

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXI

No. 3

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE UNSEEN INFINITE

Arisen to voiceless unattainable peaks  
I meet no end, for all is boundless He,  
An absolute joy the wide-winged spirit seeks,  
A Might, a Presence, an Eternity.

In the unconscious dreadful dumb Abyss  
Are heard the heart-beats of the Infinite.  
The insensible midnight veils His trance of bliss,  
A fathomless sealed astonishment of Light.

In His ray that dazzles our vision everywhere,  
Our half-closed eyes seek fragments of the One:  
Only the eyes of Immortality dare  
To look unblinded on that living Sun.

Yet are our souls the Immortal's selves within,  
Comrades and powers and children of the Unseen.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 150)*

# THE UPANISHAD IN APHORISM

## The Isha Upanishad

FOR the Lord all this is a habitation whatsoever is moving thing in her that moves.

Why dost thou say there is a world? There is no world, only One who moves.

What thou callest world is the movement of Kali; as such embrace thy world-existence. In thy all-embracing stillness of vision thou art Purusha and inhabitest; in thy outward motion and action thou art Prakriti and the builder of the habitation. Thus envisage thy being.

There are many knots of the movement and each knot thy eyes look upon as an object; many currents and each current thy mind sees as force and tendency. Forces and objects are the forms of Kali.

To each form of her we give a name. What is this name? It is word, it is sound, it is vibration of being, the child of infinity & the father of mental idea. Before form can be, name & idea must have existed.

The half-enlightened say “Whatever form is built, the Lord enters to inhabit”; but the Seer knows that whatever the Lord sees in His own being, becomes Idea and seeks a form and a habitation.

The universe is a rhythmic vibration in infinite existence which multiplies itself into many harmonies and holds them well ordered in the original type of motion.

Thou lookest upon a stone and sayest, “It is still.” So it is, but to the sense-experience only. To the eye that sees, it is built out of motion and composed of motion. In the ordered repetition of the atomic movements that compose it, consists its appearance of stillness.

All stability is a fixed equilibrium of rhythm. Disturb the rhythm, the stability dissolves & becomes unstable.

No single rhythm can be eternally stable; therefore the universe is an ocean always in flow, and everything in it is mutable & transient. Each thing in Nature endures till the purpose of Kali in it is fulfilled; then it is dissolved and changed into a constituent of some other harmony.

Prakriti is eternal, but every universe passes. The fact of universe endures for ever, but no particular world of things can last; for each universe is only one rhythm out of an infinite number of possible movements. Whatsoever system in Nature or of Nature is thoroughly worked out, must give place to a new harmony.

Nevertheless all world and everything in world is eternal in its essential being; for all essential existence is Brahman without end or beginning.

Forms and names are also Brahman and eternal; but, in world, theirs is an eternity of recurrence, not of unbroken persistence. Every form & every idea that has once been, exists still and can again recur; every form or idea that is to be, already exists

and was from the beginning. Time is a convention of movement, not a condition of existence.

That which inhabits the forms of Kali is Self and Lord of the Movement. Purusha is master of Prakriti, not her subject; Soul determines Form & Action & is not determined by them. Spirit reflects in its knowledge the activity of Nature, but only those activities which it has itself compelled Nature to initiate.

The soul in the body is master of body and not subject to its laws or limited by its experiences.

The soul is not constituted by mind and its activities, for these also are parts of Nature and movements only.

Mind and body are instruments of the secret all-knowing and omnipotent Self within us.

The soul in the body is not limited in space by the body or in experience by the mind; the whole universe is its habitation.

There is only one Self of things, one soul in multitudinous forms. By body & mind I am separated even from my brother or my lover, but by exceeding body & mind I can become one with all things in being & in experience, even with the stone & the tree.

My universal soul need no more be limited by my individual mind and body, than my individual consciousness is limited by the experiences of a single cell in my body. The walls which imprison us have been built up by Prakriti in her movement and exist only in her inferior kingdoms. As one rises higher they become conventional boundaries which we can always stride across and, on the summits, they merely mark off compartments in our universal consciousness.

The soul does not move, but motion of Nature takes place in its perfect stillness.

The motion of Nature is not real or material motion, but vibration of the soul's self-consciousness.

Nature is Chit-Shakti, the Lord's expressive power of self-awareness, by which whatever He sees in Himself, becomes in form of consciousness.

Every thing in Nature is a becoming of the one Spirit who alone is Being. We and all things in Nature are God's becomings, sarvabhutani.

Although there are to world-experience multitudinous souls (Purushas) in the universe, all these are only one Purusha masked in many forms of His consciousness.

Each soul in itself is God entirely, every group of souls is collectively God; the modalities of Nature's movement create their separation and outward differences.

God transcends world and is not bound by any law of Nature. He uses laws, laws do not use Him.

God transcends world and is not bound to any particular state of consciousness in the world. He is not unity-consciousness nor multiple consciousness, not Personality nor Impersonality, not stillness, nor motion, but simultaneously includes all these self-expressions of His absolute being.

God simultaneously transcends world, contains it and informs it; the soul in the body can arrive at the God-consciousness and at once transcend, contain and inform its universe.

God-consciousness is not exclusive of world-consciousness; Nature is not an outcast from Spirit, but its Image, world is not a falsity contradicting Brahman, but the symbol of a divine Existence.

God is the reverse side of Nature, Nature the obverse side of God.

Since the soul in the body is eternally & inalienably free, its bondage to egoism, law of bodily nature, law of mental nature, law of pleasure and pain, law of life and death, can only be an apparent & not a real bondage. Our chains are either a play or an illusion or both play & illusion.

The secret of our apparent bondage is the Spirit's play by which It consents to forget God-consciousness in the absorption of Nature's movement.

The movement of Nature is a sevenfold flow, each stream subject to its own law of motion but containing latent, expressed or half-apparent in itself its six sisters or companions.

Nature is composed of Being, Will or Force, Creative Bliss, Pure Idea, Mind, Life and Matter,—Sat, Chit or Tapas, Ananda, Vijnanam, Manas, Prana and Annam.

The Soul, Purusha, can seat itself in any of these principles and, according to its situation, its outlook changes and it sees a different world; all world is merely arranged and harmonised outlook of the Spirit.

What God sees, that exists; what He sees with order & harmony, becomes a world.

There are seven worlds, Satya, of pure being, Tapas, of pure will or force, Jana, of pure delight, Mahas, of pure idea, Swar, of pure mentality, Bhuvah, of pure vitality, Bhuh, of pure matter.

The soul in Sat is pure truth of being and perceives itself as one in the world's multiplicity.

The soul in Tapas is pure force of divine will & knowledge and possesses universe omnisciently and omnipotently as its extended self.

The soul in Ananda is pure delight and multiplies itself in universal self-creation and unmixed joy of being.

The soul in Mahas is pure idea, perceives itself in order and arrangement of comprehensive unity in multiplicity, all things in their unity & each thing in its right place, time and circumstance. It is not subject to the tyranny of impressions, but contains & comprehends the objects it knows.

The soul in Manas is pure mentality & receives the pure impression of separate objects & from their sum receives the impression of the whole. It is Manas that measures, limits & divides.

The soul in Prana is pure vitality & pours itself out in various life-energy.

The soul in Annam is pure matter & forgets force of consciousness in the form

of consciousness.

Matter is the lowest rung of the ladder and the soul that has descended into Matter tends by its secret nature & inevitable self-impulsion to reemerge out of form towards the freedom of pure universal being. These are the two movements that govern world-existence, *adhogati*, the descent towards matter or mere form and *urdhwagati*, the ascent towards Spirit and God.

Man is a mental being, *manu* or *manomaya purusha*, who has entered into a vitalised material body and is seeking to make it capable of infinite mentality & infinite ideality so that it may become the perfect instrument, seat and temple of the manifest *Sacchidananda*.

Mind in the material world is attentive to two kinds of knowledge, impacts from outside, corporeal or mental, received into the individual mentality and translated into mental values and knowledge from within, spiritual, ideal or mental similarly translated.

Inert physical bodies receive all the impacts that the mind receives, but being devoid of organised mentality, retain them only in the involved mind in matter and are incapable of translating them into mental symbols.

Our bodies are naturally inert physical bodies moved by life & mind. They also receive all impacts, but not all of them are translated into mental values. Of those which are translated, some are rendered imperfectly, some perfectly, some immediately, some only after a longer or shorter incubation in the involved mind in matter. There are the same variable phenomena with the internal knowledge. All the knowledge translated here into mental values forms the stuff of our waking consciousness. This waking consciousness accepted by the *manomaya purusha* as itself & organised round a central I-sense is the waking ego.

The Jiva or embodied mental being is in its consciousness much wider than the waking ego; it has a wide range of knowledge & experience of the past, present and future, the near & the distant, this life & other lives, this world & other worlds which is not available to the waking ego. The waking ego fails to notice many things & forgets what it notices; the Jiva notices & remembers all experience.

That which goes on in our life-energy & bodies below the level of waking mind is our subconscious self in the world; that which goes on in our mind & higher principles above the level of our waking mind is our superconscious self. The waking ego often receives intimations, more or less obscure, from either source which it fails to trace to their origin.

Man progresses in proportion as he widens his consciousness & renders ever wider & finer experiences available for the perception & delight of the waking consciousness & in proportion as he can ascend to higher reaches of mind & beyond mind to ideality & spirit.

The swiftest & most effective means of his advance & self-fulfilment is to dissolve his waking ego in the enjoyment of an infinite consciousness, at first mental of the

universal manomaya Purusha, but afterwards ideal and spiritual of the high vijnana & highest Sacchidananda.

The transcendence & dissolution of the waking mental ego in the body is therefore the first object of all practical Vedanta.

This transcendence & dissolution may result either in loss of the waking self & relapse into some sleepbound principle, undifferentiated Prakriti, sushupta Purusha, Sunyam Brahma (Nihil), etc or in loss of the world self in Parabrahman or in universalisation of the waking self & the joy of God's divine being in & beyond the world, Amritam. The last is the goal proposed for man by the Isha Upanishad.

The waking ego, identifying the Jiva with its bodily, vital & mental experiences which are part of the stream of Nature's movement & subject to Nature & the process of the movement, falsely believes the soul to be the subject of Nature & not its lord, anish and not Ish. This is the illusion of bondage which the manomaya Purusha either accepts or seeks to destroy. Those who accept it are called baddha Jivas, souls in bondage; those who seek to destroy it mumukshu Jivas, self-liberating souls,—those who have destroyed it are mukta Jivas, souls free from illusion & limitation.

In reality, no soul is bound & therefore none seeking liberation or liberated from bondage; these are all conditions of the waking mind and not of the self or spirit which is Ish, eternally lord & free.

The essence of bondage is limitation & the chief circumstances of limitation are death, suffering and ignorance.

Death, suffering & ignorance are circumstances of the mind in the vitalised body and do not touch the consciousness of the soul in vijnana, ananda, chit & sat. The combination of the three lower members, mind, life & body, is called therefore aparadha, the lower kingdom or in Christian parlance the kingdom of death & sin, the four higher members are called paradha, the higher kingdom, or in Christian parlance, the kingdom of heaven. To liberate man from death, suffering & ignorance and impose the all-blissful & luminous nature of the higher kingdom upon the lower is the object of the Seer in the Isha Upanishad.

This liberation is to be effected by dissolving the waking ego into the Lord's divine being and experiencing entirely our unity with all other existences & with Him who is God, Atman & Brahman.

All individual existences are jagat in jagati, object of motion in stream of motion & obey the laws & processes of that motion.

Body is an object of motion in the stream of material consciousness, of which the principal law is birth & death. All bodies are subject therefore to formation and dissolution.

Life is a current of motion in the stream of vital consciousness composed of eternal life-energy. Life is not itself subject to death,—death not being a law of life-energy,—but only to expulsion from the form which it occupies and therefore to the physical experience of death of its body.



All matter here is filled with life-energy of a greater or less intensity of action, but the organisation of life in individual animation begins later in the process of the material world by the appearance first of the plant, then of the animal. This evolution of life is caused & supported by the pressure of the gods of the Bhuvan or life-world upon Bhu.

Life entering into body is dominated partly by the laws of body; it is therefore unable to impart its own full & uninterrupted energy to its form. Consequently there is no physical immortality.

The organisation of individual animated life tends to hasten the period of dissolution by introducing shocks of an intensity of force alien to matter which wastes the material form by its activity. Therefore the plant dissolves while the stone & metal endure in their own equilibrium.

Mind entering into the vitalised body tends still farther to hasten the period of dissolution by the higher demands of its vibrations upon the body.

Mind is a knot of motion in the stream of mental consciousness. Like life, it is not itself subject to death, but only to expulsion from the vitalised body it has occupied. But because the mental ego identifies itself with the body and understands by its life only this residence in its present perishable gross corporeal body, therefore it has the mental experience of a bodily death.

The experience of death is therefore combined of the apparently mortal mind's ignorance of its own true immortal nature and of the limitation of energy in the body by which the form we inhabit wears out under the shocks of vibrating life-energy & vibrating mentality. We mean by death not dissolution of life or of mind, but dissolution of the form or body.

The dissolution of body is not true death for the mental being called man; it is only a change of media & of the surroundings of consciousness. Matter of body changes its constituents and groupings, mental being persists both in essence and personality and passes into other forms & environments.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 351-59)*

## ‘THOU ART THE ETERNAL VICTOR...’

**January 19, 1914**

O LORD, divine Master of Love, Thou art the eternal victor, and those who become perfectly attuned to Thee, those who live for Thee alone and by Thee alone, cannot but win all victories; for in Thee is the supreme force, the force of complete disinterestedness, of perfect clear-sightedness, sovereign kindness.

In Thee, by Thee, all is transfigured and glorified; in Thee is found the key to all mysteries and all powers. But one can attain Thee only if one no longer desires anything except to live in Thee, serve Thee, make Thy divine work triumph more swiftly for the salvation of a greater number of men.

O Lord, Thou alone art real and all else is an illusion; for when one lives in Thee one sees and understands all things, nothing escapes Thy perfect knowledge, but everything wears another appearance; for all is Thou in essence, all being the fruit of Thy work, of Thy magnanimous intervention; and in the most sinister darkness Thou couldst kindle a star.

May our devotion grow ever deeper.

May our consecration grow ever more perfect.

And mayst Thou, already the real sovereign of life, become in effect its true sovereign.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 58)*

## CHARITY

IN its most general sense, charity may be defined as the act of giving to each one what he lacks.

That is to say, in the last analysis, to put each thing in its place, which would result in the establishment of the supreme justice upon earth.

Such is the theory, but in practice charity could be considered as the path men ought to follow in their groping advance towards justice.

For, in his present state of evolution, man is incapable not only of realising justice in his earthly abode, but also of conceiving it as it is in its absolute essence. Charity is the living acknowledgment of this inability.

Indeed, in our ignorance of true justice, the justice which is one with perfect harmony, perfect equilibrium and perfect order, our wisest course is to take the path of love, the path of charity which shuns all judgment.

This is what justifies the attitude of those who always set charity against justice. Justice is, in their eyes, rigorous, merciless, and charity must come to temper its excessive severity.

Certainly, they cannot speak thus of divine justice, but more rightly of human or rather of social justice, the egoistic justice which is instituted to defend a more or less extensive grouping of interests and is as much opposed to true justice as shadow is contrary to light.

When we speak of justice as it is rendered in our so-called civilised countries, we should call it not rigorous and merciless but blind and monstrous in its ignorant pretension.

So we can never make too many amends for its fatal effects, and there charity finds an opportunity to apply itself fruitfully.

But this is only one side of the question and before delving deeper into our subject, I would like to remind you that charity, like all other human activities, is exercised according to four different modes which must be simultaneous if its action is to be integral and truly effective. I mean that no charity is complete if it is not at the same time material, intellectual, spiritual or moral and, above all, loving, for the very essence of charity is love.

At present charity is considered almost exclusively from the external standpoint and the word is synonymous with the sharing of part of one's possessions with life's rejects. We shall see in a moment how mean this conception is even when confined to the purely material field.

The three other modes of action of charity are admirably summed up in this counsel given by the Buddha to his disciples:

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch.”

To instruct those who know less, to give to those who do evil the strength to come out of their error, to console those who suffer, these are all occupations of charity rightly understood.

Thus charity, regarded from the individual point of view, consists, for each one, of giving to others all they need, in proportion to one's means.

This brings us to two observations.

The first is that one cannot give what one does not have at one's command.

Materially this is so evident that it is unnecessary to insist upon it. But intellectually, spiritually, the same rule holds true.

Indeed, how can one teach others what one does not know? How can one guide the weak on the path of wisdom if one does not tread the path oneself? How can one radiate love if one does not possess it within oneself?

And the supreme charity, which is integral self-giving to the great work of terrestrial regeneration, implies first of all that one can command what one wants to offer, that is to say, that one is master of oneself.

Only he who has perfect self-control can consecrate himself in all sincerity to the great work. For he alone knows that no contrary will, no unexpected impulse can ever again come to impede his action, to check his effort by setting him at variance with himself.

In this fact we find the justification of the old proverb which says: "Charity begins at home."

This maxim seems to encourage every kind of egoism, and yet it is the expression of a great wisdom for one who understands it rightly.

It is because charitable people fail to conform to this principle that their efforts so often remain unfruitful, that their goodwill is so often warped in its results, and that, in the end, they are forced to renounce a charity which, because it has not been rightly exercised, is the cause of nothing but confusion, suffering and disillusionment.

There is evidently a wrong way of interpreting this maxim, which says, "First let us accumulate fortune, intelligence, health, love, energies of all kinds, then we shall distribute them."

For, from the material standpoint, when will the accumulation stop? One who acquires the habit of piling up never finds his pile big enough.

I have even been led to make an observation about this: that in most men generosity seems to exist in inverse proportion to their pecuniary resources.

From observing the way in which workmen, the needy and all the unfortunate act among themselves, I was forced to conclude that the poor are far more charitable, far more prepared to succour their fellow-sufferers than are those more favoured by fortune. There is not enough time to go into the details of all that I have seen, but I assure you that it is instructive. I can, in any case, assure you that if the rich, in proportion to what they have, gave as much as the poor, soon there would no longer be a single starving person in the world.

Thus gold seems to attract gold, and nothing would be more fatal than wanting to accumulate riches before distributing them. But also, nothing would be more fatal than a rash prodigality which, from lack of discernment, would squander a fortune without benefiting anyone.

Let us never confuse disinterestedness, which is one of the conditions of true charity, with a lack of concern that springs from idle thoughtlessness.

Let us learn therefore to make judicious use of what we may have or earn while giving the least possible play to our personality and, above all, let us not forget that charity should not be confined to material aid.

Nor in the field of forces is it possible to accumulate, for receptivity occurs in proportion to expenditure: the more one expends usefully, the more one makes oneself capable of receiving. Thus the intelligence one can acquire is proportionate to the intelligence one uses. We are formed to manifest a certain quantity of intellectual forces, but if we develop ourselves mentally, if we put our brains to work, if we meditate regularly and above all if we make others benefit by the fruit, however modest, of our efforts, we make ourselves capable of receiving a greater quantity of ever deeper and purer intellectual forces. And the same holds true for love and spirituality.

We are like channels: if we do not allow what they have received to pour out freely, not only do they become blocked and no longer receive anything, but what they contain will spoil. If, on the contrary, we allow all this flood of vital, intellectual and spiritual forces to flow abundantly, if by impersonalising ourselves we know how to connect our little individuality to the great universal current, what we give will be returned to us a hundredfold.

To know how not to cut ourselves off from the great universal current, to be a link in the chain which must not be broken, this is the true science, the very key of charity.

Unfortunately there exists a very widespread error which is a serious obstacle to the practical application of this knowledge.

This error lies in the belief that a thing in the universe may be our own possession. Everything belongs to all, and to say or think, "This is mine", is to create a separation, a division which does not exist in reality.

Everything belongs to all, even the substance of which we are made, a whirl of atoms in perpetual movement which momentarily constitutes our organism without abiding in it and which, tomorrow, will form another.

It is true that some people command great material possessions. But in order to be in accord with the universal law, they should consider themselves as trustees, stewards of these possessions. They ought to know that these riches are entrusted to them so that they may administer them for the best interests of all.

We have come a long way from the narrow conception of charity restricted to the giving of a little of what we have in excess to the unfortunate ones that life brings in our way! And what we say of material riches must be said of spiritual wealth also.

Those who say, "This idea is mine", and who think they are very charitable in allowing others to profit from it, are senseless.

The world of ideas belongs to all; intellectual force is a universal force.

It is true that some people are more capable than others of entering into relation with this field of ideas and manifesting it through their conscious cerebrality. But this is nothing other than an additional responsibility for them: since they are in possession of this wealth, they are its stewards and must see that it is used for the good of the greatest number.

The same holds true for all the other universal forces. Only the concept of union, of the perfect identity of everything and everyone, can lead to true charity.

But to come back to practice, there is one more serious pitfall in the way of its complete and fruitful manifestation.

For most people, charity consists of giving anything to anyone without even knowing whether this gift corresponds to a need.

Thus charity is made synonymous with sentimental weakness and irrational squandering.

Nothing is more contrary to the very essence of this virtue.

Indeed, to give someone a thing he has no need of is as great a lack of charity as to deny him what he needs.

And this applies to the things of the spirit as well as to those of the body.

By a faulty distribution of material possessions one can hasten the downfall of certain individuals by encouraging them to be lazy, instead of favouring their progress by inciting them to effort.

The same holds true for intelligence and love. To give someone a knowledge which is too strong for him, thoughts which he cannot assimilate, is to deprive him for long, if not for ever, of the possibility of thinking for himself.

In the same way, to impose on some people an affection, a love for which they feel no need, is to make them carry a burden which is often too heavy for their shoulders.

This error has two main causes to which all the others can be linked: ignorance and egoism.

In order to be sure that an act is beneficial one must know its immediate or distant consequences, and an act of charity is no exception to this law.

To want to do well is not enough, one must also know.

How much evil has been done in the world in the name of charity diverted from its true sense and completely warped in its results!

I could give you many examples of acts of charity which have led to the most disastrous results because they were performed without reflection, without discernment, without understanding, without insight.

Charity, like all things, must be the result in us of a conscious and reasoned will, for impulse is synonymous with error and above all with egoism.

Unfortunately it must be acknowledged that charity is very seldom completely

disinterested.

I do not mean charity which is performed for the purpose of acquiring merit in the eyes of a personal God or to win eternal bliss.

This utterly base form is the worst of all bargainings and to call it charity would be to tarnish this name.

But I mean charity which is performed because one finds pleasure in it and which is still subject to all kinds of likes or dislikes, attractions or repulsions.

That kind of charity is very rarely completely free from the desire to meet with gratitude, and such a desire always atrophies the impartial clear-sightedness which is necessary to any action if it is to have its full value.

There is a wisdom in charity as everywhere, and it is to reduce waste to the minimum.

Thus to be truly charitable one must be impersonal.

And once more we see that all the lines of human progress converge on the same necessity: self-mastery, dying to oneself in order to be born into the new and true life.

To the extent that we outgrow the habit of referring everything to ourselves, we can exercise a truly effective charity, a charity one with love.

Besides, there is a height where all virtues meet in communion: love, goodness, compassion, forbearance, charity are all one and the same in their essence.

From this point of view, charity could be considered as the tangible and practical outer action determined by the application of the virtues of love.

For there is a force which can be distributed to all, always, provided that it is given in its most impersonal form: this is love, love which contains within itself light and life, that is, all the possibilities of intelligence, health, blossoming.

Yes, there is a sublime charity, one which rises from a happy heart, from a serene soul.

One who has won inner peace is a herald of deliverance wherever he goes, a bearer of hope and joy. Is not this what poor and suffering humanity needs above all things?

Yes, there are certain men whose thoughts are all love, who radiate love, and the mere presence of these individuals is a charity more active, more real than any other.

Though they utter no word and make no gesture, yet the sick are relieved, the tormented are soothed, the ignorant are enlightened, the wicked are appeased, those who suffer are consoled and all undergo this deep transformation which will open new horizons to them, enable them to take a step forward which no doubt will be decisive, on the infinite path of progress.

These individuals who, out of love, give themselves to all, who become the servants of all, are the living symbols of the supreme Charity.

I invite all of you here, my brothers, who aspire to be charitable, to join your thought with mine in expressing this wish: that we may strive to follow their example

a little more each day so that we may be like them, in the world, messengers of light and love.

20 May 1912

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 99-106)

*The egoistic consciousness passes through many stages in its emotional expansion. At first it is bound within itself, callous therefore to the experiences of others. Afterwards it is sympathetic only with those who are identified in some measure with itself, indifferent to the indifferent, malignant to the hostile. When it overcomes this respect for persons, it is ready for the reception of the altruistic principle.*

*But even charity and altruism are often essentially egoistic in their immediate motive. They are stirred by the discomfort of the sight of suffering to the nervous system or by the pleasurable of others' appreciation of our kindliness or by the egoistic self-appreciation of our own benevolence or by the need of indulgence in sympathy. There are philanthropists who would be troubled if the poor were not always with us, for they would then have no field for their charity.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 454)



## “FAR FLUTE” CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo.

Your comment on “Surya” has made me really happy; for I at last feel that I need not consider myself destined never to write truly satisfying poetry.

Below is another little poem for your consideration (I have not been able to hit upon a good title for it).

that throbb’st	
Far flute <del>athrob</del> upon my darkening sense,	[1]
What yogin’s rapture mingles with thy lay?	[2]
What sanctities has thy dream-quiet known In eve’s dim echoes of the sunken day? What visionary urge Has stolen from horizons watched alone Into thy essence with ethereal guile,	
long	
That thou <del>thus</del> with thy slow melodious surge	[3]
thus      heart	
Canst <del>ah</del> my soul enisle?	[4]
else perhaps	
...Or is it that a village boy who wends	[5]
Homeward his steps beneath the drowsy sway	
Of palms, sees the familiar instrument	[6]
Wake to strange potence in his wondering hands, Till all the air is tremulously rent By wizardries of incorporeal tone, Because for one brief moment, sweet, intense, Into his thought the immortal legend strayed Of how Lord Krishna once the flute had played And made its simple heart of song His own?	
...Whatever unknown lips’ mellifluence	
here	
Be this, ’tis ecstasy to me; nor less,	[7]
When in a while I find the charmer gone And from the shadows wafted on the breeze The last gleam fades of all that passionate peace,	

The music that has been.  
 For in its wake unearthly tenderness  
 Lingers as though a press  
 Of benediction lay on me unseen  
 And love spoke to my heavenward groping mood  
           Out the  
 Even out of night's inhuman vastitude. [8]

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] that throb'st

[2] "lay" and "surge" for a flute are not very apt, but, owing to the rhyme, I can suggest nothing else.

[3,4] "thou thus" won't do at all. "thus" can be transferred to the last line, where "all" is out of place. But then there will be too many sibilants. So I suggest "heart". [That thou with thy slow long melodious surge/Canst thus my heart enisle?]

[5] "is it that" is rather flat and prosaic. [Or else perhaps a village boy who wends]

[6] Should it not be "hears"? "sees" sounds inappropriate.

[7] "this, 'tis" is far from euphonious. [Be here, 'tis ecstasy to me; nor less,]

[8] Even has no clear sense here. [Out of the nights inhuman vastitude.]

Yes, it is a good poem.

Undated [early 1931]

\*

[Typescript sent to Sri Aurobindo]

Far flute that throb'st upon my darkening sense,  
 What yogin's rapture o'erflows in thy call [1]  
 Across earth's somnolence?  
 | What sanctities has thy ear, dreaming, known [2]  
 In eve's dim echoes of the sunken day  
 Ere the cold stars emerge?  
 What visionary urge  
 Has stolen from horizons watched alone  
 Into thy essence with ethereal guile,  
                                   this  
 That thou canst with slow, haunting rise and fall [3]

canst

Of liquid melody my soul enisle? [4]

...Or else perhaps a village boy who wends [5]  
 Homeward his steps beneath the drowsy sway  
 Of palms, hears the familiar instrument  
 Wake to strange potency in his wondering hands,  
 Till all the air is tremulously rent  
 By wizardries of incorporeal tone,  
 Because for one brief moment, sweet, intense,  
 Into his thought the immortal legend strayed  
 Of how Lord Krishna once the flute had played  
 And made its simple heart of song His own! [6]

...Whatever unknown lips' mellifluence  
 Be here, 'tis ecstasy to me; nor less,  
 When in a while I find the charmer gone [7]  
 And from the shadows wafted on the breeze  
 The last gleam fades of all that passionate peace,  
 The music that has been.  
 For in its wake unearthly tenderness [8]  
 Lingers, as though a press  
 Of benediction lay on me unseen  
 And love spoke to my heavenward groping mood  
 Out of the night's inhuman vastitude.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] This won't do—the metre is drunk. You cannot put the accent on the first syllable of o'erflows. You can say “streams out” or something equivalent.

[2] Again, no metre. What was wrong with the original version of this line? I seem to remember that it was good.

[3] [*Lines 10,11*] Awkward rhythmical construction and stumbling order of words. I suggest an emendation which puts the rhythm both into the verse and into the sense. [That thou with this slow, haunting rise and fall]

[4] [Of liquid melody canst my soul enisle?]

[5] By the way “wends his steps” is a rather risky license. Wends is rigorously intransitive, although you can write “wends his way”, but not “steps”. How would “bends his steps” do?

[6] Very good line.

[7] I forgot to point out that this is awkward. “In a while I find” is flatly prosaic, not to say colloquial and it has no rhythm. Something like “When the sweet sound is

hushed, the charmer gone” is wanted. If you accept it, I would suggest “rich, intense” in the second verse, to avoid the repetition of the epithet.

[8] [*Lines 4-11*] All this close is excellent.

Undated [*early 1931*]

\*

(*To be continued*)

AMAL KIRAN  
K. D. SETHNA

*Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us,  
Luminous beckoning hands in the distance invite and implore us.  
Ignorant, circled with death and the abyss, we have dreamed of a human  
Paradise made from the mind of a man, from the heart of a woman,  
Dreamed of the Isles of the Blest in a light of perpetual summer,  
Dreamed of the joy of an earthly life with no pain for incomer.*

*‘Ahana’  
Sri Aurobindo*

(*Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 533-34*)

## TOWARDS A SINGING REALITY

...  
We are  
a drop  
in the cosmic field  
of consciousness,  
but we are also  
the entire field.

We can widen  
our consciousness,  
take the garden into us,  
the town and the country,  
the planet and the galaxy...  
for all is made  
of the same stuff.

It is what God does.  
But he does it in reality,  
while we do it in imagination  
—because we are  
the image.

\*

Every day  
the way we look  
at the universe  
should be a little  
wider, higher, deeper.

And one day  
The whole universe  
With its billions  
Of milky ways  
Will say  
“I”  
of itself.

\*

“I”  
the aspiration.

\*

In the same way  
as the cells of the plant  
aspire to become flower,  
man aspires to something  
to which he can give  
no name.

Nothing can be  
more powerful  
than aspiration.  
Because it is  
*réalisé d'avance*.  
What Sri Aurobindo  
brought to us  
—Supermind—  
is  
*réalisé d'avance*.

\*

...

MEDHANANDA

(From *On the threshold of a new age with Medhananda*)

*True spirituality transforms life.*  
*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 32)

## UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

*(Continued from the issue of December 2007)*

*['Udar' was the name given by Sri Aurobindo to Lawrence Pinto. An exhibition was arranged on the occasion of his centenary, 26 April 2007. We present here portions of the 'text' part of the exhibition.]*

### Golconde

IN one of the most remote parts of India, one of the most advanced buildings in the world was constructed under the most demanding of circumstances concerning material and craftsmen. This reinforced concrete structure was completed primarily by unskilled volunteers with the most uncertain of supplies, and with virtually every fitting custom-fabricated. Yet this handsome building has a world stature, both architecturally and in its bio-climatic response to a tropical climate 13 degrees North of the equator. It has the reputation of being the most comfortable building in Pondicherry, although it has no mechanical cooling system.

Jeffrey Cook  
'Solar World' Congress, Perth

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Golconde needs no introduction. People who understand architecture have acclaimed this construction in concrete widely. The work commenced in October 1937 and it took almost a decade to get completed. The final finishing of some parts of the floor was done sometime in the early 1960s. The history of the construction of this building has no analogy with others where a large labour force worked under the supervision of engineers and contractors to build a large structure in the shortest possible time. This building, however, had on the contrary, a slow growth and almost an organic one, where the individuals working there poured in their love and dedication to develop a concrete structure. They were few in number—a handful of labourers working in harmony with a small number of engineers, supervisors from divergent walks of life. Many were sadhaks. This was their way to serve the Mother. All through these years of construction the Mother gave Her guidance and help for the outer problems of constructing the building. Simultaneously She also sorted out the human problems of the disciples working there. The people and the building developed together.

Chitra S.

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The realisation of Golconde was not merely the construction of a beautiful modern house in reinforced concrete for sadhaks, but a vehicle for the spiritual awakening and development of innumerable people who otherwise might not have been touched by the Light for a long time to come.

It was the first practical means of contact and communication of any important size between East and West, that the Ashram had. From many points of view Golconde is a milestone in the spiritual growth of the sadhaks and the Ashram. In its way, it too is a temple, joining men and women of all the world irrevocably to the Divine, like a jewel from the original mine that gave it its name.

Agni (Agnes Sammer)  
(wife & collaborator of Franticek Sammer)

\*

Our eight months at the Ashram (in 1938) were extremely fruitful and instructive. Not only was the life in this Indian monastery the revelation of another way of life, but the conditions under which the work of the building was done were so remarkable when compared with those we had known in this materially bewildered world, that we lived as in a dream. No time, no money, were stipulated in the contract. There was no contract. Here indeed was an ideal state of existence in which the purpose of all activity was clearly a spiritual one... Time and money were of secondary value. The situation was quite other than the usual one of being pinched between a client and a contractor. Here everything was done to free the architect completely so that he might give himself entirely to his art and science.

Antonin Raymond

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My particular task was to design and help construct Golconde, a multi-storey dormitory for the disciples. This was to be the major structure in the Ashram. It was to be one of the first high-strength, reinforced concrete buildings in India. Since the design was to be completely open, the task was to build a straightforward structure that would solve the problems peculiar to this type of architecture in a tropical country. Since ventilation was important, large horizontal louvres were installed. These could be closed during the rains, which at times would come in horizontally. All of our architectural problems had to be solved within the spirit of Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

‘Sundarananda’ (George Nakashima)

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Chandulal, who was then the chief engineer, was the most devoted worker of all; his life was dedicated to the service of the Mother. He ate only the Ashram food, slept [without a mattress, just] on a mat and pillow on a cot, dressed always in half-pants and Ashram sandals, and had no other hobbies than the Building Service. The Mother had great confidence in him. Yet he had never had any experience with reinforced concrete, or with such a big building as Golconde. His junior engineer, Jatindranath Baul, who came a little later, knew much more in this respect.

Mrityunjoy

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“Golconde, was something of a ‘do-it-yourself’ project. I found myself not only the designer, but something of a general contractor,” said George Nakashima, who along with Franticek Sammer had been sent by Antonin Raymond to build Golconde. He worked in close collaboration with Chandulal, the Ashram engineer. It was the first high-strength reinforced concrete building in India.

During the concreting days we had to be on the site more than twelve hours a day. Instead of six months, it took about six years to finish the concreting; it ended somewhere towards the end of 1945. (Meanwhile, by the end of 1942 all the three architects had left, due to the deterioration in the international situation.)

Mrityunjoy

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Sanjivan recounted to some of his art students and to a few friends, something interesting. He had told them that the Mother had instructed them to choose only the “living pebbles” for the concreting work—and that is what they did.

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The lines of the building were so beautifully designed, with the roof made of large curved cement-concrete tiles, that the whole is truly a masterpiece of architecture. Mr. Raymond brought with him his team of architects, consisting of George Nakashima, a Japanese-American, and Franticek (François) Sammer, a Czechoslovakian. George Nakashima made the first drawings of Golconde and even made a model of a room. Work was started on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1937. I had the very happy opportunity of working with him and learning so much from him. François was a perfectionist and, very much in the manner of the Mother, believed in “perfection in detail”. The perfection of the work done at Golconde added to the fame of this building.

Udar

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All nails used for the frames for concreting would be straightened, counted and used again. Hundreds of nails were required every day. The store was maintained with scrupulous care, where every nail was counted.

Antonin Raymond

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In every single thing, François insisted on the utmost perfection and to me this was a wonderful training and such a great help in my own sadhana. I informed the Mother about all this and she was very pleased with such a way of working.

Udar

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It required a supreme boldness on the part of the Mother to push through her idea, knowing very well the limited and obscure conditions in which it had to be worked out—through an inexperienced engineer, a handful of assistants with little or no technical training, and a few unskilled labourers who had never even seen a reinforced concrete building, let alone worked on constructing one.

Mrityunjy

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Here are two outstanding examples of this approach. Normally, in reinforced concrete work where large areas are cast in form work, when the form work is removed, the faces of the cast areas are plastered over and made level and smooth. But for this work at Golconde, François insisted that the surfaces be left as they were, after the form work was removed and only smoothed over with a carborundum stone. In this way, the quality of the work could be seen and so the work had to be done very carefully, there should be no holes, no blank spaces and this was done by having the concrete vibrated at the time of casting. This was quite a new technique to us. The details of the form work could be seen, the joints of the planks, the screw heads and even the grain of the wooden planks. All this was part of the aesthetic detail in the architecture and those who visit Golconde are impressed by it.

Udar

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The other example was in the use of the wooden planks for the staircase hand-rails. François insisted that the planks should be left with all the defects in them, defects which all planks have and which are normally covered over. These small defects add

to the beauty of the wood and show its intrinsic value.

Udar

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As many sadhaks as possible were pressed into service there; to anyone young or old asking for work, part time, whole time, [the Mother's] one cry: "Go to Golconde, go to Golconde." It was one of her daily topics with Sri Aurobindo who was kept informed of the difficulties, troubles innumerable, and at the same time, of the need of his force to surmount them. Particularly when rain threatened to impede or spoil some important part of the work, she would invoke his special help; for instance, when the roof was to be built. How often we heard her praying to Sri Aurobindo, "Lord, there should be no rain now." Menacing clouds had mustered strong, stormy west winds blowing ominously, rain imminent, and torrential Pondicherry rain! We would look at the sky and speculate on the result of the fight between the Divine Force and the natural force. The Divine Force would of course win: slowly the Fury would leash her forces and withdraw into the cave. But as soon as the intended object was achieved, a deluge swept down as if in revenge.... During the roof-construction, work had to go on all night long and the Mother would mobilise and marshal all the available Ashram hands and put them there. With what cheer and ardour our youth jumped into the fray at the call of the Mother, using often Sri Aurobindo's name to put more love and zeal into the strenuous enterprise!...

And that is how this beautiful structure could be realised on the physical plane.

Nirodbaran  
(*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*)

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Udar was closely connected with the Golconde work from the very beginning. The main concreting work of Golconde was over somewhere towards the end of 1945. Still a lot of work for completing the building such as fixing of the louvre blades, the doors, the other fittings, completing the floor etc. were remaining. This work was taken up by Udar and his team of workers. Golconde is built in three parts: East, West and middle portion. Little gaps are left in between these parts which are covered with copper plates. This is to avoid cracks due to heat. Golconde is also earthquake proof and is provided with lightning conductors. As soon as this building was ready, the Mother appointed Mona as the over-all in-charge of Golconde. Each room was provided with a set of furniture of simple beauty made out of Burma teak, with the inside of the cupboard drawers made of red cedar. The furniture was designed by Sammer, one of the architects of Golconde, and was made by Udar. Due to pressure

of visitors during the World War II this building, which was to be a dormitory to house special sadhaks for their sadhana, was obliged to be opened to visitors, even before it was fully completed.

Mrityunjoy

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Why the name “Golconde”? To set up such a large building required quite a lot of money and, in those days, much money was not available. So the Mother spoke to Sir Akbar Hydari about it, and as he was the Dewan to the Nizam of Hyderabad he was able to get from the Nizam a donation of one lakh of rupees for this building through the Finance Department which was under Raja Shamraj. Today, one lakh does not seem much, but in those days it was indeed quite a large sum, as its buying-power was over twenty times what it is now. Especially at Pondicherry where things were remarkably cheap. A ton of cement, good Japanese cement, cost only around Rs. 25/- and steel about Rs. 200/- per ton. Pondicherry was then a free port and there were absolutely no Customs or Import charges or restrictions. And as we had then a good off-loading pier, shipments from Japan could come directly to Pondicherry. Hence with this large sum of money the building work was taken up. Now because the first money came from Hyderabad, the Mother wanted to give a name to the building which had some connection with Hyderabad and so she chose the name Golconde, the French rendering of Golconda, the famous diamond mine in erstwhile Hyderabad State.

Udar

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In the catalogue, “Festival of India”, Golconde is singled out as “the finest example of modern functional architecture built in India in the pre-Independence period.”

Charles Correa  
(an outstanding Indian architect)

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The floor is a layered limestone found in several places in India. Here in the South it is known as Cuddapah Stone, as it comes from that district. It has been used for ages—but not as we have done in Golconde: highly polished, and with the sides cut by machine to a very straight edge. As the machines to do this were not available here at that time, I had to design and make our own machines at as low a cost as possible. The architects had specified that the floor slabs should be laid “butt-jointed”

—as is done with glazed tiles in bathrooms and so on. But for such large slabs, this meant very high-precision edge-cutting, which my machine could not manage. So Sammer, who was the architect in charge, and truly an artist, said that they should be laid with wide joints. This was done, and the result is much more beautiful than a butt-joint would have been.

This is how Mother works. She has often created difficulties so that in overcoming them we arrive at a much truer and more beautiful result.

Udar

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The Mother asked us to drill an artesian tube-well, and she indicated where it had to be done. When we were drilling this well, generally clay and sand were extracted; but once some black material came up, which was quite intriguing. As I then had free access to Sri Aurobindo, I took a handful of this stuff to show it to him and he asked me what it was. I said that it looked to me like half-formed coal. On hearing this, Sri Aurobindo smiled sweetly and said, “Ah then! You want to pull down Golconde and have a coal mine there?” It was truly wonderful to hear him joke and smile. One would, perhaps, expect such a Mahayogi to be serious and ponderous, but he was always ready with a joke and a smile. He once said that one could be serious about a few small things, but about the rest, one should always laugh at them. Years later we learnt that this black stuff was lignite and that it stretches over a wide area and forms the reason for the Neyveli lignite mining.

Udar

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Here is an excerpt from a letter of Sri Aurobindo: “... As regards Golconde and its rules—they are not imposed elsewhere—there is a reason for them and they are not imposed for nothing. In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First, Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things; and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon or lose their full beauty or value;...

(25 Feb 1945)

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Golconde, today a guest house of the Ashram, was not originally intended for that purpose. The Mother wanted a big building to lodge some of her sincere and serious

disciples. But circumstances changed that. Golconde turned into a guest house long before it was completed, during the middle of the Second World War when visitors began to pour in and many people wanted to settle in Pondicherry with their families to be under the protection of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The Mother reluctantly permitted it, and once started it continued until the building was completed after the war. Then the Mother put Mona in charge, an English lady with a hospitable heart and an excellent organising capacity. The maintenance and orderliness of Golconde under her personal supervision and hard work has gained a great reputation at home and abroad.

Mrityunjoy

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I really don't know how many years it took, but it went on and I had very fine workers. I can't say I had any kind of genius but everything came from the Mother, I couldn't do it myself, I know that. I look back and I see that I was not a very great engineer but I tell you, if somebody is asked to solve any big problem and he comes to Mother, you can't imagine how she can solve problems.

Udar

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It was a joy to step into the Laundry. It was well-designed, always neat, clean and well-maintained. All the washing was done by hand, and the jobs were distributed: there were soapers, washers, rinsers. On sloping cement benches the servants sat scrubbing the already soaped clothes. Soaping was done by one worker and supplied to four scrubbers, each of them with his own seat and four basins for rinsing—first in hot water in one basin and then three times in cold water.

Kusum

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About the tea at Golconde: When we were working there we were so engrossed in our work that we did not even think of taking a tea-break or whatever. But the Mother, in her marvellous sweetness, though she herself did not drink tea, knew our habits and our likes, so she asked Mona to see that we got tea at 3:00 p.m. every day. This was the start of the Golconde Tea Time.

Udar

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Afternoon teas at Golconde were filled with stories that brought me insights into life with Mother as only Udar could recount it.

Nancy

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When the regular Playground groups were formed Mother used to encourage even the ladies to join the group. When I went to ask the Mother if I could join the group, She asked me, "Have you got the time?" I was quite disappointed and told Mother, "Yes, Mother, my work is over by 5 p.m. and the Playground groups start at 5.30 p.m." Then She told me that I could join the Playground group activities. But by 1958 I had to leave the group as there was so much work the whole day and I was getting tired by the evening. I wrote to the Mother that I would like to leave the group, the Mother said, "Yes, you leave the group and rest in the evening."

Mani-ben

\*

My visit this time for the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been unforgettably revealing, about things I was quite unaware of. I am a practical man, dealing with sand, stone, steel and cement all the time; that has almost hardened my life. But here during these few days I discovered a new thing in life. It is not the Divine aloof in the temple, not just Sri Aurobindo in his room, but the Divine in action, making the material plastic and submissive for a new creation. You people are lucky to be tools in the hands of the Mother. I shall come again on a pilgrimage to see the building when it is ready.

A Professional Engineer

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Times were different. Attitudes were different. Means were less but meanings were more. The sadhaks therefore achieved much with very little. Their assets were faith, devotion and persistence or perseverance .... They, whether engineer or plain worker, poured not only their sweat but also their heart-felt love into the job. They took great pride and derived greater joy working. They could, after long years, say with the same pride and joy: "I was there."

Batti

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All this reminds us that Golconde was conceived as a dormitory for sadhaks—and for sadhaks of an Integral Yoga; forty individuals who would be willing to put reverence for the divine consciousness in matter into the smallest details of their daily life. Clearly, to live amid these surroundings is at once a privilege and an education. Most of us are not yet ready for that; but to all who value beauty and order in daily living, and who sense the consciousness in material things, Golconde remains a lasting inspiration.

Shraddhavan

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The Mother said: “Golconde is not a guest house. It is a dormitory (*dortoir*) in which those who reside there can meditate and do their sadhana in beautiful surroundings, in very fine rooms and with many of the little daily jobs done for them, to keep them more free for their sadhana ... In the old days, the Rishis used to live in the mountains and their disciples lived in caves in these mountains. Golconde is the modern equivalent of the caves for the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo.”

Udar

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*(To be continued)*

P. AND G.

*The future is full of possibilities for those who know how to prepare themselves for it.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 74)*



## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of December 2007)

### Bangladesh—a new birth for East Bengal

BANGLADESH was born in 1971, on 16<sup>th</sup> December. East Bengal regained its soul by cutting itself off from West Pakistan. ‘East Pakistan’ was abolished forever. We were simply overjoyed.

As soon as the Mother came to know about the liberation of Bangladesh She told Dyuman-da to start preparing sweets. Dyuman-da went running to the Dining Room and requested that *rasogullas* be made. Everybody was unbelievably excited. Anandamayi-di, Renu-di and a host of others made big *rasogullas* and the next day we all received the Mother’s prasad even as we prayed in our hearts with love and goodwill for Bangladesh. The Mother’s inexhaustible love had helped liberate Bangladesh. During those difficult times it was the Mother’s untiring dynamic power that gave strength and limitless courage to the youth of Bengal. This part of history is known to all and we were its witnesses.

My birthday is on 31<sup>st</sup> December and so I went to the Mother with a bunch of ‘Victory’ flowers. As soon as I entered Her room I exclaimed:

“*Victoire à la Douce Mère!*” (Victory to Sweet Mother!)

The Mother was delighted.

“You are saying ‘Victory to Sweet Mother’? Everyone has been telling me the same thing since this morning.”

I offered Her the ‘Victory’ flowers.

“Mother, Bangladesh is my country.”

The Mother took both my hands into Hers and said:

“Ah! So you are from that country?”

“Yes, Mother,” I replied happily, “Bangladesh is my country. I came from there.”

The Mother pulled me closer to Her and looked at me with affectionate eyes. I could not take my eyes away from Her. My whole being, my heart, mind and body accompanied by the Mother went wandering across Bangladesh through every town and village and open expanse and river and hill and paddy field. I had never had such an intense experience of love for one’s country.

Bengal of Gold, country mine, I love you in every soul,  
Your sky, your breezes in my heart forever with music roll.

An intense prayer had surged up in me from early morning:

May the Mother protect my country,  
 Let both parts of Bengal awake and become one.  
 Bengal's hearts, Bengal's minds, brothers and sisters in every Bengal home,  
 Let them all become one, O Lord, One, One, One.

The Mother gently pressed both my hands and nodded Her consent. I understood that the country would be safe and united, come what may. My prayer was answered and my whole being spilled over with gratitude and love. I bowed to the Mother and came away.

How tremendous has been the Mother's force behind this rebirth of East Bengal. The Mother followed the progress of this war in great detail. In the end Her force vanquished the Pakistani army. The Mother's children proved once again that they were not cowards. They offered their lives in order to free their motherland and this happened during Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary year. This was also the Mother's intense aspiration and Sri Aurobindo fulfilled it.

The two parts of Bengal finally became one with the birth of Bangladesh. The Bengalis of East Bengal sought and got this name for their country from West Bengal which yielded it with delight. In that moment nobody could object, no, not for a name. That East Bengal was finally free was what overjoyed everyone's hearts. West Bengal gave proof of her inner magnanimity. Both the Bengals were tied with the same string. Two brothers came together again and this was amply proved during the war.

When Vivekananda visited East Bengal he wrote:

At last I am in Eastern Bengal. This is the first time I am here and never before knew Bengal was so beautiful. You ought to have seen the rivers here—regular rolling oceans of fresh water, and everything so green—continual production. The villages are the cleanest and prettiest in all India.

He wrote again:

I paid a long visit of two months to Assam and the different parts of East Bengal. For combined mountain and water scenery this part of the country is unrivalled.

O earth of my country,  
 My head is bowed at Thy feet.  
 The Mother of the Universe holds you  
 In her love embrace so sweet.

### Amusing Incidents

Listen to an amusing incident. From the time I settled here, I kept hearing about the Supramental manifestation from the elderly sadhaks. They talked about this all the time. There was a sort of repressed excitement in their conversations. We younger ones were not at all bothered by this: "When would the Supramental manifestation take place? How would it take place?" Such questions never cropped up in our minds. You can imagine how very ignorant we were. My friend Gauri and I would sit on a cement bench in our Nanteuil house under the huge Ashwattha tree and chat about all sorts of things. One day Gauri asked me:

"Do you understand anything about this Supramental manifestation that the elderly keep talking about? What is it?"

"That is not of our concern," I replied. "It is not possible for us to move even a little bit. We needn't go so far ahead in a single life. It is like counting chickens before they hatch. Ours is only to love the Mother and if She finds us worthy then we will certainly feel something about this in this life. So let us not dance our brains out with this."

Both of us sat quietly. The leaves of the Ashwattha tree rustled overhead. Suddenly I burst out laughing. Gauri looked at me very puzzled.

"Why are you laughing, Priti?"

"You know, Gauri," I said, "when the Supramental Light manifests, the Mother will distribute all Her sarees to Her girls. We would wear those sarees and go to the Mother to get Her blessings. Wouldn't that be lovely?"

Gauri was a little nonplussed.

"How did you ever get such an idea?"

"I don't know. It just occurred to me. Maybe an intuition."

We again fell into silence.

You know what was astonishing about this? When the Supramental Light came down, the Mother, in fact, gave away Her own sarees to all Her girls. She would discuss with Vasudha which saree to give to which girl. She took a long time to select the saree. While selecting the saree for Tapati She told Vasudha:

"Tapati is a very jovial sort of girl. Should I give her this georgette saree with the cherry blossom print?"

The Mother loved that particular saree very much and had worn it on several occasions.

For the April Darshan we all wore those sarees given by the Mother and went to Her for blessings. Gauri and I, we were both astonished beyond words. We had never imagined that what I had said in jest would become such a reality.

So the Mother definitely understands all our thoughts and desires!

Let me tell you about another incident. It was 1956 after the descent of the Supramental Light when everyone was asking the Mother all sorts of questions about

it. Our curiosity knew no end. One day in the translation class the Mother uttered the word ‘Gnostic’ and suddenly stopped. I was full of uncontrollable curiosity. My mind was not at all in the class. After the class ended, I followed the Mother, staying very close behind. After some time I called out to Her. The Mother turned around:

“What do you want?”

“Mother, in the class you said ‘Gnostic’ and then became silent. What was on Your mind, Mother?” The Mother looked quite surprised.

“Ah! so you caught that moment.”

“Please tell me, Mother, what You really wanted to say.”

A mischievous smile lit up the Mother’s face.

“If I tell you something about this then your head will split in two. Go and get Nolini.”

I ran as fast as I could and called Nolini-da. The Mother took Nolini-da into the interview-room and stood there in a corner telling him various things. Nolini-da simply listened quietly while I leaned over the window sill and waited silently. If only I could catch a single word!

\*

We need to give up all *samskaras*. I understood this one day from the Mother Herself.

Every evening in the Playground, the Mother would sit in front of the map of India and distribute toffees to everyone, those famous toffees made by Ganpatram-ji. An American lady named Rijuta would take the toffee from the Mother with her left hand. I found that very improper. How could she take the toffee with her left hand? And so one day I blurted out to the Mother:

“Why does Rijuta take the toffee from You with her left hand? It doesn’t look good.”

The Mother looked at me greatly surprised and holding both Her hands up in front of me asked:

“What is the difference between these two hands?”

I just sat speechless and a little embarrassed. We were used to taking toffees or flowers from the Mother by stretching both our hands. And so it was difficult for us to imagine taking anything from Her with just one hand. That this was a *samskara* was for us hard to understand. To the Mother the left or the right hand were both the same. How difficult it is to free ourselves from our old *samskaras*. The most important thing is the attitude with which we receive something from Her. If we wish to be totally free from all types of *samskaras* we need to have a very generous mind.

\*

He who gets your flag to hold  
Gets from you a strength untold.

The Mother would stand in front of the map of India, erect, to take the salute of the March Past. Beauty and force surrounded Her. She looked marvellous.

The first March Past took place on one of the Darshan days, I don't remember which. For the March Past in front of the Mother, Light used to be the standard bearer of the 'E' group (women) walking in front of us holding aloft the Mother's blue symbol on a white silk flag. It was truly admirable the way Light marched upright with steady steps holding the enormous flag of the Mother. Light exuded beauty and power. I felt the Mother was pouring power into her. Abhay Singh was the standard bearer of the men's group. Light and Abhay Singh would gently lower the flag in front of the Mother in a gesture of obeisance. An aura of strength and beauty enveloped both Light and Abhay Singh. And we members of the group would feel at that moment a descent of tremendous power. Even today during the March Past the boys and girls of the different groups and even the spectators feel the same power of the Mother. The Mother came and always stood in front of the map of India to take the salute during the March Past. Those who have a subtle sight are still blessed with that vision of the Mother.

\*

One could never go to the Mother with a complaint against anybody. Even if we had noticed the gravest of faults in somebody's nature we were supposed to accept it. We were taught to meet the person on his points of beauty since we are all composed of both good and bad. We all have our flaws and defects but then we also have our qualities. This is what I learnt from the Mother through a very ordinary incident. We were waiting in the Playground for the Mother. The Mother looked at us and smiled and said a few words. Plucking up a little courage I told the Mother:

“Look, Mother! This girl doesn't study at all.” (The girl was standing near us.)

The Mother looked at the girl and sweetly smiled:

“But see how beautifully she embroiders. She is like a fairy where work is concerned.”

And saying this, the Mother poured Her tenderness through Her eyes on the girl.

\*

One day, while discarding a saree, I remembered an incident. We are used to discarding clothes as soon as they are torn. And if they get old we just throw them away.

I would notice while going to the Mother to have Her blessing that flowers were

embroidered on the Mother's gown at several places. It was quite puzzling to me. Minu, Jaya, Bela and others were responsible for stitching the Mother's gowns. So one day I asked Minu:

"Why do you keep embroidering flowers here and there on the Mother's gown? Can't you do it in a certain pattern? What a strange idea."

Minu laughed and said:

"Is the Mother short of gowns? But the Mother will not throw any of Her old gowns away. As soon as there is a tear in the gown, She asks us to patch up that area and embroider a flower over it. All these innumerable flowers on the gown just go to show how old these gowns are. The Mother has many such gowns on which we have embroidered flowers on Her instructions."

What Minu said came as a revelation to me. How we need to take care of every little thing as long as it can be used. The Mother was showing us this through Her own example. Every little act of the Mother revealed to us so many useful things that it is impossible to describe in words: the way She talked, the way She looked, the freshness and beauty of every bodily movement beckoned us, as it were, towards some subtler world and transported us onto streams of *ananda*.

From the ocean of bliss an arrow has come today.

The Mother of Bliss is Herself present in our midst. Doubts, despair, sorrows, death—nothing can impede our march ahead. Each new day is a declaration of war against these forces. Thanks to the Mother's unearthly Grace we have overcome so many of these obstacles and difficulties.

The Mother used to always mitigate the punishment that we merited for our conduct. The Mother's Body was our protective shield. Like Karna on whom She had put the shield of the sun at the time of his birth, the divine Mother Herself, Aditi, was our shield. And this shield will protect us forever. It will protect us now from the attacks of the subtle world.

\*

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

(Translated by Maurice Shukla from the original Bengali *Abismaraniya Muhurta*)

## PROGRESS

The older ways that we have been  
Lived well, felt deeply,  
Loved and played,  
Have seen their days of fullness,  
Ripened and decayed.

What we have been  
Has served its end  
Now disappearing undeterred  
The past an old familiar song,  
The new as yet unheard.

Small selves dissolve  
Our limits dim  
Have grown to reach a greater height.  
Profounder depths reveal the truth,  
Emerging and expanding light.

What once we were  
Is now so small  
Within our being, vaster grown  
We stand prepared, we're ready  
To welcome the unknown.

LORETTA

## TOWARDS A TOWNSHIP

*(The long journey from isolated settlements to urban living is still underway.)*

HERE'S a conundrum. Auroville, as the name suggests, is intended to be a town. Yet, 35 years [in 2003] after its inauguration, it is still little more than a scattering of settlements with a few outposts of urbanisation. This summer Auroville schoolchildren were invited to imagine the city of the future. What did they draw? Nothing resembling a city but rather an Auroville of rivers, forests, reindeer, snowmen and giant Ferris wheels (and, of course, Matrimandirs) over which rocket-powered Aurovilians flit like dragonflies.

Why is it taking so long not just to build, but even to imagine the town? The answer lies partly in external circumstances but also within the Aurovilians themselves...

In 1965, when Mother invited Roger to design the township, the energy for manifestation was high. Mother began by making a few rough drawings indicating four zones and their orientation. In March, 1966, Roger submitted two proposals to Mother. One was a fairly conventional grid-type town plan, the other a circular concept reminiscent of Mother's symbol. Mother enthusiastically accepted the latter, saying "He received my formation, my old formation which I had left asleep." This became known as the 'Nebula' model. Roger reported, however, that Mother wanted the concept to be made dynamic. In November, 1967, Roger returned with a new model—the so-called 'macrostructure' model—in which two huge buildings swirled around a central core. Mother did not like huge buildings blocking the view of the centre, so Roger started splitting the macrostructure model into smaller elements. Finally, in February 1968, he presented the first 'Galaxy' model. Here the long curved sweeps, which give the impression of centripetal and centrifugal forces radiating in and out of the centre, were defined by what Roger termed 'lines of force': long, curving buildings, some of which ascended, some of which descended as they approached the centre. At the centre of the original Galaxy model was a massive sculpture of a flame surrounded by a vast, circular lake. By 1971 that centre had been redesigned as an oval island encompassing the Banyan tree, the amphitheatre and the site for Matrimandir and its gardens.

The extraordinary Galaxy plan was an inspiration for many. It came at the right time: the youthful idealism of the 1960s was strong and young people were searching for new forms to embody a new consciousness. But it proved, like other dreams of the 1960s, very difficult to materialise. True, by early 1972 construction had begun on both Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir. However, much of the land in the area designated for the city had still to be purchased. Moreover the countries of the world had not come together to build this city of the future, as Mother had intended ("The completeness and the beauty of the town depend on the generosity of the world"),



and consequently the vast funding required for the construction of the Galaxy did not materialise. At the same time, doubts about the wisdom of constructing it at all began to surface. Why? At that time, many Aurovilians were in close contact with the land and the local villagers. As they began to learn about that land, and as their rhythms attuned more and more to natural cycles and the slow pace of life in rural Tamil Nadu, the futuristic Galaxy with its huge buildings and moving sidewalks appeared more and more like science fiction, the product of another world which knew nothing and cared nothing about local realities. As one Aurovilian starkly put it, “The Galaxy is an imposition on nature, on the villages and on the Aurovilians.”

Other factors militated against early completion. The Galaxy would be highly energy-intensive both in terms of construction and maintenance. This hadn't seemed a problem when it was first designed, for energy was cheap and plentiful. However, the first oil crisis in the early 1970s and the rise of the environmental movement made such town plans look increasingly profligate and irresponsible. Meanwhile the pendulum was swinging away from macro-housing projects: cities like Chicago were demolishing large, multi-storey housing complexes because of the social problems they engendered. Then again, no manual, no guidance existed concerning the phasing of the construction. It looked very much as if the main lines of the Galaxy would have to be realised in one go, which would create huge logistical problems. Add in the fact that some Aurovilians were fleeing all forms of urbanisation as well as hierarchical structures where the architect (or anybody) is king and one begins to realise why it was so difficult to get the Galaxy off the drawing board. For some Aurovilians the most trenchant criticism was expressed by another architect, Joel. “I think almost everybody in Auroville would agree that the primary thing is not a ‘finished product’ but a certain inner process of consciousness, and the forms will evolve from that process.”

However, perhaps the key element in the failure to materialise the original vision was the fact that Mother was no longer physically present. In March, 1972, she told Satprem that for her plan for Auroville to succeed not only would she have to remain in her body, but she would also have to become strong. If the city was to be built fast—and she repeatedly told him she wanted it to be completed within 15-25 years—it had to be centrally planned and built. Only Mother's authority would have made that possible. When she left it became inevitable that subsequent development would be more piecemeal, more ‘organic’.

Not surprisingly, Roger grew increasingly frustrated. Finally in 1974, fed up with what he termed “conservative opposition” unwilling “to push the future forward”, he resigned from the committee of organisation. Subsequently he left for a long self-imposed exile in France. The increasingly vicious and disruptive struggle between many Aurovilians and the Sri Aurobindo Society which characterised much of the later 1970s seemed the final nail in the coffin of the Galaxy...

## **Not yet dead**

Yet the idea that Auroville would eventually be a city was not completely dead. Land already purchased in the central area (in 1982, 50% of the city area had been acquired) was planted out with trees, but the general understanding was that this was a temporary measure: one day the city would be there. But what kind of city? Roger said that Mother gave him only two initial parameters: one was the division into four zones, the other was the figure of 50,000 inhabitants. Now both of these parameters were questioned. It was pointed out that in conventional town planning the strict zoning principle had fallen out of favour because of its tendency to create 'dead' zones. As to the 50,000, the early Aurovilians had grown used to inhabiting wide open spaces and many couldn't imagine how another 49,500 could be shoehorned into the area without the carefully restored environment once again being devastated. In fact one senior Auroville architect suggested that 10,000 inhabitants was the absolute maximum which could be accommodated.

Others, while accepting Mother's guidelines, doubted that the Galaxy concept was the best way of achieving them. Ajit's study of historic city architecture in India and abroad led him to believe that 50,000 could be accommodated in the designated township area not through massive lines of force but through high-density, low-rise constructions which utilised local materials and people-friendly spaces and perspectives, all unified by a common 'pattern language'. Others didn't agree. In the circumstances, as Joel Goodman expressed it in 1982, the feeling was that "we are simply not yet ready to start the city".

Some Aurovilians wouldn't accept this. For them the city was an integral part of Mother's vision for Auroville and shouldn't be postponed into an indefinite future. In the mid 1980s, Paulette and Gilles Guigan made studies to ascertain exactly what Mother wanted for 'the city of the dawn'. When these were circulated widely in the community they helped generate a new appreciation of her intentions. Meanwhile some old-timers, exhausted by the daily battle with goats and high-maintenance greenbelt living, were beginning to look afresh at the advantages of apartment living, while many newcomers tended to have professional backgrounds and lacked the hang-ups regarding urbanisation which burdened some of the hard-core pioneers. But where were these new arrivals to live? For it was becoming very difficult to find accommodation or a site to build in existing settlements, newcomers were discouraged from starting new settlements and the city area remained off-limits.

## **Practical dreaming**

1988 was something of a watershed. The Auroville Foundation Act was passed, marking a new period of stability, and Roger had returned, stating "There is more fraternity and more authenticity than before." Now he clarified that he had never intended the original Galaxy plan to be manifested in all its details; the details had only been included "to give a sense of completion".

Suddenly there was a new spirit of flexibility and cooperation in the air. “We must become practical dreamers”, said Luigi, one of Roger’s closest associates, while Ed, a long-term greenbelter, mused that Sri Aurobindo’s symbol might provide the key to a new way forward: the ascending aspiration of the earth meeting the descending inspiration from above within the square of integration.

Meanwhile the first priority remained obtaining funds. In 1989 Auroville sent a portfolio of funding requests for land purchase and infrastructure development to the Human Resource Development Ministry to be forwarded to the Planning Commission, Government of India. The total requested was 56.6 crore rupees (US\$ 38 million). The Planning Commission politely requested further details. As such huge wish lists without any kind of context were clearly not going to get us anywhere, and as the community urgently needed to agree upon development priorities, it was decided to draw up an Auroville Development Plan for the next five years. In 1991 a Development and Planning Coordination Group was formed to prepare this plan for approval by the Residents Assembly. The Group, which was constituted of people with widely divergent views, made some progress in defining priorities and came up with the Auroville Development Perspectives document, but eventually the gulf between the ‘visionaries’ and those who favoured ‘organic’ development proved too wide and the experiment collapsed.

In 1992 a Development Group was established with more specific objectives: to make recommendations regarding the location and density of constructions in the Residential and Industrial Zones. The urgency of the need to evolve guidelines for development in the city—where construction had at last begun—enabled them to come up with practical recommendations.

### **Nothing is fixed**

This new spirit of pragmatism was evident in May, 1994, when the first ‘Master Plan’ was approved by the Residents Assembly and the Governing Board. What is striking about this plan is that, as one of its drafters explained, “It only defines what is necessary and widely agreed upon at this stage of Auroville’s development, giving ample space for everything unfolding. The report says that nothing can be considered as fixed, final and determined until it has finally been put into matter.” In this plan there are no lines of force, no densely urbanised cityscapes. And while the geometricism of the Galaxy is still evident in the perfectly circular Crown and outer ring road, the dynamic sweeps are now defined by four city parks which divide the zones, while the original radial roads have been reduced from twelve to eight. The mantra now was ‘green city’, ‘sustainable city’.

However, as construction activity exploded, particularly in the Residential Zone, there were the beginnings of a backlash. Even opponents of the original Galaxy concept conceded that it represented a unified vision of development, whereas now every new settlement reflected the taste of the presiding architect rather than any attempt to

attain a larger synthesis. Meanwhile supporters of the Galaxy concept became increasingly concerned that the last vestiges of it would be snuffed out by architects and individuals more interested in realising their own visions. In 1998 a Development Group with strong loyalty to Roger assumed responsibility for granting or denying building permission within Auroville. Their somewhat inflexible approach soon made them unpopular. Meanwhile the Planning Group, which had responsibility for issuing development guidelines, continued to affirm they were open to anyone working with them. The proviso, however, was that Roger's was the final authority, a condition which alienated some potential collaborators.

Exactly where Roger stood in all this is hard to say. When he returned to Auroville in 1988 he stated that the Galaxy concept "contains in its entirety the message of Mother and the dream She had for us." At the same time he stressed that, "I am not here to impose anything—it is up to Auroville to find it, to define itself." Later he was to affirm that nothing in the town plan was fixed, with the exception of the lines of force, the high-rise buildings which, he explained, "are essential for the silhouette of the city and for integrating all access to the city centre". While his statements over the years about the town seem somewhat confusing, even contradictory, the reality seems to be that he remains faithful to certain features of the original Galaxy—like the lines of force and the fact that there be no visual separation between Matrimandir and the inner city—while being willing to modify the original plan. Recently he mentioned that he no longer wants to be seen as the architect of the city, but rather as an advisor. Whenever there is a problem, he stated, "I am willing to be the final judge to keep Mother in the reality of the town."

### **Land speculation**

In early 1999, a new element entered the equation. A large plot of land in the Green Belt was bought by speculators who threatened to build a big housing colony. This new threat to Auroville's geographical integrity led to the establishment of a Land Use Coordination Committee with the brief to draw up a land use plan. This, a visiting town planner explained, "is the main part of a Master Plan that shows how the land is reserved for specific purposes. Once there is an approved land use plan for Auroville we can request the authorities concerned to protect the land for Auroville against speculators and unwanted development." In July a revised Master Plan, incorporating land use, was approved by the Residents Assembly and sent to the Governing Board. The latter approved it in principle, but requested that experienced town planners be consulted prior to sending the document to the Central Government. Two very senior town planners with experience in metropolitan urban planning offered their help.

The result of this collaboration was the drafting, in early 2001, of the first phase of the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan. This was a 25 year 'perspective' plan containing the broad concepts for the town's development. In April, 2001 this

was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The second phase is a more detailed 5 year development plan. “We start,” explains Lalit, a member of Auroville’s Future, the town planning service, “by making assumptions about the population growth of Auroville over the next five years (they assume a population of 5,000 by 2006), and from that we estimate the likely patterns of consumption for water, transport, energy etc. Then we make surveys to establish present consumption levels and come out with a blueprint suggesting what kind of development could take place in the near future.” Lalit’s colleague, Pashi, believes that Aurovilians’ attitudes to urban development have tended to be based upon emotion rather than hard facts. “So we need to come to statistic-based and data-based thinking to see what is practically possible and what is not.”

On 20th January, 2003 the efforts of the town planners and Land Use Coordination Committee began to bear fruit. The Tamil Nadu Government issued a Government Order stipulating that, in future, layout approval on private land within the Auroville Township Master Plan area would require a ‘no objection’ certificate from the Auroville Foundation.

### **Zone by zone**

What is the reality of the township today, zone by zone? In the Industrial Zone development has been relatively slow: today less than one third of our productive units are situated in this zone. Development has been hampered by water scarcity, poor access and lack of suitable land. The latest idea is to rename this zone the Auroshilpam Economic Zone (‘Auroshilpam’ was Mother’s name for the Industrial Zone): while offices would be located here for administration and research, the bulk of manufacturing would be outsourced.

In the Cultural Zone Transition School was constructed in 1985 and later a large sports ground was established. Recently, a high school—Future School—has come up close to Transition. The Zone has also seen the establishment of a Youth Centre and an artists’ colony—Kalabhumi—although the status of the latter as a permanent settlement in the Cultural Zone was long in doubt.

For many years, the incomplete Bharat Nivas remained the sole outpost in the International Zone. Only recently has it begun to assume its true role as India’s pavilion. Simultaneously its international character has been underlined by the construction of Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity in its midst. Other major developments in the International Zone have been the Visitors Centre complex, which was inaugurated in 1991, and Savitri Bhavan, a study centre for the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

However, one of the key components of the International Zone—the pavilions of different nations and cultures—have taken much longer to manifest. To date, in addition to Bharat Nivas only the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, the Student Guest House of the American Pavilion and the first phase of the Unity Pavilion have been

constructed. There are various reasons for this. Cost is one factor, but the slow pace of development is also due to ambiguous responses to the pavilions' concept from the Aurovilians themselves. Some feel that, in an increasingly internationalised world, it is an outmoded concept which would merely encourage chauvinism; others fear that nations with the most resources will dominate the space available. Many others are unclear about what 'their' pavilion should display as expressions of the soul of their nation. Even the suggested grouping of the pavilions in the International Zone has undergone radical changes over the years. The present plan is to group the pavilions by continent, each continent having a central plaza or campus round which its nations and cultures will coalesce.

### **Residential explosion**

By far the most activity in the city area over the last 15 years has taken place in the Residential Zone, driven by an increasingly serious accommodation shortage. From the late 1980s onwards major new settlements came up in the south-east sector of the zone. Each project was a learning experience, both for architects and clients. The advantages for the architects included the ability to express their ideas on a wider canvas and the savings in energy and, theoretically at least, costs accruing from modular construction techniques (actually, construction costs on almost all these projects ended up wildly exceeding original estimates). Meanwhile the inhabitants of these new communities were saved—to a greater or lesser extent—the energy-sapping experience of being responsible for the construction of their own accommodation.

The two main criticisms directed at these new settlements relate to aesthetics and lifestyle. For while each settlement tends to have its own architectural language, little or no attempt has been made to relate this language or to connect in any way with settlements nearby to create the beginnings of an 'urban fabric'. As to lifestyle: many of these settlements were presented as opportunities for Aurovilians and newcomers to experience community. However, living in proximity to others does not automatically make for community. In recent years there has been a movement to construct settlements that will foster greater collectivity. For example, while the 'Creativity' project is still not completed, its future inhabitants have been meeting regularly for almost two years to discuss their needs and agree upon guidelines for harmonious living. Another experiment in high-density community living is the Line of Force project, the first part of which was completed last year.

Recently, in spite of a continuing shortage of accommodation, the apartment boom has ground almost to a halt. Developers like Rolf point out that the demand has slackened because costs have escalated (he estimates that the cost of construction doubles every 5-6 years). At the same time, developers find it difficult to get the upfront money they need for apartment projects as they cannot obtain conventional loans. One possibility being floated is that Auroville business units extend loans which could be repaid through renting out the completed apartments to community members.

However, this is still a controversial topic.

Other development constraints include uncertainty about water resources in the Residential Zone and a lack of coordination, even competing agendas, between the various groups and individuals responsible for housing matters. Projects like Kailash and Courage have almost foundered on disputes between the Development Group and the architects involved, while newcomers seeking accommodation frequently recount harrowing experiences of being bounced back and forth between the Entry Group, the Development Group and the Housing Group.

### **A little help from our friends**

For many years, the Aurovilians involved in town planning were amateurs with much enthusiasm but little expertise. As the problems became more complex, so their shortcomings became more obvious. Crucially, they were unable to come up with basic principles of urban design, described by the architect Helmut as “the ground rules for building up the city—rules which are clear enough and flexible enough to carry over to a new generation of designers, builders and users.”

In the late 1990s a young town planner offered his help, and subsequently we have had the assistance of two very senior metropolitan town planners. A German traffic planner has also offered his help in evolving a concept for a pedestrian-friendly, pollution-free transport system within the city. All of this has introduced a new spirit of professionalism into our town planning process.

The other main fillip to the development of the town in recent years has been Auroville’s participation in the Asia-Urbs programme. The idea behind this European Commission-funded project was for European cities to transfer their best practices in urban governance, sustainable energy generation, waste disposal etc. to city partners in Asia. Auroville at present is far from being a township, let alone a city, but the enthusiasm and drive of Aurovilians like Luigi and Sauro, and the fact that Auroville was still something of a *tabula rasa*, something which fascinated many town planners, managed to convince the organisers that Auroville should be included. Under one Asia-Urbs project, Auroville was partnered with Venice and Cologne. Not only did it receive valuable town planning assistance from each municipality, it also received major funding from the European Commission for the Auroville Centre for Urban Research (ACUR). This, the first building in Auroville’s administrative zone, opened recently and presently houses Auroville’s town planning and development groups, along with many other key working groups. In effect, ACUR is our first town hall.

### **What are we building?**

Various people, including India’s pre-eminent town planner, Mr. Doshi, have remarked that in Auroville we’re building much more than a physical township—we’re trying to build a new consciousness. And this requires not bricks and mortar, master plans and subsidies, but goodwill, honesty, transparency and, above all, a

willingness to open ourselves to another reality. For Mother said more than once that the town is already built: we merely have to bring it down, to materialise it.

How do we go about this? More than anything, it implies a surrender—of our hang-ups regarding urbanisation, of our preconceptions concerning what a city should look like, of our suspicions regarding the motives of fellow Aurovilians—along with a full commitment to make Auroville a town, not a snooze of suburbs.

The last 35 years have not been wasted. Instead of the Aurovilians moving into a ready-built city—the original concept—Auroville became a laboratory for the organic working out of many problems. We have learned much—about the land, about construction in the tropics, about the needs of the bioregion and its people, about ourselves. Today, we have a chance to take the next step. A new group, the Auroville Planning and Development Council, has been constituted to work on all issues relating to planning and development. Its membership is diverse, its size, perhaps, unwieldy. But if they can pool Auroville's collective experience of the last 35 years and then listen, not only to each other but to Mother's voice as it speaks through our defective instrumentation, perhaps, just perhaps, we'll be able to pass at last beyond the either/or right/wrong monotony of our argumentation to that space where Mother's city—whatever that city may be—flashes like the morning star, calling us to a brand new day.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 44-49)*

*(Message for the first anniversary of Auroville)*

*Let Light, peace and joy be with all those who live in Auroville and work for its realisation.*

*Blessings.*

*28 February 1969*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 200)*



## WHY AUROVILLE NEEDS INDIA

TIME and again I ponder over the words the Mother spoke to Satprem on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968: “India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that the... cure will be found. And then, that is why—THAT IS WHY I was made to start Auroville.” (*Mother’s Agenda*) Cryptic words. Words that inextricably link India and Auroville together. As though the one would not be able to fulfill its true spiritual role without the other. As though Auroville were created to help India rise to her destiny. And Auroville in turn, by virtue of being in India, draws its sustenance from the living body of India’s wisdom.

### **Spirituality**

Spirituality is the cornerstone on which both India and Auroville are founded. Spirituality is the alpha and omega of the hopes that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have for both India and Auroville.

“India,” the Mother declared, “is the guru of the world... India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world.” India is the only country where the Truth has not been extinguished; where there has been an unbroken tradition of spiritual Masters. And yet, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have repeatedly warned that without proper development, India’s soul-force could be severely diminished. For instance, in 1965, in a letter to a disciple, the Mother wrote, “India should be the spiritual guide explaining what is happening and helping to shorten the movement. But, unfortunately, in her blind ambition to imitate the West, she has become materialistic and neglectful of her soul.”

In 1968, the Mother founded Auroville, “the City the Earth needs”. The phrase “the City the Earth needs” has become a catchy byword or slogan for Auroville. And unfortunately in our brochures, videos and presentations on Auroville we have come to narrow the meaning of this phrase. “Earth” is seen only as material earth or nature. And a philosophy of environmental sustainability has emerged in Auroville and is justified as being that which the Earth needs. In reality, in the broadest meaning of the Mother’s words, what the Earth needs is a city that, in all its aspects, activities, and ways of being is turned completely towards the Divine. A city that by the sincerity of its aspiration will help in the manifestation of the Truth. Undoubtedly such a city could only be founded and could only survive in India, where, as has been said before, there has always been a recognition of the emerging Divinity. It could also be argued that the Mother hoped that Auroville, “the city at the service of Truth”, would prove to be a beacon or guiding light that would allow for a resurgence of spiritual values in India.

### **The Challenge of India**

Indeed, in the early years, Aurovilians boldly took up the challenges that faced rural India—poverty and environmental degradation—and showed, by example, how

through hard work and determination a land could be regenerated and its people rehabilitated. As it develops the facilities of a city however, Auroville has not successfully addressed the challenges of urban India. Auroville's low-density urban development has few solutions, if any, to offer modern India. And sometimes I wonder if the problems in land acquisition and the threats we face from real-estate speculators arise from the fact that, by and large, Aurovilians hesitate to take up the challenge of urban development.

An even more dangerous drawback is that Auroville has not yet inculcated in its development any Indian values. For I believe that the new life the Mother foresaw for India and for Auroville roots itself in the eternal values of India. Although Indians are the single largest race in Auroville, comprising almost one-third of its population, the socio-cultural values—individuality, independence, initiative, work ethic, vital creativity etc,—that have shaped life in Auroville are largely western. Visitors and Indian Aurovilians have often remarked that Auroville is too westernised. It has been argued by some that the reason for this unbalanced development is because, in Auroville, economic and decision-making power lies largely in the hands of Westerners and not Indians. But I feel the imbalance is more due to the fact that Indians have not yet been able to articulate and manifest the values that they believe in, the values they have imbibed through the greatness of an enduring civilisation. The Mother herself observed: “The West expresses more than it really knows. India knows more than it can really express.”

### **The Values of India**

What then, the question arises, are the distinctive traits or socio-cultural values that Auroville can learn from India? The first and foremost quality of Indians that has ensured the continuity of their civilisation is their unshakable faith in God and their capacity for endurance. Faith is indispensable for the spiritual life that Auroville aims to lead. The western mind, with characteristic impatience, often lacks the faith and the perseverance to wait for the truth to emerge and instead seeks to impose solutions from the mind. The ideals of Auroville, which are eternal spiritual ideals, are too often interpreted by the mind. But as the Mother says, “Truth cannot be expressed in mental terms... Truth cannot be formulated, it cannot be defined,—it can be *lived*.... Truth is something living, moving, expressing itself at each second.” Auroville would do well to cultivate faith in India's national motto, “*Satyameva Jayate*” (Truth always triumphs).

Another western tendency is to be suspicious of authority and dismissive of authoritative figures. In contrast, India with its social stratification into castes, with its hierarchical order of a joint family system, with its belief in the power of “gurus” and its respect for elders and teachers, shows obedience to authority that borders on servility. A healthy balance would be to seek the middle way between these two extremes. Auroville, I feel, is hindered in its progress because Aurovilians do not

easily accept leaders to chart out the community's development. There is lack of trust among us, and consequently we fall into the error of trying to deal with our problems democratically. The Mother's vision of a natural hierarchical order is yet to be manifested in the community.

Plurality is a characteristic that marks both India and Auroville. Like Auroville, India embraces quite a mix of ethnic groups and cultures, a profusion of languages, lifestyles and ranges of economic levels. Examining this plurality, Shashi Tharoor writes, "Any truism about India is immediately contradicted by another truism about India." In the same way, it has often been observed that there are as many views of Auroville as there are Aurovilians. The value that Auroville needs to learn here is tolerance and respect for this diversity. Too often, we sink to unacceptable levels of intolerance by denouncing someone's way of life, someone's spiritual practices etc. As in Indian classical music, where the musician feels free to improvise within set rules, so also Aurovilians must be left free to develop according to the Truth as they perceive it in their evolution towards manifesting Auroville's ideals.

Lastly, like India to the outside world, Auroville despite its rich diversity is perceived as a single entity. And as we respect the diversity amongst us, we should equally celebrate our oneness and the common goal that unites us. Auroville, like its mother country India, is greater than the sum of its comprising parts.

To conclude, as Sri Aurobindo says, "the method of the West is to exaggerate life and to call down as much—or as little—as may be of the higher powers to stimulate and embellish life. But the method of India is on the contrary to discover the spirit within and the higher hidden intensities of the superior powers and to dominate life in one way or another so as to make it responsive to and expressive of the spirit and in that way increase the power of life." Auroville has so far developed by "the method of the West"; but now in the dawn of a new millennium, it is of utmost necessity, for the future of India and the world, that Auroville grows by "the method of India", by the identification with the spirit within and the imposition of its rule on matter.

BINDU MOHANTY

*Never forget that here it is for the perfection of the work that we are striving, not for the satisfaction of the ego.*

*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 160)

## ‘THE MOTHER OF SRI AUROBINDO’

It was the year 1971. I had decided to visit Afghanistan during my University holidays. During those days, this country was one of the ‘hottest’ destinations for backpackers. In some shabby hotel in Kabul, I overheard hippies talking about a ‘cool’ place in the Indian Himalayas. The name of the village was Manali. The ‘blessed’ ones who had experienced the place were strongly advising their fellow wanderers to visit this great spot. According to some of the hippies, one could even meet ‘cool’ Tibetan refugees living in this heavenly valley! It triggered something in my head (or was it in my heart?): “I must go and meet these cool guys!” was my immediate resolve. It was probably the name ‘Tibet’ which ‘awakened’ something deep in me.

Retrospectively, though I did not know anything about spirituality or ‘karma’ (I don’t have much more knowledge 35 years later!), I realise now that there are instants in life which can change one’s existence; unconsciously, I knew that it was one such moment. On that day in Kabul, I made up my mind to travel to India as soon as possible and spend some time in this mysterious ‘paradise’ of Manali. A sort of overpowering attraction was pulling me towards the place.

The very next year, I managed to book a plane ticket to India; I was determined to go directly to Manali without stopping anywhere on the way.

On a fine morning of July 1972, I landed at Palam airport. After the usual long customs and immigration clearances, I walked outside to have my first *darshan* of Bharat. As I looked for a cab to take me to Old Delhi Railway Station, I saw the most amazing, not to say shocking sight opposite the airport terminal: snake-like scaffoldings covered a building under construction. In my mind, scaffoldings were always straight and strictly perpendicular. That day, my Cartesian vision (straight and perpendicular) got a beating. This was the beginning of my initiation to the Land of India: things could be different from the West and still hold together.

The cab took me to the station where I boarded the first available train to the North. I was not aware that something called ‘reservation’ existed, but the Ticket Controller was kind enough to show me the pantry car where I could sit relatively comfortably. From Ambala, I caught a bus to Chandigarh from where I boarded another to Simla and on the third day, we uneventfully reached Kulu. From the town famous for its shawls and its Dushera festival, the serpentine road follows the river Beas for some 40 kilometres, steadily climbing towards the village of Manali (today it has become one of the most popular and largest of hill resorts of North India, but in those days, it was a tiny village).

During the monsoon, the poor state of the roads made the drive rather frightening as the bus often slid dangerously close to the precipice. The roaring waters of the Beas, a hundred metres below rendered it all the more scary. The name “the Valley of the Gods” did not reassure anybody.

We had reached about halfway, stopping at every village, hamlet or crossing, when the driver suddenly told the passengers that a landslide had blocked the road ahead; there was no question of reaching Manali that day. He generously offered to take everybody back to Kulu where the passengers could spend the night. We were told that hopefully the road would be opened the next day, if the weather permitted and if the Army managed to clear the landslide.

Though everybody decided to follow the driver's advice and go back to Kulu, one and a half hours away from the small village where we had stopped, I decided otherwise. Why stop when I was so close from my objective, only 18 kilometres away? No question of my going back. I thought of spending the night on the roadside or in a *dhaba*, assuming that the next morning I could leave early and trek to Manali. I must admit here that I had some difficulty with the *dhaba*'s food, my French palate not being used to the hot stuff that the *paharis* can ingest. As dusk was approaching, I just had some hot tea and started looking around for a not too uncomfortable place to spend the night in my sleeping bag.

It was the time destiny chose to strike. A young boy approached me and I quickly gathered that he was inviting me to his place. I was not too keen, but during the 'conversation' (he knew two words of English and I knew one or two more), he spoke about Sri Aurobindo. I was intrigued because I knew of the existence of the sage. I even had a pocketbook of a (bad) translation of *The Life Divine* in my backpack, but I did not know anything about his life, Pondicherry, the Ashram or Auroville. The book of Sri Aurobindo in my bag was rather ungraspable (for me at least), but I enjoyed reading a few pages everyday.

As our exchange continued, the boy caught my hand and told me to follow him. Why not? Adventure is adventure!

It was becoming dark, but I could just distinguish the mountain path by which the youngster was leading me. Suddenly, he began to talk about "the Mother of Sri Aurobindo". I thought to myself, the lady must be quite old. I knew that Sri Aurobindo was no more and if his mother was still on earth, she must be really old. Later, I grasped that Sri Aurobindo's mother was French. This was new to me! I had thought that the Bengali yogi was of pure Indian blood. Anyway, as a Frenchman, I was flattered by the news. That someone half French was able to write a complex book like *The Life Divine* was a good sign: it meant that a white or half-white man could write on such an arduous subject!

We continued to walk for a couple of kilometres in the mountain to finally reach a small typically Himachali house.

In the house was a young lady who, I immediately understood, was connected with the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. She spoke good English, unfortunately mine was too limited, and also knew a few words of French, but her vocabulary was even more limited than mine in English.

The lady, I never asked her name, showed me around the house. It was small but

cozy. In her room, near her bed, there was a photo in a frame. I gathered that it was a picture of the French lady, 'the mother of Sri Aurobindo'. Indeed, she looked old but what attracted me most were her eyes and what was handwritten at the bottom of the photo. I will always remember the words: "The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?" Without fully understanding, my heart said, "Yes, I want to help", though I did not have the faintest idea what the lady meant and why she needed people's help. I nevertheless strongly believed that the world was changing, being at that time a great fan of Bob Dylan who had proclaimed "*The Times They Are A-Changin*".

I gradually understood that the French 'mother' had asked this young lady to live and work there, amidst the orchards. As I was tired, she showed me an adjacent room with a charpoy and told me that I could sleep here. On a small table I noticed another picture of Sri Aurobindo's 'mother'. Before taking leave, the lady offered me a glass of milk. For her, it was probably the best thing to offer. The problem was that I could not stand milk. Since childhood, I had an aversion for this beverage. But I had not eaten anything and I thought to myself that it would be rude to refuse something so kindly offered. What to do with this milk? I looked at the photo of the 'mother' and decided to close my nose and eyes and gulp down the contents of the glass. It was not so bad, I thought later.

That night, I had a really good sleep without any dream, though I took some time to fall asleep; the strange circumstances of this encounter turned in my head. The next morning, after a good breakfast, I asked permission to take a photo with the 'mother's' picture and her message. Later, the lady and the boy insisted on accompanying me to the village where I would catch a bus.

At night, I had not seen much of the surroundings because it was too dark. I realised now that we had crossed the most fabulous apple orchards. While walking down, I discovered the stunning beauty of the valley above this small village of Kaltrain where we had accidentally stopped the previous day. Walking down the mountain path amongst the orchards, we picked up a few apples; they must have been the first ones of the season.

When we reached the bus stop, the news had spread that the road was opened again. We waited for a while and the bus finally came. I bade farewell to the Ashram lady and the boy (probably her brother). I was not to see them again, but the night I spent in their house will remain engraved in my memory for ever. This seemingly chance encounter was to change my life.

An hour later, on the road between Kaltrain and Manali, I encountered my first Tibetan. The guy, a tall Khampa from Eastern Tibet was indeed 'cool', he smiled while slogging on the badly potholed road.

In India or in Tibet, it is said that everything can be explained by one word, 'karma'. It is a very useful word as it can explain whatever we cannot understand with our little white man's brain. It is indeed practical and further there seems to be some truth in it.

I can only conclude that it must have been my good karma to have my first encounter with the ‘mother of Sri Aurobindo’ and then with my first Tibetan! My life since then has been linked with both.

During the following weeks, I travelled to many places in the Himalayas and I had the occasion to meet a number of Tibetan refugees who had been rehabilitated by the Indian Government in the hill stations. Most of them were working on the construction and repair of high-altitude strategic roads.

I visited Dharamsala, Dalhousie, Mussoorie, Kathmandu and many other places and the more I met with these peculiar people, the more I became interested in their way of being as well as their history. They had lost everything: their country, their wealth, often several members of their family and still they could stand happily on the roads and smile.

How could someone educated in a Cartesian country with a modern utilitarian education understand this bizarre phenomenon? We are taught that if one loses everything important and dear in life, one must be sad and grim-faced, there are no two ways about it. In the beginning I thought that the experience of the Chinese invasion and the destruction of their thousand-year-old civilisation had been too much for them to bear, leading to cracks in their brain. This might have been true for a few individuals, but when a similar experience repeated itself in so many different places, with so many different people.... It kept me wondering!

While in Dharamsala, in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, I met their leader, the Dalai Lama and I began to understand something that I had not so far understood: these people had a different set of values than Westerners have. They may have lost their material wealth and their country, but they had not lost the deeper human qualities which we call peace of mind or compassion. This was their strength. And their leader was the living example of these qualities.

In seeing this ‘simple monk’, as he prefers to call himself, I saw that inner strength and the power of compassion are qualities which are practically unknown today in the world. This monk seemed to be the embodiment of a wisdom which was part of the spiritual and cultural heritage of a nation that had spent most of its time looking ‘within’, into the heart of man.

Perhaps in the West we spend too much time looking ‘outside’. We have been looking to the ‘outside’ to try to find out how to control the material world and nature around us, but in the process, we have forgotten the inner qualities and powers of the spirit. Did that Tibetan road worker have the lost key to our major problem: how to live a contented and happy life?

It was also while in Dharamsala that I met a young Tibetan boy who was studying in the Ashram School. He told me about my ‘gaffe’. The Mother was not Sri Aurobindo’s physical mother but his collaborator and companion on the path to the next stage of evolution.

He convinced me that I should also visit Pondicherry. I eventually made it with

the 2<sup>nd</sup> caravan which reached Auroville in December 1974. Since then the world has changed a great deal, not always for the best. Have I been able to 'help' as the Mother had invited me way back in 1972, is another question!

CLAUDE ARPI

*Finally, even if all is determined, why say that life is, in Shakespeare's phrase or rather Macbeth's, "a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? Life would rather be that if it were all chance and random incertitude. But if it is something foreseen, planned in every detail, does it not rather mean that life does signify something, that there must be a secret Purpose that is being worked up to, powerfully, persistently, through the ages, and ourselves are a part of it and fellow-workers in the fulfilment of that invincible Purpose?*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 469-70)*



# DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of January 2008)

## 21. Islamic Bhakti Poetry

ISLAM came to Tamil Nadu very early and has been part of the socio-religious scenario for the last one thousand years. But the literary history of Islam in Tamil Nadu becomes visible only after the sixteenth century. When the Muslims of Tamil Nadu settled down as part of the milieu and were not seen as invaders or proselytisers any more, it was time for spreading Islam through peaceful means. Literature gave a big hand in this, and the Muslim writers adopted the genres in Tamil literature in a big way. The earliest solid work of Islamic devotional literature is *Seerappuranam* by Umaru Pulavar which was commissioned by Seethakkathi (Syed Khader).

Seethakkathi was a rich trader who lived in the seventeenth century and became a legend for his generosity. As there was no available work in Tamil on the Prophet's life and teachings, and the younger generations were becoming increasingly strangers to Arabic, Seethakkathi requested Umaru Pulavar to write a biography of the Prophet. After Seethakkathi's death, Umaru Pulavar completed the work with the help of another nobleman, Abdul Khasim Marakkayar.

*Seerappuranam*, except for its subject, remains a child of the Tamil milieu. The work begins with long descriptions of the land, the city and the gifts of Mother Nature. What we see is no desert region but luscious Tamil land! The rains pour down generously from the tops of mountains, cochineal insects spread everywhere, the paddy stalks sway rich and thick, lions and elephants abound in the forests and a variety of trees spread scent around: Sandalwood, Champak, Myrobolan, Ashoka, Teak and the rest.

Mecca in Arabia resembles Madurai a good deal. There is nothing that is not available in the market of Mecca including horses, pearls, various gems, kasturi, sandal, akil and saffron. In short, says Umaru Pulavar, it was like the tree in Indra's grove, the Kalpavriksha. Here lived happily Abdollah and Ameena. When she was with child, Abdollah went to Madeena in connection with his business:

It was fate that worked now  
When time sped as hours  
And Abdollah died remembering god,  
As if he had but gone to sleep.

Those with him blamed fate  
And buried Abdollah with due rituals.

They returned to Ameena at Mecca  
And gave her all the news.

On hearing the words the peacock-like  
Ameena wept with a broken heart  
Covering her face with her lotus hands  
Her akil-scented tresses all awry.<sup>1</sup>

She is consoled by the elders and the Prophet is born in the background of several miracles. Such myth-making was nothing strange for the Tamil milieu already attuned to the miracles-ridden religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Umaru Pulavar says that all the idols set up to represent god by the people fell down face downwards. The throne of Iblis was smashed to smithereens. Groups of stars fell on earth burning. The child was bathed in holy rivers, his eyes were painted with collyrium and he was fed with nectar.

The sky, the earth, the seven seas,  
Mountains and rivers, the eight directions:  
Everywhere the lovely-faced Muhammad  
Was taken, his name proclaimed,  
By the angels with vast wings outspread.  
Then they returned to Ameena's home  
And placed the baby with her.  
All this happened in a moment.

Touched by miracles at each step, with the diction of the Tamil culture entwined with Arabic terms like 'Jalal', 'Jamal', 'Khalimat' and 'Salavat', *Seerappuranam* is a devotional scripture for Tamil Muslims and is used as the basic text for religious life by the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

This is not surprising, for the work has several passages that help the aspirant envision the Supreme as the all-pervading One. The opening verse of the poem:

He is the wealth of wealth  
He is the most precious of precious things  
He is the essence of purest essence  
He is the fragrance of fragrant flowers  
He is the atom of atoms  
He is the luminary of the most luminous lights  
He is the prettiest of prettiest forms

1. All translations from Tamil used in this essay are by Prema Nandakumar, unless otherwise stated.

He is the embryo of embryos of all beings:  
 Such being thy qualities  
 Who had performed austerities,  
 To you we surrender  
 Our soul, heart and mind.<sup>2</sup>

The writing of Puranas caught on and we now have several of them like *Nakurpuranam* and *Mukayuddinpuranam*. The latter was written by Vannak Kalanjiya Pulavar. The Islamic devotional poets also made use of other genres like ‘ula’, ‘parani’ and ‘kalambakam’. Even the unique ‘*pillai-t-tamil*’ was attempted by Seyyadu Anappiyya Pulavar. *Nabikal Nayakam Pillaitamil* (19<sup>th</sup> century) follows the set pattern of the genre but the theme is made explicit. When the protection of the deity is invoked, we have a fine description of the Nirguna Supreme, as in the opening verse of *Seerappuranam*:

Marvellous scripture, created things,  
 Clear knowledge, recipients of sense knowledge,  
 Undying life, pleasure,  
 Delicious taste, clear ambrosia,  
 Fragrance of fragrances, the essence of compassion,  
 The luminous tree, the rain cloud,  
 An eternal jewel, light of the sun,  
 Peerless reason and undivided form  
 Meritorious harbour—  
 Praise rises and swells for these creations.

Eminent one,  
 Embryo of embryos in heaven and earth,  
 You created the many creatures  
 According to their destinies  
 By thinking and proclaiming “Laulaka!”

Merciful One, you rule majestically  
 As fruitful protection.<sup>3</sup>

The baby Mohammed dances, swaying to and fro; his cradle inlaid with gems is rocked by celestial women who sing lullabies; he beats a tiny drum and drags a little chariot; and he plays with children making mud houses and they pray to him not to

2. Translated by E. Saa. Viswanathan.

3. Translated by Paula Richman.

destroy their tiny homes (*sitri*). All the time we also remember that the subject is the Prophet Mohammed himself, and his miracle-rich life is referred to at the appropriate places. Calling upon the little one to clap his hands, the poet sings:

In this world surrounded by water-filled oceans,  
 There live without anger  
 Learned and ordinary people  
 Both receiving the fruits of knowledge  
 And always-increasing wealth  
 Without distress or poverty  
 In the land of victorious Mecca.

One day, there,  
 After the flooding rains ruined the Kaa'ba,  
 When the Quraishis were renovating it,  
 Even groups of strong men  
 Were unable to pick up and move  
 The stone called Hajar al-Aswad.

But you picked up the stone  
 And carried it  
 To the southeast corner of the raised wall.

With those fair lotus-like hands  
 That picked up the stone as your own,  
 Clap your hands.

Great teacher full of discipline,  
 Taha Muhammad, clap your hands.<sup>4</sup>

Generally Islam is perceived as being against the worship of physical forms and the ritualism associated with idolatry. However, for centuries the worship of great devotees of God (Walis) has been in vogue and the place of their burial is hailed as a Dargah. The orthodox Muslims refer to it as just a burial place and visiting it is considered to be the way of expressing one's gratitude by reciting holy verses and making offerings. They do not accept it as a place of worship at all. But these Dargahs of saints have received high reverence and worship from the common man in India, irrespective of his faith. They have contributed in a great way to the flourishing of the Sufi *sampradāya* in India, which is part of the Sant *sampradāya* that has been enriching

4. *Ditto*.

the spaces of India ever since the beginning of the Bhakti Movement in Tamil Nadu in the third century.

The Sant *sampradāya* in India's Bhakti Movement has been presented as having four streams: *Tattva-darsi* (philosophical), *Bhāva-samarpana* (emotive ecstasy), *Svachchand* (metaphysical) and Sufi (bridal mysticism). The coming of Islam into India when the Hindu king of Sindh was defeated by Islamic invaders in the seventh century was no doubt a great loss for the icon-rich Vedic streams of religions. But the way of Sanatana Dharma has ever been inclusive, and so Islam as a religion flourished. Gradually there was a good deal of mutual absorption, for the common man wanted peace.

Naturally, the earlier Sufi saints were concentrated in North India. And the earliest was Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti whose *makbara* in Ajmer is venerated by Hindus as well. There are many *sampradāyas* in Sufism including the Khodiya (brought by Mohammed Ghose to India) and Kalandariya of Sheikh Biralishah Kalandar. The Sufis drew from the Bhakti Movement of the South the closeness with the Divine who was seen by the Sufis as a "*sadā suhāgin*", the eternal Bride. With its Islamic origins, it was natural that the Sufis should only sing of Nirguna. It must be pointed out here that Sufism is not simply a mix of Islam and the Bhakti Movement. And it may have originated in Arabia itself:

The Arabs laid stress on asceticism and disciplining of the body, while the latter Sufis in Iran and India, under the influence of Greek philosophy, Platonic ideology, Christian faith, Vedantist thinking, Buddhist lore, etc. believed in leading an emotionally rich life. They drank and danced and advocated that physical love could sublimate itself into spiritual love. They had faith in God: they loved the Prophet, but they maintained that the Murshid or Guru could also lead to realisation of the divine Reality.<sup>5</sup>

The most famous of the Dargahs in Tamil Nadu which can be spoken of as a citadel of Sufism is the one at Nagore. The holy place has been bringing comfort and peace to millions irrespective of caste, religion or colour. It is well to remember how this miracle settled down in Tamil Nadu.

Abdul Qadir (Nagore Nayakam) came in the line of the Prophet Muhammad and was born in Ayodhya in 1504. Miracles accompanied him ever since his birth. He left home in his eighteenth year, tarried for a while in Gwalior where he met his spiritual mentor Mohammed Ghose. In due course he reached the heights of Sufi mystic planes of consciousness.

Nagore Nayakam's miraculous life included the possession of an Amuda Surabhi (Rikwat) which could produce unlimited food. He travelled in far countries like Turkey,

5. Kartar Singh Duggal, *The Mystic Muse* (1996), p. 1.

Khorasan, Palestine and Medina. He was wont to receive messages from the divine being, Hisru. When he cured King Achutappa Naik of a debilitating disease, he received five acres of land in Nagore where he remained for the rest of his life. When he withdrew from the physical in his 68<sup>th</sup> year, his mortal remains were laid to rest there. Devotees belonging to other religions come to the Nagore Durgah from all over the world with plentiful offerings to express their gratitude, devotion and Ananda. For them, Nagore Nayakam continues to be a Presence, a perennial stream of life. Musicians like Nagore Haneefa have given wide currency to the Saint by composing and singing songs on his ministry at Nagore. Among other Sufi saints of Tamil Nadu, Nather Wali of Tiruchi needs to be mentioned too. The lives of these saints have produced a considerable amount of devotional literature. The presence of such *tai'fas* (saint cults) shows what an impregnable place has been given to the idea of a guru in the Sufi tradition.

In the world of devotional Islamic poesy in Tamil, Gunangudi Masthan Saheb's works have a very important place. His original name was Abdul Khader (1788-1835) and he took to the life of a renunciate quite early in his life. His simple and pure life brought him disciples even from non-Islamic fold like Ayyaswami Mudaliar and Saravana Perumal Iyer. They have all sung about his greatness as a guru. Kovalam Sabapati Mudaliar has written a "Pancharatnam":

Can darkness veil the charioteer of the Sun?  
 How can ignorance ever stain me  
 When I am in the group that worships  
 Thy lotus feet? O Lord  
 Whom even scriptures cannot describe!  
 The final step of the seven-fold states,<sup>6</sup>  
 O Gunangudi! Lord of True Wisdom!

Masthan Saheb was very handsome, according to Saravana Perumal Iyer. We have his *Padal Tirattu* (Collection of Songs) which reveals the deep inspiration that flowed from the poesy of Thayumanava. The work opens with an attempt to define what constitutes the state of Ananda (Delight of Existence). Arabic words and Islamic thoughts are woven into the songs. Masthan Saheb says that Ananda is created by the Supreme through creation, play, greatness, strength and compassion.

O Lord you can have a game  
 With the millions of universes  
 Held as a ball in your hand!  
 You can whirl the seven worlds

6. Nafsil Kamal, the Perfected Being, Perfection being the Seventh and final stage in the Sufi Way.

As in a child's play!  
 You can draw the cosmos  
 Close to you for a game!  
 You can bombard the atom  
 And hang the earth and heaven  
 On it! And churn the seven seas  
 All in joyous sport. You are master  
 Of all occult powers and yet  
 Have you not the power to appear  
 In my presence? Despite being  
 At your feet, will I be a useless being?  
 O Padshah with all good qualities,  
 My teacher, Mohiuddin!

The state of Samadhi (cognitive absorption) is dealt with by the poet in numerous verses. These verses stand witness to the perfect manner in which the yogic diction of Indian culture had been absorbed by the Sufi saints of Tamil Nadu:

That is Samadhi when you forget boundaries  
 And your troubles are gone; it is Samadhi  
 When you destroy the 'I' and the 'Mine',  
 The body, material things and the 'who';  
 That is Samadhi when you are with wise men  
 Having no idea of the passage of day and night;  
 It is Samadhi not to have a list of achievements  
 As found in the holy scriptures;  
 That is Samadhi to understand that the wife,  
 The son and relatives are no relations;  
 Grant this to thy servant, O Lord,  
 I have put my faith in you. With patience  
 Come to me, though I resist, noble Rasool!  
 Dear as my eyes twain, O Mohiuddin  
 Of Gunangudi with increasing grace!

Though Masthan Saheb is thus engaged in a monologue with his Master, he also keeps a wary eye on the people around him. He warns us to keep away from these troublemakers who deliberately create unrest in the society. Fake gurus are never a step away!

Like Sirdars they preen themselves,  
 But in reality are full of lowly thoughts  
 And rascals all...

They say 'I am a Pir' and thus trade  
Selling upadesa...

When he thinks of the sinners, his poems become bouquets of angry laughter:

Sinner who searches for strychnine fruit  
Beneath the Kalpavriksha;  
Sinner whose doctrine is all about  
Whether a dog can catch a stork...  
Sinner who will not follow the Wise  
Even if driven forward with a whip.

Masthan Saheb is equally critical of himself. For instance, his anxiety to gain a totally meditative stage is repeatedly thwarted and so he records his lamentations.

Shall I lament that my heart melts not  
Like water? Does not stay in a good state?  
Shall I lament that I am not able  
To meditate on the supreme light  
Beyond thought? Shall I lament  
That I am not able to experience  
The streaming down of grace?  
Shall I lament with my hands on head  
Crying, in search of god?

Internal evidence shows that Masthan Saheb was probably a weaver of mats. Thayumanava's poems on "Tejomayanandam" have strongly influenced his "Akatheesar Sathakam". This is an important document of yoga. The Guru's presence is seen as of vital importance to perform tapasya and achieve self-control. In the section on the "State of Wind", Masthan Saheb indicates the possibility of reaching to higher states of consciousness by purifying the mental consciousness. The Sathakam also makes use of Tantra yoga and tantric diction in the "State of Vision" when he calls upon the Mowna Guru (Silent Teacher) to guide him in his spiritual journey. The Siddha Nandiswara:

The source-light from crown to feet,  
The bridge Nandiswara from feet to the crown.

O my Chief, Nandiswara, how long do I bow  
At your feet to gain your compassion?...



Stainless Beyond! The main entrance  
To the palace of Silence, O Mahat, Nandiswara!

The cosmic Lord, Stream of wisdom,  
Flood of grace, sprout of silence, Nandiswara!

The Shodashi Puja of Tantra flashes past in Masthan Saheb's mind. Mother Kundalini is worshipped anxiously so that she can destroy all the desires. Not all, of course, he adds. The desire "to worship Ambika and gain Release" must burn in him always. After the "State of Vision" we enter the "State of Meditation" and from thence to the "State of Samadhi". There the search ends. In all the ten states marked by him, the need for a Guru is given great emphasis.

The bridal mysticism of the Sufis is found in poems like "Rahman Kanni" and "Kanmanimalai Kanni". As with Sufis, Masthan Saheb has loved music and has composed songs too that are well known. Here is one in Punnagavarali raga:

*Pallavi:*

Come let us watch the procession  
Of the Gunangudi Chief, the Realised One.

*Anupallavi:*

The Realised ones,  
The immortals, the good people  
Sing in praise as he comes granting us freedom.

*Charanam:*

The Scriptures say, Salaam! Salaam!  
Brilliant lightnings streak the sky  
The hearts hail, Raheem! Raheem! Raheem!  
Bismillahi Rahaman Raheem say the hearts quietly  
Offering all their faith.

Some of the songs describe in searing terms the many ways in which women have been exploited and used by man. Apparently there was criticism by the menfolk about his exposing their male chauvinism. He lashes out:

Come out boldly and clash with me  
If you are male lions with moustaches!

Finally he invites all of us to go over to holy Gunangudi. There he describes the Dance of Shiva with brilliant phrases, as he watches it in between his brows when sitting in yoga:

The cymbals keep time as the anklets at his feet  
 Dancing joyously like a peacock in the forest,  
 Giving up the three desires that could enslave us,  
 Kicking the Evil by one foot, the other foot folded,  
 Holding me by hand, gifting me grace,  
 The heart beating with love always,  
 Our Lord of Gunangudi presented  
 A soul-enthraling dance!

It was thus no surprise that Subramania Bharati, the famous poet of the Tamil renaissance was also a close student of Islam and its literature. To conclude, here is his poem on “Allah!” which is considered a classic:

The supra-flame  
 That cannot be seized  
 By thought or speech  
 The Lord who laid down  
 The movement continuous  
 Of millions of universes  
 In all directions  
 On the shoreless expanse  
 Of the space beyond...

A father who has compassion  
 For the poor and the rich  
 The teacher who chases away  
 Fear from the frightened  
 And the heroic ones;  
 May you live immortal  
 For aeons on this earth  
 With joy! Give up fear!  
 Hail Him! His name is Allah!

*(To be continued)*

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

### A TASTE OF 'SEEDS'

**Seeds—Poems by Maggi.** Published by Maggi, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006, 104 pp. Hardbound. Price not indicated.

THE verse collection in Maggi's recently published volume, *Seeds*, defies easy characterisation. But as one opens to the author's unexpected imagery, subtle rhythms, striking conceits and often playful diction, any need to characterise falls away: what more need be said than—"this is real poetry, original and fine".

On no few occasions one strikes pure gold, perfect creations, "seeds" in fact, which take root in the heart and put forth delightful *bhakti* shoots for which one can only say, "Thank you", if, indeed, one can say anything at all.

*Bhakti* pervades *Seeds*, the work of a lifelong devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but it is Maggi's own special brand of *bhakti* in which mingle depth and humour, tenderness and passion, sweetness and irony, and nary a trace of piety is found.

These are nourishing seeds, and delicious too.

MICHAEL Z.

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In her introduction to the book, Maggi writes:

In the early morning of New Year's Day 1969 a new force came to the Mother and entered Her for the benefit and progress of the earth. She alluded to it as a Being of great Benevolence. Many people felt the Ashram bathed in a sweet contentment that morning.

In the afternoon in Mother's room I felt embraced by this loving energy. It was like being rocked gently in its waves. Before I left Mother took a felt pen and covered almost the whole of the front page of a 1969 diary with the words 'Bonne Année' before placing it in my hands. A subtle force flowed in with it.

Changes came in with the new Being and some of the people around the Mother, She noticed, began to reveal unsuspected capacities.

As for myself it turned out to be an interesting Année in several ways. For one this Being of Benevolence had waved a poetry wand about me. Verse started coming to me.

After some years responsibilities came to rest on my shoulders and most of the available creative energy went into a three-volume version of the Mahabharata.

When I was already into my seventies and no longer expecting to write poetry I had a dream encounter with Sri Aurobindo in which He silently transmitted something to me, a most moving experience at the end of which I was given permission to kiss His feet, after which poetry started flowing again as never before.

For the first time I was able to express something of the experiences that had come to me in poems such as 'O You', 'Envol', 'Entry' and others.

So to the embodiment of Divine Benevolence, our Mother, and to the Master of Life and Poetry, Sri Aurobindo, whatever is of worth in these poems is not so much offered, as humbly and lovingly returned to the source.

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Here is a collage made up of observations penned by readers who have loved the poems:

It is not the sort of book one reads straight through from beginning to end.

There are some books that one holds more tightly than others. One glides one's hand over them, caressing them fondly, with the sense of touching what is a treasure and one holds the book against one's heart.

[The poems] remember so intimately our earth, yet unseal its diviner breath.

...It is always so good to encounter the limpid voice of psychic yearning—a flame to ignite one's own.

Maggi's poems are holy poems, full of charm, full of truth and they speak anywhere and everywhere of the Future which has already started, of the new world (in a convincing manner for the inner awareness). They seem to be utterances of the soul's voice: simple, sweet, pure, *true*. They are experiences we have on the way...(each person a little different from the other).

...I found myself "at home" at once, laughing and crying, in a world, our world indeed, translucent and divinely meaningful.

There is an evidence of the living direct action, influence, presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and a kind of promised victory of Their intentions.

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The first poem in the book is:

### A Day of Grace

You are the ineffable, the uncommunicable,  
He whose name may not be said.

Neti, neti says the sage shaking his head  
 But You are too a myriad nearnesses:  
 By night the clean white sheets upon my bed.  
 Morning, the honey on my bread.  
 At noon the hum and dance of bees  
 Around the hive hung high above  
 In Your ecstasy of love.

And You the squirrels in the trees,  
 The shiny black pips of sitaparam that they spit,  
 Their darting squirrel eye, Your eye,  
 Their stripes the signature of Your wit,  
 Their leaps Your fire.  
 All day the world's athrob with You.

You the black crow raucous and swift  
 That flaps his way through the infinite.  
 Each leaf today's atremble with Your grace.  
 I see your face in every face.

You the crimson glory of the west.  
 The homing bird, the nest,  
 You are rest.  
 You are the stars and moon that light our way.  
 You are the palm trees that rustle and sway.  
 You are the way, You are the sway.  
 You are.

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Another poem:

“O You”

At last the mind surrenders and adores,  
 It can no other.  
 For all in front is turned to Light  
 It gazes, dumb in wonder:  
 Ideas in flocks are taking flight.  
 It knows not now of time

Nor even of self-giving that has brought it here.  
 And all is stilled beyond the pale of art.  
 Image cannot catch the eye, nor melody, nor rhyme the ear.  
 All passionate and sweet to heart,  
 All that was grist to mind's hungry mill  
 Is ground to dust and to the ten directions blown  
 And all is still.

No-one to stand within these sweetest spaces inside You  
 With whom I have conterminous grown  
 In golden white Eternity of Love.  
 We are One. We are alone.

With the last trailing echoes of your secret Name  
 The dust begins to settle.  
 Something stirs its petty territory to claim:  
 The stunned brain,  
 The silenced tongue  
 Are quivering again  
 With words to move the stricken lips  
 And tears the smitten heart.  
 All they would utter if they could is  
 "You. O You!"

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And this is the last poem:

Sri Aurobindo: I Bow to Thee

Because I bow to Thee  
 I've had a wondrous life.  
 I bow to Thee.

I've had my share of woe and strife.  
 I bow to Thee.  
 Also of beatitude.  
 To Thee for all I bow in gratitude.

After long days of bliss  
Nights of darkness have betimes assailed me.  
But studded on my brow always I found the imprint of Thy kiss.  
I bow to Thee.

Lord now we're coming to an end  
I bow to Thee.  
Only the rounding of an endless bend?  
I bow to Thee.  
There is no end.

I bow to Thee. I bow to Thee.  
Today, tomorrow, whenever it may be  
Grant me no celestial seat.  
I only pray to touch Thy feet  
And bow to Thee.

\*

*For me true poetry is beyond all philosophy and beyond all explanation.*  
*The Mother*

*(On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 241)*

## NAVANIT STORIES

### “TAJI MASSOUR-NI DĀL!”<sup>1</sup>

WHEN the Kathiawad Political Conference was held at Bhavanagar, Gandhi presided and therefore from every town and village masses of people arrived, the educated and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, farmers and landlords, non-cooperators and political activists; no class or type stayed back. Speeches abounded on the need to take the vows of Swadeshi, Khadi, Charkha, eradication of untouchability, and every other related topic, in order to prepare oneself and the nation for Swaraj. People listened to all of them focusing their eyes on the president.

Now Shivji-bhai of Maddhada was called to speak. As he came on the dais his eyes met the president's, and the two exchanged smiles. He noticed that the other had kept his finger on the bell in front of him and understood that he was being warned against veering off into topics not raised by the president's men. Sending up a silent prayer to God to control his tongue and save his face, he began his speech:

Do you all realise whom we are facing here today? We are going to be tested—are we living beings or cadavers, are we made of gold or rags. Be very careful, my brothers and sisters, the reputation of our race is in your hands; a jeweller of Sorath<sup>2</sup> has come to test Sorathi gems; you will repent all your life if you turn out to be worthless pieces of glass. Take care that it does not turn out to be like foaming soda. You have always been *bhavanasheel*,<sup>3</sup> now it is time to prove yourself *kartavyasheel*.<sup>4</sup> Victories don't materialise merely by mouthing great slogans. Only if you are ready to sacrifice your lives can you hope to be victorious. Get up and go home if it is going to be merely a repetition of the *taji massour-ni dāl* fiasco.

We don't need to waste the president's precious time but I hope you know that *taji massour-ni dāl* incident? Perhaps most of you don't know or have forgotten it.

Once a sadhu-mahatma came to a town—as powerful a preacher as he was a scholar, and as strong in character and *tyāga* as he was in oratory. Large crowds came from all the villages around to avail of his stirring commentaries and sage instructions during his reading of the scriptures—like you have assembled here in this conference. The audience was spellbound by the sadhu-maharaj's discourses and, like snakes to a snake-charmer's tune, swayed to his words.

1. Renounced the soup made of pulses.

2. Saurashtra.

3. Emotional.

4. Conscientious.



The mayor also attended these sessions regularly. And as in the eyes of the other devotees, tears would also fill his eyes when the sadhu expounded the depths and beauty of bhakti in the scripture. Seeing this emotional response in his congregation, especially in the mayor, the sadhu felt his efforts were bearing fruit. The sessions went on for a month.

Came the last day. Winding up his last sermon, the sadhu-maharaj said, “Bhaktas of God, today we have come to the end of our study. You have heard so much about how to lead your daily lives if you wish to attain Mukti in this lifetime; what remains now is for you to put at least some of it into practice. The worth of a teaching is in its being lived, that is what distinguishes a sadhak. So, you must now take the vows of discipline necessary to realise the great goal we have placed before ourselves. It would gratify me to see those among you who will take up some vows and declare it tomorrow in front of me here. It would prove that my long and strenuous efforts have not been wasted and I would go from here with a peaceful and satisfied mind.”

Back home, the mayor was thrown in an unprecedented predicament. “Some vow will have to be taken, else how shall I face the townsfolk? But which vow? Of charity? But my God, that would involve giving away my money! Of compassion towards all? But that, being its root, must lead me to charity, and how can I allow that? It would ruin me. Of brahmacharya? But then what to do with my recently wedded fourth wife? The vow of clinging to Truth? But what would happen to my business then? To give up ghee? or milk? or any of the regularly cooked grains or pulses? or any of the vegetables or fruits? But to give up any of these things would mean inviting some deficiency which would mean debilities and sicknesses! And don’t the scriptures themselves declare that *shariramādhyam khalu dharma sādhanam*?<sup>5</sup> How can one follow any Dharma without a body? O God, what a strangling dilemma!”

At long last his subtle and supple mind supplied him with a way out, and he heaved a huge sigh of relief. “I shall give up the *dāl* of *massour*! It is *touwer* not *massour* that we cook in these parts and even if desired it is very difficult to procure; so there is no danger of finding it in my plate even by the rarest of chances. That then is my vow.”

The next morning, he was in high spirits as he strode into the meeting, confident that the preacher and the public would heartily acclaim him. Coming up to the sadhu-mahatma he said, “Reverend, I have taken a vow.”

“*Thanya, thanya!*<sup>6</sup> Who else will lead if not you, sir? *Yadyad-ācharati shreshṭhas-tat tadevetaro janāh.*<sup>7</sup> The life of the great is naturally the ideal, the

5. The body is indeed the means of performing one’s Dharma.

6. “Congratulations! Well done!”

7. As behave the pre-eminent, that example follow the masses.

path, followed by the ordinary. Tell us then Seth-ji, what is the vow you have taken?"

"Maharaj, from this moment to the end of my life, I shall not eat *massour-ni dāl*."

It was as if a thunderbolt had crashed on the sadhu-maharaj's head. For an entire month he had made himself hoarse struggling to push into the dense heads of these rural folk the *navaneet*<sup>8</sup> he had garnered after years of contemplation on his observations and experiences, and was this the effect on the most intelligent of them? Does he see nothing in his life and nature that needs to be renounced? Just this, this blessed thing, which need not be given up at all?

And Shivji-bhai concluded his speech:

Brothers, we have assembled here for taking our vows of service to our motherland, of undertaking a sadhana for her attaining Swaraj in front of this man. But take great care that it does not end up like *taji massour-ni dāl*.

PUJALAL

(Translated from *Navanit*, published by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada, Gujarat, 1945)

8. Butter; distilled essence.

*You seem not to have understood the principle of this yoga. The old yoga demanded a complete renunciation extending to the giving up of the worldly life itself. This yoga aims instead at a new and transformed life. But it insists as inexorably on a complete throwing away of desire and attachment in the mind, life and body. Its aim is to refound life in the truth of the spirit and for that purpose to transfer the roots of all we are and do from the mind, life and body to a greater consciousness above the mind.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 803)