CHAPTER – IV

THE CONTEMPORARY SPROUTS: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

Prior to the critical appreciation of the creative writings to be done in the following chapter, contemporary Puducherry Writers in English have been introduced here each with a detailed profile. This includes a few of Sri Aurobindo’s path – seekers in recognition of their creative writings in English. Many of the writers discussed over here are from other parts of India and even abroad. The contributions of a few faculty members from the Department of English at Pondicherry Central University as well as a few natives of Puducherry are also dealt with in this Chapter.

1. Aju Mukhopadhyay: Aju Mukhopadhyay is a bilingual poet, critic, essayist, biographer, feature and fiction writer. He has 12 books in English and 12 in Bangla. He has five books of poems published in English including the most popular “Water” and “The Paper Boat” besides two in Bangla; three books of short stories in Bangla and one in English besides a novel “In Train” in English. Among his works essays on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother deserve special mention. He has written their biographies in English and Bangla. His forthcoming book is titled- *Sri Aurobindo: The Yogi of Divine Life*.

He edited three little magazines of which two were for short stories. He has broadcast some of his short stories through the All India Radio. One of his short stories was prize. His works, both poetry and fiction, have been highly acclaimed by critics. His next book of short fiction-*the Moments of Life*-is in the press.

He is included as advisor and coordinator in the board of editors of some renowned magazines. He regularly writes in magazines, e-zines and sometimes in newspapers. Quite a few of his works have been translated and included in anthologies.
He was awarded Certificate of Competence as a Published Writer by the Writers Bureau, Manchester, UK. He was awarded the title “Best Poet of the Year-2003” by the Poets International, Bangalore, India and “2007 Editor’s Choice Published Poet” by the International Library of Poetry, USA. His poems are sometimes displayed at the top or among the first few in some websites, like www.asianamericanpoetry.com, www.poetsindia.com and others. He is a member of the Research Board of Advisors of the American Biographical Institute who offered him the American Order of Merit. He works for the conservation of nature and ecology.

2. Manoj Das:

Manoj Das was born in the coastal village of Orissa in 1934, He grew up amidst Nature’s splendor. But he also experienced its fury when a cyclone devastated his area, followed by a famine and an epidemic that killed thousands of people. Added to this, his affluent house was twice plundered by dacoits while Manoj, aged six then, looked on with disbelief. Such ups and downs in life probably enriched his creative mind at its formative stage. And by the time he was in high school, he had already published many works in his mother tongue, Oriya. He taught English in a college at Cuttack before he came over to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963, where he continues to be a Professor at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He started writing in English in the late 1950s and today he can probably be called the foremost bilingual writer in India. Asked he started writing in English, he said,

“... At one stage, I felt inspired to write in English because I was haunted by the feeling that much of the Indian fiction in English that claimed to project the Indian life and situation was not doing justice to its claim. I thought born in a village just before Independence and hence living through the transition at an
impressionable age, I could present through English, a chunk of genuine India”.

(The Times of India May 18, 1980).

He has received many awards including the Padma Shree, Sahitya Akademi Award and the Saraswati Samman. Some years ago, he was given the annual BAPASI Award by the Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India. Does he feel at home in Pondicherry? He feels he is an Indian first, wherever he is. He has lived in Pondicherry for more than four decades. He loves its ambience and has great regard for its people. Manoj Das is a formidable influence on contemporary Oriya literature. But outside Orissa, he is better known as an Indo-Anglian writer. Which of the two aspects of his literary personality would he wish to be remembered for? “That does not depend on my choice,” he said and continued, "I have a wide readership in Orissa. In English I have a trusted and serious readership, but numerically smaller. If the quality of my writing matters, both the streams of my contribution should prove lasting in their own rights”.

(The Times of India May 18, 1980).

In his nearly 300 short stories, Manoj Das has brought about the awareness of the rural Indian life. He has been a crusader against the invasion of India's intellectual climate by decadent values. He has stressed the divinity and psychic splendour inherent in man. No wonder, he has among his admirers celebrities such as Graham Greene, Keating, Dr. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar and so many academicians in the Western world. His work include:

- *Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults*
- *Chasing the Rainbow : Growing up in an Indian Village*
- *Cyclones*
- *The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories*
- *Farewell to the Ghost*
• The Lady Who Died One and a Half Times and Other Fantasies
• Legends of India's Temples
• The Miracle and Other Stories
• My Little India
• Selected Fiction
• Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the 20th Century
• Submerged Valley & Other Stories
• Tales Told by Mystics
• Tiger at Twilight

3. Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala:

Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala was one among the strong associates of The Mother, Mirra Richards. He always had the opportunity of taking down notes of the Mother’s messages for about three years. His diary published in the year 1973 contains all those messages and his intimate relationship with the ashram inmates. He regularly contributes articles on wide range of philosophical concepts to the journal: Arya of Sri Aurobindo’s ashram. He is a regular contributor to Sri Aurobindo’s Action as well. The Wisdom of India and Gleanings From the Ramayana are the widely read books of his.

Down Memory Lane authored by him during his stay in Germany upon his daughter’s request in 1996 is considered to be his autobiography. In this book he aptly shares his personal life, his fascination towards Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, his correspondence with other ashram inmates and his views about philosophy: spirituality and the principles of yoga.

4. Dr. Purushothaman Raja:
Dr. Purushothaman Raja is now serving as Professor of English at Tagore Arts College, Pondicherry. He is a Creative Writer, Translator and Critic who has been conferred the Literary Award (Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 1987), Michael Madhusudan Academy Award (Calcutta, 1991) and Best Poet of the Year Award (Una Poesia Per La Vita, Italy, 2002).

Listed below are his publications in English in each genre up to Dec. 2006. This total number of Publications is: 2834.

**Creative writings:**

- Poems 526
- Short Stories 164
- Folktales (Collected & retold) 492
- Erotic Folktales (Collected & retold) 85
- Articles 369

**Translation of Tamil works by various writers into English:**

- Poems 155
- Prose Poems 10
- Short Stories 61
- Plays 6
- Essays 10
- Riddles 167
- Siddha’s Poems 105
- One-Act Plays 5
**Critical Writing:**

- Book Reviews 286
- Critical Essays (research oriented) 64
- Essays on the culture & History of Pondicherry 167
- Write-ups on Pondicherry based writers 87
- Interviews with Indian English writers 48
- Interviews with Pondicherry writers 27

**Books Published:** So far, he has Authored 20 books for adults and 8 booklets for Children

**Poems:**

- *From Zero to Infinity* (Pondicherry: All India Books, 1989)

**Short stories:**


**Folktales:**

- *Folktales of Pondicherry* (Delhi: Sterling, 1987)
- *Sudden Tales the Folks Told* (Delhi: B.R. Publishers, 1995)

**History:**

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Translations:

The Sun and the Stars (Sivaganga: Agaram, 1982)


Biography & Criticism:

M.P. Pandit: A Peep into His Past (Pondicherry: Dipu, 1993)

Many Worlds of Manoj Das (Delhi: B.R. Publishers, 1993)


Autobiography:

For Your Ears Only (Pondicherry: Busy Bee Books, 1998)

Edited Volume:


5. B.V Selvaraj (IAS):

B.V Selvaraj is an officer of the Indian Administrative Service (AGMU-1981). He has served in various capacities as Collector-cum-District Magistrate, Commissioner and Secretary to Government, Development Commissioner, Relief & Rehabilitation Commissioner, Chief Electoral Officer, Resident Commissioner etc., in the State of Mizoram, National Capital Territory of Delhi, Union Territories of Puducherry and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. He has functioned, in addition, as Chairman & Managing Director of several public sector Corporations, Central deputation in Government of
India, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Registrar of Pondicherry Central University. At present, he is the Administrator of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep.

Poetry Books Published by him are, *Puducheria-1997* (Julienne Selvaraj, Pondicherry), and *Hi-Rum-Cherry-2003* (The Word Publications, Pondicherry.)

6. M.L. Thangappa:

Mathanapandian Lenin Thangappa worked as a School Teacher in High Schools of Tamil Nadu from 1954 to 1959 and in the union Territory of Pondicherry from 1959 to 1968 and as Lecturer in Tamil Language and Literature in colleges of the Union Territory of Pondicherry from 1968 to 1994.


7. Dr. Rita Nath Keshari:
Dr. Rita Nath Keshari joined the Dept.of English, Tagore Arts College Lawspet, Pondicherry in 1997. In July 2005 she was transferred to Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Karaikal, and has been working there since then. Her Publication details are as follows:

Number of Books Reviewed: 30

Number of Critical/Creative and Journalistic Writings published: 750.

Books:


She has also contributed academic articles to several edited volumes. At present she is working on the *Encyclopaedia of Pondicherry (5 Volumes)* with Prof. P. Raja.

8. Themis:

She was a Professor of English literature in St. Xaviers’ College, Bombay when she joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo himself corrected her poems and expressed high opinions about her poetic caliber. She is one of the foremost exponents of mantic poetry as enunciated by Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry published her collected *Poems* in 1994. Poems Written by Themis as contained in her book titled (*Poems by Themis*) include,

- Renewal
• Magdalen
• Reed Of The Yamuna
• Confessional
• Be Mute…
• Yearning
• Unfulfilled Fulfilment
• The Root
• Dream
• Dark Roots
• Your Word
• Memories
• Poets

9. Shyam Kumari:

A bilingual writer, she has written extensively about the devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo to elucidate for the skeptical mind the inner process of recognition of the divine power and the consequent surrender. Her commentary on *Mother’s Prayers and Meditations* is considered to be a classic. She is the author of the following poetry:-

• Sweet Distance
• Mock Me Not
• Silver Solitude
• The Lover’s Lament
• On Completing Fifty-Two Years
• What Am I?
• A Drop
• Scholar!
• Wings Of Dreams
• To Wait
• A Question
• Nothing Withheld
• Prayer Of An Old Mother
• Sri Radhika’s Face

10. K.M. Shantha:

As Professor of English she had twenty years of teaching experience in the government colleges of Pondicherry. She proved to be a specialist in Linguistics, feminist writing and criticism. She had a Ph.D degree in Linguistics. Apart from retelling several folk tales of Kerala in English, she published several poems in “Mirror”, “Indian Express”, “Poet”, “JIWE”, “New Times Observer” and “Youth Age”. She died an untimely death. Her poem include

• January
• Home Of Harmony
• Surya
• Monsoon Patterns
• Gothic Gateau

are the best of her poems.

11. SEEMA DEVI:

A Gynecologist by profession, Dr. Seema Devi is an artist who has solo exhibitions to her credit. Her poems like her paintings reflect her awareness of social evils and also a strong indictment of human apathy. She strives to find answer to many of her queries in her writings

• Contentment- A Flower
• Elegant Journey
• Sublimation
• Never Come To This Garden
• Eternal Call
• Our Ugliness
• I Shall Deface You
• That Morning
• To The Unseen Bird
• You And Me

are the most popular poems of her.

12. Ashalata Dash:

Influenced by her elder sister who is a poet, she began writing poetry at a young age. She was in government service in Orissa and then took voluntary retirement to join the ashram in Pondicherry. K.D Sewthna, the captain of Sri Aurobindonian School of poetry, has witnessed her development as a writer of mystic poetry.

Poems Written by Ashalata Dash are:

• Motherhood Satisfied
• Wishes Have…
• Love
• All-Pervading
• A Surer Communication
• Under Protest
• When Hearts Open
• Muse Beside Me
• An Offered One
• Recurring Deposit
• Blessed Suffering
• Fead And Reveal

13. R. Jayanthi:

A professor of English, she has genuine socialist leanings which do not turn into mere rhetoric in her poetry. The broad range of themes in her poetry indicates her wide reading and general exposure. Here poems have been published in various journals during the last three decades. Her poems include

• Except...
• The Cat On The Wall
• Christmas Eve
• Faustus’ Heirs
• Sati
• The Temple?
• The Singer Or The Song
• Monotony
• Twilight Zone
• Just Another Year..
• Middle Class Dreams

are some of her most appreciated poems.

14. MARIA NETTO:
She has been writing poems, short stories and essays for the last two decades on a variety of themes. Her experience as school teacher has sensitised her to the problems faced by youngsters. Her works have appeared in a variety of women’s magazines.

The best Poems written by Maria Netto as appear in her collection of poetry titled (Tabularasa) are:

- Lament Of The Sleepless Eye
- A Plea For Foresight
- Oppressor
- To A Garland Weaver
- Somalia
- Dreams
- Awareness
- From A Hospital Bed
- The Reluctant Poet
- Theme Of The Mirdangam
- Shadow
- A Tribute To A Working Woman
- Rebirth
- Flame Of Life

15. Dr. Murali Sivaramakrishnan:

Dr. Murali Sivaramakrishnan is a poet, writer, painter and critic. A specialist in Indian aesthetics and literary theory, he received his Ph.D from the University of Kerala (1990).
He is a scholar of national repute deeply concerned with indigenous values and environmental issues. His book *The Mantra of Vision: An Overview of Sri Aurobindo's Aesthetics* has come to be recognized as a valuable contribution to the study of Indian poetics and comparative aesthetics. He has also authored a collection of critical essays on aria studies, South Indian Studies (1998) and three volumes of poems and sketches. His paintings have gone on display at several major exhibitions in India and abroad. He has authored numerous articles on art, literature, and ideas in journals of international repute. His publications include:

- *Image and Event: The Dynamics of Representation* (forthcoming)
- *Ecological Criticism: Application and Possibilities* (co-edited with Ujjawal Jana)(forthcoming)
- *Cries and Whispers: Nature, value, Education* (Essays—forthcoming)

16. Prof. Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan is a Professor of English at Pondicherry University. Her specializations are Indian Writing, Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies and Folklore Studies and Oratures. As an avid translator, she has translated Tamil Folk and Tribal Tales and contemporary Tamil fiction under the title Hundred Tamil Folk and Tribal Tales published by Orient Blackswan, apart from classical Tamil poetry. She believes
that non-conventional writing has tremendous potential for being influential in our times. The Silent One is her debut novel published by penguin.

17. Dr. Clement Sagayaradg Lourdes:

Dr. Clement Lourdes is the associate professor in English at Pondicherry Central University. His area of specialization is Indian writings in English literature and translation studies. In 2008, he published the English translation of some of the short stories of the Puducherry writer Prabanjan a renowned short story writer in Tamil. Apart from this, he has several articles and editorials published in reputed national and international journals to his credit.

18. U.R. Anusha

She is the youngest among the Women poets represented here. With the distinguished career in academics, Anusha is seriously committed to her creative writing. She writes on a variety of social themes and one can detect strains of feminism in her literary output.

- Independence And After The Posture Of Liberty
- The Individual Among The Crowd
- On Death
- Cry Of A Woman
- The Prostitute’s Song
- The Blood Sucker
- To Loss

are some of the master pieces of this young poet.

19. B. Sankar

Mr. Sankar is the youngest of all creative writers discussed here. At present, he is Pursuing Doctorate in English at Pondicherry University under the guidance of Clement
Lourdes, Associate Professor in English. He is an Artist and Poet who has written hundreds of Poems in Tamil and More than 80 Poems in English which are as Manuscripts. Soon, his collection of Poetry in English is anticipated to be published. His Poems titled “The Killer Sea” written after devastative Tsunami in December 2004, had been included in the book Confluence and got published. He worked for his PhD on the fascinating topic: “Power of Horror: Occult and Rational in select novels of Bram Stocker and Indira Soundarajan: A Comparative study.”

As the Contemporary sprouts had been introduced here including a few of Sri Aurobindo’s path – seekers in recognition of their creative writings in English each with a detailed profile, the following chapter would critically study the contribution of each to different genres of creative writings in English such as poetry, short stories and fictions, novels and autobiography.