All India Magazine**

Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry

The Science of Living: A Simple Programme

40 pp., ISBN: 81-7060-250-5, Rs 15

Binding: Soft Cover

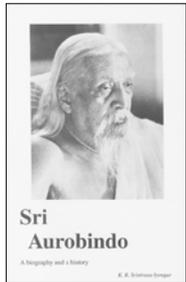
**Other Authors****Sri Aurobindo*****A biography and a history***

— K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Puducherry

843 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-813-8, Rs 400

Binding: Soft Cover



Prof. Iyengar's biography of Sri Aurobindo, long a standard reference work, is now in its fifth edition. The author's subtitle indicates the depth and breadth of the book, as it links the life of Sri Aurobindo, who "played for our age the crucial role of leader of humanity's evolving destiny", with the history of India and the world. It

also provides detailed discussions of Sri Aurobindo's writings, from the early poems and plays to the politics of *Bande Mataram*, from the philosophy and social thought of the *Arya* to the epic masterpiece of *Savitri*, as the essential keys to understanding his life and work.

This book is available again after a long time.

By Maggi Lidchi-Grassi

Published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata

Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's three novels form a trilogy, imaginatively retelling the familiar story of the Mahabharata from a particular dramatic perspective. She uses the person of Arjuna and his inner development as the lens through which to view and understand the compelling personalities of this epic, the events leading to the battle of Kurukshetra, the great story of that fight to cleanse the earth of *adharma* and the effects of the struggle

on its main protagonists, and their adventures that follow after the end of the war. Arjuna's story is the crucible through which the reader comes to understand how we are moulded into our own divinity.

The Battle of Kurukshetra

394 pp., Rs 500 Hard Cover

The first volume in the author's trilogy version of the Mahabharata, this novel is a subjective interpretation and retelling of the events leading to the great battle of Kurukshetra, the dramatic and psychological centrepiece of India's monumental epic. Using first person narratives, the story is told in turns by Ashwatthama and Arjuna, who come to stand on opposite sides of the battlefield, but whose interwoven lives and shared history bring an intense existential focus to the lines of war drawn up by the dictates of *dharma*. The book is a study of their characters and how they affect and are affected by the flow of events in the Mahabharata.

**The Legs of the Tortoise**

392 pp., Rs 600 Hard Cover

This second volume in the Mahabharata trilogy resumes the story from the moment of Arjuna's anguish prior to the start of the battle of Kurukshetra and follows his evolution during the course of the epic battle, to Indraprastha after the war, and through the Ashwamedha campaign. The sentiments and conflicts of the main protagonists as developed in the novel are based on encounters, incidents and speeches from Veda-Vyasa's Mahabharata, but the author's treatment of the story has been greatly influenced by the writings of Sri Aurobindo from *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.

The Great Golden Sacrifice of the Mahabharata

300 pp., ISBN: 81-7595-864-2, Rs 700 Hard Cover

In this third volume of her trilogy, as in the previous two, it is through Arjuna's experiences that the author develops the central themes of her interpretation of the Mahabharata: surrender and sacrifice. Arjuna the great warrior, the beloved friend of Krishna, the favoured disciple of Drona, the best-loved of Draupadi, Arjuna the epic hero is revealed also to the reader as Arjuna the man. We follow him through all the events of this final part of the story as he comes at last to understand Krishna's teaching and becomes a hero of the highest order: a man who finally knows his true self and fulfills his spiritual destiny.

Five books by Medhananda on Ancient Egypt

Published by Sri Mira Trust, Puducherry

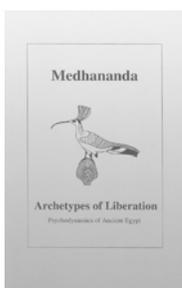
These five books on Ancient Egypt were written by Medhananda in close collaboration with Yvonne Artaud to present the thesis that Egyptian hieroglyphs and images contain the teachings of an advanced psychology of self-knowledge. Drawing inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's work on the psychological nature and structure of man and the universe and acknowledging his interpretation of psychological symbolism as revealed in *The Secret of the Veda*, the authors intend these volumes to be interpretations, stimuli and guides for explorations into the different aspects of being, inner movements and states of consciousness of the spiritual seeker. The bold visuals of the hieroglyphs and ancient images, the numerous notes and richness of references to other cultures, and the extensive bibliographies and indexes make these books a research collection of esoteric knowledge unveiled through poetic language, humour and insight.

The Way of Horus

The Pictorial Way of Ancient Egypt

281 pp., ISBN: 81-86413-37-5, Rs 280 Soft Cover

Readers of this book will learn that during the Golden Age of Ancient Egypt human consciousness was quite different from our mainly mentally dominated consciousness; it was turned towards the inner movements of the soul, which were then expressed in images and symbols. The author is convinced that rather than taking these Egyptian hieroglyphs and images at face value, the deeper meaning should be explored. In place of a pantheon of primitive gods and figures he perceives a multiplicity of soul powers representing inner movements of consciousness, aspects of ourselves, as well as universal principles.



Archetypes of Liberation

Psychodynamics of Ancient Egypt

243 pp., ISBN: 81-86413-38-3,

Rs 260 Soft Cover

This book takes a close look at what lies behind the many ancient Egyptian figures and gods, with their strange animal heads and fantastic crowns. The author sees them as expressive symbols for psychological principles, archetypes, functions and structures of man's own complex being. The images are "all symbols for those yet unknown parts of ourselves we must meet and become acquainted with on the way to total self-awareness. ...all these symbols and images are always ourselves or parts of ourselves."

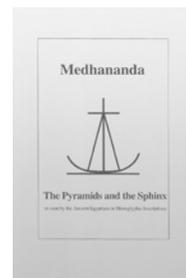
The Pyramids and the Sphinx

as seen by the Ancient Egyptians in Hieroglyphic Inscriptions

127 pp., ISBN: 81-86413-39-1,

Rs 160 Soft Cover

The Pyramids and the Sphinx are viewed today as wonders of the world and have been studied from the religious, mythological, philosophical and even occult point of view. This book proposes that the pyramids may have been erected by the ancient Egyptians in an attempt to penetrate the secrets of their inner psychological structure, and the riddle of the Sphinx may be a mirror of unrevealed secrets in the human subconscious. The author examines these mysteries, these monuments to wisdom, as the building blocks of consciousness, as "seats of soul power for everybody".



The Royal Cubit

Psychometrics of Ancient Egypt

247 pp., ISBN: 81-86413-40-5, Rs 260 Soft Cover

In *The Royal Cubit* the reader is introduced to the Egyptian royal measuring tool, an instrument 52 centimeters long, used by architects, engineers and masons to build pyramids and temples. The author's research revealed that it was also perceived as a secret codex with 28 symbols, named according to the nights of the moon and corresponding to a list of gods, or soul powers. This codex represents a programme of self-knowledge and transcendence, an ancient discipline of self-culture, aimed at developing the higher ranges of consciousness.

The Ancient Egyptian Senet Game

The Game of Archetypes

389 pp., ISBN: 81-86413-36-7, Rs 300 Soft Cover

This book examines the ancient game board of the Egyptian pharaohs with its thirty symbols. Medhananda found that each of these "houses" or symbols corresponds to a psychological force-field, to an archetype within us. The reader is invited to explore these force-fields in order to discover the many ways of being, to become more conscious of the multifaceted self. Many parts of the ancient hieroglyphic "Great Senet Text" are translated and interpreted by the author.

see review of all five books on page 13

**Pranab's Talk of 04-12-1973 on the Mother
with an Introduction by Nirod**

— Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya

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

Binding: Soft Cover

In December of 1973, entreated by many friends and sadhaks, Pranab gave a talk regarding the last days of the Mother's life, carefully describing events as he personally observed and experienced them, and answering some of the questions that had been put to him by many people after the Mother left Her body. This published version of his talk addresses many of those difficult questions in simple and direct terms and gives a vivid sense of Pranab's service to the Mother.

India's Spiritual Destiny

Its Inevitability and Potentiality

— Mangesh Nadkarni

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry, in association with UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd.
135 pp., Rs 325

Binding: Soft Cover

In this collection of six essays originally written as lectures for seminars and conferences, Mangesh Nadkarni examines some of the crucial problems facing India today from the spiritual perspective offered by Sri Aurobindo, who pointed out that what man is facing now is not just a social, political, economic, ecological or nuclear crisis but an evolutionary one. Man is a transitional being, and he must evolve from his current mental consciousness, which has proven incapable of solving these problems, to a higher truth-consciousness. Dr Nadkarni shows how Sri Aurobindo's vision embraces all aspects of human life, all forms of human activity, and the deepest aspirations of the human soul, finally offering man the only comprehensive solution to his problems: a radical transformation of consciousness.

see review on page 10

OTHER LANGUAGES

FRENCH

**Commentaire sur la Bhagavad-Gîtâ et autres écrits
(1909-1918)**

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Puducherry
161 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-831-6, Rs 110

Binding: Soft Cover

Dans ce « Commentaire sur la Bhagavad-Gîtâ »,



Sri Aurobindo nous présente les protagonistes de la bataille du Kurukshetra, telle qu'elle est dépeinte dans le *Mahâbhârata*. Mais c'est principalement la relation entre Shri Krishna, l'Avatâr, et Arjuna, son disciple et ami, qu'il décrit. Leur dialogue, qui forme le corps de la Gîtâ, nous livre un message dont la portée est universelle. Car le conflit qui

ébranle Arjuna, quand il prend conscience de l'ampleur de la destruction qui se prépare, est celui de l'Homme, lorsque s'effondrent toutes ses valeurs.

« Abandonne tous les *dharma*,
toutes les normes d'action,
et prends refuge en moi seul,
je te délivrerai de toute faute et de tout mal,
ne t'afflige pas, »

dit Shri Krishna. S'en remettre tout entier au Seigneur Suprême, dans un amour où toute distance est abolie, tel est le moyen de recevoir la vraie connaissance et de découvrir une loi d'action plus divine.

Une Drôle de Petite Fille

***Histoires de Douce Mère
racontées aux enfants***

— Pournapréma

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo
Ashram Publication

Department, Puducherry
37 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-802-2, Rs 125

Binding: Hard Cover

Dans ces histoires racontées aux enfants de l'Ashram, Pournapréma nous parle de la vie de Douce Mère, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa rencontre avec Sri Aurobindo.



Savitri : Une légende et un symbole

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Christian Feuillette, éditeur, Canada
724 pp., ISBN: 2-923438-01-9, Rs 1200

Binding: Soft Cover

Traduction de Guy Lafond

La Grande Guerre du Kurukshétra

Une épopée indienne I

— Maggi Lidchi-Grassi

Publisher: Les Belles Lettres, Paris
398 pp., ISBN: 2-251-72005-7, Rs 1350

Binding: Soft Cover

GERMAN**Savitri : eine sage und ein gleichnis**

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Puducherry

780 pp., ISBN: 81-7058-794-8, Rs 980

Binding: Hard Cover

Sri Aurobindos poetisches Lebens- und Hauptwerk ist ein 23'000 Zeilen umfassendes, in Blankvers geschriebenes einzigartiges Epos, in welches er in den Worten der Mutter „das ganze Universum gepackt hat“. Sie betonte, es stelle die „höchste Offenbarung“ von Sri Aurobindos Vision dar und nannte es „dies wundervolle prophetische Gedicht, das die Menschheit zu ihrer zukünftigen Verwirklichung führen wird.“

Eine dem grossen indischen Epos Mahabharata entnommene Legende dient als Grundlage für die entworfene Symbolik von der Suche der menschlichen Seele und ihrem Schicksal.

Der Sieg Savitri's, Inkarnation der Göttlichen Mutter, welcher es gelingt ihren Geliebten dem Tod zu entreissen, markiert die Geburt einer Dämmerung auf Erden, den Beginn eines neuen evolutionären Zyklus.

Überarbeitete zweisprachige Ausgabe, Englisch-Deutsch

ITALIAN

Perseo il Liberatore : dramma lirico in cinque atti

— Sri Aurobindo. ISBN: 88-901049-3-7 Rs 900

Come Cominciare? : Testo elementare di Spiritualità

Affermativa — M. P. Pandit Rs 50

ISBN: 81-7509-098-7

Mahabharata (Primo Volume) : La Battaglia di

Kurukshetra — Maggi Lidchi-Grassi Rs 1300

ISBN: 88-7183-159-4

SPANISH

La Práctica del Yoga Integral de Sri Aurobindo

— Jugal Kishore Mukherjee

Tomo I : ISBN: 84-933818-8-8 Rs 650

Tomo II : ISBN: 84-933818-9-6 Rs 650

RUSSIAN

Savitri: Legenda i Simbol : Kniga 1

ISBN: 5-98865-007-4 — Sri Aurobindo Rs 280

BENGALI

Srimayer Bani – 3 (Matribani 15) — The Mother Rs 120

Asimer Swakshar Jekhane : Prasanga: Sri Aurobindo,

Rabindranath, Sri Ramkrishna, abong anyera

— Saurendranath Basu Rs 150

HINDI

Prajwalit Agnikund : Srima ki Prarthanayen

ISBN: 81-7058-822-7 — The Mother Rs 8

Param — Conversations With the Mother; Recollected
by Mona Sarkar. ISBN: 81-7058-823-5 Rs 85

Baton hi Baton mein

— Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya Rs 50

**TAMIL**

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— Essays by various authors Rs 100

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— Essays by various authors Rs 75

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In India: Place your order through our website as indicated above. Alternatively, to calculate the order value manually, add on 5% of the total value of books as well as Rs 30 towards postage and forwarding. Payment can be made by bank draft favouring SABDA payable at Puducherry, money order, or credit card online via our website, on receipt of which the books will be sent by registered post/courier.

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**SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Puducherry 605 002, India**

Tel. +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656

Fax +91 413 222 3328

Email mail@sabda.in

Web <http://www.sabda.in>

BOOK REVIEWS

Death, Dying and Beyond

— Alok Pandey; Published by Sri Aurobindo Institute of Research in Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry; 327 pp., Rs 225

In the opening chapter of *The Life Divine* entitled “The Human Aspiration” Sri Aurobindo states that God, Light, Freedom, Immortality are the “earliest preoccupation of man”. Of the four, man has always been fascinated by the prospect of immortality, including permanence in his bodily existence. Cross-cultural experience, as manifest in systems of knowledge, culture, folklore, and life values, confirms this abiding desire in man. From the Upanishadic story of Nachiketa’s famous encounter with Death to the various accounts on the subject in the Mahabharata, from *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* to the mystical seances and Near Death Experiences (NDEs) recorded in modern medical science and parapsychology—all testify to the mystery and enigma called death. Not surprisingly, death is a recurrent motif in some of the greatest literatures of the world.

At the heart of Sri Aurobindo’s thought and vision, and central to his philosophical enquiry, is the question of death. His celebrated poem *Love and Death*, modeled after earlier literary traditions, matches his later magnum opus *Savitri*, which is a more accomplished and esoteric interpretation of the Mahabharata legend. Similarly, in the Mother’s case, we see an abiding interest in the nature of death, from her earlier mystical experiences in Paris, Algeria and Japan to her fascinating conversations recorded later in the *Agenda*. It is therefore wholly fitting that a comprehensive volume called *Death, Dying and Beyond* has now been published by the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.

Although the topic of death could be approached from many disciplinary perspectives, arguably a psychologist or a psychiatrist, rooted in a vibrant and futuristic spiritual tradition, can do special justice to this difficult question. Dr. Pandey, a follower of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, has been able to observe and study several encounters with death in the course of his medical practice. There is

thus a degree of appropriateness in his handling of the theme. There is also a poet in Alok Pandey, as seen throughout the volume. How else can the treatment of death be saved from slipping into a mood of despair and pessimism, the fate other such accounts are bound to suffer without the help of a poetic spirit?

Significantly enough, the study does not boil down to a chronicle of medical cases or terminally ill patients who have reported Near Death Experiences. Alok Pandey has been refreshingly original and eclectic in his approach. The book was initially conceived as the outcome of a seminar. But as Pandey explains in the Preface, this idea was soon given up and the attempt was to make instead “an all-comprehensive book that would cover all aspects of the mystery of Death”. Pandey acknowledges the wonderful efforts of all the team members who helped bring this book to print.

It is not easy to categorize this work. Divided into nine sections, the volume is part commentary and part compilation of quotations, experiences, case histories, and anecdotes. Some of the latter are given in the form of appendices. The decision to adopt this editorial approach may not have been an easy one. The uneasiness of the decision is occasionally reflected in the text. At such times, one feels that it might have been better to avoid longer quotations or extracts in favor of a largely authorial treatment.

It is difficult to summarize a book of nearly 330 pages. What I shall therefore attempt here is to highlight some salient features, drawing attention to the overall thematic design and framework of the study.

I liked the opening quotation from the Mother which reflects essentially the spirit of Pandey’s work:

From birth to death, life is a dangerous thing.
The brave pass through it without care for the risks.
The prudent take precautions.
The cowardly are afraid of everything.
But ultimately, what happens to each one is only what the Supreme Will has decided.

In the opening chapter Alok Pandey explains death as “first the process of decay and disintegration that is almost a part of all material forms we know upon earth”. Similarly, he shows us that thoughts and ideas die too. At the physical

At the heart of Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision, and central to his philosophical enquiry, is the question of death.



level of the cells death is a necessity. It is also “a necessity so long as we live in the separate ego sense”. The author introduces concepts like apoptosis (programmed cell death) or necrosis (abrupt cell death), trance, catalepsy, and ecstasy. There is the story of the Pilot Baba and allusions to the hibernation of animals and reptiles, like snakes, that defy the traditional signs of death. Paul Brunton’s account of the Yogi called Brama is an extremely engaging one. The Yogi here is able to stop his breathing progressively and stop completely the beating of his heart.

What are the stages that an individual being passes through at the time of death? According to Pandey, they are three: the decentralization of the universal will that unites the organism, the withdrawal of the mind and the life-force, and the point of no return, when decomposition sets in and the being that inhabited the body moves on.

Physical immortality with all the limitations of the human body is not necessarily a boon. Ashwatthama’s fate, “to live for 300 years wandering alone upon the earth carrying the stench of blood, the horrors of the war weighing heavily on his soul”, could hardly be an enviable one.

Expression of grief seems inevitable in a given community at the time of death. Even animals such as dogs and cats are known to go through a process of grief. Alok Pandey points out the right attitude to be maintained at the time of death of a person close to us. He gives us practical suggestions and explains the meaning of rituals. He brings in the moving story of Ruru and Pramadvara. In the Appendix to “The Shroud of Death” we find interesting excerpts regarding the death of young ones, the fear of death and four methods of conquering it, music for the departed soul, and wisdom from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In fact, the entire book is sprinkled with many fine quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and other spiritual literature.

The chapter “Beyond Death” should interest us the most. Here, as in *Savitri*, death is aptly described as a passage through the inner worlds. Pandey deals successively with subjects such as self-experience after death, ghosts, the reality of heaven and hell, recollections of past life, the soul’s choice, and the cessation of the cycle of birth and death. Appendix IV, “Beyond Death” brings in interesting experiences and stories.

The chapter entitled “The Ancient Debate” foregrounds the question whether the soul exists or not. Extracts from

the book *Life After Life*, by Raymond Moody, lend authenticity to our understanding of reported phenomena such as out of body experiences, beings of light met on the other side, and the sensation of being pulled back from death into the body. And in the following chapter the author presents some of the ethical and moral issues associated with death and dying, many of which have no easy answers and therefore pose difficult problems for both the dying and their caretakers.

And finally the chapter “Towards a Vision of the Future” outlines a new understanding of death, as the evolution of the human race reaches beyond the mental being. Here Pandey brings in various perspectives such as that of the scientist and the occultist. He speaks of the traditional understanding of immortality as well as the new promise of a glorious body.

Death, Dying and Beyond is a handy volume that contains all that you wanted to know about death. It is well written, well researched, readable, and admirably documented. The length may appear to be somewhat forbidding to the lay reader though, and in the next edition some of the longer extracts could be shortened. That would make the book neater and more appealing.

For Alok Pandey, of course, the book is clearly a labor of love. *Death, Dying and Beyond* is a collector’s item and should appeal to a wide audience of interested readers.

— Sachidananda Mohanty
S. Mohanty is Professor of English Literature at the University of Hyderabad.



With Aurobindo in Baroda

— Dinendra Kumar Roy; Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department; 66 pp., Rs 28

Dinendra Kumar Roy felt very nervous on being appointed to teach Bengali to a man considered to be a fount of languages. Aurobindo Ghose stood first in the Latin and Greek papers of the Civil Service Examination, “with marks that no previous candidate, English or foreign, had received before in those two languages”. His credentials delineated an awesome image in Roy’s mind. Roy imagined him as “a stout young

man...bespectacled and dressed from head to toe in Euro-pean clothes; rude in speech, arrogant of eye and terribly haughty in temper". He shuddered to think of the terrible

With *Aurobindo in Baroda* is charming and captivating, wonderfully evoking the sweet, self-abnegating nature of its central figure.

arrogance this young man must have cultivated after almost a score of years in England.

Expectedly, Dinendra Kumar's

wild imagination was completely confounded by his very first meeting with Sri Aurobindo. Clothed in a coarse khadi dhoti, a tight-fitting waistcoat on his back and upturned Nagrai slippers on his feet, Sri Aurobindo projected an image quite the opposite of what Roy had imagined.

But Dinendra Kumar was to discover very soon Sri Aurobindo's uncommonness. And this gradual discovery of one of the most forceful personalities of the last century is what makes *With Aurobindo in Baroda* so unique. Nothing would have ever been known of Sri Aurobindo's domestic life in Baroda had this booklet not been written. Speaking about a little-known period of Sri Aurobindo's life, Dinendra Kumar's reminiscences throw indirect light on his inner state, enough to make the reader realise "that Aurobindo was not of this world". Besides, it is heart-warming to see Sri Aurobindo's god-like traits displayed so early in his life.

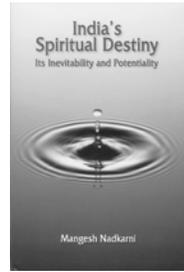
With a marked flair for literature, Dinendra Kumar Roy had authored *Ekti Kusumer Marmakatha: Prabhad Prashney* a year prior to his association with Sri Aurobindo, and published nine other books during his lifetime. He was also associated with the *Saptahik Basumati*, first as an assistant-editor and then as its editor.

The prolonged hearing and the unexpected verdict of the Alipore Bomb Trial, which pushed Sri Aurobindo into unforeseen political limelight, prompted the author to write his firsthand account of his days spent with this extraordinary man in Baroda between 1898 and 1899. Candidly written in simple literary Bengali, the contents of this booklet were originally serialised in the Bengali journal *Sahitya* in 1911-1912. Later, in 1923, these essays were published in the form of a book titled *Aurobindo Prasanga*, literally, "About Aurobindo". The English translation is vivid and succinct, aptly preserving the unique flavour of the original work as well as capturing its subtle nuances.

With Aurobindo in Baroda is charming and captivating, wonderfully evoking the sweet, self-abnegating nature of its central figure, and rightly conveying the impression that "he who has spent even a few days with Aurobindo can never forget him for the rest of his life."

— Arup Mitra

A. Mitra's association with the Ashram began in 1956. Having learnt art under the Mother's direct guidance, he taught it for sixteen years at the Lycée Français de Pondichéry.



India's Spiritual Destiny

— Mangesh Nadkarni; Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry, in association with UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd.; 135 pp., Rs 325 (hard cover)

A book titled *India's Spiritual Destiny: Its Inevitability and Potentiality* has recently been released in Pondicherry. Written by the well-known author and exponent of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and thought, Dr Mangesh Nadkarni, this book is a collection of six talks given over a period of time at different institutions, the first one being in 1988 and the last one in 2003. The release of the book is most timely and appropriate as it addresses some very fundamental questions facing India and the world today.

Although India attained independence in 1947 it has not been able to find a clear direction for its growth and development in order to fulfil its true destiny. This is because it has missed out on the master idea of the nation—spirituality. The central and basic issue for India is spirituality, and that should have been the line on which all our development and progress ought to have been made.

Unfortunately, the intellectual class and the leaders of the nation have taken recourse to other ideas and ideologies, such as rationalism, Marxism, secularism, Gandhism, religious revivalism, and so on. None of these ideas – although all of them contain some truth – can ultimately help India to fulfil its higher destiny. The author has brilliantly shown the limitations of all these ideologies and put them in their proper perspective from the spiritual point of view in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

The Indian political and intellectual classes, for whatever reason, have not given Sri Aurobindo and his thought a proper recognition; but it is only a matter of time until this happens. This book is one of the first to deal with political and social questions and will greatly help in getting a proper understanding of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

It is of great urgency that a deep change of spirit should be born and that we create our own political system, true to the Indian genius and spirit.

Another very important contribution made by the author is the analysis of the different types of spirituality—the world-shunning spirituality and the spirituality which embraces the world. He has shown that it is only a spirituality that takes up the whole of human nature and all the deeper aims of humanity that can create a new India and a new world. Sri Aurobindo has assured us that with the descent of the supramental power, human evolution will be hastened and the problems that plague the human race will be solved in due course.

I would, however, like to make a suggestion that while this outcome is certain, some practical steps and directions could have been put forward, particularly in the fields of politics and education. For, as early as the second decade of the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo had written about the danger of India imitating the political institutions of the West, whether of Great Britain or of proletarian Russia, as that would open the door to a peril of stupendous proportions. We can now see this staring us in the face. It is therefore of great urgency that a deep change of spirit should be born and that we create our own political system, true to the Indian genius and spirit. Similarly, in the field of education, some practical ideas based on the concept of an integral education would have been useful. The inclusion of concrete guidelines for future development could have perhaps initiated national dialogues on both subjects.

On the whole, this is a very readable and important book with profound implications for the future development of India and the world. It will surely help in removing much of the cynicism that is prevalent in the world today.

— Kittu Reddy

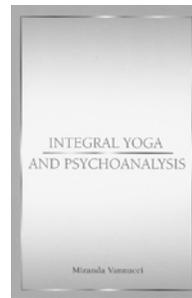
Kittu-da has been teaching at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education since 1958. He currently teaches History and Sri Aurobindo's works.

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis

— Miranda Vannucci; Published by Miranda Vannucci; 143 pp., Rs 450

Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis is clearly a work of love. The book has a beautiful and attractive cover and is exceptionally well laid-out and printed. It consists of nine talks presented by Miranda Vannucci at meetings of Aditi, a group of devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo in Italy. These talks were, in the words of the author, “an attempt to fulfil a need felt by some people to benefit from the practical contribution that psychoanalysis can give to the practice of yoga”.

Whether psychoanalysis can actually make such a contribution is not discussed in this book, but simply taken for granted. One will search in vain for a serious discussion of the considerable differences that exist between the two systems in terms of their basic assumptions about the aim of life, the origin of psychological problems and the “best practices” needed in order to overcome them. What the book does contain is a plain juxtaposition of insights from psychoanalysis and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga dealing with a wide range of topics: the role of self-analysis, dreams, *bhakti*, the ego, body language, work, higher levels of consciousness, the vital, and finally the transformation of mind. In each area, the author gives her own ideas, largely derived from psychoanalytic thought, and then follows these up with passages from the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that deal more or less with the same topic. This pattern, which has been followed quite systematically throughout the book, indicates both its strengths and its weaknesses.



The author bases her comments on extensive psychoanalytic practice and she offers in this book a wonderful, representative collection of the core ideas that psychoanalysis makes use of. The author also shows familiarity with the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and the book is packed with beautiful and appropriate passages from their writings.

What is to this reviewer somewhat disconcerting, however, is that these two approaches to human growth are presented as if they were saying the same thing, while quite often they do not, or at least not in the way the author suggests. A few typical examples will show the problem.

On page 13 the author writes:

By activating self-analysis, we can try to understand the connection between the present-day fact and events of the distant past. For instance, the feeling of being refused by people, and similar problems may be rooted in incomplete acceptance by the family of origin during childhood.

Shortly after this she quotes from the Mother:

These things from the past...seem to be coming forward to show themselves ... a whole curve. Then once I've seen it, it's gone.

This latter passage is presented as if the Mother confirms what the author has been saying, but this is not at all the case: the Mother talks about experiences later in her life (which the people around her know about), and there is no question of analysis, only of being attentive to what such spontaneously arising memories want to show.

Similarly, on page 25 the author talks about how dreams refer to unresolved conflicts in one's infancy, and then claims that working through them helps "to lessen what the Mother called gaps of the consciousness", but the gaps the Mother talks about are part of an entirely different phenomenon. The gaps psychoanalysis can help with are located in the lower and higher vital, while the gaps the Mother talks about are in planes far above the ordinary mind. She talks about them to explain the remarkable phenomenon during which some people can contact in sleep or *samadhi* the highest realms of consciousness long before they have mastered all the steps in between, so that they cannot carry back the full living reality of these higher states when they return to their ordinary life. It is hard to see how mulling over traumatic happenings in one's youth could help to complete one's spiritual experience in the highest ranges of the mind and above!

There are many similar juxtapositions, but perhaps the most serious case of confusion comes near the end of the book, where on page 126 the author speaks of "internal digging" (which, to say it mildly, Sri Aurobindo was never

very enthusiastic about). She then quotes, as if in support, a passage from *The Synthesis of Yoga* in which Sri Aurobindo says "It is true that intellectual deliberation and right discrimination are an important part of the Yoga of knowledge...", but the author leaves out the end of the passage:

Still, psychological self-knowledge is only the experience of the modes of the Self, it is not the realisation of the Self in its pure being.

The status of knowledge, then, which Yoga envisages is not merely an intellectual conception or clear discrimination of the truth, nor is it an enlightened psychological experience of the modes of our being. It is a "realisation", in the full sense of the word; it is the making real to ourselves and in ourselves of the Self, the transcendent and universal Divine...

It is true that the author never claims that psychoanalysis can do more than contribute something to the yoga, but it would have helped considerably if she had made more clear where the two differ, and how emphatically Sri Aurobindo opposed digging in the dark before one has enough light to see what one is doing.

The author offers in this book a representative collection of the core ideas that psychoanalysis makes use of.

If it comes to a second edition it would also be helpful to get the text checked by someone familiar with psychoanalytic theory and Integral Yoga in English, as the present translation from the Italian is a bit awkward at places and contains several unnecessary errors (e.g. on p. 92 "es" instead of "id", and in the Bibliography the use of "Opera Omnia" for both the SABCL and CWSA editions). Still, in spite of these shortcomings, it is an appealing book that shines with the love Miranda Vanucci so clearly feels both for the Mother and for the people she works with.

— Dr 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.

The most important surrender is the surrender of your character, your way of being, so that it may change.... It is this that is most important. You have certain ways of understanding, certain ways of reacting, certain ways of feeling, almost certain ways of progressing, and above all, a special way of looking at life and expecting from it certain things—well, it is this you must surrender. That is, if you truly want to receive the divine Light and transform yourself, it is your whole way of being you must offer...

— The Mother [CWM: 4, 372]



Sri Aurobindo Laho Pranam

— Krishna Chakrabarty; Published by Krishna Chakrabarty, Puducherry, 98 pp., Rs 70

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.

— The Mother (9th December 1950)

‘জগদীশ্বরের তুমি ছিলে পার্থিব প্রকাশ - হে প্রভু! তোমার প্রতি আমাদের অপার কৃতজ্ঞতা অর্পণ করি। প্রভু, আজ আমরা যা লাভ করেছি তা সবই তোমার মহৎ আশা, সদিচ্ছা, ও কঠিন প্রয়াসের ফল। প্রভু, তুমি কতই না ক্রেশ স্নীকার করে প্রতিকূল অবস্থার মধ্যে, কঠোর প্রচেষ্টার মাধ্যমে আমাদের এই বিপুল সঙ্কম দান করেছ। আমাদের নত মস্তকে প্রার্থনা যে - হে প্রভু! এ কথা যেন কোন মুহূর্তেই বিস্মৃত না হই যে তোমার কাছে আমরা কত ঋণী।’

শ্রীঅরবিন্দের মহাপ্রয়াণের পর শ্রীমায়ের এই শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জলির প্রকৃত তাৎপর্য হয়তো আমাদের পক্ষে সঙ্কর্ণ ভাবে অনুভবন করা সম্ভব নয়। সত্যিই, সমস্ত মানবজাতির জন্য তাঁর মহান প্রচেষ্টার কথা কতটুকুই বা আমরা সঠিক ভাবে জানি। যে মহৎ লক্ষ্য নিয়ে তাঁর সাধনা অর্থাৎ মানবকে মানবোত্তর এক আধ্যাত্মিক প্রাণীতে উত্তীর্ণ করা, - সেসবের কতটুকুই বা আমরা বুঝি। তবুও এমন এক অভিনব সম্ভাবনা কথা যদি ভাবাও যায়, কিছুটা হয়তো অনুমান করা সম্ভব যে কী দুঃসাধ্য সাধনে তিনি রতী ছিলেন।

শুধু তাঁর আধ্যাত্মিক জীবনে নয়, ছেলেবেলায় সুদূর ইংল্যান্ডে পাড়ি দেওয়া, বিদেশে নিঃসঙ্গ জীবনে প্রায়শই অর্থাভাবে অর্থাহারে দিন কাটানো, তারই মধ্যে গ্রীক, ল্যাটিন সহ বিভিন্ন ইউরোপীয় ভাষায় ও অন্যান্য বিষয়ে অগাধ বৃৎপত্তি অর্জন করা, স্বেচ্ছায় ICS না হওয়া, দেশে ফিরে সাধারণ চাকুরে জীবন গ্রহণ

করা ও তারই সাথে বিদেশী শাসনের বিরুদ্ধে অগ্নিগর্ভ আন্দোলনে প্রেরণা দেওয়া, সক্রিয় রাজনীতিতে যোগদান ও রাজদ্রোহিতার অপরাধে বিচারাধীন অবস্থায় বৎসরাবধি কারাবাস, এবং হঠাৎই সকলের অগোচরে পণ্ডিচেরী যাত্রা - তাঁর সমস্ত জীবনই পরম লক্ষ্যে উত্তীর্ণ হওয়ার এক নিরন্তর প্রয়াস। আলিপুর জেলে কারাবাসের সময় তাঁর লেখা *Invitation* (আমন্ত্রণ) কবিতার এই ছত্রদুটিতেই যেন প্রতিফলিত হচ্ছে তাঁর জীবনাদর্শ।

“Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.”

‘বজ্রকঠোর সম, বিপদ যার পরমাত্মীয়-

সেই আমার যথার্থ অনুগামী, মোর মানসলোকের সহযাত্রী।’

যাঁরা শ্রীঅরবিন্দের সান্নিধ্যে এসেছেন, তাঁর চিন্তাধারার সঙ্গে কিছুটা পরিচিত হয়েছেন, তাঁর অভিনব প্রচেষ্টার কথা কিছু বুঝেছেন, অবাক বিস্ময়ে তাঁর প্রতি স্বতঃস্ফূর্ত ভাবে শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জাপনে যেন বাধ্য হয়েছেন। আর যাঁরা দীর্ঘকাল তাঁর আশ্রমে থেকে সাধনা করেছেন বা এখনও করছেন, যাঁরা শ্রীঅরবিন্দ ও শ্রীমাকে হয়ত অনেক অন্তরঙ্গ ভাবে দেখেছেন, জেনেছেন ও বুঝেছেন, তাঁদের বিমুগ্ধ শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জাপন প্রায়শই হয়েছে নীরবে, কখনোও বা সরবে। এমনই এক সরব শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জাপনের বহিঃপ্রকাশই হল এই বইটি, ‘শ্রীঅরবিন্দ লহ প্রণাম’।

জীবনী আকারে পরিবেশিত এই বইটিকে কিছু জীবনীমূলক বলা যবে না। শ্রীঅরবিন্দের জীবনের বিভিন্ন ঘটনার উপস্থাপনার উদ্দেশ্যে তাঁর জীবনের বিবরণ দেওয়া নয়, তাঁর প্রতি নানা ভাবে বারবার সেই শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জাপনেরই যেন সুযোগ খোঁজা। শৈশবে তাঁর নির্ভীকতায়, কৈশোরে তাঁর নিরুদ্বেগ আত্মপ্রত্যয়ে, যৌবনকালে তাঁর অসীম পাণ্ডিত্যে, মধ্যবয়সে তাঁর তেজেদীপ্ত বৈপ্লবিক কর্মকাণ্ডে, আর পরিণত কালে তাঁর বিস্ময়কর আধ্যাত্মিক জ্ঞান ও প্রয়াসে - তাঁর জীবনের ক্রমবিকাশের সাথে সাথে তাঁর প্রতি অকুণ্ঠ শ্রদ্ধাপনের বাসনা জাগে ক্রমাগত।

বেশ কয়েকটি চিত্রসমৃদ্ধ ও সুন্দরভাবে মুদ্রিত এই বইটির পরিধি কিছু খুব বেশী নয়, একশ পৃষ্ঠার কিছু কমই। পড়তেও বেশী সময় লাগে না। তবে সে শুধু স্বল্প পরিধির জন্য নয়, সুদক্ষ পরিবেশনার গুণে। বইটিতে বর্ণিত শ্রীঅরবিন্দের জীবনের নানা ঘটনা হয়তো অনেকেই জানা, তবুও পড়তে পড়তে লেখকের সাথে কৃতজ্ঞচিত্তে বার বার শ্রীঅরবিন্দকে প্রণাম জানানোর সুযোগ লাভ, এইটাই নিঃসন্দেহে শ্রীঅরবিন্দের অনুরাগীদের পরম প্রাপ্তি।

— সর্বানী

FIVE BOOKS BY MEDHANANDA ON ANCIENT EGYPT

Published by Sri Mira Trust, Puducherry

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281 pp., Rs 280

Archetypes of Liberation

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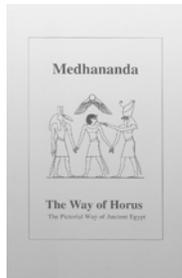
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The Ancient Egyptian Senet Game

389 pp., Rs 300

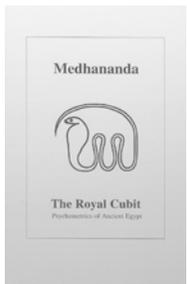


Medhananda, 1908-94, born in Pforzheim, Germany, studied international and ecclesiastic law at Munich, Heidelberg, and Paris. In 1934 he left Germany with his French wife to escape the rise of Nazism. They settled on the island of Moorea in French Polynesia where they raised coffee and vanilla. During the war he was interned near Tahiti as an enemy alien. After his release in 1946 he first came across the writings of Sri Aurobindo, and in 1952 joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where he was put in charge of the Sri Aurobindo Library. He was co-editor of the journal *Equals One*, and co-founder, with Dr. Yvonne

Artaud, of the Identity Research Institute, a non-profit foundation for psychological research. In the early 1980s he started an in-depth exploration of the symbology of the hieroglyphs and pictorial imagery of ancient Egypt, using the psychological approach which Sri Aurobindo had initiated for his interpretation of the Vedas.

Dr. Yvonne Artaud, born 1924 at Lyon, France, was a surgeon-dentist for young children in Paris before she joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1952. Author of numerous studies on animal psychology and early-childhood education, she created several innovative teaching-learning materials including the “Aurograms”, a symbol language to be used as a means of self-expression and communication by children from different linguistic backgrounds. She was Medhananda’s amanuensis and editor and his partner in all his Egyptian research.

Medhananda’s writings on Ancient Egypt



In connection with his own psychological interpretation of the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo once wrote that he hoped his studies would “lead up to a recovery of the sense of the ancient spiritual conceptions of which old symbol and myth give us the indications and which I believe to have been at one time a common

culture covering a great part of the globe with India, perhaps, as a centre.” [CWSA 15:596]

One of his disciples, a sadhak of German origin to whom the Mother gave the name “Medhananda” when he joined the Ashram in 1952, was ideally equipped to take up this hint and to explore it further. Those who would like to know more about the life and background of this remarkable man could refer to the collection of autobiographical material, *On the Shores of Infinity*, put together from recorded conversations and notebooks by his co-worker and amanuensis Yvonne Artaud. Here, it is enough to say that from a very young age the brilliant scholar was fascinated by the myths and symbols of many different world cultures, and that both his education and his own gifts had equipped him to make profound studies in this area. He also had an intense inner life from his very childhood, which finally brought him into contact with Sri Aurobindo through the book *The Mother* which he found in French translation in a bookshop in postwar Tahiti.

When he came to the Ashram the Mother put Medhananda in charge of the Sri Aurobindo Library, and

in addition to his other duties for many years he taught classes in Comparative Religion at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The teachings of Sri Aurobindo and his own temperament led him readily to take a psychological approach to the symbolic myths and images of ancient cultures. In his conversations and notebooks we find unusual insights into the deeper psychological significances of the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, classical myths of Greece and Rome, Germanic sagas and legends, and the pre-Christian culture of Polynesia, as well as tales from Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu traditions and the early Christian Gnostics. Some of these perceptions appeared in the various issues of *Equals One*, the journal of which Medhananda was editor and main author (under a series of playful yet significant pseudonyms) from 1964 to 1975.

It was in the early 1980s that, with the help of Yvonne Artaud, he began to put together a series of systematic studies on Ancient Egyptian images, in which he found a key to a deep psychological message, comparable in some ways to that of the ancient rishis. A portion of these studies has now been published as a set of five books.

In their introduction to *Archetypes of Liberation*, the second book of the series, the authors state:

The intent of this book (and of the Egyptian pictures in it) is to make us aware of our greater self, and of its eternal principles as parts of ourselves, as the threads in the carpet we are. What is called in different cultural environments our true self or our soul—that which remains when we pass from one life to another—is not a simple single entity. It is like a giant “molecule” built around a centre and made up of many psychological aspects or archetypes which connect, each in its own invisible way, the one with the many, involution with evolution, eternity with time. Called in Egypt “neteru” and later in religions “angels” or “gods” and imagined outside of ourselves, these are possibilities, capacities, and potentialities which man must discover and develop if he wants to be really himself and live in peace with himself.... Sleep and death, our soul ship, our vibratory snake nature, our capacity to flower, our vast emptiness, our plenitude, are all psychological archetypes, ways of being and transformation processes, teachers of liberation, powers of self-creation... What was apparently standing out-

side and above man reveals itself in ourselves as an intimate possibility that we can cherish and aspire to become...

This can be taken as the mission statement of the entire series. The fifth book, for example, *The Ancient Egyptian Senet Game...*, deals with a board game, of which several exemplars have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs and recorded by archaeologists. Perhaps it is the most ancient board game known on earth. It is believed to have been played competitively by two players, in a similar way to the common children's game Ludo. On the examples recorded by scholars, each of the squares of the board is marked with a symbol. Medhananda has interpreted these as signalling stages of an inner journey which would culminate in the realisation of the One, the true self and reality dwelling in us and the whole universe. This interpretation may not be as unlikely as it might first appear. Even today in the bazaar of Pondicherry one can buy simple printed sheets showing the game of Snakes and Ladders, which is familiar to children all over the world. In this version, each ladder and snake is labelled in Tamil with a psychological quality, and the entire journey from square one to 100 and beyond is depicted as a journey of spiritual discovery, leading up to the world of the gods, and beyond to liberation. This does not mean that every child who enjoys playing the game experiences it as such. Perhaps most of the Egyptian aristocrats who played the Senet game enjoyed it as a game rather than as a map to self-realisation. Yet it is quite possible that both the Indian and the Egyptian board games were created first as teaching materials by people who were used to seeing the phenomena of the world around them as signs of a deeper underlying reality, in a similar way to the rishis who composed the Vedas with a dual meaning, an outer sense for ordinary people, a profounder one for those who were ready to grasp it.

The spoken language of ancient Egypt is completely lost to us. The only clue to what it might have sounded like is the Rosetta Stone, carried to France by Napoleon and later deciphered by the French scholar Champollion. Engraved on this stone is the same text in three scripts: hieroglyphics, a later cursive script, and then classical Greek. On the basis of these inscriptions, phonetic values and some meanings were ascribed to the hieroglyphics—

the pictorial writing of ancient Egypt. All subsequent dictionaries and decipherments are based on this work of Champollion. But the Rosetta Stone dates from a very late period of ancient Egyptian history, to a time when the ruling dynasty was a Greek family, the Ptolemies. Champollion himself suspected that at an earlier period, if not the time of the Stone itself, the hieroglyphs had symbolic significance—alongside, or even rather than purely phonetic values. Indeed it is highly probable that this pictorial script represents a unique stage in the development of writing, standing somewhere between the figurative messages scratched or painted on stones and cave walls all over the world by our Stone Age ancestors, and the phonetic scripts which have given rise to all modern alphabets. (Perhaps the early Chinese ideograms, also highly pictorial, represent a parallel movement.)

If so, it is also very likely that in the early stages of their use—as far back as 4000 BC—the hieroglyphs carried a symbolic sense which might parallel the early stages of language, as described by Sri Aurobindo, when a single word could carry a very wide range of related suggestive meanings in different contexts. At a later stage in the development of language, the meanings have gradually become more restricted, and the signs too may have come to denote simply phonetic values.

The aim of Medhananda and Yvonne was to rediscover the symbolic content of these signs, and of other ancient Egyptian pictorial images, which still seem to speak powerfully across the millennia, even though we cannot quite grasp what they are saying. Medhananda and Yvonne offer us a key to deciphering that message.

In his Egyptian studies, Medhananda was not approaching the hieroglyphs and pictures as a scholarly historian, anxious to establish exactly what these images meant to the people who created them. Like his teacher Sri Aurobindo he recognised that it is impossible for us to recapture the precise meaning and connotation that any ancient text had for its original readers. Rather he was concerned about the here and now, about the need to move on from our normal analytic mental processes to discover a deeper significance to all the forms and events of earthly life. He was an ardent practitioner of this search, and an expert at conveying his deeper perceptions with humour and inspiration.

The authors posit a "Golden Age" in early Egyptian history...perhaps corresponding to the symbolic age of the cycle of human development described by Sri Aurobindo.

The result is not a series of scholarly studies. The authors have drawn upon the existing scholarly resources for the images themselves, and for the meanings assigned to them by the official dictionaries, as the starting point for a series of meditations on the symbolic content of the images themselves. They posit a “Golden Age” in early Egyptian history, when the knowledge of the One Reality and its self-expression through its own many Becomings was part of a living culture—perhaps corresponding to the symbolic age of the cycle of human development described by Sri Aurobindo:

Undoubtedly, wherever we can seize human society in what to us seems its primitive beginnings or early stages,—no matter whether the race is comparatively cultured or savage or economically advanced or backward,—we do find a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions. Symbolic, but of what? We find that this social stage is always religious and actively imaginative in its religion; for symbolism and a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling have a natural kinship and especially in earlier or primitive formations they have gone always together. When man begins to be predominantly intellectual, sceptical, ratiocinative he is already preparing for an individualist society and the age of symbols and the age of conventions have passed or are losing their virtue. The symbol then is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities,—the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life and shape and govern or at the least intervene in its movements.

The Human Cycle CWSA 25:7

Medhananda and Yvonne Artaud see in the sign-writing of the ancient Egyptian culture a set of teaching symbols intended to convey this deeper knowledge and support a psychological practice that would lead to its realisation in the individuals who “read” them. Sri Aurobindo speaks of a state of Knowledge in which all the objects and happenings of our lives are seen as signs of a deeper

underlying Reality: “an exterior notation by which the soul represents its perceptions of certain truths of the Infinite and makes them effective in the terms of Substance. These things are a language, a notation, a hieroglyphic, a system of symbols, not themselves the deepest truest sense of the things they intimate.” [*The Synthesis of Yoga CWSA 23-24:294*]

From his own experience, it was natural for Medhananda to see things in this way. These five books contain his explorations of various sets of ancient Egyptian pictorial images, communicated in an informal story-telling style, intended to make this way of seeing accessible to seekers of today. The books are not scholarly explorations meant to speak to our reason, but teachings intended to evoke a capacity to experience the One in All.



Medhananda was a seer and raconteur rather than a writer. The assembling of his insights into a coherent written form was largely due

to his co-worker Yvonne Artaud. The original texts which emerged in this way during the 1980s have now been prepared for publication by some of their friends who feel that their lives have been immeasurably enriched by the insights which Medhananda shared with them. They have provided a full scholarly apparatus of notes, references, indexes, and bibliographies. Perhaps in the process some of the spontaneity and charm of Medhananda’s original utterances has been lost. While every effort has been made to satisfy the demands of scholarship, in the end each of us has to decide for ourselves how satisfying this approach is. Does it work for us? Does it give us helpful answers to the poignant riddle posed by Life, the Sphinx: “Why is it all, and wherefore are we here?” This will be the test of the lasting value of Medhananda’s work.

— Shraddhavan

Shraddhavan is the Sanskrit name given by the Mother in 1972 to a young Englishwoman who had left her country to join Auroville. She has been associated with a wide range of educational projects in Auroville, most recently as the Project Coordinator of “Savitri Bhavan”. Her writings—poems, stories, essays and book reviews—have been published in Mother India and elsewhere.