CHAPTER – III

THE BEGINNINGS: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

This chapter provides a brief sketch of Sri Aurobindo’s life, his prolific writings, his Philosophy of Spirituality and yoga, the contribution of his followers to the world of Literature and the unique mission and aim of Auroville: the dream world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was a revolutionary, poet, philosopher, writer, and Spiritual master. Despite his fascinating life he was skeptical of any biographies saying “No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for man to see” (On Himself: 5). Yet his writings and outer life give a profound glimpse into the life of this unique spiritual master.

Sri Aurobindo paved a new approach to yoga, which he termed “Integral Yoga”. Unlike the Yogis of old he felt yoga and spirituality need not involve retreating from the world. Sri Aurobindo wished to bring the Divine into all aspects of life. For the last 40 years of his life he worked tirelessly for this goal of bringing down a new spiritual consciousness (Mathur 1985: 8).

We are Sons of God and must be even as he (Savitri). Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was born on 15th August 1872, to an anglicized father Dr Krishnan Ghosh. He wanted his children to be schooled in English, therefore at the age of seven Aurobindo was sent to study in England. Aurobindo studied first at St Paul’s, London and then at Kings College, Cambridge. Life in England was often tough for Aurobindo; resources were meager and for many years he had to often survive on a frugal diet. However he proved to be a scholar of great intellect and capacity. He mastered the classics and
English poetry (later he wrote extensively on the English poets). The famous don Oscar Browning declared Aurobindo one of the greatest scholars he had seen. It was at the Cambridge University that Aurobindo first became aware of the plight of his country, at the time under the rule of the British Empire. Aurobindo became inspired to join a society committed to overthrowing the British rule. This period was an important landmark in Aurobindo’s life. With his new political perspective he turned down an opportunity to join the British civil service. He had passed all his exams but failed to turn up for the obligatory horse riding test. Therefore at the age of 21 he returned to India increasingly committed to working for Indian independence (Kalaamani 1990: 10-11).

**Sri Aurobindo the Revolutionary**

On his return to Indian soil Sri Aurobindo was overwhelmed with a feeling of intense inner peace. This experience came unsought and was an indication of his future spiritual capacity. However at the time Sri Aurobindo’s main concern and passion was political independence of his beloved motherland. Sri Aurobindo threw himself into revolutionary politics, associating with the great figures of Bengal such as Bipin Pal and B.C Chatterji. He was dismayed with the weakness of Congress and argued for direct action aiming for complete independence. Through his journal *Vande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo was the first leader to call for the full independence for India.

For several years Sri Aurobindo was a pivotal figure in the movement for independence. He had the qualities of a natural leader but was always happy to work in the background as much as possible. It was during this period that Sri Aurobindo also became increasingly interested in Yoga and Meditation. Whilst engaged in
spiritual disciplines, Sri Aurobindo came across a teacher of meditation, Lele Maharaj. He taught Sri Aurobindo how to control thoughts and not let them enter into his mind. Sri Aurobindo followed his instructions to the letter and within 3 days he succeeded in completely emptying the mind and entered into a state of nirvana. This same experience had taken Lele Maharaj over six years to attain nirvana. Lele Maharaj was amazed at the progress of the young Aurobindo. However it was the political struggle which held the greatest sway on Aurobindo, the freedom of India was his primary concern. After a fatal incident involving revolutionaries, Aurobindo became a marked man. In 1908 he was arrested for the possession of weapons and was held in jail for a year before his case came to court. His trial became a major event with much attention placed on the incident. The evidence against Aurobindo was quite weighty and he feared he would be convicted. However Aurobindo was fortunate to have C.R.Das as his defence lawyer. C.R.Das threw himself heart and soul into Aurobindo’s defence. To Aanal Kiran, is commitment and capacity meant Sri Aurobindo felt completely assured and did not have to even concern himself with his own defence (Mathur 1985: 23-24).

The Spiritual Mission of Sri Aurobindo

By a curious stroke of fate it was in a British jail that Sri Aurobindo began to be seriously awakened to the inner life. Confined to his own prison cell Sri Aurobindo was able to practice meditation and read about the ancient principles of yoga, undisturbed by outer commitments. Sri Aurobindo began to have profound meditations. Entering into higher realms of consciousness he became aware of the omnipresence of God. As Sri Aurobindo himself said,
I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Amongst these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances.

(The Uttarpura Speech, 30 May 1909).

It was also in prison that Sri Aurobindo was visited by the soul of Swami Vivekananda, who instructed Sri Aurobindo about the workings of the super consciousness which was above the mind. Sri Aurobindo also became aware of a divine inner guidance that was never to leave him. From this divine source he was given an Adesh “inner command” that henceforth he should not worry about politics. India would gain her independence in due course but this would be achieved by others. The task, for Sri Aurobindo was the renewal of “sanatana dharma, the eternal religion.” To pursue this spiritual task it was necessary for Sri Aurobindo to leave the political arena. In his own words Sri Aurobindo said of his mission (Ghosal 1989: 30).

We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves…
It is the spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex. (Savitri).

After gaining a dramatic acquittal Sri Aurobindo was released, but was still pursued by the British, who considered him “the most dangerous man we have to reckon with…” It was around this time that he again came into contact with Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and fellow revolutionary. She warned Sri Aurobindo of the dangers he was in. After a while Sri Aurobindo followed another “Adesh” to move to the French province of Pondicherry. At Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo was able to dedicate himself fully to his spiritual disciplines. Despite frequent requests to return to politics, Sri Aurobindo spent much of his time in meditation becoming more aware of the supramental consciousness. Through his practice of Yoga Sri Aurobindo also gained the capacity to be a prolific writer producing many articles, writings and poetry. Gradually spiritual seekers began to be attracted to Pondicherry and so an informal ashram began to be set up. Significant moment in the life of Sri Aurobindo and the fledgling ashram was the arrival of a French woman, Mirra Richards, who would later be affectionately known as the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Mother, instantly recognized Sri Aurobindo as the one who had been guiding her sadhana (spiritual practices). In turn Sri Aurobindo entrusted the organization of the ashram to the Mother and under her guidance, which continued for nearly fifty years, the Ashram grew into a dynamic spiritual community. Sri Aurobindo Ashram still flourishes today and has a unique character in the sense that it does not involve retreating from the world. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:
The way of Yoga followed here has a purpose different from others, - for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter (Savitri).

Sri Aurobindo was a rare combination of poet, philosopher, writer and spiritual Master. During his time in Pondicherry he wrote several books explaining his view on Yoga and Spirituality. His most notable exposition was perhaps in “The Life Divine” which is a comprehensive explanation of his integral yoga. Sri Aurobindo was also a noted poet. Many of his poems are vivid and soulful portrayals of his supramental experiences. For example, “Only the illimitable Permanent is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still. Replaces all, - what once was I, in It A silent unnamed emptiness content Either to fade in the Unknowable Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.” (last verse of Nirvana by Sri Aurobindo)

In November 1926 Sri Aurobindo would retreat from Ashram life, (he felt this withdrawal was necessary to be able to complete his work.) However he spent many hours every day carefully replying to the letters of his disciples. These letters were an opportunity to explain his yoga and how it applied in particular situations. With good humor and great compassion he was able to relieve the fears and anxieties common to many seekers. Sri Aurobindo's letters show great wisdom and he often displayed a good sense of humor as he said himself:

A God who could not smile could not have created this humorous universe,

(On Himself: 33).

It is rewarding to read these letters and also stories by disciples such as Dilip Kumar Roy who maintained a long and fruitful written communication with his Guru.
In these letters and other writings Sri Aurobindo gives an insightful look into the play of cosmic forces that work unseen behind external circumstances. Although distanced from any direct involvement in politics Sri Aurobindo still took a keen interest in political events from around the world. In particular he saw in Hitler and Nazi Germany a great threat to the whole of civilization. Therefore at the outbreak of the Second World War, Sri Aurobindo, the former revolutionary against the British Empire, came out with his full public support for the Allies and their cause. Some Indians who still saw Britain as the main enemy did not always appreciate this decision. However although Sri Aurobindo was a prolific writer he felt his main task was to bring down a new consciousness, which would usher in a new era where spirituality and truth were given a higher profile. But Sri Aurobindo went to great pains to say he did not wish to bring about a new religion or creed. He strongly advocates this in his article, Sri Aurobindo, On Himself. Regarding this Venkateswara Rao says that

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion - for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature, (Rao 1994: 38).

He offered a new vision of yoga and a spiritual path that could be followed by sincere seekers. However Sri Aurobindo never desired to have a large number of disciples or followers. He admitted his path was not always easy and could be quite
arduous. But to attain a real transformation of one's nature was not possible without maintaining certain spiritual standards and spiritual discipline.

Sri Aurobindo taught that the different world religions were right in their own way. However Sri Aurobindo also stated that there was no need to repeat what had happened in the past. The world is in continuous evolution and there is a need to bring down a higher truth with each age. Continuing the vision of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo sought to combine the best from Eastern spirituality and Western materialism (Mohanty 2005: 57).

I saw them cross the twilight of an age The sun-eyed children of a marvelous dawn... The massive barrier-breakers of the world...The architects of immortality...Bodies made beautiful by the Spirit's light, Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire, Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy (Savitri).

After a short illness Sri Aurobindo entered his mahasamadhi on 5th December 1950. During his last illness Sri Aurobindo refused any major surgery or even to heal himself. He said by leaving his body he would be most effective in continuing his spiritual mission. For Manoj Kumar & Usha Sri Aurobindo's life was of constant service to bringing down a higher ideal and vision.

The vast universal suffering feel as thine: Thou must bear the sorrow that thou claim to heal; the day-bringer must walk in darkest night. He who would save the world must share its pain. If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief's cure? If far he walks above mortality's head how shall the mortal reach that too high path? If one of theirs they see scale heaven's peaks, Men then can hope to learn that titan climb. God must be born on earth and be as man That man being human may grow even as God (Savitri)
The complete works authored by Sri Aurobindo as published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram include”

- Baji prabhu
- The Century of Life
- Chandovalari - A Handbook of Sanskrit
- Crown
- Bande Mataram

Early political writings, most of them editorials and articles from Bande Mataram, a Calcutta daily edited by Sri Aurobindo from 1906 to 1908.

- Hymns To The Mystic Fire Hymns to Agni from the Rig-veda, translated in their esoteric sense, with original Sanskrit text, a Forward, and an essay, “The Doctrine of the Mystics”.
- The Secret of the Veda A Study of the way of writing of the Vedic mystics, their philosophic system, their system of symbols, and the truths they figure; and translations of selected hymns of the Rig-veda.
- The Upanishads Sri Aurobindo's translations of and commentaries on every Upanishad or other Vedanta texts he worked on, with an introduction.
- The Foundations of Indian Culture An exposition of Indian civilization and culture with essays on Indian spirituality, religion, art, literature and polity.
- The Human Cycle -The Ideal of Human Unity -War and Self-Determination Social and political writings: the psychological evolution of human society;
the possibility of the unification of the human race; the problem of war and the self-determination of nations.

- Sri Aurobindo's principal philosophic work, a theory of spiritual evolution culminating in the transformation of man from a mental into a supramental being and the advent of a divine life upon earth.

- The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings All of Sri Aurobindo's shorter prose writings on philosophy and yoga written after 1910 and published during his lifetime.

- Essays Divine and Human Short prose pieces mostly on philosophy and yoga written after coming to Pondicherry and not published during his lifetime.

- The Mother Sri Aurobindo's most famous short work on the Divine Mother, with the letters on his spiritual collaborator, the Mother.

- The Synthesis Of Yoga

Sri Aurobindo's principal work on Yoga; an examination of the traditional systems of yoga and an explanation of his own method of Integral Yoga.

- Letters On Yoga

Three volumes of letters to disciples in which Sri Aurobindo explains his teaching and method of spiritual practice and deals with problems that confront the seeker.

- On Himself

Sri Aurobindo's notes and letters to disciples about his own life, his inner development through Yoga, his spiritual work, etc.

- Collected Poems

Collection of over two hundred poems, lyrics, sonnets, narrative poems, poems in new meters and an essay “On Quantitative Metre”.

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• Collected Plays And Short Stories (Two Volumes)

Dramas of heroism and romance set in India, Persia, Norway and elsewhere.

• The Future Poetry

A survey of the evolution of poetry and its future potential for inspiring men through the rhythmic word.

• Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art

A collection of several hundred letters on the form and substance of poetry, sources of poetic inspiration, rhythm and technique, appreciation of art; etc.

• Savitri: A Legend And A Symbol (Revised Edition)

Sri Aurobindo's major poetic work, an epic in blank-verse of about 24,000 lines in which a tale of the Mahabharata is made a symbol of the human soul's spiritual quest and destiny (Peter Heehs, 1998: 25-33).

The book titled Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo authored by A.B. Purani makes a rough record of what Sri Aurobindo had said in his public talks as the author remembers to have heard. Hence, the author makes it clear that Sri Aurobindo is not responsible for these records as he had no opportunity to see them. So, it is not as if Sri Aurobindo said exactly these things but that he remembers him to have said them.

The Evening-Talks may afford to the outside world a glimpse of his external personality and give the seeker some idea of its richness, its many-sidedness and its uniqueness. Guru-griha-vasa—“staying in the home of the Guru”—is a very old Indian ideal maintained by seekers through the ages. The Aranyakas—“the ancient teachings in the forest-groves”—are perhaps the oldest records of the institution. It was not for “education” in the modern sense of the term that men went to live with the Guru; for the Guru is not a “teacher”. The Guru is one who is “enlightened”, who is a
seer, a Rishi, one who has the vision of and has lived the Truth. He has, thus, the
knowledge of the goal of human life and has learnt true values in life by living the
truth. He can impart both these to the willing seeker. In ancient times seekers went to
the Guru with many questions, difficulties and doubts but also with earnestness. Their
questions were preliminary to the quest.

The Master, the Guru, set at rest the puzzled human mind by his illuminating
answers, perhaps even more by his silent consciousness, so that it might be able to
pursue unhampered the path of realization of the Truth. Those ancient discourses
answer the mind of man today even across the ages. They have rightly acquired—as
everything of the past does a certain sanctity. But sometimes that very reverence
prevents men from properly evaluating, and living in, the present. This happens when
the mind instead of seeking the Spirit looks at the form. For instance, it is not
necessary for such discourses that they take place in forest groves in order to be
highly spiritual. Wherever the Master is, there is Light. And Guru-griha—the house of
the Master—can be his private dwelling place. So much was this feeling a part of Sri
Aurobindo’s nature and so particular was he to maintain the personal character of his
work that during the first few years—after 1923—he did not like his house to be
called an “Ashram”, as the word had acquired the sense of a public institution to the
modern mind. But there was no doubt that the flower of Divinity had blossomed in
him; and disciples, like bees seeking honey, came to him. It is no exaggeration to say
that these Evening-Talks were to the small company of disciples what the Aranyakas
were to the ancient seekers. Seeking the Light, they came to the dwelling place of
their Guru, the greatest seer of the age, and found it their spiritual home—the home
of their parents, for, the Mother, his companion in the great mission, had come. And
these spiritual parents bestowed upon the disciples freely of their Light, their
consciousness, their power and their grace. The modern reader may find that the form of these discourses differs from those of the past but it was bound to be so for the simple reason that the times have changed and the problems that puzzle the modern mind are so different. Even though the disciples may be very imperfect representations of what he aimed at in them, still they are his creations. It is in order to repay, in however infinitesimal a degree, the debt which we owe to him that the effort is made to partake of the joy of his company—the Evening-Talks—with a larger public, (Purani 1970: 10-13).

**Evening Sittings**

Sri Aurobindo was never a social man in the current sense of the term and definitely he was not a man of the crowd. This was due to his grave temperament, not to any feeling of superiority or to repulsion for men. At Baroda there was an Officers' Club which was patronised by the Maharajah and though Sri Aurobindo enrolled himself as a member, he hardly went to the Club even on special occasions. He rather liked a small congenial circle of friends and spent most of his evenings with them whenever he was free and not occupied with his studies or other works. After Baroda when he went to Calcutta there was hardly any time in the storm and stress of revolutionary politics to permit him to lead a “social life.” What little time he could spare from his incessant activities was spent in the house of Raja Subodh Mallick or at the Grey Street house. In the Karma yojin office he used to sit after the office hours till late chatting with a few persons or trying automatic writing. Strange dictations used to be received sometimes: one of them was the following: “Moni (Suresh Chakarvarty) will bomb Sir Edward Grey when he will come as the Viceroy of India”. In later years at
Pondicherry there used to be a joke that Sir Edward took such a fright at the prospect of Moni's bombing him that he never came to India!

After Sri Aurobindo had come to Pondicherry from Chandernagore, he entered upon an intense period of spiritual Sadhana and for a few months he refused to receive anyone. After a time he used to sit down to talk in the evening and on some days tried automatic writing. Yogic Sadhana—a small book—was the result.

In 1913 Sri Aurobindo removed to Rue Francois Martin No. 41 where he used to receive persons at fixed times. This was generally in the morning between 9 and 10.30. But, over and above newcomers, some local people and the few inmates of the house used to have informal talk with Sri Aurobindo in the evening. In the beginning the inmates used to go out for playing football, and during their absence known local individuals would come in and wait for Sri Aurobindo. Afterwards regular meditation began at about 4 p.m. in which practically all the inmates participated. After the meditation all of the members and those who were permitted shared in the evening sitting. This was a very informal gathering depending entirely upon Sri Aurobindo's leisure. When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother removed to No. 9 Rue de la Marine in 1922 the same routine of informal evening sittings after meditation continued. As years passed the evening sittings went on changing their time and often those disciples who came from outside for a temporary stay were allowed to join them and as the number of devotees practicing the yoga increased, the evening sittings also became more popular. The small verandah upstairs in the main building was found insufficient. Members of the household would gather every day at the fixed time with some sense of expectancy and start chatting in low tones. Sri Aurobindo used to come last and it was after his coming that the session would really commence. He came dressed as usual in Dhoti, part of which was used by him to cover the upper part of his
body. Very rarely he came out with Chaddar or Shawl and then it was “in difference to the climate” as he sometimes put it. At times for minutes he would be gazing at the sky from a small opening at the top of the grass-curtains that covered the verandah of the upstairs in No. 9 Rue de la Marine. How much were these sittings dependent on him may be gathered from the fact that there were days when more than three-fourths of the time passed in complete silence without any outer suggestion from him, or there was only an abrupt “Yes” or “No” to all attempts at drawing him out in conversation. And even when he participated in the talk one always felt that his voice was that of one who does not let his whole being flow into his words; there was a reserve and what was left unsaid was perhaps more than what was spoken. What was spoken was what he felt necessary to speak. Very often some news-item in the daily newspaper, town-gossip, or some interesting letter received either by him or by a disciple, or a question from one of the gathering, occasionally some remark or query from him self would set the ball rolling for the talk. The whole thing was so informal that one could never predict the turn the conversation would take. The whole house therefore was in a mood to enjoy the freshness and the delight of meeting the unexpected. There were peals of laughter and light talk, jokes and criticism which might be called personal,—there was seriousness and earnestness in abundance.

These sittings, in fact, furnished Sri Aurobindo with an occasion to admit and feel the outer atmosphere and that of the group living with him. It brought to him the much-needed direct contact of the mental and vital make-up of the disciples, enabling him to act on the atmosphere in general and on the individual in particular. He could thus help to remold their mental make-up by removing the limitations of their minds and opinions, and correct temperamental tendencies and formations. Thus, these sittings contributed at least partly to the creation of an atmosphere amenable to the
working of the Higher Consciousness. Far more important than the actual talk and its content was the personal contact, the influence of the Master, and the divine atmosphere he emanated; for through his outer personality it was the Divine Consciousness that he allowed to act. All along behind the outer manifestation that appeared human, there was the influence and presence of the Divine. What was talked in the small group informally was not intended by Sri Aurobindo to be the independent expression of his views on the subjects, events or the persons discussed. Very often what he said was in answer to the spiritual need of the individual or of the collective atmosphere. It was like a spiritual remedy meant to produce certain spiritual results, not a philosophical or metaphysical pronouncement on questions, events or movements. The net result of some talks very often was to point out to the disciple the inherent incapacity of the human intellect and its secondary place in the search for the ultimate Reality.

But there were occasions when he did give his independently personal views on some problems, on events and other subjects. Even then it was never an authoritarian pronouncement. Most often it appeared to be a logically worked out and almost inevitable conclusion expressed quite impersonally though with firm and sincere conviction. This impersonality was such a prominent trait of his personality! Even in such matters as dispatching a letter or a telegram it would not be a command from his to a disciple to carry out the task. Most often during his usual passage to the dining room he would stop on the way, drop in on the company of four or five disciples and, holding out the letter or the telegram, would say in the most amiable and yet the most impersonal way: “I suppose this has to be sent.” And it would be for some one in the group instantly to volunteer and take it. The expression very often he used was “It was done”, “It happened”, not “I did”. There were two places where
these sittings took place. At the third place there was no sitting but informal talk to a small number of disciples who were attending him after the accident in November 1938.

From 1918 to 1922 the gathering was at No. 41 Rue Francois Martin, called the Guest House, upstairs, on a broad verandah into which four rooms opened and whose main piece of furniture was a small table 3½ x 1½, covered with a blue cotton cloth. That is where Sri Aurobindo used to sit in a hard wooden chair behind the table with a few chairs in front for the visitors or for the disciples.

From 1922 to 1926 No. 9 Rue de la Marine, where he and the Mother had shifted, was the place where the sittings were held. There, also upstairs, was a less broad verandah than at the Guest House, a little bigger table in front of the central door out of three, and a broad Japanese chair, the table covered with a better cloth than the one in the Guest House, a small flower vase, an ashtray, a block calendar indicating the date and an ordinary timepiece, a number of chairs in front in a line. The evening sittings used to be after meditation at 4 or 4-30 p.m. After November 24, 1926, the sitting began to get later and later, till the limit of 1 o'clock at night was reached. Then the curtain fell. Sri Aurobindo retired completely after December 1926 and the evening sittings came to a close (Purani 1970: 24-39).

*Sri Aurobindo: a Contemporary Reader*-the book written by Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty compiles some of the finest writings of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) — the nationalist, visionary, poet-philosopher. It reflects the range, depth and outreach of the moral, intellectual and spiritual vision of this versatile and multifaceted genius. It aims at providing, at one place, access to the key concepts, tenets, and the spirit of the extraordinary range of texts authored by him.
Although concretely grounded in contemporary times — with its location in a specific socio-cultural matrix — this work projects a body of writings that is certain to have lasting value. In particular, the compilation brings forth Sri Aurobindo’s social vision and his role as a cultural critic: his views on ethnicity, his exposition of the key role language plays in the formation of communitarian identities, his crucial understanding of self-determination which has incidentally become an important aspect of human rights discourse today. Situating the writings in a specific intellectual, spiritual and historical context, this collection will enable readers to appreciate the overall vision of Sri Aurobindo, in what can be conceived as a caravan of history of ideas in terms of a common heritage of humankind, and recent developments in theory and disciplinary practice, especially those pertaining to consciousness and future studies.

**THE MOTHER**

I belong to no nation, no civilization, no society, no race, but to the Divine. I obey no master, no rules, no law, no social convention, but the Divine. To Him I have surrendered all, will, life and self; for Him I am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is His will, with complete joy, and nothing in his service can be sacrifice, for all is perfect delight (The Mother).

**Early years of the Mother**

Mirra Alfassa, more popular as ‘The Mother’, was born on the 21st of February, 1878, in Paris. She was the first Westerner to become an Indian Guru; worshipped by the Indians as a reincarnation of the Divine Mother herself. She was
born to Maurice Alfassa, a banker and Mathilde Ismaloun. Her family was non-religious but she began experiencing spiritual bliss and spell right from the age of five. Her mother found this behavior of Mirra Alfassa very embarrassing. Between the age of 11 and 13, The Mother experienced a sequence of spiritual and psychic experiences.

Mother’s early education was at home; she learnt drawing and painting at a studio in 1892 and later studied at Paris Salon. The Mother was a talented painter and musician. In her late twenties, she traveled to Tlemcen, Algeria and studied occultism from a Polish adept. She returned to Paris in 1906 and worked with various spiritual groups and started giving speeches between 1911 and 1913. When ‘The Mother’ turned 36, she traveled to Pondicherry, India to meet Sri Aurobindo. She got to know of Sri Aurobindo from her friend Alexandria David-Neel who had visited him in 1912. In 1914 The Mother traveled to Pondicherry with her husband to visit Sri Aurobindo. Once she saw him, she realized that he was her mentor whom she has envisioned in her earlier visions and made up her mind to work with him for the rest of her life. She lived in Pondicherry for eleven months and traveled back to France owing to the First World War.

**The Mother at Pondicherry**

The Mother returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and lived there the rest of her life. Sri Aurobindo believed that she was the reincarnation of the Divine Mother and thus named her ‘The Mother’. The Divine Mother is considered to be the feminine aspect (creative energy) of the Divine consciousness and spirit.

Growing number of disciples for Sri Aurobindo led to the birth of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926. The Mother, as Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Shakthi’ helped in
organizing the ever increasing number of followers. From the beginning, The Mother was entrusted the material and spiritual charges of the Ashram. She lived here until she was 95; she left her body on 17th November 1973.

The Mother set up the ‘Sri Aurobindo international centre for education’ in 1952 – this was established to fulfill the wish of Sri Aurobindo in providing a new class of education for the Indian youth. This education centre proved to be a boon for children who came to seek shelter is ashram along with their parents during World War II. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru extended complete support for this cause. The mother founded the international township project of Auroville in 1968, showcasing collective living of all communities.

The mother wore saris as Sri Aurobindo encouraged her in doing so, her collection included 500 saris. She was once offered Rs. 1, 00, 000 for one sari that she wore; this prompted her to sell and distribute all her saris and jewelry to raise funds for the ashram after the Master’s Samadhi. The Mother attached spiritual significance to flowers and presented them to her disciples when they visited her.

**Works of the Mother**

A lot of work by The Mother has been published. The list includes:

**Overview of Works by the Mother:** Quotations taken from introductions to the works in ‘Collected Works of the Moth’

**Prayers and Meditations:** Prayers and meditations selected by the Mother from her diaries of 1912 to 1919. The Mother says of them, “This book is meant for those who aspire for an utter consecration to the Divine”

**Words of Long Ago:** This volume contains works by the Mother before she settled in Pondicherry in 1920.
Questions and Answers: The Mother met with disciples over the years, sometimes after meditation, sometimes for more structured talks and classes. Many of the questions and answers were copied down. These form a large and important portion of the Mother’s detailed instructions on the spiritual life.

On Thoughts and Aphorisms: The Mother’s commentaries on Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts and Aphorisms given over the twelve year period extending from 1958 to 1970.

The Agenda: The Mother had conversations in French with Satprem during the period 1961: 1973. These were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The work of translating them into English still continues. The Agenda forms an important part of the published words of the Mother during this period, and is regarded by many as a key to her later spiritual work.

Notebook on Evolution (compilation): An anonymous, selected compilation of the words of the Mother on transformation, taken from the Agenda.

On the Dhammapada: From August 1957 to September 1958, in a weekly class with the children of the Ashram school, the Mother read from and commented on the Buddhist teachings as contained in the Dhammapada. The Mother based her commentaries on a French translation of the Pali text. The commentaries, given in French, were tape-recorded at the time.

Notes on the Way: Volume 11 of ‘The Mother’s Collected Works’. Comprises conversations of the transformation of the body, documenting Mother’s own experiences from the year 1961 – 1973. This is an unparalleled account of the actual process of supramentalization and the transformation of the physical body.

Sri Aurobindo’s Path-Seekers

Fascinated by Sri Aurobindo’s thought on Philosophy of divine life, scholars/devotees from across India and abroad thronged around Sri Aurobindo. Many of them had even chosen Pondicherry as their second native and began to live over here. During their existence at Pondicherry, almost all of them rendered their writings on wide range of subjects in line with Sri Aurobindo’s thought and Philosophy. As they are hardcore spiritual writings, they are not covered under creative writings in English from Pondicherry. However, their impact over other few creative writers of English from Pondicherry can not be denied. Hence, this section contains a historical sketch of the most reputed disciples of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry from across the globe.


   Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta, the most notable revolutionary, linguist, scholar, critic, poet, philosopher and mystic, was the most senior of Sri Aurobindo’s disciples. He was born in Faridpur, East Bengal, to a cultured and well-to-do family. While in his teens he came under the influence of Sri Aurobindo, then a well-known revolutionary fighting for independence against the British. When in his fourth year at Presidency College, Calcutta, he left a promising academic career and a lucrative Government job to join a small revolutionary group under Sri Aurobindo. In May 1908, he was among those arrested for conspiracy in the Alipore bomb case and Acquitted a year later. After having
spent a year in jail, he worked as a sub-editor for the *Dharma* and the *Karmayogin*, two of Sri Aurobindo's Nationalist newspapers, in 1909 and 1910.

He was taught Greek, Latin, French and Italian by Sri Aurobindo himself, and was among the four disciples who were with Sri Aurobindo in 1910 at Pondicherry. When the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was founded in 1926, he settled permanently in Pondicherry serving the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as Secretary of the Ashram and later as one of its Trustees. As a prolific writer on a wide range of topics, he has about 60 books to his credit, of which about 16 are in English and 44 in Bengali, as well as many articles and poems in English, Bengali and French.

The Mother has said,

He could rise at his will to the sphere of Sat-Cit-Ananda, and also it was said that he had attained the level of Over mind (Reddy 1998: 5-7).

Nolini Kanta Gupta died at Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 7 February 1984. His works include:

- *The Coming Race*
- *Essays on Poetry and Mysticism*
- *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*
- *Light of Lights* (poems)
- *Sweet Mother*
- *Vedic Hymns*
- *Reminiscences* (with K.Amrita)
- *Evolution and the Earthly Destiny*
- *About Woman* (a compilation, ed. by Sacar).
2. A.B. Purani (1894-1965):

Ambalal Balkrishna Purani was a prominent disciple and biographer of Sri Aurobindo.

He was born in the state of Gujarat. A nationalist activist as a young man, in 1923 he joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram on being convinced by Sri Aurobindo that he need not worry about the freedom of India as it was sure to come in time. He was a personal attendant to Sri Aurobindo from 1938 to 1950.

His work, most notably The Life of Sri Aurobindo and Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo, constitutes one of the main sources on the life and sayings of this guru. He travelled extensively to give lectures on the yogic teaching of Sri Aurobindo, visiting the United States in 1962. Some of the lectures are available in book form which includes major works like Savitri and the Life Divine. His Evening Talks throws a major light on the personality of the great master Sri Aurobindo and his multifaceted knowledge.

Lectures on Savitri gives a brief idea about the great epic Savitri.


Pavitra (from the Sanskrit word for 'pure') was one of the very early disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The name was one of Srimati Radharani’s 1000 names. He was born Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire in Paris. In 1914 he graduated from the Ecole Polytechnique with a degree in Engineering. He served in the army in World War I as an artillery officer, and after the war worked as a junior engineer in Paris, at the Ministry of transport and communication.
He was interested in Occultism, and in 1920 departed for Japan to study Zen Buddhism. In 1924 he left Japan and spend time with tantric lamas in monasteries in North China and Mongolia.

In 1925 he came to India and met Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in Pondicherry, where he was accepted as a sadhak. Sri Aurobindo gave him the name Pavitra (“Clearness”). In 1951 the Mother appointed him the director of the just founded Sri Aurobindo International University Center. He served in this position for eighteen years, as well as the general secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram until his passing in 1969. The Mother reports in (Agenda May 1969) that Pavitra left his body in a totally yogic way and merged with her.

According to Satprem “On Pavitra and Pavitra's Death”, Pavitra left some very interesting memoirs of his conversations with Sri Aurobindo and Mother in 1925 and 1926, large parts of which were destroyed. Almost a third of Pavitra's notebooks were maintained by his closest collaborator, with the pretext that it would be “better left unsaid”. What was left was published as Conversations avec Pavitra. The book titled, The message of Sri Aurobindo Ashram is highly commented by the entire international community who are keen and interest about learning about Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Fayard 1974: 3-9).

4. **Sri Dilip Kumar Roy (1897-1980):**

Sri Dilip Kumar Roy was a remarkable truth seeker and God Lover. Through his multi faceted spiritual and artistic qualities, he inspired many to lead a spiritual life of greater harmony, peace and love.

Dilip was rare in combining the keenest intellect with the purest devotion of a Bhakti devotee. Dilip was a brilliant scholar, gaining a Tripos in Maths from Cambridge University. He also maintained a friendship and correspondence with the
great humanist and philosopher Bertrand Russell. However the dazzling academic brilliance of Dilip’s mind did not satisfy his heart’s deepest urge, to experience the presence of God. After a certain amount of deliberation, he forsook a materially prosperous life to enter under the guidance of Spiritual Master, Sri Aurobindo. In his book “Sri Aurobindo Came to Me” He recalls with great humility and openness his joys and trials of being a spiritual aspirant. He fondly recalls the guidance and inspiration of his ever patient and compassionate Guru.

I find it still difficult to decide what it is that drew a flawed mentality like mine to one so perfect in his flowering (referring to Aurobindo.)

Dilip’s rare accounts of his many conversations and letters with Sri Aurobindo give a most welcome insight into the spiritual direction Sri Aurobindo gave to his dearest devotee. This quote from Savitri, selected by Dilip in his autobiography, encompasses the sentiments of his early spiritual tutelage.

O mortal, bear this great world's law of pain,
In thy hard passage through a suffering world
Lean for thy soul's support on Heaven's strength,
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace.
A little bliss is lent thee from above,
A touch divine upon thy human days.
Make of thy daily way a pilgrimage,
For through small joys and griefs thou mov'st towards God (Savitri: 76).

Dilip also maintained close friendship with some of the leading contemporary spiritual and humanitarian figures. In his book “Among the Great” he shares his
thought and interviews with Romain Rolland, the artist; Gandhi, the Saint; Bertrand Russell, the thinker; Rabindranath Tagore, the poet and Sri Aurobindo, the Seer. Dilip was also very close to Sri Krishnaprem a British army officer who fully embraced Vaishanava Hinduism. It is a testament to Dilip’s fully blossomed human nature that he connected with such a diverse range of luminaries.

After the passing of his Guru, Sri Aurobindo; Dilip decided to set up his own Ashram, Hari Krishna Mandir. It was in this last section of his life that Dilip was able to devote his time and soul, to the yoga of Bhakti and devotion. As Sri Aurobindo remarked, about Dilip; “Your destiny is to be a Yogi but an ascetic dryness or isolated loneliness is not your spiritual destiny since it is not consonant with your swabhava which is made for joy, largeness, expansion and a comprehensive movement of the life force - Poetry and music come from the inner being”. Dilip was a supreme singer and musician. His soul stirring songs transport the listener to a realm of heavenly delight, far beyond the domain of worldly thoughts. The source of his music remains a divine mystery but his golden voice unreservedly captures the hearts of those who listen. As Mahatma Gandhi said of him. “I may make bold to claim that very few persons in India – or rather in the world – have a voice like his, so rich and sweet and intense.”

During his life in the Ashram, Dilip most gratefully acknowledged the help and inspiration of his daughter disciple Ma Indira Devi. Indira was a mystic in her own right and devoted to the ideal of harmony, love and devotion. The literary masterpieces of Sri Dilip Kumar Roy are, Sri Aurobindo Came to Me – not strictly his Autobiography, although some people refer to it as autobiographical in nature and “Pilgrims of The Stars” Autobiography of two Yogis, Ma Indira Devi & Dadaji Sri Dilip Kumar Roy.
5. **Champaklal (1903 – 1992):**

Champaklal was the devoted personal attendant to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother for over fifty years. He arrived at Pondicherry on 1921. From 1926 until 1938 he was the only other person apart from the Mother to see Sri Aurobindo on a daily basis. While his service to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, helping devotees seeking the Mother's blessings, and various other tasks, took up much of his time, he still found time to paint, and he was encouraged in this by the Mother. His most notable work is, *Champaklal Speaks* Pondicherry: Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press in 1975.

6. **Indra Sen (1903 - 1994):**

Indra Sen was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, psychologist, author, educator, and the founder of Integral Psychology as an academic discipline. Sen was born in the Jelum district of Punjab (now part of Pakistan), but grew up in Delhi when his family moved there. From a young age he was interested in the spiritual quest. He completed a Master's degree in both Philosophy and Psychology from the University of Delhi. On 5 December 1928 he married Lilawati, and they had two children. To further his studies, he enrolled at the University of Frieburg, in Germany, and obtained a Ph.D in Psychology. He also attended the lectures of Martin Heidegger and taught Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit at the University of Koenigsburg. at this time, his main interests were Hegel’s philosophy, and Jung’s psychology. He later returned to the University of Delhi. In December 1933 he met Jung when the latter visited Calcutta for the Indian Science Congress. Sen went on to become the President of the psychology section of the Indian Science Congress.
Congress, and was also a recipient of the Eastern-Western psychology lecture award of the Swami Pranavananda Psychology Trust.

In 1934, he first travelled to Pondicherry with a friend, Surendranath Jauhar, and he met Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. After a number of visits, his wife became a devotee of The Mother. In 1945 Dr Sen resigned from the University and moved to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where his family had already been staying for two years. In following years, through lectures, published writings, and personal contacts, he presented Sri Aurobindo's work to academia and universities, where it became well known for the first time in a series of professional papers published from the mid 1930s through the 40s and 50s, he coined the term Integral psychology, to describe the psychological observations contained in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga psychology and philosophy. He also was concerned with the formulation of integral education as presented in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. His papers, which were sent to Sri Aurobindo and later The Mother, before being presented at scientific congresses or published in Ashram journals. It was however not until 1986 that these papers were published, by the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in book form, as *Integral Psychology: The Psychological System of Sri Aurobindo*. This has since been issued in a second edition. The field of Integral psychology was later taken up and developed by Haridas Chaudhuri when he founded the Integral Counseling Psychology program at what is now the California Institute of Integral Studies, in the 1970s.

Another of Dr Sen's tasks was to develop three centers for the ashram under The Mother's supervision. One was at Jwalapur, near Haridwar, and the other two in the Kumaon hills- “Mountain Paradise”, an orchard, and “Tapogiri”, a place for Sadhana (spiritual practice). The last mentioned especially, he was very committed to.
In all Dr Sen's work, themes of integral and wholeness were very important, and he frequently used terms like “Integral Culture” and “Integral Man”. He observed that in Indian psychology “the theoretical and the practical motives of life are combined” and was critical of psychoanalysis for not being interested in the problem of emotional life as a whole.

7. **Nirodbaran (1903 – 2006):**

Nirodbaran or “Nirod” for short was the personal physician and scribe of Sri Aurobindo, and senior member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He graduated from Edinburgh University with a degree in Medicine. He was told about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother by Dilip Kumar Roy while in Paris. In 1930 he visited the Ashram and met the Mother. He then spent 2 or 3 years practising medicine in Burma, but this work failed to satisfy him. He returned to the Ashram with the intention of practising Yoga, and took up work as the resident doctor. He found to his surprise that poetry was one of the vocations taken up by some of the disciples. As Sri Aurobindo had already withdrawn from the public life of the ashram, he communicated with and instructed the sadhaks via letters, and Nirodbaran entered into a voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (receiving about 4000 letters), who encouraged and guided his attempts at poetry. He published a collection of his poems as *Blossom of the Sun* and *50 poems by Nirodbaran*, which were revised and commented on by Sri Aurobindo.

In November 1938 Sri Aurobindo broke his leg and as a physician Nirodbaran was one of the disciples with medical knowledge who attend him while he recuperated. Later he had published *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (3 volumes), *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* (2 volumes), and his memoir *12 years with Sri Aurobindo*, as well as various volumes of poetry and other writings. In 1994
Nirodbaran was invited to Pitanga Hall in Auroville to speak about his recollections of Sri Aurobindo, ending the strained relations between Auroville and the Ashram that had characterised the two centers since 1979. The enthusiastic response of the Aurovilians to his talk indicated the desire for greater contact with those who, like Nirodbaran, had had direct experience of Sri Aurobindo and Mother (Deshpande 1993: 1-3). Nirodbaran left his body on the evening of 17 July 2006 at the Ashram Nursing Home in Pondicherry. He went peacefully. He was 102. He was buried at the Ashram's Cazanove Gardens at around 4 in the evening of the next day.

8. **K.D. Sethna (1904):**

Kaikhosru Dadhaboy (K.D.) Sethna is an Indian poet, scholar, writer, philosopher, and cultural critic. He has published more than forty books. He is also known as Amal Kiran. Kiran studied at Bombay University and was one of Sri Aurobindo’s earliest disciples, arriving at the Ashram in 1927, age 23, to take up the path of Integral yoga under Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He was named Amal Kiran, or "Clear Ray", by Sri Aurobindo in 1930. His book of poems "*Inmost Beauty*" was published at 1933. In 1949 he was a founding editor of the Journal of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, “*Mother India*” which he edited for almost fifty years. He recently celebrated his centenary at the Beach Office of the Sri Aurobindo Society. Originally, Amal Kiran was born a Parsi-Zoroastrian but, after meeting with Sri Aurobindo, embraced Hinduism. (Deshpande 1994: 2-3). His major Literary works include, *Light and Laughter, Talks on Poetry, India and the World Scene and The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*

9. **M. P. Pandit:**

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M. P. Pandit was a prolific writer, and secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and personal secretary to The Mother. He wrote over 100 books and many articles on the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, social and political thought, science, philosophy, religion, mysticism and the classical texts and spiritual traditions of India (Raja 2-3: 1993).

- Bases of Sadhana,
- Bases of Tantra Sadhana,
- Commentaries on Sri Aurobindo's Thought Vol. 1
- Deathless Rose
- Dhyana (Meditation)
- “Dictionary of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga” (compiler),
- “Gems from Sri Aurobindo First Series” (compiler),
- “Gems from Sri Aurobindo Second Series” (compiler),
- “Gems from Sri Aurobindo Third Series” (compiler),
- “Gems from Sri Aurobindo Fourth Series” (compiler),
- “Gems from the Tantras (Kularnava) Vol. 1” (compiler),
- “Gems from the Tantras Vol. 2” (compiler),
- Heart of Sadhana
- How Do I Begin?
- How Do I Proceed?
- Japa (Mantra Yoga)
- “Kundalini Yoga”,
- Legends in the Life Divine
- Life Beautiful
- Lights on the Tantra
• Mystic Approach to the Veda & the Upanishad
• “Occult Lines Behind Life”,
• Pandit in America
• Pitfalls in Sadhana
• “Sri Aurobindo on the Tantra”
• Thoughts of a Shakra: Yogishananda Natha
• “Upanishads: Gateways of Knowledge”,
• “Vedic Deities”,
• “Vedic Symbolism”
• “Wisdom of the Gita, First Series” (compiler),
• "Wisdom of the Gita, Second Series" (compiler, from Sri Aurobindo),
• Wisdom of the Upanishads (compiler)
• “Wisdom of the Veda”,
• “Yoga for the Modern Man”,
• Yoga in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri
• “Yoga of Knowledge”,
• “Yoga of Love”,
• “Yoga of Self Perfection”,
• “Yoga of Transformation”,
• “Yoga of Works”,

Are some of his important works.


Satprem was a French author and an important disciple of The Mother. During World War II he was a member of the French resistance. He was arrested by the Gestapo in late 1943 and spent one and a half years in German concentration camps.
Scarred by the experience, after the war he became interested in the existentialism of Andre Gide and Andre Malraux. He travelled to Egypt and then India, where he worked briefly as a civil servant in the French colonial administration of Pondicherry, on the Bay of Bengal. There he discovered Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and their "new evolution". He resigned from the civil service, and went in search of adventure in French Guiana where he spent a year in the Amazon (the setting for his first novel L'Orpailleur (The Gold Washer), with his copy of Sri Aurobindo’s the _Life Divine_ then Brazil, and after that Africa.

In 1953, aged thirty, he returned to India and Pondicherry to put himself at the service of The Mother and settle in the Ashram. He taught a little at the Ashram school, and was in charge of the French copy for the quarterly Bulletin of the Department of Physical Education which was The Mother's publication which is still printed in English and French. During this time he met his companion Sujata Nahar. Then travelled once more to Congo, Brazil, Afghanistan, Himalayas, New Zealand and sailed round the world before once again returning. On 3 March 1957, The Mother gave him the name Satprem ('the one who loves truly'). Satprem remained restless and dissatisfied for some years, torn between his devotion to the Mother and to Sri Aurobindo's teachings and his wanderlust. In 1959 he again left the ashram. He became the disciple of a Tantric, a priest of temple at Ramesvaram. Then as the disciple of another Yogi he spent six months wandering around India as a mendicant sanyasi practicing tantra, which formed the basis of his second novel, _Par le Corps de la Terre, ou le Sanyassin (By the Body of the Earth, or The Sanyasi)._ After this he returned again (as he put it, “the bird flew back once more”), to the Pondicherry Ashram and the Mother, who started inviting him from time to time to her room, originally for work in connection with the Bulletin. As their relationship developed,
he asked more questions, and eventually decided to record their conversations, taking a tape-recorder to her room. The result of this collaboration was *The Agenda*, the first volume of which (which covers 1951 to 1960) also contains Satprem’s letters to The Mother during his wandering days. Also, under The Mother’s guidance he wrote

*Sri Aurobindo, ou l’Aventure de la Conscience (Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness)*, which became the most popular introductory book to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (published in 1964). In 1972 and 1973 he also wrote under the Mother’s guidance the essay *La Genèse du Surhomme (On the Way to Supermanhood)*, which she regarded very highly. This was published in 1974. Satprem relates that on 19 May 1973, six months before The Mother’s death he was barred admission to her room (the beginning of a serious falling out between the Ashram leadership and himself.) Moreover, Satprem and his followers believe there is evidence in the recorded audiotapes that the Mother did not actually die but rather entered a "cataleptic trance" or state of suspended animation in which there would not even be a detectable heartbeat. Satprem recorded a famous conversation between the Mother and Pranab which made Satprem conclude that several Ashram sadhaks did not want the Mother to continue her life. However, Pranab has argued that on the contrary he was very much concerned about the Mother’s health and that he had received precise instructions from her as to what to do when she appeared to have left her body. These instructions, he says, were exactly followed before she was buried in the second chamber of Sri Aurobindo’s Samadhi in the Ashram courtyard under the Service tree, which she herself got prepared after Sri Aurobindo’s departure in Dec. 1950. Georges Van Vrekhem disagrees with Satprem’s claim that the Mother’s work was cut short in those last six months, and argues instead that she did indeed attain a Supramental body and what remained was the residue, like the empty cocoon of a
caterpillar after it has become a butterfly. After the Mother’s mahasamadhi all of Satprem’s correspondence from 1962 to 1973 with the Mother was confiscated, and he fled with the tapes of the Agenda to Auroville, where, at the age of fifty, he edited the 13 volumes of the Agenda, while at the same time wrote the trilogy Mère (Mother) - Le Matérialisme Divin (The Divine Materialism), L’Espèce Nouvelle (The New Species), La Mutation de la Mort (The Mutation of Death) - both a biography of the Mother and his own analyses and commentary on the Agenda material. Satprem became a rallying point for the community shocked by the attitude the ashram leaders had taken. His one-man revolt against the Ashram leadership began in 1974, and involved two issues. One was his wish to publish, unexpurgated, the entire transcript of his talks with the Mother. He saw the resistance of the ashram trustees and elders in this regard as symptomatic of the way they had directed the ashram from 1962 onwards. The other was his claim that under the current leadership the Yoga had become institutionalized and dogmatic, like the yogas of the past. For their part, the elders wished to publish the transcripts but only in edited form. Wherever Satprem saw conservatism and dogmatism, they saw a loyal commitment to their gurus to uphold the original truth of their teachings. During this time, Satprem was looked to by the French-speaking Aurovillians as the successor and inheritor of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's work, and a number of radicals were drawn to him because of his revolt against the Ashram elders. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to get the 13 volumes of the Agenda published by the Ashram, Auroville, and Sri Aurobindo Society presses, Satprem founded the Institut de Recherches Évolutives (Institute for Evolutionary Research) in Paris in July 1977 as a non-profit organisation to do so. Soon after there was an allegation of an assassination attempt against him in August 1976. In December 1977 (or 1978) the Ashram trustees “expelled” him for “anti-
ashram activities” as he attempted to publish the *Agenda*, and he became *persona non grata* in the Ashram. Satprem and Sujata left Pondicherry in 1978. In 1980 Satprem wrote *Le Mental des Cellules* (*The Mind of the Cells*), a synopsis and introduction of the whole Agenda, with many fascinating and important excerpts, written with great passion, even if his frequent Darwinian metaphors hardly bear resemblance to the actual scientific theory of Darwinism. He also refers to personal experiences, including the 1976 attempt upon his life, which he only survived by going into a state of complete non-resistance. In 1982 all thirteen volumes of the *Agenda* were published in French, and Satprem felt he had completed all his external work. The following year, he and Sujata decided to withdraw completely from public life to devote themselves exclusively to Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work of the transformation of the cellular consciousness of the body and realization of the new evolution, and the search for the “great passage” in the evolution beyond Man. The 1985 book *La Vie sans Mort* (*Life without Death*) is a follow-up to *Mind of the Cells*, co-written with Luc Venet, and provides a glimpse of Satprem in his post-Ashram life in this period. After seven years, Satprem emerged and began producing a steady stream of books on his experiences, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teachings, and the future evolution of Man. In 1989, he wrote *La Révolte de la Terre* (*The Revolt of the Earth*), in which he describes his years “digging” in the body. This was followed in 1992 by *Evolution II*, where he asks “After Man, who? But the question is: After Man, how?” In 1994 came his *Lettres d’un Insoumis* (*Letters of a Rebel*), two volumes of autobiographical correspondence. In 1995 he wrote *La Tragédie de la Terre - de Sophocle Sri Aurobindo* (*The Tragedy of the Earth - from Sophocles to Sri Aurobindo*), an urgent message for mankind to take action against the cycle of death. This was followed in 1998 by *La Clef des Contes* (*The Key of Tales*), and in 1999 by
'Néanderthal Regarde (Neanderthal Looks On), an essay on the betrayal of Man in India as in the West. In 2000 followed La Légende de l'Avenir (The Legend of the Future) and in 2002 Mémoires d'un Patagonien - Conte Préhistorique et Posthistorique (Memoires of a Patagonian - Prehistoric and Posthistoric Tale) and La Philosophie de l'Amour (The Philosophy of Love). In 2008, the IRE published his last book, L'Oiseau Doël (The Doël Bird). In 1999, Satprem also started the publication of his Carnets d'un Apocalypse (Notebooks of an Apocalypse) (in French, seven volumes published to date, in English only vol.1, 1973-1978, dealing with the years and his experiences immediately after the passing of the Mother), which records his work in the depths of the body consciousness. Satprem died on April 9, 2007. His companion Sujata Nahar died after him on May 4, 2007, (Fayard 22-24: 2007).

10. Prithwindra Mukherjee:

Prithwindra Mukherjee was born in Kolkata in 1936. He was brought up in Sri Aurobindo Ashram School (at present Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) in Pondicherry. He is the grandson of the Bengali revolutionary Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin). Professional and academic life, Prithwindra started as a teacher of Bengali, French and English language and literature in Pondicherry. He was mentioned by the Sahitya Akademi (New Delhi) manuals and anthologies as a poet before he attained the age of 20. As a specialist of French language and literature, he translated several French authors like Albert Camus, Saint John Perse and Rene Char directly from the original. He moved to Paris with a French Government Scholarship (1966-70). He prepared and defended a thesis on Sri Aurobindo at Sorbonne. Later he served as a lecturer on Indian civilisation and philosophy, producer of several radio features on Indian culture and music for Radio France, and he was also free-lancing as a journalist for the Indian and French press.
His next thesis for Doctorate was supervised by Raymond Aron in University of Paris. It was on the pre-Gandhian phase of India’s freedom fight. His thesis discussed this movement from 1893 to 1918 and its spiritual roots. In 1977, invited by the National Archives of India as a guest of the Historical Records Commission, he presented a paper on Jatindra Nath Mukherjee and the Indo-German Conspiracy in the presence of personalities like Arthur L. Basham and Professor S. Nurul Hasan. Prithwindra's original contribution in this area has been recognised by Professor Amales Tripathi, Bhupendrakumar Datta, Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay, DM.N. Das (Utkal University), Professor A.C. Bose, Samaren Roy, Bhupati Majumdar, and Basudha Chakravarty. Quite a few of his papers on the subject have been translated into major Indian languages. Since his reaching Paris, for a number of years, invited by the literary magazine Desh of Calcutta he published his impressions of Paris life (Paris'ër chithi - Letters from Paris), as well as several cover features including Jatin Mukherjee alias Bagha Jatin, M.N. Roy, Tarak Nath Das, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, French Revolutionary and the Bengali intelligentsia and the poetry-cum-dance genre of the kirtana (on which he has also produced a documentary film). He went to USA as a Fulbright scholar and discovered, especially in the Wilson Papers, scores of files covering the Indian revolutionaries. On returning to France in 1981, he joined French National Centre of Scientific Research in 1981. He was also a founder-member of the French Literary Translators' Association. He retired from there a few years back. He has published as much in Bengali as in French. One of his recent contributions is a documentary film on the musical pillars in the temples of South India (CNRS-Audiovisual, Paris). The eminent author Jacques Attali in his French biography of Gandhi mentions his debt to PM for having revised the manuscripts and collaborated actively (Fayard 2007: 89-91).
The following are his publications

- *Danse cosmique*
  - (trilingual collection of selected poems, published on the occasion of the creation of Correspondences voice (Dawn Upshaw) and orchestra (Berliner Philharmoniker, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle) by the senior French composer Henri Dutilleux: it contains as the first movement PM's 'Danse cosmique', in homage to Shiva Nataraja; Foreword by Jean Biès, éd. Le Décaèdre/ Findakly, 2003

- *Sri Aurobindo, 'Biographies*', Desclée de Brouwer, 2000

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R Y Deshpande (1931):
R.Y. Deshpande was born on 17 April 1931 at Nagapur in Marathawada Maharashtra India. He completed his MSc Physics at Osmania University, Hyderabad. He served as the Research Physicist at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai from 1955-57, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai 1957-80 and at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Berkeley, California USA 1964-65. He headed several Atomic Energy and Space Projects in Advance Technology. He was the Examiner for a number of PhD theses in the field of Solid State Physics. He served as the Director of Amravan Group, Puducherry, for 5 years. Since 1981 he is the Professor of Physics at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He also teaches Astrophysics, Savitri, The Future Poetry, Science and Society. He was the Editor of Mother India, A Monthly Review of Culture, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, from 1996-2004. Presently he is the Senior Editor of Science-Culture-Integral Yoga Web-Magazine founded in Los Angeles.

He has attended Interviews, Talks and Seminars dealing with Social, Spiritual, Scientific and Literary aspects, at different places, including Radio and TV. He gives a number of classes on Sri Aurobindo’s epic Savitri. Having Correspondence with experts in literary field He has written Poems, Essays, Articles, Book Reviews and Comments published in a number of Literary and Cultural Periodicals. His publications include,

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Poetry

- The Rhododendron Valley 1985
- All is Dream-Blaze 1992
- Under the Raintree 1994
• Paging the Unknown 2000
• Passing Moments 2002
• The Birth of Savitri 2003

Prose
• The Ancient Tale of Savitri 1995; 1996
• Vyasa’s Savitri 1996
• “Satyavan Must Die” 1996
• All Life is Yoga 2000
• Sri Aurobindo and the New Millennium 2000
• Nagin-bhai Tells Me 2001
• The Wager of Ambrosia 2002
• India and the New Millennium 2001
• Narad’s Arrival at Madra 2006
• Towards New Age 2007

Edited Prose
• Nirodbaran: Poet and Sadhak 1993
• Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic 1994
• Perspectives of Savitri I 2000
• Perspectives of Savitri II 2001

This ready for Publication

Poetry
• The Joy of Becoming
• Episodes
• Aswapati’s Horses

Prose

• Upon My Honour
• Big Science and India
• Islam’s Contribution to Science
• Savitri’s Initiation into Yoga
• The Ancient Tale of Savitri has been translated into Bengali, Marathi, Tamil

Books under Preparation

• The Radiant Daughter—A Spiritual Biography of Savitri
• Harindranath Chattopadhyaya
• Theories of Evolution
• Savitri’s Yoga for the Conquest of Death
• Globalisation or the Shrinking Sky
• Indo-US Nuclear Deal.

Auroville the Dream World of Sri Aurobindo and The mother

The Vision  In 1954

the Mother had envisioned that there should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where, all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and Misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and
the care for Progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place, Titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organize. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In general, intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life. But in the increase of duties and responsibilities. Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys. They bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position. In this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign Lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value of material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining One’s livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one’s subsistence and for the field of his work. In brief, it would be a place where the relations. Among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, Relations of real brotherhood (Inaugural Speech of the Mother: 1968).

It was in the mid 1960s, however, that the City was concertized when the Mother said, India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth and it is in India that there will be cure, and it is for that I had to create Auroville because from
the spiritual point of view, India is The foremost country in the world. Her mission is to set the example of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo came on earth to teach this to the world (Inaugural Speech of the Mother: 1968). Based on the work and inspiration of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Auroville is intended as a site for the manifestation of human unity in Diversity. As such, it offers itself as a testing ground and laboratory for the next step in human evolution. Auroville took root when the Mother identified, The Banyan tree to be the physical centre of the City. The site is bounded by the sea to the east, the Kaluveli tank to the north, the Tindivanam Road to the west and Pondicherry to the south. Aurovilles Inauguration the Universal Township of Auroville was inaugurated on 28th February 1968 in the presence of 5000 people. Representatives of 124 countries and all the Indian states placed a handful of earth from their homelands in a marble-clad urn near the site of the Matrimandir at the centre of Auroville. This symbolized the creation of the city dedicated to human unity and international understanding. The Mother announced the Auroville Charter.

**Auroville Charter**

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly Spring towards future realizations. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity, (Auroville Charter: 1968).

The Mother envisaged developing Auroville as a township for 50,000 inhabitants with a circular form, covering an area of about 20 sq. km. Auroville
received the unanimous endorsement of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1983. It is now administered under the Auroville Foundation Act (Government of India Act no. 54, dated 29 Sept. 1988) which provides for the preparation of a Master Plan. The Act also provides for the acquisition and transfer of the undertakings of Auroville and to vest such undertakings in a foundation established for the purpose with a view to making long-term arrangements for better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its original Charter and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The relevance of Auroville to the country as a whole is to use all the researches carried out here diligently and with commitment, individually and collectively, in order to raise the overall quality of life. While conceiving the town, the Mother also evolved a form for the township; subdivided into four principal zones namely the Residential Zone, International Zone, Industrial Zone and Cultural Zone. The original sketch drawn by the Mother in Her own hand is the basis for further development of the Auroville Township. At present, the Auroville community has People from almost 40 countries across the globe (Kalladan 2002: 45-56).

This chapter has given a complete picture of the beginning of English writings in Puducherry. The contributions of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and their disciples have been touched upon with a brief sketch of them. The following chapter will look into the contemporary writers in English.