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## Recent Publications

# Sabda

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This issue includes a brief report on SABDA's participation in the London Book Fair last April and three articles: reflections on the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's release from Alipore Jail in 1909, a glance at the Ashram's past through the prism of a memoir by Priti Das Gupta, and a thoughtful look at the continued relevance of Sri Aurobindo's early essays on the national value of art.



*A concourse at the London Book Fair*

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## The Master's *Yajña* for Liberation

### Two Momentous Centenaries

The other day a seeker who had lately been introduced to Sri Aurobindo – and as in several other cases the impact had been overwhelming – asked this author: “At which stage of his life did Sri Aurobindo suddenly realise his divinity and suddenly break away from the sort of life he led—and what was the immediate occasion?” Articulation of an answer was beyond me, even though it was no riddle for me. Sri Aurobindo, for me as for many others, was the Divine Sri Aurobindo; it was not possible to visualise a pre-Divine Sri Aurobindo. But this could not be my answer to the seeker, nor could I ignore the sincerity behind his query. After all, Sri Aurobindo himself had provided answers to queries on the so-called factual plane in his *Tales of Prison Life* as well as in the *Uttarpara Speech*.

Nevertheless, even lifting words from his own writings, in this context, needed a preface, and this is how this author proceeded: let us keep the case of Sri Aurobindo aside for a moment. Even in the lives of average people like us no transition from the usual pattern of life into the life of a spiritual seeker really takes place suddenly. A quest for the Truth continues deep within us, even though we are not aware of it. At a certain point along the way, any external event or influence could inspire us to break away from the pattern of existence we followed, and the change may appear sudden.

But no formula, of course, applies to the Avatar. However, I understand the situation in a metaphorical way. You may decide to wake up at a certain hour and set the alarm in your clock accordingly before going to sleep. Even when the alarm rings and you wake up, it may take a few seconds for you to recollect that it had been your own doing, followed by your own decision to go to sleep and then to wake up.

This is how I see the so-called transition in the life of Sri Aurobindo, for he had to at least symbolically share the self-forgetfulness of humanity. In order to reveal the light that could transform the massive ignorance in which mankind remains plunged, he had to identify himself with humanity and all its weaknesses. His incarceration at the Alipore prison served as his own alarm.

He was different and great even before that milestone in his life. He achieved major yogic experiences in a day or two, surprising his guide Lele, that would have taken decades for a normal *sadhak* to achieve. Once in politics, despite his total unwillingness to be in the limelight, in no time “his effulgence dazzled the country from Cape to Mount”, and none other than the Governor-General of India, anxious to deport him, told a compatriot that Sri Aurobindo was “the most dangerous man in India”. Though he had been in public life for not even four years, the prosecution lawyer, the barrister Norton, lamented on the 144<sup>th</sup> day of the Alipore trial that he was “treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone”. Sri Aurobindo himself hardly took note of such statements, for he was by nature intrinsically different from other men.

But this difference was only the preface to the difference that was to emerge before long.

Totally helpless in the gloomy and suffocating solitary cell where, as he recollected in his *Tales of Prison Life*, one had to live “bound to the wheels of an iron law, subservient to the whim of others”, he felt utterly distressed for a short period of time. Then he woke up to the fact that “God was having a game” with him. In his famous *Uttarpara Speech* he made explicit the Providential purpose behind his travail: he had indescribable realisations, the total

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and intimate identification with the Divine – in other words, the awakening to his own identity – that would ultimately lead him to give us a glimpse of the evolutionary future of man, the message of the Life Divine.

As I had stated earlier, there was no phase of his life this author could describe as pre-Divine, for his entire life was a preparation and then an offering, a *yajña* on behalf of the earth, for the realisation of the prospect concealed in our destiny, a liberated future. The first phase of his adult life was devoted to winning the liberation of India, for India to him was much more than what people understood it to be, and the second phase was devoted to the liberation of mankind from the abyss of *Avidya*, the octopus hold of unconsciousness.

As Sri Aurobindo was liberated from the foreign prison in 1909, the first centenary of the event is an occasion for us to meditate on the significance of liberation in its ultimate sense. And the momentous

centenary knocking at our door, that of the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1910, marking the Master's arrival at his "Cave of Tapasya", Pondicherry, should prompt mankind's arrival at the threshold of the new world awaiting it.

— Manoj Das

*Shri Manoj Das is a well-known writer. Awarded the Padma Shri for his distinguished contribution to literature, he is also the recipient of the Saraswati Samman and Sahitya Akademi awards.*

### **Tales of Prison Life — Sri Aurobindo**

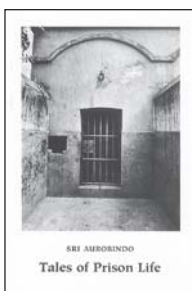
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication

Department, Pondicherry

123 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7058-495-7,  
Rs 45

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



Sri Aurobindo's account of his experiences as an undertrial prisoner in Alipore Jail, Calcutta, where he spent one full year till his acquittal in May 1909. Also includes *Uttarpara Speech*.

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## **Thoughts on *The National Value of Art***

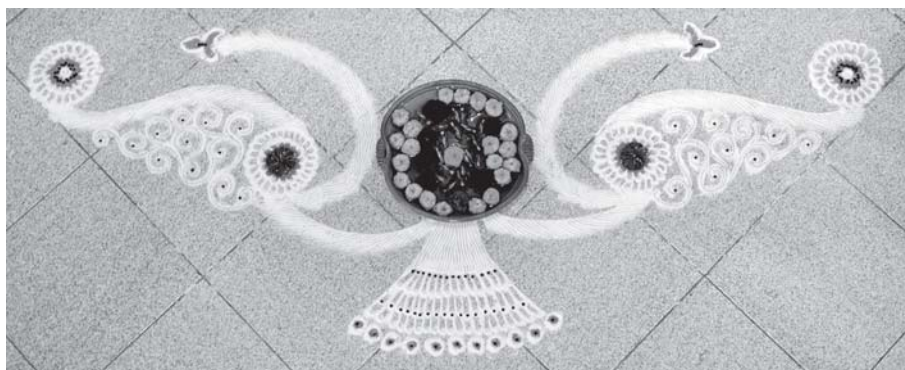
At a time when art, beauty and truth seem to grow increasingly irrelevant to our lifestyle, Sri Aurobindo's essays on the national value of art written a century ago remind us how essential these values are in the life of a nation. Obsessed as we are today with the latest gadgetry and the comforts which modern amenities provide, we seldom miss the intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions that form the true basis of a civilised society. The eminent art historian, painter and sculptor C. Sivaramamurti conveys a telling image of how the arts can shape a man of culture when he writes in his book *Indian Painting* that 'a *nagaraka*, a gentleman of taste, should have in his chamber a lute (*vina*) hanging from a peg on the wall, a painting board (*chitrapahalaka*), a casket full of brushes (*vartikasamudgaka*), a beautiful illumined manuscript and sweet-smelling flower garlands.' Sri Aurobindo's essays examine the value of music, art and poetry to the cultivation of the spirit of a people.

### **The Three Uses of Art**

In *The National Value of Art* Sri Aurobindo writes: 'The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual. By speaking of the aesthetic use as the lowest, we do not wish to imply that it is not of immense value to humanity, but simply to assign to it its comparative value in relation to the higher uses.' [pp. 8–9]

Let us elaborate these three uses of art. The first is the purely aesthetic, something which most people might accept but interpret each in their own way. For example, one decorates one's house, wears nice clothes, or creates a beautiful *kolam* on the floor because these things make one happy. Beauty of form, of colour, of sound has never failed to delight the senses. Didn't John Keats rhapsodise, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: | Its loveliness increases; it will never | Pass into nothingness.'?

The second use is educative and intellectual: art becomes an instrument to broaden man's consciousness and heighten his aesthetic sensibilities. Just as the ear cannot do what the mouth is meant to do, or vice versa, reading and writing alone cannot provide the complete education we need for our integral growth. So fine art, music and



Kolam design by T. Saroja, Rice Flour, Turmeric Powder, Pepper Seeds & Flowers

dance must not be considered merely as extra-curricular activities; they should also be incorporated into the regular curriculum along with science, language and sociology. As Sri Aurobindo says, 'It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive.' [p. 25] In this country only Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan gave art its due place in general education, giving birth to a whole new school of music, dance and the visual arts and crafts.

The highest use of art is spiritual: the practice of art becomes a means of progress and self-realisation. As we move forward on the path of life and experience, art helps us to be at peace, it gives us lasting happiness, it leads to an understanding of our deeper self, and then becomes an instrument for attaining a higher consciousness. In world art, ancient Indian art enjoys a revered place because it embodies the spirituality, philosophy and aesthetics of the Indian psyche. Art can be characterised as the holistic expression of the highest achievements of a person or a civilisation.



Tailor, Haripura Posters, Tempera on Paper  
by Nandalal Bose

### The Aesthetic Sense

Art and beauty are generally considered as synonymous by laymen. By beauty they mean what is pretty and pleasing to the eye. But as one studies art one learns that this element of so-called beauty seems to dwindle in importance as contemporary art evolves. And so the ordinary man finds contemporary art to be ugly, unintelligible, a random splash of colours. Often even educated persons share this feeling. Only a few, the artists and some sensitive art lovers, perceive the *raison d'être* of contemporary art and have an understanding of it.

Let us now briefly try to understand how to look at art and develop an aesthetic sense. First and foremost, do not judge works of art by the outward norms of beauty alone, but try to fathom the character and expression of the work and perceive the spirit within. All the outward details meant to enhance this inner truth should be given only a secondary importance. Our emotions, moods, aspirations and meditations stir the placid sea of forms where the anatomically correct lines and visually measured perspectives are then overruled by imagination and vision, to give birth to a certain distortion of form,



exaggeration of line or intensification of colour. Mundane subjects such as dying sunflowers, an old man praying or a piercing cry of anguish, in fact anything may touch one if the aesthetic *rasa* is tapped and the inner spirit is experienced. Gradually the finite form becomes a vessel to contain the inner experience.

If at every point one consciously makes an effort to choose the true, the aesthetic, the beautiful, *satyam, shivam, sundaram*, one can progress commendably. Sri Aurobindo stresses the importance of aesthetic values when he says:

Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified. [pp. 18–19]

We need to make art an intrinsic part of our daily life and education, or we will remain uncultured at our core, however much we may advance materially, intellectually and philosophically.

### Art Can Express Eternal Truth

Sri Aurobindo describes the highest form of art:

Spirituality is a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the highest and most perfect Art which, while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality, as the best European Art satisfies these

requirements, reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things, the joy of God in the world and its beauty and desirableness and the manifestation of divine force and energy in phenomenal creation. This is what Indian Art alone attempted thoroughly and in the effort it often dispensed, either deliberately or from impatience, with the lower, yet not negligible perfections which the more material European demanded. [p. 22]



Untitled, Reverse Painting on Mylar Sheet  
by K. G. Subramanian



Udayan Jataka, Cave 17 at Ajanta

The fulfilment of all the senses at all the levels has to be achieved in order to reach the highest aesthetic experience. In the Ajanta paintings one might say this has been achieved to perfection, because in them we find technical expertise, emotion, sensuousness, grace, study from life, philosophy and expression of the spirit which leads to the complete satisfaction of the being. While a great many Indian artists today show several of these qualities, they seem to fall short of the spiritual experience. Unfortunately, the word 'spiritual' is taboo in mainstream aesthetic discussions, while at the other extreme, in spiritual circles, the word is overplayed and is often pictorially represented in a literal and religious way, such as showing a person



Nataraja at Gangaigondaicholapuram

walking towards a ray of light or illustrating certain lines from some spiritual writings. It must be remembered that art is a language in itself and does not need a quotation to explain it. Art has to be lived, experienced and expressed, for it is not the form but its underlying spirit which has to be grasped. A Chinese artist has beautifully said: 'In the eyes of a real artist the image of a blade of grass and that of God are equivalent; each can evoke the same aesthetic experience.'

'Ideal art is rather a spiritual discovery, than a creation', wrote A. Coomaraswamy in 1909. This can be better understood when we see the Nataraja figure which embodies a whole philosophy and vision of Indian thought and aesthetics, expressing the dance and joy of creation. Sri Aurobindo writes on the power of expression that art may achieve:

Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance. So wonderfully has God made the world that man using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours, can raise this apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach. What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas. [p. 23]

First published in serial form in the weekly review *Karmayogin* in 1909–10 and later made available as a book in 1922, Sri Aurobindo's *The National Value of Art* is, to my knowledge, the only piece of literary writing in English to cover all aspects of art—from the very basic and material to the sublime and spiritual. Within this modest-looking work, the earnest seeker will find a source of wisdom that can light his way to a meaningful appreciation of art.

— Kirti Chandak

After graduating from the SAICE in 1991, Kirti studied painting in Santiniketan and Baroda. She is a freelance artist and founding member of the Shilpataru Art Foundation in Pondicherry and teaches art at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

All quotations from Sri Aurobindo are from *The National Value of Art*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005. The text of this edition is the same as the text in *Early Cultural Writings*, volume 1 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*.

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## Moments Eternal

Priti Das Gupta

Eternity wells up in the flow of time throughout the writing of Priti-di. And the flow takes us along in its movement. In sharing her journey with us so generously, she makes us feel a part of it, as if we too are living it with her. And in many ways we are, through the enrichment she gives us, the quality of her own being, her experiences with The Mother, and the unfolding of the many-sided life of the Ashram. And for those of us who were also present at that time, this book gives the rare opportunity to live afresh our own lives, or their most formative parts, imbuing the experience with deeper insights.

We came to live permanently in the Ashram in the month of April in 1943—my mother Violette-di ('Bhabhiji' to everyone who knew her), my younger brother, and myself. Our father followed some time after. The Mother had asked Violette to be here before the April Darshan. So there we were, very, very young and very happy to be in the midst of all the elder beings gathered here. More of this later...

In this setting we discovered Priti-di. I had heard that on finishing her studies, she had decided to come to the Ashram—alone and preceding her family! Her inner poise and the sense of purpose and consecration she carried held a great attraction for me. I remember her very vividly, as she moved around the Ashram. I hold this visual image of her: a figure in white, soft, yet clear and firm, walking her path. The images from childhood abide and continue to inspire from their niche in the sanctuary of one's soul. That is where Priti-di remains for me—in the continuity of time. But our families too became close as our lives in the Ashram took shape. Our fathers worked together in the Ashram Press, the children went to school and played with one another, and Violette-di and Priti-di had a special relationship, one forged by The Mother. I

could not be with one of them without being with the other! In my being, they have been woven together like the warp and woof of an incredibly rich tapestry. Let me share with readers something that perhaps reveals the secret of their relationship. Since the 'personal' is part of Priti-di's own narrative, this story too may have its place here. Violette-di told me, only a few years before she moved on, how they first met.

Priti-di writes that The Mother would come to the Playground and take a short walk. Well, as she started on this walk, there was Violette-di standing to one side. The Mother stretched out her right hand, took hers and said, "Let us walk." A few steps further along, Priti-di was standing to one side. The Mother stretched out her other hand, took hers and continued her walk around the Playground. And thus they remained linked with The Mother, who later gathered other young women around her to join these two in a group that came to be known as the *ashta-sakhis* [eight friends].

Priti-di writes that she came to the Ashram because she "couldn't live without Mother", who became truly her *friend*. Her journey is rich with this relationship and all her experiences of the supreme Mystery that is the human embodiment of The Mother. In simple words Priti-di tells us of the unique revelation given to her, in which she sees The Mother in her four aspects of Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati, Mahakali, and Maheshwari. After this stupendous revelation, in which The Mother reveals her mighty Presences one after another, she appears as The Mother we met everyday in our life—with the disarming charm and sweetness of her smile and all-enveloping love.

We are beholden to Priti-di for sharing this vision of the most sublime heights and vastnesses of the Supreme Shakti and of her descent into the human



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embodiment that lives in our midst, relates to us, and helps us to transcend our limitations. In those few pages of the section titled “The Four Aspects of the Mother” Priti-di has given an incredible line of ascension for us to hold on to.

Scattered throughout the book Priti-di gives us all the details of life in which the human embodiment of The Mother accepts our individual

This range, from the supernal heights of Divinity to our daily human existence, is the field of the Mother’s action, which Priti-di unfolds in the pages of her book. There is much else, but this is, for us, the most precious of all gifts.

Since the personal note seems to recur, I wish to share something that I hold in my memory as a very living experience, and to the understanding of



The Mother with Priti-di to her left and Violette-di to her right

play and shapes us with the transforming power of her love. The Mother makes us aware of our psychic entity and brings it forth into the dynamics of our external personality. She unravels, through love and also firmness when needed, all its subtle movements, and works on this matrix of which we are made, so as to purify and change it into a complex material of manifestation more worthy of the inner psychic entity. A minute, incessant, and painstaking effort of the Divine Mother worked out in human time and at the level of human living is revealed to us.

which Priti-di gives a clue. She creates a very vivid portrait of her father Naren-da’s life and person. He gave us all much affection. He was also our teacher of philosophy in the Higher Course at the Centre of Education. Priti-di mentions that when *The Life Divine* was first published, he wrote a review of the book, which was sent to Sri Aurobindo.

Something unusual used to happen to me in our philosophy class. I had a seat at one end of the first



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row, near a window. We used to read from *The Life Divine* and then Naren-da would speak. After the first few words, I would just look out of the window and go off into some other 'space'—it was deeply fulfilling! I just paid no further attention to what was happening in the class, and he never called me back to attention! He let me be. Even today, the sense of that 'space' exists consciously in me.

Priti-di's words also make some of us relive, with special intensity, a time in our own lives that is like a flow of perennial freshness, concrete and inspiring, for it rests deep in the being. This experience is of the time when we came to live in the Ashram as very young children. There were very few of us at the time, and we landed in the midst of a community of great and earnest beings, much older than us, who had gathered around Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in their spiritual quest. They were more than a little surprised by our sudden arrival! But we were very happy to be in their midst and were at ease in our milieu. Our days were spent in the precincts of the Ashram, going from one room to another, breathing deeply of the presence of those who lived there, and playing the rest of the time in the courtyard.

After the initial surprise was over, the great 'elders' took us, little mites, into their own lives and poured into these empty jars the wealth of their beings. We could feel that they were giving us all they had—by speaking to us, by telling us stories, or simply by letting us be around them. We were somehow in their care. A few years back, when I mentioned this to Nirod-da, he replied, "This was our work for The Mother."

The Mother had received us, body and soul, with the sweetness of her love and constant attention. Sri Aurobindo, in his august Presence, presided over the scene of our young existence.

Such were the early beginnings that hold all time, as in a seed.

To Priti-di goes our immense gratitude for all this and much more.

— Aster Patel

*Aster Patel was brought up in the Ashram since early childhood and studied and taught at the Centre of Education. She pursued her further studies (Ph.D. in Comparative Philosophy) at the Sorbonne, University of Paris. She is at present in Auroville, working in Bharat Nivas. She also gives workshops in Integral Psychology at 'Knowledge', the Higher Course of the Centre of Education. She is engaged in other areas of activity too, such as writing, speaking and conference work.*

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In the following excerpt from *Moments Eternal*, Priti talks about the body and the integral Yoga, and how the Playground had become the field for *sadhana*:

As soon as we entered the Playground we all felt a new atmosphere, as if we were in fairyland. As if a festival of ananda was on. The solemn seriousness of the elderly was removed by the Mother. And the elderly with new-found eagerness also joined joyfully in the Mother's karmayoga, this *sadhana* of the transformation of the body. They began mixing with the children as friends. Nolini-da, Pavitra-da, Amrita-da, Dyuman-bhai, Purani-ji, Nirod-da and many others became our best friends. We could speak with them most freely. In the beginning we used to say about them (of course, behind their backs!) that these were people who were forbidden to laugh! When the elderly got into their group uniforms they started feeling young! What enthusiasm they put into their marching and exercise! Enjoying themselves just like kids! The Mother had wiped out the notion of age from all of us. All began breathing the air of the New World in the Playground.

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### ENGLISH

#### **The Mother: Selected Photos**

— Compiled by Tara Jauhar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch Trust,  
New Delhi

266 pp., ISBN: 978-3-934726-44-4, Rs 1600

Size: 23x35 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

More than 250 black-and-white photographs have been selected and arranged with a focus on one particular element: the powerful vibration that is radiated by the Mother's physical appearance. Most are original pictures presented without touching up or repairing any defects; they are arranged without chronology or theme or identifying remarks so that the reader is left solely to experience the depth and dramatic power of the photographs. At the back of the book the pictures are reproduced in smaller size with dates and some brief comments. The book is printed on art paper.

*See review on page 17*

#### **Sri Aurobindo**

#### **An International Volume of Sri Aurobindo's Hymn to Durga** (Ten Languages)

— Sri Aurobindo

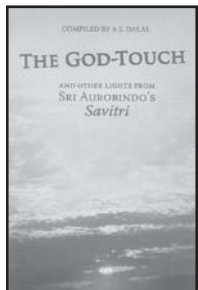
Publisher: Satadal, Pondicherry

40 pp., Rs 40

Size: 14x11 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This booklet is a rendition of the short prose piece *Hymn to Durga* in ten languages: the original Bengali, English, French, Sanskrit, Oriya, Hindi, Tamil, German, Spanish, and Malayan. Sri Aurobindo, who wrote the piece in 1909, invokes Mother Durga to make herself manifest in India, giving her sons and daughters the courage, strength, and knowledge to fight the powers of darkness that keep her in bondage.



#### **Compilations**

#### **The God-Touch and Other Lights from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri**

— Edited by A. S. Dalal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Publication Department,  
Pondicherry

139 pp., Rs 65

ISBN: 978-81-7058-898-6

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These selected passages from *Savitri* are arranged under twenty headings with the intent to present to readers, those new to the epic as well as those familiar with it, a thematic approach for reading the poem. The subtitle of each heading provides the general theme of the passages that follow, such as "This Enigmatic World", "Fate and Destiny", "Life—a Journey and an Ascent", and "The Deeper Seeing". Each passage expresses a more or less complete thought and represents a certain aspect of Sri Aurobindo's vision as revealed in the poem.

#### **The Message of the Gita**

#### **as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo**

— Edited by Anilbaran Roy

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Publication Department,

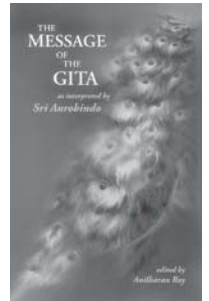
Pondicherry

374 pp., Rs 185

ISBN: 978-81-7058-923-5

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



This book contains the original Sanskrit text of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a translation partly by Sri Aurobindo, and commentary drawn entirely from *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo's principal work on this important scripture. The editor, Anilbaran Roy, was an early disciple of Sri Aurobindo, and prepared the commentary with the permission of Sri Aurobindo. While introducing the first edition of the book in 1938 the editor wrote, "The Gita is a great synthesis of Aryan spiritual culture and Sri Aurobindo's luminous exposition of it...sets out its inner significances in a way that brings them home to the modern mind." This new edition has been brought out after a long time.

#### **Eternal Youth**

#### **Rays of Light from The Mother**

— Compiled from the writings of the Mother

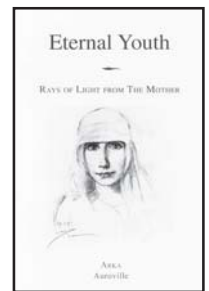
Publisher: Arka, Auroville

50 pp., Rs 70

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These selections from the Mother's works reveal the truths behind the facades of old age and death, that they are the



habits of Nature, and that the incapacity to grow and progress is the real deterioration into old age. The book has been brought out by ARKA, a community for senior Aurovilians, which is dedicated to manifesting the Mother's vision of Auroville as a place of "unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages".

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets  
— Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

**Blossoming of Devotion**

40 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7060-283-5, Rs 30

**The Four Austerities and the Four Liberations**

40 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7060-279-8, Rs 30

**The Goal**

40 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7060-280-4, Rs 30

**Spiritual Experiences of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Jail**

**The Supreme Discovery**

**The Path of Later On**

32 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7060-281-1, Rs 30

**What is Light**

32 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7060-285-9, Rs 30

***Talks with the Mother (recorded from memory)***

**Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes**

— Mona Sarkar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Publication Department,

Pondicherry

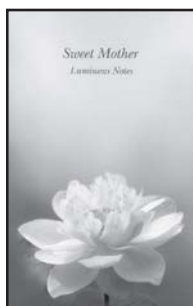
177 pp., Rs 95

ISBN: 978-81-7058-899-3

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book is a collection of conversations with the Mother on a variety of topics. They were noted down from memory except for a few that were recorded on tape. In these conversations the Mother covers a wide range of subjects, from her signature, her photographs, and the significance of flowers to palmistry, the March Past, and football. Perhaps most significantly, she talks extensively on *Savitri* in a manner not expressed anywhere else in her writings or talks. This book includes revised versions of all the conversations published earlier in the two parts of *Sweet Mother: Harmonies of Light*, as well as new material.



**Other Authors**

**Moments Eternal**

— Priti Das Gupta

Publisher: Sri Mira Trust,

Pondicherry

291 pp., ISBN: 978-81-86413-53-

1, Rs 100

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book, translated from the original Bengali, presents a series of vignettes from the author's early childhood in Bengal, her first visit to Pondicherry, and her many years of life in the Ashram, where she settled in 1944. The stories convey how a young woman learned some essential truths of spiritual life, while communicating the warmth and intensity of the intimacy she and her companions shared as they matured under the Mother's guidance. Through these reminiscences the author describes the significance of her life in the Ashram and evokes many aspects of the Mother's personality.

*See article on page 7*



**Sri Aurobindo's Message for Today and Other Articles**

— Satadal

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Sthan, Kolkata

87 pp., Rs 100

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This collection of short articles includes pieces on some of the early disciples, descriptions of commemorative events in the Ashram such as the golden jubilees of the Ashram school and the *Mother India* journal, thoughts on musical and dramatic performances given in the Ashram, and several poems. The title essay presents the author's thoughts on the present global crisis in the light of Sri Aurobindo's message to humanity.

**Seven Dedicated Lives**

— Sunayana Panda

Publisher: First Feature Ltd., London, UK

80 pp., ISBN: 978-0-9562923-0-8, Rs 75

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

These biographical essays provide glimpses into the lives of seven disciples – Nirodbaran, Tehmi, Rishabhchand, Millie, Krishnalal, Mona Pinto, and Udar – who joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the 1930s and 1940s and played active roles in the life of this spiritual community. The book also includes an article on why

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Christmas is celebrated in the Ashram. The stories of how these *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* were drawn to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the ways in which they dedicated themselves and their work to the ideal set before them are inspirational and exemplary.

*See review on page 20*

**The Story of a Soul**  
**Volume Two, 1956—Part Two**

— Huta

Publisher: The Havyavahana Trust, Pondicherry

230 pp., ISBN: 978-81-87372-22-6, Rs 350

Size: 18x24 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

*The Story of a Soul*, Huta's journal of her progress on the spiritual path, runs from 1954 to 1973. This volume covers the second half of 1956 and records many of her conversations with the Mother, their private meditations in the Mother's room at the Playground, and their correspondence. In her numerous cards and messages the Mother consoled Huta in her difficulties, appreciated her skill in various works, and promised to help her realise her true being. The book also includes the account of how the Mother introduced Huta to her future work as an artist.

*See review on page 22*

**In the Perspective of Sri Aurobindo**  
**A Study of Scientific Developments and Contemporary Literary Theory**

— Dr Nikhil Kumar

Publisher: Novelty & Co., Patna

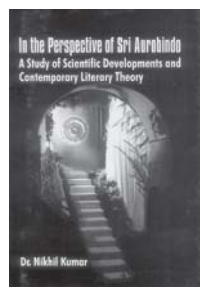
196 pp., Rs 195

ISBN: 978-81-86931-42-4

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

In this critical study the author examines certain areas of intellectual enquiry and perceives the inadequacy of the ruling divisive mental consciousness to move humanity forward in the evolution. He draws broad conclusions about the impact of Sri Aurobindo's revelation of the supramental consciousness on the evolution of science, psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, and man's relation to Nature. He also looks at contemporary literary theories and finds a compelling need for a reinterpretation of some of the works of Shakespeare, Keats, and Shelley in the light of the higher consciousness brought down by Sri Aurobindo.



**Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis - II**  
**Suffering, Gratitude, and Joy**

— Miranda Vannucci

Publisher: Miranda Vannucci, Italy

140 pp., Rs 600

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book, similar in format to the previous volume *Integral Yoga and Psychoanalysis - I*, is an attempt to suggest possible points of contact between the disciplines of psychotherapy and the integral Yoga. In Part One of this book the author explores depression, pain, and the sense of guilt, offering analytical hints from her own work as a psychoanalyst as stimuli for the process of psychological purification which is so important to the practice of the Yoga. In Part Two she reflects on gratitude and joy, with some consideration of the antithetical roles of envy and jealousy and criticism and doubt. Numerous extracts from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are used to elaborate the author's premise.

**OTHER LANGUAGES**

**FRENCH**

**Pondichéry, dernier refuge**  
**Souvenirs d'un disciple de Sri Aurobindo**

— Suresh Chakravarty

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry

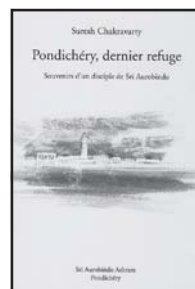
124 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7058-883-2,

Rs 95

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

En 1910, Sri Aurobindo, réfugié à Chandernagor alors qu'il luttait pour l'indépendance de l'Inde, envoya Suresh Chakravarty à Pondichéry pour préparer son arrivée dans cette ville de l'Inde française où il pourrait échapper aux poursuites des Anglais. Suresh Chakravarty fait ici le récit de son voyage et des événements qui l'ont précédé, ainsi que des premières années qu'il passa avec quelques compagnons auprès de Sri Aurobindo.



**Une jeunesse éternelle : Rayons de lumière de La Mère**

— Compiled from the works of the Mother

Rs 70

French original of *Eternal Youth* (See page 10)



## RUSSIAN

**Zhizn' Bozhestvennaya - I** — Sri Aurobindo hc Rs 360  
ISBN: 978-5-7938-0036-5

**Esse o Gite - 1** — Sri Aurobindo hc Rs 360  
ISBN: 978-5-7938-0039-6

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ISBN: 978-5-7938-0045-7 hc Rs 430

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ISBN: 978-5-7938-0044-0

**Pis'ma o yoge VI** — Sri Aurobindo hc Rs 360  
ISBN: 978-5-7938-0049-5

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— Sri Aurobindo

**I snova otvety Materi** — The Mother hc Rs 290  
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**Nauka Zhit' :** Izbrannie pis'ma i statyi o vospitanii i  
obrazovanii — The Mother Rs 150  
ISBN: 978-5-7938-0027-3

**Samootdacha i Milost' Svishe** — Compiled from the  
works of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother Rs 50  
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Ashramitov Rs 80

## GERMAN

**Flammenworte**  
(Englisch-Deutsch)

— Sri Aurobindo  
Rs 125

ISBN: 978-81-7058-914-3

## ITALIAN

**Glossario di termini nei testi  
di Sri Aurobindo**

— Compilato dalla Biblioteca Archivi e Ricerca Sri  
Aurobindo Rs 700

**Erik e Vasavadatta** (Inglese/Italiano) : due drammi lirici  
in cinque atti — Sri Aurobindo Rs 2000

ISBN: 978-88-901049-6-1

## Le Religioni

— Parole dagli scritti di Mère e Sri Aurobindo  
64 pp., ISBN: 978-81-7058-944-0 Rs 85

**Jai Ma:** Al Servizio della Madre

— Pashupati Bhattacharya Rs 10

## KOREAN

**Living Within** — Compiled from the works of Sri  
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ISBN: 978-89-90706-23-2

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hc Rs 100

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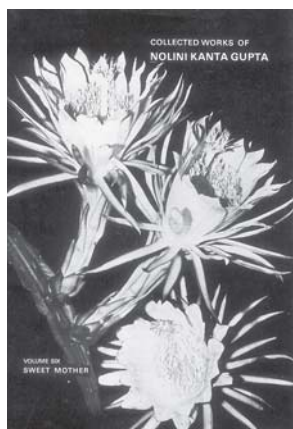
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## Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta

These eight volumes represent a lifetime of prolific literary activity, beginning with his first published work in 1910 and continuing for seven decades. His essays probe sociological and political problems (volume one), mysticism and poetry (volume two), and Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga and philosophy (volumes three and four). The talks on the Mother and her work, the observations and notes on life and yoga, and the numerous translations (volumes five to eight) set off his brilliance as a scholar and his intimate knowledge of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The seventh volume also has a section containing Nolini-da's reminiscences, which are informative and compelling narratives that convey something of his very close relationship with Sri Aurobindo ever since his participation in the *swadeshi* revolutionary movement, his time in Alipore jail and the court appearances in the bomb trial, his former teachers, the early years in Pondicherry before the Ashram was formally organised, even his enthusiasm for playing football.



### All volumes now available independently

As readers are already aware, the paperback edition of the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, brought out on the occasion of his birth centenary, is available as a complete set of eight volumes for Rs 350. But now independent volumes may also be purchased. However, with this option Volume 1 is a hardback edition and Volume 3 is a more recently published, independent paperback edition. The remaining volumes sold independently are from the centenary paperback set.

Volume 1:	The Coming Race and Other Essays	406 pp	Rs 35
Volume 2:	Essays on Mysticism	376 pp	Rs 55
Volume 3:	The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo (Parts 1–7)	434 pp	Rs 115
Volume 4:	The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo (Parts 8–12)	409 pp	Rs 55
Volume 5:	Light of Lights	313 pp	Rs 55
Volume 6:	Sweet Mother	271 pp	Rs 55
Volume 7:	Sweet Mother (New Talks)	503 pp	Rs 55
Volume 8:	Vedic Hymns	282 pp	Rs 55

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## New Location for SABDA Office

In June SABDA's Head Office moved to 17 Rue de la Marine, in the Matrisharanam building on the ground floor. This is just next to SABDA's Kripa branch showroom. The office was previously situated at 123 S. V. Patel Salai. Due to its central location our new premises are more easily accessible to visitors.



Our new reception area



View from the entrance to the main hall



Another view of the main hall



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## BOOK REVIEWS



### **The Mother: Selected Photos**

— Compiled by Tara Jauhar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch Trust, New Delhi

266 pp., ISBN: 978-3-934726-44-4, Rs 1600

Size: 23x35 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

### **In Conversation with a Photographer-sadhak**

Someone once asked the Mother:

*Why does meditation in front of different photos of you give different experiences?*

It is because each photo represents a different aspect, sometimes even a different personality of my being; and by concentrating on the photo, one enters into relation with that special aspect or different personality which the photo has captured and whose image it conveys. The photo is a real and concrete presence, but fragmentary and limited. [CWM, 16, 232]

She went on to explain what she meant by a fragmentary and limited presence:

Because the photo catches only the image of a moment, an instant of a person's appearance and of what that appearance can reveal of a passing psychological condition and fragmentary soul-state. Even if the photograph is taken under the best possible conditions at an exceptional and particularly expressive moment, it cannot in any way reproduce the whole personality. [CWM, 16, 232]

The recent publication *The Mother: Selected Photos* offers its readers the opportunity to experience different aspects and personalities of the Mother's being through a collection of black-and-white photographs in a

handsomely produced volume. They are arranged without chronology or theme or identifying remarks in an unusual presentation. We turned to one of the Ashram's long-time photographers for a closer examination and assessment of the artistic merits of the book. Robi Ganguli took up photography in 1948 and spent many years learning and practising this art, often with the Mother's direct guidance. Recently he had the opportunity to go through the book and shared some of his impressions with me for this newsletter.

When I arrived at his place for the interview, he was quietly turning the pages of the book that lay across his lap and admiring what he called "a collection of very beautiful photos of the Mother, which would unquestionably have a strong effect on any devotee". He admired, too, the excellent quality of the printing and binding and commented that the book was very reasonably priced. He showed me some pictures that were

taken when he was present and a few others that he had probably taken himself. I asked him if he thought the unusual arrangement of the photographs in the book was successful. He paused thoughtfully and answered that there was evidently a plan behind

the layout of the images, but that the plan was not apparent to him and the book did not convey to him a coherent vision or idea. But the images were not only beautiful, they were very powerful too.

He, however, did not appreciate what he termed as "technically sloppy" some pictures where dust spots and fungus damage had not been touched up. He does not think such defects add anything to the picture; on the contrary, they detract from the atmosphere of the photos. He told me that the Mother had asked him on several occasions to touch up such spots before making prints for distribution. In fact, this was a standing instruction to all the photographers who made prints for the Sri Aurobindo albums of pictures taken by Cartier-Bresson.

Showing me a few pages by way of example, he said that he would have preferred more space around the photos in these pages. He found it difficult to concentrate on some of them, particularly when facing pages contained

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full-page photos, each one powerful and needing total concentration. The “full” facing pages were occasionally successful when the photos were in a series, such as a few of the Japanese scenes. The randomly arranged full-page photos, facing each other, didn’t always work well for him.

He was clearly moved by these photos of the Mother and also spoke with a deep appreciation for the craft and the art of photography. This prompted me to remind him of an interview we had done for a previous newsletter, during which he shared how he first took up photography. In 1948 his friend and tennis partner Jayant Patel encouraged him to come and learn photography from his brother Chimanbhai. Robi-da was interested, and referred the matter to the Mother. In his own words he recounts that interaction:

“Mother, may I learn photography?” She asked me, “Are you serious?” I said, “I can try to be serious.” She gave me permission and told me, “If you are serious, I’ll take you there.” [She just pointed her finger up.]

She then told him to bring the pictures he had started taking. Every week or fifteen days he took whatever photographs he had to her, and she would explain what was right and what was not right about the photos. She talked to him about form and line and the appropriate choice of subject, giving him very precise guidance and criticism. He remembered one competition where he won second prize and somebody else had won first prize. The Mother asked him if he knew why he had got second prize and not first. When he asked her to explain the reason she said that his picture was a classical picture; everything was in balance. She told him that the days of such pictures were over. The first prize picture had captured a person in movement on one side of the photograph, opposed by an object on the other side. She said that art must reflect the times we live in. “Today it is balance by tension. And that picture reflects that.”

Every day, during the athletics season, several Ashram photographers used to take photographs of the events that were going on in the Sportsground. The Mother was always present during these events. One morning she suddenly said to him: “Bring all the pictures you took in the Sportsground yesterday.” When he asked her why, she replied: “Yesterday your artistic being was in the front. I want to see what kind of pictures you have got.” There were many other instances when she would look at photographs and comment on their merit or their weakness. For about thirty years Robi-da and others

organised the Pondicherry International Salon of Photography, an annual international exhibition, opening at the Exhibition Hall on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August every year. In the early days the Mother would see every single picture entered for the exhibition. He would open the packet in front of her and she would go through the pictures, commenting why one picture was good and another was not. He recalls that once when some nude studies were submitted, he asked the Mother what should be the salon’s policy. She said that if it was really a good nude study, it became a work of art. Such pictures could be exhibited. But if it was not a good picture, it often ended up being simply the picture of a naked woman! Such pictures naturally had to be rejected.

Robi-da ended by saying that *The Mother: Selected Photos* is a very fine collection because it brings together so many beautiful photos of the Mother in one volume. There are early photos from her life in Paris, haunting images from Japan, scenes showing her at work, pictures taken in her room, meeting people, playing tennis, at the Sportsground watching the events, in the Playground giving classes, and many, many portraits and Darshan photos. It is an opportunity for devotees to see many less familiar photographs along with the better-known ones and to experience the “real and concrete presence” of the many aspects of the Mother’s personality.

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In a talk about concentrating on her photos, the Mother said:

the fact of concentrating on the photograph puts one in contact with the Force, and that is what is necessary in the case of everyone who responds automatically.

It is only when the person who concentrates puts a special will, with a special relation, into his concentration that it has an effect. Otherwise the relation is more general, and it is always the expression of the need or the aspiration of the person who concentrates. If he is absolutely neutral, if he does not choose, does not aspire for any particular thing, if he comes like this, like a white page and absolutely neutral, then it is the forces and aspects he needs which will answer to the concentration.

[CWM, 7, 271]

*Robi Ganguli was interviewed by Karen Ecke, a member of the newsletter’s editorial staff.*

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## The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo

—K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)

Publisher: Clear Ray Trust, Pondicherry

135 pp., ISBN: 978-81-87916-07-9, Rs 125

This classic study of Sri Aurobindo's poetry was warmly appreciated by Sri Aurobindo himself—though his modesty restrained his comments on a book that was written, as he noted, “in high eulogy” of his own work. *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* was first published in 1947; but the last chapter, “Sri Aurobindo—A New Age of Mystical Poetry”, forming almost half of the book, had appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Circle* in 1946. From a historical point of view, this essay has the distinction of having first introduced the public to passages from *Savitri*, whose opening cantos began to come out in fascicles and journal instalments soon after K. D. Sethna's article.

When he wrote these essays, Sethna had access to only a limited portion of *Savitri*, not always in its final form, and to an even smaller part of *Ilion*. But this makes little difference to the enduring value of his argument for Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius. For this purpose he needed only a sufficient sample of passages from the poet's early, middle and later work. After a short Prologue, the three chapters of the book bring out major aspects of Sri Aurobindo's poetic achievement in each of these periods through detailed analysis of representative examples.

“Genius,” wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, “is one attempt of the universal Energy to so quicken and intensify our intellectual powers that they shall be prepared for those more puissant, direct and rapid faculties which constitute the play of the supra intellectual or divine mind.” Swami Vivekananda also linked genius and Yoga, pointing out that the secret of genius is a tremendous power of concentration. He added that according to the science of Yoga we are all potential geniuses. There is much to be said for the Indian view of the Vibhuti or genius as one who manifests supernormal powers that are latent in all of us. The West, on the other hand, though it has produced remarkable geniuses in many fields, has labelled this mysterious phenomenon, but offers little satisfying explanation of it apart from

recent developments in transpersonal psychology which are indebted to Eastern thought.

The connection between genius and Yoga is especially significant in the case of Sri Aurobindo. His experience of poetic inspiration evidently helped to prepare him for Yoga, while his practice of Yoga brought about the flowering of his poetic genius. It is hardly possible to speak of his genius apart from his Yoga. His natural talents were unusual enough, as Sethna shows in discussing *Love and Death* and *Urvashi* in the first chapter. But it was the heightening of these inborn abilities through Yoga that made him capable of writing *Savitri*, the epic on which his eventual reputation as one of the greatest poets of all time is likely to rest.

Due to the very nature of the subject, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* is not light reading. Those who have not been initiated into the intricacies of prosody may be especially daunted by the technical discussions in the second chapter, “Sri Aurobindo and the Hexameter”. Here Sethna sums up much of Sri Aurobindo's own treatment,

in *On Quantitative Metre*, of the problem of adapting classical metres to English. He goes on to discuss the opening passage of *Ilion*, which was all that was then available of that unfinished work. But technical as some of it is, this chapter forms an essential link in the demonstration of Sri

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*The connection between genius and Yoga is especially significant in the case of Sri Aurobindo....it was the heightening of his inborn abilities through Yoga that made him capable of writing Savitri, the epic on which his eventual reputation as one of the greatest poets of all time is likely to rest.*

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Aurobindo's unique, many-sided achievement as a poet.

It may seem strange that an Indian mystic, in the midst of the most intensive Yogic *sadhana*, was so captivated by an ancient Greek theme and the possibilities of the Homeric metre that he worked for years on an epic about the fall of Troy, making it his major literary project until in 1916 he began to transfer his poetic energies to *Savitri*. But it is hinted in the poem itself that his interest in this subject was not merely literary. He says of the Greek warriors emerging from their tent:

So one can see them still who has sight from the gods  
in the trance sleep [...]

Not only the theme of *Ilion*, but the hexameter itself attracted Sri Aurobindo for reasons that are out of the ordinary, connected with his perception of the deeper

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role of metrical movement in making poetry a means of expressing higher realities than those to which we normally have access. Sethna observes: “Sri Aurobindo has taken up the hexameter with a consciousness unfettered by the labourer brain, a consciousness wholeheartedly given in all its intricate potency to his sense of secret superhuman rulers of art no less than life.”

“Every poet is in essence a Platonist,” begins the last and most important chapter, “Sri Aurobindo—A New Age of Mystic Poetry”. “No poet but feels he is serving a sacred mission beyond his own self, the mission of some perfect beauty waiting to be revealed.” I am reminded of my first meeting with Amal. He immediately and correctly sized me up as a Platonist and proceeded to recite a short poem:

Said Aristotle unto Plato,  
“Have another sweet potato?”  
Said Plato unto Aristotle,  
“Thank you, I prefer the bottle.”

This bit of nineteenth-century doggerel sums up a little crudely, but effectively enough that it has stuck in my memory for more than thirty years, the well-known (if oversimplified) contrast between Aristotle’s down-to-earth empiricism and Plato’s intoxication with the beauty of ideal forms. These represent two major sides of the development of Western civilization and can even be applied, with some reservations, to similar temperamental distinctions in other cultures. It could be said that the Aristotelian temper of our scientific age is what makes our times unfavourable to true poetry and delays the widespread recognition of a mystically inspired masterpiece such as *Savitri*. But those who are capable of appreciating this sublime poetry will find their understanding and enjoyment of it enhanced by Sethna’s superb book.

— Richard Hartz

*Richard studied philosophy at Yale University and South Asian languages and literature at the University of Washington. He first visited Pondicherry in 1972 and settled in the Ashram in 1980. He works in the Archives and Research Library.*

## **Seven Dedicated Lives**

— Sunayana Panda

Publisher: First Feature Ltd.,

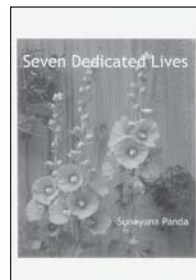
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Rs 75

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Binding: Soft Cover



The Mother used to say that those who were with her, assisting her in her work, had also been with her in her former lives whenever she had descended on the earth to carry out her work of divinizing the world:

We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life. We are of one family and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth.

7 April 1929

This slim volume, *Seven Dedicated Lives*, so masterfully written by Sunayana Panda, very palpably brings this fact home to the reader. Sunayana has depicted the *raison d'être* of each of these seven beautiful people very skilfully and clearly in this book by showing how, from the far corners of India and even from remote England, the Mother’s beacon light guided them to the shores of the then little known and still less important town of Pondicherry to assist her in her stupendous work of transformation.

How true is the saying “He who chooses the Divine, has been chosen by the Divine”! It is intriguing to trace the life story of a young boy from an obscure town in Chittagong, who goes to Calcutta for higher studies, gets involved in the revolutionary movement then in progress, returns to his native town to avoid further harassment by the British CID, then sails away to Scotland to study medicine, holds a lucrative government job in Rangoon as a full-fledged doctor, subsequently loses the job because of his black marks in the police records, comes to Pondicherry to visit his niece and finally, lives on in the Ashram for the rest of his very long and fruitful life, in spite of his early avowal to his Guru that spiritual life was not his cup of tea! In retrospect do we not see the beautiful Hands delicately but surely pulling the strings to bring the chosen one to his ultimate destination?

In a similar way, on returning to India from England, a brilliant aeronautical engineer from Hubli finds himself



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jobless because he is overqualified. His well-to-do Roman Catholic family disowns him because he is engaged to a Protestant English girl. He is desperate to make money so that he can bring his sweetheart to India and marry her. He comes to Pondicherry, starts a business, makes money, marries his fiancée, lives in grand style and now his sole aim is to enjoy life to the full. But then he comes for the Darshan, he sees the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and he is irrevocably caught! He winds up his business and joins the Ashram with his young wife and baby daughter. In no time he becomes a most trustworthy and an indispensable instrument of the Mother. Working day and night, he assists her in her projects and starts many profitable industries and businesses for making the Ashram financially self-sufficient.

The young wife, a ravishing beauty at the age of twenty-six and English to the core, totally uninterested in either religion or spirituality, has only one aim in life—to make a very happy English home with her handsome husband and her darling newborn daughter. But the unseen Power is again at work. She turns out to be an ideal Hindu wife, who follows her husband's *dharma*, sacrificing her own likes and dislikes in the process, and joins the Ashram. To the end of her days she lives a most disciplined life, almost like an ascetic. The Mother had chosen her instrument well to run her newly built, dream guest house with the utmost efficiency and the legendary English standards of cleanliness! For, this young English lady, who had had some experience only in secretarial work, now brings out her hidden talent for organization, administration and bookkeeping.

The Mother needs an ideal teacher to teach English in her school—the flame of aspiration is at once lit in the heart of a young, versatile, extremely gifted Parsi lady, who is a much sought after professor in the prestigious Sophia College of Bombay. She resigns from her job, joins the Ashram and teaches in the Ashram school until she is well past eighty.

A fine artist is needed for decorating the Mother's rooms—just the right man comes all the way from Gujarat, having been trained in Santiniketan by the well-known painter Nandalal Bose, and serves her till the end of his life.

The Mother wants to break the rigid dress conventions of Indian women—a young housewife from a very conservative Bengali Brahmin family who has joined the Ashram only a few years back during World War II, appears in the Playground dressed in white shirt and shorts to set an example for the other Ashram ladies! At the Mother's bidding she courageously performs a very revolutionary role in the bold French play, *Vers l'Avenir*, written by the Mother herself, which deals a heavy blow to the age-old, artificial social concepts of marriage! To whatever the Mother asks her to do, however difficult it may be, this young housewife has only one answer: "Yes, Mother."

Generally, the Jains belong to a very orthodox community who do not readily take to alien ways. An inroad has to be made in this community! A very well educated Jain young man happens to read some political writings of Sri Aurobindo and straight away falls in love with the Master's sublime prose. He is at the helm of his family's textile business and so has miles to go before he can dedicate himself completely to the Master. He fulfils all his duties, trains able administrators to take over from him and comes to the Ashram to serve the Mother and Sri

Aurobindo with his entire being. Since then, starting with his family members, there has been a steady influx of Jains to the Ashram.

Having been very closely connected with all the personalities mentioned in *Seven Dedicated Lives*, I am struck by the author's deep insight into their characters and aspirations which I had marked only because I had seen them at

very close quarters. How a young person who is more than two generations removed from them can come so near the truth is really amazing! Sunayana has a very lucid, fluid and warm style which makes reading her book a really pleasant experience. The only regret is that like all good things it comes to an end much too soon.

This review would remain incomplete without a word of congratulation to the cover designer, Giles Herdman, who has chosen a very appropriate floral arrangement for his design; the spiritual significance given by the Mother to this beautiful flower is "**Offering**"!

— Aniruddha Sircar  
*Aniruddha-da (Babu-da) settled in the Ashram in 1946, completed his schooling at the SAICE in 1955, and has since been teaching English at the Ashram school.*

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**The Story of a Soul**  
**Volume Two, 1956—Part One**

— Huta

Publisher: The Havyavahana  
Trust, Pondicherry

198 pp., Rs 300

ISBN: 978-81-87372-21-9

Size: 18x24 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



**The Glorious Fifties**

After Sri Aurobindo's passing there was a momentary feeling that the pace of life in the Ashram may slow down. But instead the 1950s saw a stupendous growth in activities initiated or encouraged by the Mother. The announcement of the start of the Sri Aurobindo University brought in numerous entrants, many of them teenaged girls wanting to join the Ashram. In addition to their formal studies, the Mother encouraged these girls to learn music, dance, handicrafts, flower culture, and painting. Huta was one such arrival, in 1955. I call these years the glorious fifties because the Mother opened new departments in every field; she was so much amongst us, the whole day long; and while giving us work or classes, she poured her love in abundance. That is the reason Huta and many like her stayed here and did not miss their homes. And Huta was special. She asked to be near the Mother and was privileged to get from her so much time, love, guidance, and trust.

The Mother used many sadhaks as instruments for various works; some gave up after a time, but this young woman Huta stuck on through all trials and persisted in her efforts to learn how to live the divine life. The Mother had promised her that, "I will teach you not only what is Divine Life but also how to live it so that you will realise in yourself that true divine life."

Huta has done quite a lot of work single-handedly, bringing out many books based on her learning experiences in various fields. In this volume she tells the story of her life with the Mother in early 1956—which is indeed the story of a soul. The book has a powerful presence, starting from the aesthetic cover, the quality of paper, the innumerable facsimiles of the Mother's handwriting, the minute details, and so many blessings.

I have heard people saying that Huta was very lucky to receive so much from the Mother. This volume tells us about her struggles, doubts, pain, problems, and revolts!

She had enough of them but still she stuck on. The book reveals how she cried, she implored, she turned her face away from the Love, and she went into deep despondency. Let's see how the Mother handled her:

An awful anxiety was pressing down on me. I said to her without any hesitation: "Mother, I do not feel like doing this Yoga. It is too tough, and you know very well how ignorant I am about the Divine Life and there seems no end to the difficulties, obscurities and obstructions. In this condition how can I find the Divine and unite with Him? Everything is disheartening, dubious and..." The rest of my sentence died on my lips as I looked up into those piercing blue-grey eyes—so deep were they, and unfathomable.

She raised her eyebrows and said with wide-open eyes:

*Child, what are you saying? Are you feeling all right? Now look here, when you have chosen to do Yoga you have to go through with it. You have also to collaborate with the Divine and open fully to the divine Light and Force.*

The Mother remained silent for a moment or two with her eyes half-closed, and then continued:

*If people have no need of the Divine, then of course I have no connection with them—they do whatever they like. But those who seek the Divine must not have any self-will against the Divine's Will. Also there must not be any lower elements – ill-will and a bad nature – in them. They should give themselves fully to the Divine alone.*

I stared at her for a second in shocked silence, because I knew too well that I could not live without the Divine. The Mother patted my hand which was resting in hers and said affectionately:

*My child, leave everything to me and I will do the sadhana for you, and take you to your goal.*

My spirit revived momentarily, only to sink again because I felt that to surmount the lower elements which were strangely influenced by evil forces was too much for me. But now the die was cast, I had to go through with this life.

Yes, no doubt she was lucky, but she deserved it because she persisted and won many battles. Many were given similar opportunities by the Mother, but failed or gave up the effort because they did not have the doggedness Huta had.

This volume tells us how Huta grew up in her spiritual journey with the Mother. It shows how insistently she sought the Mother's attention and received her love. It also relates how the Mother appreciated Huta's artistic taste regarding the embroidery of her clothes and how Huta was given work in the Mother's stores, which led her to arrange a very important doll exhibition that brought to light information on how the Mother had received certain articles. One finds the detailed instructions which the Mother gave Huta regarding the decoration of the idols for the exhibition, such as the colours of the sarees and the jewellery for the four main goddesses: Mahakali, Maheshwari, Mahalaxmi, and Mahasaraswati.

The Mother's tender care of Huta healed her heart and soul, but even extended to curing her headaches, as the following incident from the book describes:

In the evening I saw the Mother in her room at the Playground and told her about my persistent headache which made me sick and miserable.

At once she put her hand on my forehead and said:

*Oh! It is too hot—it is burning.*

Then she held my head in her hands and concentrated for quite a long time. After that, she massaged my forehead gently and said:

*It will go.*

In the book there are many such wonderful scenes between Huta and the Mother. I'll close with some gems from the Mother we find only in this book as they are from the privileged correspondence:

I want the Victory to come soon.

You are born for the Divine and you will find the Divine.

Do not let the mud of ugly thoughts and low feelings stain your consciousness and take you out of my protection.

Child, if you do not listen to the devil, you will surely become happy and healthy. You see, I do not want the devil to become fat!

Remain open to the Divine's energy that will give you the strength to keep up your resolution to always remain in the Divine's protection.

My love is with you surrounding you with its strength and protection and my blessings never leave you.

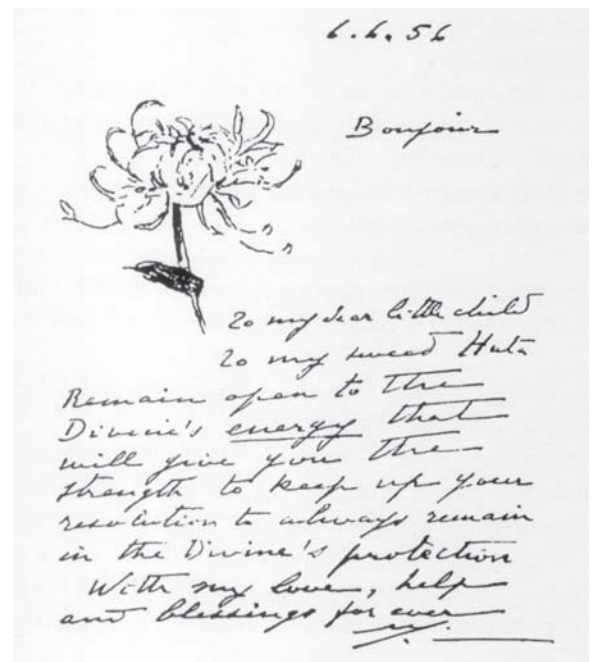
— Sunanda Poddar

*Postscript to the review:*

*Before the newsletter was ready to go to press, the next volume of The Story of a Soul was published. Sunanda offered this insight on the most recent volume:*

In this book (*The Story of a Soul: Volume Two, Part Two*) I was struck by the number of cards sent to Huta on almost a daily basis, which had a picture of a flower and its spiritual significance written out by the Mother. It reminded me of my own experience of communicating with the Mother through flowers: those which I offered to her expressing my aspirations and prayers and then the flowers she chose to give me in return. In this silent but powerful way the Mother gave us the help we needed to progress in our *sadhana*. We had only to be open to the vibrations of the flowers she so lovingly placed in our hands.

*Sunanda came to stay in the Ashram in 1951, when she was sixteen. She began working at SABDA while still a student at SAICE and continued until 1994. In 1952 she also began her work of telling and writing children's stories. She has been looking after Sri Smriti since its inception in 1989.*



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## SABDA at the London Book Fair

This year's London Book Fair was held in April 2009 at the Earls Court Conference Centre. This is primarily a trade fair and rivals the Frankfurt Book Fair as the world's most important global marketplace for the publishing industry. India was the fair's market focus this year, and the many opportunities for international business in India's expanding market were highlighted. SABDA participated in the fair in collaboration with Savitri Books, our United Kingdom distributor. Jojhar Dhillon of Savitri Books, who manned the stall for the three-day event, was pleased with the overall success of the fair and gave a positive report of his experience there. In addition to strengthening existing business relationships, such as the one with the wholesalers Gardners Books, he made several new contacts. He met a representative from Nielsen Book,



*SABDA's stall at the London Book Fair*

a leading provider of information and transaction services for publishers, and made sure that the complete Savitri Books catalogue is up to date on their online database.

Another interesting contact was a local authority librarian with responsibility for the reading material of ethnic minorities in her area. After relating her difficulties in obtaining books in the native languages of Asian communities in the UK, she was gratified to see the linguistic diversity of the titles in our catalogues and keen to order a selection of books.

As a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Jojhar's most satisfying contacts were perhaps "the encounters with individuals who had deliberately sought us out amidst the larger and more lavish displays. Those who were familiar with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram were invariably delighted to see us present at the London Book Fair."

