

## **Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta - A Pilgrim's Trail**

**Original Bengali Book - "Kolkatay Sri Aurobindo Smrititirtha" written by Anshuman Banerjee**

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### **About the Book**

The book "Kolkatay Sri Aurobindo Smrititirtha" by Anshuman Banerjee is a collection of stories of the sites where Sri Aurobindo lived and worked in a tumultuous time marked by the Bengal Partition and the few years thereafter. The most relevant portions of this book have been translated into English and compiled in this book "Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta - A Pilgrim's Trail". Most quotes in Bengali have been translated into English. However, should there have already existed a quote translated into English by the concerned author, the same has been used in the book.

Under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo, the political scene in India took the shape of a full-scale non-violent, non-cooperation and passive resistance movement after the Bengal partition in 1905. The centre stage of Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary activities for the freedom movement was Kolkata, between 1906 and 1910 which Anshuman Banerjee has highlighted through the places in the city he lived in. This would not have been possible without the vigour and tireless efforts of Joyadi who was then the secretary of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture.

"Sri Aurobindo and Calcutta Memorial Committee" was created with Prof Nishith Ranjan Ray as the President. The objective of this committee was to set up plaques in places of Kolkata where Sri Aurobindo had lived, in order to preserve the memories of his revolutionary activities and also to spread awareness about the contributions of all the associated freedom fighters of this glorious era.

Initially, Sri Aurobindo's plaques were unveiled on 2nd May at 6 Bankim Chatterjee Street, 4 Shyampukur Lane and 102 Sri Aurobindo Sarani. This date was selected as Sri Aurobindo had been arrested on this day from 102 Sri Aurobindo Sarani. In the same year, ten more plaques were put up in different locations associated with his life. The formalities and work related to this process were extremely challenging. It will be relevant to quote a few incidents pertaining to this:

Joyadi was initially not allowed to enter the house of 12 Wellington Square, by the security. She went to Surendranath College, approached the person concerned with the maintenance of the house and procured the keys. To her dismay, she found that the entire house was in a very bad condition, with heaps of garbage lying all around. A local 'Rickshaw Puller' came to her rescue, who in turn involved other residents of that area in the massive task of cleaning the entire place. Everyone was fascinated with Joyadi's sweet but strong personality.

The house at Chhoku Khansama Lane had been difficult to locate. Joyadi had to take a lot of pains before she got the approval to enter the premises and procure some important documents. Shri Purnendu Sengupta helped a lot in this direction. A secret tunnel was discovered behind a book rack inside the house!

Another daunting task was to approach the house at Muraripukur due to the foul smell, filth and garbage in the surrounding area. Joyadi with her strong determination took up this challenge and found that a major portion of the house had caved in. Therefore, the plaque had to be established in a park adjacent to the house, after getting it enclosed by railings, with the support of the local councillor. The house at Grey Street (Sri Aurobindo Sarani) had been demolished. Consequently, the plaque was put up in a nearby suitable location.

From the incidents mentioned above, we can get a glimpse of Joyadi's dedication in accomplishing this great task. She had to approach and officially correspond with different people including authorities of Calcutta University and Municipal Corporation. There were financial issues which she handled in a practical manner. Joyadi received cooperation and respect from all corners due to her charisma and magnetic personality.

There are no remains of the house in Muraripukur, but in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case, Sri Aurobindo was arrested from this place, that is, from the office of 'Nabashakti'. The plaque at Muraripukur will remind everyone about Sri Aurobindo's contributions towards India's freedom movement.

In this book, Anshuman Banerjee has beautifully portrayed the historical significance associated with the locations of the established plaques. He has meticulously selected the incidents from various sources and highlighted the Bengal Freedom Movement. He has skilfully shown the transformation of Aurobindo Ghose the revolutionary to Sri Aurobindo the seer and yogi. The book has rare information and valuable historical facts.

The writer has been able to weave the reconnection between Sri Aurobindo's worldly life and his superhuman power. There is a perfect combination of the sweet, light moments and the grave, solemn incidents of his life. For example, when Sri Aurobindo got married, a poem named "Mrinale Aurobindo" had been published by his in-laws. The mention of such unknown anecdotes has brought Sri Aurobindo closer to the hearts of people.

In the year 1903, Sri Aurobindo had met the young revolutionary Abinash Bhattacharjee and had looked into his eyes for a long time, which according to Abinash was, as if he wanted to know him inside out! Later Sri Aurobindo had mentioned that during this time, he was mostly meditating. It has also been mentioned that the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission had helped in preparing the youth of Bengal. In this context, an interesting incident had taken place - when Sri Aurobindo had been arrested from the house at Grey Street, the police found a clay pot with soil, which they claimed was material for preparing bombs and started rejoicing! It was actually soil collected by Mrinalini Devi from Dakshineswar.

Towards the end, Banerjee has expressed his concern about the fact that we tend to forget the past in order to give place to the present. But for people and organisations loving history, this endeavour will be of great significance. That the efforts had been recognised by one and all has been proved by the related article published in Anandabazar Patrika on September 23, 1990.

The plaques that have been established will have far reaching effects on the recollection of Sri Aurobindo, and publishing this book will be a concrete step towards reinforcing this memory.