

Recent Publications

Sabbha

The four volumes of *Letters on Yoga* from The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo offer the reader a unique understanding of how, through the correspondence, Sri Aurobindo channeled the forces working to effect a change of consciousness. The exchange of letters was a means of contact between disciple and guru, a method of personal teaching, and a journey of introspection and self-discovery for the *sadhaks*. The lead article in this issue describes the new edition of *Letters on Yoga* and how it differs from the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library edition published more than four decades ago. It reminds us of the very individual attention Sri Aurobindo, and the Mother who consulted on his replies, gave to each disciple in the Ashram. The *Letters on Yoga* reveal how the Integral Yoga aims at the transformation of human nature, one *sadhak* at a time.



This sketch of the Salon by Jayantilal Parekh shows Sri Aurobindo's armchair and the table he used while answering the *sadhaks'* letters in the 1930s. To the left one sees the Mother's chair where she sat while they discussed the replies. The drawing was made sometime in the 1940s.

Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga*

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Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga*: Divine Man-Making*

WHEN PEOPLE want to understand the nature of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga they are often referred to his major prose works such as *The Life Divine*, his treatise on the nature of spirit, life, and human evolution; *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which includes an explanation of how his philosophy of conscious evolution could be effectively practiced in life; and *Essays on the Gita*, his exposition of the Gita's philosophy and method of self-discipline, which he said deals with almost all spiritual problems. However, for concise answers to questions and problems related to one's individual *sadhana*, one might instinctively turn to the letters Sri Aurobindo wrote to his disciples in reply to their appeals for guidance in the yoga. Collected and published as *Letters on Yoga*, they have become a comprehensive guide to the practice of Integral Yoga. For instance, if you are having trouble quieting your thoughts, or if you are meeting resistance in the lower vital, or if you are perhaps suffering from some physical ailment, these letters could be of immense value. Fortunately for us, others have been through such difficulties and received help through Sri Aurobindo's direct guidance. While the *Letters on Yoga* go far beyond offering advice on specific kinds of problems – collectively they may be said to describe the entire system and process of the Integral Yoga – there is hardly a problem of spiritual change for which one cannot find some direct or relevant advice.

As explained in the “Note on the Texts” at the end of each of the four volumes of *Letters on Yoga* in The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA), the letters were written between 1927 and 1950

to hundreds of correspondents in tens of thousands of letters, some of them many pages in length, others only a few words long. Most of his replies, however, were sent to just a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his Ashram; of these disciples, about a dozen received more than half the replies. Sri Aurobindo wrote most of these letters between 1931 and 1937, the prime period of his correspondence. Letters before and after this period were written on a more restricted scale and confined to a few persons for special reasons.

In the CWSA, the four volumes of *Letters on Yoga* (volumes 28–31) contain 5891 letters in all. This means that about thirty percent of the letters here had not been published in the three volumes of *Letters on Yoga* in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) edition, which contained just 4099 letters. The newly published letters are distributed in fairly equal number across the four volumes. In addition to the four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, there are four other volumes of the CWSA which contain letters by Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, *Autobiographical Notes*, and *Letters on Literature, Poetry and Art*. When these volumes are included, there are a total of 10,177 letters in the CWSA. When applicable, some letters have been included in both *Letters on Yoga* and in one of the other volumes.

Many of the new letters in the CWSA that were not published in the early 1970s in the SABCL were received by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library from different correspondents after the SABCL was published, but others, which were available then, were not included at that time for various reasons. A good number of the new letters came to light in books prepared by six disciples regarding their correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. Other disciples had published their more limited correspondence with Sri Aurobindo in Ashram journals both before and after the SABCL was published. Additional letters had been long held by the Ashram, but were not utilized in the SABCL, and still others came to the Archives later, after the passing of the disciples.

In both the CWSA and SABCL editions, a selection of the available letters was made by their respective editors, which was done most commonly to avoid repetition. Often, Sri Aurobindo explained the same

* In a letter written sometime in 1914–15 Sri Aurobindo said: “My business is now not man-making, but divine man-making.”

thing to various correspondents, though when a unique aspect or angle was included in one letter but not another, both letters or several letters on the same topic would generally be included. It is also the case that errors in the reproduction of certain letters for the SABCL have been corrected in the CWSA. This was possible because of the more systematic and comprehensive work which was done for the CWSA, including a thorough examination and comparison of the original manuscripts, when these were available, as well as all the existent typescript and printed versions of the letters.

It is to be noted that Sri Aurobindo revised many of the letters for later publication, removing personal information and sometimes adding and elaborating and making the content more generally applicable to a wide readership. Of the 10,177 letters included in the eight volumes of the CWSA that contain letters, more than 1000 were revised. It is inspiring and touching how much attention, care, exactitude, and labour Sri Aurobindo put into his *Letters on Yoga*. It is also a sign of the importance he attached to them and of their potential help in guiding his disciples. This care has been reciprocated by decades of detailed analysis and faithful reproduction in the CWSA by the Archives team. Occasionally, several versions of a letter were found which may have been revised by Sri Aurobindo at different times. He sometimes made revisions at several stages in the publication process (e.g. on a typescript of the letter and on the proofs provided by the printer). In some cases, a more recent version of a letter was found and included in the CWSA than that used in the SABCL. For some letters, the latest revised version has been included in the *Letters on Yoga*, but the original manuscript version (when available) has been used in a different volume, since those volumes often include the original questions along with Sri Aurobindo's answers.

An important new feature of the *Letters on Yoga* in the CWSA compared to the SABCL version is the much more detailed organization and categorization of the letters. The four volumes of the *Letters on Yoga* are subtitled, respectively, Foundations of the Integral Yoga, Practice of the Integral Yoga, Experiences and Realisations in the Integral Yoga, and Transformation of Human Nature in the Integral Yoga. While the organization of the letters is based in general on that of the SABCL, the new edition is somewhat different, more elaborate, and with smaller groupings. Specifically, in the SABCL, the three volumes of *Letters on Yoga* are subdivided into a total of twenty-eight titled sections (and within these, many untitled groupings). In the new CWSA, the four volumes of *Letters on Yoga* are methodically subdivided into titled Parts, Sections, Chapters, and 1335 labelled topics (with starting page numbers shown in the Tables of Contents). This gives the new edition of the *Letters on Yoga* greater accessibility.

Some examples will help give an idea of the specificity of the organization as well as the general contents of the *Letters on Yoga*. The first volume, *Letters on Yoga I*, is divided into five parts: 1. The Divine, the Cosmos and the Individual; 2. The Parts of the Being and the Planes of Consciousness; 3. The Evolutionary Process and the Supermind; 4. Problems of Philosophy, Science, Religion and Society; 5. Questions of Spiritual and Occult Knowledge. Part 1 is further divided into three sections: 1. The Divine, Sachchidananda, Brahman and Atman; 2. The Cosmos: Terms from Indian Systems; 3. The Jivatman and the Psychic Being. In Part 1 you will find letters on specific topics such as "The Divine and the Supermind," "Purusha and Prakriti," and "The Jivatman in a Supramental Creation." Part 5 is divided into four sections: 1. The Divine and the Hostile Powers; 2. The Avatar and the Vibhuti; 3. Destiny, Karma, Death and Rebirth; 4. Occult Knowledge and Powers. In Part 5 you will find letters on specific topics such as "Karma and Heredity," "Beings of the Higher Planes," and "The Place of Occult Knowledge in Yoga."

A few examples from the other volumes will help round out the picture. In *Letters on Yoga II*, Part 1, Section 2: Sadhana through Work, there are five chapters containing 41 listed topics, with most topics having multiple letters. In *Letters on Yoga III*, Part 2, Section 3: Symbols, after a general chapter on symbols and symbolic visions, there are 11 more chapters containing 95 listed topics, each a particular type of symbol.

A Sample of the Correspondence

9-10-32

For some two or three months almost every alternate day I dream of eating and eating. I do not understand how in the subconscious the desire is so inordinate while in waking hours it does not appear so hideous. What is the way to turn it the right way?

How can we be conscious of the vital and physical beings as separate entities? How can the Will turn them divinewards from their selfishness or obscurity? Can the vital be compelled to surrender to the Truth or the Divine in spite of itself? Or if it can see the ultimate benefits derived from being moved by the Divine, may it not seize upon the idea for its own selfish end and become more diplomatic? & what signs can show that they have ultimately & really surrendered? A detailed exposition of these questions would help me in forming the idea about the transformation of the vital.

1. The first thing to be attained about eating, is to get rid of the greed of food, the attachment and desire—to take it only as a need of the body, to think little of it and not to allow it to occupy a big place in the life; also to be satisfied with what you get, not to hanker. At the same time sufficient food should be taken,

The first thing to be attained about eating, is to get rid of the greed of food, the attachment and desire,—to take it only as a need of the body, to think little of it and not to allow it to occupy a big place in the life; also to be satisfied with what you get, not to hanker. At the same time sufficient food should be taken, avoiding either deficiency or excess; an excessive coercion or nigrāha in this respect (as opposed to reasonable control) often brings a reaction. One should go steadily, but not try to get too much done at once.

The disciples wrote their letters to Sri Aurobindo in notebooks, which were returned the next day with Sri Aurobindo's replies. In this 1932 letter a *sadhak* poses a series of questions about the transformation of the vital. Sri Aurobindo's answer, begun immediately below the letter, went on to fill the entire next page of the notebook.

Sri Aurobindo's reply, which we have enlarged to improve legibility, is numbered point one, as it addresses the writer's first question. Beneath it is the text as it appears on page 422 of *Letters on Yoga-IV*, the CWSA edition. This text includes the remaining portion of his reply to that first question in the letter. Answers to the other questions can be found in the text quoted on the following page, the last page of the main article, concerning resistance in the vital.

In the same volume, in Part 4, Section 2: The Psychic Opening, Emergence and Transformation, there are five chapters containing letters under 33 separately labelled topics. While no writings can be a substitute for direct inner spiritual guidance, these examples suggest that the *Letters on Yoga* can serve as a comprehensive practical guide to the Yoga.

So what about those hypothetical problems posed at the start of this article? Trouble quieting your thoughts? Here is an example of a new letter from Sri Aurobindo on the topic:

What you perceive as suggestions or voices, are accepted and felt by people to be thoughts of their own mind. When one practises Yoga and observes the thoughts, one sees that they come from outside, from universal Nature, from the mental, vital or subtle physical worlds etc. The proper thing is then to stand back from these thoughts, voices or suggestions, to reject them or else control them, to make the mind free and quiet and open only to the divine light, force, knowledge and the presence of the Divine. Your mistake has been to allow free play to these thoughts, voices and suggestions instead of rejecting, silencing and controlling them. It is what you must now do. Aspire, get into contact with the Light and the true Force, reassert your will to reject these suggestions and voices. Do not take interest in these voices, keep the mind quiet. (*Letters on Yoga IV*, p. 42)

Meeting resistance in the vital? This new letter provides some suggestions:

It is not easy to compel the vital, though it can be done. It is easier by the constant pressure of the mind to persuade and convert it; but it is true that in this mental way of doing it the vital does often attach itself to the spiritual ideal for some gain of its own. The one effective way is to bring the light down always in the vital, exposing it to itself, so that it is obliged to see what is wrong with itself and in the end to wish sincerely for a change. The light can be brought down upon it either from within from the psychic or from above through the mind into the vital nature. To call down this light and force from above the mind is one of the chief methods of the Yoga. But whatever way is used, it is always a work of persistent and patient spiritual labour. The vital *can* be converted suddenly, but even after a sudden conversion the effects of it have to be worked out, applied to every part of the vital until the effect is complete and that takes often a long time. As for the physical consciousness, that can only be converted by long spade work, as it were,—rapid changes in this or that point can be made; but the whole change means a long and persistent endeavour. (*Letters on Yoga IV*, pp. 110-111)

Suffering from some physical ailment? Another new letter gives some important advice:

Illness must not be accepted as a means of transformation; it rather indicates certain difficulties encountered by the force of transformation especially in the vital and the body. But it is not necessary that these difficulties should be allowed to take this obscure form of illness. All illness should be rejected and all suggestions of illness; the Force should be called in to cure by the assent to health and the refusal of assent to the suggestions that bring or prolong its opposite. (*Letters on Yoga IV*, p. 549)

The *Letters on Yoga* represent a very important part of Sri Aurobindo's writings. Like his other major works, they are "integral"; they cover an enormous field of thought and inner experience with an integrated, unifying vision. Yet they differ from most of his other writings in that they are more practical, specific, and easily accessible. They are generally easier to understand and apply to one's own life and spiritual practice than his other works. One can read through the letters systematically, and swim through that vast ocean of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, or one can consult the Table of Contents and select just those volumes, parts, sections, chapters or topics that are most pertinent to one's interests or concerns of the moment. Or, with an issue or problem in mind, one can simply choose and open one of the volumes randomly, seeking there for an answer. However one may choose to use these texts, one can be sure to find true and wise guidance. For the Consciousness of Sri Aurobindo stands behind each letter, and each letter reveals a light from that Consciousness.

— Larry Seidlitz

Larry works at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry facilitating online courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings, and also edits and writes for publications related to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE CORRESPONDENCE

Nirodbaran once wrote in a humorous vein maintaining that Sri Aurobindo certainly had sufficient time for concentration on his “real work” in the course of his day. Sri Aurobindo replied with the details of his schedule, filled mostly with reading and answering the daily batch of letters from his disciples:

From 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. afternoon correspondence, meal, newspapers. Evening correspondence from 7 or 7.30 to 9. From 9 to 10 p.m. concentration. 10 to 12 correspondence, 12 to 2.30 bath, meal, rest. 2.30 to 5 or 6 a.m. correspondence unless I am lucky. Where is the sufficient time for concentration? 4 April 1936

Late at night Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would sit together and review the correspondence, consulting on what answers to give. This work would often stretch to six or seven in the morning. In this letter he writes about the sheer volume of letters he faced:

I have today fifty letters each 2000 pages long—of course this is not a mathematically accurate statement, but it expresses the impression they make on me—so excuse brevity in my answer to your length. 20 July 1935

The following letters demonstrate the value of the correspondence for the inner work being done on each sadhak:

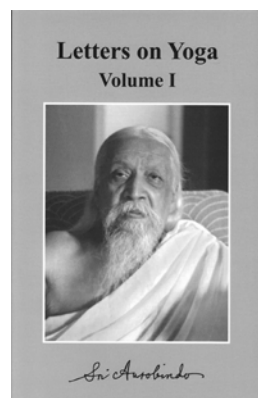
If I have given importance to the correspondence, it is because it was an effective instrument towards my central purpose—there are a large number of sadhaks whom it has helped to awake from lethargy and begin to tread the way of spiritual experience, others whom it has carried from a small round of experience to a flood of realisations, some who have been absolutely hopeless for years who have undergone a conversion and entered from darkness into an opening of light. 12 January 1933

Moreover these letters of yours and my answers have been a strong means of canalising our help and making it habitually available to you and effective—not by the words themselves alone but by the forces behind them. 17 April 1933

It is an undoubted fact proved by hundreds of instances that for many the exact statement of their difficulties to us is the best and often, though not always, an immediate, even an instantaneous means of release. This has often been seen by sadhaks not only here, but far away, and not only for inner difficulties, but for illness and outer pressure of unfavourable circumstances. ... Moreover, this method succeeds most when the writer can write as a witness of his own movements and state them with an exact and almost impartial precision as a phenomenon of his nature or the movement of a force affecting him from which he seeks release. 17 December 1932

Even if the Mother does not answer, to have brought any matter of your action and self-development before her in the right spirit means to have put it under her protection, in the light of the Truth, under the rays of the Power that is working for the transformation—for immediately those rays begin to play and to act on the thing brought to her notice. 18 May 1932

All references are from *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35.



Letters on Yoga

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Volume I contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the foundations of his spiritual teaching and method of Yogic practice. (590 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-953-2, Rs 290)

Volume II comprises letters written by Sri Aurobindo on the practice of the Integral Yoga. (522 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-060-6, Rs 260)

Volume III contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the experiences and realisations that may occur in the practice of the Integral Yoga. (508 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-061-3, Rs 260)

Volume IV comprises letters of Sri Aurobindo on the transformation of human nature – mental, vital, and physical – through the practice of the Integral Yoga, and on the difficulties encountered along the way. (820 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-962-4, Rs 380)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

Sri Aurobindo

Letters on Yoga: Volume I (New CWSA edition)

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry

590 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-953-2, Rs 290

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Letters on Yoga—I, the first of four volumes, contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the foundations of his spiritual teaching and method of Yogic practice. The letters in these volumes have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to disciples and others between 1927 and 1950, but primarily in the 1930s. About one-third of the letters in the present volume were not published in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

This first volume is arranged by subject in five parts: the Divine, the Cosmos, and the individual; the parts of the being and the planes of consciousness; the evolutionary process and the supermind; the problems of philosophy, science, religion, and society; and questions of spiritual and occult knowledge. Individual letters deal with many subjects relating to these themes, including definitions of the outer being, the inner being, and the psychic being as well as of the planes of consciousness from the supermind to the subconscious, the supramental descent and transformation, doubt and faith in yoga, and answers to questions about destiny, *karma*, death, and rebirth. *see article on page 2*

Letters on Yoga: Volume IV (New CWSA edition)

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry

820 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-962-4, Rs 380

Size: 14x22 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Letters on Yoga—IV contains letters of Sri Aurobindo on the transformation of human nature – mental, vital, and physical – through the practice of the Integral Yoga, and on the difficulties encountered along the way.

This final volume of *Letters on Yoga* is arranged by subject in four parts. The first covers *sadhana* on the level of the mind (mental

difficulties, cultivation of the mind, power of expression, and speech), and is followed by *sadhana* on the level of the vital (the vital nature, vital temperament, and vital defects; human relations and interactions). The third part deals with *sadhana* on the physical, subconscious, and inconscient levels and the fourth addresses the kinds of difficulties encountered in the practice of Yoga, how to face and overcome such difficulties, and the nature and function of the adverse forces in the *sadhana*.

see article on page 2

Introduction to the Gita

— Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry

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

Size: 12x18 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

The essays in this volume were originally written by Sri Aurobindo in Bengali and published serially in the journal *Dharma* in 1909–10. They discuss the elements pivotal to understanding the Gita: the breadth and significance of its setting, the nature of its chief protagonists, and the circumstances and political objectives that brought the Kauravas and the Pandavas to the battlefield. The essays point to the central teaching of the Gita, which answers man's most searching questions about God and the world, the purpose of life, and the way to right living.

Sri Aurobindo's Message: 15 August 1947

— Sri Aurobindo

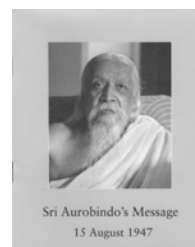
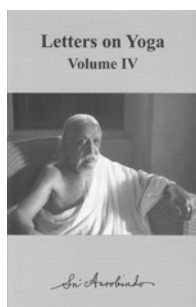
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication
Department, Pondicherry

5 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-073-6, Rs 10

Size: 11x14 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In response to a request from All India Radio, Sri Aurobindo gave a message to mark 15 August 1947, the day of India's independence. This message to his countrymen spoke of five dreams that he had worked for, and which he now saw on the way to fulfilment. The realisation of these dreams would mark the beginning of a new age, not only for India but for the entire world, "for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity".



The Mother

India and Her Destiny

— Compiled from the Writings of the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

41 pp, ISBN 978-93-5210-074-3, Rs 18

Size: 11x14 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Compiled from the writings of the Mother, this booklet speaks of India's soul and its mission to act as spiritual guru to the world, the significance of India's freedom, its division, and its path to unity, India's true genius and her destiny, and some notes on Indian culture.



Guidance in Day-to-Day Life

— Based on Selections from the Collected Works of the Mother

Publisher: Dipak Kumar Gupta, Pondicherry

36 pp, Rs 25

Size: 11x14 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



Gathered from the Mother's writings, the selections in this small booklet offer guidance to those who embark on a spiritual path. Passages deal with subjects such as what it means to be vigilant in one's

sadhana, why it is more effective to concentrate in the heart, how to widen one's thought, the role of wealth as a force of Nature to be utilised in building the new creation, and how to offer one's wrong movements to the Light.

Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

Cure of Illness

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-368-9, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Initiation into Yoga

50 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-366-5, Rs 30

Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

Meditations on Savitri — I

Book One: The Book of Beginnings

— Paintings by Huta under the Mother's guidance

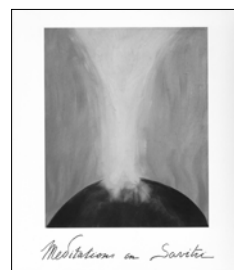
Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry

263 pp, ISBN 978-81-87372-34-9, Rs 1000

Size: 23x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This is the first in a series of volumes that present all of the 472 paintings on *Savitri* made by Huta under the Mother's guidance. From 1961 to 1966 the Mother and Huta meditated together on lines chosen from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, and when an image appeared to the Mother she described it to Huta with the help of a few strokes. Huta then completed the work in her studio as an oil painting. The Mother named the series of paintings *Meditations on Savitri*. This volume of 127 paintings accompanied by the corresponding lines from *Savitri*, covers the five cantos of Book I, "The Book of Beginnings". From 1962 to 1966 these paintings were published in book form in four volumes. However, many of the paintings were redone prior to a 1967 exhibition, and these are included in the present book.



Blessings of the Grace

— Conversations with the Mother, recollected by

Mona Sarkar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

187 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-986-0, Rs 170

Size: 18x25 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These conversations with the Mother, originally held in French, were noted down from memory by Mona Sarkar. They took place from 1959 to 1968, and covered such topics as the Mother's way of working with *sadhaks*, the different nature of the experience when people met her in her interview room, her work to reveal the divine harmony behind appearances, her relation with her own Mahasaraswati aspect, the power of Sri Aurobindo's presence one feels in his room, and the new consciousness that descended on earth in 1969. The last fourteen pages contain the Mother's written answers to questions Mona had submitted to her in his diary in 1951. The book contains many photographs of the Mother and facsimiles of her handwritten notes in the original French. *see review on page 12*

Other Authors and Miscellaneous

“Eternity looked out from her on Time”: A Pictorial Album

— Photographs of the Mother and texts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother



Publisher: Chandernagore
Barasat Gate Cultural
Association,
Chandernagore
91 pp, Rs 300
Size: 29x21 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

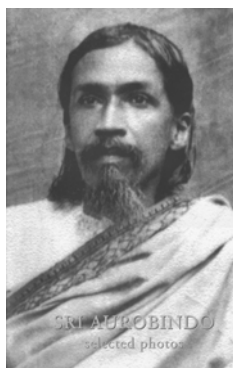
Issued on the occasion of the centenary of the Mother's arrival in Pondicherry in 1914, this album presents 120 selected photographs from the Mother's life, many accompanied by texts from Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Photos from her childhood and early years in Paris as well as a number from her stay in Japan precede the more numerable ones from her life in the Ashram. The Preface provides a brief introduction and creates an ambience for experiencing the Mother's presence through these photographs.

Sri Aurobindo: Selected Photos

— Compiled by Michael Bonke

Publisher: Mitra Auroville, Auroville
298 pp, ISBN 978-3-934726-70-3, Rs 1900
Size: 23x35 cm
Binding: Hard Cover

The 145 black and white photographs in this book have been selected and arranged in an attempt to bring out the depth of spiritual vibration that radiates from Sri Aurobindo's photos. There are four categories of pictures: Sri Aurobindo's youth in England and his political period before imprisonment; his time in Alipore Jail and his early stay in Pondicherry, pictures taken by Cartier-Bresson in April 1950; and pictures of his Mahasamadhi. Most are unretouched photographs, arranged without chronology or theme or identifying remarks. At the back of the book the pictures are reproduced in smaller size with dates and some brief comments.



Sri Aurobindo and the Hooghly Conference

— Trija Roy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Bhavan Hooghly
Chunchura, Hooghly
43 pp, Rs 50
Size: 12x18 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

Drawing on personal accounts by the participants, contemporary newspaper and journal articles, and archival notes and documents published in research journals, the author provides a brief history of the Hooghly Conference held in September 1909, which Sri Aurobindo attended as an elected delegate and leader of the Nationalist wing of the Congress Party. He describes Sri Aurobindo's leadership and his efforts to forge unity within the party without sacrificing the ideal of complete independence for India.



Matrimandir: Hymn to the Builders of the Future

— Dominique Darr

Publisher: Centre d'Art, Auroville
212 pp, ISBN 978-2-7466-7417-2, Rs 3000
Size: 30x24 cm
Binding: Hard Cover

This book of photographs and brief accompanying texts by photographic reporter Dominique Darr chronicles the construction of the Matrimandir from its conception in 1965 to its official inauguration in 2008. After the introduction, the photographs are organised into sections, with introductory texts in French and English, that follow a chronology: the beginnings of Auroville in 1968; the excavation of the Matrimandir's foundation, completed in January 1972; the emerging concrete structure with its four pillars; the participants, skilled and unskilled, who laboured on the site; the shape of the geodesic dome and its covering of golden discs; the area surrounding the Matrimandir; the inner chamber lit by a ray of the sun falling on a crystal; and the meditation rooms around the base of the structure.



Auroville Architects Monograph Series: Poppo Pingel

— Mona Doctor-Pingel

Publisher: Mapin Publishing Pvt.Ltd., Ahmedabad

204 pp, ISBN 978-1-935677-11-6, Rs 1650

Size: 23x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

In this first monograph of a three-volume series on Auroville architects, Mona Doctor-Pingel presents a bird's eye view of architect Poppo Pingel's life and his influential work in Auroville, as well as a few brief write-ups on his oeuvre penned by those who have been professionally associated with him. The book includes a brief description of Auroville and a Foreword by Balkrishna V. Doshi. This volume is replete with photographs, both in colour as well as in black and white, providing a visual introduction to the architect's work. It also carries a few photographs of the city of Auroville in its early years.

Faith—A Lifelong Companion

— Ram Sehgal

Publisher: Notion Press, Chennai

95 pp, ISBN 978-93-84391-48-5, Rs 125

Size: 13x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In this memoir the author travels back seventy years to his arrival with his family at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1945. It is a journey animated by his faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The author depends again and again on this essential element of spiritual life to face and triumph over the troubles and obstacles that assailed him in his professional life, first at Air India and later in the field of advertising, where he rose to leadership positions at several agencies. The stories recounted here illustrate and reinforce his thesis that success in life is truly measured by the power of faith and prayer to strengthen you in times of adversity.

see review on page 16

Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India

— Sachidananda Mohanty

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

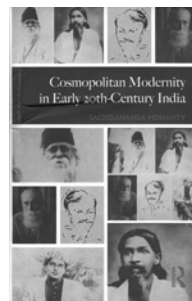
174 pp, ISBN 978-1-138-85933-3, Rs 650

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Using the lives and works of Irish poet and spiritualist James Cousins, French thinker Paul Richard, Dilip Kumar Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, art historian Ananda

Coomaraswamy, and revolutionary-intellectual Taraknath Das, the author explores their connections to Sri Aurobindo as regards the concepts of cosmopolitanism, citizenship, and modernity in India. He discusses issues of cosmopolitanism concerned with moving beyond literary, cultural, and ethical borders towards a more universal world view and how they are closely connected to the idea of cultural citizenship which these six figures believed in. He argues that by becoming bridges between cultures and ways of life, East and West, they brought the best of their cultures into a synthesis and were truly modern cosmopolitans.



The English of Savitri

Comments on the language of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* (Book One)

— Shraddhavan

Publisher: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville

512 pp, ISBN 978-93-82474-00-5, Rs 500

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Based on the transcripts of classes given by her at Savitri Bhavan, the author's aim as reflected in this book has been to try to read the poetry as correctly as possible, according to the natural rhythms of English speech, to gain a basic understanding of what the words mean and the structure of each sentence, and thereby to enter more deeply into the atmosphere of the poem. Drawing on what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written and said about *Savitri* and on what she has learned from the work of such commentators as Amal Kiran, A. B. Purani, Dr Prema Nandakumar, and M. P. Pandit, the author shares her understanding of the poem. This volume covers the five cantos of Book One.

ABCs of Indian National Education

— Dr Beloo Mehra

Publisher: Standard Publishers (India), New Delhi

155 pp, ISBN 978-81-87471-94-3, Rs 495

Size: 15x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

Inspired by what she has found in the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's writings and talks on education, the author has put together a list of twenty-six themes that should guide, shape, or be a part of an Indian national education programme. These themes, one for each letter

of the English alphabet, speak to aspects of the essential Indian spirit and emphasise an education based on self-knowledge and self-discovery, a respect for India's heritage, an understanding of India's contribution to the past, present, and future of humanity, and a deeper connection with the diverse cultures of the world.

see review on page 14

The Divine Journey: Glimpses of the Mother's Life (DVD)

— Prepared by Sri Aurobindo Archives & Research Library

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

ISBN 978-93-5210-080-4, Rs 175

A thirty-minute audiovisual presentation on the Mother's life, this DVD is comprised of photographs accompanied by Sunil's 1978 and 1979 New Year Music.

OTHER LANGUAGES

FRENCH

Matrimandir: Un Hymne aux Bâtisseurs du Futur

— Dominique Darr hc Rs 3000

see page 9 for a description of this bilingual book

SPANISH

Días de Prisión — Sri Aurobindo Rs 800

ISBN 978-84-936142-8-7

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Sri Aurobindor Xaite Baro Basar — Nirodbaran

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BOOK REVIEWS

Blessings of the Grace

— Conversations with the Mother, recollected by Mona Sarkar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

187 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-986-0, Rs 170

Size: 18x25 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Bénédictions de la Grace. Let's begin with the significance of Grace given by the Mother to the flower she called Divine Grace: "Thy goodness is infinite; we bow before Thee in gratitude!" However intense and deep our devotion be, however humble our gratitude, we can never fully conceive the grandeur and magnitude of the Divine Grace that is constantly showered on us. We are bathed and inundated in its ineffable flow.

Very often when we read what Mother has written to one of us, we feel in our purer moments of sincerity that She is addressing all of Her beloved children, Her *chères enfants*. The breath of divinity is "upon the waters of our being", and we too are privileged and blessed.

So here, reading this book with a consciousness aspiring to become "intimate and one with Her", we reap a rich harvest of moments lived in closeness to Her. Her fragrant Presence permeates and pervades the entire book, and when She speaks of the Lord, one feels His radiant Presence.

It is praiseworthy of Mona Sarkar to be able to recollect and record from memory so many precious revelations, elaborating what Mother has confided to him. Thanks to his generous sharing of these treasures, we are blessed. Her injunctions to one, are they not also addressed to all aspirants? Let's express our joy and gratitude.

There are several topics that the book covers. To Her not very conscious children, She reveals some of the aspects of Her Divinity, Her powers of transformation and creation, Her omniscience and omnipotence, Her profound love that is "wider than the universe", Her Supreme Grace and Her compassion. All this fills us with an inexpressible feeling. We are stunned, dazed in awe when she says:

It is an exceptional Grace to be enveloped in my light. Nothing wrong can happen when this light is there...One is completely under me, under my influence. It is I who guide...This never abandons you.

What a security and encouragement!

If one has faith, a faith that comes from there (*the heart*), a true faith, then the light cannot disappear...If one is tranquil and armed with this faith, faith like an intangible sword...which rises straight up without wavering, well, with this one is always enveloped by my light.

It is a marvellous thing to be under my supreme protection.

On hearing these loving words we pray to become worthy of Her. Like happy, carefree children we feel so confident, secure and exalted.

Our Mother is above time and space. She explains: "[F]or us, where the world is a field of action, one must widen the consciousness and be in touch with the universal consciousness and abandon oneself completely to the Divine—the action, the work and everything. Then alone one can perceive gradually the action of the Eternal and Infinite."

Mother speaks of vibrations and tells us how She works with them. For example, She receives our call and sends Her help through vibrations according to the need and receptivity of the individual. Some see Her light, some Her form.

Later she talks about the vibration which was at the origin of Creation: "At first, there was a vibration. The Supreme sent forth a vibration which by variations took the forms to create this universe." She goes on to reveal that *Savitri* and *Prayers and Meditations* have "the same intensity of vibration and rhythm, the same origin, the same intuition, in fact, the same revelation with the power to transform."

On page 75 we find this powerful and awe-inspiring statement:

I know much better what is happening in you, that of which you are not aware, not even a hundredth part. Are you wondering how? Because all that exists, all that moves, comes from me. I

know in advance what is going to happen to you, what you have been and what you will be. Everything. For the whole world, for the whole universe ... the how and the why, everything ... I know everything because I was there at its birth, and during its development. It is from me and by me that everything exists.

She tells us about Sri Aurobindo's Eternal Presence at the Samadhi:

His presence vibrates, concrete, all around the Samadhi. And His influence penetrates and touches the central being and awakens the consciousness to the spiritual life. Even those who come out of curiosity to visit the Samadhi, return "amazed by a mysterious alchemy and find an inner peace, because there He showers His peace and His compassion constantly. It is this that bathes them when they pass before Him. It is an unbelievable surcharged activity of His force and His Presence.

When I look at the Samadhi and see what is happening there, I am astonished to find this column of dazzling light vibrating with an energy and a transforming force....It is the New Light materialising.

At night, when everything is quiet, there are some entities who clean up this place of all that the people have left behind – all the formations of falsehood, desires, impatient supplications, all sorts of complaints, bad-will and maladies, as well as hostile forces – and make this place peaceful and pleasant. They purify the whole surrounding with so much love so that His presence is felt.

In the chapter "Sri Aurobindo in the Subtle Physical" she says: "Each day there are thousands who die and many others who are born....Sri Aurobindo is occupied with all this. He is in the subtle physical and constantly people who die come to Him and also He decides who will come back....He is preparing souls who shall reincarnate."

Each time Mother comes down for the special *puja* blessings all the gods and goddesses accompany Her to have the privilege of Her Darshan. She helps not only man but all these gods and goddesses. Some come seeking Her help and others help Her a great deal, not only for terrestrial work but on the whole towards a complete accomplishment of Her work on the cosmic and extraterrestrial planes.

Mother elaborates on many points revealing overwhelming truths about Herself. We read what She says of Her Rudra aspect, which very rarely descends into Her, because when it does, very few can bear the power of its force, its violent shaking of things to bring about rapid change. She also speaks of Om as the signature of the Lord, and its great transforming power. She says that rain is a benediction, a grace of God to bless and purify the earth.

In the chapter "The Mother's Ways of Seeing in Her Two Rooms" we read that when Mother sees people in Her own room, it is a physical contact. In a single glance She sees the soul and with that the possibilities of their aspirations. She sees their true being which tells Her all that the person is. We can hide nothing from Her. She knows and sees everything in us in our utter nakedness. At other times she meets people in the Interview Room:

Whereas [in the interview room], it is absolutely different, because it is not I who see here but the Lord....here it is not I who am presiding but the Lord.

Before calling in the people, I concentrate on the Lord. And when He appears, I go behind Him, as behind a veil, and I give Him the whole charge of the morning for meeting people...let them live in the Peace and the Light of the Lord. And saying this, I offer everything to Him and I go behind him like someone who witnesses. And from that moment, it is He who presides...he envelopes all with His love and His compassion....He bathes them in His atmosphere, so that people can live in the Peace and the Light.

She narrates with a touching intimacy so many little incidents of Her life that teach us to develop a dynamic will power, patience and endurance.

The chapter "In Search of the Psychic Being" shall help us "to walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster" by making us conscious of the meaning of life. In all the harsh circumstances that assault them Her children must be intrepid, with

Courage their armour, faith their sword, they must walk,

.
Casting a javelin regard in front,

and aspiring to become

Heroes and soldiers of the army of Light.

With Her promise of constant support, help and encouragement we feel entirely safe on this venture, securely wrapped in Her Presence. This quest is a unique adventure with inexorable difficulties and ineffable recompenses. Once we have accepted to tread on this path, we must be ever alert, look into ourselves and



scrutinise, and march on ever forward, for Her “outstretched Hand is felt upon our lives”. In a persistent purification and surrendering with faith to the Guiding Presence our days “become a happy pilgrim march”.

And yet She enjoins us to be patient, determined, sincere, honest and transparent. She warns us against subterfuges, darkening shadows, pretence, arrogance and lack of humility for, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow.”

She also advises us to be pure and cautions us to reject desires, as these lines from *Savitri* remind us:

He tore desire up from its bleeding roots
And offered to the gods the vacant place.

and

All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.

We have seen only a little of what this book contains. Mother has answered so many questions that her aspiring child asked. She has elaborated and explained with so much patience and love, in varied metaphors, repeating the topics to enable us to understand more clearly. This book is a treasure trove of wonderful spiritual and occult truths. While reading it, we are bathed in the Presence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

— Nirata

Nirata-di came to Pondicherry as a child and joined the Ashram's school in early 1945, the second year after its foundation. Since 1959 she has taught English and later painting at the Centre of Education.

ABCs of Indian National Education

— Dr Beloo Mehra

Publisher: Standard Publishers (India), New Delhi

155 pp, ISBN 978-81-87471-94-3, Rs 495

Size: 15x23 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

This book of just about 150 pages written by Dr. Beloo Mehra is a brief but excellent collection of some of the most important fundamental concepts of Indian education – nay, of all good education.

Beloo, who spent fourteen years in the United States, was naturally influenced by the thought processes prevalent there. Her first years in Pondicherry were a mix of unlearning and relearning. Having interacted closely with her, I must say that her rapid assimilation of the ideas and concepts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are quite remarkable. In the light of this new vision, she has presented in her introductory book some very deep and fundamental concepts which should be taken note of by the authorities framing our national education policy.

It should be mentioned that this book does not give a detailed, practical framework for Indian education, and that was not the author's aim as she clearly outlines in the Introduction to the book. The framework for a truly Indian education needs to be done by others, especially by those who are in positions of decision-making and who are heading the policy-making bodies in the field of education. However, what the author has provided in this short book is a very sound conceptual foundation for all educationists. And what is of highest concern is that these concepts are based on deeper Indian ideals.

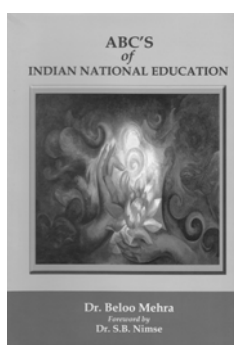
The author starts with the letter A and rightly stresses the aim of education, and indeed of all life; the importance of fixing an aim in life is crucial. In fact, the Mother in her essay titled “The Science of Living” begins thus: “An aimless life is always a miserable life. Every one of you should have an aim. But do not forget that on the quality of your aim will depend the quality of your life.” (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 3)

Starting with this solid foundation, the author emphasises some of the most important but sadly neglected aspects in modern life and education. The letter B stands for Beauty, which is indeed an important part of a human being's make-up. What is remarkable

is that the author puts a powerful stress not only on outer beauty, but much more on inner beauty.

When the author moves on to the letter E, she emphasises the aspect of evoking knowledge from within. This is what is truly required rather than packing a child's brain with information.

Coming to the letter G, which refers to graduality, she touches on some very basic ideas that concern the field of education. She speaks of the need for an integral education when she asserts that all claims of life must be given their due importance.



In the chapter for the letter H, Beloo Mehra speaks of the importance of presenting to students a deeper understanding of their history and heritage. She writes that “learning about India’s heritage and history doesn’t need to be and should not be a chauvinistic and narrow-minded retelling of the past glory that India was. At the same time, we don’t want to

shy away from the truth that India was indeed once upon a time a glorious land with [a] great many riches of knowledge in all spheres of human life and activity, including material prosperity.”

The letter K, in the author’s vision, brings us to the idea of knowing oneself, a very important and neglected aspect of modern education. When the author comes to the letter S, she speaks of the deeper educational significance of stories and storytelling as well as their value to engage the interest of learners of all ages.

Throughout the book readers will find helpful references to a variety of source material, including the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, other thinkers and educationists, as well as quite a bit of online and audio-visual material. These can help the reader to enrich the study of the topic under discussion.

Readers will also find several hints for rethinking the fundamentals of curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, educational planning and administration. These hints need to be carefully considered by those concerned with educational decision-making for further development and possible implementation.

In an effortless way the author brings out almost all the intrinsic values of Indian culture that should be the guiding principles of Indian education—in fact, all education. It is hoped that all those seriously interested in Indian education will take note of this presentation. More so in the modern, globalised world, where such a medley of conflicting ideas are in the public arena, this book comes as a clear reminder to stick to the basic tenets of Indian culture. I recommend this book to all who are concerned with and would like to improve our present-day Indian system of education.

— Kittu Reddy

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

Excerpt from the book:

Indian spirituality in its essence is not removed from life, but is the basis of all life including all creative pursuits such as art, literature, philosophy, music, etc. A true Indian education must be grounded in this understanding of spirituality. Spirituality that motivates growing minds and hearts to experience all the joys of life and living and to expand and deepen their seeking for truth through all that life has to offer; spirituality that takes up all the intellectual, creative, vital energies and colours them in its own truth.

Faith—A Lifelong Companion

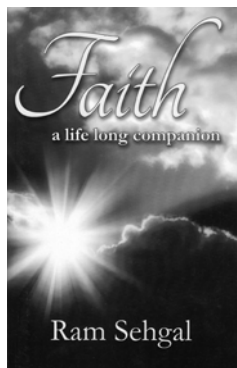
— Ram Sehgal

Publisher: Notion Press, Chennai

95 pp, ISBN 978-93-84391-48-5, Rs 125

Size: 13x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



I have often pondered on why we read a book. Perhaps it is not only a relaxation, a change or even sometimes an obsession, but it helps us to break away from ourselves and see things in a new light. Quite often we rekindle a flame for progress and grow in consciousness, for we quite unexpectedly enter into the consciousness of the writer.

This is a book you really cannot put down once you start. The first chapter begins with a brief overview of Sri Aurobindo's life. In the list given of his major works, personally, I missed the mention of his epic *Savitri* and his unique works on the Veda and the Upanishads. Then follows a short biography of the Mother and a vivid picture of Ashram life, particularly of the Mother's multiple activities during the time when the author was growing up. These are referred to as "The Glowing Years", I believe, for two reasons. Firstly, it was the time when the Ashram was expanding rapidly into so many fields under the Mother's direct initiative, especially a new growth after children were accepted. For much later, while reading out *The Ideal Child* in French, she spontaneously added: "Childhood is the symbol of the future and the Hope of all the victories to come." Secondly, it was during this period that the Mother brought down the Supramental on 29 February 1956.

Small details of Ram's early life stand out as we read on. For instance, there is this frank remark: "The Mother would give me what I needed but not necessarily what I wanted." Again, when she heard that he could not sleep for several nights and that sleeping pills did not help, she told him: "The body is capable of curing itself. It is only when you fill the body with medicine that the body loses its confidence."

His journey of faith begins when he leaves the secluded and protected atmosphere of the Ashram to look for a

job and find his place in the world. He writes: "I knew that faith alone would not make my journey easy. But it would give me the strength and confidence to face all obstacles." When offered a job with Air India, he wrote to the Mother asking if she approved. She replied, "Very good! It is an excellent occasion to see the world and enlarge your consciousness. Accept it, with my blessings." On another occasion she told him as he was leaving (as she said to so many of her children): "This is your home, come back!"

Subsequent chapters, "A Shaky Start" and "The Flying Years", tell of travel as a flight purser for Air India. He regularly sent a postcard to the Mother from each of the many countries he flew to. During this time he certainly grew in consciousness, as the Mother wished. He writes: "I learnt punctuality, discipline, the ability to handle people with different characters and behaviour, to listen to people attentively and show my concern, breaking no rules, and finally, to be truthful in all the reports that were sent to the headquarters after every flight." He adds, with that streak of humour that shines throughout the book, "It was almost like a degree in management for free!" And regarding discipline, he wryly comments that "if discipline is enforced and helps to keep one's job, one is less likely to be resentful".

After this rich experience, he was ready to hunt for a new career. As it so happened, a friendly passenger on a flight from London to New York turned out to be the media director of a leading advertising agency in New York. He went over to Ram after the meal had been served and asked him: "What are your plans for the future? You are too bright to be in this job for long." Ram told him that he was keen to join the advertising profession. He was advised to take a course in advertising in London.

After finishing the course he did enter the advertising profession, where he had considerable success. Although he had to pass many anxious moments in his chosen career, he had faith as his support. He writes: "Faith is an excellent guide and teacher. Faith is believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe. Faith has strange ways of manifesting itself. There are times when we need to pray for strength to bear our problems."

There were what he terms scary moments in his life. But he knows that the Mother is in command of each

situation. He always placed her photo in each of the dwellings he moved to, as well in every office he occupied. Once, he had a narrow escape from a bomb blast in Bombay and returned unharmed. A senior executive, pointing to the Mother's photo, said: "Sir, She saved you. If you were a few minutes late, you would have been blown off!"

Indeed, Ram epitomises that line from *Savitri*: "Happiest who stand on faith as on a rock." For finally, it was in the profession of advertising, at an agency which he helped to grow and with which he grew, that he made it to the top. It would not be amiss to mention that the international *Advertising and Marketing Magazine* gave him their Person of the Year award.

In addition, I quote from the following citation from the Advertising Club of Calcutta when he received the honour of being inducted into its Hall of Fame: "For smoothly making the transition from the Ashram to advertising, for successfully bringing the agency out of the shadow of its parent, for nurturing and growing the agency and its people, for fusing creative skills with strategic strengths and making an independent entity out of a subsidiary...to Ram Sehgal, a People's Professional."

Life can never be a bed of roses, for hurdles, setbacks and impasses came along to test Ram's faith in his eventful journey. In times of difficulty, he writes: "I automatically recall the Mother's words. She had said when you are confused, sit in silence; make every effort to drive away the negative thoughts and await the Divine Grace." And even when negative thoughts got the better of him, Ram was always reminded of her advice: "You can overcome any difficulty if you work sincerely, and the Divine's Grace helps you." He does admit his occasional mistakes or blunders. Yet, when we look back on life, we all know this truth, so beautifully expressed in *Savitri*: "He makes our fall a means for greater rise".

I may add that the nature of Ram and his family is one of nobility, modesty and generosity. And I would like to end with a touching incident about Ram's father, Muralidhar. After our Sweet Mother left her physical body, I heard that Ram's father went to Ravindra-ji, who was in charge of general distributions, and said he wanted to give sweets to all. Surprised yet amused, for he had a keen sense of humour, Ravindra-ji asked, "Why?" Muralidhar simply replied, "The Mother

told us that she would leave only when her work was completed. So I wish to offer sweets."

In the penultimate chapter "Travel Experiences" Ram concludes with these words: "Faith is knowledge of the heart, beyond the reach of reason or proof....Prayer for us has always been an attitude of dependency on The Mother's Grace. The occurrences that surprise you are not a series of coincidences. For one who has faith, no explanation is necessary."

What I gather from his book is that Ram has lived a fruitful and exciting life with full trust in the Mother. He shows that dedicated hard work, giving always one's best, is the way to overcome setbacks. One must go forward with confidence and faith in the Mother's constant Grace. Readers devoted to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo will find here a sense of the Mother's concrete presence in all that happens in one's life.

And since faith is often preceded by a prayer, I would like to conclude this review with these lines from *Savitri*:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force,
Then miracle is made the common rule.

— Richard Pearson
Richard arrived in India from England to join his father in 1946 at the age of eleven. He studied at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education where he teaches Natural History and is a captain of gymnastics. He is the editor of the book Flowers and Their Messages.

Interacting with UNESCO during the Mother's Years

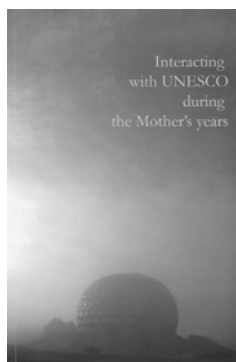
— Compiled by Paulette Hadnagy

Publisher: Stichting De Zaaier, Holland

154 pp, Rs 250

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



“Auroville is meant to hasten the advent of the supramental Reality upon earth. The help of all those who find the world is not as it ought to be is welcome. Each one must know if he wants to associate with an old world ready for death, or to work for a new and better world preparing to be born.”

In 1972, the year of Sri Aurobindo's Birth Centenary, the Mother sent this message to UNESCO, an organisation dedicated to promoting world peace through education, scientific research and intercultural dialogue. It serves to reveal the profound sentiments and principles that nearly five decades ago drew UNESCO and its member nations into supporting the development of the universal city of Auroville.

The presence at Auroville's foundation ceremony of representatives from UNESCO, and the four resolutions it subsequently passed commending the Auroville project, point to the shared esteem and goodwill that have characterised the relationship between the two entities.

As presented in this book, the Mother's statements on seeking UNESCO's backing for Auroville shed light on this perhaps little-known aspect of the City of Dawn's history. In order to grasp the tremendous amount of work that preceded the official recognition of Auroville by UNESCO, we need to delve into the correspondence and the personal accounts of the pioneers – Kailas Jhaveri in particular – who initiated such interaction. Most of the crucial excerpts in this book, taken from Kailas Jhaveri's autobiography *I am with you*, concern the initiatives she took between 1965 and 1972 with the approval of the Mother.

This will help us to understand that the similarities between certain aspects characteristic of the Auroville project and some of the principles UNESCO espouses – such as their emphasis on the development of knowledge, and their ongoing quest for human unity, internationalism and integral education – are much more than the outcome of a shared worldview. Nor are they limited to a commonality of interests, as the wording of the last paragraph of the first resolution passed by UNESCO in 1966 might suggest: “The General Conference...expresses the belief that the project will contribute to international understanding and promotion of peace and commends it to those interested in UNESCO's ideals.”

The recognition of those similarities helped launch Auroville on the international scene and secure for this purpose the much-needed support of UNESCO and the Government of India. Perhaps the Mother had foreseen the need to secure the endorsement of an organisation of stature. The implicit safeguard offered by UNESCO served indeed as major support at times when, because of various hardships, the Auroville project came under threat.

As the excerpts published in this book show, UNESCO's recognition of Auroville was much more than a symbolic gift on the occasion of the former's twentieth anniversary. Mentioned in this work are two projects, originated by UNESCO and with which the Mother felt Auroville could be associated, that foster the quest

Excerpt from the book:

This book serves a dual purpose. One is to document how determined the Mother was, applying her force to secure UNESCO's support and cooperation and, by its international status, potential world recognition of her Auroville megaproject—while at the same time allowing no interference from UNESCO or any institutional body. At the same time, it provides a poignant documentation that reminds us that being an Aurovilian truly needs to revolve around unending education, emanating from within as well as coming from without, being complementary to the achievement of an effective human unity.

for human unity: the World University for Human Unity and, while cautiously safeguarding the specificity of the Auroville project, the Design for Living. These two examples show how determined the Mother was to turn into reality the universal nature of the Auroville project.

To carry on this steadfast work demanded a tremendous amount of energy, primarily from Kailas Jhaveri, who as the major architect of the interaction with UNESCO dedicated to it seven years of her life. *Interacting with UNESCO during the Mother's Years* is an essential tool for anyone wishing to understand the background and implications of Kailas' assignment. The many excerpts Paulette Hadnagy has gathered in this book highlight the central role the Mother played in Kailas' work. They provide a reference to Auroville's history and to the teachings that since its inception have gone hand in hand with this project. Several archival photographs offer a glimpse of the beginnings of Auroville, allowing us to plunge to the very heart of this period that saw the Auroville community begin to grow and flourish. Some recent pictures of the Matrimandir and its surrounds, taken by Paulette, are included as well, to highlight the symbolic continuity of the Auroville project turned to the future.

Extracts from Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* towards the end of the book remind us of the ways by which the gnostic society heralded by Sri Aurobindo can provide answers not only to the socio-environmental impasses which humanity faces today but also to the spiritual ones. In its own way, UNESCO tries to address these problems as well.

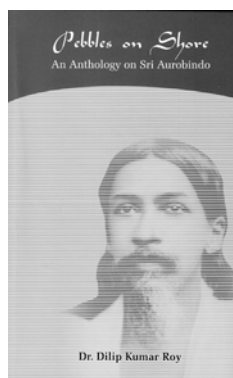
“[T]o hand over the management of Auroville to any country or any group however big it may be is an absolute impossibility,” stated the Mother. To those who are tempted to use this warning to justify a possibly paralysing policy of insular self-sufficiency, it helps to remember, as this book invites us to do, that to be recognised by another in no way means submission, and that the coming together of entities sharing a commonality of objectives often makes them stronger. Although, in certain aspects, the “UNESCO machine” can be viewed as imperfect, the fact is, like Auroville, it reflects humanity as it is today.

While fostering the progress of underdeveloped nations along with the well-being of the less fortunate strata

of society, UNESCO aims at bringing peace to the world through a reconciliation of knowledge, through the education of its populations, and by protecting the exceptional heritage of each civilisation that has contributed to humanity its particular richness and diversity. This universalistic vision reminds us of Sri Aurobindo's appeal for a “religion of humanity” and aligns itself harmoniously with the Mother's call for an actual human unity, the foundation of a model ideal society and “cradle of the superman” upon which Auroville is to be built.

— Félix Tessier

As a volunteer at l'Avenir d'Auroville (Auroservice team), Felix Tessier works as a specialist on ethno-anthropological questions raised by sustainable development in the world community, in view of the possibility of designating Auroville as a UNESCO World Heritage site. After studying history, ethnology and anthropology at university, Tessier participated in a UNESCO designation project at the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia. This assignment, done in collaboration with researchers from the French Institute of Sustainable Development (IRD), elicited his interest in the questions raised by the UNESCO World Heritage designation process.



Pebbles on Shore

An Anthology on Sri Aurobindo

— Dr Dilip Kumar Roy
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo
Pathamandir, Kolkata
196 pp, Rs 250
Size: 14x22 cm
Binding: Soft Cover

The book under review is an ‘anthology on Sri Aurobindo’ as the author calls it though I would prefer to call it ‘an anthology of lectures on Sri Aurobindo's yogic philosophy’. The author painstakingly explains the knotty problems of the yogic philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in his own words to bring it to a wider audience. The recurrence of the epithet ‘yogic philosophy’ ensures that the reader does not misconstrue what he is explaining as mere philosophy but as the

yogic experiences of Sri Aurobindo couched in philosophical terms. The author dwells at length on the first chapter of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, because he believes that it contains an index of the whole of the divine theme as found in that great work.

Let us look more closely at the first chapter of *The Life Divine*. It covers the entire gamut of Aurobindonian philosophy or metaphysics, wherein Sri Aurobindo takes man first, his aspiration to exceed himself bringing in its wake a whole lot of problems, problems of disharmony and harmony, his evolutionary past and his evolutionary future. His recurring theme is that man must awake to the need for the realization of the Divine within him and for the divinization of life on earth. His ascent into the static Brahman is a precursor to the bringing down of the glories of the dynamic Divine on the earth. This clarion call to man to divinize life is a radical departure from the old Vedantic realization that ruled India for centuries.

One of the contentious issues in metaphysics is the problem of Being and Non-Being. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Omnipresent Reality embraces both Being and Non-Being in its inclusive sweep for there are many realities or poises of the Supreme. If any one of these realities is experienced to the exclusion of the others and posited as the only reality there comes into existence a bewildering plethora of contending and contradicting schools of thought such as Advaita, Vishishtadwaita, Dwaita, etc., each claiming to be the sole repository of Truth. Sri Aurobindo beautifully synthesizes all these into a harmonious whole which he calls the Purnadwaita, and calls his yoga the Integral Yoga.

It is not possible in an essay to dwell at length on all major points of *The Life Divine*, and the author has done well to choose specific topics to be presented so that the reader can get some hold on Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical venture. Only one thing needs to be highlighted: something very central and novel to world thought and philosophy, and that is the reality of the psychic being. Any integral approach to the concept of

evolution perforce has to consider the psychic being's role in the evolution of man. According to Sri Aurobindo, the psychic being is part and parcel of the Divine Consciousness, which evolves a psychic personality, a Purusha, with the help of the innumerable stages of evolution, right from matter to the mental man at present. The ascent of consciousness from matter to plant and thereafter to animal and man is the saga of the emergence of the psychic, which when realized by man heralds the beginning of spiritual life. Thus the importance of the psychic cannot be gainsaid in the final plenary emergence of the Superman and the supramental being. This transcending of the mind and the democratization of spirituality may look like a vain chimera, but the urgent need for this is accentuated by the present crisis through which humanity is passing. The Supermind, its poises and its workings are all presented in detail by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*, and the author's explanation of these in his lectures may help those who want to understand these new thoughts in all their nuances.

The problem of evil and suffering is a slippery terrain on which many philosophies have floundered. The Semitic religions introduced a clear dichotomy between the Divine and the Devil, and the Devil was as much an irrefutable and inexorable reality as the Divine. But there is no permanent place for Satan in Vedantic philosophy or in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Sin and suffering and death are products of ignorance and falsehood, engendered by the

divisive mind and the rampant vital ignorant of the Truth, and with the dawn of the divine consciousness they vanish, and man is liberated into a state of Divine Bliss and Immortality. The author must be congratulated for talking to the audience about this most popular topic in the light of Sri Aurobindo's exquisite chapter in *The Life Divine*, "The Origin and Remedy of Falsehood, Error, Wrong and Evil".

The author has added an interesting collection of lectures titled "Essays of General Interest". Sri Aurobindo's views on modern science are not only interesting but also valuable because of the tussle between science and spirituality. Many great minds have

Sri Aurobindo's yogic vision of consciousness determining form and not vice versa is slowly gaining ground in the light of modern scientific discoveries like relativity.

taken differing standpoints on this matter of importance in modern times, when man is torn between these two seemingly irreconcilable realities. Modern science, after the advent of quantum mechanics, is shedding some of its untenable rigidities and accepting more and more the non-material reality behind matter, which has been the only reality for the blinkered scientific community. Sri Aurobindo's yogic vision of consciousness determining form and not vice versa is slowly gaining ground in the light of modern discoveries like relativity and in particle physics, neurophysiology and astrophysics. Some exciting new frontiers of science like dark matter are compelling material science to accept the reality of consciousness and its relation to matter. A new science more in tune with spiritual verities is emerging. Under the title "Matter and Consciousness: Modern Science, Vedanta and Sri Aurobindo" the author has many interesting things to say, and the reader is well advised not to skip this chapter. His observations on a renaissance in India and her future role as Guru of the world as well as India's contribution in unifying the materialistic West and the spiritual East are welcome additions to this interesting book.

In conclusion, one can say that the book is a useful addition to the many books purporting to explain in simpler terms the ins and outs of Sri Aurobindo's yogic philosophy. To those who complain that Sri Aurobindo's language is difficult to understand, one can only say that it is not the language that is difficult to understand but the profundity of the ideas he expounds. These are not mental constructs but spiritual experiences couched in a language which challenges the comprehension. I can venture to add that a modicum of familiarity with Vedantic thought would help the reader in following Sri Aurobindo's exposition with some ease. *The Life Divine*, in my opinion, is Veda in prose. All told, this book will be helpful for those who want to understand Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and share in his vision.

— K. Balasubramaniam

Since 1972 Bala-bhai has been teaching English, Mathematics, and Numerical Analysis at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

Sunil: The Mother's Musician

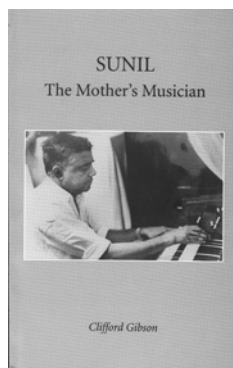
— Clifford Gibson

Publisher: Kokilaben Mehta

361 pp, Rs 275

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



I was studying English with Jhumur-di in 1968, which was also my most intense period of painting. One day, I showed her my work, explaining that visions appeared whenever I listened to Sunil-da's music, and that I tried to capture them faithfully on paper. During my next class Jhumur-di informed me that she had spoken to her uncle, Sunil-da, about my

work and he had shown an interest to see it.

I only knew Sunil-da as a middle-aged man who regularly went to the Tennis Ground to exercise. The image I retained of him was of someone wearing a white T-shirt over a pair of blue shorts, slowly riding his bicycle back home when I, with other members of group A3, would walk in rows of two from the Playground to the Tennis Ground. We would always cross each other in front of Trésor House.

But now, six years later, I found Sunil-da wearing a light cream-coloured, short sleeve shirt over his white dhoti. I would soon learn that this was his trademark combination. Settling down comfortably in his reclining chair, he straightaway plunged into an examination of each painting. He enquired if I remembered which vision I had seen while listening to a particular piece of music. And I noticed him nodding in silent approval as I gave him the information about the pieces that had engendered each vision. I asked if he ever saw such visions while composing music. 'No,' he explained, 'as a musician, I only feel an intense emotion while composing.' As the first instalment of his music for *Savitri* had recently been played accompanied by a slide show of Huta-ben's paintings, I enquired when he foresaw finishing the entire poem. His reply shook me. Smiling wryly, he soulfully said: 'Shesh ki haubey?' (Will it ever finish?)

Clifford Gibson's book, *Sunil: The Mother's Musician*, is a valiant effort at recreating the full genius

of Sunil-da. Although a bit sketchy, disjointed and often repetitive for entirely understandable reasons, the editor has to be praised for his untiring efforts, particularly in the absence of a complete biography. By clubbing together some of Sunil-da's early reminiscences, his lengthy correspondence with the Mother, his correspondence with various friends, and comments from fellow members of the Ashram, Gibson has succeeded in recreating the warmth and qualities of Sunil-da. I wonder if anything better can be achieved seventeen years after Sunil-da passed away.

It is interesting to note how Sunil-da became a professor of mathematics even though he held a degree in chemistry because the Mother deemed that he would be more useful to her in that capacity. Likewise, he composed music at her insistence. 'So, you see,' Sunil-da explained in a letter to a friend, 'I would be neither the one, nor the other without Her help' (284). To someone else he confided: 'You may think that I am not in my senses if I tell you that I have still to learn why I have been chosen to do such a work as music by the Mother' (245).

In February 1966 the Mother wrote:

Sunil, my dear child,

We need a music to accompany and frame my readings of passages from *Savitri*... You alone can do this music the way it should be done.

Would you be interested in this work? It would make me very happy. (52)

To which Sunil-da responded cautiously: 'The idea is excellent, but what frightens me is I am not sure of my ability.' The Mother was quick to reassure him: 'Those who are really capable are always modest' (53). And the rest is history. However, proving right his earlier question, the work sadly remains unfinished. But it is heartening to note that the Mother did not reject a single piece of music for *Savitri* that Sunil-da composed. Compare this to the paintings for *Savitri* done by Huta-ben. The Mother asked her to redo many frames as they were not up to the mark. Huta-ben herself told me this.

But because of some difficulties, the slide show of the paintings and the music could not be continued in tandem for too long. At one point Sunil-da enquired of the Mother whether he should discontinue creating music for *Savitri*, to which the Mother replied firmly: 'The *Savitri* music is a business between you and me

and does not depend on anybody else. Continue without anxiety and everything will be all right' (88–9). As there was no further link between Huta-ben's paintings and his music, Sunil-da felt relieved to drop a few 'frames' from his compositions. 'I realised that there cannot be music for many lines of *Savitri*,' he explained to me. This would also clarify why there are only sound effects and no music in some of his compositions for the epic.

The year 1970 became a watershed in my life after Sunil-da summoned me in late August and asked if I was interested in recording his latest composition for *Savitri* in place of Victor who had gone abroad. I could not believe my ears! Obviously, Victor's loss was my gain. And thus began my recording experience under the guidance of Sunil-da. But more than the recording itself what interested me was the time I would be able to spend in the company of this man I admired. I am extremely grateful to him also for generously acknowledging my work (350, Appendix 1).

The first thing that struck me on entering his recording studio was the presence of a Yamaha electric organ, which I knew belonged to Henry Bell, who was the father of my schoolmate Hillary. I was charmed to hear Sunil-da play it, and he quickly explained to me that in order to make his composition compatible to the electric organ, he had to create the new composition on the electric organ itself. Admittedly, the novel music originating from the new organ was different from his usual style. Thus, the music for *Savitri*, Book II, Cantos I and II, bore the oddity of having some electric organ pieces sandwiched between the many paddle harmonium compositions for the first time. I recollect that there was a particularly delightful electric organ piece that he dropped altogether because he later felt it to be too rhythmic and 'cheap' and, therefore, unusable!

Around the first week of October we completed the sound-mixing, the sequencing and the superimposing of the Mother's readings. And then, on the 9th of October came the worthy climax of the entire enterprise! Accompanied by my friend Rajesh, who had done some recordings for me in the evenings because I was not authorised to skip the group activities, Suresh Hindocha and I went with Sunil-da to the Mother's room to play the newest music for her (126). The Mother listened to the entire hour's music without any interruption and she looked ecstatic when Sunil-da knelt down before

her after it was over. ‘Excellent! Excellent!’ she exclaimed twice, ‘You see how you are improving with each composition?’ Then the discussion veered to the French version of her readings. The Mother assured him that she would complete translating and recording the readings soon.

Sunil-da shared with me an incident that had occurred during a previous music-playing session in the Mother’s room. For some unknown reason, the big Telefunken recorder refused to work and Suresh, the technician, could not repair it. Feeling let down, Sunil-da then turned to the Mother, fervently appealing to her to intervene. At first she said that she knew nothing about machines. But later she touched the big machine with both her hands, saying, ‘There. Play it now.’ And lo, it started playing! Sunil-da proudly explained to me that for three years the machine had been working faultlessly (83).

After the Yamaha was reclaimed by its owner, Sunil-da received the gift of an electric organ from André Viozat. But he openly lamented the loss of the sonority of the previous, smaller one even though it was far less sophisticated than the new one (159).

Few people know that in the composition ‘Four Aspects of the Mother’ the Mother humming in her own voice has been used in the Mahalakshmi aspect of the four-part music. In this respect, Manoj-da’s reminiscence about seeing Sunil sitting at his organ, listening to the Mother’s voice as she hummed the theme and waiting in quiet meditation for an inspiration to come reveals Sunil-da’s depth of feeling (131). Even more revealing is Sunil-da’s naïve statement made to the Mother: ‘I have often a feeling these days that it is You who made me a musician.’ ‘Perhaps,’ quipped the Mother (54).

I heard that the Mother had remarked after listening to Sunil-da’s ‘The Hour of God’ that ‘Beethoven has been surpassed.’ And on enquiry, Sunil-da did confirm this. Displaying his customary humility, he said it with such detachment that I felt as if the Mother had spoken to him about someone else’s achievement!

I also asked him to corroborate the Mother’s comment apropos the 1967 New Year Music. And he confirmed that she did observe that ‘the composition did not have a single hole in its inspiration.’ Nevertheless, Sunil-da baffled me when he went on to

remark: ‘I am not very satisfied with the production. I wanted to use a violin but could neither procure a good instrument nor a competent player.’ When I said that the music reaches its crescendo in the last but one movement where the long chords of the guitar are introduced, he reminisced how the Mother sat up straighter and straighter while listening to that part of the music.

Sunil-da has referred to some of his spiritual experiences in his correspondence. To a friend he wrote:

[F]rom my childhood I knew what I really was and yet always I tried to reach for what I could become. I have always felt the One whom I call Divine very close to me. He had come to me in my dreams both waking and in my sleep. He is my friend and my love and I have unshakable trust in Him. He is much more real to me than you are...However, I am miles away from the experience of the One as Absolute or Infinite....When I was just a young boy I was on the verge of an experience of an infinite calm and...just when it mattered most I felt within me an unreasonable fear of self-destruction....This helped me discover my limitations’ (192).

Elsewhere he explained, ‘I have heard the call of that delight— that is to say, I am totally in delight but I haven’t been able to acquire Him. I have seen only the picture, the picture hasn’t yet become alive’ (295). To yet another friend he affirmed: ‘My greatest joy in this life has been my success in discovering Her, who is my true Mother, as well as my attempts to express in my music my deepest feelings for Her’ (202). And again: ‘For me there is only one attraction. Could I, one day, make an entire and utter self-giving to Her a reality in my life, claiming nothing, asking nothing, desiring nothing?’ (271)

Sunil-da never shied away from working on improving his recordings. Once, around the year 1972, I casually visited his studio, knowing that he was in the last stages of recording his latest music for *Savitri*. ‘Ah, there you are!’ he exclaimed unexpectedly as soon as I entered the studio. ‘Please listen to this piece and tell me if you like it.’ It was the signature tune that he had used on several occasions for the *Savitri* music, each time modifying it slightly. After hearing it I felt that the usual power that the tune evokes was sadly missing this time round. I was hesitating to say this because Victor was extremely pleased with the standard of recording of the piece and was refusing to give in to Sunil-da’s request to record it again. But when I sensed

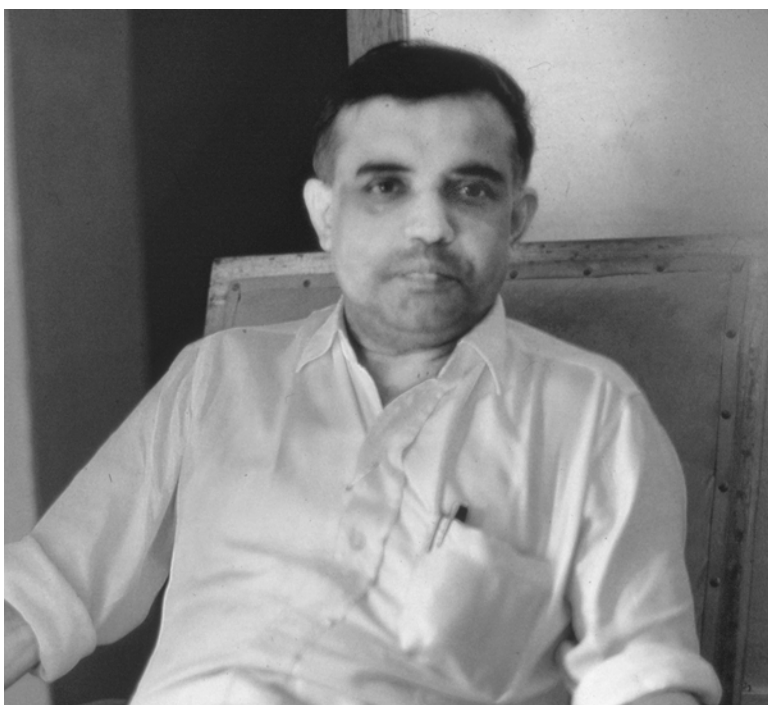
Sunil-da's wish, I sided with him openly. Sunil-da was ecstatic! He immediately set about redoing it with Kanak-da. Victor became so cross with me for going against his wish that he stopped talking to me for some time.

Sunil-da told me that the Mother once enquired, '*Quel âge avez-vous?*' (What is your age?) When he replied that he was forty-eight, she exclaimed, '*Ah, vous êtes jeune!*' (You are young!) Unfortunately, being young and being healthy are not always synonymous. In 1976 Sunil-da fell ill and had to postpone the recording of the *Savitri* music (257–8). Although he recovered soon after, this sickness affected his general health for the remaining twenty-two years of his life. In 1978, the centenary year of the Mother's birth, he came down to the Red House, opposite the Ashram library, to see the life-sized portrait of the Mother that I had painted for the occasion. He liked it very much.

After this, I did not see him as often because I was absent from Pondicherry for some years, although I called on him occasionally on his birthday. But I rushed to see him as soon as I heard that he was admitted to the nursing home towards the end of 1997. He appeared to be happy to see me and called me aside. 'Do you still visit Calcutta?' he asked softly. Then he requested me to do him a strange favour: 'Visit my hometown and tell me on your return how the place looks now.' I felt saddened by this surge of nostalgia. For, surely, the vast acres of orchards that surrounded his family house during his younger days, creating vibrations of peace that he refers to in a 1992 letter (334), must have made way for multiple housing colonies, which have mushroomed all over urban Bengal six decades later! How could I

tell him that, when he seemed to be enchanted with his childhood vision? So, I did not go, and his request remained unfulfilled because I felt happier to let him live in his past.

The inclusion of Victor's reminiscences of Sunil-da's last pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's rooms on his birthday in 1997 aptly rounds off the



great man's life, a life that presented to the world a new brand of music. The editor deserves to be congratulated for giving the admirers of this colossus an invaluable gift in the form of the book *Sunil: The Mother's Musician*.

— Arup Mitra

Arup Mitra is an artist and also the author of the book Uttara Yogi. He is a former student of SAICE and lives in Pondicherry.