

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXI

No. 6

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## MAN, THE DESPOT OF CONTRARIES

I am greater than the greatness of the seas,  
    A swift tornado of God-energy:  
A helpless flower that quivers in the breeze  
    I am weaker than the reed one breaks with ease.

I harbour all the wisdom of the wise  
    In my nature of stupendous Ignorance;  
On a flame of righteousness I fix my eyes  
    While I wallow in sweet sin and join hell's dance.

My mind is brilliant like a full-orbed moon,  
    Its darkness is the caverned troglodyte's.  
I gather long Time's wealth and squander soon;  
    I am an epitome of opposites.

I with repeated life death's sleep surprise;  
I am a transience of the eternities.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 156)*

## ‘THE SUPREME SHASTRA OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA’

THE supreme Shastra of the integral Yoga is the eternal Veda secret in the heart of every thinking and living being. The lotus of the eternal knowledge and the eternal perfection is a bud closed and folded up within us. It opens swiftly or gradually, petal by petal, through successive realisations, once the mind of man begins to turn towards the Eternal, once his heart, no longer compressed and confined by attachment to finite appearances, becomes enamoured, in whatever degree, of the Infinite. All life, all thought, all energising of the faculties, all experiences passive or active, become thenceforward so many shocks which disintegrate the teguments of the soul and remove the obstacles to the inevitable efflorescence. He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite. He has received the divine touch without which there is no awakening, no opening of the spirit; but once it is received, attainment is sure, whether conquered swiftly in the course of one human life or pursued patiently through many stadia of the cycle of existence in the manifested universe.

Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. So also all perfection of which the outer man is capable, is only a realising of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process.

The usual agency of this revealing is the Word, the thing heard (*śruta*). The Word may come to us from within; it may come to us from without. But in either case, it is only an agency for setting the hidden knowledge to work. The word within may be the utterance of the inmost soul in us which is always open to the Divine; or it may be the word of the secret and universal Teacher who is seated in the hearts of all. There are rare cases in which none other is needed, for all the rest of the Yoga is an unfolding under that constant touch and guidance; the lotus of the knowledge discloses itself from within by the power of irradiating effulgence which proceeds from the Dweller in the lotus of the heart. Great indeed, but few are those to whom self-knowledge from within is thus sufficient and who do not need to pass under the dominant influence of a written book or a living teacher.

Ordinarily, the Word from without, representative of the Divine, is needed as an aid in the work of self-unfolding; and it may be either a word from the past or the more powerful word of the living Guru. In some cases this representative word is only taken as a sort of excuse for the inner power to awaken and manifest; it is, as it were, a concession of the omnipotent and omniscient Divine to the generality of a law that governs Nature. Thus it is said in the Upanishads of Krishna, son of Devaki, that he received a word of the Rishi Ghora and had the knowledge. So Ramakrishna, having attained by his own internal effort the central illumination, accepted several

teachers in the different paths of Yoga, but always showed in the manner and swiftness of his realisation that this acceptance was a concession to the general rule by which effective knowledge must be received as by a disciple from a Guru.

But usually the representative influence occupies a much larger place in the life of the sadhaka. If the Yoga is guided by a received written Shastra,—some Word from the past which embodies the experience of former Yogins,—it may be practised either by personal effort alone or with the aid of a Guru. The spiritual knowledge is then gained through meditation on the truths that are taught and it is made living and conscious by their realisation in the personal experience; the Yoga proceeds by the results of prescribed methods taught in a Scripture or a tradition and reinforced and illumined by the instructions of the Master. This is a narrower practice, but safe and effective within its limits, because it follows a well-beaten track to a long familiar goal.

For the sadhaka of the integral Yoga it is necessary to remember that no written Shastra, however great its authority or however large its spirit, can be more than a partial expression of the eternal Knowledge. He will use, but never bind himself even by the greatest Scripture. Where the Scripture is profound, wide, catholic, it may exercise upon him an influence for the highest good and of incalculable importance. It may be associated in his experience with his awakening to crowning verities and his realisation of the highest experiences. His Yoga may be governed for a long time by one Scripture or by several successively,—if it is in the line of the great Hindu tradition, by the Gita, for example, the Upanishads, the Veda. Or it may be a good part of his development to include in its material a richly varied experience of the truths of many Scriptures and make the future opulent with all that is best in the past. But in the end he must take his station, or better still, if he can, always and from the beginning he must live in his own soul beyond the limitations of the word that he uses. The Gita itself thus declares that the Yogin in his progress must pass beyond the written Truth,—*śabdabrahmātivartate*—beyond all that he has heard and all that he has yet to hear,—*śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*. For he is not the sadhaka of a book or of many books; he is a sadhaka of the Infinite.

Another kind of Shastra is not Scripture, but a statement of the science and methods, the effective principles and way of working of the path of Yoga which the sadhaka elects to follow. Each path has its Shastra, either written or traditional, passing from mouth to mouth through a long line of Teachers. In India a great authority, a high reverence even is ordinarily attached to the written or traditional teaching. All the lines of the Yoga are supposed to be fixed and the Teacher who has received the Shastra by tradition and realised it in practice guides the disciple along the immemorial tracks. One often even hears the objection urged against a new practice, a new Yogic teaching, the adoption of a new formula, “It is not according to the Shastra.” But neither in fact nor in the actual practice of the Yogins is there really any such entire rigidity of an iron door shut against new truth, fresh revelation, widened experience.

The written or traditional teaching expresses the knowledge and experiences of many centuries systematised, organised, made attainable to the beginner. Its importance and utility are therefore immense. But a great freedom of variation and development is always practicable. Even so highly scientific a system as Rajayoga can be practised on other lines than the organised method of Patanjali. Each of the three paths of the *trimārga*<sup>1</sup> breaks into many bypaths which meet again at the goal. The general knowledge on which the Yoga depends is fixed, but the order, the succession, the devices, the forms must be allowed to vary; for the needs and particular impulsions of the individual nature have to be satisfied even while the general truths remain firm and constant.

An integral and synthetic Yoga needs especially not to be bound by any written or traditional Shastra; for while it embraces the knowledge received from the past, it seeks to organise it anew for the present and the future. An absolute liberty of experience and of the restatement of knowledge in new terms and new combinations is the condition of its self-formation. Seeking to embrace all life in itself, it is in the position not of a pilgrim following the highroad to his destination, but, to that extent at least, of a path-finder hewing his way through a virgin forest. For Yoga has long diverged from life and the ancient systems which sought to embrace it, such as those of our Vedic forefathers, are far away from us, expressed in terms which are no longer accessible, thrown into forms which are no longer applicable. Since then mankind has moved forward on the current of eternal Time and the same problem has to be approached from a new starting-point.

By this Yoga we not only seek the Infinite, but we call upon the Infinite to unfold himself in human life. Therefore the Shastra of our Yoga must provide for an infinite liberty in the receptive human soul. A free adaptability in the manner and the type of the individual's acceptance of the Universal and Transcendent into himself is the right condition for the full spiritual life in man. Vivekananda, pointing out that the unity of all religions must necessarily express itself by an increasing richness of variety in its forms, said once that the perfect state of that essential unity would come when each man had his own religion, when not bound by sect or traditional form he followed the free self-adaptation of his nature in its relations with the Supreme. So also one may say that the perfection of the integral Yoga will come when each man is able to follow his own path of Yoga, pursuing the development of his own nature in its upsurging towards that which transcends the nature. For freedom is the final law and the last consummation.

Meanwhile certain general lines have to be formed which may help to guide the thought and practice of the sadhaka. But these must take as much as possible the form of general truths, general statements of principle, the most powerful broad directions of effort and development rather than a fixed system which has to be followed as a

1. The triple path of Knowledge, Devotion and Works.

routine. All Shastra is the outcome of past experience and a help to future experience. It is an aid and a partial guide. It puts up signposts, gives the names of the main roads and the already explored directions, so that the traveller may know whither and by what paths he is proceeding.

The rest depends on personal effort and experience and upon the power of the Guide.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 53-58)*

*Sri Aurobindo was there from the morning till the evening.*

*For, yes, for more than an hour he made me live, as in a concrete and living vision of the condition of humanity and of the different strata of humanity in relation to the new or supramental creation. And it was wonderfully clear and concrete and living.... There was all the humanity which is no longer altogether animal, which has benefited by mental development and created a kind of harmony in its life—a harmony vital and artistic, literary—in which the large majority are content to live. They have caught a kind of harmony, and within it they live life as it exists in a civilised surrounding, that is to say, somewhat cultured, with refined tastes and refined habits. And all this life has a certain beauty where they are at ease, and unless something catastrophic happens to them, they live happy and contented, satisfied with life. These people can be drawn (because they have a taste, they are intellectually developed), they can be attracted by the new forces, the new things, the future life; for example, they can become disciples of Sri Aurobindo mentally, intellectually. But they do not feel at all the need to change materially; and if they were compelled to do so, it would be first of all premature, unjust, and would simply create a great disorder and disturb their life altogether uselessly.*

*This was very clear.*

*Then there were some—rare individuals—who were ready to make the necessary effort to prepare for the transformation and to draw the new forces, to try to adapt Matter, to seek means of expression, etc. These are ready for the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. They are very few in number. There are even those who have the sense of sacrifice and are ready for a hard, painful life, if that would lead or help towards this future transformation. But they should not, they should not in any way try to influence the others and make them share in their own effort; it would be altogether unfair—not only unfair, but extremely maladroit, for it would change the universal rhythm and movement, or at least the terrestrial movement, and instead of helping, it would create conflicts and end in a chaos.*

*The Mother*

*(Notes on the Way, CWM, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 24-25)*

## **‘THOU GUIDEST OUR LIVES...’**

**January 30, 1914**

ALL that is conscious within me belongs unreservedly to Thee, and gradually I shall strive always harder to conquer the subconscious, the yet dark bedrock.

O divine Master of love, eternal Teacher, Thou guidest our lives. It is in Thee alone and for Thee alone that we want to live; enlighten our consciousness, guide our steps, and grant that we may do the utmost we can, using all our energies solely to serve Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 61)*



## MATRIMANDIR TALKS

31 December 1969

THAT was the first idea: there was the Centre and the town was organised around it. Now they are doing the very opposite! They want to build the town and put the Centre in afterwards.

And the “thing” is ready to come! I have known it for a long time, it is there (*gesture upward*), it is waiting.

(*Silence*)

A’s idea is an island at the centre, with water around it, running water, which will provide the whole water supply for the city; and when it has passed through the city, it will be sent to a pump-house, and from there it will go out to irrigate all the surrounding cultivated lands. So this Centre is like a small island and on it is what we called at first the “Matrimandir”—which I always see as a very big room, absolutely bare, receiving a light that comes from above, arranged in such a way that the light from above would be concentrated on one place where there would be... whatever we want to put as the centre of the city. At first, we had thought of Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, but we can put whatever we want. Like that, with a ray of light striking it all the time, which turns, turns, turns... with the sun, you understand. If that is properly done, it will be very good. And then underneath, so that people can sit and meditate, or simply rest, *nothing*, nothing, except something comfortable underneath so that they can sit without getting tired, probably with some pillars, which would serve as back-rests at the same time. Something like that. And that is what I always see. And the room should be high, so that the sun can enter as a *ray*, according to the time of day, and strike the centre which will be there. If that is done, it will be very good.

And then for the rest it is all the same to me, they can do what they want. At first they thought of making a place for me to stay, but I will never go there, so it is not worth the trouble, it is completely useless. And to look after this island it was agreed that there would be a little house for B who would like to be there simply as the guardian. And then A had arranged a whole system of bridges to link it with the other bank. And the other bank would consist entirely of gardens all around. These gardens... we thought of twelve gardens—to divide the distance into twelve, of making twelve gardens, each one centred on something, a state of consciousness, and the flowers which represent it. And then, the twelfth garden would be in the water, around—not around, but beside—the “Mandir”, with the tree, the banyan which is there. That is the centre of the city. And there, the twelve gardens around the outside would be repeated with the flowers arranged in the same way.

(Silence)

For the outside of this kind of temple, A had thought of making a big lotus. But then, this interior, this play of light, I don't know if it would be possible with a lotus shape?

If A and C could both collaborate... if they could both come together, and if one of them could always be here, one of them, now one, now the other, if one of them could always be here, with a single plan they would draw up together—it would go much faster, a hundred times faster.

This idea of the ray of sun... when I look, at once that is what I see. And a ray of sun which could come at all times—it would be arranged in such a way that it comes all the time (*gesture following the movement of the sun*). And then, something would be there, a symbol, which would be both upright so that it can be seen all around, and flat to receive the light fully. What?... And let it not become a religion, for heaven's sake!

(Silence)

Who could find the way to realise that? Because there is no lack of sun here.... Of course there are days when there isn't any, but after all, there are many days when there is—so that from every side, from any angle, the ray falls. It should be arranged like that. It's a question of geometry. You can speak about it to C, because if he had an idea...

That is what is needed, something, a symbol—we'll find what is needed, we'll see—of course, like an altar, but... What? Which receives the light both directly from above and from all sides.

And then, no other windows, you understand? All the rest in a sort of half-light. And that, like a light... that would be good, it could be very good. I would like someone who can feel that.

And if it were well realised, that would already be very interesting for people. It would be a concrete realisation of something.... They will begin to say that it is a religion of the sun! (*Mother laughs*) Oh, you know, I am used to *every*, every stupidity.

(Silence)

Of course, logically, or rather psychologically, it is a mistake to build all around and the Centre afterwards.

The idea of A, of his group, is to have industries which can bring in money for Auroville, then... That is to say that instead of being able to get it done quickly, it will take centuries.

I will speak to A about it tomorrow. I mean I will tell him to see C who has some excellent ideas—well, that he should come to an understanding with him. You see,

it's very simple: we'll try to make A understand and to set up a collaboration.

For me now, things are no longer exclusive, not at all. I see very well the possibility of using the most opposite tendencies *at the same time*.... It is not exclusive. I do not say: "Ah! No, not that!" No, no, no. All, all together. That is what I want: to be able to create a place where all the opposites can unite.

Unless that can be done... (*gesture of turning round and round*) it goes on and on and on.

\*

### 3 January 1970

*Sweet Mother, I have told C to come, he is waiting outside.*

Yes. There is an interesting thing. For a long time I had been feeling something, then we spoke about it the other day and I *saw* it. I spoke of it to A, I told him to see C and I also told him that I had *seen* what should be done. Of course he did not say No, he said Yes to everything, but I felt that he did not really intend... But, this is what happened. I saw clearly—very, very distinctly.... That is to say it was like that and it *is* still like that, it is there (*gesture indicating an eternal plane*)... the interior of this place....

It will be a kind of hall like the inside of a column. No windows. The ventilation will be artificial, with those machines (*gesture indicating an air-conditioner*) and only a roof. And the sun striking the centre. Or when there is no sun—at night and on cloudy days—an electric spotlight.

And the idea is to build right now a sort of example or model to hold about a hundred people. When the town is built and we have had the experience, we will make it into something big. But then it will be very big, to hold a thousand to two thousand people. And the second one will be built around the first: that means, the first one will not go until the second one is finished. That is the idea.

Only, so as to talk about it to C (and if possible, if I see that it is possible, to talk about it to A), I wanted to have a plan. I will have it made, not myself, because I can't any more; I would have been able to do it at one time, but now I don't see well enough. I will have it done this afternoon, in front of me, a plan, and with this plan I will be able to explain really well. But to you I simply wanted to say what I have seen.

It will be a tower with twelve facets, each facet represents a month of the year; and up above, the roof of the tower will be like this (*gesture indicating a roof which slopes upwards from the sides to the centre*).

And then, inside, there will be twelve columns. The walls and then twelve columns. And right at the centre, on the floor, there is my symbol, and above it four of Sri Aurobindo's symbols, joined to form a square, and above that... a globe. If

possible, a globe made of transparent material, and with or without light inside, but the sun should strike the globe; then according to the month, the time, it will be from here, from there, from there (*gesture indicating the movement of the sun*). You understand? There will always be an opening with a ray. Not a diffused light: a ray which strikes, which should strike. It will require some technical knowledge to be able to carry it out, and that is why I want to make a design with an engineer.

And then, there will be no windows or lights inside. It will always be in a kind of clear half-light, day and night—by day with the sun, by night with artificial light. And on the floor, nothing, just a floor like this one (*in Mother's room*). That is to say, first wood (wood or something else), then a sort of rubber foam, thick, very soft, and then a carpet. A carpet everywhere, everywhere except at the centre. And people will be able to sit everywhere. And the twelve columns are for people who need support for their backs!

And then, people will not come for a regular meditation or anything of that kind (but the inner organisation will be made afterwards): it will be a place for concentration. Not everyone will be able to come; there will be a time in the week or a time in the day (I don't know) when visitors will be allowed to come, but anyway, no mixture. A fixed time or a fixed day for showing people around, and the rest of time only for those who are... serious—serious, sincere, who want to learn to concentrate.

So I think that is good. It was there (*gesture upward*). I still see it when I speak of it—I see. As I see it, it is very beautiful, it is really very beautiful... a sort of half-light: one can see, but it is *very* tranquil. And then, very clear and very bright rays of light (the spotlight, the artificial light, must be rather golden, it must not be cold—that will depend on the spotlight) onto the symbol. A globe made of a plastic material or... I don't know.

*Crystal?*

If it is possible, yes. For the small temple the globe will not need to be very big: if it were as big as this (*about thirty centimetres*) it would be good. But for the big temple it will have to be big.

*But how will the big temple be built? On top of the small one?*

No, no, the small one will go. But the big one will be built later, and on a vast scale... the small one will go only after the big one is built. But of course, for the town to be finished, it will take about twenty years (for everything to be really in order, in its place). It is like the gardens: all the gardens which are being made are for now, but in twenty years all that will have to be on another scale; then, it must be something really... really beautiful.

And I wonder what material should be used to make this globe, the big one?...

The small one, in crystal perhaps: a globe like that (*thirty centimetres*). I think that will be enough. One must be able to see the globe from every corner of the room.

*It shouldn't be raised too high above the floor either?*

No, Sri Aurobindo's symbol does not need to be big. It should be so big (*gesture*)...

*Twenty-five, thirty centimetres?*

At the most, at the very most.

*That means that it will be at about eye-level?*

Eye-level, yes, that's it.

And a *very* tranquil atmosphere. And *nothing*, you see—great columns... It remains to be seen whether the style of the columns should be... whether they will be round, or if they will also have twelve facets.... And *twelve* columns.

*And a roof in two sections?*

Yes, a roof in two sections so as to have the sun. It must be arranged in such a way that the rain cannot come in. We cannot think of having to open and close something when it rains, it is not possible. It must be arranged in such a way that the rain cannot get in. But the sun must enter as rays, not diffused. So the opening must be small. It needs an engineer who really knows his job.

*And when would they start?*

I would like to begin at once, as soon as we have the plans. Only, there are two questions: first the plans (we can get the workers) and then the money.... I think that it is possible with this idea of making a sort of small model (of course "small" is a manner of speaking, because to be able to hold a hundred people easily it still needs to be quite big), a small model to begin with, and then while making the small model they will learn, and the big one will be made only when the town is finished—not right now.

I spoke about it to A, who told me the next day: "Yes, but it will take time to prepare." I didn't say anything about all that I've just told you, I only spoke of doing something. And afterwards I had the vision of this room—so I no longer need anyone to see what it should be: I know. And it requires an engineer rather than an architect, because an architect... it must be as simple as possible.

*I told C what you had seen, this great empty room; it moved him very much. This great empty room was just what he saw. He understands quite well. Well, empty—that means simply a form.*

But a form... Like a tower, but... (that's why I wanted to have a sketch, to show it) twelve regular facets, and then there should be a wall, not an upright wall but something like this (*slightly inclined gesture*). I don't know if it is possible. And inside, twelve columns. And then an arrangement must be found to catch the sun. Twelve facets in such a way that at any time of the year it can come. It needs someone who knows the job well.

The outside... I did not see the outside, I did not see it at all. I saw only the inside.

I wanted to explain to C when I had the papers. It would be easier, but since you have called him...

*D goes and brings C to the room. Mother tells him:*

After we decided to build this temple, I saw it, I saw it from the inside. I have just tried to describe it to E. But in a few days I will have some plans and drawings, so I will be able to explain more clearly. Because I don't know at all how it is outside, but inside I know.

*C: The outside grows from the inside.*

It is a kind of tower with twelve regular facets, which represent the twelve months of the year, and it is absolutely empty.... And it must be able to hold from a hundred to two hundred people. And then, to support the roof there will be twelve columns inside (not outside), and right at the centre, well, the object of concentration.... And with the collaboration of the sun, all the year round the sun should enter as rays: no diffusion, an arrangement must be made so that it can enter as rays. Then according to the time of day and the month of the year, the ray will turn (there will be an arrangement up above) and the ray will be directed onto the centre. At the centre there will be the symbol of Sri Aurobindo, supporting a globe. A globe which we shall try to make from something transparent like crystal or... A big globe. And then, people will be allowed in to concentrate—(*Mother laughs*) to learn to concentrate! No fixed meditations, none of all that, but they must stay there in silence, in silence and concentration.

*C: It is very beautiful.*

But the place is absolutely... as simple as possible. And the floor in such a way

that people are comfortable, so that they don't have to think that it hurts them here or it hurts them there!

*C: It is very beautiful.*

And in the middle, on the floor, my symbol. At the centre of my symbol we will put, in four parts, like a square, four symbols of Sri Aurobindo, upright, supporting a transparent globe. That has been seen.

So I am going to have some small plans prepared by an engineer, simple ones, to show, and then I will show you when it is ready. So. And then we will see. The walls will probably have to be of concrete.

*C: The whole structure can be in reinforced concrete.*

The roof should probably be sloping, and then at the centre there will have to be a special arrangement for the sun.

*You said that the walls would be slightly sloping.*

Either the walls or the roof should be sloping—whichever is the easiest to do. The walls could be made straight and the roof sloping. And the upper part of the roof resting on the twelve columns, and up above, the arrangement for the sun.

And inside, nothing; nothing but the columns. The columns, I don't know, we will have to see whether they should be made with facets (like the roof, with twelve facets) or else simply round.

*C: Round.*

Or simply square—it remains to be seen.

And then, on the floor, we will put something thick and soft. Here—you are comfortable as you are sitting? Yes? First there is wood, and then this kind of rubber, and on top of it a woollen carpet.

*With your symbol?*

Not the carpet. For the symbol, I had thought it would be better to make it out of something durable.

*C: It should be in stone.*

The symbol... everything will be around it, of course. The symbol will not cover

it all, it will be only in the middle of the space—(*Mother laughs*) they mustn't sit on the symbol!—that, in the middle. The proportion of the symbol to the whole will have to be considered very carefully in relation to the height.

*C: And the room quite large?*

Oh yes, it has to be... it should be like a sort of half-light with these rays of sunlight, so that the ray can be *seen*. A ray of sunlight. Then according to the time of day, the sun will turn (with the time of day and the month of the year). And then at night, as soon as the sun disappears, spotlights are lit which will have the same effect and the same colour. And day and night the light remains there. But no windows or lamps or anything like that—nothing. Ventilation with air-conditioners (they are built into the walls, it is very easy). And silence. Inside no one speaks! (*Mother laughs*) That will be good. So, as soon as my papers are ready, I will call you and show them to you.

*C: Very good.*

*C leaves. Mother then continues speaking with E.*

I did not ask C if he had seen A because... A is completely in the “practical” atmosphere of today. It is good—it must get started!

You see, this is what I have learned: the failure of the religions. It is because they were divided. They wanted people to be religious to the exclusion of the other religions; and every branch of knowledge has been a failure because they were exclusive; and man has been a failure because he was exclusive. And what the new consciousness wants (it is on this that it insists) is: no more divisions. To be able to understand the spiritual extreme, the material extreme, and to find... to find the meeting-point, the point where... that becomes a real force.

From the practical point of view I will try to make A understand; but I have seen, it seemed to me that what is needed... A, when he is here, looks after Auromodèle, the practical side, all that. It is very necessary, it is very good; and for the building of the Centre, I would like C to do it, and so I would like C to stay when A is away; C should be here when A is gone, and we shall do it with C. Only I don't want either of them to feel that it is one of them against the other. They must understand that it is to complement one another. I think C will understand.

*But A might take that as an encroachment on his responsibilities?*

Perhaps not. I will try, I will try.

No, when I told him that it was necessary to build the Centre, that I had seen it



and that it should be done, he did not object. He only told me, “But it will take time.” I told him, “No, it must be done at once.” And that is why I am having these sketches made by an engineer to show to him, because it is not an architect’s job, it is an engineer’s job, with very precise calculations for the light of the sun, very precise. It needs someone who really knows. The architect has to see that the columns are beautiful, that the walls are beautiful, that the proportions are correct—all that is very good—and then the symbol at the centre. The aspect of beauty, of course the architect should see to that, but the whole calculation aspect... And the important thing is this, the play of the sun onto the centre. Because that becomes the symbol—the symbol of the future realisation.

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 277-88)

*She knew herself the Beloved of the Supreme:  
 These Gods and Goddesses were he and she:  
 The Mother was she of Beauty and Delight,  
 The Word in Brahma’s vast creating clasp,  
 The World-Puissance on almighty Shiva’s lap,—  
 The Master and the Mother of all lives  
 Watching the worlds their twin regard had made,  
 And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss,  
 The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 525)

# “FAR FLUTE” CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

*(Continued from the issue of May 2008)*

*[From Amal to Sri Aurobindo]*

Here are two experiments with the first stanza. In the second, not only “sense” but also “day” which had to wait for a rhyme in the next stanza is companioned:

- 1) Far flute throbbing across earth’s somnolence,  
What Yogin’s rapture trembles in thy call?  
What sanctities has thy dream-vigil known  
In eve’s dim echoes of the sunken day  
Ere the cold stars emerge
- falls
- And, deepening round them, silence ~~grows~~ immense? [1]  
What visionary urge  
Has stolen from horizons watched alone  
Into thy being with ethereal guile,  
That thou canst thus enisle  
With slow, prolonged, miraculous rise and fall  
Of liquid melody my darkening sense?

or

- 2) Far flute \* {along} night’s dismal way,  
{upon}
- What Yogin’s rapture trembles in thy call?  
What sanctities has thy pure<sup>+</sup> vigil known  
In eve’s dim echoes of the sunken day  
Ere the cold stars emerge,  
And chill the gaze of earth to somnolence?  
Etc. etc.

\* I don’t suppose “that throb’st” or “throbbing” can do here, can it? But I cannot think of a good substitute. Shall I say “that wanderest down night’s dismal way”?

+ Perhaps “dream” would be infelicitous here, since “somnolence” coming later in the same sentence insinuates the ordinary meaning of that word. “Pure”, however, is only tentative.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

[1] “falls” [And, deepening round them, silence falls immense?]

The version (2) is altogether a failure. The other would do with the substitution of the word “falls” for the vaguer expression “grows”; but unfortunately you have got the right thing, but in the wrong place. The reasons for this wrongness are, first, that the two lines “Ere the cold stars emerge” and “What visionary urge” cannot be separated without destroying a beautiful rhythmic movement—and that would be “murder without extenuating circumstances”,—and, secondly, that “Ere the cold stars emerge” must come at the end of a movement of thought and rhythm (the other line taking up a new movement yet linking itself beautifully to what went before by the rhyme)—if you add a clause after it, nine-tenths of the force, both rhythm-force and power of significant suggestion, are lost. On the other hand, “Ere the cold stars emerge” cannot be separated, either, from the line that goes before it; otherwise you might have put the new line between the “eve’s dim echoes” and “the cold stars”, only substituting “While” or “When” for “And”. There seems to be no place but the one I indicated. Perhaps something like this

“What sanctities has thy dream-vigil known,  
While the vague deepening silence falls immense  
On eve’s dim echoes of the sunken day,  
Ere the cold stars emerge.  
What visionary urge”—etc.

Like that, the first verse will become, like the others, a harmonious and well-woven whole.

[*Undated*]

\*

[*Typescript, undated after 7 April 1931*]

### FAR FLUTE...

Far flute throbbing across earth’s somnolence,  
What Yogin’s rapture trembles in thy call?  
What sanctities has thy dream-vigil known  
While the vague deepening silence falls immense  
On eve’s dim echoes of the sunken day  
Ere the cold stars emerge?  
What visionary urge

Has stolen from horizons watched alone  
 Into thy being with ethereal guile,  
 That thou canst thus enisle  
 With slow, prolonged, miraculous rise and fall  
 Of liquid melody my darkening sense?

...Or else perhaps a village boy who bends  
 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!

...Whatever unknown lips' mellifluence  
 Be here, 'tis ecstasy to me; nor less,  
 When on his lonely path the charmer's 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 of the night's inhuman vastitude.

\* \* \*

### **FAR FLUTE**

Far flute throbbing across earth's somnolence,  
 What Yogi's rapture trembles in your call?  
 What sanctities has your dream-vigil known  
 While the vague deepening shadow falls immense  
 On eve's dim echoes of the sunken day  
 Ere the cold stars emerge?  
 What visionary urge  
 Has stolen from horizons watched alone  
 Into your being like a fathomless smile,

That you can thus enisle  
 With slow prolonged, miraculous rise and fall  
 Of liquid melody my darkening sense?

...Or else perhaps a village boy who bends  
 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!

...Whatever unknown lips' mellifluence  
 Be here, it's ecstasy to me; nor less,  
 When on his lonely path the charmer's gone  
 And from the shadows wavering with 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 of the night's inhuman vastitude.

[from *The Secret Splendour—Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna*  
 (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 6]

(Concluded)

AMAL KIRAN  
 K. D. SETHNA

## ADDENDUM

On another occasion Amal had put the question to Sri Aurobindo, “To help me distinguish the planes of inspiration, could you just indicate where the following phrases from various poems of mine have their sources?”, citing 9 examples, one of which was taken from “Far Flute”:

What visionary urge  
 Has stolen from horizons watched alone  
 Into thy being with ethereal guile?<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's comment on these three lines ran:

“Second line Intuitive with Overmind touch. Third line imaginative Poetic Intelligence.”

1. See version pp. 497-98. This line as it stands now in the poem has been partly changed, see p. 498, bottom of the page.

### KRISHNA

*O immense Light and thou, O spirit-wide boundless Space,  
 Whom have you clasped and hid, deathless limbs, gloried face?  
 Vainly lie Space and Time, "Void are we, there is none."  
 Vainly strive Self and World crying, "I, I alone."  
 One is there, Self of self, Soul of Space, Fount of Time,  
 Heart of hearts, Mind of minds, He alone sits, sublime.  
 Oh, no void Absolute self-absorbed, splendid, mute,  
 Hands that clasp hold and red lips that kiss blow the flute.  
 All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He!  
 Many limbs sate His whims, bear His sweet ecstasy.  
 Two in One, Two who know difference rich in sense,  
 Two to clasp, One to be, this His strange mystery.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 590)*

## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of May 2008)

AFTER inaugurating the weight-lifting section, the Mother opened the *asana*-room. Ambu-bhai taught *asanas*. *Malkhamb* started after this. Vishnu-ji became the *malkhamb*-instructor. Tara and Parul learnt the *malkhamb*-exercises very quickly. At the Tennis Ground, Purani-ji taught wrestling. It was quite unbelievable how even at that late age, Purani-ji could wrestle with the young boys. Purani-ji was a very close friend of my father's. He loved all of us brothers and sisters very deeply. On the day of the inauguration of the wrestling pit, the Mother came and sat in a chair at the entrance and the wrestling lessons started. With Purani-ji, girls too learnt to wrestle beautifully. Everyone was quite wonder-struck to see girls take up wrestling!

Then boxing started. There was no discrimination between boys and girls. The girls too picked up boxing skills wonderfully. They boxed fearlessly. Boys and girls wore the same kind of dress which was quite unthinkable in those times.

\*

A French lady used to come to the Playground every evening. Her name was Doutsie. In the beginning she would conduct medical check-ups for us girls. Today where the Playground bathrooms and toilets are, there used to be a small single-storeyed house. It was here that the 'E' group medical check-up took place and Doutsie carried out all the tests.

You might be astonished to hear that the Mother would be present and She assisted Doutsie in this work. Isn't it unbelievable!

So one day this lady proudly declared in the Playground:

"I can run very fast. I'm sure nobody can beat me!"

Pranab was standing next to the Mother. The Mother whispered to him:

"Get some of your girls and prepare for a race."

So Pranab at once called out some of the girls and told them:

"Get ready for a race with Doutsie."

As far as my memory goes Sujata, Minou, Paru, and Tapati were selected. We were standing near the Mother and could see Her face light up with a smile full of mischief. And so the race started. Panting and puffing, poor Doutsie arrived behind everyone else. We just could not stop laughing. I turned to see the Mother: She too was laughing heartily.

Let me tell you of another amusing incident. An elderly French gentleman told Pranab:

"You know I can box very well. I'd love to box with you."

So Pranab and the gentleman got into the boxing ring and began their boxing

match. The Mother sat in Her chair and watched the fight. We too followed it with great eagerness. There was much excitement among the young in the ground. Everyone waited to see who would win. After some time the gentleman became so breathless that it was too painful to watch. Then he himself conceded:

“I am out of breeze!” (He was obviously translating literally the French ‘souffle’ with ‘breeze’ instead of ‘breath’.)

Pranab withdrew while all of us burst out laughing on hearing the gentleman’s English. The Mother, however, was quiet as She sat quite still.

\*

On Darshan days, all sorts of programmes were put up. Two little girls, Selvi and Yamuna, would do a Bharatanatyam dance before the Mother. They danced beautifully.

On one such Darshan, a French lady named Monique came to show her dance. She had made a ring of flowers and in the course of her dance she brought this flowery ring right in front of the Mother’s face. What an incredible dance that was! We really had great trouble stifling our laughter as we sat near the Mother and watched. However, the Mother looked on with great seriousness. At the end of the dance she offered that ring of flowers at the Mother’s Feet.

\*

One day a gentleman arrived at the Ashram and proudly declared:

“I can materialise all kinds of things from the invisible world.”

He said many other such things with great pride. After listening to him Pranab made all the arrangements in the Playground for him to show his skills. The Mother was present too. He began by saying all sorts of things and doing all kinds of movements. Then suddenly Pranab roared out and approaching the gentleman told him:

“I know this game of yours. You are not materialising anything from the invisible world, you are just making a fool of us all.”

The gentleman simply shied away, quite baffled. The Mother suddenly got up from Her chair, went through the Guest-house door and began walking out. I followed Her, close behind. Without looking to the left or right She continued walking straight ahead, all alone. She got into the Ashram through the main entrance and went straight to the first-floor. I still cannot forget that scene. What cheek we humans have, trying to cheat the Mother!

\*



One day, Mota-kaka (Pranab's uncle, Charuchandra Bhattacharya) and a European gentleman, both rather roly-poly and dressed up, turned up for a programme in the Playground before the Mother. After bowing to the Mother both of them started such a dance in the centre of the ground that the whole place began roaring with laughter.

The Mother too laughed so much that waves of ananda kept rippling all around. This was the first time that I had seen the Mother laugh after Sri Aurobindo's departure. And in that moment the whole mood of sadness just dissolved into thin air.

\*

How many different types of programmes were held in the Playground! The Mother would sit in Her chair and watch. One after another, the various items followed. The younger ones performed all kinds of shows. 'Musical chairs' for the children was the sweetest of them all. For the senior girls, one of their many items was walking with a pot on their heads. The pots kept falling and breaking. Lakshmi-bai was the only one who could reach the finishing line without dropping the pot. The Mother would watch all these games with such incredible interest!

\*

The tug-of-war was the most exciting item of all. We enjoyed watching this and it was tremendous fun. Udhar would call out to all the groups to get ready for this item. Once, towards the end of these games, Udhar suddenly announced:

"Mother's group versus 'E' group!" ('E' was the group for senior girls.)

All of us who stood near the Mother were taken aback. Gauri, Milli-di, Minnie-di, Violette, Vasudha and I had never taken part in any games. We looked at the Mother in utter helplessness. By calling out the Mother's group, it was as if the Mother Herself was being challenged. Who was Udhar challenging? He just did not think of this at that time. The Mother looked at us and said:

"Go ahead, all of you!"

Repeating the Mother's name we moved forward. I felt so extremely embarrassed in the middle of the ground in front of all those people! We hadn't the slightest idea how to pull the rope! Not even how to stand! On the other hand the 'E' group girls were greatly experienced! I kept calling out to the Mother. Then as soon as Udhar signalled, we began pulling the rope. I don't know what happened then, but all of a sudden, quite unexpectedly, the Mother's group won! Her force worked on us quite miraculously that day. We returned to Her filled with gratitude. She showered Her praises on us, especially on Gauri and Violette.

\*

Let me tell you about another amusing incident. As I said earlier, Pranab used to teach the captains once all the classes in the Playground were over. At that time the Mother would come and sit in the open ground. Many of us like Gauri, Debu, I and several others sat round the Mother. I remember, once it was very cold. I was freezing, sitting there. Gauri and I decided to put a cape over the Mother. She must surely be feeling cold. Immediately we two friends went and selected a cape for Her. Gauri used to look after the Mother's capes in the Playground. Both of us put the cape over Her shoulders but with a single movement She removed it. However, we did not get disheartened. After some time, we once again put the cape over Her shoulders. Once again it was the same story. She flung the cape away. After two-three audacious attempts on our part, the Mother finally yielded. So then we came in front and buttoned up Her cape. Whenever the Mother was concentrated on something She did not tolerate any kind of disturbance. This incident was a clear proof of this.

Let me tell you something about the Mother's cape. One day it suddenly occurred to me to get a cape made for the Mother. As soon as the idea came to me I told my uncle, Himangshukumar Neyogi, to get a cape made in Calcutta for Her. Then when the cape was ready both of us offered it to Her in Her room in the Playground. After this I offered Her many more capes, all of which were brought from Calcutta by my uncle. Now the Mother did not object anymore to wearing a cape. Both Gauri and I were delighted. I once offered the Mother a milk-white soft velvet cape. But I was not sure whether She would like it since it had a high neck. The Mother came and stood in front of the map of India. She was wearing that milk-white velvet cape. She said:

"This cape is very beautiful, soft like a cat's fur."

Unsure whether the Mother liked that style, I mumbled a little hesitantly:

"But the neck is high, Mother."

"Oh, it's lovely! And it's very stylish!" the Mother answered.

And in this way the Mother started wearing capes. Gauri would put the cape over Her in Her room. Only then did She come out and stand in front of the map of India. Then the March Past would begin. How enchanting the Mother looked then!

\*

Gauri and I were sitting near the Mother. The play had begun. The stage had been set up on the western side of the Playground.

A gentleman came and stood on the stage and started singing. He sang with such a shrill voice that Gauri and I had great difficulty suppressing our laughter. Then I looked all around and saw that everyone was laughing, although softly. It is hard to find a voice more out of tune than this! When he finished one song and started another both Gauri and I burst into laughter. It was impossible to pretend, or be polite any longer. However, when I looked up at the Mother I saw that She was listening to the song in silence. Good Lord, what infinite patience the Mother had!

\*

### The Mother's Eyes

*Let me do my work, my head bowed to Thee,  
Thy Eyes in my inmost eyes shall see.*

The poet-sadhak's heart's yearning is reflected in this prayer. He is longing for a touch of the Divine eyes in his inmost heart. He never dreamed in his wildest dreams that the Mother would come down in a human body of flesh and bone on this very earth.

But then probably this is how we express ourselves. After getting this vision of the Mother we seem to boast:

*...is there any who knows what honour lies  
In meeting Her Eyes with our common eyes?*

We have no idea how very blessed we are!

The Mother's eyes changed constantly. I saw those long golden eyes for the first time when I went to Her for Pranam on the evening of my arrival. That was my life's first blessing of the Mother. On seeing Her then I felt that She was Mother Durga herself. Those same golden eyes overflowing with love. This golden light used to radiate from Her eyes from time to time, from those iridescent golden eyes. Absolutely incredible!

We used to wait for hours in a hush just to get a touch of that Divine Sight!

\*

### The Second World War

During the Second World War the Mother helped countless people come out of their difficulties and sorrows in countless ways. As soon as the inner call came from any of them She would go at once towards them however busy She might have been. She would come back to Her body only after She had lifted them out of their trouble. She used to go into a trance. Hours went by but the Mother would keep standing immobile. Sometimes holding a glass because She wanted to drink but She never did. For the call had come.

*(Concluded)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

## THE NEW SPIRITUALITY, OR: THE AUROBINDIAN REVOLUTION

IN *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo quotes the triple statement of the Upanishads: “Brahman is in all things, all things are in Brahman, all things are Brahman.”<sup>1</sup> The Upanishads, the foundation of Vedanta, have been a living source of spiritual inspiration since they were formulated some three thousand years ago; yet the full scope of their significance was not put into practice until Sri Aurobindo dedicated himself to the implementation of their unadulterated message. In the meantime there had been Mahavir and the Buddha, Shankara and Christ, and a multitude of great saints and realised souls; but no religion or spiritual path teaches that Brahman, the Omnipresent Reality, is “this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect”<sup>2</sup>—and this shopping housewife, this jetliner, this cancer tumour and this self-immolating fanatic... All spiritual paths and all churches point toward a hereafter, moksha, nirvana, and teach how to get out of this life or cycle of lives by what they suppose to be the shortest way possible. Matter is the anti-Divine, the body is a burden, a prison, a tomb. Individual escape out of this bad or illusionary sub-lunar world is the direct goal, after which all will be happiness and ecstasy in eternity. Yet to Sri Aurobindo, from the very beginning of his sadhana, “a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful.”<sup>3</sup> And he wrote about his Yoga: “Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.”<sup>4</sup>

In the course of his sadhana he gradually became aware of the dimensions of the spiritual innovation to be brought about by him. Firstly, matter and the Earth were no longer seen as something despicable in which the soul had descended by some accident or other. The statement of the Upanishad “Matter also is Brahman” was to be taken literally, and the physical universe was seen as “the external body of the Divine Being.”<sup>5</sup> He wrote: “Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it: [on the contrary] it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through its contradictions and perplexities...”<sup>6</sup>

1. *The Life Divine*, p. 139.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

3. *On Himself*, p. 12.

4. *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 100.

5. *The Life Divine*, p. 6.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 680.

Secondly, the “evolutionary unfolding of the being” became more than a naturalist scientific theory, it became a spiritual fact directly significant for the effort of the Yoga. Much of our bodies, life forces and mental capacities is shaped by evolution. We carry the development of life on the Earth not only in our visible body but deep in ourselves, where the past continues to be present and must be overcome if we want to advance into the future. The chakras represent the earthly and therefore cosmic evolution in us and are hierarchically ordered from below upwards, toward the levels which are worlds of consciousness above our present human rationality, to be integrated in the bodies of the future. True, in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga one has first to realise the psychic and overmental, spiritual realisations, but then, strengthened with these realisations, one has to descend into the nether regions of the subconscious, where the dark roots of humanity are.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo had the revelation of the Supermind, the divine Truth-Consciousness. This is the consciousness in which all is one and is experienced as one, in the timeless immensities as well as in the time-bound sub-atomic materialisations; it is the consciousness which eternally contains all in itself, manifests all out of itself and then takes all again into its bosom. This is the true “mind of God” behind the mysteries of the infinite and the infinitesimal, confounding present-day science because it is incapable of widening its vision beyond the physical realm. And Sri Aurobindo saw that this Truth-Consciousness, however high or far or deep beyond our present mind, was the only basis to realise the next step in evolution for which the time had come. “This knowledge first he had of time-born men.”<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, to work out his vision and his personal realisations of it, he had to establish a method which could be followed by others, a spiritual path which he called the “Integral Yoga”. For it had to contain the essence of humanity’s spiritual achievements in the past in order to integrate them into a vision of the future. In this spiritual undertaking, in the working out of this “new spirituality”, he and the Mother stood alone. Time and again they have compared their pioneering effort to hewing a path in the jungle, advancing through constant danger into the unknown. For the mighty Powers-that-be, hostile to any new spiritual acquisition or change, become merciless when their reign is threatened and their dominant position on the Earth might come to an end. “My gaping wounds are a thousand and one / And the Titan kings assail...” wrote Sri Aurobindo in his marvellous autobiographical poem ‘A God’s Labour’.<sup>8</sup>

All this together was—and is—the Aurobindian revolution. “Revolution” is often nothing more than an overblown word. But if initiating a new step in the terrestrial evolution, based on the materialisation of a consciousness beyond our present mind and even imagination, and to be incorporated into a material being on the Earth—if this is not a revolution, then what is?

7. *Savitri*, p. 74.

8. *Collected Poems*, p. 100.

It is but seldom realised that at the time of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's early lives the coming of the "superman" was felt by many to be necessary and even imminent. The name of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose thinking Sri Aurobindo was familiar with, will come to mind. But there was also Marx's new *homo economicus*, there was the new atheistic and humanitarian man of Auguste Comte, the Freudian and Jungian new man, and several more. Those were indeed the decades of an intense reaction of discontent against the dry rationality of the Enlightenment. This reaction would lead to fascism, with its own ideal of the new man, the man of the deed, and ultimately to Hitler's ruthless superman, the "blonde beast".

Still the historical perspective should be extended much farther backwards in time. For if this was, and is, the moment of a new evolutionary creation which is the fulfilment of the evolutionary past and makes a quantum leap beyond it, it must mean that Nature had worked out all the preliminary stages on the Earth to their utmost possibilities. As the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said, there are long periods of preparation, but then there is the moment in which the evolutionary *saltus* happens. Today's humanity in upheaval is certainly significant of such a critical moment in its evolution.

The "procession" of avatars is well-known in Hinduism and, as Sri Aurobindo remarked, pictures the successive evolutionary stages perfectly.<sup>9</sup> Sri Krishna declared in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the avatar comes at times when humanity is in crisis.<sup>10</sup> The materialisation of a new step in the evolution, like every birth, is a time of intensest crisis, *qua* importance exceeding by far the "axis-times" as defined by Karl Jaspers. The beings of an established level of evolution are themselves incapable of piercing the ceiling of their species, of going beyond the highest stratum of their materialisation. Such a breakthrough can be effected only by a direct intervention from "above", materially incarnated in a being which in India is known as *avatar*. Sri Aurobindo argues in one of his letters that between the hominids and *homo sapiens* there *had* to be an avatar, in that case Lord Rama. If so, there had to be an avatar to initiate the still greater leap between *homo sapiens* and the supramental being—and we know the name of that avatar: Sri Aurobindo-Mother,

A single being in two bodies clasped,  
A diarchy of two united souls.<sup>11</sup>

For the first time in the history of humanity a complete, double-poled avatar incarnated representing He and She, the male and female principle on all levels of existence and manifestation.

9. *Letters on Yoga*, p. 402.

10. See *Essays on the Gita*, p. 168.

11. *Savitri*, p. 295.

The Divine takes on a material body in what could be called metaphorically an “avatic field”. This consists of a preparatory period leading up to his appearance. Then there is his presence on earth when he lays the foundations of the change he has come down to bring about, always against impossible odds because he has come to do the impossible. While the decisive change is taking place only a few humans are aware of his presence, and fewer still are aware of the implications of his work. When the avatar has left his earthly body a transitory period follows, often of great confusion. And finally comes the time of the accomplishment of the evolutionary or spiritual change, perceptible to all and having a permanent impact on the destiny of humanity as a whole.

We are in the transitory period between the presence of the avatar and the concrete realisation of his purpose. Our strength is in our faith, unreasonable or maybe grotesque in the eyes of those who do not have the call to participate consciously in the Great Change. One of the keywords of the Integral Yoga is “surrender” because, having dedicated our lives to the Work, we accept that the ultimate realisation—the transformation of the body—will not be ours in this life. But to support our faith there is the presence of Sri Aurobindo and of the Mother—for the task of the avatar is not limited by his and her physical incarnation; and we can inwardly open to the supramental force, manifested in the Earth-atmosphere in 1956, and its deputy, the force descended in 1969 to enable the realisation of the overmental, transitional or intermediary being. Trying to become intermediary beings (“overwomen” and “overmen”—*surhommes*) is, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the task given to us.<sup>12</sup>

In the physical sciences it is a rule that a theory should prove its validity by making predictions that can be tested. Is Sri Aurobindo’s theory of the supermind only a grandiose illusion, or will humanity die out before anything like the apparition of the supramental being can happen on our planet? Sri Aurobindo has made predictions. In his writings in the *Arya*, later published in book form, one can read that: 1. India had to become free; 2. Asia had to awake; 3. humanity had to become one; 4. the Indian spirituality had to spread in the whole world; 5. the human species would be succeeded by a new species of supramental beings. It should be borne in mind that these predictions were made during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, when reasonable people could only consider them as chimeras. In 1947, in a text to be broadcast on the occasion of India’s freedom, Sri Aurobindo summarised these predictions himself and called them his “five dreams”.

When one considers what has become of these “dreams” at present, one cannot but agree that all five have been realised to a considerable degree. Thus they may be held to be a rational justification of Sri Aurobindo’s previsions of the future. He wrote that a next evolutionary step is *inevitable*, a statement which, considering the evolutionary process, can only be doubted for fear that our Earth might not survive its

12. See *The Mother: Questions and Answers 1957-58*, pp. 190-91.

present predicament. But the fundamental cause of this predicament is precisely the *Umwertung aller Werte*, the revaluation of all values required to create the new, as yet unknown ones. In this so-called post-modern period of a humanity caught in the vortex of its unification, Sri Aurobindo's vision provides us with the interpretation of the apparent chaos.

Mentally conditioned by the physical sciences, few people still believe in miracles, but I know of two which are historically proven. The first is Joan of Arc, the young French village girl who, at the head of rowdy medieval armies, defeated the English, put her king on his throne, and told her judges frankly: *Je suis venue de par Dieu*—I have come from God. The other miracle is Auroville, the utopia of all utopias, which after forty years in quasi impossible circumstances and despite all ordeals, is still there—and growing.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

(This text was read on 17 February 2008, at the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Human Unity, on the occasion of the symposium held to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Auroville.)

*A common spiritual life meant to express the spiritual and not the mental, vital and physical being must found and maintain itself on greater values than the mental, vital, physical values of the ordinary human society; if it is not so founded, it will be merely the normal human society with a difference. An entirely new consciousness in many individuals transforming their whole being, transforming their mental, vital and physical nature-self, is needed for the new life to appear; only such a transformation of the general mind, life, body nature can bring into being a new worthwhile collective existence. The evolutionary nisus must tend not merely to create a new type of mental beings but another order of beings who have raised their whole existence from our present mentalised animality to a greater spiritual level of the earth-nature.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 1061)



## PUJALAL-JI

*(I first came to the Ashram in 1965 for the August Darshan. By the Mother's grace I stayed here for about two and a half months. Then I wrote to the Mother from Kolkata, expressing my wish to join the Ashram. She accepted and I returned in 1968 just before the February Darshan and remained here for good.*

*A few days later, I told Nolini-da about my desire to learn Sanskrit. "That's a good idea," he replied. "Why don't you learn it with Pujalal?" Just then Pujalal-ji happened to come by and Nolini-da introduced me to him. "Krishna wants to learn Sanskrit with you," he said. Pujalal-ji consented happily.*

*Pujalal-ji began teaching me Sanskrit shlokas. I learned quite a few shlokas, though I did not go very far in learning Sanskrit. However, I received from him his measureless affection. His love for people welled up from the very depths of his being. He was especially affectionate with the Ashram children.*

*Much later, I requested Pujalal-ji to tell me something about his life. He agreed and told me about his childhood, his youth before coming to the Ashram, his meeting with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and other things related to his life here. My jottings sat still in a notebook for twenty years after he left his body. Then Srinwantu (the Bengali edition) asked me if I could write a short biographical note on Pujalal-ji. But at that time I was going through a very difficult time physically and inwardly. So I could not get down to writing anything. I told Dada that I was not able to bring myself to do this work. He encouraged me, saying, "You can do it." With Dada's assurance as a cue, I took up the pen again. Dada, Manoj-da and Sarala-di, in particular, have all been most helpful in this endeavour and I would like to express my gratitude to them. My heartfelt thanks also to Maurice, who was one of Pujalal-ji's numerous students, for translating and rearranging these notes.)*

WHEN God descends upon this earth, he brings along with him into the *lila* his play-mates, who assemble around him one by one. Among the extraordinary companions of Sri Aurobindo was Pujalal.

Pujalal-ji took birth on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901 in Godhra, a village in the Panchmahal district of Gujarat. His father was Sri Ranchhoddasji Dalvadi and his mother, Dhulibai. Pujalal-ji's father was courageous, strong and radiant. His mother was an embodiment of love, gentleness and compassion.

Pujalal's ancestors were from Napa, a village in the Khera district. When the Muslim Nawab attacked, they moved from Napa to Godhra.

Before Pujalal's birth, many children were born in his family, but they all died young. That's why Puja was the apple of everyone's eye. Prayers were offered to God beseeching a long life for Puja and he was named Punjalal.

His days of happy childhood were spent in Godhra. The families of Pujalal-ji, his grandfather and his elder uncle lived in three adjoining houses. There was a rather large pond in front, surrounded by several banana trees.

Puja's grandfather loved him very much. From time to time he would go to Puja's school and, with great warmth and tenderness, hand him one paisa as pocket money. (One paisa was worth a lot at that time. You could buy many things with it.) Quite often Puja's grandfather would lovingly feed him with hot millet bread soaked in ghee and *gur* (molasses), a favourite Gujarati snack. At other times he would offer him a sweet made with ripe banana.

Puja-ji's father was in the brick-business and owned about thirty-five *bighas* of land. He was as strong as he was short-tempered. Puja-ji remembered an incident: From time to time Muslim goondas in their neighbourhood used to make a lot of commotion. Once one of these goondas entered his house to cause trouble. Puja-ji's father gave him such a thrashing that he dropped his weapon and fled. He did not trigger any disturbance after that.

When Puja was a child, his father once took him to a distant village, carrying him on his shoulders. The little boy astride his shoulders sat happily playing the tabla on his father's head. The father said nothing, but upon returning home he gave him such a spanking that the neighbours came rushing to save the boy. The beating was so harsh that Puja developed fever. Everyone rebuked the father severely.

I asked Puja-ji: "How strong was your mother's love for you?" He laughed and said: "Who else can love if not a mother? My dear mother loved me very much. Her love was immeasurable. An incident comes to mind.

"My younger sister's name was Chanchal. My mother laid little Chanchal on the *dolna* (a rocking cradle) and went for a bath. She asked me to swing the cradle. Hardly had she left when my little sister started crying. I tried to quiet her sweetly but despite my efforts she did not stop crying. Then I thought of frightening her and so I went into the kitchen and came back with a burning piece of wood picked up from the wood-stove with a pair of tongs. I stood in front of Chanchal and imagined that on seeing this burning piece of wood she would get scared and shut up. Unfortunately the piece slipped from the tongs and landed on my little sister's hand! Her tender hand got burnt at once. I too began screaming while my little sister was howling away. Mother rushed out on hearing the cries of her children and saw that my sister's hand had got badly burnt with the burning piece of wood. But my mother said nothing to me. It took quite some time for the wound to heal, but my sister carried the scar all her life."

Little Puja was admitted to the village school. After finishing there he joined an English school in Godhra.

Pujalal-ji mentioned in one of our conversations that he was extremely fond of swimming. There was a huge pond or a sort of lake behind their house. It may also have been a marsh. This pond or lake later got divided. A railway bridge was constructed over one part of the lake, a road to the royal palace went through another and an access road was laid through the third to reach the village. Next to this water-body was a huge tamarind tree. There was also a banyan on the embankment. By the pond near their house there was a small *kutchha ghat* and on the other side quite a large pucca one. Puja-ji used to enjoy bathing in this large pond. He would swim from one end of the pond to the other. But sometimes his friends would splash water on his face and eyes and disturb little Puja whenever he went to swim there. So then he would go to another pond to swim. By the pond there was a rather huge mango tree. One day he climbed onto this mango tree and jumped off into the pond. As he did not know anything about diving, he hurt his chest very badly. Then there was a pond with innumerable white lotuses. Puja-ji would swim to the centre and pluck the lotuses. From their seeds a delicious sweet was prepared. Once he swam for a long time with one of his relatives, shuttling from one end to the other, but later, when he was in the middle, he suddenly became breathless. By holding on to his relative he managed to reach the shore with great difficulty. On another occasion, while he was swimming in the pond he saw a Muslim man washing clothes. When he swam to his side the man gave him a huge slap. Little Puja could do nothing but turn back heavy-hearted.

As mentioned already, Puja was born in 1901. Swami Vivekananda was still alive. (He left his body in 1902.) From his childhood Puja was drawn to Swamiji. One of his friends who was a few years older used to tell him about Swamiji. From him he heard about Swami Vivekananda's return to India after making his famous speech in America. When he came back, school and college students removed the horses from his carriage and started pulling it themselves. The young brides of the houses, who usually stayed indoors, came out of their houses to shower flowers on Swamiji's carriage and perform *arati* before him. The entire route was lined with people. Everyone was eager to have at least a glimpse of this man. Puja loved remembering these incidents of Swamiji's life.

When Puja finished class V in the English school of Godhra, he left Godhra to join the Parsi English school in Nadiad. There he stayed at his elder sister-in-law's place. And thus his happy childhood days rolled on. Then it was time for a new chapter in his life.

## 2

In Nadiad a new chapter unfolded in Puja-ji's life. After joining the Parsi English High school, he met Ambubhai Purani. Purani-ji had opened an *akhara* (gymnasium) in Nadiad where wrestling, lathi, knife play and other martial arts were taught. Puja-ji joined this *akhara* in order to practise and develop these skills.

Now, the principal of the Parsi school was lame. He did not appreciate sports or games or physical exercise. Besides, he feared that the presence of his schoolboys in these nationalist *akharas* could also attract the wrathful eye of the British Government. Therefore he tried to dissuade Puja several times from participating in the *akhara*. Puja repeatedly disobeyed him so he was dismissed and sent away without a certificate. Ambubhai took Puja to Ahmedabad, got an order from an official of the Education department and thus succeeded in getting Puja a certificate from the principal of the Parsi school. After this Puja enrolled in an English-medium high school.

Puja was an extremely energetic young boy. His brother-in-law once jokingly called him a monkey. Being called a monkey hurt him so deeply that he moved out of his sister's house. His father was seriously ill at that time and the family's financial situation was also rather tight. Puja rented a room and began living alone. He often ate just one meal a day in an inexpensive local restaurant while continuing with his studies. Later he moved in with Purani-ji.

At exam time Puja left with Purani-ji for Ahmedabad to sit for the matriculation examination there. A doctor they knew put them up in his bungalow. Ambubhai had another reason to go there and that was to start another gymnasium. At that time the Indian people were up in arms against the Rowlatt Act, which had just been passed. Some of them killed a British surgeon. The British Government reacted to this with very repressive laws. In retaliation, some people in Ahmedabad set fire to the examination hall and the matriculation test papers were torn up and destroyed. As a result Puja could not take the exam and returned to Nadiad. He took the exam a few days later somewhere else and passed successfully.

But Puja-ji was more interested in sports than in studies. He was good at different sorts of exercises, as well as wrestling, lathi, knife play and gymnastics. As for studies, though he was fond of history and geography, he could not come to terms with maths.

Puja-ji then enrolled in a college in Ahmedabad. Along with several other boys he rented a room above a temple. Purani-ji had opened a canteen for needy students, but this canteen was almost three miles from the place where they stayed. As a result, Puja-ji usually had just one meal a day, even as he carried on with his studies and his various physical activities at the gymnasium.

Once in the college sports meet, Puja came first in the quarter-mile run, beating a Parsi boy who was known to be the best in this event. (This boy went on to become a police inspector who harrassed Indians considerably.) Hardly was the quarter-mile run over that the one-mile race was flagged off. Here Puja-ji came second. The governor distributed the prizes on this occasion.

Even though he was battling against poverty, Puja-ji stopped neither his studies nor his physical training at the gymnasium. He possessed very few clothes and had to go barefooted to college. The British principal objected to his coming to college barefooted. "What connection is there between education and wearing shoes?" Puja-ji asked. At night he slept on a bedsheet spread over a cold stone floor. Even in winter

he had no other bedding and would cover himself with a part of his dhoti. In that biting cold, his body would just shiver and curl up. After a cold-water bath in the morning, he would walk three miles to the *akhara* and help Purani-ji with the gymnasium work. He never felt any physical discomfort at that time and was always happy. Purani-ji's father, Ambalal Balkrishna Purani, had a sweet shop. Sometimes Puja-ji would go to his shop and eat sweets. At times he would walk three miles to a gymnasium in Sharangpur, munching almonds all the way. In those days in Gujarat, you could get a *seer* (about two pounds) of almonds for ten *annas* (a rupee was equivalent to sixteen *annas*).

While studying for his Intermediate degree, Puja chose science because he felt that it was necessary to master the sciences to take India forward. But since he was weak in maths he did not go very far and failed in his exams. Once again he paid his college fees in order to continue his studies. But even after paying his fees, he did not sit for the exam. Thus college education came to an end.

As mentioned earlier, Puja was drawn to sports, physical training and work for the country. The youth were intent on battling for the liberation of their Motherland and they realised that the Motherland would never achieve freedom unless her children became strong and fearless. Puja-ji therefore directed all his energies towards this service of the country. He accompanied Purani-ji to Bharuch to take up the training of boys in the gymnasium there. One more chapter now unfolded in his life.

### 3

Pujalal-ji went to Bharuch with Purani-ji and began training the boys in the gymnasium in the different skills of lathi, knife play and physical exercises.

The town of Bharuch is set on the Narmada, not very far from the sea. The river there is almost half a mile wide. On full moon or new moon nights when the sea is at low tide, big wall-like waves would rise in the Narmada.

Pujalal harboured a sort of fear of this river. Yet he knew that the presence of any sort of fear in the being was an obstacle to progress. Somehow he had to conquer this fear. How did he finally overcome it? Let us hear the story.

It was the dead of night and dense darkness reigned all around. The whole town was silent, not a sound or stir anywhere except the swelling waters of the Narmada. The river was flowing past at tremendous speed on the surge of its huge waves. The waves crashed on the banks relentlessly. A railway bridge stood across the river.

The time was after two, half past two at night. Puja-ji advanced towards the Narmada. He stopped for a moment and looked up at the sky. In the deep night even the sky appeared inky black, as if a huge eerie being pervaded space. Pujalal-ji lowered his gaze and in the thick of night beheld Mother Narmada's indescribable image before him. In a flash he jumped into the Mother's waiting whirling arms. Overcoming the waves, frolicking through the waters, he swam on and on until he reached the other

bank of this half-mile-wide river. Then he walked back across the rail bridge to the other side. He had overcome his dread of the river.

There were a few old forts in Bharuch. When the waters of the Narmada swelled up because of the tide they would enter these forts. Flooding was common. Once there was a very bad flood and the waters entered one of the old forts. People in the area went from house to house by boat. Even then, Purani-ji and Puja-ji used to bathe in the river every day.

One day, while going to the river, Purani-ji said, “We bathe in the river every day. Now, if one could swim in the Narmada, that would be an act of courage!” Puja-ji took up Purani-ji’s challenge and both of them jumped into the river. The river was very wide at that time—wherever you looked you saw only water. They aimed to reach a certain ghat, the ferryboat point. Both of them swam furiously as they were carried along by the surging waters. The current was strong and the two swimmers pushed against it to advance. Purani-ji managed to reach the ferry-ghat, but Puja-ji was caught by the current in the middle. It was difficult to escape the billowing waters and strong current in the middle. Puja-ji could neither advance nor retreat. Though stuck in the middle, he did not panic. At last he managed to get out of this current and after swimming a good distance reached the ferry-ghat.

The ferrymen and those at the ghat had been observing Puja-ji’s struggle with dismay. Seeing him reach the ghat, they all heaved a sigh of relief.

At times Puja-ji took some boys of the *akhara* for a walk along the Narmada. The famous Shulpanishwar temple of Shiva was almost sixty miles away on the bank of the Narmada, but still they would walk there. The Narmada is known as the Ganga of Gujarat. Everyone in Gujarat worships Mother Narmada uttering, “*Narmada kankar, hey Shankar!*” or “*Vasey Shankar!*” (In every pebble of the Narmada dwells Shankar.) Along the banks of the Narmada are several places of spiritual retreat for rishis and munis. Innumerable yogis, sadhus and sadhaks sit there, absorbed in their spiritual endeavour. In addition to these spiritual seekers the common people too converge on the Narmada with devout fervour. Hundreds of beautiful temples dot its banks.

On the Narmada’s banks, in a small hut near a village called Malsa, lived one Swami Madhodas. He was a spiritual seeker from Bengal who pursued a life of sadhana there. Puja-ji was very fond of this place. But by the time he went to Malsa, Swami Madhodas was no longer alive.

Puja-ji’s favourite saint was Shankarananda Giri Maharaj, a seeker of a very high calibre. He was the spiritual brother of Swami Brahmananda, the great yogi whom Sri Aurobindo had met on the banks of the Narmada. Like Brahmananda, he was said to be 250 or 300 years old, and both suffered from toothache! Shankarananda Giri Maharaj had a strong, compact physique. He reminded Pujalal-ji of the German chancellor Hindenberg during the First World War. Shankarananda had participated in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which was the first clear battle-cry for India’s independence.

Having a darshan of Shankarananda Maharaj filled one with a feeling of great

purity and the heart was suffused with faith and devotion. He had his ashram by the Narmada where a few of his disciples lived. There were also some fields attached to it. Once on his way back to Ahmedabad, Pujalal-ji stopped there for the night with his boys. Deeply touched by the purity of the ashram atmosphere, he decided to return there one day without the boys. And his resolve was sincere, for he did go back to the ashram all alone after accompanying the boys back home. He spent a few days there in extreme happiness. Shankarananda was very fond of him and welcomed him with a lot of affection. The swami did not allow everyone into the ashram. Maharaja Gaekwad of Baroda, for example, went to see him there, but Shankarananda Giri Maharaj did not meet him.

Once Pujalal sat in a quiet corner of the ashram reading the *Gita* by himself. Suddenly Shankarananda appeared before him and asked, “What are you up to young man?” “I’m reading the *Gita*,” Pujalal replied. “You can do that later. Serve Shankar first,” Shankarananda retorted. “Of course, I will serve Shankar. But now I need to get some knowledge; that’s why I am reading the *Gita*,” Pujalal answered quietly.

Purani-ji also went to see Shankarananda and stayed in his ashram for a few days. Ambubhai even worked on the fields. He was as robust as he was hard-working, and Shankarananda was extremely pleased with him.

At that time, Pujalal-ji had long hair and a bushy beard that covered his face. Shankarananda’s disciples used to address him as ‘Rishi-ji’. Of all the spiritual seekers and yogis Puja-ji had met, it was Shankarananda that Puja-ji was most fond of—after Sri Aurobindo. And this fondness was mutual.

Puja-ji also met Vishnu Bhaskar Lele who came to Ahmedabad once. Lele spoke for a long time with Purani-ji, but he did not inspire in him great faith. Pujalal-ji also went to visit Gandhi-ji’s Sabarmati ashram, but he did not enjoy it very much. Like Purani-ji, Puja-ji believed in the revolutionary path to gain freedom. His battle was to win freedom for his Motherland. They knew that unless her children were fearless, winning freedom for their Mother was impossible. That is why Purani-ji had set up clubs and gymnasiums everywhere in Gujarat to train the youth in martial arts and other physical exercises. They had sworn their lives for Mother India’s liberation.

Pujalal-ji’s ideal and inspiration was Swami Vivekananda. He never stopped reading his writings. To him they were a fountain of strength. Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna’s words led him to the quest of the Ultimate.

After Bharuch, Pujalal-ji left for Kushindra to take charge of exercise-training in a gymnasium established by Purani-ji. While he was working at Kushindra, he received the grace of visiting Pondicherry for the first time. Two amusing incidents took place on his journey to Pondicherry.

Pujalal-ji got into a small train in order to proceed to Pondicherry. A muslim goonda along with his gang of hoodlums was sowing terror in this train by insulting and assaulting the passengers. He moved towards Puja-ji and twisted his leg. Pujalal-ji gave him a resounding slap in return. The fellow-passengers were delighted. The

goonda's gang pounced on Puja-ji and began pulling his hair and beard. At this point the fellow-passengers came to his rescue. What did he himself do in that situation? Pujalal-ji doesn't remember. As soon as the train pulled into the next station, the goonda, fearing the police, took to his heels with his gang.

When Puja-ji reached the terminus, he got off to catch the big train. Since the train was scheduled to arrive only later, he lay down on a bench to rest and soon fell asleep; indeed, he slept for a very long time. Both the trains he could have taken had left by then. Where could he spend the night now? The railway police had been observing him and wondered, "He has been sleeping for so long on the platform. Two trains have come and gone and he still has not woken up. Who could he be? He must be a goonda." They approached Puja-ji and ordered, "Let's go." "Where?" Puja-ji enquired. "To the police station," they replied. With great difficulty, Pujalal-ji managed to convince the police that he was no goonda and that he had simply overslept in the station.

Pujalal-ji first came to Pondicherry either on the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> of October in 1923. Purani-ji had preceded him. In those days Sri Aurobindo used to come and sit on a chair in the verandah at eight o'clock in the morning. He would read the newspapers and meet any visitors who wished to see him. As soon as Puja-ji saw Sri Aurobindo, he felt that if there was a God in the world, then this was verily he, that *Purnabrahma Narayana*. Puja-ji told Sri Aurobindo, "I want to take up yoga-sadhana." "Why?" Sri Aurobindo asked. "For God," Puja-ji replied. Sri Aurobindo then looked at him intently for a long time. After observing him thoroughly both within and without, he finally gave his consent for him to take up yoga. With his customary humility, Pujalal-ji told us, "I wasn't, after all, a very good-natured chap." Sri Aurobindo continued, "Keep aspiring to the Divine above." Sri Aurobindo then moved his left hand above his head. "Aspire to him up there. The Divine will descend."

Every day Pujalal-ji would make a flower-garland and put it around Sri Aurobindo's neck. Then he would sit near him and meditate for a while. Even though he did not know the spiritual significance of the flower, the *shesali* or *Aspiration* flower was his favourite. After that, he would weave a garland for the Mother and offer it to her.

In those days, besides Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, there were very few people living in the Ashram. Nolini-da, Amrita-da, Moni, Bejoy Nag and a very small number of others lived with them. Puja-ji returned to Gujarat after his first visit to Pondicherry.

Once he came with Purani-ji's wife Lilavati and her year-and-a-half-old daughter Anu. Pujalal-ji always loved children and little Anu used to adore him. After a couple of visits between Pondicherry and Gujarat in 1926, he came back to Pondicherry.

Every evening Puja-ji used to go for a walk along the sea-front. One evening, while taking his walk someone came running to call him. He was taken to the Ashram. The day was the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1926.

Puja-ji said, "Returning to the Ashram that day, I felt as if I were battling against



a huge storm and massive winds in order to move forward. The closer I came to the Ashram, the more difficult it became to walk. Once I reached the Ashram I saw Nolini-da, Amrita-da and many others sitting quietly. I sat down in their midst. A little later Sri Aurobindo came out and behind him the Mother as well. It was the day when Sri Krishna's consciousness descended. Sri Krishna's consciousness came down into Sri Aurobindo that day.

“Sri Aurobindo's complexion was like that of the golden *champak* flower. His cheeks were aglow with a roseate golden light. The Mother was wearing a saree and her head was covered. I could not see her face very well.

“Sri Aurobindo looked at everyone. We all went and bowed before him and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo held his left hand a few inches above the Mother's head and blessed everybody with the right hand. He gave hints that henceforth he would carry out his work through the Mother. By accepting the Mother we would be led to Sri Aurobindo. The air was still. A profound silence pervaded the atmosphere, a sublime peace and ananda reigned all around. After everyone had finished their pranam, Sri Aurobindo sat for a while longer, waiting perhaps for anyone who had not yet come for the pranam. Then both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother slowly got up and went inside. The door closed behind them. At this point Datta, rapt in a divine trance, exclaimed, ‘The Lord has descended, He has conquered death and sorrow, He has brought down immortality.’ ”

*(To be continued)*

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTY

(Translated by Maurice Shukla from the original Bengali article)

*Because thou lovest God only, thou art apt to claim that He should love thee rather than others; but this is a false claim contrary to right & the nature of things. For He is the One but thou art of the many. Rather become one in heart & soul with all beings, then there will be none in the world but thou alone for Him to love.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 486)*

## NIGHTWATCH AT MATRIMANDIR, OR HOW I CAME TO AUROVILLE

NIGHTWATCH at Matrimandir...

A cosmic spectacle; the black expanse above, the big black crater of Matrimandir's excavation carved deep into the soil. The four pillars—two of which are completed and the other two nearing completion—are four huge ships coming together from the four corners of the earth to meet at this propitious spot.

Vastness, silence, a sort of solemnity reign supreme. Being alone for half the night with Matrimandir is like being a part of some occult, worldwide initiation into things unknown. Matrimandir watches me rather than the inverse.

A part of the person may feel lost in this great world: coming from the other end of the globe and now sitting on the edge of a deep hole in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in south India. Another, more subtle part of the person knows it has been chosen to live and work at the very centre of the new world that is being born—hidden still and almost invisible, but with a sure force and a definite direction. Matrimandir is nowhere, in a sense; far from everything and everywhere. But we know it for sure to be in the very heart of everything, in the centre of a cosmic play of forces redirecting the universe towards the divine spirit which, almost palpably, seeks to manifest here and now.

So many visitors to Matrimandir are reminded,—strange sort of memory,—of the pyramids and other occult world loci. Behind the school books' kind of history of kings and conquerors there is a history of souls seeking expression in art and architecture, but remaining hidden behind symbols which can be read by those who have the eyes to see. The Greeks had their Delphi, the place where the gods expressed their opinions and wishes through the oracles of the Pythia. Delphi was for them the centre of the universe, apparently of that world behind politics, art and the ordinary movements which were embodied in Athens. They called Delphi the "omphalos", the navel, of the earth, the occult centre where the vapours emerged transmuting the ordinary into the sacred and supernatural. But it is interesting to note that if Delphi was the navel, and the navel is the seat of the vital powers, were they not the vital gods and beings who expressed themselves in the vague and ambiguous oracles?

Matrimandir is related to a much higher principle, to the soul; of Auroville first, but undoubtedly to the universal soul as well. The Mother: "The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville and the sooner it is there the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians."

Nightwatch at the soul of the new creation...

The black expanse above continues to be black, but a play of lightness and delight transforms at every moment this monument under construction into a mind-blowing centre of the three worlds. A single spotlight guides our worker from the neighbouring Tamil village, who is on night-duty to keep the recently concreted portion of the

north pillar moist. Hundreds of insects of all shapes and colours and levels of evolution are attracted by the light and they fly, jump and bump without any visible pattern against the lens of the spotlight. That's how I came to Auroville too,—an insect from somewhere in the dark world, attracted by the one spotlight in the huge night, jumping and bumping around without any as yet visible pattern. The insect does not seek out the light, it is the light that draws the insect. After one and a half years in Auroville I still don't know why or how I came. I did not choose to come here; rather I feel I was chosen. When I broke away from my previous life I told my confreres of the religious order of which I was a member, "As soon as I know why I am going, I may feel ready to come back." Well, I still don't know but the more I discover something of a reason, the surer I am that I won't go back.

The possibility seldom arises to feel proud of being an Aurovilian when one knows that we are not here on account of personal merits but rather because of the difficulties each one of us represents so that these can be integrated and transformed in the evolutionary experiment of Auroville. We all bring with us a particular set of problems, forces, idiosyncracies as fuel for the cosmic fire. We also represent, each one of us, a particular aspect of the old world that has to be new-made.

I may have been chosen because I represented a strong force of the past age: religion. For fifteen years I was a member of a religious order, the Franciscans, and for eight of those years a Roman Catholic priest. In 1968 my superiors sent me, partly as a sociologist and partly as a missionary, to central India to set up an institute for community development. My old interest in Yoga guided me towards a hathayoga centre, but while travelling through India for the work of the institute, I tried to come into contact with other brands of Yoga as well. One day I found myself in Pondicherry and the next day in Auroville. That was it! I thought that I left again following a ten-day visit, but I discovered more and more that it was just my body that left. After almost three years, the time I needed for the big step from religion to spirituality, I came back to Auroville and rejoined my soul. Simply, it had not left the place. It is not a nice experience to travel around India and, after my one-year's assignment was over, to Pakistan and then once more to Holland, without a soul. One lives less than half a life, one is not there, not oneself. That must be the reason why so many people feel as if they have come home as soon as they enter the Ashram or, if it is their destination, Auroville.

I did not know why I suddenly broke away from my order and the Church and the intimate circle of my confreres, who were real friends to me. I mentalised the reasons. The most comic one, though at that time I took my mind quite seriously, was to prepare a thesis on "Jesus and Sri Aurobindo" or something like "The Yoga of Jesus". I spent my first night at the beautiful Ashram guest house Golconde; the next morning I took the bus to Auroville, and it "happened" to be the very day when the excavation of Matrimandir started. I joined the thirty or so people who carried red earth away from the excavation in baskets on their heads, and from that first moment

I knew a lot of things.

I knew that the thesis would not be written, because the dialogue between the Great cannot be understood mentally but only by a plunge into identification. Carrying earth of Matrimandir promised to be the shortcut towards that. I also knew immediately that I would not go back to Holland; and before I knew it (it was something else in me that knew, or it was somebody else that knew for and in me), I had become an Aurovilian.

Auroville is far from being the perfect society yet, but being around here brings joy and peace on levels of the being which all the solemnities of my order and all the ordinations and celebrations of my Church never managed to touch.

I was a theologian. Theologically, I have not come anywhere near “solving” many of the mental problems involved in my transition from Rome to Auroville, from religion to “no religions”, from Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But my little victory over theology is that I hardly care any more.

I had a restless nature; always searching, travelling, discovering, never settling anywhere, giving up things as soon as I thought I knew their secrets, not letting myself be tied to anything or anybody. And now I find myself in one place for a long time already and without any desire to leave or to go anywhere else. It seems a common experience of most Aurovilians that they cannot live and breathe any more in any other place. As soon as we set foot outside Auroville, we feel a strong inclination to rush back. Some of us even feel “home-sick” for Matrimandir when we are in Pondicherry!

I don’t know how and why I am here, but I know that it is a joy and a blessing to be at the cradle of a new world and safely in the arms of the divine Mother.

And the amazing thing for me is this: the more I discover Sri Aurobindo, the Integral Yoga and Matrimandir, the more I feel that I have not really broken with my past life as a member of a religious order and an official representative of religion, but I experience that I am only now slowly becoming what I then, spiritually and occultly, was supposed to be.

RUUD LOHMAN

*(A House for the Third Millennium by Ruud Lohman, published by Alain Grandcolas, 1986, pp. 1-6.)*

## MATRIMANDIR NIGHTWATCH

**3 September, 1972**

Vast endless eternal presence  
Our beginnings and endings  
Are small flares of ego-flame—  
Re-kindling of aspiration.  
We go to make a new beginning  
To satisfy our need for pageantry,  
To make an ego-signpost along the path of ignorance,  
Knowing birth to be a choice, more or less clear,  
And death, for most, to be an accident  
Born of long-practised ignorance—  
Endless cycles of beginnings and endings  
Superimposed upon, yet fully pervaded by  
The ever-existent, unbroken process of love.

**31 May, 1974**

After the pressured rush  
In the midnight hush  
Remain a thousand living whisperings.  
Wholesome presences of work well done.  
Concentrations, dedications  
Live on, though the workers are gone;  
Each hammered nail, lifted stone, sweep of broom,  
The single small movements made by many men  
Uniting to create a vast construction  
Greater, finer than all the work we do.  
For God gives in measureless bounty  
To fulfil our efforts  
And we are made anew, single yet combined  
As we build this temple of divinity.

LORETTA

# UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

(Continued from the issue of May 2008)

## Theatre

ANOTHER place which was associated with Udar was the theatre. We are told that there was a series of warehouses where our theatre stands today. He arranged for the purchase and the construction. And on February Darshan, on Mother's birthday, it was inaugurated with a March past and a performance. Some years later, Udar would stand there, on that stage and play many roles—in the Bourgeois Gentleman, Perseus the Deliverer and others.

*The Golden Chain*

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### *L'Anglais tel qu'on le parle*

This was the first play that Udar acted in. It was in 1947, and he was the 'Garçon', the hotel boy.

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### *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*

A farcical 19<sup>th</sup> century comedy by Eugène Labiche.

It chronicles the misfortunes of a retired manufacturer who goes on a holiday to Switzerland with his wife and daughter, followed by two friendly suitors who devise stratagems to please the father and get the daughter's hand.

When this comedy was put up in 1948, Udar was the central character, M. Perrichon.

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### *Le Grand Secret*

A Play by the Mother—Six monologues and a conclusion.

Six of the world's most famous men have been brought together, apparently by chance, in a life-boat in which they have taken refuge when the ship that was carrying them to a world conference on human progress sank in mid-ocean. There is also a seventh man in the boat...

Presented in the Ashram on 1 December 1954. Udar was the statesman.

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*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

This is a comedy by Molière about a rich merchant who aspires to become a gentleman and hires tutors to acquire the superficial accomplishments of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Man of Society.

When this play was put up in July 1959, Udar played the role of M. Jourdain, the central character.

\*

*The Viziers of Bassora*

A Play by Sri Aurobindo.

The Play is a depiction of the conflict of good and evil in which good triumphs over evil. The play has another theme, that is of love. Love is presented by Sri Aurobindo as a benevolent force which destroys evil and conflict and paves the way for harmony and peace.

Udar was the caliph Haroun al Rashid in the December 1964 presentation.

\*

*Perseus the Deliverer*

A Drama by Sri Aurobindo.

“Here the stage is the human mind of all times: the subject is an incident in its passage from a semi-primitive temperament surviving in a fairly advanced outward civilisation to a brighter intellectualism and humanism—never quite safe against the resurgence of the dark or violent life-forces which are always there subdued or subordinated or somnolent in the make-up of civilised man—and the first promptings of the deeper and higher psychic and spiritual being which it is his ultimate destiny to become.” (From Sri Aurobindo’s preface to the play.)

1 December 1966 when the play was staged, Udar was King Cepheus, father of Andromeda.

\*

On another occasion when we were rehearsing the drama of Sri Aurobindo, *Perseus the Deliverer*, we all went to her in our stage costumes to show them to her. I was dressed as a king since the role I had was that of King Cepheus, the father of Andromeda. When the Mother saw me she exclaimed, “Ah, now I remember seeing you dressed like this, one of the times we were together in a previous life. You were then a Roman Emperor.” She did not specify which one and I was too thrilled to ask her and the moment passed.

Udar

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*Rodogune*

A Drama by Sri Aurobindo.

A tragedy set in Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria. Rodogune, which underlines the purposiveness of suffering, is a parable of the working of Fate and also a celebration of the supremacy of love, its power and glory.

December 1968 was when it was performed and in it Udar was Nicanor, a prince of the house of Syria.

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*The Prince of Edur*

A Play by Sri Aurobindo, written in 1907. (Incomplete)

“Historically, Bappa the hero of the play was the founder of the greatness of Mewar. He had spent his childhood among the Bheels (Bhils) of the forest, become their chieftain, and ultimately founded a kingdom around Chitor. In Sri Aurobindo’s play, Bappa of the Bheels—who is really the Prince of Edur in exile—manages to thwart the designs of all his enemies including the usurper Rana of Edur, and marries his daughter as well, the clash of interests and the heady march of events make for dramatic excitement, but Sri Aurobindo seems also to have visualised Bappa in the prototypical image of patriot and deliverer, a fiery son of the Mother issuing from his ‘Bhavani Mandir’ in the hills to cause confusion among the enemies of the country.” (*Sri Aurobindo—a biography and a history* by K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, 2006 ed., p. 154)

When the play was presented in the Ashram Theatre in 1970, Udar played the role of Visaldeo, a minister.

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**Noël**

In England Christmas is a very happy family affair, so Mona, Udar’s wife, also celebrated a simple Christmas celebration with her friends and family in the Ashram and sent something for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

In 1944, during the war years, when all of a sudden there was a large influx of children, Mother asked Mona to organise a little celebration for them. Games were organised and presents were distributed. All this was done in the Red House, facing the Ashram Main Library, where Udar lived with his family.

The children enjoyed the celebration so much that it was decided to hold it the next year too. The Christmas celebration was then held at Fenêtres after Udar, Mona and Gauri moved there a few years later. Mother decided that from then on the distribution of presents would be for everyone in the Ashram and that it would be



held in the Playground. For the next 10 years or so, the Christmas tree was decorated and lit up at the Playground. It was a simple affair, and the young and the old participated in the cheerful mood of the celebration. Mother herself sat near the tree and distributed presents.

In those days the Ashram's finances were very limited, so the presents which were given to the children were not new toys which were bought. What the children got in their little packets from Mother was recycled material. The tennis-balls with which Mother played were afterwards passed on to the other players. When the balls were completely worn out they were dyed in bright colours and distributed to the children at Christmas. And small eggless cakes, with chocolate topping, made in the Ashram Bakery, were also one of the gifts.

Even though everyone enjoyed this little celebration, the Playground, as it turned out, was not the ideal place. Sometimes it rained and everything had to be hurriedly taken into one of the rooms, and at other times there were strong winds and the decorations on the tree would get blown away. In 1956 the Theatre Hall was constructed and it was then the biggest covered space in the Ashram. From 1958 the Christmas tree was decorated at the Theatre and Mother distributed the gifts there. Probably the last time that Mother came to the Theatre for Christmas was in 1961.

*The Golden Chain*

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I first met Udar on December 24<sup>th</sup> 1968. That night Maggi, Udar and I joined Kusum at her new shop "Fleurs en Flacon", a few doors from the back of the Ashram on Rue St. Gilles. Our mission was to sing Christmas carols to the Mother. Udar brought his harmonica. After a few practice songs, we walked over and stood under Mother's window on Rue St. Gilles (where the original balcony Darshan was given). And there in the empty street, under the South Indian sky—with Udar's soulful accompaniment on the harmonica we sang 'Silent Night' to the Mother of the stars and the earth.

Constance

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Mother used to take our Wednesday evening class. Since it was Christmas time Mother was telling us about the origins of this Festival of Light and why we celebrated it here, in the Ashram.

Long, long ago, she said, some wise men noticed that the days were getting shorter and the nights longer at that time of the year. They felt that the increasing darkness might soon engulf the world and life would suffer. So they sat together in

meditation and prayed and prayed. They then noticed that the days were slowly becoming longer and the stark nights shorter. Since then the Return of Light was celebrated in Ancient Egypt.

\*

A disciple explains to the children that the shortest day of the year corresponds to the greatest declination of the sun to the south, about 21<sup>st</sup> December; then the sun again mounts to the north. Mother comments:

“That is why the 25<sup>th</sup> of December was a festival of Light long before Jesus Christ. This festival was in vogue long before Christianity; it originated in Egypt and very probably the birthday of Christ was fixed on the same day as that of the return of Light.”

(CWM, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, p. 6)

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We remember how happy we were to find a present on top of our mosquito nets on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> December and how Udar-da would come in his red Father Christmas costume and a big white beard, ringing a bell.

*The Golden Chain*

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And how can we forget him and his involvement in our joyous evenings by the Christmas tree?

Ramraj

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### **Baudet**

Mother was giving balcony darshans on the first floor, before she went up, long back. And as she was giving darshan a baby donkey left its mother and came and joined the people looking at the Mother upstairs. Now, I did not go to the darshan and I used to wait upstairs because she used to give me a rose every morning. That morning she said, “Udar, I want to show you something. You see, there is a baby donkey there, he left his mother and joined the crowd to have my darshan; he wants to come to me, so you go and get me the donkey.”

I went without question, but I tell you Mother arranged the circumstances and everything went off so easily. I went there, saw the donkey; it took me to its mother,

then a man came with a stick; I asked him, "Is it your donkey?"

He said "Yes." I said, "I want to buy your donkey!" "Yes," he said. The donkey was very docile, it followed me back and I brought it through the Ashram front gate, around the Service Tree and attached it in front of Dyuman's room. Then I went upstairs and told the Mother. She came down and Mother started caressing the donkey so much. At that time we were staying in the Red House. We had a small garden. We had a beautiful dog named by the Mother 'Beauty'. The dog and the donkey became good friends. The dog would make the donkey run up and down the garden. The donkey enjoyed running. Then I asked the Mother what to do with the donkey. She said, "Put it to work!"

Well, what other work is there for donkeys beside pulling a carriage. So I had a specially small carriage made. My God, you may say that donkeys are stupid but this donkey was not stupid, he knew the difference between play and work. He absolutely refused to move. So I reported to the Mother. She said she would ask Sri Aurobindo. When she came back, she said, "Sri Aurobindo said, 'typical sadhak!'"

Mother called him Baudet. Richard Pearson used to ride on that donkey's back. Every year there used to be a donkey race. So we registered that donkey for the race. My God, this donkey came first. He ran like a racehorse! That kind of thing he liked to do. But work, No!

Udar

## DEPARTMENTS

### Senteurs

When the Mother was in France she had a friend, a lady, Madame Lucienne Merle who was a manufacturer of perfumes and toilette products. One of her best products was an alcohol-based lotion called Friction de Foucaud. It was stated to have 60 uses and really it was so, and very good. Mother asked me to get in touch with the Company of Lucienne Merle in France and import their Friction de Foucaud.

Then, after Pondicherry merged with India, difficulties began. The import of Friction de Foucaud was banned. The Company suggested that we import the basic essences and add the alcohol here. Mother asked me to accept the suggestion and as a chemical laboratory was necessary for the work, the Mother asked me to start the Laboratoires Senteurs.

Now, it was the Mother's practice to get me to start many things in the Ashram and when these were well established she put me on to something else. So I did not remain to run any one unit but started several. To this end, I had to train someone each time to carry on the work when I had to go to start something else. In this case, I found a very capable and dedicated worker in Kusum, and she took over the work I

was doing at the Laboratoires Senteurs but I remained as the Sole Trustee, according to the Mother's instructions.

Udar

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After the Merger, as it was difficult to get foreign goods, Udar started the perfumery specially for Friction de Foucaud which Mother used daily. As usual as we were busy with office work during the daytime, we worked at night. Udar started it at Fenêtres (his house) and when more help was required a few students also came. As in the daytime no one was at Fenêtres, perfume and other toilette products were kept in his office for those who wanted to buy. Later on as it grew it was necessary that it become a separate full-fledged unit.

Lilou

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When Udar started making perfume, at their house Les Fenêtres where by that time they had shifted, I used to accompany Lilou, mostly after work and group activities, to help in the preparation and bottling of perfumes.

Suprabha

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### **HEC [Honesty Engineers and Contractors]**

It was started by Manoranjan-da but as he could not cope with the work he asked Udar through Mother to be his partner. Later on, as Manoranjan-da became involved in other businesses he left HEC and Udar had to run it. Udar turned it into a Trust so that all the profit would go to the Ashram.

Lilou

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Later on, Udar, under Mother's direction, started several other units like the Hand-made Paper Unit, the Laboratoires Senteurs, etc. He also took up and developed the Coco Garden Cement Concrete Works, and managed Honesty Engineers and Contractors. He also helped establish the New Horizon Sugar Mills and the Stainless Steel Factory.

Lilou

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### Sodalicious

So that people could get good soft drinks, Sodalicious was started. It was made using filtered water and natural ingredients. Mother told Udar not to use saccharin as is generally done, but to use sugar though it becomes more expensive.

Lilou

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### Handmade Paper

“Why don’t you start a handmade paper department, we’ll give you all help,” said the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. I told them, “I am not interested in paper, I am an aeronautical engineer. We have no paper specialist, but I will ask the Mother.” And Mother was very enthusiastic, she said, “Take it up. I don’t want any profit, I want you to make me good paper.” Then I became enthusiastic, and I began to study, to read all the books. And again it so happened,—when you begin to work for the Mother, all the circumstances begin to collaborate—even the best material for the best paper is very close to us here. I soon realised that the best paper, called rag paper, is made from tailor cuttings.

Udar

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The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (K.V.I.C.) had approached us through one of their officers with a proposal to start a Handmade Paper Unit in the Ashram. I took the proposal to the Mother who was very pleased with it and asked me to take it up at once. “Make me good paper,” she said. “I do not care if you make any profit on it or not but I want good paper, the best that can be made.”

So we took up the proposal in that spirit. It was decided to set up the largest size unit of the K.V.I.C.’s range and to use the best material: the bleached, not heavily twisted rag bits from the hosiery units in South India. This was the best material anywhere, we were informed; so we made arrangements to buy all that we could get from the many hosiery and banian factories nearby.

Udar

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The K.V.I.C. were very generous and most helpful. They gave us a substantial grant and, besides, a loan at low interest and sent their best man to set up our unit here. We tried to get the best of all the things necessary—the washers, the beaters, the paper-

lifting vats, the driers, etc. Then we made the paper and soon arrived at a very good quality. Mother was very happy with our product. The K.V.I.C. were also very pleased with us because we took up the work with so much enthusiasm which they had found lacking in the other units they had set up all over the country. At that time, they informed us that they had set up about 600 units of different sizes. Because of the Mother's Force behind us which gave us all the enthusiasm, ours soon became the foremost unit in the whole of India and today our unit is considered as one of the best in the world, including even Japan where handmade paper has a high standard.

Udar

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As there was no HMP office at that time everything was done by Udar from his Harpagon office. He also arranged to have the first All India Handmade Paper Industries Conference under the auspices of Khadi and Village Industries at the Ashram. Mother gave the message for the Conference:

“In work aspiration towards perfection is true spirituality.”

L.

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### **Nursing Home**

The new Nursing Home of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was declared open on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1981 by Dr. Nripendra in a simple but solemn ceremony. It was on that date in 1914 that the Mother first came to Pondicherry to see Sri Aurobindo and she had arrived here at 4 p.m. and so the opening was done on that auspicious date and at that hour. This Nursing Home is situated at the south-eastern corner of the Boulevard, facing the sea. It is in a very fine location. Here is the story of how it came to be.

The plot of land on which it is built was once rented by our Trust, Messrs. Honesty Engineers and Contractors as a place for doing mosaic works. It was put by me under the charge of Asher with Santosh to take up mosaic contracts. One day a request came to the Mother for a Nursing Home and Mother spoke of it to Amrita and me who were with her at the time. She said that if we had to have a Nursing Home it should be on the sea-front and she asked me if I knew of any place that was available. I told Mother of the place that Shri Vora had bought and Mother asked me to find out if he would offer it to her. I sent word to him through Asher and suggested that he offer to Mother at least half the land. He said that he would consult his family and let us know. Then a day or two after this Mother told me Shri Vora had offered her the whole land. I was very happy to hear this and told Asher about it. When Asher spoke

to Shri Vora he was quite surprised for though it had been decided by him and his family to offer the whole place to the Mother they had not yet informed her or anyone else about it and so he could not understand how Mother knew. What had happened was that Shri Vora's psychic being had gone to Mother and had offered the land to her and so she knew about it. When Shri Vora came to know this he was very happy.

The plan for the Home was drawn after the Mother herself had indicated the curved form it should take.

The foundation stone was laid by Nolini as directed by the Mother on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1969 and Mother sent her message for the occasion as follows:

9.8.1969

Finally it is faith that cures  
Blessings

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### **Precast Concrete Works**

When the construction work of New Horizon Sugar Mills was taken up by HEC they required a lot of building material like hollow blocks (nine lakhs were supplied), RCC door and window frames and lime mortar etc. As Coco Garden (Precast Concrete Works) was at that time only an Ashram department (under Khiroda-da and Kalikumar-da), they were not authorised to do business as they did not have any licence. Udar applied for and obtained the licence in the name of Precast Concrete Works and from 1963 the manufacturing of concrete products and selling them started simultaneously.

Lilou

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Udar started Precast Concrete Works where they made precast cement articles like slabs, rings etc. Also made there were flooring tiles. Much of Jipmer Hospital has flooring and walls clad with Precast Concrete tiles.

Wilfy

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### **Watch Repairing Department**

In 1976 when I joined the Watch Repairing Department I saw there were lots of good tools and on enquiring I came to know that they had all been given by Udar.

It was Udar who started repairing Mother's watches and got the necessary tools. So I went to him and heard a few stories about how it all began and how he got the tools through friends abroad. Then he gave me some tools, still left with him, and a 400-day clock "Jaeger-leCoultre" which used to be in Mother's room. He wanted me to repair it and show him how good I was. I managed to repair it and he was very happy and gave me the clock. He said Mother had given it to him and now I could keep it. How happy I was!

Promesse

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### **New Horizon Sugar Mills**

When Laljibhai decided to put up a sugar factory here Mother asked Udar to help him. But as Laljibhai was not here and he had no office, everything fell on Udar. There was a lot of paperwork to be done for obtaining the licence and putting up the factory. All this was done from his office and by Honesty Engineers and Contractors in whose name the licence was obtained. The construction work was taken up by HEC and Udar used to go daily to the site to inspect personally the work.

Lilou

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### **Aurofood**

Manibhai Patel had come here to establish a flour mill, etc., and the Mother asked me to help him in his projects.

The first thing was to get the land. And you had to buy it from the small farmers, small lots; you've got to go to the farmers, you've got to bargain with them, arrange to buy it. I had to do everything, and a friend called Asher was helping me. And we had to go to buy the land, go to the registrar, pass on the name, sign, oh! Tremendous work—from morning till night it was going on.

Mother asked me to buy land outside Auroville. I went to see Roger Anger and asked him, "But tell me what is Auroville?" He said, "You go twelve miles outside Pondicherry and do what you like."

So I took the driver and drove in the car, told him to drive slowly. Suddenly I felt a flash and asked the driver to stop. A man was ploughing a rice field. We asked him if he was ready to sell his land for a good price, he said, "I am not getting much out of it, so if you offer a good price I'll be ready to sell it to you." We asked him, "But what is a good price?"

He told us something quite reasonable, he was not greedy; so I didn't bargain



with him and he told his neighbours and little by little we bought the land. It meant a lot of work at the registration office, gathering signatures etc. and my friend Asher helped.

Udar

\*

There was the question of getting the machinery, which was coming from abroad. There were two possibilities for the import of these machines—whether at Madras port or at Pondicherry. I felt we should bring the goods to Pondicherry both because it would cost much less and it seemed wrong to off-load at Madras while we had our own port. The Mother supported my view and Manibhai ordered the ship to Pondicherry.

When the ship arrived, it was a Greek ship, the captain was very disappointed to see the very inadequate crane facilities on the pier. He said it would be impossible to off-load the machinery with them. Now we had occasion to have many talks with the captain and spoke a great deal on Yoga and spiritual matters. He was inclined to be skeptical and finally said, "If you can off-load all the machines onto that pier, I will believe in all this talk of spiritual force. Seeing is believing." We left it at that.

Among the machines there was one piece that weighed about 6 tons and the question was really about that piece as the cranes were only of 3-ton capacity each. I had said that we would lift it with two cranes working in tandem but the captain was rather doubtful. He said that tandem working was very difficult and needed highly trained cranesmen. Anyway, the work was taken up and Manibhai and I were present throughout. All the machines were unloaded without any hitch till we came to the last 6-ton piece. We decided that we would have a rest and do the work after lunch. When we went for lunch, those present felt they should continue and try to lift the big machine even in our absence. So a special double boat-lighter brought this machine to the quay-side and the two cranes were hitched on to the box. The captain, with his officers, was in the boat, away off, to watch the drama. All this we were told later as we had not been present.

The cranes slowly lifted up the box till it came to the level of the quay-deck and then something happened and both the cranes tipped over. The cranesmen jumped out of the cranes and whole box and two cranes were falling into the sea. It would have been a very major accident involving the loss of 20 boatmen, the boats, the machine and the two cranes. But, in falling over, the crane jibs swung inwards and the box came over the deck and landed on it as on a cushion. Both the cranes then came upright again. At that time we came back from our lunch and found a great state of consternation and panic and then relief.

We looked for the captain. He went back at top speed to his ship and raised anchor and went off in a great hurry, cutting out his dinner engagement and sent a message to say that there was something very strange here. He had never seen anything

like it in his life and he wanted to get away from it all as soon as possible.

I told the whole thing to Mother, “Yes, Udar! I know the whole thing.” Then I said, “Mother but why did it happen in my absence?”

“I also wondered about it. Udar, you have got a wonderful faith in me, but that particular moment when you would have seen the crane tip over, you might have lost your faith. So I took you away from the scene.”

Once Sri Aurobindo was asked if faith had necessarily to be blind and he said, “If it is not blind, it is not faith.” That is how Aurofood started.

Udar

\*

*(To be continued)*

P. AND G.

*Men usually work and carry on their affairs from the ordinary motives of the vital being, need, desire of wealth or success or position or power or fame or the push to activity and the pleasure of manifesting their capacities, and they succeed or fail according to their capability, power of work and the good or bad fortune which is the result of their nature and their Karma. When one takes up the yoga and wishes to consecrate one's life to the Divine, these ordinary motives of the vital being have no longer their full and free play; they have to be replaced by another, a mainly psychic and spiritual motive, which will enable the sadhak to work with the same force as before, no longer for himself, but for the Divine*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 669)*

# THE RISHI TRADITION IN INDIA

## Introduction

THE land of Bharata is indeed what it is because of its Rishis since ancient times. Indian culture is hence often called the culture of the Rishis. “The Rishis were the mystics of the time and took the frame of their symbolic imagery from the material life around them”<sup>1</sup> and so “it would be quite possible for [them] to see at once the inner experience and in image its symbolic happening”.<sup>2</sup> The Rishi tradition is a perennially flowing stream continuously enriching the mind, heart and imagination of the people of India. In the true sense, a Rishi is one through whom the secret words of the Vedas were revealed and who had the inner sight to understand the *mantra*. He “*sees* or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language—the *mantra*. Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and realisation.”<sup>3</sup> He possesses a superior faculty of hearing truth (*satyashrut*), has discovered a certain line of development beyond the range of sensory perception by his strength of self-discipline and achieved his many-faceted inner perfection. Whatever he achieves by *tapasyā*, he casts into a veiled language called the *mantra*. The divine word comes vibrating out of the Infinite to his inner audience.

## Views from Traditional Texts

The word Rishi means a person, man or woman, to whom Vedic mantras are revealed, who is an author of sacred hymns, a priestly singer of those hymns or mantras, and a poet, a saint or a sage. Thus we come across many names of the Rishis of ancient India. The term is classified into four categories:

1. Vedic mantra itself is a Rishi (*rishirvedamantrah*).
2. Rishis are revealers of Vedic mantras (*rishayo vedamantra-drashtārah*).
3. One who composed the Vedic mantra is a Rishi (*yasya vākyam sa rishih*).
4. One who knows the Veda is a Rishi (*vedajna rishih*).

The Rishis of Vedic periods were of two types: those who perceived the mantras directly by their *tapas* and others who were incapable of direct perception but lived a life of intense aspiration to go deep into the mantras. Later the term Rishi expanded and we come across terms like *shrutarshi*, *kandarshi*, *taparshi*, *satyarshi*, *devarshi*, *saptarshi* (as the Great Bear Constellation), *brahmarshi*, *maharshi*, *paramarshi*,

1. CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 14.

2. SABCL, Vol. 11, p. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 517.

*rajarshi* and *janarshi* etc. in the Scriptures, which denote some special characteristics of the various Rishis. The role of Rishis as seers is prominent in Vedic literature whereas their role as teachers is emphasised in Epics and Puranas. The Epics mention various Rishis, such as those who were householders, those who never thought of women and had drawn their virile force in the body up into the brain and turned it into *ojas* (*ūrdhvaretas*) and those who were wanderers (*yāyāvara*) like Narada who was always wandering. Some had their own hermitages with family and pupils (*ashramavāsi*). The Mahabharata and Yajurveda mention names of Yajnavalkya, Aruni, Upamanyu, Dridhasu, Vedavyasa, Dirghatamas, Aurva and Parasara. The women-Rishis were called Rishikas and Brahmavadinis like Romasha, Lopamudra, Kadru, Vishvavara etc. Rishis were also named according as they were born from their mother's womb, such as Sarasvata, Aurva, Astika, Parasara, Sharadvan, Ashvatthama, Drona, Dvaipayana, Shukra and Shakuntala (a *rishi-kanyā*). Rishis were the originators of ancestries (the *gotra*) in human society and as such they are the ancestors of the human race.

In some cases, the term Rishi is used in the sense of *vedamantra* or Veda itself as seen in Panini's three sutras viz. (i) *kartari carṣidevatayoh*, (ii) *praskanva-hariścandāvriṣé* and (iii) *bandhane cārṣau* (Ashtadhyayi: 3.2.186, 6.1.153 & 4.4.66), and Patanjali also says in his Mahabhashya on Ashtadhyayi (1.7)—*acare punarṣirniyamam vedayate*.

## Life of Rishis

People living in the Vedic age were not all Rishis, invariably endowed with spiritual and material wealth. Some Rishis who married did so to procreate and not to satisfy their carnal desires. Girls who married Rishis, too, led a life of abstinence. However, Rishis were also human and had weaknesses of nature common to all humans. They were often prone to jealousy, anger, temptation, intolerance, timidity, vengefulness etc. but they had powers as well to grant boons and to curse, apart from other attributes like celibacy of various types, such as *kumara brahmacharya*, *ajivana brahmacharya*, *akhanda brahmacharya* or *charita brahmacharya*. Brihaspati, a householder, was a *brahmachari*. Their other attributes were determination, fearlessness, truthfulness, straightforwardness, kindness, forgiveness, freedom from greed, self-respect, *vātsalya*, *sharaṇāgata-vātsalya* etc. Some Rishis like Yajnavalkya could foresee events and could appear or disappear as they wished. Their habitation was in all parts of India and they lived also on mountains and on river banks. Mt. Kailasa was their favourite place. They practised austerities and performed sacrifices (*yajna*) at Naimisharanya. Usually cows were reared in the hermitage both as common cows and sacrificial *homa-dhenu*. They must have led a life of peaceful co-existence with the flora and fauna of the hermitage, so badly missed in life today, for tame animals like deer, wild beasts like lions and tigers roamed about and snakes lived around naturally undisturbed in the ambience of nature's pure harmony.

As there were no restrictions of entry into hermitages and Rishis were always hospitable to guests, even ladies, nymphs and semi-celestial damsels came to hermitages freely. Amba resided for a night in the hermitage of Shaikhavatya without any fear. Some Rishis were allured also by nymphs like Menaka who bore children by them. Kings from cities visited Rishis with their wives, sons and ministers or came outside the city limits to welcome the Rishis. They even offered their kingdoms to Rishis.

Being ascetic by nature and practising austerities, Rishis used to be lean and had long beards, matted and braided hair and moustaches. Their way of collecting food is described as *silouchhavritti*, *kapota-vrata*, *go-vrata*, *chakrahara*, *sampraksala*, *ashma-kuttaka* and also begging from every tree or plant. Some resorted to *vāyvāhara* (subsisting on air), *jalāhāra* (on water), *phalāhara* (on fruits) and even drinking the rays of *omkāra*. Their general economic condition was one of plain living and high thinking.

The majority of Rishis died a natural death and the funeral rites consisted of *agnidāha* by family members. Some even accomplished self-cremation by entering directly into the fire. Rishis are mentioned as having attained their *lokottara-gati* after death from *purvarshi-loka*, *antariksha-loka* and *surya-loka* to *svarga-loka*, *brahma-loka* or the *nirvāna*.

## Conclusion

Rishis devoted most of their time to self-introspection, to works of composition, teaching pupils and disseminating knowledge among the masses. Veda was their main theme. By the age of the Mahabharata, all four Vedas and their sections (*shākhās*) were well known. Other areas worked upon were *chikitsā-shāstra* (medical science), *samara-shāstra* (military science), *dhanurvidyā* (archery), *vyūharachanā* (music), and *mantra-shāstra* (incantation). Some Rishis were also cultivators. Students were educated by living in the *gurukula* of a Rishi and co-education prevailed in the hermitage (*gurukula*).

Though engaged primarily in a tapasya of self-realisation, the Rishis devoted themselves also to humanitarian works like protecting the weak, killing the wicked ones and other similar activities. The ancient Rishis “were creators, educators, guides of men and the life of the Indian people in ancient times was largely developed and directed by their shaping influence.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus goes on the tradition of Rishis in India since antiquity. Just as the Vedic poetry of ancient Rishis ignites the ‘fire’ in man, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Bande Mataram* reverberates in the heart of all Indians as the mantra of love for the motherland ever since he wrote it. Sri Aurobindo called him a Rishi, and Sri Aurobindo himself

4. CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 525.

is called by Romain Rolland “the last of the great Rishis” who “holds in his hand, in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of creative energy”, who shines like the Sun in the sky to us.

THAKUR PRASAD

*The Indian mind holds... that the Rishi, the thinker, the seer of spiritual truth is the best guide not only of the religious and moral, but the practical life. The seer, the Rishi is the natural director of society; to the Rishis he attributes the ideals and guiding intuitions of his civilisation. Even today he is very ready to give the name to anyone who can give a spiritual truth which helps his life or a formative idea and inspiration which influences religion, ethics, society, even politics.*

*This is because the Indian believes that the ultimate truths are truths of the spirit and that truths of the spirit are the most fundamental and most effective truths of our existence, powerfully creative of the inner, salutarily reformative of the outer life. To the European the ultimate truths are more often truths of the ideative intellect, the pure reason; but, whether intellectual or spiritual, they belong to a sphere beyond the ordinary action of the mind, life and body where alone there are any daily verifying “tests of values”. These tests can only be given by living experience of outward fact and the positive and practical reason. The rest are speculations and their proper place is in the world of ideas, not in the world of life.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 113)*

## ROGER ANGER A PERSONAL TRIBUTE FROM AN INVISIBLE COLLEAGUE

*[Roger Anger was a graduate of the famous French school of art and architecture: L'École des Beaux Arts. He came in contact with the Mother in 1964, at the age of 44, when he was already famous in France. He won the Brussels Premier Prix International d'Architecture in 1967. His remarkable work in Grenoble for the housing of the athletes during the Winter Olympics was chronicled in the very first issue of the journal Research in Architecture published by the Centre Scientifique de Bâtiments in Paris. He had an office staff of 300 in Paris, which he gradually reduced to 100 by 1972 as he spent almost half his time in Pondicherry, drawing up plans for Auroville and making models of Matrimandir. These were shown to the Mother regularly and She interacted with him in a detailed manner, just as She had taken a keen interest in the building of Golconde.*

*From 1964 to 2008, he gave much of his time and energy and almost all of his thinking and consciousness to the building of Matrimandir and finalising the galaxy plan of Auroville—both of them highly inspiring and symbolic, but requiring endless and tedious detailing and execution.*

*Matrimandir is completed but the Auroville plan goes on.*

*Roger withdrew from his body on 15 January, less than 6 weeks before Matrimandir was declared completed on 21 February 2008. He was not there in person to hear the words, “How stunningly beautiful!”]*

I CAME to know about Roger Anger around 1964, when he was asked by the Mother to be the Chief Architect of Auroville. When I met him in 1966 along with his design team, I had already read about his work. The entire team visited my institute, the Central Building Research Institute, as official guests and the Mother's children at Sri Aurobindo Centre, Roorkee, and I was witness to the Mother's concern about all the details and Her specific instructions to me to keep Roger in the picture at all times. This set my attitude towards him.

His best self came forward in his interaction with students of the Ashram School, some of whom have become architects today. He invited them to participate in the Bharat Nivas competition and some of the younger ones were invited to dream about Auroville and one of them suggested a helipad, which Roger incorporated in his plan.

He took up the responsibility of realising the Mother's vision about which She spoke to him in great detail and depth. However, human instruments can realise the Divine's dreams only within their own limitations, which they can either extend or break according to the measure of their own growth and seeking. Roger did try to

realise the vision as best as he could for 44 years of his life with admirable dedication, single-mindedness and consecration. Accompanying this heavy charge, there were significant changes in design concepts around the world in terms of sustainability, leading to obliteration of many well-established divides, namely: Rural and Urban; Low rise and High rise. This is what Roger was struggling with, without abdicating his allegiance to the Mother's vision. He was genuine, though not always successful. In preparation probably for this change, the Mother deputed Roger and myself to attend the UN Conference on Environment and Development at Stockholm in June 1972.

Auroville's best tribute to Roger's life and work would be to incorporate these sustainability considerations into the basic dream of the Mother.

This is possible, if we stop having endless discussions and get down to serious work.

This is going to happen anyhow.

How fast we can grow through this—that is our choice and challenge.

CHAMANLAL

*The... psychic truth the individual has to grasp is this, that he is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind,—let us leave aside for the moment that which seems to be not of his kind. That which we are has expressed itself through the individual, but also through the universality, and though each has to fulfil itself in its own way, neither can succeed independently of the other. The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development or self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral or religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfilment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth. The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; it is the thing whose possibilities he individually expresses, even when he transcends its immediate level, and of which in his phenomenal being he is one result.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 47)



## THE MIRACLE OF MATRIMANDIR

SINCE the day the Mother decided to give a form and a dimension to Her Vision, She has never ceased to watch over all the details of its manifestation while working through a handful of people of committed faith and dedication.

The work to be achieved still needs a consecration consonant with the spiritual responsibilities the Mother required for this construction.

The teams working on the Matrimandir have renewed themselves over the years. Succeeding one another, they have devoted their time and courage to the achievement of this task in spite of pressure and resistance. Each in his or her own way and to their own capacity knew how to offer their indispensable contribution to the creation of this unique building: the Matrimandir, the tool of the Mother to accelerate the transformation and the advent of a new consciousness.

Undoubtedly it was impossible to assume the responsibility for a work of such an importance without the play of 'forces' wanting to delay its completion—yet even they collaborated fully in its fulfilment.

Today, we must forget the difficulties of the past and fully enjoy seeing the miracle of its realisation being finally accomplished.

Auroville, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007

ROGER ANGER

(Source: *Auroville Today*)

*The path of works is in a way the most difficult side of God's triune causeway; yet is it not also, in this material world at least, the easiest, widest & most delightful? For at every moment we clash against God the worker & grow into His being by a thousand divine touches.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 472)

## DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of May 2008)

### 24. Subramania Bharati

It has been a long trek of two millennia and more to come to the twentieth century and find devotional poetry in Tamil flourishing as well as ever. Twentieth century Tamil faced its stiffest challenge from the self-styled Rationalists who were led by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker to denounce all Tamil writing as barbarian with the possible exception of *Tirukkural*. There were widespread instances of breaking idols of Ganesa and desecrating Rama, and burning publicly copies of the highly revered *Ramayana* written by Kamban. If the Tamil public was able to face the disturbances unfazed, it was because of the deep culture imbibed by the Tamilians attuned to devotional poesy from times immemorial and the sattwic nature which had been sculpted by reciting such poetry. And the very fresh diction and angle that Subramania Bharati brought to Tamil devotional poetry acted as an armour against any attempt to devalue or desecrate Tamil literature in general and Tamil devotional poesy in particular.

Subramania Bharati was born on 11 December 1882 at Ettayapuram in Tirunelveli district. He lost his mother early but his stepmother proved to be an affectionate sustainer. Bharati's father wanted his son to learn English and become an officer. But the boy was drawn to Tamil early. His childhood classmate, S. Somasundara Bharati says:

I have personal knowledge of the praises bestowed on Bharati's father for his child's amazing poetic gift. When he was barely eight, he would compose brilliant verses on the lead given by others. Well-known versifiers used to be wonder-struck at this phenomenon.

This led to his being honoured by the title "Bharati" at a function in the Ettayapuram court. Henceforth Subramanian (affectionately called Subbiah) came to be known as Bharati. He studied for a while at a High School at Tirunelveli. When his father died, leaving the family in straitened circumstances, Bharati left for Banaras to stay with his aunt Kuppammal and her husband Krishna Sivan. His two-year stay in the holy city left him enriched with a knowledge of Sanskrit and Hindi while he was also able to pass creditably the Entrance Examination of the Allahabad University.

Bharati belonged to a typical middle-class Hindu family which believed in ritualism and devotional recitation. At Banaras he charmed the hearts of Krishna Sivan and his guests by rendering soulfully the hymns of the Nayanmars. He returned to Ettayapuram to work in the court of the zamindar. By now married, he had to look

around for a profession that would assure him of a steady income. Another reason for his going out of Ettayapuram was that he did not feel at home with the degenerate way of life in the tiny principality.

While working as a Tamil pundit in Madurai in the Setupati High School, he happened to meet the editor of the leading Tamil daily, *Swadesa Mithran*. G. Subramania Iyer was a remarkable personality, a social reformer and patriot, and he appointed Bharati as sub-editor in 1904. The job did not bring any rich salary but Bharati had found work after his own heart. He remained glued to his work as he read wide-eyed the speeches of eminent leaders like Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. When he translated them for publication in the paper, a new Tamil prose was born, free of all pundit-encumbrances. What is usually termed hackwork translation for a daily became a creative workshop for him. His politics was formed in this editorial office while the lyricist in him was released to wing with rainbow colours thanks to the Bande Mataram Movement.

Subramania Bharati's journalism breathed fire and brimstone during the Bande Mataram Movement. He became the editor of the Nationalist paper, *India*. It was not surprising that he soon became a target of British repression. Like Sri Aurobindo, Subramania Bharati became a self-exile in Pondicherry where he remained till 1919. He read the Vedas with Sri Aurobindo and transcreated some of the essays of the Mahayogi on the subject. Unemployed, with almost no avenues for publication, and unable to bear any more the privations of dire poverty, he returned to British India with his young wife and two little daughters. He was arrested, imprisoned for twenty days in the Cuddalore jail and then released when he gave an undertaking not to engage himself in politics. Sometime after, he joined *Swadesa Mithran* again at Chennai. Unfortunately, one day he was thrown down by the temple elephant at Triplicane, suffered internal injuries and passed away in 1921. He was only thirty-nine years old. It is a mark of Bharati's power as a poet and writer of Tamil prose that he is hailed today as the supreme maker of modern Tamil literature. Ninety years after his passing, the Bharati Age remains undimmed in every way.<sup>1</sup>

With Bharati, devotional poetry first took the hue of patriotic poetry. This was because Nationalists like him saw the motherland not as a formation of land, rivers and mountains, but as a living Mother. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's poem, "Bande Mataram" in the novel, *Ananda Math*, had disseminated this symbol in a trice. As Sri Aurobindo pointed out:

The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no farther slumber

1. It may be mentioned here that Bharati has been canonised as a devotional poet, as an 'Alwar' by some followers. They have installed his bronze image in the temple of Madhya Kailas in Chennai in the niche of Rajarajeswari, identifying him mainly as a devotee of Mahashakti.

till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror.

Subramania Bharati's encounter with Sister Nivedita in 1905 made this feeling a visual experience. Throughout his life Bharati considered her as his guru and dedicated his first two volumes of patriotic poetry, *Swadesa Gitangal* (1908) and *Janma Bhoomi* (1909) to Sister Nivedita "who without words, in a split second, taught me the nature of true service to the Mother and the greatness of sacrifice." There is also his gem-like poem on her:

Nivedita, Mother,  
 Temple consecrated to love,  
 Sun dispelling my soul's darkness,  
 Rain to the parched land of our lives,  
 Helper of the helpless and lost,  
 Offering to Grace,  
 O you divine spark of Truth,  
 My salutations to you.<sup>2</sup>

Like Sri Aurobindo, Subramania Bharati saw his motherland as an image of Parashakti and personified the state of freedom as a Mother Goddess. Here is a face-to-face monologue with Mother Freedom by Bharati:

Alas, born in a hapless land  
 That remembers not the glories lost,  
 Knowing the power of your grace, Mother,  
 How best may I propitiate thee?

I call thee Light! Nectar of the brave!  
 Preserver of the righteous!  
 Destroyer of suffering and deceit!  
 I call for the descent of your grace.

Naturally, the images associated with Parashakti get entwined with Bharati's patriotic fervour.

2. All translations from Subramania Bharati are by Prema Nandakumar.

Our Mother salutes a renunciate  
 Who sports crescent-crowned tresses;  
 She also worships the Lord who rules  
 The seven worlds with a single discus...

Our Mother is the heroic daughter  
 Of snow-white Himavant;  
 Even should he lose his strength, she will not,  
 But rise to greater heights every day!

To such a person as Bharati, devotion to the Supreme was very much there in his veins. He invoked various godheads (including Allah and Jesus Christ) to gain freedom from fear, and was the very image of true secularism. A didactic poem, "Puthiya Athi soodi" by him gets off to a fine start with its prayer:

Wearer of *aththi* leaves and the young moon,  
 The ash-smeared in an eternal trance;  
 The dark-hued asleep on the ocean;  
 Revealer of wisdom to Muhammad;  
 Father of Jesus;  
 Even thus different sects describe  
 That eternal One; its nature is  
 Effulgent knowledge;  
 He who knows That is free from care;  
 May we praise that Grace  
 And gain immortal life.

Ganesa was a favourite deity of Bharati as he was a regular visitor at Manakkula Vinayaka temple which is not far from the beach in Pondicherry. His *Vinayakar Nan Mani Malai* is composed with stanzas in four types of metres alternating in a regular sequence, *venpa*, *kaliturai*, *viruththam* and *āsiriyappa*. The poem opens with a verse of salutation to Vinayaka to write a paean to the same deity!

Bharati's firm faith lists out the good that accrues to devotees of Ganapati:

The inner ear will open to sounds; the inward eye  
 Will glow; it will blaze forth; manliness will be his gift;  
 One can issue forth in the directions  
 And plant the flag of victory; why, one can  
 Hold the venomous serpent in hand;  
 One can live for all time, never cowed down  
 By poison, illness or dire enmity.

As the poem proceeds, the sprightly heart of the poet reveals the anguish within its inner folds. Bharati does not know how to make money. He can only ply his trade which is inditing poetry. “My work is poetry, service to the Motherland, and eternal vigilance,” he says and laughs at the troubles (financial, political) that surround him:

No fear, no withdrawal;  
 No shame, no body's trembling;  
 No sin, no hiding;  
 We shall nothing fear.  
 Let the earth quake, yet fear not!  
 Let the sea boil and rise, be not afraid!  
 We shall fear none and nothing  
 Nor place, nor time.  
 The sky is here, and the moon too;  
 The sun, wind and water,  
 Fire, earth, the moon and stars;  
 We have body, life and mind,  
 Food for life and maids to love,  
 Songs to hear, and the world to see,  
 And Ganapati's name to chant—  
 Eternal these...

While the encounter with Sister Nivedita seems to have embedded deep in him a reverence for Shakti, the close encounters with Sri Aurobindo during his ten years at Pondicherry seem to have strengthened his devotion. In fact, the group of songs on Shakti can be spoken of as the pivotal source of Bharati's devotion. He comes to her repeatedly as a child clings to its mother. Having lost his mother at a tender age, calling out to the Mother Goddess in times of distress and peace seems to have helped him face life:

Having tuned aright a stringed lute,  
 Shall we cast it on a rubbish heap to rot?  
 Listen, Mother Might! You've given me life  
 And lit this lamp of Reason.  
 A burden, this to earth unless  
 My thoughts can be turned to deeds.  
 Vouchsafe me this power of action  
 To achieve my country's good.

The Kali form is dear to him at all times and he sees the divine as the visible creation:

You manifest as all, O Kali,  
 Everywhere you;  
 The bad and the good,  
 Aren't they the divine's play?  
 The five elements, O Kali,  
 And the senses, all yourself:  
 O Kali, you are knowledge  
 Beyond the mind.

There is also the *terribilita* of Kali which comes through a cyclonic movement of diction and imagery in “*Oozhi-k-koothu*” which describes Kali's dance of destruction:

As the worlds mightily clash  
 And crash in resounding thunder,  
 As blood-dripping demon-spirits  
 Sing in glee amid the general ruin,  
 To the beat and the tune, O Mother,  
 You leap in ecstatic dance!  
 Dread Mahakali!  
 Chamundi! Gangali!  
 Mother, Mother,  
 You've drawn me  
 To see you dance.

In the group of his prose poems, there is an exquisite and detailed presentation of the Universal Energy which we term as “Shakti”. The novelty of this devotional poem written nearly a century ago has not palled with the passage of time:

The snake-charmer blows his pipe.  
 Was the music born in the flute?  
 Was it born in the hole?  
 Was it born in the breath of the snake-charmer?  
 It was born in his heart;  
 It came out through his pipe.  
 The heart will not twang separately.  
 The flute will not blow by itself.  
 The heart cannot mingle with the flute,  
 The heart merges with the breath;  
 The breath with the flute.  
 The flute will then give out notes.  
 This is the play of Shakti.

She sings in the heart.  
 The music is heard through the holes of the reed.  
 Shakti is making music by joining two dissimilar things.

Though well-versed in the received tradition of mythology and an occult approach to divinities,<sup>3</sup> Bharati could bring in new angles of perception that heightened the devotional content immeasurably. And, as with Sri Aurobindo, Kali and Krishna were dual-divinities who had become one with his consciousness. Bharati's devotion to Krishna was also the result of his immersion in the poetry of the Alvars. When writing the novel *Chandrikayin Kathai* (which unfortunately remains unfinished), he inserted a beautiful poem on Krishna's omnipresence sung by the heroine Visalakshi to the baby, Chandrikai, a poem on "Nandalala" that has become the darling of Tamilians:

I see your complexion, Krishna,  
 In the crow's dark feathers.

I see the divine green, O Krishna,  
 In the leaves of all the trees.

'Tis thy music, Krishna, that I hear  
 In all the sounds of the world.

And I thrill with your touch, Krishna,  
 When my finger feels the flame.

Nammalwar's decad, "Kannan kazhaladi" inspired one in an identical rhythm:

O mind, remember  
 Kannan's holy feet;  
 It will give definitely  
 An indestructible form.

The Lord who sports  
 A darkling Form,  
 Will give us riches,  
 Gratification and fame.

Bharati celebrated Krishna's birth in a poem which he probably wrote for the Janmashtami festival at home. This is in Perialwar's style about how various godheads

3. Subramania Bharati was closely associated with some Siddhas of Pondicherry and considered himself a Siddha in the making.



came laden with gifts for the newborn in Nandagopa's palace:

Sankara came and said:  
 All will be auspicious from now!  
 Chandra came and poured nectar.  
 From the skies: no more  
 Disturbances: the lightning sheen  
 Will never grow dull any more!  
 All this when earthlings looked on.

In one poem, Krishna is bombarded with a quiverful of questions. Why is the unripe fruit sour but the ripe one sweet? Why do we fall sick? How come we get well by observing vows? Why is the air cool and the fire hot? After releasing his questions, Bharati does not seek an answer. Krishna exists. That is enough. "I remain saluting your golden feet, Krishna!"

Bharati's *Kannan Pattu* is considered one of his "three great poems", the other two being *Panchali Sapatham* (which contains a moving prayer to Krishna by Draupadi) and *Kuyil Pattu*. The twenty-three lyrics in the sequence have lilting music inherent in them. V.V.S. Aiyar who had heard the songs sung by Bharati when relaxing on the sands of Pondicherry's beach, wrote in his foreword to the sequence:

Those who had in the peaceful evenings on the beach, bathed in the entrancing moonlight that transformed the blue sea into a milky ocean, and heard the poet singing in his rich voice his new songs with the pride of imagination and creative enthusiasm—those would hold each song in this book as a priceless jewel.

The approaches chosen by Bharati in these poems are from people we see around us all the time—fathers, sons, lovers, friends, masters, servants. The very first poem highlights Krishna as a friend, and the lines flow by with exquisite ease:

In times of anger, he uses just a word  
 And makes us double up with laughter;  
 When there is a misunderstanding  
 He eases it somehow and brings joy back;  
 When in great danger he comes to you  
 And himself removes its cause. Ah!  
 He destroys the sorrows that converge  
 As if they were insects come to a lamp.

Perialwar shows us the image of Yashoda trying to feed Krishna. Bharati's Krishna is the Mother here, a Tantric image in tune with the Vaishnava approach of Lakshmi

as the Universal Mother. All that the motherless Bharati had lost in his early life is described here. For the Universal Mother is the mother to the motherless! Verse after verse, Bharati's descriptions glow with a rare yearning:

She would tell me stories  
 Keeping in mind my mood,  
 My age, my liking;  
 Some all of happiness; some  
 To denote my rise and victory;  
 A few of sorrow; ah, a few tales  
 On despicable fall and loss;  
 All this told with love streaming,  
 And I would grow ecstatic with wonder.

Krishna as father? Why not? The Lord as father is rich, a scholar, a poet, a repository of good qualities (the Divya Mangala Vighraha in Vaishnavite parlance). But Bharati's characteristic mischief relates the Lord to the sufferings of the children. Occasionally the father grows mad, and envelopes with deep anguish even when the son walks on the dharmic path. And who is Krishna? They speak of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and the curmudgeons among them even get into scuffles over the subject. And Bharati comes out with a characteristic statement on the 'caste' of the Divine!

He was born a Kshatriya;  
 Brought up well among Yadavas;  
 Became famous among Brahmins;  
 Interacts with the Vaisyas too.  
 Dark in colour is he;  
 Loves gold-sheened damsels;  
 He is a renunciate in his ways;  
 Laughs at your false shastras, ah!

In this longish poem Bharati points out the good that this father-figure did for mortals including the caste-system for better governance and yet purblind humanity has desecrated and dehumanised everything.

The boldest poem is, perhaps, "Kannan, En Sevakan". Of course, Krishna is seen as a charioteer of Arjuna and so the idea is nothing new but the way Bharati projects Krishna by presenting the Lord as a domestic servant is amazing. The poet has had troubles aplenty with servants who always ask for higher salaries and give lame excuses for absence. And then comes Krishna to him as a servant, introducing himself as of the cowherd clan. And as the days went by with this perfect servant, Krishna had also become Bharati's friend, counsellor, teacher and even god himself!

The poems, “Kannamma—my child” and “Krishna—my mischievous boy” are justly famous. It is pure Perialwar, cast in the Bharatian mould.

Bharati has handled the bridal mysticism initiated by the Alvars with exquisite care. He had, of course, a vast literature on hand in this mode that included the devotional poets of the North including Vidyapati, Bilwamangal and Jayadeva. However, unlike them, Bharati avoids all conventional conceits like the conch and the discus, the kaustubha and the peacock feather. Bharati evokes the mood of the varied facets of the Nayaka-Nayaki bhava by choosing familiar objects to build the image of the heroine-jivatman searching for the hero-Paramatman in six poems:

Like the worm on the fishing-rod,  
 Like a flame in the wind,  
 My heart did throb in anguish  
 For an endless term.  
 Like a caged parrot  
 I sorrowed alone.  
 Even the sweetest things  
 Turned bitter to my taste.

As with Andal’s dream vision, Bharati insinuates one that infuses hope in the fading heart, and soon we come to the verse marking the change:

As I lived again in thought  
 The magic touch, the softness,  
 The body thrilled anew  
 And a novel peace was mine.  
 I wondered in my mind  
 Who He might have been:  
 Lo! The divine form of Krishna  
 Stood before my eyes.

While the convention in Vaishnavite Nayaka-Nayaki *bhava* sees the Jivatman as the Nayaki and the Paramatman as the Nayaka, Bharati boldly essayed poems of Jivatman as a man anxious to be united with his lady-love, the Paramatman whom he names Kannamma. It is quite possible this deviation was suggested to him by his involvement with Islamic studies, especially Sufism. In Sufi bhakti poetry we do have the symbolism of the eternal seeking of divine beauty (*sada suhagin*) through which God can be seen and attained.

The Sufi inspiration is clear in Bharati’s songs to Kannamma. Here the poet-devotee is in search of the divine beauty and personifies the same as Kannamma and seeks in Nature without and the imagination within by inditing six songs titled,

“Kannamma—my Lady Love”:

Are those flame-bright eyes, Kannamma!  
 The Sun and the Moon?  
 Does the dark eye-ball, Kannamma!  
 Reflect the inky skies?  
 Are those woven diamonds gleaming  
 On the raven-like silken robe  
 The star-clustres above  
 In the middle of the night?

Finally, Krishna is also Kannamma the Mother, the Home-of-All. So Bharati rests his mind in peace at the feet of Mother Kannamma:

I take refuge in you, Kannamma,  
 I take refuge in you.

Kannamma, as we know not the right from wrong,  
 Install the right and eject the wrong away!

The life-giving stream of devotional poetry in Tamil continues to enrich the spaces of religion and spirituality in innumerable ways. Even film music has made its delicate and honeyed offerings through the compositions of Papanasam Sivan and Kannadasan. While the former’s poems sung by M. S. Subbulakshmi for the film *Meera* remain favourites with listeners, Kannadasan’s lyric on Krishna has been swaying the world of devotion in Tamil Nadu and has proved that the Bhakti Movement continues to be on its victory-march:

Bamboo-reeds that gave us the flute!  
 Sing, sing the greatness of Purushottama!  
 O flowering-groves with bees a-buzz  
 Spread all over the banks of Ganges!  
 Sing, sing of our Madhusudana!

*(Concluded)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

## ABOUT DONKEYS

*(Extract from a journal kept during a stay in the Ashram in 1959-60)*

THIS evening Ganapatram came and sat by me while I had supper [at the restaurant of which he was in charge]. He was very happy. Nirodbaran had been to the restaurant for the first time, that afternoon.

I mentioned that I'd been reading his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, and how humorous Sri Aurobindo's replies had been.

"Yes," Ganapatram agreed, "and Nirod was very direct and open with him, too. I remember one day he wrote and said to Sri Aurobindo, 'You say you have selected all the people who come here to live in the Ashram, but how is it, in that case, that there are so many fools? Today, do you know, I met a man and asked him ... and he replied... and he was no better than a donkey. Why are there so many donkeys here?'"

"Nirod told me," went on Ganapatram, "'You see, I have written this to him, and asked him. Now we will see what he says.' Next day, he had a reply dealing with other parts of the letter, but at the end Sri Aurobindo had written, 'There is a place in this Ashram for donkeys. They too are needed.'

"Well, we laughed over this together at that time, but then one day Udar found a real donkey—a young one—somewhere in the town and brought it to the Ashram. He told the Mother that he had a donkey, and could it be kept? And she said, 'Bring it to the courtyard and I will see it.'

"So one morning Nirod comes to me where I work in the Reading Room and says, 'Hey, Ganapatram, come and look. That fellow's come that Sri Aurobindo needed. He's going to have an interview with the Mother.' And there was a donkey, standing where the Samadhi is now, under the service tree. And the Mother came down and looked at him, and then stroked his chin and took his head in her hands and said, 'Look how beautiful he is. What a fine mouth.' And we were standing laughing and laughing, five or six of us, because a donkey, you know, in India is a byword for being ugly and stupid. But the Mother said yes, he could stay, and at once wrote out chits saying he was to be supplied with this thing and that thing and where he was to live, and she gave instructions to Udar to look after him.

"And you know, some years later there was a donkey race organised in the town. All the town donkeys ran and our donkey ran—and ours won. He won and was given a prize."

Some children came to buy ice-cream, and Ganapatram got up to serve them. "There are so many funny stories about things that have happened here," he said, "that one could sit and laugh about them for hours."

DICK BATSTONE