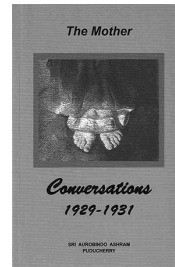


Recent Publications

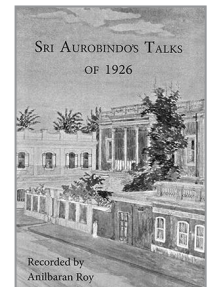
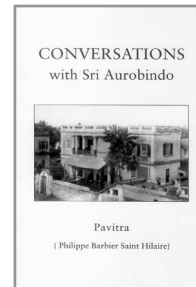
S a b d a

CONTENTS

Conversations on Yoga	2
RECENT PUBLICATIONS	13
Ordering Information	18
BOOK REVIEWS	
Sri Aurobindo's Early Poetry	19
Bankim Chandra Chatterji: A Rishi	22
The Mother's Loving Guidance to Her Disciples	26
Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Nationalism	28
Discourses on <i>The Synthesis of Yoga</i> Vol 10, The Yoga of Self-Perfection	33



CONVERSATIONS ON YOGA: THE EARLY YEARS



During the early years of the small community gathered around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to practise Yoga, informal conversations sparked by questions from these nascent disciples and the explanations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother played a significant part in developing their consciousness and understanding of the distinct character of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Our lead essay describes the nature and substance of these early conversations on Yoga that took place between 1925 and 1931 at the outset of what became the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Conversations on Yoga

Three books of some early conversations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with disciples which give us illuminating insights into the practice of Integral Yoga are *Questions and Answers 1929-1931* by the Mother, *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* by Pavitra, and *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926* as recorded by Anilbaran Roy. They are similar to each other but different from other talks and writings by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother because they were back-and-forth conversations with either one or a small group of disciples which occurred regularly over a period of time, a relatively early period in the Yoga, and were focused, though not exclusively, on the practice of the Yoga. The wise spiritual guidance of the Masters comes in response to specific questions put by the disciples who were in most respects beginners in the Yoga.

Despite their similarities, there are also important differences between the books. The Mother's *Questions and Answers 1929-1931* is different in style from the latter two books in that she gives relatively longer in-depth explanations of certain key principles; for those in 1929 she responds to pointed questions which are posed in the text, whereas for those in 1930-1931 no questions are recorded but each explanation is headed with a title signifying its topic. The conversations of 1929 were recorded by one of the participants who noted them down immediately afterwards and later sent them to Sri Aurobindo, who revised them for publication. Those of 1930-1931 were recorded in abbreviated longhand by one of the participants and the notes were later elaborated. These were not revised by Sri Aurobindo but the Mother did approve of their publication.

Pavitra's *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* differs from the other two books in that Part One, which comprises most of the book, is based on regular personal conversations that Pavitra had with Sri Aurobindo about his *sadhana* from December 1925 to November 1926, beginning near the time of Pavitra's arrival in Pondicherry and ending a few days before Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day in 1926. A few of these conversations near the end of this period were with the Mother, and a few of those with Sri Aurobindo reference Pavitra's discussions with the Mother. Part Two is based on the evening talks Sri Aurobindo had with a small group of disciples in 1926 on a range of topics; the few recorded here mostly concern occult phenomena, a special interest of Pavitra. As an introduction to the book, there is a talk by Pavitra given in 1964 to the students of the Ashram school about his interesting life leading up to his coming to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926 recorded by Anilbaran Roy is based on the talks Sri Aurobindo had with a small group of disciples several times a week between May and

September 1926, as noted down soon after the talks. Anilbaran Roy's original notebooks were lightly edited and a few unclear or doubtful passages were omitted. About two-fifths of these conversations overlap with A.B. Purani's account of these conversations in *Evening Talks*, though they differ due to their unique perspectives, and about three-fifths are newly published in this book. They cover a wide range of issues including India and its liberation, but many deal with *sadhana* and Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics.

Questions and Answers 1929-1931

We begin with the Mother's *Questions and Answers 1929-1931*. As mentioned above, the conversations from 1929 are different in style from those of 1930-1931, but both sets are characterized by penetrating explanations of important facets of the Yoga.

The following two extended quotations give a flavor of the richness of their substance. The first is from "Questions and Answers 1929", the beginning of the first conversation:

Will you say something to us about Yoga?

What do you want the Yoga for? To get power? To attain to peace and calm? To serve humanity?

None of these motives is sufficient to show that you are meant for the Path.

The question you are to answer is this: Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much so that it is simply impossible for you to do without it? Do you feel that your very *raison d'être* is the Divine and without it there is no meaning in your existence? If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path.

This is the first thing necessary — aspiration for the Divine.

The next thing you have to do is to tend it, to keep it always alert and awake and living. And for that what is required is concentration — concentration upon the Divine with a view to an integral and absolute consecration to its Will and Purpose.

Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down.

A fire is burning there, in the deep quietude of the heart. It is the divinity in you — your true being. Hear its voice, follow its dictates.

There are other centres of concentration, for example, one above the crown and another between the eye-brows. Each has its own efficacy and will give you a

particular result. But the central being lies in the heart and from the heart proceed all central movements — all dynamism and urge for transformation and power of realisation.

What is one to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga?

To be conscious, first of all. We are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it. It is through unconsciousness that the undivine forces enter into us and make us their slaves. You are to be conscious of yourself, you must awake to your nature and movements, you must know why and how you do things or feel or think them; you must understand your motives and impulses, the forces, hidden and apparent, that move you; in fact, you must, as it were, take to pieces the entire machinery of your being. Once you are conscious, it means that you can distinguish and sift things, you can see which are the forces that pull you down and which help you on. And when you know the right from the wrong, the true from the false, the divine from the undivine, you are to act strictly up to your knowledge; that is to say, resolutely reject one and accept the other. The duality will present itself at every step and at every step you will have to make your choice. You will have to be patient and persistent and vigilant — “sleepless”, as the adepts say; you must always refuse to give any chance whatever to the undivine against the divine. (pp. 1-2)

The second quotation is from “Questions and Answers 1930-1931” and is titled “Difficulties in Yoga”:

The nature of your difficulty indicates the nature of the victory you will gain, the victory you will exemplify in Yoga. Thus, if there is persistent selfishness, it points to a realisation of universality as your most prominent achievement in the future. And, when selfishness is there, you have also the power to reverse this very difficulty into its opposite, a victory of utter wideness.

When you have something to realise, you will have in you just the characteristic which is the contradiction of that something. Face to face with the defect, the difficulty, you say, “Oh, I am like that! How awful it is!” But you ought to see the truth of the situation. Say to yourself, “My difficulty shows me clearly what I have ultimately to represent. To reach the absolute negation of it, the quality at the other pole — this is my mission.”

Even in ordinary life, we have sometimes the experience of contraries. He who is very timid and has no courage in front of circumstances proves capable of bearing the most!

To one who has the aspiration for the Divine, the difficulty which is always before him is the door by which he will attain God in his own individual manner: it is his particular path towards the Divine Realisation.

There is also the fact that if somebody has a hundred difficulties it means he will have a tremendous realisation — provided, of course, there are in him patience and endurance and he keeps the aspiring flame of Agni burning against those defects.

And remember: the Grace of the Divine is generally proportioned to your difficulties. (p. 143)

We see from these three pages, selected from 180, the profundity and lucidity of these conversations of the Mother, and the tremendous guidance they provide to *sadbaks* and *sadbikas* of the Integral Yoga. They were directed specifically to a small group of disciples during the early years of the Ashram's existence, but their relevance for beginners on the Path (and aren't we all beginners?) is timeless.

Conversations with Sri Aurobindo

Let us now turn to Pavitra's *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo*, a relatively short book of 165 pages including the supplementary material at the end of the book. We become aware of his interest in occultism in the Introduction, which recounts Pavitra's life before coming to the Ashram. After completing one year of scientific studies at the École Polytechnique, the First World War broke out and he joined an artillery regiment. During the war, he says,

we sometimes had hard knocks, so to say, difficult times, but sometimes there was also a lot of free time to be filled. I don't know how – it was probably the hand of destiny – I started reading some books on so-called psychic phenomena...

There were all sorts of things. There were telepathy, clairvoyance, phenomena involving mediums... Then gradually, from one book to another, I was led to read what in Europe are called books on occultism... I read all that one could read on the subject...

I must say that it was Theosophy that opened the door to India to me, and for that I am extremely grateful...

So with these ideas from India, I entered a new phase, a phase of... of aspiration for spiritual perfection.

In November 1918, at the front, he contracted the Spanish flu, and while at the field hospital, where several people were dying each day from the flu, he had a very strong idea

which took away all fear of death: the complete offering of his life so that his spiritual destiny might be fulfilled. He recovered and soon after was demobilized from the military. After completing his studies he began work as an engineer, but it soon lost all interest for him. He explains, "And then, in 1920, I made the decision to give up that life and devote myself to the search for my spiritual teacher, my guru." He spent several years searching, in Japan, in Mongolia, studying Indian, Japanese and Chinese spirituality. From there he set out for India and after landing in Ceylon, decided to go first to Pondicherry, where he knew Sri Aurobindo resided. He met with Sri Aurobindo and explained to him his situation, and in the evening met the Mother. Sri Aurobindo had asked him to come again the next day when he explained to Pavitra the nature of his path and that if he wanted to try, he could stay. Pavitra explains, "I fell at his feet. He gave me his blessing and it was over. You see, a whole chapter of my life had come to an end. The search, the search for the source of light, the search for the one who would lead me to the Truth was over. Something else was beginning – the realisation, to put it into practice. But this time I had found Sri Aurobindo, I had found my guru."

Pavitra's conversations with Sri Aurobindo continued, approximately weekly, and Sri Aurobindo guided him, at first especially in meditation and in the realization of the witness Purusha. We find that Pavitra, like many, had difficulty controlling his thoughts when meditating. In his second meeting with Sri Aurobindo which is recorded in the book, Sri Aurobindo explained to him:

There is a region in us which is above space and time, immobile, immutable at first; it does not participate in the waves of emotions and thoughts. The first aim is to centre one's consciousness in this region and keep it there; this is Mukti. In us, beyond our personality, the Purusha is revealed, with several attributes which are successively unveiled.

First he appears as the witness of actions and sensations, untouched, unmoved.

Then he manifests as the giver of sanctions: he consents or refuses his consent to a movement of Prakriti – desire or thought or even action. When such an order is given – for instance, the refusal to participate in a certain emotion – then even though the past is still strong, the being turns away from that emotion.

Then the Purusha is the Knower and in him is the knowledge. This knowledge has several forms: the lowest is intuition, then comes unitive knowledge. In any case, the senses are no longer the avenues of knowledge; it comes directly.

Finally, the Purusha reveals himself as the Ishwara, the Lord. Governing and acting through his instruments, he at last takes his kingdom in his hands. (pp. 20–21)

This explanation continues. Sri Aurobindo says that this experience is established in two stages. In the first, one establishes a mental contact in the zone of the spiritual mind. One realises that one is above the mind, emotions and body, and one achieves peace and certitude. To achieve this, particularly in Pavitra's case (an alternative method of sitting down and opening to the influx from above is also mentioned), the first thing is to stop the thoughts at will. He says, "One must first separate oneself from the mind *mentally*, for one is not yet able to do it otherwise; one must observe it and study it. When this is done, it becomes easy to stop the thoughts. This is the first lesson of Yoga." He then explains,

Gradually a strong aspiration brings about the inrush (sometimes abruptly) of something new into the consciousness. Sometimes it is peace, solid as a rock. Sometimes light, almost physical, which illumines everything, inner and outer. Sometimes guidance. In any case, ineffable peace is followed by knowledge. And all this comes down from above – not, as with the Tantrics, starting from the lowest chakra, but on the contrary from above.

So for you, the first goal is to separate yourself from your mind and recognise it as being outside you. Take the attitude of the witness. Let thoughts come, but don't let yourself be carried away by them. Practise during meditation. Then you have to infuse into daily life what you first established in meditation. (p. 21)

One would be hard-pressed to find a more succinct and yet thorough guidance for the first essential steps of the Yoga. And yet, it is not easy to do, and Pavitra encountered various difficulties. At one point he says, "*All these days I have had many difficulties with my mind. At certain times, when I succeed in rising above it, everything is all right, but at other times I am overwhelmed. Meditation is laboured and without much benefit.*" (p. 39) Sri Aurobindo replies,

What is happening to you is common. The dynamic mind (not the mechanical, which only repeats the actions and thoughts of ordinary life) acquires even more strength when the other higher parts are calm and when, at certain times, it is reduced to silence. When one relapses during meditation, one loses one's feet in the whirlwind. It is a common experience. Don't be afraid of it, but continue to detach yourself more and more. When this detachment is complete, the waves will gradually become less powerful and recede. This experience has to be extended to the whole conscious life and not only to the period of meditation. (p. 39)

On the next visit five days later, Pavitra reported improvement in his concentration and detachment. Sri Aurobindo then suggested this advice, which would seem to have a general applicability:

Now that you can observe the calmness of the mind and separate yourself from the action of the mind linked to the physical, you must give up these efforts and remain in an expectant attitude, open to the working from above – without making an effort to go towards that which is above, but, knowing it is there, offering yourself for its descent. Don't even make an effort to “see” or “feel”. Quiet everything below and wait – make a simple aspiration towards what you know is near. (p. 42)

Pavitra's *sadhana* proceeded rapidly, and once the mind was opened to the higher consciousness, the Force from above began descending into the vital and working there. He explains to Sri Aurobindo:

As I said, I am conscious of the dissolving power of the Force from above. It goes down to the navel centre and works from there. I cannot say yet how it works, but at times a sense of vital power rises.

I am fully conscious from above of vital movements rising. For instance, a movement of pride rises – it comes from the navel – and I realise it as distinct from myself. But what shall I do with it? Up to the present time I have merely tried to force it down and bar its coming into the conscious field. But I think it is not right. (p. 94)

Sri Aurobindo responded, “No. That is what people ordinarily do, but it simply suppresses the vital movements. You have to call down the same power that dissolves the mental formations and apply it to open the vital. You have to watch and understand the movements, see how they rise, what supports them in your nature. A full understanding of this is necessary.” (pp. 94-95)

In the final section of the book, titled “Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo”, talks held with a small group of disciples during 1926, Pavitra recorded those conversations especially pertaining to occult phenomena. For example, there is this interesting observation and warning:

Mediumship brings great dangers. To be a medium is to lend oneself without control to all kinds of beings of the vital plane, often of the lowest order. These vital beings try to contact the physical plane in order to find willing instruments there to project on them their influence. They are always in search of human beings to make use of them; this varies from a simple influence to a complete possession. The latter is a fearful danger.

Apart from possession, we must remember that the vital is the plane of desires, and that any work with the forces of that plane carries in itself the danger related to these desires: ambition, greed, lust, etc. (p. 135)

We find in this book a fascinating glimpse into the guru-disciple relationship Sri Aurobindo had with Pavitra, with his wise and patient guidance leading Pavitra to the

development of his consciousness. Sri Aurobindo explains subtle nuances of the discipline he enjoins on Pavitra to steady and quiet and then detach from the mind, and how to deal with the difficulties that ensued. There is also guidance on detachment from the movements of the vital consciousness and their transformation in the light and power of the higher consciousness. We find fascinating glimpses into the Mother's Yogic work on Pavitra's consciousness and her unique perspectives on its transformation. We also learn of Sri Aurobindo's views and guidance related to various occult matters with which Pavitra had a special interest.

Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926

The third book of conversations on Yoga we will discuss is Anilbaran Roy's account, his recollections written down soon after the talks took place, of Sri Aurobindo's talks with a small group of *sadhaks* several times a week on the Library House veranda that overlooks the entrance to the Ashram. There were seven regular participants and five occasional participants, and their names are used in the text preceding their questions and comments. Among those present, A.B. Purani also made a record of the conversations along with other discussions held both before and after this period, and his book *Evening Talks* is a more extensive record. However, unlike Purani's account, these are presented in chronological order, and are confined to this interesting series of conversations prior to Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day realisation in November 1926.

Anilbaran Roy has presented Sri Aurobindo's explanations as if they were in his own words, but it should be kept in mind that they are Anilbaran's recollections of what Sri Aurobindo had said. It is therefore important to know something about the person that he was. Born in 1890 in the Burdwan District of Bengal, he went on to study at Calcutta University, where he received Master's degrees in English and Philosophy as well as a degree in law. For several years he taught college courses in Philosophy. In 1921, he gave up his developing academic career to join the Non-Cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Two years later he joined the Swarajya Party of Chittaranjan Das to work for India's freedom. In 1924 he was arrested and imprisoned for two years in Alipore Central Jail and Baharampur Jail. While in jail, Anilbaran corresponded with Sri Aurobindo and began to practice Yoga under his guidance. After his release from jail in 1926, Anilbaran went to live with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and for the next forty years he remained in the Ashram. An introspective *sadhak* who spent most of his time in quiet spiritual practice, he also had an active intellectual life and wrote several books and numerous articles for newspapers and journals. In 1966 he returned to Bengal to work for the reunification of Pakistan with India. However, due to the lack of response from the people and the government, the endeavour failed to bear fruit. He passed away in Calcutta on 3 November 1974.

Sri Aurobindo's evening talks with this group of disciples during this period in 1926 covered a wide range of issues from the mundane to the spiritual, often coming in response to questions from the participants. In the present essay, I am focusing on conversations on Yoga, but this book in particular gives Sri Aurobindo's insights and perspectives on a host of issues, from the unity of India and of Europe to the Ayurvedic system to ancestor worship in Japan to nation building and politics. On the subject of Yoga the talks covered the nature of the psychic being, difficulties in the supramental yoga, the mental and supramental consciousness, divine power and divine grace and how the descent of supramental will help humanity, to name but a few.

To give a more vivid sense of the kinds of insights provided in this book, focusing on those related to Yoga, a few extended quotations will be valuable. The first talk recorded in the book, from 18 May 1926, is about Yoga, and comes in response to a question from another disciple who was present about how the Supermind will be expressed in the activities of the superman. Here are a few selections from Sri Aurobindo's reply:

Certainly when the Supermind is realised in you, you will have external activities—a superman is not going to pass his time sitting in an armchair, meditating on philosophy. But yours is a state of preparation. You will have to make your mind plastic, make your whole being a proper instrument, so that the higher power may work through you. This is sufficient work for you—this preparation of your mind and being by sadhana. During this time you retain certain external activities as a field of experiment. You do any kind of work in order to learn to do it in the proper way. In ordinary life, the manner of working is blind and haphazard—there is not the right attitude. When a Yogi works, he works with a deeper consciousness; his hands and fingers move automatically, not as a dead automatic instrument but with full consciousness behind the automatic activity...

When the Supermind comes and sets you to work, what form that work will take is not possible to say beforehand. There are infinite possibilities, and the Truth-Force will determine the work for each according to his Swadharma and according to the development of circumstances. The mind can catch glimpses of the nature of the work that is to be accomplished, but these can be falsified....

We should reject the constructions of the mind. The constructions of the mind, the plans and forms evolved by the physical mind are an obstacle, an impediment to the working of Truth. Observe the forces that are at work, study the mistakes committed in life and find out the truth behind them, but do not form plans; leave it to the higher power to organise and effectuate the work that has to be done.... Of course the purpose must be fixed—there should be an unalterable purpose before you. But as to the means and methods of achieving that purpose, you must always be ready to change and modify them according as developments arise. (pp. 1–4)

One more sample from the conversation of 10 August 1926 is particularly interesting. It comes in reply to a letter that was read out to him by Anilbaran from Satyendra Mitra who distinguished between Jnanayoga and Karmayoga and hinted that Karmayoga is better than Jnanayoga. Here are a few selections from Sri Aurobindo's reply:

My Yoga is not merely Jnanayoga—it also contains the other elements. Neither is it true that there cannot be any work in the beginning of this Yoga. Action is compatible with the first stage of this Yoga; but the purpose of this action is to come in contact with the light above. Instead of acting in the way men ordinarily do, one seeks to dwell in the higher consciousness and to execute with faith (*śraddhā*) and concentrated will (*niṣṭhā*) any action for which the call comes from within—this is possible in the first stage of the Yoga.

After that, in the intermediate stage, special stress has to be laid on the inner change. At this stage, it is not advisable to undertake any action that may hamper the inward-oriented sadhana. It is not possible to effectuate the inner transformation while being engaged in any activity that demands the total absorption of the mind and the heart....

When, as a result of the practice of Yoga, the inner change has been effected and the sadhak has been established in the higher consciousness and the higher light, then there is no harm in doing any action from there. But this action does not take the form of blind stumbling as do the actions of the lower life. The Yogi turns his transformed nature into an instrument of the divine Shakti and the divine will gets infallibly effectuated through him. Behind this action reign an immutable peace, a true vision and a divine delight.

There is a great and profound purpose behind our Yoga. It is not solely for India, it is for the whole world, although India may be its starting point. But it is no use speaking of that now; the world is not yet ready for it. (pp. 131–32)

The book of 254 pages presents a fascinating look into the interactions of Sri Aurobindo with this small group of close disciples. There is a lot of back and forth between the disciples themselves and with Sri Aurobindo, and sometimes lightheartedness and humor. We get a sense of the vastness of Sri Aurobindo's knowledge on a wide range of issues. There is a definite emphasis on issues related to the Yoga so it is a helpful guide in these matters and our understanding becomes more nuanced.

Taken together, these three books are a valuable resource of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's guidance in Yoga specifically addressed to their disciples. They address a range of issues confronted by the disciples in the early stages of their practice of the Yoga. As a set, they give us both the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's guidance, which differ in their style and approach. The Mother's *Questions and Answers 1929–1931* shows us the Mother's

wise and deep guidance, her explanations are given at length and are well-formulated; most were revised by Sri Aurobindo. In Pavitra's *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo*, we get a more focused guidance on certain fundamental aspects of the *sadhana*, while in *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926* recorded by Anilbaran Roy we find a more wide-ranging discussion of Yoga as well as other topics.

—Larry Seidlitz

Larry Seidlitz, PhD, is a psychologist and scholar focusing on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He is presently associated with Savitri Bhavan in Auroville, where he leads the Savitri Study Circle and helps edit their journal Invocation. For many years he edited Collaboration, a USA-based journal on the Integral Yoga and has authored the books Transforming Lives, Integral Yoga at Work, and The Spiritual Evolution of the Soul.

WORKS CITED

1. The Mother. COLLECTED WORKS OF THE MOTHER Volume 3: *Questions and Answers 1929–1931*. 2d ed. (pp.1–180) Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2003. [Page numbers of references in this essay are from this edition]

NOTE: The same text as above is available in a smaller format, without the pages comprising Commentaries on the Dhammapada.

The Mother. *Conversations 1929–1931*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2013.

2. Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire). *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2007.

3. *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926*. Recorded by Anilbaran Roy. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2020.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 10 Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection (Chapters 1–7)

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced
Research Trust, Pondicherry

354 pp, Rs 525, ISBN: 978-93-85391-42-2

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Volume Ten of this series commences with Part Four of *The Synthesis of Yoga*: “The Yoga of Self-Perfection” and covers the first seven chapters. In his talks that form the basis of these volumes, the author, employing simple language and contemporary contexts, strives to explain the philosophical arguments Sri Aurobindo articulates regarding his synthesis of the traditional paths of yoga with his own unique contribution to achieve the Integral Yoga. Initial chapters address the definition of integral perfection and its double movement of personal effort followed by the complete surrender to a higher power. The psychology of self-perfection deals with the instrumentation of the inner being, its purification through the emergence of the psychic being as the unifying principle. The last two chapters chart the purification of the mind, the intelligence, and the will to develop intuition, inspiration, and revelation as higher powers of “thought-sight and truth-seeing”.

See review on page 33

Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Nationalism

—Anurag Banerjee

Publisher: Sayantan Publication, Kolkata

224 pp, Rs 499, ISBN: 978-81-967740-4-2

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Originally serialised in the quarterly journal *Śraddha* in 2017–18, this account of Sri Aurobindo’s political philosophy and strategy

for gaining complete independence from Britain covers familiar territory. It does, however, include some lesser known details recovered from the archives of documents relative to the time period Sri Aurobindo was intimately involved in the movement. The section on the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, for example, reveals how deeply he was associated with all aspects of its publication, including directives on the responsibilities of its officers and a review of its budgetary issues; his plans to reorganise the Nationalist Party in another chapter are presented in comparable detail. The final chapter, “Sri Aurobindo on Religious Nationalism and Communal Harmony”, was first presented as a research paper at a national seminar in 2022.

See review on page 28

Reading *The Life Divine*, Reading *Savitri*

—Shraddhavan

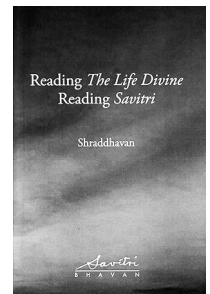
Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

36 pp, Rs 120, ISBN: 978-81-974549-4-3

Dimensions: 14 x 21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The first article in this booklet explains the basis for the study circle talks on *The Life Divine* conducted at Savitri Bhavan. Subtitled “Some Highlights of a Pilgrimage”, the text signals eight highlights of *The Life Divine*, including among others the foundation of Sri Aurobindo’s world view, the ascent of the soul, the divinisation of matter, and spiritual evolution—the keynote of earthly existence.



The second article, “Reading *Savitri* for Progress and Delight”, describes the many ways that people approach the reading of this epic poem. But the author warns that without the deeper response of our souls a continuous reading

becomes a ritual, an aesthetic appreciation hardly feasible, an intellectual study at risk of engendering a stereotyped understanding. The poem should be read as a means of progress and for the delight of the soul.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji: A Rishi
Mankind on the March (Series One)

—Oeendrilā Guha

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

61 pp, Rs 70, ISBN: 978-93-85391-10-1

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The first in a series of monographs titled *Mankind on the March* dedicated to personalities who have made significant contributions to human evolution, this book looks at the life of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The monographs seek to present research based on the insights and observations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on each of the featured personalities. The author first situates Bankim Chandra Chatterji in the context of the Bengal Renaissance and then examines his life and works as a patriot, a humanist, a novelist and a poet—in full, as a Rishi who stood for a religion of humanity.

See review on page 22

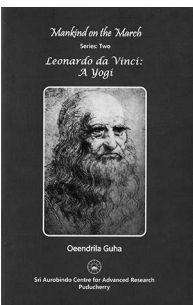
Leonardo da Vinci: A Yogi
Mankind on the March (Series Two)

—Oeendrilā Guha

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

32 pp, Rs 75, ISBN: 978-93-85391-43-9

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



The second in a series of monographs titled *Mankind on the March* dedicated to personalities who have made significant contributions to the evolution of consciousness, this book looks at the life

of Leonardo da Vinci. Taking as its premise that these personalities are representatives of the five distinct psychological stages of social evolution as described by Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*, the author studies the life of da Vinci. A man of the Renaissance, da Vinci used his remarkable intelligence to serve the higher faculties of the human being. A polymath, a seeker of beauty and delight, a genius of the individual age, he exemplified a universality of spirit.

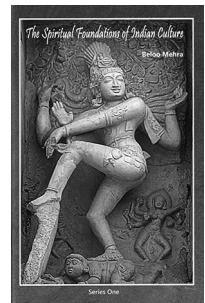
The Spiritual Foundations of Indian Culture
 —Beloo Mehra

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry

58 pp, Rs 95, ISBN: 978-93-85391-32-3

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

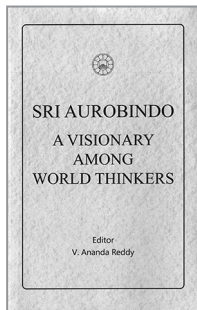
The first in a series of monographs, *The Spiritual Foundations of Indian Culture* presents the fundamental spiritual truths and enduring principles on which Indian culture is founded. The book seeks to revive the



glorious revelations from the Vedic scriptures in the light of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teaching. The monograph inspires a deeper introspection into how this spiritual heritage has shaped Indian culture through the ages. The author examines the concept of Brahman as the eternal goal of life, Yoga as the means of self-perfection, and Dharma as the law that governs and conditions our actions; together they can effect a complete change of consciousness. In the second part of the book, the author suggests how Indian culture can impact the future of humanity as the world progresses towards the manifestation of the Divine in all aspects of life.

Sri Aurobindo: A Visionary Among World Thinkers: Comparative Studies in Select Concepts from Sri Aurobindo and World Thinkers

—Essays by various authors, ed. V. Ananda Reddy
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry
387 pp, Rs 750, ISBN: 978-93-85391-41-5
Dimensions: 16 x 24 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



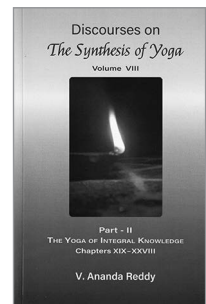
Contemporary scholars compare Sri Aurobindo's perspective on a range of concepts and ideas with noted philosophical and contemplative thinkers from both India and the West. The leadoff essay by Nolini Kanta Gupta sets the high tone of this collection by

setting out the ideal of Sri Aurobindo "to divinise the human, immortalise the mortal, spiritualise the material". Five essays compare Sri Aurobindo's ideas with other Indian thinkers on subjects such as spiritual awakening and enlightenment and interpretations of Advaita. The remaining essays examine comparisons with Western philosophers including Heraclitus, Gebser, Hegel, and Chalmers; psychologists Freud and Csikszentmihalyi; revolutionaries Marx and Gramsci; and educationists and linguists Steiner, Montessori, and Bakhtin. In the wideness and depth of these reflections one recognises Sri Aurobindo's power to reveal, "to the eye of vision and the heart of faith", the promise of this highest ideal for our future.

**Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 8
Part II: The Yoga of Integral Knowledge
(Chapters 19–28)**

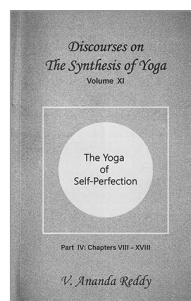
—V. Ananda Reddy
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry
522 pp, Rs 680, ISBN: 978-93-85391-46-0
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

Transcribed from Dr Reddy's talks on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Volume Eight completes his discourse on The Yoga of Integral Knowledge. The author traces Sri Aurobindo's description of the different planes of consciousness defined by the relationship between Soul and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti. At the base of the ladder of ascension is the plane of the lower triple purusha—the vital, physical and mental aspects of existence. Transcending this plane of our ordinary consciousness, one ascends towards a hierarchy of worlds. Three chapters are devoted to Vijñana or Gnosis, where the mental man is changed into the gnostic soul, a truth-conscious godhead, the path to attaining that consciousness, and finally the highest level of consciousness, that of Gnosis and Ananda. From there the discourse turns to address the relationship between the higher and lower knowledge, the experience of Samadhi within the Integral Yoga, and the deeper aspects of Hathayoga and Rajayoga, whose practices are intended to serve a higher, more dynamic purpose in a spiritual transformation.



**Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 11
Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection
(Chapters 8–18)**

—V. Ananda Reddy
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry
433 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-45-3
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover



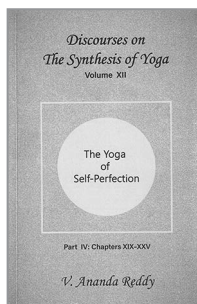
The previous volume in this series showed how the psychology of self-perfection applies to the instrumentation of the being, its purification in preparation for the liberation

of the Spirit and the Nature, which is where Volume Eleven begins. The liberation of the soul into the limitless Spirit demands freedom from the first two “master-knots of the lower nature”: desire and ego. The liberation of the Nature exacts freedom from the second two: the dual action of Nature and the rule of the three *gunas*. Subsequent chapters delineate the elements of perfection starting from a basic equality of the soul mounting to an ideal action of the Divine through the perfected being. Along with an integral equality comes the requisite raising of the capacities of the actions of the mind, life, and body to a divine level. In the final chapters the author speaks of the Divine Shakti and how faith in the action of the Shakti is the most essential element in helping to perfect the instrumental being.

**Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol 12
Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection
(Chapters 19–25)**

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for
Advanced Research Trust, Pondicherry
450 pp, Rs 625, ISBN: 978-93-85391-47-7
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



In this, the final volume of his commentary on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the author attempts to help readers understand the last, gloriously complex six chapters of the book. He begins with some characteristics of the supermind: it is a

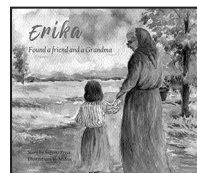
knowledge by identity and oneness; it is total, encompassing the transcendent, the universal, and the individual simultaneously; there is no division between truth and will or between the idea and its execution, because it is both the knower and the known. When the powers of the supermind descend, they begin to

operate with different capacities, retaining their essence and character but diluted from their supramental fullness. Chapters on the gradations of the supermind, the supramental thought and knowledge, its instruments, and the supramental sense and time vision seek to characterise a greater perfection that comes by the gradual descent of more and more of the supramental light and energy into the whole mental being, lifting the intuition and its powers towards their source in the supramental nature.

Erika found a friend and a Grandma

—Story by Sajjyoti Priya; Illustrations by Mahua
Publisher: Nava Vihan, Pondicherry
52 pp, Rs 395, ISBN: 978-81-956476-6-8
Dimensions: 24 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

Based on a true incident that took place in a small village in Hungary, *Erika found a friend and a Grandma* is a delightful story about a seven-year-old girl named



Erika and her friendship with an elderly woman named Hanna. Written by Sajjyoti Priya and illustrated by Mahua, this tale celebrates the bond of love and friendship that develops between these two strangers, who decide to spread a message of joy and goodwill in the world.

The Mother's Loving Guidance to Her Disciples

—Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced
Research Trust, Pondicherry
266 pp, Rs 375, ISBN: 978-93-85391-48-4
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover

The author has woven a detailed history of the early days of the Ashram with charming accounts of how the Mother guided her disciples in their work and spiritual growth through her daily loving touch. Much of the material here is well known, drawn from Sri Aurobindo's letters and

from reminiscences written by older members of the Ashram, but the author has skilfully gathered the diverse source material into a narrative that describes how life was organised by the Mother. We see how people were drawn into a particular work that eventually developed into a regular service. Creative avenues of expression receive a special emphasis – dance, music, photography, art, skilled handiwork – the Mother encouraged all such avenues for the spiritual development of the *sadhaks*.

See review on page 26

Sri Aurobindo's Early Poetry

Tradition, Modernism and Mysticism

—Sarani Ghosal Mondal

Publisher: La Mère Books, Kolkata

76 pp, Rs 330, ISBN: 978-93-341-6051-2

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In this scholarly study of Sri Aurobindo's early poetry the author finds threads of poetic tradition, modernism's economy of style, and elements of the romantic, or the mystic in these poems. She sees the early poetry as a preface to the poetry as Mantra of the Real, Sri Aurobindo's poetic theory as expounded in *The Future Poetry*. References to the influence of Emerson, Whitman, Arnold, and Phillips, the poetry of Mother-worship in both the early poetry and later in Alipore Jail when he wrote the mystical poem "The Mother of Dreams", the poetic nature of his prose writing after 1909, and his translations of the Vaishnava poets are just a few of the themes addressed in the book. Detailed explications of many poems in Chapter Two, "The Sad and the Sublime", and a flow of extracts from *The Future Poetry* and Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry go far to enhance our appreciation of his early poetry.

See review on page 19

Matrimandir: The Petals

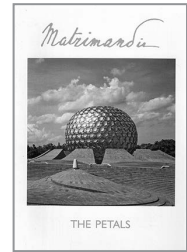
Publisher: Auroville Press,

Auroville

16 pp, Rs 80

Dimensions: 12 x 18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



This small accordion-style booklet explains that the twelve petals surrounding the Matrimandir correspond to the twelve petals of the Mother's symbol. Inside each Matrimandir petal is a small meditation room representing one of the twelve powers of the Mother. Colour photographs of each of the twelve meditation rooms with some words of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo signify the power associated with the petals of the Mother's symbol.

BENGALI

Savitri (Gadyanuvad) Tritiya o Chaturtha Khand—Sri Aurobindo, ISBN: 978-93-341-1239-9, Rs 475

FRENCH

Une Introduction à l'Épopée de Sri Aurobindo Savitri—Une Légende et Un symbole
—Compiled by Shraddhavan
ISBN: 978-81-974549-5-0, Rs 150
L'Anglais de Savitri: Volume 02 (Livre Trois: Le Livre de la Mère Divine)
Commentaires sur le langage de l'épopée de Sri Aurobindo—Shraddhavan
ISBN: 978-81-974549-3-6, Rs 620
Matrimandir—Les Pétales, Rs 80

GUJARATI

Pahelani Krutio (Granth 2)—Sri Mataji, Rs 300
Kelavani (Granth 12)—Sri Mataji, Rs 300
Vichar Ratno ane Sutronu Vivaran (Granth 10)
—Sri Mataji, Rs 300
Sadhanani Nodhpothi 1964-1973 (Granth 11)
—Sri Mataji, Rs 300

HINDI

Sriaravind Sahitya Sanchayan (Bhag 1)
—Sri Aravind ke Lekhon se Sankalit
ISBN: 978-81-962318-7-3, Rs 650
Matrimandir—Pankhudiyan, Rs 80

MARATHI

Sri Aravindalikhita Patre: Khand Ek
—Sri Aurobindo, Rs 320
Sri Aravindalikhita Patre: Khand Don
—Sri Aurobindo, Rs 260
Sri Aravindalikhita Patre: Khand Teen
—Sri Aurobindo, Rs 220

ORIYA

Sindhuru Bindue—Santosh Rath
ISBN: 978-81-86413-70-8, Rs 130

SANSKRIT

Matrimandir—Dwadashadalani, Rs 80

TAMIL

Sri Aravindar (Vazhkai Varalaru)—Dr R. Ravi
(Gunavathy Maindan), Rs 300
Savitri Panmuga Sitthiram—Bhuvanasundari
ISBN: 978-81-974549-8-1, Rs 350
Vaazhum Kalai—Sri Aravindar-Sri Annai
Ezhuttukkallilirundhu Thogukkappattavai
ISBN: 978-81-7060-473-0, Rs 195
Sri Aravindarin Azhagiya Varungala
Kavithaigal
—Sri Aravindar, ISBN: 978-81-7060-472-3
Rs 165
Matrimandir—Ithazhgal, Rs 80

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

If you no longer wish to receive a printed copy
by post of the bi-annual SABDA newsletter
Recent Publications please inform us at
mail@sabda.in

or

WhatsApp us at +91 94885 03098.

As a reminder, you can simply download the
PDF of the newsletter (21st February and 15th
August) from our website <https://www.sabda.in>
and choose the Newsletters tab.

Ordering Information

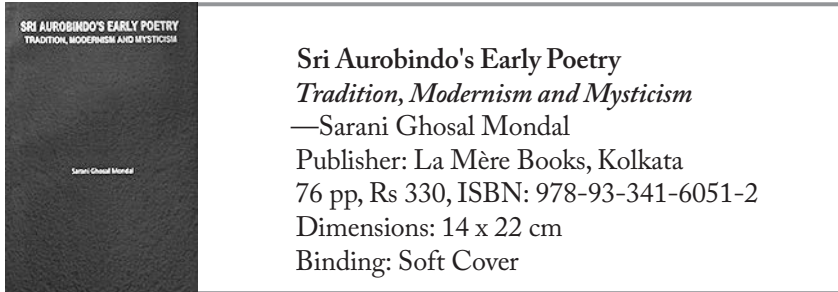
Our complete catalogue of books and other
items, with images and content descriptions,
can be viewed at our website. Submit your
order through the website's shopping cart
facility, which will instantly generate
an online quote including postage and
forwarding. You may then proceed to pay
online or by other indicated options.

In India: For orders of total book value
above Rs 2500, shipping of books is free.
Below this limit, shipping is charged.
Payment can be made by bank draft
favouring *SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram*
payable at Pondicherry, or online via our
website. On receipt of payment, the books/
items will be sent by registered post/surface
courier.

Overseas: Place your order through our
website as indicated above. Those without
internet access may contact us to receive
quotes for the various available mailing
options.

SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry 605 002 India
tel: +91 413 222 3328, 223 3656
email: mail@sabda.in
web: <https://www.sabda.in>
WhatsApp: +91 94885 03098

BOOK REVIEWS



Professor of English Mondal has gifted us a short but sweet, thoroughly researched and well-argued rehabilitation of Sri Aurobindo's early, sometimes more psychologically and emotionally themed poetry in the context of different phases of his life and in contrast to his later, increasingly spiritual and mantric poetry.

Considering Aurobindo Ghosh's early literary works in the context of his later ones gives us insights into the evolution of consciousness in the poet himself, as he saw and used poetry as a means of transcribing his inner life. Of course, Sri Aurobindo's later magnum opus *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol* towers even over his other spiritual poetry, but long before he consciously encoded his yogic experiences into mantric language he had already recorded his thoughts and feelings in verse. As Sri Aurobindo is considered a *kavi*, a seer-poet, and avatar by many readers, and in this regard his most well-developed, later compositions often perceived as the most relevant and impactful today, it's nice for a change to be reminded that he had a more humanly familiar side as a young man, as his early poetry attests to. At the same time, as Mondal makes clear, to relegate his first publications to a purely human, less or uninspired position within his works would be a disservice to the seeds of a mystical orientation, spiritual yearning and promise of future revelation, not to speak of his already evident technical talent and skill. Rather, Mondal gives us a fine example of how to conduct nuanced research on as delicate and complex a subject matter as Sri Aurobindo's evolution as a poet through the themes on his mind, close to his heart and burning in his soul that seemed worthwhile of expression to him already early in his literary career. Mondal argues that they can give us not only insights into his development as a poet but also into his evolution as an individual, from

the personal towards the transpersonal, from relatable humanity in isolation and loss to inspiring divinity “Beyond the last pinnacle seized by the thinker”. (CWSA 2: 202)

In the first chapter Mondal explores Sri Aurobindo’s early poetic influences and takes us through Sri Aurobindo’s transition, physically as well as in style and themes of his poetry, from the West to the East. She takes us through the relevance of writings such as “Light”, “Envoi”, “Songs to Myrtilla” and “The Harmony of Virtue”; in this last she perceives a foreshadowing of his “maturest period” in Pondicherry, reminding her of his translation of the Isha Upanishad. Mondal introduces Sri Aurobindo’s developing theory of poetry and his postulated necessary psychological faculties of “revealing power” and “inspiration, intuitive judgement and intuitive reason” for producing worthwhile poetry. The professor finds the closest match in Arthur Symons’ writings on the topic from 1899, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and differences as well as commonalities between Sri Aurobindo’s views on theoretical deliberations on metaphysical sources and potential effects of poetry and those of T.S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and W.B. Yeats. Some of them see poetry as “the natural subjective efflux of the soul” or the poet as a “seer”. Addressing the criticism that Sri Aurobindo “could not use the techniques of modernism”, she rather sees him as an integral poet able to draw on various styles and themes that usually might be considered incompatible. Finally, Prof. Mondal tracks the image of the divine feminine and its increasing prominence in Sri Aurobindo’s writing, reflecting his intensifying inner focus on Her until its first, in her eyes, entirely mystical and spiritual poetic expression in “The Mother of Dreams”, which she links to “Rose of God” and of course to *Savitri*.

In the second chapter, “The Sad and the Sublime”, Mondal’s scholarship highlights letters that reflect Sri Aurobindo’s own perspectives on his literary work, such as his acknowledgement of influences from Stephen Phillips, Meredith, Swinburne and Matthew Arnold, but “only on his expressive devices”, not “on his consciousness”. Further, the professor perceives the “most obvious echoes” of Keats, Wordsworth and Petrarch in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry but that “he was never imitating”. She argues with the help of T.S. Eliot that no poet can stand completely apart from what has come before and finds that Sri Aurobindo took “cues” from Emerson for his developing theory of poetry. Emerson’s phrase “poetry as efflux of the soul” is seen by Mondal to be reflected in Sri Aurobindo’s early use of the symbol of the rose. She examines the theme of different forms of love in Sri Aurobindo’s translations done in Baroda and Calcutta, which Mondal deems a “history of consciousness” through which he “was seeking to reveal the consciousness of the poets of that age”. She contrasts the style of the translations from what Sri Aurobindo termed the moral, intellectual and material phases with Sri Aurobindo’s own poetry of the time, which retained his refinement of the “creative vital” through his yoga, while the

translations of other poets “followed their temperament as reflected in their words and images”.

Moving into the main part of the second chapter, we examine specific poems in more detail. Mondal reflects on themes of modernism, nature-mysticism, and the poetic expression of interiorised meditative states in contrast to those of a more mundane consciousness in respect to the three poems “The Sea at Night”, “Evening” and “A Tree”, while she interprets “Revelation” to be about a “spiritual vision of a cosmic lady”. She sees the progression from romantic to divine love as a major theme, which gets a strong biographical and psychologically interpretative component in poems she finds to be by and large about Sri Aurobindo’s relationship with his young wife who, Mondal argues, he perceived as a feminine aspect of the Divine. To explore this theme the professor takes us through seven early poems of Sri Aurobindo, from “Life and Death” and “O Face That I Have Loved” to “I Cannot Equal”, “O Letter Dull and Cold”, “My Life is Wasted”, “Because Thy Flame is Spent” and “Rose, I have Loved”.

Finally, in the third and last chapter, “Conclusion—The Turning Point (1909–12): Linking the Early with the Later Poetry”, Mondal speculates on the psychological and emotional states expressed in as well as the biographical context of Sri Aurobindo’s early poetry:

There is an undercurrent of sadness in Sri Aurobindo’s early lyric poetry, the source of which might have been in the lonely life of a student at Cambridge,...who suffered from financial problems as his father could not send him money regularly. Temperamentally too, Aurobindo did not interact much with his other classmates and also stayed away from cricket and other games. Apart from the note of sublimity, which was already there in his early poetry written between the mid-1880s and 1910, we come across sudden painful lines in *Songs to Myrtilla* written during his stay in England:

For there was none who loved me, no, not one.
Alas, what was there that a man should love?
For I was misery’s last and frailest son
And even my mother bade me homeless rove.

Further, the professor identifies the relationship with his wife Mrinalini, their often-times physical but also inner distance due to his increasingly yogic orientation, and finally her sudden death as a source of pain that expressed itself in his writing of that time, as exemplified by a letter to his father-in-law in 1919:

God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre.... Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving.

Of course these challenging times of youth and married life in the midst of revolution and intensifying *sadhana* were followed by even greater ones in terms of outer circumstances, be they solitary confinement in Alipore Jail or secret departure to French India, but even greater inwardly by taking on the entire terrestrial evolution of consciousness as his field of work. Mondal identifies the “Uttarpara Speech” and other prose of that time as “concealed poetry”, which marks the transition from more personal, psychological, still more human-seeming themes to that of what she calls “supreme realisation” (“Ahana”, “The Infinite Adventure” and “Omnipresence”). Even poems composed in prison without pen and paper seem to her expressions of “new-found ecstasy and enthusiasm” in spiritual (“Invitation”) and pantheistic (“Who”) experiences. Professor Mondal perceives this transition to naturally lead to the more purely mantric, rather than psychologically expressive later poetry, the linguistic framework for which Sri Aurobindo began outlining in *The Future Poetry* in 1917. His vision of a future poetry and “conjugal love conquering death” was to find its “supreme realisation” between 1930 and 1950 in *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol*.

—Matthias Pommerening

Matthias, a psychologist, is a frequent contributor of book reviews for Recent Publications.

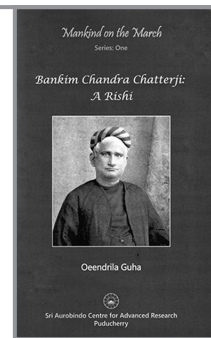
Bankim Chandra Chatterji: A Rishi
Mankind on the March (Series One)

—Oeendrilu Guha

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust,
 Pondicherry

61 pp, Rs 70, ISBN: 978-93-85391-10-1

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



Bankim Chandra Chatterji: *A Rishi* by Oeendrilu Guha, part of a monograph series on personalities who contributed to human evolution, is a neat and compact and condensed survey of the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterji over his formative and mature years and across different literary genres. Based on Sri Aurobindo’s assessment, the author establishes Bankim Chandra as Rishi, while taking into account the roles of artist, humanist, positivist, realist, and modernist too, which help secure the idea of

the Rishi. Beginning by establishing the background and milieu of Bankim Chandra's writings, Ms Guha proceeds methodically and logically, taking up for analysis the many facets of the Rishi's personality, studying them as part of and reflected in and through his literary works mainly. Bengal of colonial times is specifically seen as the land of Renaissance, with a big roll call of visionaries and revolutionaries who welcomed the new era of religious, social, and political reforms. The author has grouped Bankim Chandra in this as an example of one who stood for the synthesis of the old and the modern, the East and the West, as seen in the second phase of the Bengal Renaissance. According to the author, Bankim Chandra was among the chief architects of this phase and led Bengal and India towards an 'eclectic expression'.

Appraisal of Bankim Chandra Chatterji as Rishi focuses on his three seminal contributions to India, which the author mentions as the finding of a fit medium of expression, moulding a religion of patriotism, and envisioning his country as Mother India. It is after presenting Bankim Chandra in his different roles that the author draws the conclusion that all of his works are written in a 'spiritual conviction', and this is mainly attributed to the 'mantric truth' of which he had the vision and then expressed in his works. Otherwise, there is no special attempt to bring home this point as evident in his writings, which are viewed from other perspectives as well, such as the historical, social, and political. Ms Guha's account of Bankim Chandra's growth as an artist includes a short survey of the poet, novelist, journalist, sometimes overlapping into the modernist, realist, feminist, and positivist. In her analysis of Bankim Chandra's poetry, she comments on the brilliance of the early works of the poet and the heralding of the Subjective Age of evolution. It is along the lines of the poetry of Sri Aurobindo, Shakespeare, and Shelley that Bankim Chandra is viewed as a poet. The comparison with Coleridge's theory of imagination offers an interestingly new perspective, and the author points out that Bankim Chandra fulfils the part that the English Romantics played, that of bringing in a 'higher and alternate truth of existence'. His contribution to nation-building was by way of giving the 'sacred mantra' as a seer-poet. The author reads into his journalistic writings too the performance of a similar task of awakening the Bengali spirit and thus contributing to nationalism.

The lengthiest discussion here, however, is of Bankim Chandra as a novelist, which gets the best attention of the author. We have an interesting observation in the comment that being an administrator in the British government proved both to be a help and hindrance in his novel writing. Yet, it was the 'creative agent' in the artist that gave us some immortal characters, and with just a handful of novels Bankim Chandra successfully established himself in the 'heart of the Bengali race'. The author does not fail to point out that his influence was not limited to Bengal and the Bengali but spilled over outside Bengal. The novels of Bankim Chandra have been categorised into three types. The romantic,

psychological type deals with Bengali domestic life. The important characteristic, as pointed out by the author, is the visible European influence, and also the creation of female characters depicted as modern, independent, symbolising the new era. Later on this marital romance evolved into 'spiritual romance', which, the author points out, is based on the *bhakti* gospel of the Gita. In the ideological novel too, the dominant motif is the economically independent woman. These novels, according to the author, can also be labelled *bildungsromans*. Amply quoted instances from the original texts and lengthy discussions on theme, character, and motifs show the author's keen and deep research on Bankim Chandra and his works, and leads her to comment that Bankim Chandra's 'sensitivity is feminine'. The point is ably justified in her sustained analysis of the major novels. Ms Guha also shows how Bankim Chandra employed his own philosophy behind

Bankim Chandra comes across as the humanist in depicting the confrontation between the individual and the society. Also, he was one of the first moderns to present a psychological analysis of human nature.

the role and power of the novelist in his works: an intimate experience of one's social reality and the different classes of people, and the moral power of sympathy, that of teaching his readers to develop a critical faculty of understanding. The exercise of both power and restraint contributes also to the success of the novel.

Ms Guha's focus, however, is on the 'Indianness' of the novelist, as the novels made the readers aware of what was truly Indian. Remarkably, Bankim Chandra did not translate his novels into English, an act of '*swadharma*'. The transition from externalities to 'inner

seeking' is seen as a mark of progress for the novelist, a higher level of self-awakening at each successive stage. Bankim Chandra comes across as the humanist too in depicting the confrontation between the individual and the society. Also, he was one of the first moderns to present a psychological analysis of human nature. The positivist in him took the opposite stand from asceticism. He was a modernist in sketching reality in his fiction, a point the author emphasises by intuiting comparisons with Wordsworth and Chaucer. As stylist, Bankim Chandra advocated the use of the vernacular fanning cultural patriotism, while borrowing heavily from Sanskrit also. The stress was on simplicity, precision, and the colloquial and the pure in language. The observation on Bankim Chandra as the stylist highlighting these points is aptly substantiated by examples from the novels and essays. Ms Guha observes:

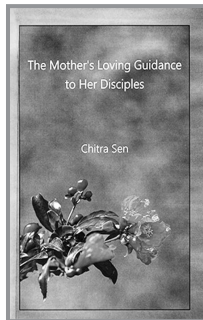
Transcending his time proved him not only exceptionally gifted but that he was conscious of his role as the stylist, the novelist, the poet because since his childhood Bankim Chandra questioned his purpose on having tak[en] birth which he sought answer to in each of his carefully written work[s].

The analysis of the multi-faceted creative personality of Bankim Chandra seems to be the result of thorough research. But one could ask for a more comprehensive analysis, which is perhaps beyond the space limitations of a monograph. However, “Bande Mataram”, the paeon song, is taken up for what is a long analysis, considering the length of the monograph. This poem, inserted into *Anandamath*, is an exposition and example of the three elements of beauty, truth, and religion that the poet considered important. The author points out that Bankim Chandra did not live to see the message of “Bande Mataram” kindling the Indian youth to patriotic fervour. Ms Guha sees the contribution of Bankim Chandra Chatterji as the harbinger of the Subjective Age, which, however, met its limitations as the immediately following generation of Indians did not take up the mission for a long time. His success lay in having implanted the seed idea in the subtle world. The author’s observation is worth quoting here: “Bankim Chandra initiated India’s ‘new birth’ and the others ensured her growth and maturity.”

In this monograph on Bankim Chandra Chatterji as Rishi, Ms Guha has touched upon all salient points, as much as the limitations of the monograph could allow. To substantiate her observations and comments, she has drawn references from many authors. Apart from Sri Aurobindo, whose writings form the basis of the present analysis, we find numerous quotations from authors such as Tagore, N.K. Gupta, R.C. Datta, and Pabitra Sarkar among a host of others. A well-defined list of citations and references at the end is a great help for those interested in pursuing this line of research.

—Madhumita Dutta

Dr Dutta, an Associate Professor of English at Vidyasagar College for Women, Kolkata, wrote her PhD thesis on Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri. She has presented papers and talks at several national and international conferences, given a series of online talks on The Future Poetry, and published articles for journals and books. Her own books include Poetry of the Future: in the Light of Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo’s Poetry: The Many and the Harmony, Savitri: A Study in Style and Symbolism, and Sri Aurobindo: A Legend.



The Mother's Loving Guidance to Her Disciples
—Chitra Sen

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced
Research Trust, Pondicherry
266 pp, Rs 375, ISBN: 978-93-85391-48-4
Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

It is always good, from time to time, to dip into the river of Mother's light and loving guidance and draw inspiration to execute our responsibilities in our work. Chitradi's book, *The Mother's Loving Guidance to Her Disciples*, gives us that opportunity. Through her narration of the experiences of several disciples, Chitradi has chronicled the growth of the Ashram departments that began under the Mother's direct guidance.

In 1926, when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the outer activities of the community here to concentrate on his inner work, he gave the Mother the responsibility of spiritually and materially guiding the lives of the people already gathered here. There followed a growth of activities in different aspects of life: "The Kitchen and Dining room, the Workshop, the Electric service, the Building service concerned with the repair and maintenance of the buildings, the Garden service concerned with growing flowers and fruits and vegetables; [t]he Sanitary service, the Domestic service, the Laundry, Granary and Bakery—to name the first departments of the Ashram." [p. 2]

Sri Aurobindo wrote: "We have undertaken a work which includes life and action and the physical world. In what I am trying to do, the spiritual realisation is the first necessity, but it cannot be complete without an outer realisation also in life, in man, in this world. Spiritual consciousness within but also spiritual life without." [CWSA 32: 578] Chitradi writes that the entire material structure of the Ashram is "a spontaneous flowering in the material world. It is the Mahasaraswati aspect of the Mother which made this miracle happen." [p. 2]

Looking through the contents of this book, we come to know some of the aspects of this development. Mother as a musician, playing her own music on the organ and encouraging Sunilda to take up his work as composer is one and Mother's accomplishments as an artist naturally led to the flowering of the Ashram artists under her guidance. Mother also showed a teacher a simple way to teach the children how to draw. The chapter on the Ashram kitchen is an amazing narrative that must be read through till the end to appreciate it. There are a few other sides of Ashram life that developed under her guidance: the performing arts, photography, and the Annual Day celebration are all described here in detail.

When I came to the chapter “Dance: An Expression of Genuine Feeling” written by Amitadi, I was thrilled. I was carried back to my experience with dance under Amitadi and the Mother. I loved dancing and learned whatever was taught here. We skimmed through the various dance styles, including folk dances of different countries, and even modern dance. But some of us wanted to learn Bharatnatyam more thoroughly. We expressed our wish to our teacher Anuben, who communicated it to the Mother, whose response was to explain why she was not so keen for us to be fixed to any one style; she wanted our bodies to be supple and flexible in order to express a greater harmony and beauty. We accepted what she said but did not quite understand what she expected. Mother, being Mother, remembered our wish, and when a disciple who was a dancer came here, the Mother requested her to teach us Bharatnatyam.

The story of my experience does not end here. Because dancing is an important activity in our school I would like to finish my narration. Amitadi was our teacher for many subjects – English, French, Botany – but she was also our captain and taught dancing and dramatics. One year she was organising the 1st December programme and one of the items was a dance to the Mother’s organ music “Aspiration of the Body for the Divine”. Amitadi asked me to innovate dance movements depicting the role of psychic aspiration and then she left me to fend for myself.

Good heavens! I was at a loss. To whatever I composed she said, “Not good enough.” I worked, sweated, wept, and then fell ill. Desperate, I wrote to the Mother. “Mother, I have to dance the role of psychic aspiration to your music. I have never danced to it and I don’t know what to do. Only ten days are left before the 1st December.” The next day the Mother sent me her answer: “Do not torment yourself. Open yourself to the harmony and it will express itself through your dance.”

Gone were my sadness and my worries. I let myself be carried away by her music. I did not bother about anybody’s opinion; I just danced away. On the final day I was in a totally different state of joy and concentration. I opened myself to the music and let it lead my body. I was supple and thus could dance with graceful movements I never thought myself capable of, extending my body movements to the very end of her musical phrases and responding to the chords. Amitadi was finally very happy—“You got it,” she told me. I understood then what the Mother meant that day when she told us she did not want our body expression to be fixed in one style but be capable of expressing greater harmony and beauty.

In this book readers will discover and delight in many reminiscences like mine, examples of how the Mother guided her disciples with loving care. The departments continued to grow and flourish, and art found expression in many ways. Chitradi brings to life how the Mother awakened in us a simple aesthetic awareness and perception of beauty in

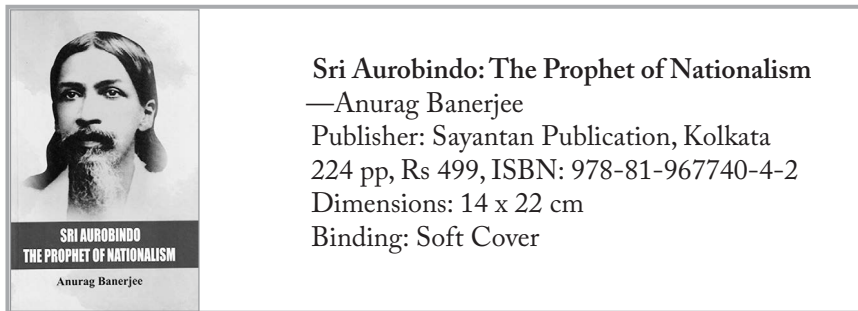
everyday living. In one of her messages, the Mother said that “[o]n the physical plane the Divine expresses himself through beauty.” (CWM 15: 6) The great value of a book such as this lies in its ability to inspire us to rededicate our lives to the joys of beauty and perfection in service to a higher truth, one of the paths in our Yoga.

To conclude, here is Sri Aurobindo’s advice to a disciple that brings our focus back to the central idea that “All life is Yoga”:

Remind yourself always it is Mother’s work you are doing and if you do it as well as you can, remembering her, the Mother’s Grace will be with you. (CWSA 32: 433)

—Krishna Dundur

Krishna Dundur completed her studies at SAICE in 1965 and the Mother gave her work as a teacher. She continues to teach here with great pleasure. It was her privilege to have had Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan and to have participated in the work of building the Samadhi.



The rise of nationalism in Europe in the mid-19th century emerged from a wave of socio-political turmoil and discontent following the French Revolution. However, its emergence among the western-educated elite in traditional societies of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere in the colonised world was likely a reaction to colonialism. While the Latin American countries gained their freedom in the first two decades of the 19th century, independence came over a century later to the rest of the colonies.

In India, the early beginnings of nationalism can perhaps be traced back to the late 19th century in what is Maharashtra today. These were sporadic incidents of violence, such as the killing of two British officers by disgruntled individuals, rather than popular mass uprisings. The idea of independence had not yet spread among the diverse peoples of the subcontinent. On the contrary, the leaders of the newly founded Congress Party, with

a few exceptions, were convinced of the benevolent effects of British rule, even as they sought reforms for some representation of Indians in the government and administration.

This changed dramatically with Sri Aurobindo's arrival in India from London in 1893. Over the next seventeen years, along with a few like-minded leaders, he launched a movement challenging the policies of moderate Congress leaders. He initiated actions that revolutionised political thinking by sowing the seeds of his unique brand of "religious nationalism" and the idea of total independence from British rule.

In his book *Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Nationalism*, first serialised in the quarterly *Śraddha* in 2017–2018, Anurag Banerjee traces the meteoric rise of Sri Aurobindo as a political leader and his radical ideas on nationalism. These ideas spawned several secret revolutionary societies across the political spectrum of India, culminating in numerous assassination attempts, subversions, and dacoities. Starting with the famous oft-quoted summation speech by defence counsel Chittaranjan Das in the Alipore Bomb Trial where he described Sri Aurobindo "as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity", the first eight chapters offer a detailed narrative account of Sri Aurobindo's activities as a political leader. The final chapter is a research paper titled "Sri Aurobindo on Religious Nationalism and Communal Harmony". Originally presented at a national seminar in 2022, this paper provides an in-depth analysis of Sri Aurobindo's novel but sometimes misconstrued views on nationalism.

In the Preface Banerjee explains the reasons for undertaking this "labour of love"; primarily to highlight Sri Aurobindo's unsung pivotal role in India's freedom struggle and his pioneering contribution in fostering the idea of an Indian nation among the politically fractured, culturally diverse, and psychologically shattered people of the time by referring to "several rare documents which had never seen the light of day".

The book's first part describes Sri Aurobindo's early life in London, his return to India, and his stint as an employee from 1893 to 1906 of Sayajirao Gaekwad, the ruler of Baroda. During these years he came in contact with most of the political leaders of the Indian National Congress in Bombay and Bengal. As he became increasingly involved, he realised that the only way to free his country would be through armed insurrection, not constitutional agitation. With the help of his younger brother, Barindra Ghosh, and another associate Jatindranath Banerjee, he began to plan and execute the organising of secret societies dedicated to revolutionary activities. The duo was sent to Bengal in 1903 to establish *samities* or revolutionary centres in the garb of gymnasiums with considerable success.

That success came to a halt when Jatin left Bengal sometime in 1905 following a conflict between him and Barin arising from their different styles of functioning—much to the

chagrin of Sri Aurobindo and despite his attempt to reconcile their differences. The dying revolutionary movement in Bengal was resuscitated by three unrelated events: the British announcement to partition Bengal, their defeat in the Boer war in South Africa, and the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war around the same time. While the first sparked widespread outrage and violent agitations, the two latter events created a sense of jubilation at what was seen as a huge blow to British prestige and the humiliation of a European power by an Asian country. Sri Aurobindo seized the opportunity to further fuel revolutionary sentiments by writing a twenty-page pamphlet called *Bhawani Mandir*, espousing the philosophical and religious basis of Nationalism. In this visionary scheme, he propounds the idea of India as the Mother, a “mighty Shakti”, not as an inert piece of land, whose liberation had to be attained at any cost. Such a document naturally attracted the ire of the British government who, although they grudgingly conceded that nothing in it could be labelled as seditious, deplored the use of religion to further political ends.

In the wake of the anti-partition riots, the Nationalist leaders’ call for boycott, the push for the Swadeshi movement, and the crying need for a national education took off in earnest and were successfully endorsed during the Benares session of the Indian National Congress in December 1905. Moderate leaders, however, rejected the motion that asked for the extension of the scheme to the rest of the country.

The Bengal National College and School, under the National Council of Education, was started on 15 August 1906 to impart learning along national lines. It emphasised India’s distinctive heritage and culture to counter the British education system and its parochial aim of producing a breed of loyal interpreters and clerks to govern their subjects.

In addition, to attract revolutionaries to the movement, a Bengali weekly paper, *Jugantar*, and a daily paper in English, *Bande Mataram*, were launched to spread the ideals of armed revolution and to disseminate the idea of creating a unified opposition to British rule through a movement of passive resistance. This would be carried out through methods such as economic, educational, judicial, and executive boycotts, as well as disobedience of unjust laws, refusal to pay taxes, and social boycotts.

Sri Aurobindo stressed that "Nationalism or the selfless service to the country worshipped as the Mother would inculcate each citizen, irrespective of affiliations, with a sense of belonging and motivate them to rise in unity to free the mother country".

Appointed the principal of the Bengal College and assuming the work of jointly editing *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo took the opportunity to leave the State Service of Baroda and settle down in Calcutta. By 1907, Bengal had been roused through his fiery writings to become the hotbed of revolutionary activities in India.

The British authorities were initially slow to react to the explosive articles in *Jugantar*, *Sandhya*, and *Bande Mataram*. Later, when notices sent to their offices to tone down their language went unheeded, managers, printers, and editorial staff, including Sri Aurobindo, were arrested on charges of sedition against the state. While some were found guilty and sentenced to various terms in prison, Sri Aurobindo was acquitted for lack of any evidence that proved him to be the managing editor of *Bande Mataram*.

The *Bande Mataram* sedition trial brought Sri Aurobindo to the forefront of the Nationalist movement after the top leaders of the Nationalist party were either deported or imprisoned. Neither proficient in spoken Bengali nor a strong orator like such stalwarts as Bipin Chandra Pal, he was content until then to act from behind the scenes. Under his leadership, the Nationalists emerged as the dominant force in the Midnapore Congress in early December 1907 much to the dismay and frustration of the Moderates, who tried in vain to persuade Sri Aurobindo to eschew his militant approach and embrace their conformist policies. The conflict between the Moderates and the Nationalists reached a breaking point during the Surat Congress held a few weeks later, where pandemonium broke out after a scuffle between supporters of the rival groups, culminating in a split in the Indian National Congress.

During this time Barin, who had assembled a group of young revolutionaries known as the Maniktola Secret Society, had been involved in several covert operations and assassination attempts. In April 1908 their botched attempt to kill Douglas Kingsford, the District Magistrate of Muzaffarpur, ended up killing two innocent ladies. All members of the Maniktola Society along with anyone connected to them, including Sri Aurobindo, were arrested and jailed pending trial. After a protracted trial that lasted almost a year, Sri Aurobindo was acquitted for lack of evidence as a co-conspirator. While some of the accused were acquitted and others sentenced to imprisonment, many were served life sentences and deported to the penal colony in the Andaman Islands.

Not pleased with the verdict of the Alipore Bomb Case that acquitted Sri Aurobindo, whom the British Government by then considered to be their most dangerous adversary, they began to explore legal options of detaining him without provoking more unrest and anti-government sentiment. By then, Sri Aurobindo's powerful spiritual experiences in jail evident in his post-release speeches and his writings in the journals *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* (launched in June and August 1909 respectively) had rightfully earned him the respect reserved for saintly men. This was likely the first time he enunciated his nuanced views on Nationalism predicated on the *Sanatana Dharma*, veering off from the strictly religious Nationalism of earlier years.

In March 1910, after a tip from a source in the police about an impending arrest, he left Calcutta for the haven of the French enclave Chandernagore, eventually travelling on

to Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry on 4 April 1910 marked the end of his political career and the start of a long and unplanned stay in Pondicherry where he continued his spiritual quest till his passing in 1950. It also marked the successful quelling of the revolutionary movement by the British government, a movement that would only be revived after a hiatus of several years. From that point on, other leaders would eventually take up his ideas of passive resistance and Swadeshi to lead India to independence in 1947.

The book reveals a hitherto unknown facet of Sri Aurobindo's personality as a business administrator and political strategist, highlighting his elaborate plans to make the *Bande Mataram*, then running at a loss, into a commercially viable unit (Chapter Three) and his efforts to restructure the Nationalist Party into a coherent organisation (Chapter Six). However, the real highlight of the book is not so much the extraordinary story of Sri Aurobindo's role in the development of the Indian freedom movement, a story that has been well documented elsewhere in multiple publications, but rather its focus on Nationalism throughout and especially so in the last section of Chapter Eight and the entirety of Chapter Nine.

In essence, nationalism provides a common identity and a sense of belonging not dissimilar to the bonds of kinship prevalent in ancient societies. While these ties were "affectual, emotional and community-oriented" in ancient times, they are rooted in the legitimacy of a politico-legal system in modern nation-states. Although different in structure and complexity, they are similar in that they are informed by the idea of a "trans-individual" identity. The obstacles that people of a given territory face in transitioning from traditional to modern societies are the apprehensions of having to surrender their primary, deep-seated moorings in community, religion, language, etc., to a larger impersonal construct of the nation-state.

At first, Sri Aurobindo's view on how to resolve this quandary was to look upon the nation as the living embodiment of a "mighty Shakti", which he called the Mother Goddess Bhawani. Nationalism or the selfless service to the country worshipped as the Mother, he stressed, would inculcate each citizen, irrespective of affiliations, with a sense of belonging and motivate them to rise in unity to free the mother country. Later, after his release from jail, in the famous Uttarpara speech, he revised his view to ascribe Nationalism to the Vedic idea of *Sanatana Dharma*. Unlike other religions which are "preponderatingly religions of faith and profession", the *Sanatana Dharma*, he affirmed, is "the eternal religion because it is the universal religion which embraces all others".

Sri Aurobindo was well aware that Nationalism was not only a catalyst for unification but could also be a divisive force, alienating the minorities. In the same speech, he went

on to say to the large, silent crowd in the open courtyard of the Jaikrishna Public Library that “it is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world”. [CWSA 8: 11]

—Gautam Chatterjee

Gautam, who studied at SAICE and earned a master’s degree from the Institut Universitaire d’Études du Développement in Geneva, has worked as an interior designer, furniture maker, and builder for more than thirty years. Interested in history, economics, sociology, metaphysics, and the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he also teaches history at SAICE.

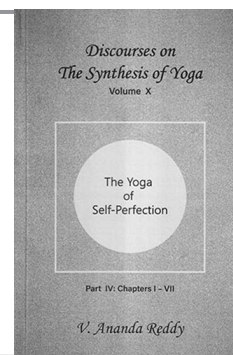
Discourses on *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Volume 10
Part IV: *The Yoga of Self-Perfection* (Chapters 1–7)

—V. Ananda Reddy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust,
Pondicherry

354 pp, Rs 525, ISBN: 978-93-85391-42-2

Dimensions: 14 x 22 cm, Binding: Soft Cover



The tenth volume of Dr Ananda Reddy’s *Discourses on The Synthesis of Yoga* deals with Chapters 1–7 of Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection. Among the four parts of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, The Yoga of Self-Perfection is unique. While the earlier parts explore Karma Yoga—the Yoga of Divine Works, Jnana Yoga—the Yoga of Integral Knowledge, and Bhakti Yoga—the Yoga of Divine Love, this section presents a completely new spiritual approach that has no immediate historical or traditional antecedent. The Yoga of Self-Perfection is, indeed, the fulfilment of the expectations of modern seekers who yearn for self-transformation. It is a guide for achieving one’s ultimate capacity through the integration of all the parts of one’s being in the process of self-perfection.

This volume gathers Dr Reddy's talks delivered between August 2010 and January 2011, systematically unfolding the principles and practices of the yoga of self-perfection. Each chapter develops key aspects of the transformative journey. The book begins with an overview of the principles of Integral Yoga, then progressively addresses the purification, perfection, and harmonisation of the physical, vital, and mental dimensions of the being. Dr Reddy's explanations of these chapters, full of insights drawn from life and the human experience, read especially well for those already acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's deep spiritual vision and seek to make this journey feel more approachable.

The Yoga of Self-Perfection stands apart because it addresses the modern seeker's mind, not confined by the traditional yogic systems' frameworks. Sri Aurobindo's vision focuses on the inner journey – balancing and refining the physical, vital, and mental aspects – to produce an integral transformation rather than focusing on any one aspect and developing it exclusively to break through to the ultimate, as do the conventional methods.

Dr Reddy effectively articulates this vision with precision and clarity, periodically supplemented with personal experiences and scholarly opinions. However, there are instances where certain generalisations arise in his commentary. For example, he states that apart from the principle of the psychic being, *The Synthesis of Yoga* cannot be distinguished from the Bhagavad Gita. The accuracy of this may be questioned, as the Gita does indeed give significant inspiration for *The Synthesis*, but diverges in a number of subtle ways. This risks oversimplifying the complexity of Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of philosophical and yogic traditions by suggesting that the psychic being is the only difference. Still, these instances do not overwhelm the value of the book because they challenge the reader to engage with the material more critically.

The compilation of these discourses feels less like a traditional scholarly work and more like a dialogue between seekers. The format, though less polished than a formal treatise, has its advantages. Readers may find the book a complementary companion to *The Synthesis of Yoga*, offering insights that clarify, simplify, and make the text's philosophical ideas more relatable. By sharing his reflections and life experiences, he effectively brings metaphysical concepts closer to home, thus making them almost tangible and applicable to the world of everyday life. For example, when he elaborates on the role of the Purusha in the chapter "The Perfection of the Mental Being", he uses the analogy of a car that needs fuel to work. The car representing Prakriti and the fuel, Purusha, explain plainly the dynamic between these two energies. Or in the chapter "The Instruments of the Spirit", when he elucidates the concept of the effective mentality, he brings up examples from his own life experiences such as the time he attended a funeral where he saw that the traditions and customs often arise from this effective mentality. These snippets of his lived experiences add colour to the otherwise strict continuum of thought.

The book presents its content in a clear, simple fashion. Each chapter begins with a review of previously presented material, and this continuity makes it easy for readers to track the unfolding of thought as common questions are addressed in the field of contemplative studies. At the same time, the book's informal style may leave some students seeking the detailed analysis and depth typically found in conventional academic works. Although the talks remain true to the actual text in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, what is lacking is an overview of the entire chapter that lets the reader connect and relate the concepts to an integral understanding.

These discourses use select passages from *The Synthesis of Yoga* that align the text to Sri Aurobindo's words. Although the author does take the freedom to use analogies and anecdotes of his own to illustrate a point, they remain within the discursive framework and only enhance the writing. He draws parallels with modern philosophical ideas as well as ancient texts and refers to passages from Sri Aurobindo's other works such as *The Life Divine*. This academic engagement in the text continues by making connections between Sri Aurobindo's philosophical enunciations and insights from luminaries such as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. As such associations embroider the story, the reader

must tactfully evaluate each interpretation because some may not conform to conventionally accepted scholarship.

The Yoga of Self-Perfection is, indeed, the fulfilment of the expectations of modern seekers who yearn for self-transformation. It is a guide for achieving one's ultimate capacity through the integration of all the parts of one's being in the process of self-perfection.

This volume excels as a companion to Sri Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga*, offering practical guidance to navigate its complexities. Dr Reddy's insights, rooted in his spiritual practice, clarify the text's philosophical ideas, making them more approachable for modern readers. Thus the book is for those who appreciate formalistic analysis; the strength of this work is that it brings concrete experience and abstract principles together, making metaphysical and philosophical ideas easier to understand and apply.

Moreover, Dr Reddy's writing style is riveting for a contemporary reader because of the systematic referencing of Sri Aurobindo's words that seamlessly inculcate precision and accuracy. The philosophical basis underlying his thought is evident and brings richness without loss of accessibility.

This book is a befitting tribute to Dr Ananda Reddy's deep engagement with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and commitment to making it accessible to contemporary seekers. Combining personal experiences, scholarly insights, and practical reflections, the

book is both an accolade to Sri Aurobindo's genius and a guide for those aspiring for self-transformation. While it may not meet the demands of readers who require a purely scholarly interpretation, the conversational and personal nature of the writing makes it useful as a complementary read. As an accompanying volume to *The Synthesis of Yoga*, it encourages readers to reflect deeply on the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo and tap into their potential for self-perfection. It holds within it that spirit of integrality in the Yoga and will thus be relevant and transformative for today's world.

—Kaninika Majumdar

Kaninika is a recent graduate of SAICE keen on pursuing further studies in art and philosophy. She is currently collaborating on a project for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library.

Intellectual, volitional, ethical, emotional, aesthetic and physical training and improvement are all so much to the good, but they are only in the end a constant movement in a circle without any last delivering and illumining aim, unless they arrive at a point when they can open themselves to the power and presence of the Spirit and admit its direct workings. This direct working effects a conversion of the whole being which is the indispensable condition of our real perfection. To grow into the truth and power of the Spirit and by the direct action of that power to be made a fit channel of its self-expression,—a living of man in the Divine and a divine living of the Spirit in humanity,—will therefore be the principle and the whole object of an integral Yoga of self-perfection.

—Sri Aurobindo

from "The Integral Perfection", Chapter 2 of
Part IV: The Yoga of Self-Perfection

CWSA vol 23–24, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 618