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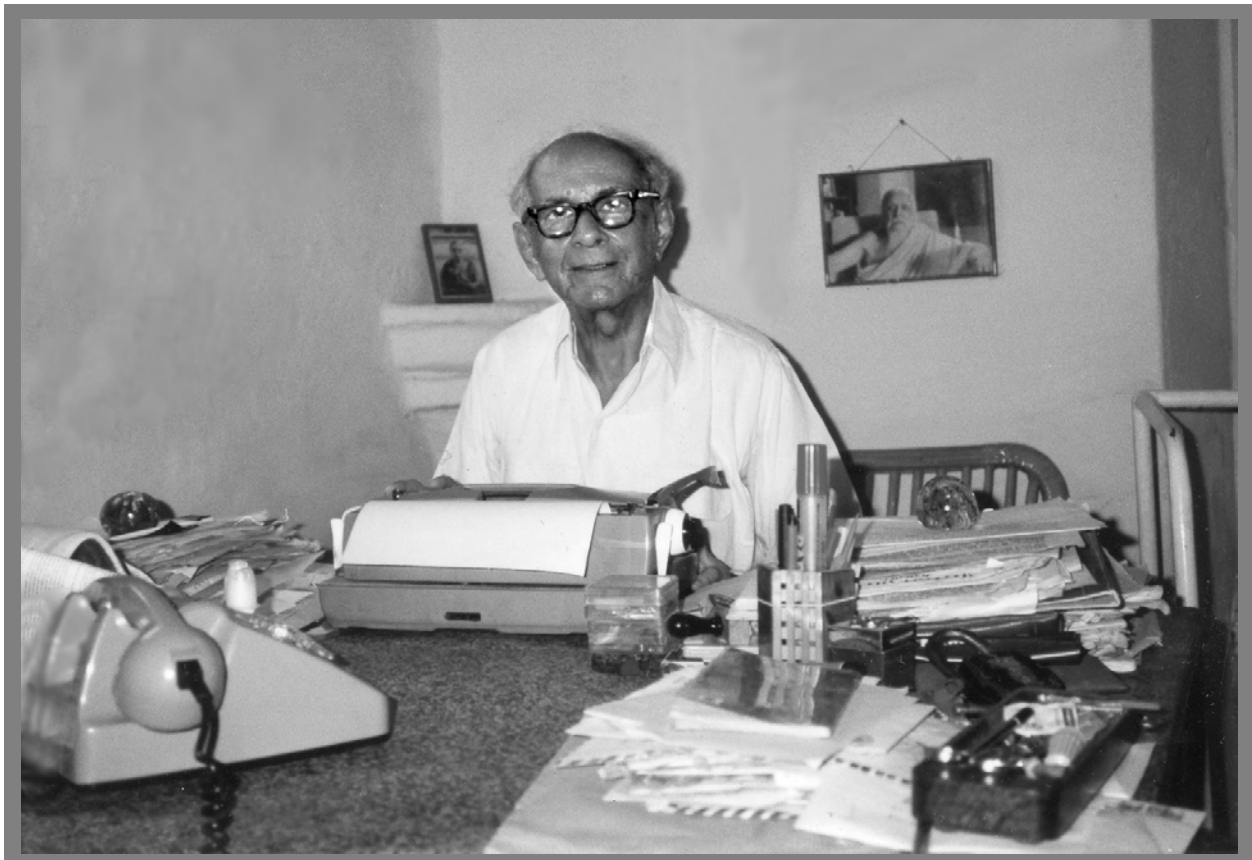
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## Recent Publications

# Sabta

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In this issue we remember the literary legacy of Amal Kiran, who passed away in June 2011. Amal had already published two books, one of poetry and the other of literary essays, before he left college. And he continued to write—more poetry and literary criticism as well as books and articles on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga and on various aspects of religion, history, philosophy, science, and Indian prehistory and antiquity. The issue also highlights the recent publication *The Mother: Her Miraculous Touch*.

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Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), who was born on 25 November 1904 in a Parsi family of Bombay, was educated at St. Xavier's School and College, where he won several academic prizes. He joined the Ashram in December 1927, and in September 1930 was given the name Amal Kiran, meaning "the clear ray", by Sri Aurobindo. He became the editor of the journal *Mother India* in 1949. Over the years, Amal contributed articles to literary, philosophical, and historical journals and periodicals both in India and abroad and wrote more than fifty books and pamphlets. He passed away on 29 June 2011.

## Amal Kiran: Beloved of the Print Medium

**Y**ou do not write about Amal Kiran. You cannot. Instead you begin meditating upon this beautiful life. The moment one remembers him, one begins to smile and keeps on smiling. You may have met him only once or daily all through your life, if you had lived in Pondicherry. But no matter. The infection was instant, and one does not get cured of this divine infection. One does not want to get cured. The smile that changes the contours of your lips when you come to a lake and see a lovely lotus abloom, on its slender stalk, swaying gently, oh so very gently. Or you come to the garden at dawn and the longed-for shoot has burst out of the Hope plant. Even when he was in the hospital, immobilized after a fall, he was the same: the beaming face struck down all the worry, anxiety and fright he saw in our faces. So aptly named too: the Pure Ray.

This burning brazier of creativity was a familiar presence in my childhood since my father K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar knew him very well and they corresponded. Then came the great day in my life in 1957 when I chose Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* as my doctoral subject. There was no need to invade the sumptuous Andhra University Library to gather books of criticism on the topic, for there were none. At that time only two persons had written in detail about the epic: A. B. Purani and Amal-da. Father placed their books in my hands and my lifelong journey with *Savitri* had begun.

The first of Amal-da's books I received from my father on that day was *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. It was a gift from Kishor Gandhi to Father and was dated 15 August 1947. In spite of my father's encouragement, it was with some trepidation that I had taken up my subject. My worry about ever managing to read the epic vanished with the very first sentence, the very first paragraph of *The Poetic Genius*. I must bring such an enthusiasm and faith as his to my studies:

How shall we crown Sri Aurobindo? Is he greater as a Yogi than as a philosopher? Does the literary critic in him outtop the sociological thinker? Does he shine brighter as a politician or as a poet? It is difficult to decide. Everywhere Mount Everest seems to face Mount Everest.

This was a perfect introduction to the author of *Savitri*. Today, fifty-four years later, having read almost all the books of Amal-da, occasionally corresponded with him, and even reviewed some of his publications, I am similarly flabbergasted: a polymath and poet who wrote on literature, philosophy, religion, history, science, politics and Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. How then shall we crown Amal-da? Amal-da had considered the various heights in that Himalayan eminence and voted for Sri Aurobindo the poet. I would say that too! But his smile pursues me: "Why don't you vote for the critic in me?"

For, it was as a critic that I met him first, since I had the privilege of hearing my father explain the contours of criticism in *The Poetic Genius*. Amal-da had total faith in his subject. The simple style charmed and clarified the mystic moments in Sri Aurobindo's poetry while his mastery of English prosody introduced the reader to the nuances of blank verse and hexameter and Alcaics. There were appropriate comparisons with Sappho, Shakespeare and Henry Vaughan among others. Father's intent was obvious. I should also try to follow such a critic, if ever I decided to become a writer.

Amal-da was to write many more books of criticism after *The Poetic Genius*, each an education in itself. The three volumes of *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, *The Inspiration of Paradise Lost*, *Indian Poets and English Poetry* do not exhaust the list. When *Blake's Tyger: a Christological Interpretation* (1989) reached my father, he replied in a letter:

Thank you very much for the copy of *Blake's Tyger*, with the affectionate inscription in your splendid calligraphy. From the cover portrait of Christ-Tyger to your own Galahad-like profile backgrounded by the shelves of books, and of course all the way through, it is a precious gift.

Prompt came a detailed reply which called his friend's epistle a "mini-review". There was a discussion about Kathleen Raine's views on the poem. This was a world of *sahridayas*, as we can see from *The English Language and the Indian Spirit* (1986). This slim volume is more than a mere collection of letters that were exchanged between Amal-da and Kathleen Raine. When she says plainly that "English learned as a foreign language can never nourish the invisible roots of poetry", our Arthurian knight is out, the Excalibur raised high in defence in this breathless sentence:

A further truth with the appearance of a paradox is that, since English is the language most subtly, intensely, profoundly developed and since India is still the country with the greatest spiritual experience, the spiritual fulfilment of English speech along the inward lines indicated or initiated by many English poets themselves will first come – if it already hasn't – through Indians and not Englishmen, Indians who have steeped themselves not only in the deepest culture of their own land by Yogic discipline but also in the finest essence of the English culture that has been diffused here for some centuries.

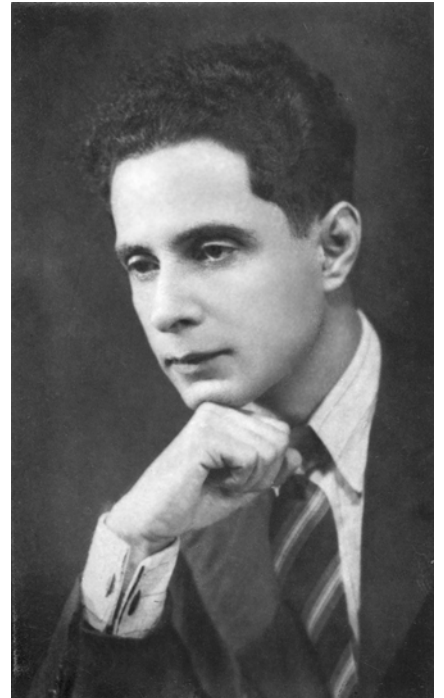
Divine conviction that the coming together of India and the English language bears "the stamp of a divine destiny"! Amal-da was speaking from personal knowledge. He was so close to the Master when *Savitri* was descending as epic poetry. This firm confidence of Amal-da as a critic has never failed to engage me, especially when reading *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare* (1965), which is a masterpiece in comparative criticism. Everywhere Sri Aurobindo is the starting point and the concluding summit. In between is the chosen author who is seen through Sri Aurobindo's vision. This is so even when Amal-da went beyond English and into French. The eminent symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé comes alive in *The Obscure and the Mysterious* (1987), which is considered "a most valuable contribution to studies of the Symbolist movement" (Arthur Beattie).

The book has several passages that teach us how to approach this symbolist poet. Haphazard assessment will do us no good, and one must take in the context and even the surrounding nature to get to the heart of Mallarmé:

The mood of the "poète impuissant" dominates the whole of Mallarmé's work and is related to the supra-sensuous aspiration in him; its double symbol is Winter, standing at once for the silence due to the failure of words and the spiritual Silence which is the supreme reality all words should strive to suggest.

Not only does Amal-da crystallize the ground for the reader but he also translates some of Mallarmé's poems and comments on them. In these translations the mood is Mallarmé, the controlled syllabic movement is Amal-da:

The eternal azure's serene irony  
Crushes with its indolent beauty as of flowers



The impuissant poet cursing his genius  
Through a sterile desert of despairing hours.

The critic scores another perfect hit in *Classical and Romantic: An Approach through Sri Aurobindo* (1997). Down the centuries critics have found the two terms as different as night and day, but what do they mean exactly? It has been the greatest literary problem of all time, as evidenced by 11,397 books on the subject being published by 1936! After 197 pages of Amalesque criticism where quotations from Sri Aurobindo rise like lighthouse beacons, we are calmed down by an integral vision of both the terms with some practical illustrations:

Stylistic Classicism is not in the least alien to the Spirit. And where modern Romanticism rises into spiritual utterance it is often stylistically Classical. When Shelley writes:

Life like a dome of many-coloured glass  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,

he is certainly not Classical in style, but when he prefaces these words with

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly,

we might be listening to a Sophocles in a truly spiritual instead of merely religious mood.

Who would believe these were just classroom talks? And another series, also delivered in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, became *Talks on Poetry* (1989). It has always been on the shelf next to my work table. The perfect teacher of poetry, Amal-da gives the right directions regarding the management of critical tools, planning and English usage. And there is never a dull moment in any one of these talks, originally delivered “without opening a single book in the classroom or consulting any notes”. Whenever I open the book to get me over a hurdle as I write, I am reminded of the line in the morality play, *Everyman*, in which the character of Knowledge says: “Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide, in thy most need to go by thy side.” The motto describes how *Talks on Poetry* has helped me whenever I have had to lecture in colleges on English and Tamil poetry.

Amal-da gives charming touches of autobiography in the course of his speeches, as when he refers to the fading away of the Fire-worshipping Parsis, and yet there is no cause to speak of disaster to that way of religion. He says that when Sri Aurobindo's poems, “Bird of Fire” and “Bride of the Fire”, are there, as also the *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, and the line from *Savitri*, “I cherish God the Fire, not God the Dream”, all is well. When this book came to my father, his eyesight had become very weak, and yet he would sit in the verandah of his Madras house and read the book in full sunlight. When he wrote to Amal-da of his slow progress, prompt came a reply, dated 1 February 1990, asking him not to strain his eyes:

It has always been good to have contact with you. It was indeed kind on your part to make it a point twice to come to my place. You have referred to my ‘halo’. Your ‘weakening eyesight’ seems to have proved rather advantageous for me, making a halo out of a bit of a blur.

Amal-da's oeuvre is not easily docketed, for what do I do with *Science, Materialism, Mysticism* when it lands upon my table as it did in 1995? Well, I simply get lost in it, and life around me falls silent. Probability in microphysics? The clinical argument leaves me breathless (having never been a student of science), but what is this? Staticle? Till then I had read only about particles. Amal-da with his mischievous smile coins the meaningful portmanteau word “staticle” and brings together the “states” of quantum physics and particles, and distinguishes the modern particle from the classical and so we get to have staticle. When the dance of Shiva goes on inside these staticles and probability theory is yoked to the dance, I get to see the Avatar theory in action!

For, the elementary and primal body or event which bafflingly extends over more than one point of space and over more than one instant of time and thus escapes all final analysis by physical concepts of space-unit and time-unit – what else can this “static” with its inherent indefiniteness and natural indeterminacy be except a free transcendent Being’s self-manifestation in the terms of microphysics –

A magic process in a magical space,  
An undistinguishable miracle’s depths  
Whose source is lost in the Ineffable?

This set at rest my worry about the predictably unpredictable overhead afflatus. Because of my own involvement with *Savitri*, all the writings on overhead poetry by Amal-da were manna from heaven, such as the energizing creations *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo* (1968) and *Overhead Poetry* (1972). However, Amal-da was not satisfied with containing worlds. He had to embrace continents. This is why we get to have such wonderful works on history such as *The Problems of Aryan Origin*, *Karpasa in Prehistoric India* and *The Beginning of History for Israel*. From Pradip Bhattacharya, who has gone deep into these historical and sociological studies of Amal-da, we realize what a fantastic job the author has done to puncture the self-righteous adumbrations of the Aryan invasion theory wallahs in India and abroad. The minutiae that Amal-da has gathered to build his arguments for beaming illuminations on India’s prehistoric times stagger one’s imagination. All this, sitting in his study in a Pondicherry home! But the Pure Ray passes through Matter and Space!

The continuous stream of Aurobindonian poets, beginning with Arjava, Amal-da, Nirod-da and Dilip Kumar Roy, has proved the strong roots of mysticism suggested by Sri Aurobindo for future poetry. So many of them—Amrita, Themis, Pujalal... But the earliest I can think of is Amal-da. A prolific poet who takes in the breeze wafted from other places too, while firmly holding on to the Aurobindonian inspiration. They say mysticism is opaque. Is it really so? Amal-da is never opaque:

Let the tears tremble  
Within the eye  
But fall not over,  
Leaving it dry.

“Taprobane” is dear to me for this is  
Tambraparni, and I was born on its  
bank:

There the mute sages go,  
Washing away  
All touch of colour and climbing  
The nameless gray

Of hills that give no answer  
Across the foam  
To the cry of wanderer ages  
For an ultimate home.



These lines are from *Altar and Flame* (1975). The very titles of his poetry collections charm me: *The Secret Splendour* (1941), *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* (1949). When his Collected Poems came out in 1993, he gave it the happy title of his first work, *The Secret Splendour*. Whenever Amal-da inscribed a book for me, it was a direct ray of blessing. The Collected Poems came to me with: “Affectionately to Prema Nandakumar, Votary of the Muse from K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 24.1.1994”. When I was invited to contribute to the

book to be presented to him on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, I chose to write on “The Triumphant Call of Sethna’s Poetry”. It was great writing about him at any time, more so with this grand production of his Collected



Poems titled *The Secret Splendour* in hand, with the Upanishadic image of two birds on the jacket cover and frontispiece, a picture drawn by Amalda himself! I can do no better than conclude here with the conclusion I wrote then, saluting the triumphant voice of his poetry heard in the title poem:

“Barren nor drear the exalted sacrifice!  
Unquenched I bring the keen revealing flame,  
The warm magnificence of love’s caress.  
Not with sage calm but thrilled vast hands, I claim  
The unfathomed dark which round my spirit lies—  
And touch immortal rapturous Loveliness!”

That is the affirmatory tone of the Vedic Rishi who hymned Agni Jatavedas, the High-Blazing Flame, King of Immortality in transformatory Riks. That is the triumphant call of the victorious secret splendour within us all.

— Prema Nandakumar

*Dr Prema Nandakumar is a well-known writer and literary critic. Her biography of the Mother, The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram (National Book Trust) has gone into several editions.*

List of books in English by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) available at SABDA:

Title	Pages	Price	Title	Pages	Price
Adventures in Criticism	113	75	Mandukya Upanishad	48	30
Ancient India in a New Light	645	750	On Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	368	380
Aspects of Sri Aurobindo	275	130	Our Light and Delight	228	150
The Beginning of History for Israel	238	75	The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo	138	125
Blake's Tyger	275	60	The Problem of Aryan Origins	443	600
Classical and Romantic	198	70	Problems of Ancient India	306	600
The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual System			Problems of Early Christianity	276	150
and the Mother's Contribution to it	80	120	"Science, Materialism, Mysticism"	356	180
A Follower of Christ and a Disciple of Sri Aurobindo			The Secret Splendour	784	550
(Correspondence between Bede Griffiths and			"A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"	107	50
Amal Kiran)	278	120	Sri Aurobindo: The Poet	436	180
India and the World Scene	353	180	Sri Aurobindo and Greece	98	80
Indian Poets and English Poetry (Correspondence			Sri Aurobindo and the New Age (Essays by various		
between Kathleen Raine, Amal Kiran)	291	100	authors, edited by Amal Kiran)	239	85
The Indian Spirit and the World's Future	185	150	Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare	124	70
Inspiration and Effort	326	100	The Sun and the Rainbow	214	150
The Inspiration of <i>Paradise Lost</i>	186	50	Talks on Poetry	438	110
Is Velikovsky's Revised Chronology Tenable?104	100		Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time	343	150
Letters on Savitri — Sri Aurobindo			The Mother: Past—Present—Future	186	135
(Edited by Amal Kiran)	113	60	The Thinking Corner	161	75
Life - Poetry - Yoga: Volume 1	289	75	The Virgin Birth and the Earliest Christian		
Life - Poetry - Yoga: Volume 2	336	75	Tradition	92	85
Life - Poetry - Yoga: Volume 3	386	100	The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo	238	125
Light and Laughter (Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran)	142	90			

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### ENGLISH

#### *Compilations from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*

Reprints from All India Magazine booklets

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry

#### **Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's Epic Poem Savitri**

44 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-313-9, Rs 40

Size: 19x25 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

#### **Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's "The Synthesis of Yoga"**

#### **Jewels from "The Synthesis of Yoga"**

48 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-317-7, Rs 30

Size: 14x20 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

#### **Significance of Death**

40 pp, ISBN 978-81-7060-316-0, Rs 30

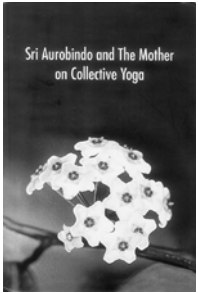
Size: 14x21 cm; Binding: Soft Cover

#### **Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Collective Yoga**

— Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, USA

78 pp, ISBN 978-0-89071-001-2, Rs 60



Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The passages in this compilation touch on several aspects of the collective side of the *sadhana*, such as the true meaning of a spiritual hierarchy, the conditions required to create a gnostic collectivity, the interdependence between the individual's progress and that of the

collectivity, and the value of collective prayer and meditation. They illustrate the fact that a representative group of aspiring souls is required for the complete realisation of the Integral Yoga and the manifestation of a new and transformed life. This is a new edition of the book, issued after many years.

#### **Mantras in Sunil's Music**

#### **Texts used in the Savitri Music and the New Year Music with Transliteration and Translation in English**

— Compiled by Bikas Chandra Sen

Publisher: Sanskrit Karyalaya, Pondicherry

120 pp, ISBN 979-81-7058-000-2, Rs 110

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



From 1965 until 1998 Sunil Bhattacharya composed and orchestrated the New Year Music and the musical accompaniment for the Mother's readings of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. In his compositions he incorporated the chanting of *mantras* from the Vedas, the Upanishads, and various *stavas* and *stotras*. This compilation brings

together all these *mantras* in the original Sanskrit with their transliterations and with the English translations, many of them done by Sri Aurobindo and Nolini Kanta Gupta. The Mother's New Year messages until 1973 and the lines used in subsequent years as prayers in English and French have also been included.

#### **Matrimandir**

— Illustrated brochure with quotations from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

Publisher: Matrimandir, Auroville



27 pp, Rs 95

Size: 30x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This booklet gives an overview of the Matrimandir, the Mother's shrine at the centre of Auroville.

Quotations from the Mother explain her vision of Auroville and the purpose of the Matrimandir. Photographs trace the construction of the Matrimandir and its surrounding gardens and showcase the inner chamber, the lotus pond, and the twelve meditation rooms, each representing one of the powers of the Universal Mother.

#### **Spiritual Heritage of India**

#### **Past, Present and Future**

— An annotated compilation based on the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch Trust, New Delhi

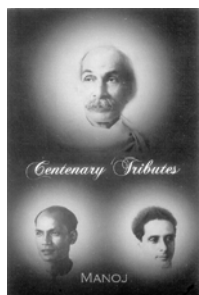
127 pp, ISBN 978-81-88847-44-0, Rs 65

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The selections in this compilation, drawn primarily from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, are brief indicators to the much deeper considerations of India's spiritual heritage on which Sri Aurobindo wrote with such insight.

The extracts highlight his constructive approach to the past, gleaned the essential truths of Indian philosophy and culture, and applying them to an analysis of modern-day sociological ideas. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother envisioned a reshaping of the Indian spirit in new moulds, a renaissance that will lead the way in the spiritualisation of the human race.



### Other Authors

#### Centenary Tributes

— Manoj

Publisher: Dipak Kumar Gupta,  
Pondicherry

84 pp, Rs 50

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This booklet is a collection of the talks given by Manoj Das Gupta on the occasions of the birth centenaries of Nolini Kanta Gupta in 1989, Nirodbaran Talukdar in 2003, and Amal Kiran in 2004. The affectionate tributes to these three respected *sadhaks* are marked by the speaker's admiration for their humility in the practice of the Integral Yoga, and an appreciation for the sincerity, poignancy, and sense of humour that characterised their journeys on the path of *sadhana*.

### The Concept and the Destiny of the Individual in the Bhagavad Gita

#### As Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo

— Mitra Chatterjee

Publisher: Ritima Banerjee, Kolkata

195 pp, Rs 150

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

In this book the author offers a critical assessment of various commentaries on the Gita by Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhusudana Sarasvati, Sridhara Swamin, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, and Sri Aurobindo. Drawing on her own extensive knowledge of Sanskrit, she analyses the meanings of certain key words that appear in the Gita and looks at how these scholars understand and present these terms. Basing her study on the three philosophical issues of the concept of reality, the destiny of the individual, and the paths of liberation, she concludes that only in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation does one find a satisfying synthesis of views and a complete understanding of these concepts as found in the Gita's teaching.

*See review on page 14*

### Selected Letters of Nirodbaran to B. S. Sreenivasa Rao

#### And An Interview with Nirodbaran

— Compiled and Edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya

Publisher: Supriyo Bhattacharya, Kolkata

86 pp, Rs 50

Size: 14x20 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

The letters compiled in this book were written by Nirodbaran to Sreenivasa Rao over a period of more than forty years beginning in 1965. While brief and to the point, they convey a warmth of friendship and show a guiding hand in the younger man's *sadhana*. The letters are prefaced by an article by Sreenivasa Rao in which he recounts how he first came to meet Nirodbaran and how their relationship developed over the years. The final piece is from an interview with Nirodbaran that appeared in *The Times of India* in August 2004.

### Sri Aurobindo: The Poet, Yogi and Philosopher

— Essays by Arabinda Basu

Publisher: Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata,

in collaboration with Maha Bodhi Book Agency

322 pp, ISBN 978-93-80336-19-0, Rs 650

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

In these twenty-four essays, most originally delivered as lectures, the author presents Sri Aurobindo's philosophical thought and approach to life, describing them as an "integral idealism". The essays examine such topics as Sri Aurobindo and Indian philosophy, the metaphysical basis of the Integral Yoga, spiritual evolution, and some aspects of the Supermind. Others look at the Integral Yoga as a systematic study of man's inner being and nature and the process of the transformation of that nature, the question of the ego and the individual self, and the nature of Knowledge and Ignorance. Sri Aurobindo as a poet of spiritual truths is the subject of the final two essays. All of the articles save one were previously published in various journals.

### Yogic Sadhan

#### with Hindi Translation

— Edited by The Uttara Yogi

Publisher: Ashir Prakashan, Saharanpur

96 pp, Rs 100

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

Sri Aurobindo received this book as automatic writing during the first three months of his stay in Pondicherry, from April to June 1910. The lectures that make up the



chapters suggest methods to purify the being and build up the inner Will. Sri Aurobindo wrote only the “Editor’s Epilogue”, in which he addresses some misconceptions that may arise due to the brevity and limited scope of the writings. The text that was received was transcribed and published a year later under the title *Yogic Sadhan*. Further editions were published in 1920, 1923, and 1933. The full text appears in Volume II of *Record of Yoga*. This edition contains the English text and a Hindi translation, an introduction in Hindi, and a glossary in English of Sanskrit terms.

### **The Tale of My Exile** ***Twelve Years in the Andamans***

— Barindra Kumar Ghose

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

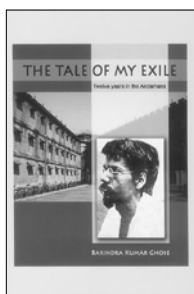
Publication Department,

Pondicherry

143 pp, ISBN 978-81-7058-991-4,  
Rs 95

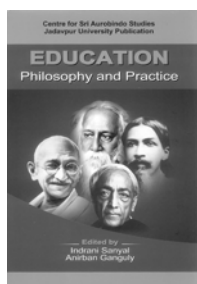
Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



Barindra Ghose, Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother, was sentenced to death in 1909 in the Alipore Bomb Case, a sentence later commuted to transportation for life in the Cellular Jail at Port Blair in the Andamans. He was released from there in January 1920 as part of a general amnesty. Told with honesty and humour, this book is the story of his imprisonment with some of his fellow revolutionaries, from the Alipore Jail to the hold of the SS *Maharaja* to the Cellular Jail and a hard life of deprivation, forced labour, and humiliation by the prison authorities. Translated from the original Bengali into English by Nolini Kanta Gupta and first published in 1922, this new edition includes an introduction and editorial notes.

### **Education: Philosophy and Practice**



— Articles by various authors

Publisher: Decent Books, New

Delhi, in association with Centre  
for Sri Aurobindo Studies, Kolkata

347 pp, ISBN 978-81-86921-56-2,  
Rs 900

Size: 14x22 cm

Binding: Hard Cover

The essays by various contributors that comprise this study of educational philosophy and practice deal primarily with Sri Aurobindo’s ideas on the subject of integral education and the development of a national system of education. To provide some historical context, a few of the essays

offer some perspectives on education propounded by Rabindranath Tagore, J. Krishnamurti, and Mahatma Gandhi. The last two articles take a brief look at the *guru-shishya* relationship which Sri Aurobindo had with two of his disciples – Dilip Kumar Roy and Harindranath Chattopadhyay – as an example of spiritual education in practice.

### **The Presence of Time** ***Bharat Nivas Chronicles I***

— Aster Mira Patel

Publisher: Centre of Indian Studies, Auroville

153 pp, Rs 475

Size: 21x26 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

This book is a collection of the author’s musings and perceptions on the journey of yoga; reflections on topics such as the need for a fresh approach to knowledge and culture, the role to be played by the youth of India in building the world’s future, and the secret of India’s vitality; and thoughts on new perspectives in psychology. It also includes a brief section on integral education, with a recounting of how the Ashram school – where she was herself a young student and eventually a teacher – began and then developed, encompassing all dimensions of life and activity.

### **Meditations on Savitri Set 2 (DVD)**

**Set of six DVDs (Books 2, 3, 4, 5)**

ISBN 978-81-87372-23-3, Rs 1000

### **Meditations on Savitri Set 3 (DVD)**

**Set of six DVDs (Books 6, 7, 8 & 9, 10, 11, 12)**

ISBN 978-81-87372-25-7, Rs 1000

— Paintings by Huta, Passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother, The Mother’s Organ Music

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## BOOK REVIEWS



### **Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* A Study of the Cosmic Epic**

— Dr Prema Nandakumar  
Publisher: Wisdom Tree,  
Delhi, in collaboration with  
Sri Aurobindo Society,  
Pondicherry  
ISBN 978-81-8328-175-1,  
500 pp, Rs 595  
Size: 14x22 cm  
Binding: Soft Cover

This is a reissue of a work that was first published with the Mother's permission in 1962. As the first comprehensive study of Sri Aurobindo's epic, it was received with much appreciation at that time, and has remained in demand ever since. Although a second edition was brought out by All India Books in 1985, that has been out of print for several years. This reappearance in a handsome new format is most welcome.

The original book was, the author tells us, substantially the same as the thesis for which she was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the Andhra University in 1961, with the addition of a detailed Preface. This new edition includes a new preface, as well as the briefer one to the second edition. In the original Preface she stated:

*Savitri* by itself, *Savitri* in relation to Sri Aurobindo's life and work, and *Savitri* in relation to the currents of human thought and experience of all times: such are the three ascending terms in the argument that I have tried to present in the following pages.

This was a huge and daring attempt to be taken up by a young woman, breaking completely fresh ground where no one before her had ventured to tread. Around the time when she was preparing her thesis, one of the Ashram's most literate *sadhaks*, Medhananda, who was the Librarian of the Sri Aurobindo Library, mentioned in conversation:

The mind that is able to really read *Savitri* has not yet been educated.

and this is probably true even today, despite the fact that in the intervening fifty years many more studies,

books and articles have appeared, each attempting to elucidate one aspect or the other of the poem or to grasp it as a whole. But with this book Dr Prema Nandakumar was one of the pathbreakers and it is easy to see why her first venture has been so much valued and sought after for nigh on half a century.

In her Preface, Dr Prema Nandakumar also mentions the advice and help she received from her father, Professor K. R. S. Iyengar, as well as from A. B. Purani, author of the only book on *Savitri* that had been published at the time that she was preparing her thesis, from M. P. Pandit, and from K. D. Sethna—in addition to her official academic guides.

The book is organised into three Parts. The first is an introductory one of sixty pages, entitled 'Towards *Savitri*', with sections on Sri Aurobindo's life, yoga, politics, philosophy and poetry, concluding with a few paragraphs on the epic itself. Here we may note a perceptive passage which is worth recalling when we approach this poem, which the Mother has characterised as 'the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision':

The Hindu tradition is to read great poetry – say the *Ramayana*, the *Gita* or the *Bhagavata* – in a mood of reverent attention over a period of years, coming to it again and again, for not in one reading alone can one hope to conquer its heights of significance. *Savitri* too calls for such continuous and reverent study. If it baffles us at first, it may be that it is a new kind of poem, demanding a new alertness in response.

The second Part is devoted to an exploration of the forty-nine cantos of the epic, a kind of 'critical synopsis', as the author says. It is probably this central section of 180 pages which has been of most assistance to students coming newly to the poem. As the late Ravindra Khanna commented in his review of the book for *Mother India*:

It takes the uninitiated reader through the most difficult passages with short but lucid explanations and significant quotations from the text.

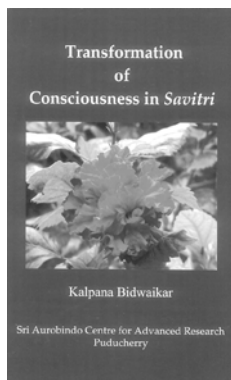
Here one regrets that, with the benefit of hindsight, the author has not taken the opportunity of this new edition to revise the section devoted to Book Eight,

‘The Book of Death’. It is not surprising that in 1961-62, noting that this – the shortest of all the twelve books of the epic – consists of a single brief canto, numbered ‘Canto Three’, she should have referred to ‘two missing cantos’. It is only since the appearance of the 1972 and 1993 editions that we have the benefit of an explanatory footnote elucidating this anomaly. But this third edition is in fact substantially a reprint or reissue—it seems that the original text has remained untouched.

Part Three, covering a further 217 pages, contains three main sections focussing on the ‘Legend’ and the ‘Symbol’, ‘Overhead’ Poetry and *Savitri*, and concluding with the chapter titled ‘*Savitri*: A Cosmic Epic.’ In this last section Dr Nandakumar first considers *Savitri* in the context of epic poetry in general, and in comparison with other epics and epic poets, such as Milton (*Paradise Lost*), Dante (*Divina Commedia*), Goethe (*Faust*) and Kazantzakis (*The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*). Here we also find an interesting section on Walt Whitman, and a consideration of the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, leading into a consideration of the Odysseus theme, which in turn leads her to counterpose Kazantzakis’ modern epic with Sri Aurobindo’s. She then turns to consider the place of *Savitri* alongside some of Sri Aurobindo’s other poetic works—the early narrative poems and the sonnets. After considering and responding to criticisms that have been levelled at Sri Aurobindo’s epic, in her concluding chapter entitled ‘Towards a Greater Dawn’, Dr Nandakumar considers differing ways in which the poem can be approached. This last section is in itself a remarkable essay, to conclude a remarkable achievement – an early achievement, both in the author’s life and in the history of *Savitri* studies –, but one that has stood the test of half a century, and seems likely to continue to prove of lasting value to new readers and students looking for a guiding hand or signal beacon to help them navigate the complexities of Sri Aurobindo’s inexhaustible epic.

— Shraddhavan

*Shraddhavan, a long-time resident of Auroville, coordinates the activities at Savitri Bhavan and edits its journal Invocation.*



## Transformation of Consciousness in *Savitri*

— Kalpana Bidwaikar

Publisher: Sri Aurobindo

Centre for Advanced

Research, Pondicherry

ISBN 978-81-901891-8-7

212 pp, Rs 195

Size: 14x21 cm

Binding: Soft Cover

As we read and try to understand Sri Aurobindo’s works, especially three of his major works, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *Savitri*, vis-à-vis the ancient spiritual texts, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita, we tend to conclude that only he offers humanity redemption from the clutches of suffering, and even death, with the ransom of his great *tapasya* and its fruit of transformation. Whereas our past prophets and seers have given the solution of the world-riddle outside life and the world by escaping into *nirvana* or *moksha*, Sri Aurobindo presents the solution in the thick of life. For him *nirvana* is only “one radiant pace”, “only half God’s cosmic work”, only “the everlasting No”. Sri Aurobindo promises to take us to the land of “the Lover’s everlasting Yes”, where we can be fully liberated from the snare of Ignorance and transformed while living still in the midst of life.

The means he presents to us for that cosmic journey is the transformation of consciousness, a radical change of our human nature into a divine nature, a complete reversal of our ignorant life into a divine life. This theme is the base and central idea of all his works, especially in the three books mentioned above. *The Life Divine* explains the theory, the rationale, the possibility of a divine life on earth against all scepticism and criticism. *The Synthesis of Yoga* is the manual, the guide map of practical steps across the uncharted route of transformation. *Savitri* is the drama of the actual enactment of transformation through the medium of mantric poetry played by cosmic actors Ashwapati, Savitri, Satyavan, and the Lord of Death.

I feel the book under review, *Transformation of Consciousness in “Savitri”* by Dr Kalpana Bidwaikar, presents a harmonious fusion of the main aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s thought currents: the Real-Idea of a divine life, the *dynamis* of the integral transformation

of human consciousness into divine nature, and the mantric power of future poetry. By discussing these points before she takes up the title theme, the author provides an appropriate backdrop to the main portrait. Sri Aurobindo has created *Savitri* not for the sake of poetry, but as a means for expressing his adventure of consciousness, his ascension to the highest peaks of existence. Such poetry is mantric, carrying the power and the force of the Spirit. It is indeed the poetry of the future. All the methods and conditions followed by him in the composition of *Savitri* have been laid down in his visionary and critical literary work *The Future Poetry*. In order to create such a poetry man must grow in consciousness, break the limitations of his mind, life, and body, undergo the disciplines of the Integral Yoga, and step into the shoes of Savitri and Ashwapati. This is the message of *Savitri*. And this very message is the theme of the book too.

Unless we fully comprehend the concept of involution and evolution, the possibility of the transformation of man into superman remains untenable. Sri Aurobindo is the first thinker and scientist of consciousness, the first cosmologist to tell us in clear intelligible words the secret of the evolution of the world. He says that Matter or the Inconscient is not essentially different from the Spirit or the Superconscient. They are the two poles of the One Truth. It is the Divine who has plunged into the world of darkness and ignorance, the One has become Many. The Divine or the Spirit is involved in all things of the phenomenal world. This is the secret of the world's evolution from matter to plant, from plant to animal, and from animal to man. Since the evolutionary process is ceaseless, the hidden superman is bound to emerge from the workshop of Nature. All these abstruse issues have been competently dealt with by the author, who has shown a flair for identifying appropriate verses from *Savitri* to support her arguments.

Then she takes up the portrayal of the title theme, the transformation of consciousness in *Savitri*, in three successive chapters towards the end of the book. According to Sri Aurobindo the complete and radical transformation of man can be achieved by following a spiritual discipline in three stages: psychic transformation, spiritual transformation, and supramental transformation.

The first step is achieved by finding one's soul or psychic being, which is generally hidden behind the

outer veils of mind, life and body, the surface actors under a shadowy entity called ego. The psychic being is a spark of the Divine, the indwelling God in the heart of man – *ishwarah sarvabhutânâm hriddeshe'arjun tishthati* – that evolves from birth to birth and at last is capable of taking up the reins of man's life and executing the will of God through its instruments. While the process of the psychic emerging as a master and ruler – *swarat* – can take a long time in the normal course of things, it can be accelerated by yoga and the result achieved in a relatively shorter time, even in a single birth.

In the epic *Savitri*, this psychic transformation has been exemplified or enacted by the heroine Savitri. In fact, Savitri is not an ordinary evolving human soul who needs to undergo this kind of spiritual exercise. She is already divine, the incarnation of the Divine Mother. But she has consented to come down to help and guide the human race in answer to the prayer of Ashwapati, the representative of mankind. She has taken birth and accepted the human ignorance and suffering in order to hew a path for man to a new life, a higher life. This calls for her to undergo the process of soul-finding, or the psychic transformation, in order to regain her lost divinity. She hears the inner voice:

“For man thou seekst not for thyself alone.  
Only if God assumes the human mind  
And puts on mortal ignorance for his cloak  
And makes himself the Dwarf with triple stride,  
Can he help man to grow into the God.

Accepting his darkness thou must bring to him  
light,  
Accepting his sorrow thou must bring to him bliss.  
In Matter's body find thy heaven-born soul.”

Savitri plunges deep into yoga until at last she meets her secret soul. The author explains:

Savitri realized in her being the oneness of the Jivatman and the soul and it was the moment of the highest communion in her. The development of the psychic and the governance of the psychic on its instruments is of utmost importance in the integral transformation. The whole being has to rise higher in consciousness and, the higher has to descend into the lower for its transformation. The psychic change makes the being ready for the ascent and descent of consciousness for a spiritual transformation. Savitri too after having realized the psychic transformation, experiences a descent of the Divine Mother in her being.

The spiritual transformation is, according to the author, exemplified or enacted in the epic by Ashwapati, the human father of Savitri. He too undergoes a severe *tapasya*:

Ashwapati takes up the *tapasya* and journeys towards the ascension of consciousness in order to redeem mankind from its present crisis. This ascension of consciousness to the higher realms and the descent of higher consciousness in one's being is what Sri Aurobindo called the spiritual change. The spiritual transformation or "the spiritual change is the established descent of the peace, light, knowledge, power, bliss from above, the awareness of the self and the Divine and of a higher consciousness and the change of the whole consciousness to that."

Even the spiritual change cannot entirely transform the ignorant nature. Sri Aurobindo has discovered a new dynamic power of the Divine called the supermind, which has the power to radically transform the nature. That power has been brought down into the earth-nature by Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's joint *tapasya* for the first time in the spiritual history of mankind. According to Sri Aurobindo's vision and his subjective experience of that power, the supermind is already at work and will change in due course the face of the earth and consequently man, by a rapid evolution or revolution, will be either transformed or replaced by a superior species called superman, or a divine man with a divine mind, life and body. The supermind alone can act with full power on the obscure physical plane:

"The supermind shall claim the world for Light  
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart  
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head  
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base."

The supramental transformation is not represented in *Savitri* as the other two stages of transformation are, for it is the vision of the future. But this vision is vividly depicted in the poem:

"When superman is born as Nature's king  
His presence shall transfigure Matter's world:  
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,  
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law;  
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's call.

The Spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life become the life divine."

The last chapter of the book dwells on the rich spiritual import of the epic, which will serve as humanity's guide and help towards the creation of the future man. *Savitri* is not only Sri Aurobindo's spiritual autobiography but also his spiritual body, and it radiates his physical presence and power.

The book is obviously the result of deep study and creative research work and opens a "lucent window" on the light and force brought down by Sri Aurobindo through the cosmic vision of *Savitri*. I am sure this book will inspire many more discoveries from the fathomless ocean of *Savitri*'s depths. Beautifully printed, it is quite handy at just 200 pages and reasonably priced too.

— Dwarika Prasad Gupta

*Dwarika Prasad previously edited two magazines, Sri Aurobindo Karmadhara in Hindi and The Call Beyond in English published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Delhi Branch, where the Mother had appointed him Manager. He currently works in Pondicherry for the Reception Service of the Ashram.*

## The Concept and the Destiny of the Individual in the Bhagavad Gita

*As Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo*

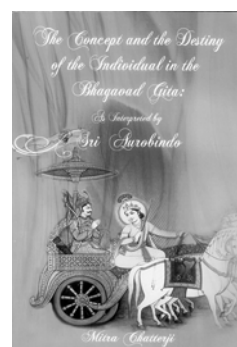
— Mitra Chatterjee

Publisher: Ritima Banerjee,  
Kolkata

195 pp, Rs 150

Size: 12x18 cm

Binding: Soft Cover



The Gita is perhaps one of the most revered of spiritual texts, as it provides guidelines not only for meeting the challenges of and finding solutions to almost all the practical problems of human life, but also for understanding the many philosophical and metaphysical concepts that most of the religious traditions of the world are concerned with. There are many beautiful concepts found in the teachings of the Gita which, when understood properly, bring out the relevance of the text and reveal the immense power of the Gita's teachings in liberating humanity from its various limitations. Sri Aurobindo considered 'the message of the Gita to be the basis of the great spiritual movement

which has led and will lead humanity more and more to its liberation, that is to say, to its escape from falsehood and ignorance, towards the truth’.

Mostly, those who approach the Gita need the help of commentaries in order to have a clear understanding of the various ideas presented therein. But the number of commentaries on the Gita is huge, and each commentator has a different view to present, especially when it comes to the philosophical and metaphysical concepts. For example, the concepts of *Moksha* or liberation, *Karma* or action, *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, Avatarhood, rebirth, and the individual soul are a few of the ideas of which one finds many differing interpretations in the available commentaries. There has not been a single commentary, other than Sri Aurobindo’s, that offers an integrated and flawless view of the various concepts of the Gita.

There has always been a need for a comparative study of the commentaries on the Gita with special reference to Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita*. And this need has been partially fulfilled by the recently published book *The Concept and the Destiny of the Individual in the Bhagavad Gita: As Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo*, written by Dr Mitra Chatterjee. This book offers a genuine understanding of a few key concepts of the Gita in the light of Sri Aurobindo. Significantly, the author has made a sincere attempt to make a comparative study of the interpretations of most of the great scholars from the past, such as Sankara, Ramanuja, Sridhara Swamin, and so on. It becomes clear from this book how the same concept has been interpreted so very differently by various commentators, yet no one has provided satisfactory answers to the questions concerned with the various concepts found in the Gita.

In its presentation, Dr Chatterjee’s book first shows the various views stated by the traditional as well as some of the modern commentators, and the shortcomings thereof. Then the author very convincingly presents her central thesis that the completeness of the Gita’s views on the various concepts discussed here has been beautifully brought out by Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gita*.

Dr Chatterjee deals with the concept of *Purusha*, the concepts of *Prakriti* and *Maya*, and the concept of *Jiva* in the first chapter of the book. The concept of liberation in different systems of philosophy and then in the Gita has been treated in the second chapter, along with the concept of Avatarhood. In Chapter Three she

deals with the *Karmayoga*, *Jnanayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga* of the Gita. The final chapter is concerned with the synthesis of the Gita’s triple path of *Karma*, *Jnana* and *Bhakti* in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

The introductory chapter of the book has been drafted brilliantly to provide a clear-cut idea of the whole presentation. The most remarkable part of this section is the precision with which Dr Chatterjee summarizes the views of all the philosophical traditions of India on the concepts of the individual self and its destiny. Personally, I would have appreciated a glossary including brief notes on the several commentators mentioned by the author, and also an index appended to the book. However, this book by Dr Mitra Chatterjee will be of great help to those who are genuinely interested to go deep into the subject of the individual self and its destiny as presented in the Gita and to understand it in the light of Sri Aurobindo in comparison to traditional commentators.

— Sampadananda Mishra  
*Sampad is presently working at the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. As part of his work he is exploring, through his research, the many wonders and splendours of Sanskrit and sharing these with others through his workshops, lectures, and writings.*

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### **The Mother: Her Miraculous Touch**

— Photographs of the Mother and quotations from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo  
Publisher: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication  
Department, Pondicherry  
ISBN 978-81-7058-970-9  
585 pp, Rs 1250  
Size: 22x28 cm  
Binding: Hard Cover (2 volumes)

Have you ever stood before a painting that attracted your attention and felt as you concentrated upon it that you were actually entering the picture, while a warmth and a sweetness captured you entirely? You may experience such a feeling as you turn the pages of this book and stop at a certain photograph, drawn in by its charm.

A warm and hearty welcome to this recently published book in two large volumes. Here are sixteen chapters; note the special number—that of the four aspects of the Mother plus the twelve Powers put out for her

work. It is truly a pictorial biography of the Mother, beginning with her childhood, and depicting through numerous photographs her multifarious activities. What is most valuable, refreshing and enchanting is the fact that the story is recorded in her own words and often in Sri Aurobindo's, revealing to us her divine manifestation undergoing the vicissitudes of earthly life, rejecting nothing that can be transformed, and teaching us how every activity and state of being can be perfected here for the divine manifestation.

Behind all lasting work I believe a great deal of preparation is needed. As the old rhyme goes:

Little drops of water, little grains of sand,  
Make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land.

So it has been with this book. It has taken nearly twenty years of labour, involving as many workers, both skilled and dedicated, for this collection to see the light of day. An added bonus is seven quotations drawn from previously unpublished letters of the Mother.

The extracts that accompany the photographs are inspiring words of advice and prayers that I feel are mantras. In places the quotes are simple down-to-earth words of wisdom meant for childlike folk:

A good deed is sweeter to the heart than a sweet  
in the mouth.  
A day spent without doing a good deed is a day  
without a soul.

and

To the rich God gives money, to the poor He  
gives Himself.

And on the other hand there are in abundance messages to spur us on and kindle an intense aspiration, such as this one which I have newly translated so as to be closer to the original French:

To know at each instant how to be reborn to a  
new life is the secret of eternal youth.

Yes, this is a book for all of us, *sadhaks* both young and old. Many of the photos are of interest to those who would like to have a glimpse of how the Mother initiated so many of the Ashram's activities. The photographs of the Mother in her various moods lead us, as we concentrate on her, to see behind the human form her divine presence. Let me point out for those not so familiar with the spiritual significances given to

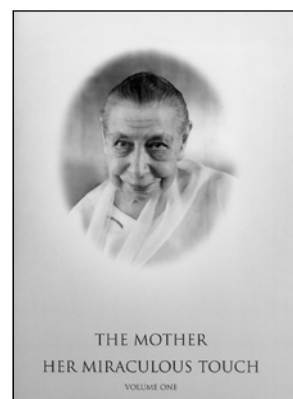
flowers that below the title on the opening page of each chapter there is an outline of the little flower known as Moses-in-the-boat (*Rhoeo spathacea*). The Mother gave the significance of this flower as the "Divine Presence" that supports all we do here and, as she says along with the meaning, "hides from the ignorant eye its ever-present magnificence".

I was struck by the short sentence in the Mother's beautiful handwriting on page 189: "Read with your heart and you will understand." Later, I thought one could say in a similar vein: look intently with your soul and you will be more receptive. I believe this is truly a book for introspection as well as for ready guidance.

Perhaps we can say that this is a book to grow with, as well as a digest of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's teachings to refer to in times of need, for if our aspiration is ardent, with each reading we see the distant goal draw closer. Of course it is true that for each of us the experience must be different and unique; I believe that is the beauty and the wonder of this yoga of ours!

What a joy and spontaneous ease radiates from those around the Mother in so many of these pictures. In the expression of those showing their work to her there is the sense of something done in dedication and expressing the beauty of their love. This, I feel, reflects the happy state Sri Aurobindo describes for us: "to be close to her is a profound happiness and to feel her within the heart is to make existence a rapture and a marvel."

And yet she was, is and will be always ahead of us, looking forward towards future realisations. I remember that for the 2<sup>nd</sup> December programme in 1955 she chose to stage "The Spiritual Destiny of India". It was a seven-hour performance, so long indeed that some children could go to sleep during the practice and be woken up before it was time for them to go on stage. Well, it was after the dress rehearsal, which was for us more important than the actual day, since it was at the dress rehearsal that the Mother gave her comments, suggestions and above all her lavish





appreciation. As she stood in the Playground talking to Udar, Vishwanath and Chandubhai, I happened to be standing nearby when I heard her say: “So what shall we do next year?” This took me absolutely by surprise as I thought that nothing could be better than what we had done! This is how she was and is, always surging forward, urging us towards new achievements and greater heights of consciousness.

The Mother was, and will be, with each of us different in a special way. I recall a memorable image from the past. It was again in the Playground, with all of us, young and old together, waiting, I believe, for the March Past to begin. I noticed the Mother standing to one side talking to a couple of American businessmen, or so it seemed to me, for the Mother, by her unusual expression and distinctive hand movements looked just like an American corporate woman!

On another occasion, also in the Playground, two senior *sadhaks*, whose names I would not like to mention, had such a heated argument that they came to the Mother, each asserting that the other was in the wrong. As she listened intently to them, I was astonished to see the two disciples becoming quieter and quieter. They finally left without a word! Such was and is the Mother’s silent action. In fact, she confided once to a disciple that in the silences and long pauses during her talks she was able to give much more of her force than while speaking.

I would like to draw the prospective reader’s attention to the message, written in Sri Aurobindo’s own hand, which appears in facsimile on the last page of the second volume. Identifying himself with the Mother he writes: “I am the Shakti of Sri Aurobindo alone, and the Mother of all my children.” This reminds me of his translation of a single paragraph of the Mother’s prayer dated November 28, 1913. The Mother had written in French, “O Divine Master, grant that today may bring to us a completer consecration to Thy Will.” Sri Aurobindo, with a most natural simplicity, began his translation: “Mother Divine, grant that today may bring to us a completer consecration to Thy Will.” A real divine *lila*! What a unique manifestation has been sanctioned for the earth, and for man!

Even from a human point of view, everything she did was original. For instance, I’m told that when she went for occasional long drives in her car, she would ask Pavitra to go as fast as possible, remarking that then

she could relax better. It seems too she would observe a person’s feet as he or she approached and was able to get an idea of the individual’s nature. Evidently once a person stood in front of her, she saw only the soul, its need and its response. This reminds me of the personal experience I had when as a young boy I approached her. I could never observe anything around me in the Meditation Hall while going to her. When I stood in front of her and looked into her eyes, her gaze penetrated so deep, so deep in me that it was slightly scary. Sometimes it was the other way around, and I felt I was descending down through her eyes so far that it seemed it would never end!

As we pass through this difficult phase in our collective life, these twin albums can certainly help to guide us. For on a small scale we see that she had established a unified and united Ashram. The Mother knew the solution for a true and lasting unity when she remarked: “if only man consented to be spiritualised”. Now the world’s difficulties have truly become ours.

*Excerpts from a previously unpublished letter of the Mother (page 427):*

*All that I do, I do it consciously and in accordance with the deep truth manifested in all things.*

\*

*There is nothing in the world that does not signify something or rather each circumstance in life has a significance. What is needed is to go deep enough in the being to discover it...*

During the two decades (1947–1967) when a large number of these photos were taken, the Ashram was little more than an intimate group of disciples; “small is beautiful”, as they say. People knew each other. There was a simple harmony, a sense of belonging to the Mother and the delight of being at her service. Now we are no longer a limited community; we are indeed a multifaceted and complex ensemble. Throughout this book we can discover the ways to establish an integral harmony based on a true understanding, an inner affinity and a complex unity. And if we try to look at things from the Lord’s terrestrial perspective, let us not forget what Sri Aurobindo wrote in his essay titled “Is India Civilised?”, when he warned against losing “the harmony of the inner and outer man which is the true meaning of civilisation and the efficient condition of a true progress”.

I feel the Mother is leading us towards a solution: to allow our consciousness to rise above the individual relation with her and begin to contact her universal aspect so as to see things and people and events with that wider vision. Finally, we can realise the third step of identification by communing with the reaches of her transcendent aspect. Let us take off from this springboard so as to reach the happy Sunshine reflected throughout these albums.

I would like to end with the final paragraph of that message in Sri Aurobindo's hand appearing on the last page of the second volume: "It is the unity of all in the

solidarity of a common manifestation that will allow the creation of the new and divine world upon the Earth. Each will bring his part, but no part will be complete except as a power in the solidarity of the whole."

— 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.*

ONE of the new books introduced in this issue is the two-volume set titled *The Mother: Her Miraculous Touch* (see the review on page 15). Through the nearly 500 photographs and the accompanying quotations from the

show her with the disciples, with the schoolchildren, visiting Ashram departments, coaching the actors in the annual drama, playing tennis, and attending the various sports activities. In these photos, where she is the magnetic centre of everyone's attention, one sees and feels quite vividly, on the faces of those gathered around her, the effect of her spiritual influence on their lives.



The Mother at the opening of Harpagon Workshop, 26.4.54.  
Chandrakant is seen here, third from right.

writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the book depicts in images and words the various aspects of the Mother's life and evokes the far-reaching scope of her work. For those who lived through those days in the 1940s and 1950s, these volumes stir wonderful memories and for those who've read or heard accounts of life with the Mother as she moved so freely among her children, they exert a strong emotional pull as well. Many of the photos

We asked Chandrakant M. Patel, who often appears in these photographs as a young man, to go through the volumes and share with us some of the memories evoked by these photographs. Chandrakantbhai was born in 1925 and first visited the Ashram with his family in 1940. After completing his studies, he eventually settled here in 1947. Even while still a visitor, he began to work at Harpagon Workshop, where he continued for many years. Today, at the age of eighty-six, he remains very active. He looks after the Engine Maintenance Service, is in charge of a cycle repair department and a farm called

Highland, and has responsibilities for the Ashram's theatre. Chandrakantbhai was kind enough to share his reminiscences, in writing and in conversation. Some of these memories date back seven decades; they are recorded here as he recalls them now. His narration is typical of his practical nature, straightforward and to the point. The headings and the comments in square brackets have been provided by the editor.

## The Miraculous Touch of the Mother

When I was asked to go through these books and relate some stories connected to the photographs, I wasn't sure how to begin. All those years we just worked for the Mother, played sports, went to meditation, without thinking of this or that. I certainly never thought then that one day I would be asked to write some reminiscences! But the pictures did bring back some strong memories. Let me start with tennis, as there are many photos of the Mother at the Tennis Ground.

### At the Tennis Ground

In 1948 it was decided to start playing tennis, and two courts were to be built as approved by the Mother. The work started on the eastern side of the allotted portion of the seafront property taken on lease. The first court was ready in three to four months' time, and it was always known as the "first court". While these tennis courts were being made ready, we used makeshift arrangements to practice tennis in the Playground. We took coconut string for a net, tying one end to a window and running the string across to the other side, to be tied around a brick resting on a tripod of sticks. Everyday we would mark the court lines with our feet. And so we started learning how to play tennis.

When the court in the Tennis Ground was ready, we started our play there. Those who wanted to play had to bring a racquet and two balls. All were required to remain at the ground after play to do work: fill up any small pits and holes with red earth, water them, and finally go over the repaired spots with a big heavy roller that had to be handled by six or seven people. Only then could everyone go home.

Now the second court was ready, made of red earth like the first one. When the Mother was informed, she said, "I will also play!" So the



Chandrakantbhai, December 2011

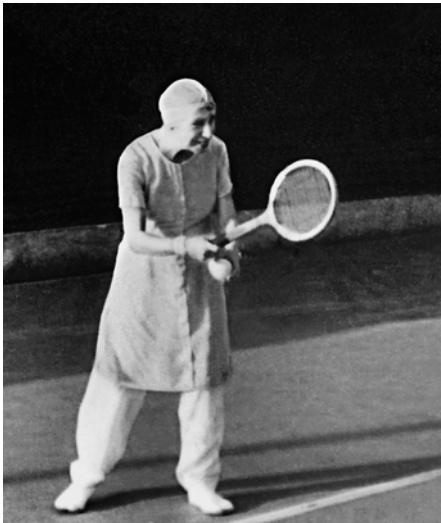
first red earth court was converted to a cement court, with a slope of four inches from the net to the service lines to allow the rainwater to drain off quickly. If it rained we would sweep the court and wipe it with cloths to prepare it for the Mother to play. She always played on the first court, with Pranab as her doubles partner.

She would come to the Tennis Ground around 4:30 p.m., but during the athletics competition season she would come at 3:45 so she could reach the Sportsground by five o'clock. Birthday persons would be called to play first. The set was five games, the Mother starting and finishing with her service games.

Once two or three of us asked the Mother, "How should we play with you?" The Mother said, "Each time I give a stroke, I pass on the energy to the opponent. How much they receive and return—it all depends upon them."

I was having long rallies regularly, but in April 1956, Udar one day counted the number of strokes in each rally during my game with the Mother. As she was preparing to leave the Tennis Ground, Udar told her, "You just had a rally of 114 strokes with Chandrakant!" This exchange of crosscourt forehands may have been a record.

When the cement courts were completed, tournaments were arranged. I was a hard server and striker of the ball. One day, after about three months of playing tennis, my wooden racquet head became loose and shaky. It was difficult to control the ball, and I felt it would be dangerous to play with the Mother using such a racquet.



Now if I went to the Tennis Ground without a racquet, she would still call me to play—and I would have to borrow one from somebody. If that racquet head gave way like mine did, I had no means to replace it. So I decided to just keep to my Harpagon work and stop going to the Tennis Ground. After two or three days, the Mother asked the others, “Why is Chandrakant not coming?” No one knew what to answer as I had not told anyone of my predicament. After another two days, when I went upstairs to see the Mother at my daily time of eight o’clock in the morning, she asked me, “Why are you not coming to play with me?” “Mother, the top of my racquet has become loose and shaky and I cannot control my shots.” “No!” she replied, “You come and I will give you a racquet.” So I went to the Tennis Ground that evening, and when the Mother arrived, she turned to Pranab and asked for her racquet. She then gave me her own racquet and after that, every year on my birthday, she gave me her old racquet and took a new one for herself.

After some time, the Mother noticed that the sea had begun to wash away the land at the Tennis Ground and this might affect the courts. So she asked for a wall to be made. Concrete piles with a tapered end were cast and driven into the sand about sixty feet away from the tennis courts. The space between this foundation and the courts was filled with earth and topped with river sand. The Mother used to take exercise by walking along this corridor. Later, a wall was erected over the foundation.

In 1949 the athletics competition started at the Tennis Ground. Basketball courts, a boxing ring, and a wrestling pit were also made ready there. In 1951 the convention to inaugurate the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre was held there under a huge tent. When the Sportsground was ready in 1951, all the athletics items were shifted there.

### Energy to work

After Sri Aurobindo left his body, the Mother gave Darshan blessings from her chair just opposite to the small Darshan room in the Meditation Hall upstairs. From sometime in 1951 or 1952 up to

1959, on the four Darshan days each year, I stood near that chair and fanned the Mother with a round fan made of peacock feathers. This continued all through the Darshan, for hours without stopping, fanning only with my right hand.

Many had experiences where they could work for hours and hours without feeling tired. Mother gave us the energy to work! One instance stands out for me. You know that Sri Aurobindo’s room was renovated in the late 1940s. The room was in disrepair and the walls had to be replastered, so it was decided to renovate the whole room and make new furniture at the same time. The Mother told us that the new furniture, made mostly of rosewood, must be ready by a certain date. Udar gave the designs for the furniture and instructed the carpenters. A small group of us did the sandpapering and polishing at night. I remember Biren-da was there helping us. We did our regular work each day



and then worked at night, for six full days, without rest or sleep. When the Mother heard that we were working through the night, she sent us plates of dried fruits and sweets, and we felt full of energy to do the work! When all was ready, we carried the furniture upstairs and installed it in Sri Aurobindo’s room. Sri Aurobindo had temporarily shifted to the southernmost room, the upstairs Meditation Hall, and so was not disturbed by our work in his room.

I remember walking to Cazanove Garden in the late 1940s, when machinery there needed to be repaired.

We would walk there, a distance of a few kilometres, carrying our tools, work until noon, walk back to the Dining Room for our meal, then walk back to Cazanove and work until four o'clock. We thought nothing of all this walking. It wasn't "exercise" for us; it was just doing our work! We didn't start using cycles to move around until 1951 or 1952.

### Football

I always seem to come back to sports! In this photo Mother is kicking a football at the Sportsground, sometime in the 1950s. Back in 1948–9 we young men played football in the military ground in Uppalam, where the Indira Gandhi Stadium is now. In the evenings a group of us – Amiyo, Ranju, Kanak, and others too – would literally run, barefoot, to the ground. We made two teams and played our game, then ran back for our meal at the Dining Room. I quickly washed my legs and feet and sat down to eat. As I was late, I would take my milk and vegetables and eight slices of bread, break up the four slices in each bowl and then add water to both the milk and the vegetables to cool them down so I could eat as fast as I could. Then I rushed off to the Ashram for evening meditation with the Mother.

Once in conversation Mother came to know I didn't have any football shoes. She told me she wanted to buy me the shoes. My friend Manubhai was standing just behind me at the time and later he said, "Why should Mother have to spend? Let's go to the bazaar and purchase them ourselves." So we went and got the shoes. After some time, Mother remembered that she had promised to buy the shoes for me. I told her we had already got them. "But I want to give you", she told me. So she handed me Rs 50, five new ten-Rupee notes. I purchased the shoes and went to the

Mother with the bill. She saw the change in my hand and said to me very sweetly, "No, no. Keep it with you—eat chocolate."

During the 1950s the Ashram football team played games against outside teams. We were known as the



best team, and sometimes our opponents used dirty tricks against us. There was an incident with one team. Two or three of their players would charge and deliberately kick the ball against our bodies—things like that. When Mother came to hear, she stopped all outside matches.

### Early visits to the Ashram

I first came here in 1940 when I was fifteen. We had come from Bombay for the November Darshan. We stayed in a rented house next to the bakery. It was called Acharya House and was owned by an old blind man.

Before the Darshan I thought I would ask for blessings for success in my studies, but when I went up and stood in front of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, my mind went completely blank! After that I came on my own every year during my school and college vacations, for about five weeks.

My routine in April and May 1941 was like this. I got up early and went to the Ashram for Window Darshan. At about 5:45 a.m. the Mother would open the shutters of one of the Salon's windows (on the first floor) and look out at us for three or four minutes. *[Over the years, the timing for the Window Darshan kept getting later in the morning; it was eventually discontinued.]* Then at 6:30 or 6:45 I went for Balcony Darshan; we all stood on the road on the north side of the Ashram building and waited for Mother to come out of Pavitra's room onto the balcony. She would stand there and slowly look all around at each one of us, shifting her gaze from one to the other. That lasted about five minutes. After that, I hurried to the Dining Room for my food and my work, which was to wipe the vessels. I remember

one Bhismadev also did this work with me. He was a very good singer but unfortunately lost his voice later on.

At about ten o'clock in the morning I went back to the Ashram for Terrace Darshan. We all stood in the Ashram courtyard and waited for Mother, who came and stood on the terrace above Dyuman's room. After a few minutes she would climb the stairs and take a walk on the upper terrace. Chinmayi went with her and held the Mother's parasol.

During the rest of the day, I prepared for the coming year's studies. At about four o'clock I went to the seaside, where I took a walk or sat alone until it was time for the evening meal. Then I went to the meditation in the Ashram, after which I went home and read until 9:30 or 10:00, and finally to sleep. This was how I passed my days.

There were hardly any organised activities back then as neither the school nor group activities had started yet. But I do remember that in early 1943, before the school actually started, Manubhai (Albert's brother) would sit on the verandah of an old house in the Playground compound and tell stories to some four or five young children. [*Manubhai also told stories to a few young children in a room inside the Ashram compound around this time.*] So maybe you could say that this was, in a way, a sign that we would soon have a school!

Like this, I came alone every year during my vacations. I worked in the Dining Room for two or three years, then in the electric service for one year, and after that Mother sent me to work at Harpagon.

### Saris and dhotis

In between my vacation visits, we made a journey to Pondy for a special reason. During World War II there were many restrictions on goods. It was 1943 or 1944, and there were no saris or dhotis to be distributed to the *sadhaks*. The Mother told Dyuman to ask my father Manibhai to arrange. Through his contacts in Bombay, Manibhai managed to get the required goods at the Kalbadevi Market. He then bought four metal trunks, which we made look all battered and old so as not to draw the attention of the officials. If we'd been caught, we would have got

into serious trouble as things like cloth were strictly rationed. We boarded the train at VT station in Bombay with these four trunks and by Mother's grace all went smoothly. We passed through everywhere – even the customs at the Pondicherry/Tamil Nadu border – without any questions put to us. As we had telegraphed our arrival time, we were met at the station and taken to the Ashram. We delivered the trunks to Dyuman. The Mother was very happy and when we went to her, she gave us blessings. That same night we went straight back to Bombay.

### No difference

Here's an amusing anecdote from the old days, I think it was in 1946. During the evening meditation, the ladies would sit on one side in the Ashram courtyard and the men would sit on the other side. Our Shanti Doshi used to go and sit right in the middle of the group of ladies. They got upset and complained to Nolini-da, who told the Mother. Mother answered firmly that she made no difference between *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* here! There were no more complaints.

### 15 August 1947

In late June 1947, Mother decided to hold a special celebration for the Lord's birthday that 15 August, as that was to be the date of India's independence from Britain. Dyuman, who was involved in organising the celebrations, told the Mother that he needed someone to help with the arrangements for the Ashram main building. So it happened that on 1 July my father received a letter from Dyuman, in which he wrote that Mother had said, "Ask Chandrakant to come." The very next day I left Bombay for Pondicherry by train. When I arrived I met the Mother, who told me to work with Dyuman. I was asked to hang coloured electric lights on the trees inside the Ashram and to string coloured paper flags on the outer walls of the compound. I remember that Tulsibhai was in charge of setting up a big tent in the Playground to accommodate the visitors. Some bamboo and string cots were provided for sleeping, and mats as well.

This day also saw one of the saddest events in the Ashram's history. Many people had come to the Ashram for the celebrations, but in the streets riots

were started by those who were against the Ashram. It was the evening, it was dark, and most of us were inside the Ashram compound. Suddenly stones were being thrown over the wall at us and some people were getting injured. Purani was standing at the main gate. I insisted on going out to pick up some stones to use in our defence. Outside, I looked to my left and saw Mulshankar, who had been caught in the melee and stabbed. When I saw him, he was standing in the street near the Rosary Gate, beckoning for help. He had been attacked while returning to the Ashram after seeing a friend in the Playground where the tent was set up. I ran to help him. I tried to stop the bleeding by applying pressure with my left hand over the wound on the right side of his neck. As I could not lift him that way and still plug the wound, I switched hands and wrapped my right arm around him, got a better grip, and then carried him towards the Ashram main gate. As we approached, those near the gate thought I had caught one of the local rioters, and they began shouting, "maaro, maaro! (hit him!)" I cried out to them, "Mulshankar! Mulshankar!" When they realised who it was, they immediately took him inside, to Dyuman's room. The Mother was informed. Pavitra-da telephoned the French doctor. Then Mulshankar was carried to the garage and taken in the Mother's Ford car to the General Hospital, where he soon died. You'll remember, Mulshankar was one of Sri Aurobindo's attendants. This tragedy came as a great shock to all of us.

### Theatre work

There are a few pictures of the stage at the Playground that was used for the annual 1<sup>st</sup> December drama. This was before we had our theatre. Mother asked me to take charge of constructing this stage from Dayakar, who had an injury and could not do that work any longer. The stage was built with big iron girders. I don't remember how we even lifted those heavy girders into place. It took eight to ten days to erect the stage with the help of nineteen workers. We used corrugated iron sheets for the roof. We built wings at the side, hung curtains, and

erected galleries at the opposite end of the Playground. After the event we would take it all apart and store the components until they were needed again.

This went on for six or seven years, until the Ashram theatre was ready. That property, which had been a godown for storing groundnuts, was purchased and renovated as a theatre, with a projection room, green rooms, etc. We used to go there in the evenings and with hammers break down the old walls before the renovation could begin. Ashram engineers made the designs for the theatre. I worked on the renovation and then remained in charge of all the arrangements for the stage. You know, the Mother never allowed an open fire to be used in any production. Instead, we used a light bulb with cellophane streamers when a fire was required for the play!

### Ever vigilant

As you know, the Mother came regularly to watch the events at the Sportsground. This book has many photos which show her there. When I saw the pictures of the shot put event, I remembered an incident. Once I was at the Sportsground, standing near the Mother and watching the shot put event. As the thrower was about to release the shot, the heavy metal ball slipped from his hand and headed in the Mother's direction. I moved forward in front of her and stopped the shot, pushing it down to the ground.



The stage at the Playground during the drama on 1 December 1954.  
The Mother is seated in the centre.

You also see lots of photographs of the Mother visiting Ashram departments—the Press, Handmade Paper Factory, the School, etc. I remember once the Mother went to Honesty Engineers and Contractors. I also went there. As the Mother got out from her car, she asked me stay and guard her purse, which she had left inside the car. So I did not go inside with the others, but remained there by the car to guard her purse. I did not let anybody come near the car!

During the anti-Hindi agitation in 1965, there was a lot of trouble in the town and bad feeling towards the Ashram. The Ashram Post Office was even set on fire. We arranged for Ashramites to stand guard on the rooftops of several Ashram houses, holding torches. One blink of the torch meant “all clear”, two blinks meant there was some movement on the streets below, and three blinks meant danger. On this signal, I would jump into our jeep with my crew and rush to the scene. That jeep is still being used today.

#### **Sweet memories**

These are a few memories, very short, that came to mind while looking at the photographs. You may like to hear them.

I stayed for a while in Golconde. I used to climb up to the roof terrace to put my clothes to dry. From there I could see the Mother walking in her room on the second floor. She walked very fast, sometimes fifty or sixty rounds of the northern part of her room. Pranab would walk by her side.

One early morning on my way to the Sportsground, I saw some pretty pink flowers. I liked them very much and thought I would cut a bunch and offer them to the Mother. I cleaned them carefully, removed all the thorns, and then gave them to her. She asked me if I knew the meaning of that flower. I said I didn't, that I just liked it. She then told me the significance of the flower was “Not to Tell a Lie”!

*[In the books on flowers the significance is recorded as*

*“Never Tell a Lie”, but it is known that the Mother would sometimes change the wording slightly depending on the person she was speaking to.]*

One day, the Mother's watch stopped while she was playing tennis. She took it off her wrist and handed it to me to fix. I tried a few movements, but unfortunately it still did not start.

Sometime in 1954–5, while observing me walking at the Tennis Ground, the Mother remarked to Priti (Das Gupta) that I had a “perfect walking style”. Of course, I was very happy to hear this when it was conveyed to me.

During a visit to the Ashram Poultry, the Mother saw the huge compressor on the ground nearby. She asked me why it was lying there, and I said there were no workers to help me remove it. She then gave me very detailed instructions: first I must make a good road, then build a shed, and only then bring the machinery to the site for whatever work was required. I was amazed at her knowledge of these things and into how much detail she went to explain everything to me.

#### **A final note**

To end I will share two very personal stories. They are connected. The first happened in 1973. I remember the date exactly. It was 12 February at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Mother called one of her attendants and told her, “I saw Chandrakant in the supramental world—young, bright, throbbing with energy.” The Mother then asked her attendant, “Does he believe all this?” and when she said, “Yes”, then Mother said, “Go and tell him.”

The second happened in 2009. On 15 February I had an experience: I was waiting for the Mother to come. When she did, she told me to follow her. We moved along quite far until we came to a huge gate. The gates slowly opened and everything behind was golden and bright—a sheer expanse of golden light.

— Chandrakant M. Patel