

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE  
24 APRIL 2019

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

### INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00  
For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00  
Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

### OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:  
Annual: \$35  
For 10 years: \$350  
Air Mail:  
Annual: \$70  
For 10 years: \$700

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. DD/Cheque should be sent by speed post only. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any inquiry. The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with the correct PIN code.



Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: [motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in](mailto:motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in)

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 4

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

#### *Sri Aurobindo*

POSEIDON AND ATHENE (Poem)	...	7
THE INVOLVED AND EVOLVING GODHEAD	...	16
ON TRANSLATING THE UPANISHADS	...	19
NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL MAN — THE EVOLUTIONARY AIM IN YOGA	...	25

#### *The Mother*

‘LET THAT LOVE BE BORN’	...	30
THE QUESTION OF CHANCE	...	31
A CONVERSATION OF 27 NOVEMBER 1965	...	36

#### *Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)*

“GRACE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	42
---	-----	----

#### *N. Jayashanmugam*

THE PEACE CHANT OF THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD	...	44
---	-----	----

#### *Anu Majumdar*

AUROVILLE — A CITY FOR THE FUTURE	...	47
-----------------------------------	-----	----



# POSEIDON AND ATHENE

## 1. LINES FROM *ILION*, BOOK VIII

But in the courts of Heaven Zeus to his brother immortal  
Turned like a menaced king on his counsellor smiling augustly:  
“Seest thou, Poseidon, this sign that great gods revolting have left us,  
Follow their hearts and strive with Ananke? Yet though they struggle,  
Thou and I will do our will with the world, O earth-shaker.”

Answered to Zeus the besieger of earth, the voice of the waters:  
“This is our strength and our right, for we are the kings and the masters.  
Too much pity has been and yielding of Heaven to mortals.  
I will go down with my chariot drawn by my thunder-maned coursers  
Into the battle and thrust down Troy with my hand to the silence,  
Even though she cling round the snowy knees of our child Aphrodite  
Or with Apollo’s sun take refuge from Night and her shadows.  
I will not pity her pain, who am ruthless even as my surges.  
Brother, thou knowest, O Zeus, that I am a king and a trader;  
For on my paths I receive earth’s skill and her merchandise gather,  
Traffic richly in pearls and bear the swift ships on my bosom.  
Blue are my waves and they call men’s hearts to wealth and adventure.  
Lured by the shifting surges they launch their delight and their treasures  
Trusting the toil of years to the perilous moments of Ocean.  
Huge man’s soul in its petty frame goes wrestling with Nature  
Over her vasts and his fragile ships between my horizons  
Buffeting death in his solitudes labour through swell and through storm-blast  
Bound for each land with her sons and watched for by eyes in each haven.  
I from Tyre up to Gades trace on my billows their trade-routes  
And on my vast and spuming Atlantic suffer their rudders.  
Carthage and Greece are my children, the marts of the world are my term-posts.  
Who then deserves the earth if not he who enriches and fosters?  
But thou hast favoured thy sons, O Zeus; O Hera, earth’s sceptres  
Still were denied me and kept for strong Ares and brilliant Apollo.  
Now all your will shall be done, so you give me the earth for my nations.  
Gold shall make men like gods and bind their thoughts into oneness;  
Peace I will build with gold and heaven with the pearls of my caverns.”  
Smiling replied to his brother’s craft the mighty Cronion:  
“Lord of the boundless seas, Poseidon, soul of the surges,  
Well thou knowest that earth shall be seized as a booth for the trader.

Rome nor Greece nor France can drive back Carthage for ever.  
 Always each birth of the silence attaining the field and the movement  
 Takes from Time its reign; for it came for its throne and its godhead.  
 So too shall Mammon take and his sons their hour from the ages.  
 Yet is the flame and the dust last end of the silk and the iron,  
 And at their end the king and the prophet shall govern the nations.  
 Even as Troy, so shall Babylon flame up to heaven for the spoiler  
 Wailed by the merchant afar as he sees the red glow from the ocean.”  
 Up from the seats of the Mighty the Earth-shaker rose. His raiment  
 Round him purple and dominant rippled and murmured and whispered,  
 Whispered of argosies sunk and the pearls and the Nereids playing,  
 Murmured of azure solitudes, sounded of storm and the death-wail.  
 Even as the march of his waters so was the pace of the sea-god  
 Flowing on endless through Time; with the glittering symbol of empire  
 Crowned were his fatal brows; in his grasp was the wrath of the trident,  
 Tripled force, life-shattering, brutal, imperial, sombre.  
 Resonant, surging, vast in the pomp of his clamorous greatness  
 Proud and victorious he came to his home in the far-spuming waters.  
 Even as a soul from the heights of thought plunges back into living,  
 So he plunged like a rock through the foam; for it falls from a mountain  
 Overpeering the waves in some silence of desolate waters  
 Left to the wind and the sea-gull where Ocean alone with the ages  
 Dreams of the calm of the skies or tosses its spray to the wind-gods,  
 Tosses for ever its foam in the solitude huge of its longings  
 Far from the homes and the noises of men. So the dark-browed Poseidon  
 Came to his coral halls and the sapphire stables of Nereus  
 Ever where champ their bits the harnessed steeds of the Ocean  
 Watched by foam-white girls in the caverns of still Amphitrite.  
 There was his chariot yoked by the Tritons, drawn by his coursers  
 Born of the fleeing sea-spray and shod with the northwind who journey  
 Black like the front of the storm and clothed with their manes as with thunder.  
 This now rose from its depths to the upper tumults of Ocean  
 Bearing the awful brows and the mighty form of the sea-god  
 And from the roar of the surges fast o’er the giant margin  
 Came remembering the storm and the swiftness wide towards the Troad.  
 So among men he arrived to the clamorous labours of Ares,  
 Close by the stern Diomedes stood and frowned o’er the battle.  
 He for the Trojan slaughter chose for his mace and his sword-edge  
 Iron Tydeus’ son and the adamant heart of young Pyrrhus.

But in the courts divine the Father high of the immortals  
 Turned in his heart to the brilliant offspring born of his musings,

She who tranquil observes and judges her father and all things.  
 “What shall I say to the thought that is calm in thy breasts, O Athene?  
 Have I not given thee earth for thy portion, throned thee and armoured,  
 Darkened Cypris’ smile, dimmed Hera’s son and Latona’s?  
 Swift in thy silent ambition, proud in thy radiant sternness,  
 Girl, thou shalt rule with the Greek and the Saxon, the Frank and the Roman.  
 Worker and fighter and builder and thinker, light of the reason,  
 Men shall leave all temples to crowd in thy courts, O Athene.  
 Go then and do my will, prepare man’s tribes for their fullness.”

But with her high clear smile on him answered the mighty Athene, —  
 Wisely and soberly, tenderly smiled she chiding her father  
 Even as a mother might rail at her child when he hides and dissembles:  
 “Zeus, I see and I am not deceived by thy words in my spirit.  
 We but build forms for thy thought while thou smilest down high o’er our toiling;  
 Even as men are we tools for thee, who are thy children and dear ones.  
 All this life is thy sport and thou workst like a boy at his engines  
 Making a toil of the game and a play of the serious labour.  
 Then to that play thou callest us wearing a sombre visage,  
 This consulting, that to our wills confiding, O Ruler;  
 Choosing thy helpers, hastened by those whom thou lurest to oppose thee  
 Guile thou usest with gods as with mortals, scheming, deceiving,  
 And at the wrath and the love thou hast prompted laughest in secret.  
 So we two who are sisters and enemies, lovers and rivals,  
 Fondled and baffled in turn obey thy will and thy cunning,  
 I, thy girl of war, and the rosy-white Aphrodite.  
 Always we served but thy pleasure since our immortal beginnings,  
 Always each other we helped by our play and our wrestlings and quarrels.  
 This too I know that I pass preparing the paths of Apollo  
 And at the end as his sister and slave and bride I must sojourn  
 Rapt to his courts of mystic light and unbearable brilliance.  
 Was I not ever condemned since my birth from the toil of thy musings  
 Seized like a lyre in my body to sob and to laugh out his music,  
 Shake as a leaf in his fierceness and leap as a flame in his splendours!  
 So must I dwell overpowered and so must I labour subjected  
 Robbed of my loneliness pure and coerced in my radiant freedom,  
 Now whose clearness and pride are the sovereign joy of thy creatures.  
 Such the reward that thou keepst for my labour obedient always.  
 Yet I work and I do thy will, for ’tis mine, O my father.”  
 Proud of her ruthless lust of thought and action and battle,  
 Swift-footed rose the daughter of Zeus from her sessions immortal:  
 Breasts of the morning unveiled in a purity awful and candid,

Head of the mighty Dawn, the goddess Pallas Athene!  
 Strong and rapacious she swooped on the world as her prey and her booty  
 Down from the courts of the Mighty descending, darting on Ida.  
 Dire she descended, a god in her reason, a child in her longings, —  
 Joy and woe to the world that is given to the whims of the child-god  
 Greedy for rule and play and the minds of men and their doings!  
 So with her aegis scattering light o'er the heads of the nations  
 Shining-eyed in her boyish beauty severe and attractive  
 Came to the fields of the Troad, came to the fateful warfare,  
 Veiled, the goddess calm and pure in her luminous raiment  
 Zoned with beauty and strength. Rejoicing, spurring the fighters  
 Close o'er Odysseus she stood and clear-eyed governed the battle.

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 455-58)*

## 2. PROLOGUE OF PERSEUS THE DELIVERER

*The Ocean in tumult, and the sky in storm: Pallas Athene appears in the heavens  
 with lightnings playing over her head and under her feet.*

### **Athene**

Error of waters rustling through the world,  
 Vast Ocean, call thy ravenous waves that march  
 With blue fierce nostrils quivering for prey,  
 Back to thy feet. Hush thy impatient surges  
 At my divine command and do my will.

### **Voices of the Sea**

Who art thou layest thy serene command  
 Upon the untamed waters?

### **Athene**

I am Pallas,  
 Daughter of the Omnipotent.

### **Voices**

What wouldst thou?  
 For we cannot resist thee; our clamorous hearts  
 Are hushed in terror at thy marble feet.



**Athene**

Awake your dread Poseidon. Bid him rise  
And come before me.

**Voices**

Let thy compelling voice  
Awake him: for the sea is hushed.

**Athene**

Arise,  
Illimitable Poseidon! let thy blue  
And streaming tresses mingle with the foam  
Emerging into light.

*Poseidon appears upon the waters.*

**Poseidon**

What quiet voice  
Compels me from my rocky pillow piled  
Upon the floor of the enormous deep?

**Voices**

A whiteness and a strength is in the skies.

**Poseidon**

How art thou white and beautiful and calm,  
Yet clothed in tumult! Heaven above thee shakes  
Wounded with lightnings, goddess, and the sea  
Flees from thy dreadful tranquil feet. Thy calm  
Troubles me: who art thou, dweller in the light?

**Athene**

I am Athene.

**Poseidon**

Virgin formidable  
In beauty, disturber of the ancient world!  
Ever thou seekest to enslave to man  
The eternal Universe, and our huge motions  
That shake the mountains and upheave the seas  
Wouldst with the glancing visions of thy brain  
Coerce and bridle.

**Athene**

Me the Omnipotent  
 Made from His being to lead and discipline  
 The immortal spirit of man, till it attain  
 To order and magnificent mastery  
 Of all his outward world.

**Poseidon**

What wouldst thou of me?

**Athene**

The powers of the earth have kissed my feet  
 In deep submission, and they yield me tribute,  
 Olives and corn and all fruit-bearing trees,  
 And silver from the bowels of the hills,  
 Marble and iron ore. Fire is my servant.  
 But thou, Poseidon, with thy kindred gods  
 And the wild wings of air resist me. I come  
 To set my feet upon thy azure locks,  
 O shaker of the cliffs. Adore thy sovereign.

**Poseidon**

The anarchy of the enormous seas  
 Is mine, O terrible Athene: I sway  
 Their billows with my nod. Man's feeble feet  
 Leave there no traces, nor his destiny  
 Has any hold upon the shifting waves.

**Athene**

Thou severest him with thy unmeasured wastes  
 Whom I would weld in one. But I will lead him  
 Over thy waters, thou wild thunderer,  
 Spurning thy tops in hollowed fragile trees.  
 He shall be confident in me and dare  
 The immeasurable oceans till the West  
 Mingles with India, and reach the northern isles  
 That dwell beneath my dancing aegis bright,  
 Snow-weary. He shall, armed with clamorous fire,  
 Rush o'er the angry waters when the whale  
 Is stunned between two waves and slay his foe  
 Betwixt the thunders. Therefore I bid thee not,

O azure strong Poseidon, to abate  
 Thy savage tumults: rather his march oppose.  
 For through the shocks of difficulty and death  
 Man shall attain his godhead.

**Poseidon**

Athene?   What then desir'st thou,

**Athene**

On yonder inhospitable coast  
 Far-venturing merchants from the East, or those  
 Who put from Tyre towards Atlantic gains,  
 Are by thy trident fiercely shaken forth  
 Upon the jagged rocks, and who escape,  
 The gay and savage Syrians on their altars  
 Massacre hideously, thee to propitiate,  
 Moloch-Poseidon of the Syrian coasts,  
 Dagon of Gaza, lord of many names  
 And many natures, many forms of power  
 Who rulest from Philistia to the north,  
 A terror and a woe. O iron King,  
 Desist from blood, be glad of kindlier gifts  
 And suffer men to live.

**Poseidon**

Behold, Athene,  
 My waters! see them lift their foam-white tops  
 Charging from sky to sky in rapid tumult:  
 Admire their force, admire their thunderous speed.  
 With green hooves and white manes they trample onwards.  
 My mighty voices fill the world, Athene.  
 Shall I permit the grand anarchic seas  
 To be a road and the imperious Ocean  
 A means of merchandise? Shall the frail keels  
 Of thy ephemeral mortals score its back  
 With servile furrows and petty souls of men  
 Triumphant tame the illimitable sea?  
 I am not of the mild and later gods,  
 But of that elder world; Lemuria  
 And old Atlantis raised me crimson altars,

And my huge nostrils keep that scent of blood  
 For which they quiver. Return into thy heavens,  
 Pallas Athene, I into my deep.

**Athene**

Dash then thy billows up against my aegis  
 In battle! think not to hide in thy deep oceans;  
 For I will drive thy waters from the world  
 And leave thee naked to the light.

**Poseidon**

Dread virgin!

I will not war with thee, armipotent.

**Athene**

Then send thy champion forth to meet my champion,  
 And let their conflict govern ours, Poseidon.

**Poseidon**

Who is thy champion?

**Athene**

Perseus, the Olympian's son,  
 Whom Danaë in her strong brazen tower,  
 Acrisius' daughter, bore, by heavenly gold  
 Lapped into slumber: for of that shining rain  
 He is the beautiful offspring.

**Poseidon**

The parricide

That is to be? But my sea-monster's fangs  
 And fiery breathings shall prevent that murder.  
 Farewell, Athene!

**Athene**

Farewell, until I press  
 My feet upon thy blue enormous mane  
 And add thy Ocean to my growing empire.

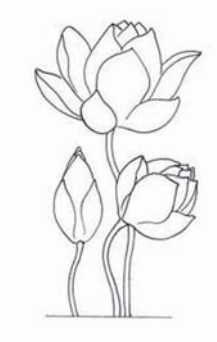
*Poseidon disappears into the sea.*

He dives into the deep and with a din  
The thunderous divided waters meet  
Above his grisly head. Thou wingest, Perseus,  
From northern snows to this fair sunny land,  
Not knowing in the night what way thou wendest;  
But the dawn comes and over earth's far rim  
The round sun rises, as thyself shalt rise  
On Syria and thy rosy Andromeda,  
A thing of light. Rejoice, thou famous hero!  
Be glad of love, be glad of life, whose bosom  
Harbours the quiet strength of pure Athene.

*She disappears into light.*

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Plays and Stories – I, CWSA, Vol. 3, pp. 331-36)*



## THE INVOLVED AND EVOLVING GODHEAD

The involution of a superconscient Spirit in inconscient Matter is the secret cause of this visible and apparent world. The keyword of the earth's riddle is the gradual evolution of a hidden illimitable consciousness and power out of the seemingly inert yet furiously driven force of insensible Nature. Earth-life is one self-chosen habitation of a great Divinity and his aeonic will is to change it from a blind prison into his splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple.

The nature of the Divinity in the world is an enigma to the mind, but to our enlarging consciousness it will appear as a presence simple and inevitable. Freed we shall enter into the immutable stability of an eternal existence that puts on this revealing multitude of significant mutable forms. Illumined we shall become aware of the indivisible light of an infinite consciousness that breaks out here into multiform grouping and detail of knowledge. Sublimated in might, we shall share the illimitable movement of an omnipotent force that works out its marvels in self-imposed limits. Fixed in griefless bliss we shall possess the calm and ecstasy of an immeasurable Delight that creates for ever the multitudinous waves and rhythms and the ever increasing outward-going and inward-drawing intensities of its own creative and communicative world-possessing and self-possessing bliss. This, since we are inwardly souls of that Spirit, will be the nature of our fourfold experience when the evolving Godhead will work here in its own unveiled movement.

If that full manifestation had been from the beginning, there would be no terrestrial problem, no anguish of growth, no baffled seeking out of mind and will and life and body towards knowledge and force and joy and an immortal persistence. But this Godhead, whether within us or outside in things and forces and creatures, started from an involution in inconscience of Nature and began by the manifestation of its apparent opposites. Out of a vast cosmic inconscience and inertia and insensibility, an initial disguise that is almost non-existence, the Spirit in Matter has chosen to evolve and slowly shape, as if in a grudging and gradually yielding material, its might and light and infinity and beatitude.

The significance of the terrestrial evolution lies in this slow and progressive liberation of some latent indwelling Spirit. The heart of its mystery is the difficult appearance, the tardy becoming of a divine Something or Someone already involved in physical Nature. The Spirit is there with all its potential forces in a first formal basis of its own supporting, yet resistant substance. Its greater subsequent and deliberately emerging movements, life and mind and intuition and soul and supermind and the light of the Godhead are already there, locked up and obscurely compressed into the initial power and first expressive values of Matter.

Before there could be any evolution, there must needs be this involution of the

Divine All that is to emerge. Otherwise there would have been not an ordered and significant evolution, but a successive creation of things unforeseeable, not contained in their antecedents, not their inevitable consequences or right followers in sequence.

This world is not an apparent order fortuitously managed by an inexplicable Chance. Neither is it a marvellous mechanism miraculously contrived by a stumblingly fortunate unconscious Force or mechanical Necessity. It is not even a structure built according to his fancy or will by an external and therefore necessarily a limited Creator. Mentally conceivable, each of these solutions can explain one side or appearance of things; but it is a greater truth that can alone successfully join all the aspects and illumine all the facts of the enigma.

If all were indeed a result of cosmic Chance, there would be no necessity of a new advance; nothing beyond mind need appear in the material world, — as indeed there was then no necessity for even mind to arise at all out of the meaningless blind material whirl. Consciousness itself would be only a fortuitous apparition, a strange hallucinating reflection or ghost of Matter.

Or if all were the work of a mechanical Force, then too mind need not have appeared at all as part of the huge grinding engine; there was no indispensable call for this subtler and yet less competent groping mechanic contrivance. No frail thinking brain should have been there to labour over the quite sufficient cogs and springs and pistons of the first unerring machine. A supermind added on this brilliant and painful complication would be still more a superfluity and a luminous insolence; it could be nothing more than a false pretension of transitory consciousness to govern and possess the greater inconscient Force that is its creator.

Or if an experimenting, external and therefore limited Creator were the inventor of the animal's suffering life and man's fumbling mind and this huge mainly unused and useless universe, there was no reason why he should not have stopped short with the construction of a mental intelligence in his creatures, content with the difficult ingenuity of his labour. Even if he were all-powerful and all-wise, he might well pause there, — for if he went farther, the creature would be in danger of rising too near to the level of his Maker.

But if this is the truth of things that an infinite Spirit, an eternal Divine Presence and Consciousness and Force and Bliss is involved and hidden here and slowly emerges, then is it inevitable that its powers or the ascending degrees of its one power should emerge too one after the other till the whole glory is manifested, a mighty divine Fact embodied and dynamic and visible.

All mental ideas of the nature of things, are inconclusive considerations of our insufficient logical reason when it attempts in its limited light and ignorant self-sufficiency to weigh the logical probabilities of a universal order which after all its speculation and discovery must remain obscure to it still and an enigma. The true witness and discoverer is our growing consciousness; for that consciousness is itself the sign and power of the evolving Divine, and its growth out of the apparent incon-

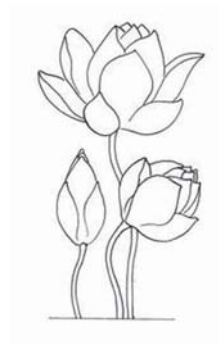
science of the material universe is the fundamental, the one abiding, progressive index event of the long earth-story.

Only when this evolving consciousness can grow into its own full divine power will we directly know ourselves and the world instead of catching at tags and tail ends of an insufficient figure of knowledge. This full power of the consciousness is supermind or gnosis, — supermind because to reach it we have to pass beyond and turn upon mind as the mind itself has passed and turned upon life and inconscient matter and gnosis because it is eternally self-possessed of Truth and in its very stuff and nature it is dynamic substance of knowledge.

The true knowledge of things is denied to our reason, because that is not our spirit's greatest essential power but only an expedient, a transitional instrument meant to deal with the appearance of things and their phenomenal process. True knowledge commences only when our consciousness can pass beyond its present normal limit in man: for then it becomes directly aware of its self and of the Power in the world and begins to have at least an initial knowledge by identity which is the sole true knowledge. Henceforward it knows and sees, no longer by the reason groping among external data, but by an ever increasing and always more luminous self-illuminating and all illuminating experience. In the end it will become a conscious part of the Divine revealing itself in the world; its life will be a power for the conscious evolution of that which is still unmanifested in the material universe.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 161-64)





## ON TRANSLATING THE UPANISHADS

### OM TAT SAT

This translation of a few of the simpler & more exoteric Upanishads to be followed by other sacred and philosophical writings of the Hindus not included in the Revealed Scriptures, all under the one title of the Book of God, has been effected on one definite and unvarying principle, to present to England and through England to Europe the religious message of India only in those parts of her written thought which the West is fit to hear and to present these in such a form as should be attractive & suggestive to the Occidental intellect. The first branch of this principle necessitated a rigid selection on definite lines, the second dictated the choice of a style & method of rendering which should be literary rather than literal.

The series of translations called the Sacred Books of the East, edited by the late Professor Max Muller, was executed in a scholastic and peculiar spirit. Professor Max Muller, a scholar of wide attainments, great versatility and a refreshingly active, ingenious & irresponsible fancy, has won considerable respect in India by his attachment to Vedic studies, but it must fairly be recognized that he was more of a grammarian and philologist, than a sound Sanscrit scholar. He could construe Sanscrit well enough, but he could not feel the language or realise the spirit behind the letter. Accordingly he committed two serious errors of judgment; he imagined that by sitting in Oxford and evolving new meanings out of his own brilliant fancy he could understand the Upanishads better than Shankaracharya or any other Hindu of parts and learning; and he also imagined that what was important for Europe to know about the Upanishads was what he and other European scholars considered they ought to mean. This, however, is a matter of no importance to anybody but the scholars themselves. What it is really important for Europe to know is in the first place what the Upanishads really do mean, so far as their exoteric teaching extends, and in a less degree what philosophic Hinduism took them to mean. The latter knowledge may be gathered from the commentaries of Shankaracharya and other philosophers which may be studied in the original or in the translations which the Dravidian Presidency, ignorantly called benighted by the materialists, has been issuing with a truly noble learning & high-minded enterprise. The former this book makes some attempt to convey.

But it may be asked, why these particular Upanishads alone, when there are so many others far larger in plan and of a not inferior importance? In answer I may quote a sentence from Professor Max Muller's Preface to the Sacred Books of the East. "I confess" he says "it has been for many years a problem to me, aye, and to a great extent is so still, how the Sacred Books of the East should, by the side of so

much that is fresh, natural, simple, beautiful and true, contain so much that is not only unmeaning, artificial and silly, but even hideous and repellent.” Now I am myself only a poor coarse-minded Oriental and therefore not disposed to deny the gross physical facts of life & nature or able to see why we should scuttle them out of sight and put on a smug, respectable expression which suggests while it affects to hide their existence. This perhaps is the reason why I am somewhat at a loss to imagine what the Professor found in the Upanishads that is hideous and repellent. Still I was brought up almost from my infancy in England and received an English education, so that sometimes I have glimmerings. But as to what he intends by the unmeaning, artificial and silly elements, there can be no doubt. Everything is unmeaning in the Upanishads which the Europeans cannot understand, everything is artificial which does not come within the circle of their mental experience and everything is silly which is not explicable by European science and wisdom. Now this attitude is almost inevitable on the part of an European, for we all judge according to our lights and those who keep their minds really open, who can realise that there may be lights which are not theirs and yet as illuminating or more illuminating than theirs, are in any nation a very small handful. For the most part men are the slaves of their associations.

Let us suppose that the ceremonies & services of the Roman Catholic were not mere ceremonies and formularies, borrowed for the most part from Eastern occultisms without understanding them, — that they had been arranged so as to be perfect symbols of certain deep metaphysical truths and to produce certain effects spiritual and material according to a scientific knowledge of the power of sound over both mind and matter; let us suppose that deep philosophical works had been written in the terminology of these symbols and often in a veiled allusive language; and let us suppose finally that these were translated into Bengali or Hindustani and presented to an educated Pundit who had studied both at Calcutta & at Nuddea or Benares. What would he make of them? It will be as well to take a concrete instance. Jesus Christ was a great thinker, a man who had caught, apparently by his unaided power, though this is not certain, something of the divine knowledge, but the writers who recorded his sayings were for the most part ordinary men of a very narrow culture and scope of thought and they seem grossly to have misunderstood his deepest sayings. For instance when he said “I and my Father are one” expressing the deep truth that the human self and the divine self are identical, they imagined that he was setting up an individual claim to be God; hence the extraordinary legend of the Virgin Mary & all that followed from it. Well, we all know the story of the Last Supper and Jesus’ marvellously pregnant utterance as he broke the bread and gave of the wine to his disciples “This is my body and this is my blood” and the remarkable rite of the Eucharist and the doctrine of Transubstantiation which the Roman Catholic Church has founded upon it. “Corruption! superstition! blasphemous nonsense!” cries the Protestant. “Only a vivid Oriental metaphor and nothing more.” If so, it

was certainly an “unmeaning, artificial and silly” metaphor, nay, “even a hideous and repellent” one. But I prefer to believe that Jesus’ words had always a meaning & generally a true & beautiful one. On the other hand the Transubstantiation doctrine is one which the Catholics themselves do not understand, it is to them a “mystery”. And yet how plain the meaning is to an Oriental intelligence! The plasm of matter, the food sheath of the universe to which bread and wine belong, is indeed the blood and body of God and typifies the great primal sacrifice by which God crucified himself so that the world might exist. The Infinite had to become finite, the Unconditioned to condition himself, Spirit to evolve matter. In the bread and the wine which the communicant eats, God actually is but he is not present to our consciousness, and he only becomes so present by an act of faith; this is the whole doctrine of the Transubstantiation. For as the Upanishad says, we must believe in God before we can know him; we must realise him as the “He is” before we realise him in his essential. And indeed if the child had not believed in what his teacher or his book told him, how could the grown man know anything? But if a deep philosophical work were written on the Eucharist hinting at great truths but always using the symbol of the bread and wine and making its terminology from the symbol & from the doctrine of Transubstantiation based upon the symbol, what would our Hindu Pundit make of it? Being a scholar & philosopher, he would find there undoubtedly much that was fresh, natural, simple, beautiful & true but also a great deal that was unmeaning, artificial & silly & even to his vegetarian imagination hideous & repellent. As for the symbol itself, its probable effect on the poor vegetarian would be to make him vomit. “What hideous nonsense,” says the Protestant, “we are to believe that we are eating God!” But that is exactly what the Protestant himself does believe if he is sincere & not a parrot when he says “God is everywhere”, which is true enough, though it would be truer to say everything is in God. If God is everywhere, He must be in the food we eat. Not only is God the eaten, but He is the eater and eventually, says the Vedanta, when you come to the bottom fact of existence there is neither eaten or eater, but all is God. These are hard sayings for the rationalist who insists on limiting knowledge within the circle of the five senses. “God to whom the sages are as meat & princes as excellent eating & Death is the spice of his banquet, how shall such an one know of Him where He abideth?”

Many of the Upanishads are similarly written round symbols and in a phraseology and figures which have or had once a deep meaning and a sacred association to the Hindus but must be unintelligible and repellent to the European. What possible use can be served by presenting to Europe such works as the Chandogya or Aitareya Upanishads in which even the majority of Hindus find it difficult or impossible to penetrate every symbol to its underlying truth? Only the few Upanishads have been selected which contain the kernel of the matter in the least technical and most poetical form; the one exception is the Upanishad of the Questions which will be necessarily strange and not quite penetrable to the European mind. It was, however, necessary

to include it for the sake of a due presentation of Upanishad philosophy in some of its details as well as in its main ideas, and its technical element has a more universal appeal than that of the Chandogya or Taittiriya.

An objection may be urged to the method of translation that has been adopted. Professor Max Muller in his translation did not make any attempt to render into English the precise shades of Aryan philosophical terms like Atman & Prana which do not correspond to any philosophical conception familiar to the West; he believed that the very unfamiliarity of the terms he used to translate them would be like a bracing splash of cold water to the mind forcing it to rouse itself and think. In this I think the Professor was in error; his proposition may be true of undaunted philosophical intellects such as Schopenhauer's or of those who are already somewhat familiar with the Sanscrit language, but to the ordinary reader the unfamiliar terminology forms a high & thick hedge of brambles shutting him off from the noble palace & beautiful gardens of the Upanishads. Moreover the result of a scholastic faithfulness to the letter has been to make the style of the translation intolerably uncouth and unworthy of the solemn rhythmic grandeur and ineffable poetical depth and beauty of these great religious poems. I do not say that this translation is worthy of them, for in no other human tongue than Sanscrit is such grandeur & beauty possible. But there are ways and their degrees. For instance *Étaawaitad*, the refrain of the Katha Upanishad has a deep & solemn ring in Sanscrit because *étad* and *tad* so used have in Sanscrit a profound and grandiose philosophical signification which everybody at once feels; but in English "This truly is That" can be nothing but a juggling with demonstrative pronouns; it is far better and renders more nearly both rhythm & meaning to translate "This is the God of your seeking" however inadequate such a translation may be.

It may, however, fairly be said that a version managed on these lines cannot give a precise & accurate idea of the meaning. It is misleading to translate Prâna sometimes by life, sometimes by breath, sometimes by life breath or breath of life, because breath & life are merely subordinate aspects of the Prâna. Atman again rendered indifferently by soul, spirit & self, must mislead, because what the West calls the soul is really the Atman yoked with mind & intelligence, and spirit is a word of variable connotation often synonymous with soul; even "self" cannot be used precisely in that way in English. Again the Hindu idea of "immortality" is different from the European; it implies not life after death, but freedom from both life and death, for what we call life is after all impossible without death. Similarly Being does not render *Purusha*, nor "matter" *rayi*, nor askesis the whole idea of "tapas". To a certain extent all this may be admitted, but at the same time I do not think that any reader who can think & feel will be seriously misled, and at any rate he will catch more of the meaning from imperfect English substitutes than from Sanscrit terms which will be a blank to his intelligence. The mind of man demands, and the demand is legitimate, that new ideas shall be presented to him in words

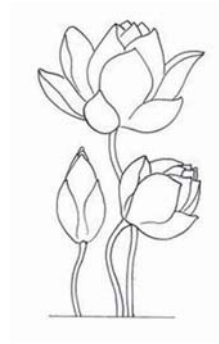
which convey to him some association, with which he will not feel like a foreigner in a strange country where no one knows his language nor he theirs. The new must be presented to him in the terms of the old; new wine must be put to some extent in old bottles. What is the use of avoiding the word “God” and speaking always of the Supreme as “It” simply because the Sanscrit usually, — but not, be it observed, invariably — employs the neuter gender? The neuter in Sanscrit applies not only to what is inanimate but to what is beyond such terms as animate and inanimate, not only to what is below gender but to what is above gender. In English this is not the case. The use of “It” may therefore lead to far more serious misconceptions than to use the term “God” & the pronoun “He”. When Matthew Arnold said that God was a stream of tendency making towards righteousness, men naturally scoffed because it seemed to turn God into an inanimate force; yet surely such was not Arnold’s meaning. On the other side if the new ideas are presented with force and power, a reader of intelligence will soon come to understand that something different is meant by “God” from the ideas he attaches to that word. And in the meanwhile we gain this distinct advantage that he has not been repelled at the outset by what would naturally seem to him bizarre, repulsive or irreverent.

It is true however that this translation will not convey a precise, full and categorical knowledge of the truths which underlie the Upanishads. To convey such knowledge is not the object of this translation, neither was it the object of the Upanishads themselves. It must always be remembered that these great treatises are simply the gate of the Higher Knowledge; there is much that lies behind the gate. Srikrishna has indeed said that the knowledge in the Vedas is sufficient for a holy mind that is capable of knowing God, just as the water in a well is sufficient for a man’s purpose though there may be whole floods of water all around. But this does not apply to ordinary men. The ordinary man who wishes to reach God through knowledge, must undergo an elaborate training. He must begin by becoming absolutely pure, he must cleanse thoroughly his body, his heart and his intellect, he must get himself a new heart and be born again; for only the twice-born can understand or teach the Vedas. When he has done this he needs yet four things before he can succeed, the Sruti or recorded revelation, the Sacred Teacher, the practice of Yoga and the Grace of God. The business of the Sruti and especially of the Upanishads is to seize the mind and draw it into a magic circle, to accustom it to the thought of God and aspirations after the Supreme, to bathe it in certain ideas, surround it with a certain spiritual atmosphere; for this purpose it plunges & rolls the mind over & over in an ocean of marvellous sound thro’ which a certain train of associations goes ever rolling. In other words it appeals through the intellect, the ear and the imagination to the soul. The purpose of the Upanishad cannot therefore be served by a translation; a translation at best prepares him for & attracts him to the original. But even when he has steeped himself in the original, he may have understood what the Upanishad suggests, but he has not understood all that it implies, the great mass

of religious truth that lies behind, of which the Upanishad is but a hint or an echo. For this he must go to the Teacher. "Awake ye, arise & learn of God seeking out the Best who have the knowledge." Hard is it in these days to find the Best; for the Best do not come to us, we have to show our sincerity, patience and perseverance by seeking them. And when we have heard the whole of the Brahmavidya from the Teacher, we still know of God by theory only; we must farther learn from a preceptor the practical knowledge of God, the vision of Him and attainment of Him which is Yoga and the goal of Yoga. And even in that we cannot succeed unless we have the Grace of God, for Yoga is beset with temptations not the least of which are the powers it gives us, powers which the ignorant call supernatural. "Then must a man be very vigilant for Yoga, as it hath a beginning, so hath it an ending." Only the Grace of God, the blessing of triumphant self-mastery that comes from long and patient accumulation of soul-experience, can keep us firm and help us over these temptations. "The Spirit is not to be won by eloquent teaching, nor by brain power, nor by much learning; but he whom the Spirit chooseth, he getteth the Spirit, and to him God discovereth His body." Truly does the Upanishad say "for sharp as a razor's edge is the path, difficult & hard to traverse, say the seers." Fortunately it is not necessary & indeed it is not possible for all to measure the whole journey in a single life, nor can we, or should we abandon our daily duties like Buddha and flee into the mountain or the forest. It is enough for us to make a beginning.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 163-70)





# NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL MAN

## The Evolutionary Aim in Yoga

In the Katha Upanishad there occurs one of those powerful and pregnant phrases, containing a world of meaning in a point of verbal space, with which the Upanishads are thickly sown. *Yogo hi prabhavapyayau*. For Yoga is the beginning & ending of things. In the Puranas the meaning of the phrase is underlined & developed. By Yoga God made the world, by Yoga He will draw it into Himself in the end. But not only the original creation & final dissolution of the universe, all great changes of things, creations, evolutions, destructions are effected by the essential process of Yoga, *tapasya*. In this ancient view Yoga presents itself as the effective, perhaps the essential & real executive movement of Nature herself in all her processes. If this is so in the general workings of Nature, if that is to say, a divine Knowledge and a divine Will in things by putting itself into relation with objects is the true cause of all force & effectuality, the same rule should hold good in human activities. It should hold good especially of all conscious & willed processes of psychological discipline, — Yogic systems, as we call them; Yoga can really be nothing but a consummate & self-conscious natural process intended to effect rapidly objects which the ordinary natural movement works out slowly, in the tardy pace of a secular or even millennial evolution.

There is an apparent difference. The aim put before us in Yoga is God; the aim of Nature is to effect supernature; but these two aims are of one piece & intention. God & supernature are only one the real & the other the formal aspect of the one unattainable fulfilment towards which our human march is in its ascent directed. Yoga for man is the upward working of Nature liberated from slow evolution and long relapses and self-conscious in divine or human knowledge.

God is That which is the All and yet exceeds and transcends the All; there is nothing in existence which is not God, but God is neither the sum of existence nor anything in that sum, except symbolically, in image to His own consciousness. In other words, everything that exists, separately, is a particular symbol and the whole sum of existence is a general symbol which tries to translate the untranslatable existence, God, into the terms of world-consciousness. It is intended to try, it is not intended to succeed; for the moment it succeeds, it ceases to be itself and becomes that untranslatable something from which it started, God. No symbol is intended to express God perfectly, not even the highest; but it is the privilege of the highest symbols to lose in Him their separate definiteness, cease to be symbols and become in consciousness that which is symbolised. Humanity is such a symbol or eidolon of God; we are made, to use the Biblical phrase, in His image; and by that is meant

not a formal image, but the image of His being and personality; we are of the essence of His divinity and of the quality of His divinity; we are formed in the mould and bear the stamp of a divine being and a divine knowledge.

In everything that exists phenomenally, or, as I shall prefer to say, going deeper into the nature of things, symbolically, there are two parts of being, thing in itself and symbol, Self and Nature, *res* (thing that is) and *factum* (thing that is done or made), immutable being and mutable becoming, that which is supernatural to it and that which is natural. Every state of existence has some force in it which drives it to transcend itself. Matter moves towards becoming life, Life travails towards becoming Mind, Mind aspires towards becoming ideal Truth, Truth rises towards becoming divine and infinite Spirit. The reason is that every symbol, being a partial expression of God, reaches out to and seeks to become its own entire reality; it aspires to become its real self by transcending its apparent self. Thing that is made, is attracted towards thing that is, becoming towards being, the natural towards the supernatural, symbol towards thing-in-itself, Nature towards God.

The upward movement is, then, the means towards self-fulfilment in this world; but it is not imperative on all objects. For there are three conditions for all changeable existences, the upward ascension, the arrested status and the downward lapse. Nature in its lower states moves upward indeed in the mass, but seeks the final salvation for only a limited number of its individuals. It is not every form of matter that organises life although every form of matter teems with the spirit of life and is full of its urgent demand for release & self-manifestation. Not every form of life organises mind, although in all forms of life mind is there, insistent, seeking for its escape and self-expression. Nor is every mental being fitted to organise the life of ideal truth, although in every mental being, in dog & ape & worm no less than in man, the imprisoned spirit of truth & knowledge seeks for its escape and self-expression. Nature in each realised state of her building seeks first to assure the natural existence of her creatures in that state; only after this primary aim is accomplished does she seek through the best fitted of them to escape from her works, to break down what she has built and arrive at something beyond. It is not till she reaches man that she arrives at a type of being of which every individual is essentially capable of realising not only the natural but the supernatural within it; and even this is true with modifications, with qualifications. But of this it will be better to speak at greater length in another connection.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the upward movement is the master movement of Nature; arrested status is a lower fulfilment, & if perfect, a transient perfection. It is a perfection in the realms of struggle and in the style of passing forms, a fulfilment in the kingdoms of Ashanaya Mrityu, Hunger who is death, Hunger that creates & feeds upon its creations; the upward movement is that which leads up through death to immortality & realises in this earth of the body the blissful and luminous kingdom of heaven; the downward lapse is destruction, Hell, a great perdition, mahati vinashtih.



These are the three gatis or final states of becoming indicated in the Gita, *uttama*, *madhyama* & *adhama*, highest, middle and lowest, offered to the choice of humanity. It is for each individual of us to choose. For as we choose, God shall fulfil Himself in us, towards a transient human satisfaction, a divine perfection or a decomposition of our humanity into the fruitful waste-matter of Nature.

Every nature, then, is a step towards some super-nature, — towards something natural to itself, but supernatural to that which is below. Life is supernatural to Matter, Mind supernatural to Life, Ideal Being supernatural to Mind, the Infinite Spirit supernatural to ideal being. We must, therefore, accept the supernatural as our goal; for the tendency of our nature to the super-nature just above it is a command of the World Power to be obeyed and not rebelled against & distrusted. It is here that Faith has its importance & Religion, when uncorrupted, its incalculable utility; for our natural mind seeks to dwell in its nature & is sceptical of supernature. Faith & religion were provisions of the All Wise Energy to accustom the natural & merely mental man to the promptings of the ideal soul in him which seeks even now to escape out of twilight into light, out of groping into truth, out of the senses & reasoning into vision & direct experience. The upward tendency is imposed on us & we cannot permanently resist it; at some time or another God will lay his hands on us and force us up that steep incline so difficult to our unregenerate treading. For as surely as the animal develops towards humanity & in its most flexible types attains a kind of humanity, as surely as the ape and the ant having once appeared, man was bound to follow, so surely man develops towards godhead & in his more capable types approaches nearer & nearer towards godhead, attains a kind of deity, & so surely the genius & the saint having appeared man is bound to develop in himself & out of himself the superman, the *siddha purusha*. For this conclusion no prophetic power or revelation is needed; it is the inevitable corollary from the previous demonstrations worked out for us in the vast laboratory of Nature.

We have to transcend Nature, to become super-Nature, but it follows from what I have said that it is by taking advantage of something still imprisoned in Nature itself, by following some line which Nature is trying to open to us that we ought to proceed. By yielding to our ordinary nature we fall away both from Nature itself and from God; by transcending Nature we at once satisfy her strongest impulse, fulfil all her possibilities and rise towards God. The human first touches the divine and then becomes the divine. But there are those who seek to kill Nature in order to become the Self. Shall we follow them? No, however great & lofty be their path, however awful & dazzling their aspiration, because it is not God's intention in humanity & therefore not our proper *dharma*. Let any say, if he will, that we have made the lower choice. We answer in the language of the Gita, *Sreyan swadharmo viguno*, Better is the law of our own being though inferior, too perilous the superior law of another's being. To obey God's will in us, is certainly more blissful, perhaps even more divine than to rise to the austere heights of the *Adwaitin* & the ineffable

self-extinction in an indefinable Existence. For us the embrace of Krishna is enough and the glory of the all-puissant bosom of Kali. We have to transcend & possess Nature, not to kill her.

In any case, whatever may be the choice for exceptional individuals, it is a general path of supreme attainment for humanity that we are seeking, — for I am not proposing to you in Yoga an individual path unconcerned with the rest of mankind, — and here there can be no doubt or hesitation. Neither the exaggerations of spirituality nor the exaggerations of materialism are our true path. Every general movement of our humanity which seeks to deny Nature, however religious, lofty or austere, of whatever dazzling purity or ethereality, has been & will always be doomed to failure, sick disappointment, disillusionment or perversion, because it is in its nature for the mass of humanity a transient impulse of exaggeration, because it contradicts God's condition for us who set Nature there as an indispensable term for His self-fulfilment in the universe and ourselves as the supreme instruments & helpers on this earth of that divine self-fulfilment. Every movement of humanity which bids us be satisfied with our ordinary Nature, dwell upon the earth, cease to aspire to the empyrean within us and choose rather to live like the animals looking to our mortal future before us & downwards at the earth we till, not upwards to God & our ungrasped perfection, has been & will always be doomed to weariness, petrification & cessation or to a quick & violent supernaturalistic reaction, because this also is for the mass of men a transient impulse of exaggeration & because it contradicts God's intention in us who has entered in and dwells secret in our Nature compelling us towards Him by an obscure, instinctive & overmastering attraction. Materialistic movements are more unnatural and abnormal than ascetic and negative religions & philosophies; for these lead us upward at least, though they go too furiously fast & far for our humanity, but the materialist under the pretence of bringing us back to Nature, takes us away from her entirely. He forgets or does not see that Nature is only phenomenally Nature, but in reality she is God. The divine element in her is that which she most purely & really is; the rest is only term and condition, process and stage in her whole progressively developed revelation of the secret divinity. He forgets too that Nature is evolving not evolved & what we are now can never be the term of what we shall be hereafter. The supernatural must be by the very logic of things the end & goal of her movement.

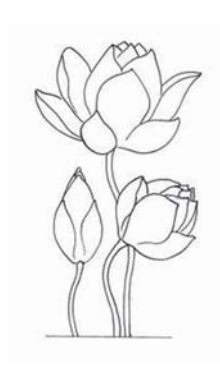
Therefore, not to be ensnared, emmeshed and bound by Nature, and not, on the other hand, to be furious with her & destroy her, is the first thing we must learn if we are to be complete Yogins and proceed surely towards our divine perfection. All beings, even the sages, follow after their nature and what shall coercion and torture of it, avail them? *Prakritim yanti bhutani, nigraha kim karishyati?* And it is all so useless! Do you feel yourself bound by her and pant for release? In her hand alone is the key which shall unlock your fetters. Does she stand between you & the Lord? She is Sita; pray to her, she will stand aside & show Him to you; but presume

not to separate Sita & Rama, to cast her out into some distant Lanca under the guard of giant self-tortures so that you may have Rama to yourself in Ayodhya. Wrestle with Kali, if you will, she loves a good wrestler; but wrestle not with her unlovingly, or in mere disgust & hate; for her displeasure is terrible and though she loves the Asuras, she destroys them. Rather go through her & under her protection, go with a right understanding of her and with a true & unfaltering Will; she will lead you on with whatever circlings, yet surely & in the wisest way, to the All-Blissful Personality & the Ineffable Presence. Nature is the Power of God Himself, leading these multitudes of beings, through the night & the desert & the tracts of the foeman to their secret & promised heritage.

Supernature, then, is in every way our aim in Yoga; being still natural to the world, to transcend Nature internally so that both internally and externally we may possess and enjoy her as free & lord, swarat and samrat; being still the symbol in a world of symbol-beings, to reach through it to that which is symbolised, to realise the symbol; being still a figure of humanity, a man among men, a living body among living bodies, manus, mental beings housed in that living matter among other embodied mental beings; being & remaining in our outward parts all this that we are apparently, yet to exceed it and become in the body what we are really in the secret self, — God, spirit, supreme & infinite being, pure Bliss of divine joy, pure Force of divine action, pure Light of divine knowledge. Our whole apparent life has only a symbolic value & is good & necessary as a becoming; but all becoming has being for its goal & fulfilment & God is the only being. To become divine in the nature of the world and in the symbol of humanity is the perfection for which we were created.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 108-14)*



## ‘LET THAT TRUE LOVE BE BORN . . .’

**June 20, 1914**

Thou must accomplish the work of transfiguration, Thou must teach us the path to be followed and Thou must give us the power to follow it to the very end. . . .

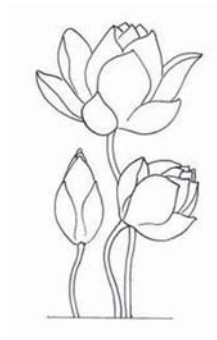
O Thou source of all love and all light, Thou whom we cannot know in Thyself but can manifest ever more completely and perfectly, Thou whom we cannot conceive but can approach in profound silence, to complete Thy incommensurable boons Thou must come to our help until we have gained Thy victory. . . .

Let that true love be born which soothes all suffering; establish that immutable peace wherein resides true power; give us the sovereign knowledge which dispels all darkness. . . .

From the infinite depths to this most external body, in its smallest elements, Thou dost move and live and vibrate and set all in motion, and the whole being is now only a single block, infinitely multiple yet absolutely coherent, animated by one tremendous vibration: Thou.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 179)*



# THE QUESTION OF CHANCE

## I

What do we understand by the term “chance”? Chance can only be the opposite of order and harmony. There is only one true harmony and that is the supramental — the reign of Truth, the expression of the Divine Law. In the Supermind, therefore, chance has no place. But in the lower Nature the supreme Truth is obscured: hence there is an absence of that divine unity of purpose and action which alone can constitute order. Lacking this unity, the domain of lower Nature is governed by what we may call chance — that is to say, it is a field in which various conflicting forces intermix, having no single definite aim. Whatever arises out of such a rushing together of forces is a result of confusion, dissonance and falsehood — a product of chance. Chance is not merely a conception to cover our ignorance of the causes at work; it is a description of the uncertain *melée* of the lower Nature which lacks the calm one-pointedness of the divine Truth. The world has forgotten its divine origin and become an arena of egoistic energies; but it is still possible for it to open to the Truth, call it down by its aspiration and bring about a change in the whirl of chance. What men regard as a mechanical sequence of events, owing to their own mental associations, experiences and generalisations, is really manipulated by subtle agencies each of which tries to get its own will done. The world has got so subjected to these undivine agencies that the victory of the Truth cannot be won except by fighting for it. It has no right to it: it has to gain it by disowning the falsehood and the perversion, an important part of which is the facile notion that, since all things owe their final origin to the Divine, all their immediate activities also proceed directly from it. The fact is that here in the lower Nature the Divine is veiled by a cosmic Ignorance and what takes place does not proceed directly from the divine knowledge. That everything is equally the will of God is a very convenient suggestion of the hostile influences which would have the creation stick as tightly as possible to the disorder and ugliness to which it has been reduced. So what is to be done, you ask? Well, call down the Light, open yourselves to the power of Transformation. Innumerable times the divine peace has been given to you and as often you have lost it — because something in you refuses to surrender its petty egoistic routine. If you are not always vigilant, your nature will return to its old unregenerate habits even after it has been filled with the descending Truth. It is the struggle between the old and the new that forms the crux of the Yoga; but if you are bent on being faithful to the supreme Law and Order revealed to you, the parts of your being belonging to the domain of chance will, however slowly, be converted and divinised.

*(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 3, pp. 163-64)*

## II

*“Chance can only be the opposite of order and harmony. There is only one true harmony and that is the supramental — the reign of Truth, the expression of the Divine Law. In the Supermind, therefore, chance has no place. But in the lower Nature, the supreme Truth is obscured: hence there is an absence of that divine unity of purpose and action which alone can constitute order. Lacking this unity, the domain of the lower Nature is governed by what we may call chance — that is to say, it is a field in which various conflicting forces intermix, having no single definite aim.”*

*(“Chance”, Questions and Answers 1929-31)*

*If chance is the expression of disorder in the lower worlds, still there are “happy” chances which are not necessarily the expression of a disorder, aren’t there?*

Happy for whom? For generally in this world as we see it, what is happy for one is unhappy for another; what is happy in one case is unhappy in another, and that too is an expression of disorder. I don’t say that necessarily it is a chance occurrence which makes you unhappy, I say that it does not correspond to the order of truths, which is very different. One may be very happy in the midst of disorder! There are many who are perfectly satisfied with their disorder and would not like to change it.

*A happy chance may come from a set of circumstances which harm nobody.*

We do not see it harming anyone or anything simply because we do not have sufficient data. We cannot judge circumstances, for we do not know the world. What do we know about it? Our vision is so short and so limited. Just think, a man can never know what lies beyond his hundred and twenty years, at the maximum, and I am putting a very big limit, and I count the first years of his existence, though generally he does not remember what has happened then. What does one know about the world in so short a time and about the consequences of things? Nothing at all. And even if we assume that one can remember sufficiently well to know the result or antecedent of a so-called “chance”, it is altogether a local knowledge. What does one know about what is happening at the antipodes or in a million other places on the earth at the same moment? We know nothing about it. And as we know that all that happens is linked, that all things are closely linked, consciously, that there cannot be a vibration in one place without there being its consequences in another, how can we tell whether our chance is not harmful to someone, though it be favourable for us? I think it is impossible to form a judgment (how shall I put it?) a correct judgment about things, for one does not know what is going on in the world.

We do not know the whole, we know nothing of the play of forces. And we say that chance is the result of a play of forces; only, instead of being the expression of divine harmony, it is the expression of conflicting wills. These wills are not all necessarily bad or hostile but they are always ignorant. Each one tries to realise his own will and the victory is to the strongest — the strongest is not necessarily the best in this field. When one thing is realised, how many others could have been realised, which were not, because this one was realised? And all these things, we do not know. We cannot compare what is with what could have been. . . . No, I have not said anywhere that chance was necessarily the work of hostile forces, but it is certainly the work of ignorant forces.

*From a scientific point of view chance is considered as something without a cause or as the result of a number of small causes which intervene and are more or less independent of each other, giving rise to the notion of disorder. But how to know whether a thing, an event, etc. is due to chance or not? The word “chance” is rather a way of speaking, isn’t it?*

But that is exactly what I am saying! I never said that chance did not have a cause. You say that a thing is due to “chance” because you cannot discern all the causes which have brought about that thing. But one who is in contact with the divine truth can know very well if it came from there or not — quite easily.

*But for one who can follow causes and effects . . .*

Excuse me, we have given a definition, we have said that unless an event is the result of the intervention of the divine Will expressed without mixture, it is a question of what we call “chance”.

*Then in the ordinary world many things are due to chance.*

But of course, I have not said anything else! In the ordinary world all is the reign of chance, except, from time to time, something of which the cause is indiscernible to the crowd but discernible to one who is in touch with the divine Will. That alone escapes chance — this does not happen very, very often, so it is not too risky to say that all things in this world happen through chance.

*We are here then by chance?*

One cannot generalise. Nor can one ask personal questions. So we shall say vaguely that for some it is a chance event, but for others it is a divine Will.



*Even in the ordinary world it is not only chance which acts. Thus for the molecules of hot gas there are two movements which seem to be superimposed: a disorderly movement and a combined movement. Probably we may then say that the happenings of the ordinary world are a mixture of these two movements: a disorderly movement and a combined movement which aims at a fixed goal?*

You have found that all by yourself!

*You have said in the same talk: "Peace has been given to you several times and often you lost it. . . ." ("Chance", Questions and Answers 1929-31)*

Yes, how many times has peace been given to you and how many times have you lost it? Innumerable times, I have said. Divine peace, not only ordinary peace (because, for ordinary peace, I believe you may go around the world several times without finding it) but divine peace has been given to you and every time you have lost it. Why? Because something in you refuses to give up its petty selfish routine.

*But divine peace is always there, isn't it? It is not "given"?*

You must not forget that when I said that, we were a small group of twelve to sixteen, gathering regularly, and it was to these I was speaking. I never thought I would be reading this to more than fifty people, never. But I said this positively to those who were there, in that little group, those to whom I had given this peace innumerable times, and every time they had lost it. That is what I mean, it was something altogether particular. Now, generally speaking, for those who are here, one may say as you do that peace is constantly given (as also consciousness, force, knowledge) to a certain extent, as much as the mind is able to receive it. So it can no longer be said that it is "lost"; but one becomes aware of it, then unaware, and again aware, then again unaware; quite simply for a reason similar to the one I have given (for it is always true, whether there are sixteen or eighteen or a hundred and fifty or seven hundred, the reason is almost the same) — that even when you are well-intentioned there is something in the being which clings desperately to its habits. People imagine that if something has changed in their little outer habits, they have made a great progress; they tell you, "But don't you see? I travel, I change my environment, change circumstances and I adapt myself very well." All that means nothing at all. It is the inner habits, the inner reactions, the inner way of seeing, the way of thinking, of directing one's action, it is this which refuses to change, which finds it so difficult to change.

*When you speak of "giving peace" do you refer to a special gift or to something general?*



It is special, it is something put upon you, with insistence, and then, for some seconds or some minutes, or even some hours, you feel it. You feel suddenly filled with peace, force, light — sometimes even with yet more precious things: knowledge, consciousness, love. And then, it disappears. Then you say, “Oh! Truly, these divine forces are not generous. They make you taste the thing to see how good it is, then take it away from you so that you may desire it all the more!” This is the usual conclusion.

*Yet we know the causes which prevent us from keeping the given peace and we try to get rid of these obstacles.*

And so you enter into a terrible battle and lose the peace still more! . . . You mean that when one loses the contact and makes an effort, one manages to get rid of the obstacle? That happens only when you are truly a first class sadhak! There are not many who do that. Those who do it I must congratulate, for they will go very fast. But there are not many who know the cause — I have told you that — ninety-nine times out of a hundred it is the poor Divine who is guilty: it is He who has given and then withdrawn what He gave; He is quite whimsical. He makes you taste of the wonderful fruit like that, then He takes it away from you, and then when He feels like it, He gives it back to you. . . . Indeed, He is quite a fanciful personage!

*Instead of giving peace, why doesn't the Divine abolish all at once the ego?*

Ah! That, that is the work for each one. That is what I told you the other day, I read to you what Sri Aurobindo has written: “Do not harbour the indolent illusion that you will be given the aspiration and the work will be done for you.” The aspiration must come from you and the abolition of the ego also. You are helped, you are supported; every time you take a step forward you will feel there is something which gives you all that is necessary to enable you to take the step, but it is you who must walk, no one will take you on his back and carry you. . . . Abolish the ego first, that's a wonderful programme! Once the ego is abolished, there will be nothing more to do, all the work will be over, for it is precisely the ego which impedes you from being in touch with the Divine. Once the ego is gone, quite simply you will be like that, in a beatific union with the Divine, and all the work will be over. But generally, one does not begin by the end. In any case, what I have just told you holds good: to abolish the ego is your work. You will be helped, but you must walk on your own feet. Do not at all hope that someone is going to carry you on his back and that you will have nothing to do except let yourself be carried.

14 May 1951

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 4, pp. 405-10)*

## A CONVERSATION OF 27 NOVEMBER 1965

[This talk begins with Mother's comments on the message distributed on the Darshan day of November 24th.]

*“It is certainly a mistake to bring down the light by force — to pull it down. The Supramental cannot be taken by storm. When the time is ready it will open of itself — but first there is a great deal to be done and that must be done patiently and without haste.”*

*Sri Aurobindo*

It is good for reasonable people. They will say, “There, he does not promise miracles.”

*Why? Do many people have the tendency to “pull down”?*

People are in a hurry, they want to see the results immediately.

And then, they believe they are pulling down the Supramental — they pull down some small vital individuality who mocks at them and in the end makes them play the shabby fool. This is what happens most often — ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

A small individuality, a vital entity who plays the big play and makes a great show, plays of light. Then the poor fellow who has “pulled” is bedazzled; he says, “There, it is the Supramental”, and he falls into a pit.

It is only when you have touched, seen in some way and had a contact with the true Light, that you can distinguish the vital, and you perceive that it is altogether like the plays of light on a stage, an artificial light. But otherwise, others are dazzled — it is dazzling, it is “wonderful”, and then they are deceived. It is only when you have *seen* and when you have had the contact with the Truth, ah! then you smile.

It is quackery, but you must know the truth in order to recognise quackery.

At bottom, it is the same for everything. The vital is like a superstage that gives shows — very attractive, dazzling, deceptive; it is only when you know the True Thing that you recognise immediately, instinctively, without reasoning, and you say, “No, I do not want that.”

And for everything it is so. Where it has taken a capital importance in human life is with regard to love. Vital passions, vital attractions have almost everywhere taken the place of true feeling, which is quiet, whereas the other puts you in ferment, gives you the feeling of something “living”. It is very deceptive. And you do not know it, you do not feel it, you do not perceive it clearly unless you know the True Thing. If you have touched true love through the psychic and the divine union, then

the other thing appears hollow, thin, empty — an appearance and a comedy, more often tragic than comic.

Whatever one may say about it, however one may explain it, is of no use at all, because he or she who is caught says immediately, “Oh, this is not what it is for others” — what happens to yourself is never like what happens to others! One must have the true experience, then the whole vital appears like a masquerade not attractive.

And when you “pull”, well, it is much more than ninety-nine times out of one hundred... out of a million there is found only one case where one happens to pull the True Thing — this proves one was ready. Otherwise it is always the vital which you pull, the appearance, the theatrical show of the Thing, not the Thing itself.

To pull is always an egoistic movement. It is a deformation of aspiration. True aspiration consists in a giving, a self-giving, whereas to pull means to want for oneself. Even if in the mind you have a vaster ambition — the earth, the universe — that means nothing, these are mental activities.

*(Long silence)*

You felt nothing special on the Darshan day?

*No.*

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.

But it was so living, so real that my whole attitude (how to say it? — a passive attitude which is not the result of an active will), the whole position taken in the work has changed. And that has brought a peace — a peace and a calmness and a confidence altogether decisive. A decisive change. And even what seemed in the earlier position to be obstinacy, clumsiness, inconstancy, all kinds of deplorable things, all that has disappeared. It was like the vision of a great universal Rhythm in which each thing takes its place and... everything is all right. And the effort for transformation, reduced to a small number, becomes a thing *much* more precious and much more powerful for the realisation. It is as though a choice has been made for those who will be the pioneers of the new creation. And all these ideas of “spreading”, of “preparing”, or of “churning Matter”. . . are a childishness. It is human restlessness.

The vision was of a beauty so majestic, so calm, so smiling. Oh! It was full, truly full of the divine Love. And not a divine Love that “pardons” — it is not at all that, not at all! Each thing in its place, realising its inner rhythm as perfectly as it can.

It was a very beautiful gift.

Well, all these things people know in some part, intellectually, like that, in idea; they know all that, but it is quite useless. In everyday practice you live in another way, with a truer understanding. And there, it is as though you touched the things — you saw them, you touched them — in their higher disposition.

It came after a vision of plants and the spontaneous beauty of plants (it is something so wonderful), then of the animal with so harmonious a life (so long as men do not intervene), and all that was in its right place; then of the true humanity as humanity, that is to say, the maximum of what a mental poise could create of beauty, harmony, charm, elegance of life, taste of living — a taste of living in beauty, and, naturally, suppressing all that is ugly and low and vulgar. It was a fine humanity — humanity at its maximum, but nice. And perfectly satisfied with its being humanity, because it lives harmoniously. And it is perhaps also like a promise of what almost the whole of humanity will become under the influence of the new creation. It appeared to me that it was what the supramental consciousness could make of humanity. There was even a comparison with what humanity has made of the animal species. It is extremely mixed, naturally, but things have been perfected,

bettered, utilised more completely. Animality, under the mind's influence, has become another thing, which is, naturally, something mixed because the mind was incomplete. In the same way there are examples of a harmonious humanity among well-balanced people, and this seemed to be what humanity could become under the supramental influence.

Only, it is very far ahead. You must not expect that it will be immediately — it is very far ahead.

It is clearly, even now, a period of transition which may last quite long and which is rather painful. Only, the effort, sometimes painful (often painful) is compensated by a clear vision of the goal to attain, of the goal that *will* be attained: an assurance, yes, a certainty. But it would be something that would have the power to eliminate all error, all deformation, all the ugliness of the mental life — and then a humanity very happy, very satisfied with being human, not at all feeling the need of being anything other than human, but with a human beauty, a human harmony.

It was very charming, it was as though I lived in it. The contradictions had disappeared. It was as though I lived in this perfection. And it was almost like the ideal conceived by the supramental consciousness, of a humanity become as perfect as it can be. And it was very good.

And this brings a great repose. The tension, the friction, all that disappeared, and the impatience. All that had completely disappeared.

*That is to say, you concentrate the work instead of diffusing it a little everywhere?*

No, it may be diffused materially, because the individuals are not necessarily collected together. But they are few in number.

This idea of a pressing need to “prepare” humanity for the new creation, this impatience has disappeared.

*It must first of all be realised in some.*

Quite so.

I was seeing, I saw that in such a concrete way. Apart from those who are fit to prepare the transformation and the supramental realisation, and whose number is necessarily very restricted, there must develop more and more, in the midst of the ordinary human mass, a superior humanity which has towards the supramental being of the future or in the making the same attitude as animality, for example, has towards man. There must be, besides those who work for the transformation and who are ready for it, a superior humanity, intermediary, which has found in itself or in life this harmony with Life — this harmony *human* — and which has the same feeling of adoration, devotion, faithful consecration to “something” which seems to it so high that it does not even try to realise it, but worships it and feels the need of

its influence, its protection, and the need to live under this influence, to have the delight of being under this protection. It was so clear. But not this anguish, these torments of wanting something that escapes you because — because it is not your destiny yet to have it, and because the amount of transformation needed is premature for your life and it is that then which creates a disorder and suffering.

For example, one of the very concrete things that brings out the problem well: humanity has the sexual impulse in a way altogether natural, spontaneous and, I would say, legitimate. This impulse will naturally and spontaneously disappear with animality. Many other things will disappear, as for example the need to eat and perhaps also the need to sleep in the way we sleep now. But the most conscious impulse in a superior humanity, which has continued as a source of . . . bliss is a big word, but joy, delight — is certainly the sexual activity, and that will have absolutely no reason for existence in the functions of Nature when the need to create in that way will no longer exist. Therefore, the capacity of entering into relation with the joy of life will rise by one step or will be oriented differently. But what the ancient spiritual aspirants had sought on principle — sexual negation — is an absurd thing, because this must be only for those who have gone beyond this stage and no longer have animality in them. And it must drop off naturally, without effort and without struggle. To make of it a centre of conflict and struggle is ridiculous. It is only when the consciousness ceases to be human that it drops off quite naturally. Here also there is a transition which may be somewhat difficult, because the beings of transition are always in an unstable equilibrium; but within oneself there is a kind of flame and a need which makes it not painful — it is not painful effort, it is something that one can do with a smile. But to seek to impose it upon those who are not ready for this transition is absurd.

It is common sense. They are human, but they must not pretend that they are not.

It is only when spontaneously the impulse becomes impossible for you, when you feel that it is something painful and contrary to your deeper need that it becomes easy; then, well, externally you cut these bonds and it is finished.

It is one of the most convincing examples.

It is the same with regard to food. It will be the same thing. When animality will drop off, the absolute necessity of food also will drop off. And there will probably be a transition where one will have less and less purely material food. For example, when you smell flowers it is nourishing. I have seen it, you nourish yourself in a more subtle way.

Only, the body is not ready. The body is not ready and it deteriorates, that is to say, it eats itself. This proves that the time has not come, that it is only an experience — an experience that teaches you something, teaches you that it will not be a brutal refusal to come into contact with the corresponding Matter and an isolation (one cannot isolate oneself, it is impossible), but a communion on a higher or deeper plane.

*(Silence)*

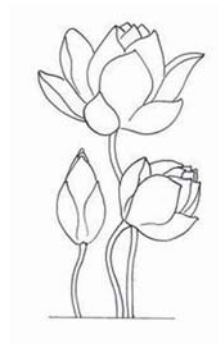
Those who have reached the higher regions of intelligence, but have not dominated the mental faculties in them, have an innocent need that everybody should think like them and be able to understand as they understand. And when they see that others do not, cannot understand, their first reflex is to be horribly shocked; they exclaim, “What an idiot!” But they are not at all idiots — they are different, they are in another domain. You do not go and say to an animal, “You are an idiot”; you say, “It is an animal.” Well, you say, “It is a man.” It is a man; only, there are those who are no longer men and are not yet gods, and they are in a situation . . . rather awkward.

But it was so soothing, so sweet, so wonderful, this vision — each thing expressing its kind quite naturally.

And it is quite evident that with the amplitude and totality of the vision, there comes something which is a compassion that understands — not that pity of the superior for the inferior: the true divine Compassion, which is the total comprehension that each one is what he must be.

THE MOTHER

*(Notes on the Way, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 22-29)*



**“GRACE” —**  
**CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

I chanced this afternoon upon this poem written, I am sure, some years ago. I touched it up here and there.

**GRACE**

“I have not trod on thorns: do I deserve  
The paradise  
Of Thy cool presence? I can plead no rough  
Austere emprise.  
I never won a combat with life’s ill,  
Nor luxury spurned:  
Only for sweeter joy when joy was mine  
This heart has yearned.  
Its single grief was a love that nought so rich  
On earth could see  
As what it longed for” . . . “Hence, dear child, am I  
Revealed to thee!  
Easy to win my grace if man but knew —  
No blood of pain  
Do I extort, no wrench of spirit or flesh,  
And strife is vain.  
One sole demand I lay upon each life —  
To realise  
That earth can never calm the deep heart’s call  
Through love-lit eyes!”

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

It is quite good as poetry. But I fear that in matter of fact things are not so comfortably easy as that!

20 August 1936



[*Version from The Secret Splendour —  
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 499:*]

## GRACE

“I have not trod on thorns: do I deserve  
The paradise  
Of Thy cool presence? I can plead no rough  
Austere emprise.  
I never won a combat with life’s ill,  
Nor luxury spurned:  
Only for sweeter joy when joy was mine  
This heart has yearned.  
Its single grief was a love that nought so rich  
On earth could see  
As what it longed for” . . . “Hence, dear child, am I  
Revealed to thee!  
Easy to win my grace if men but knew —  
No blood of pain  
Do I extort, no wrench of spirit or flesh,  
And strife is vain.  
One sole demand I lay upon each life —  
To realise  
That earth can never calm the deep heart’s call  
Through love-lit eyes!”

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

# THE PEACE CHANT OF THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

## I

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (5-1-1) a mantra occurs. It is chanted as the *śāntimantra* (peace chant). It runs as follows:

*pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate  
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate.*

The word *pūrṇam* (with its modifications) is repeatedly used in the mantra. It occurs as many as seven times in the two lines of the text. Those who are not familiar with the Upanishads and their style are likely to be confused by the repetitions. However, a trained scholar notices that the key to a proper understanding of the text is to be found in the two definitions given to the word *pūrṇam*. First of all, the word is equated with the reality of That (*adaḥ*); secondly, the word is again equated with the reality of the world (*idam*). The two definitions have been offered in the first line itself of the couplet. The purpose is that once the definitions are rightly grasped it is easy to determine the teaching of the text.

There are four steps in the thought-structure of the mantra.

(1) When the highest reality is given the attribute of complete independence, it is referred to as That (*pūrṇamadaḥ*).

(2) When the word is given the attribute of complete dependence on That, it is referred to as This (*pūrṇamidam*).

(3) When the world rises from That (*pūrṇāt*), it is referred to as the creation of the world (*pūrṇamudacyate*).

(4) The world is held as a possession of That (*pūrṇasya pūrṇam*). When it is taken away from That (*pūrṇamādāya*), That remains unchanged and unaffected (*pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate*).

The central idea of the mantra may be stated thus: That is immeasurable by the measure of the world.

## II

Though the world originates from That, it clearly belongs to a lower order of reality, lower than the order of That. However, we do not remember that the two, the world and That, belong to two orders. We confuse the two and wrongly think that they do not have two corresponding measures. In other words, we try to measure the reality of That by the measure of the world. We believe that we are knowers of That, but unfortunately, we have fallen into a delusion and not known it.

Let us examine the notion of possession as understood by common people who think and act according to the law of the world. As long as an individual has possessions such as wife, children and wealth, he is safe, fearless and cheerful. On the contrary, when he is overcome by misfortune, he loses all his possessions and becomes miserable and unhappy. This is the law of the world by which the common people of all categories are bound.

According to the *śāstras* of our country, That is said to be immortal and blissful, without fear and without evil. From That the world is born and by That it is protected from the adverse circumstances. On account of this the world is said to be dear to That. When this world is taken away from That, no harm is done, no damage is caused to That. The reason is this: That is completely independent and free of all limitations. From this it is clear that although the world is regarded as a possession of That (*pūrṇasya pūrṇam*), its dispossession does not alter the original nature of That. This is the significance of the words *pūrṇam evāvaśīsyate*.

At the level of the world, dispossession is the cause of damage and suffering — this is the logic of the lower order. On the contrary, at the level of That, dispossession does not cause either damage or suffering — this is the logic of the higher order. Therefore it is an error to think that the higher can be measured by the lower, the reality of That by the reality of the world.

## III

By confusion and delusion we miss the truth of That and are assailed by death (*mṛtyu*) and suffering (*duḥkha*). What then is the way out of the problem? We must carefully discriminate between the two orders of reality and know the truth of That according to the logic of the higher order. If we do so, we gradually open our mind to the truth of That and become immortal and blissful like That even while we are here in the world.

It is useful to conclude our discussion with a translation of the *śāntimantra* given by Sri Aurobindo. It brings out the Truth of That through the language of mathematics. It is as follows:

This is the complete and That is the complete;  
 subtract the complete from the complete,  
 the complete is the remainder.

(*The Life Divine*, 1939-40 Ed., p. 355)

This is a poetic version of the mantra. Its prose version may be stated in these terms:  
 If the world is taken away from That, That loses nothing; That remains as That only.

N. JAYASHANMUGAM

*For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity. To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind, and usually even his practical parts only escape from the general necessity either by shutting out the problem or by accepting a rough, utilitarian and unilluminated compromise. For essentially, all Nature seeks a harmony, life and matter in their own sphere as much as mind in the arrangement of its perceptions. The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur, and it drives towards a more subtle and puissant order than can normally be the result of a less difficult endeavour. The accordance of active Life with a material of form in which the condition of activity itself seems to be inertia, is one problem of opposites that Nature has solved and seeks always to solve better with greater complexities; for its perfect solution would be the material immortality of a fully organised mind-supporting animal body. The accordance of conscious mind and conscious will with a form and a life in themselves not overtly self-conscious and capable at best of a mechanical or sub-conscious will is another problem of opposites in which she has produced astonishing results and aims always at higher marvels; for there her ultimate miracle would be an animal consciousness no longer seeking but possessed of Truth and Light, with the practical omnipotence which would result from the possession of a direct and perfected knowledge.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 4-5)

# AUROVILLE: A CITY FOR THE FUTURE

(Continued from the issue of March 2019)

[In this issue we present 2 more chapters — 14 and 19 — from Anu Majumdar’s book. Between these we have included excerpts from two other chapters — 15 and 16 — to keep in view the larger picture. — Eds.]

## 14. A CULTURE STILL TO BE INVENTED

To become ourselves is the one thing to be done . . .<sup>1</sup>

— Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*

On 28 February each year, a fire is lit at the amphitheatre in the darkness before dawn. Behind it stands the Matrimandir, still in silhouette. As people settle to silence, the flames rise and we hear a recording of the Mother reading the Charter of Auroville once again. It is the nearest Auroville comes to a ritual of sorts, but more a yearly remembrance and rededication to the reason we all stepped into this life and, to share that experience with others inspired by Auroville. For some, the fire is also a symbol of the awakening soul, purifying and renewing itself and a moment of cohesion with the Dream.

The first line of the Charter states: “Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole” and then there is that business of each one being the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness, should they choose to live in Auroville. It is a subtle definition of the kind of society Auroville must be, and the cohesion of its collective body.

Who then is ‘humanity as a whole’ if not the Divine? From that cohesive centre the collective is engendered and sustained.

Unity is the divinisation of life, the giant step across all forms of egoism and division to that beauty of life which Earth waits for. And so, Auroville is a culture still to be invented. “A divine life must be first and foremost an inner life . . . there can be no divinity in the outer existence if there is not the divinisation of the inner being.”<sup>2</sup>

At the same time individual change and progress will need support from a conscious collective and not be obstructed by it.

1. CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1059.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1060.

. . . if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions . . . There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop . . . and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at the least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving . . .<sup>3</sup>

As a city of Universal Culture Auroville has not one, but two zones of culture: the Cultural and International Zones. The growth and meeting of these two points to a unique field of research and learning for a city intended for human unity. The Mother would drop a hint on this: *The spirit of Auroville . . . basically is the art of creating a unity through the harmony of complexity.*<sup>4</sup>

Auroville's unity encompasses diversity, but it is not about a diversity that only categorises difference. For instance, in the United States there are Americans and then, there are African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics and so on. We did without such categories for a few decades which brought an Auroville spirit and a free sophistication to our simplicity. But there has been a tendency to fall back into categories like Aurovilians, Indians and Tamils. The 'Aurovilians' then are Anglo-Saxons, Europeans or 'foreigners' in general. This is a self-defeating trend which only widens differences instead of bridging them, or creates a sense of the 'other' in our attitudes. It is not a very Aurovilian trend and it throws the challenge of unity back at us again.

A culture of unity implies an inner training. "To find the highest beauty is to find God,"<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo would write, and that between them, music, art and poetry offered a perfect education for the soul, for beyond its intellectual utility, the real service of art lay in the growth of spirituality in the race.

Sri Aurobindo was also a poet, with dozens of sonnets, hundreds of poems, the epic, *Savitri*, that runs to over 700 pages, and a volume on poetic theory, *The Future Poetry*, to his credit. The Mother was also a trained artist and both as we have seen were very aware of all that was at stake for humanity:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.<sup>6</sup>

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 25, p. 247.

4. The Mother's conversation of 25 October 1967; *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 8.

5. CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 145.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 22, p. 1090.

Sri Aurobindo's poetry has of course been widely ignored and misunderstood, dismissed as romantic and mystical, while *Savitri* even berated for being nebulous, verbose and inflated, or else, "his talent and resourcefulness in the use of the English language were limited".<sup>7</sup> Despite such bad press, *Savitri* continues to be read widely across generations, and across very different affiliations of people, in translations, as theatre, as meditation, and is unlikely to ever go out of print. A few lines can alter one's seeing, or open vast experiences within, which is what some of the greatest poetry in the world does, their lines lingering in us forever.

Aldous Huxley, who included passages from *The Life Divine* in his *Perennial Philosophy*, described the book as, "not merely of the highest importance as regards its content but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophical literature."<sup>8</sup> In 1943 Sir Francis Younghusband nominated Sri Aurobindo for the Nobel Prize in literature, and again in 1949, as recounted in Peter Heehs' book, *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography*, two Nobel laureates, the Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral, and Pearl S. Buck, moved and seconded a formal nomination to the Swedish Academy. It was taken up for consideration in 1950 but Sri Aurobindo passed away.

\*

A lot gets said about 'research' in Auroville but what does it imply in the act of creation and of engendering a learning culture?

Artists begin from the ground beneath their feet. From where do we write, create or choreograph? What is our source, our native place as Aurovilians? Here the ground is made from all over the world and the sky is inside. Our anchor lies forward as we stand between two opposite poles of matter and spirit that are seeking to unite inside us, and change us forever, because Auroville is a new creation willed by the Divine. What we search and create here are ways to receive and manifest this Consciousness because the purpose of Auroville is unity.<sup>9</sup>

Most Auroville writers tend to acknowledge Sri Aurobindo as an influence even if their work is different in expression. And, as always, poetry is the first language of humanity:

City of Peace and God's unguarded light,  
City of Silence and the rich unfolding word;  
City of Love and the laughter of the Gods,

7. Bijay Kumar Das (ed.), *Critical Essays on Post-Colonial Literature*, Atlantic, 2008, pp. 18-20.

8. *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, Peter Heehs, p. 404.

9. Earth & Sky, Anu Majumdar, *Ritam Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, August 2005.

City of Man, his labour born of dream . . .  
 City whose song the hidden soul shall sing  
 City of lost boundaries, province once of kings . . .

These are the opening lines of Roger Harris's 'City of Peace', written after a Matrimandir meeting in 1983, asserting the truth of a city not yet manifest, yet willing it into existence. Roger H. is Irish American, if one goes by his poetry. He grew up mostly in France and Italy, where his father served as a diplomat and was a friend of Gore Vidal. Roger went to college in Ireland and the United States and was one of the regulars working on the Matrimandir structure, where we all felt so at home.

"English Literature from Calcutta, huh?" Roger H. signalled expansively when I first met him in Centre kitchen. "So who's your favourite poet? I like Graves."

A collection of Robert Graves still sits on Roger's bookshelf. Roger had met him on the island of Madeira while hitch-hiking through Europe, and got invited to dinner by the poet.

Any other influence, I ask him many years later, after Roger Harris's life changed drastically due to an accident.

"Yeats," says Roger quoting from 'Byzantium', "my singing masters of the soul. . . . Of course, Dante and Cavalcanti. And later it was Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Appollinaire and Dylan Thomas." He goes silent for a while. "Sri Aurobindo is a great poet. That's the main influence. He's Sir Superman (laughs). Soon it's going to be his darshan day, I look forward to that." In another poem from *Alchemies of the Night*, Roger H. writes:

This is our home  
 Born not of earth,  
 Though part of earth,  
 But the sky . . .<sup>10</sup>

Sky is an unobtrusive reference to Auroville's vertical anchor, its first ground reality.

In between her work with the village children, Meenakshi, a Tamil poet, educator and social activist, thinks of the column of light descending in the Matrimandir's Inner Chamber and writes 'Auroville, the Ganga'. A translated excerpt:

Auroville the Ganga!  
 Bhagiratha  
 Desiring your presence on earth,  
 O Ganga

10. Roger Harris, *Alchemies of the Night*, Auroville: Auroville Press Publishers, 2009, p. 61.



Performed a mighty tapasya.

Yes,  
 We are all Bhagirathas;  
 We are all a new Bhagiratha.  
 Do you understand  
 The severe tapasya  
 We perform to bring you  
 to earth, Auroville, Ganga?

Meenakshi's work has been anthologised by A. K. Ramanujan and others, both in Tamil and in English translation, but her primary interest has always been education and skills for the village children.

After coming to Auroville I decided to stop writing until there was some real experience on which words could fly. But in the early days there was a constant *Presence*, whispering all the time:

Impulse in the heart of a secret wind  
 Inside the cave of a heaven wide sun  
 Blue glory where the eagle sweeps high  
 Singing your kingdoms inside our lives.

Deep the waves of that measureless song  
 Like mountains tender with a force that turns  
 Across this dream-red earth of light  
 And your single green laugh that decides the world

Here we listen to your crystalline pulse  
 Sing a destiny that greatens our birth  
 As breath beneath the skin changes till we are free  
 And a new memory of life anchors our will.<sup>11</sup>

A culture and people are easily recognised by the values and attitudes they embody. To a group of people from Aspiration who visited her in March 1970, the Mother would remark: "You are the pioneers, you have the most difficult task, but I feel it is the most interesting one. Because you must establish in a concrete, durable and growing way the attitude that is needed to truly be an Aurovilian."<sup>12</sup>

11. Anu Majumdar, 'Presence', at Tagore Symposium Sahitya Akademi meet, Auroville, 2010.

12. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 312.

*Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the 'Dream' states, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position.*<sup>13</sup>

Today Auroville has poets, artists, writers, musicians, potters, choirs, singers and songs for children, actors, theatre groups, dancers, choreographers, photographers, film-makers, jugglers, clowns, designers, architects. It also has windsurfers, footballers, tennis players, basketball players, marathon runners, yoga freaks and gymnasts. And there are those who go cycling. There was a bit of all that in the Auroville Dance Lab.

After a brief but intensive training with Krishna, my dance teacher, he was gone again. Alarippu to Thillana, even after a hundred repetitions, is something new. Yet it could not possibly be the final limit of this dance form. Tradition is something that always moves ahead. Kapila Vatsyayan's magnificent treatise on the origins of Indian dance traditions, outlined in her book, *The Square and the Circle*, was a solid inspiration at this point. A fresh range of movements seemed to hang at its edge. I began to take each Adavu apart, peeling away the fixed cultural layers and decorations, to touch in its bare structure, not a void but a wellspring. Here was an abstract physical language that was astonishingly young and dynamic yet full of rasa. It could definitely move further and do things differently.

At this time, Sangita, one of Chandralekha's dancers, came to offer a six-week workshop. Several people participated, among them Paulo, who had just come from Brazil and started a modern dance class which I had joined. One morning I found Sangita crouched, head between her hands. She was from Sri Lanka and her father's best friend had just been shot. "How long will it take to change?" It was an anguished cry. The need to respond to that somehow, was instant. It came as a prayer, a poem, and the need to dance it: *At the frontline the witness stands / confronting his soul / the images speak of dream and destruction / and the long destiny of the world / we fluctuate / but this hour will not leave us. / Let the wide current / break open this stone wind / and the pulse of the earth / flow out in freedom . . .* But to get there, I first needed to break through several walls to my own centre from where the work could be generated.

At a workshop session a few days later, Paulo played me a short Stravinsky piece. I took it home and began working with it. A week later it became *First Passage*, my first wall-breaking piece presented at the concluding workshop performance for which Chandralekha came especially from Chennai. Chandra, as we called her, was already an inspiring legend and a path-breaking contemporary Indian choreographer. After *First Passage*, Chandra invited me to join her group, but I knew I had work to do in Auroville, and it was just beginning.

After that, every movement of the world became a teacher: The movement of

13. The 'Dream'

a word in the mind creates a song in the heart. The movement of a song through the wind can cause a child to dance. A thousand dancers on the street can break down a wall, while the universe creates and destroys itself every second, and we say it is Nataraja's dance. How to move with all this? Choreography came out of all that.

After working alone for a while I was joined by Joy and a few others, and as the group began to grow, so did new work and performances. By the time I was starting prep work for *Crossroads*, the Auroville Dance Lab had a core of eight dancers working every day. Joy had ballet training, Paulo had modern dance and jazz, Aurelio, Veronique and Lia had done some contemporary and some improvisation work, Kanchana had some Bharatanatyam, Shvetaketu only had basketball and I had Bharatanatyam and T'ai chi. We taught each other, and together, we also trained in Kalaripayattu and Hatha yoga. It was a terrific and maddening amalgam to work with. It made all kinds of things possible and many things redundant in order to allow these different people to work together as a unified whole.

*Crossroads* was first presented at the UNESCO conference in Auroville in 1994: Humanity at the Crossroads — Evolution of Consciousness. Set to my poem, *Crossroads* worked with many layers simultaneously: word, voice, movement, theatre, light, space and breath.

Grey alleys jump lanes  
 Street by street  
 On the main highway  
 The white fire rises  
 Rises.<sup>14</sup>

Space was a textured, continuously changing arena with projections of Pierre's work, while Holger used the poem as a base to compose the music. Recorded in three voices, it was layered by repetition, texturing, rhythm, tone, space and silence. Over the next years *Crossroads* was performed many times in Auroville and at all contemporary dance festivals in India. *Speaking in Tongues* grew out of another dialogue:

Man is legend, each atom child  
 Rumours of a new world  
 Surround his desire  
 in the deepening combat of time.

He is the myth that is slowly breaking  
 Between different deaths he hears

14. Anu Majumdar, 'Presence', at Tagore Symposium Sahitya Akademi meet, Auroville, 2010.

Himself from everywhere  
 Uncertainly speaking in tongues . . .

*Speaking in Tongues*, my last work, was created for two beautiful dancers and for the Attakalari Biennale of 2002. Grace was trained in ballet, modern dance and African dance. The other dancer was Kanchana, originally from Kottakarai village, and part of the Auroville Dance Lab. Kanchana left us to join Nrityagram to learn Odissi, and was soon performing and giving workshops in places like the Lincoln Center, New York. It was a joy to get her back after five years. Each dancer offered the work an entirely different sensibility, and it was these contradictions that the work sought to integrate, along with the traditional and contemporary worlds. Things unravelled and fell apart, opening further horizons. Solo passages were combined with unexpected duets, challenging a curiosity of the ‘other’ which led to unanticipated inner openings, and a gradual acceptance of one another and, of oneself. The third protagonist on stage was the shadow, playing with the two dancers, dialoguing, merging and dissolving barriers.

A knee injury brought a shift from dance to writing, and after some years, Auroville Dance Lab began to look like a fabulous past life and mostly forgotten, even by the dancers. Today, Auroville is capable of producing much bigger productions like the Auroville Choir, which does so well under Nuria’s baton, or mega theatre productions by Jill or else Paul’s *Millidacious* that involved a record 100 people, young and old in its cast and crew.

Recently, I caught up with Joy with whom I had worked for almost twelve years. Joy was the first to give me the benefit of the doubt and to work with me right from the start of the Dance Lab, something that I’m very grateful for. She was the firm mainstay who could spot an error straightaway and would prod us to a disciplined practice. Joy had grown up in the Ashram from the age of ten, where along with the ‘Free Progress’ system there were sports, singing, theatre and ballet. Joy’s theatre and musicals for children were always things of marvel and fun. An accomplished singer, she has in recent years produced several music CDs with children and for children and has been equally active in theatre, playing many lead roles in Jill and Aryamani’s productions. Joy is in a reflective mood as we chat:

“Earlier whatever we did, it had to find its source in Auroville in some way, even if we were looking at some situation in the world, it had to have that other way of expression, another sense, not because we wanted to be different, but because we were exploring other values, looking at things differently. It used to be a constant choice. Now, we have some very good things, slick things, but not much surprise. I miss that something different, that Auroville breath. Wanting to find something truly different or new is much more demanding. Sometimes it is not comfortable at all. It needs a lot of patience. It’s a bit the same with people who came here thirty to forty years ago and those who came later. Yet it is a miracle that we can all live

together. So something will come,” she smiles, “that is the hope.”

Veronique joined the Dance Lab when we were looking for dancers for *Crossroads*. The only one to step out for a smoke, Vero was the most unfussy, disciplined dancer, always quick and receptive and able to go straight to the heart of things. Now active in theatre, she has played in a variety of productions directed by Aryamani, Jill, Ellen and Paul, excelling in a gamut of roles, from that of a commanding Greek oracle to wild burlesque. We meet after many years in Svedame, in the large mushroom house covered in green sunscreen where she and her partner Louis live. “I grew up in a conservative Catholic family, attended mass for eighteen years,” Vero laughs at my disbelief. Then she met Louis, who was always talking about Auroville, and they arrived finally in 1993. With her children now grown and already a grandparent she says, “It’s only in our heads that we grow old!”

“Theatre confronts me with my potential,” she admits, “it also makes you understand humanity. But I sometimes miss that time we had with the Dance Lab, when we worked every day, the whole group. There was such a spirit of experiment. I miss that creative intensity now. It was our work, and that is what we offered to Auroville.” Recently she was part of *Millidacious*. “It was a good musical. A huge cast and done with a lot of love, lots of care and cheerfulness. But it was like a big family event, we are still quite a small place, you know.”

\*

Why is it that we are still such a small place and no longer exploring the unexplored? Instead, there appears to be a return to ‘normalcy’.

Auroville was set on a fairly high target. In the 4 April 1972 conversation in the *Mother’s Agenda* I came across this:

“It’s not easy, but we are not here to do easy things. The whole world is there for those who like an easy life. I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life — it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress . . . you can’t fool people who have devoted their entire life to go beyond humanity. There is only one way to be convincing — it is to BE that . . . we are here to prepare a superhumanity, not to fall back into an easy life . . .”

The Mother’s descriptions of Auroville usually had constructions, of cities being built, of great beauty, gardens, sports and music, housing, the principles of construction, even cooking, and always, art. “There was art,” she would say, pleased, “and it was beautiful, it was good.”<sup>15</sup>

So it makes me wonder why after almost fifty years we have stagnated at roughly 2,500 people. Has our perception of Auroville shrunk: Or is it symptomatic of a phase we are passing through: Auroville is now readily projected as a forest, or

15. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 275.

at best a sustainable town, even a village but never as a city. It is an image that is more in fashion and easier to communicate. Even so, to learn that the ‘ville’ in Auroville for some has come to mean village and thus Aurovillage, is disturbing. Art too pays lip service to such ideas, now to be accepted. Any reference to Auroville as an aspiration for the future, for the transformation of humanity, let alone as a city could get ridiculed as old-fashioned or rejected as controversial. The Mother had changed her mind, we were told, and thus encouraged to change with the times and shift to a new environmental paradigm for Auroville. There is a risk of becoming one-dimensional and narrow, and perhaps we need to understand the context of this apparent rejection of the city and the self-contented laissez-faire attitude that replaces it in some ways.

\*

Auroville has been accused of ‘modernism’ from some quarters which sees the project, and the city plan in particular, as Utopian, elitist, part of an absolutist, grand narrative and its belief in unity and progress as already out of date. In a sense it is a classic postmodernist face-off. This world view started gaining momentum from the 1980s, characterised by a scepticism and negativity towards the city as the environmental culture grew. It was typically subversive, wanting to throw the city out and break down structures of hierarchy around it and ‘what the Mother said’. It was not interested in ‘purity’ of style or in the future but in going back to nature, to tradition, conventional common sense, or to an ‘anything goes’ pastiche. Culture became a networked social circuit with an environmental leverage, something quite different from the City of Universal Culture that Auroville was meant to be.

Of course, postmodernism is morphing to a ‘post-postmodernism’ which takes stock of its shortcomings and seeks trust, dialogue and sincerity to transcend postmodernist irony and nihilism.

This is an extremely short-cut reading of the shifting patterns and of periods of history, and yet Auroville can hardly be boxed in any one category. It certainly contains something Utopian, yet it is also irreverent as it was created to break down prejudices, divisions and superficialities and be multiple, diverse and environmental to boot. For that Auroville always demands our trust and sincerity. Which is why Auroville remains a culture still to be invented. It starts with us now but carries a very long breath into the future, into a trans-trans-trans-modernity. It would be a mistake to judge it by present shortcomings or trends and try to alter its course from a limited perspective or experience. Human nature is the environment which will take the longest to perfect and for that we have been given a city to work it out in all details.

Auroville still needs to get past the shadow of doubt that each period casts upon it and find an inner integrity to become what is must become. It is the one thing to be done.

A living city is also a natural vehicle for a culture to grow, providing it with rich encounters and ingredients for learning, but surely a ‘city with a soul’ can open the human experience one step further.

Dr. Vishakha Desai, member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council, and former president of the Asia Society, New York, made the following observation at the Auroville Festival in Chennai, in 2015: *The Arts have the unique capacity to be culturally specific and yet transcend that culture . . . It has the capacity to make us think and see in a way that transforms our world.*

I have been fortunate to navigate multiple fields in Auroville: teaching, construction work at Matrimandir, Pour Tous and working committee, to long years with the Auroville Dance Lab, followed by a solitary writing phase, after an injury, that resulted in fiction, short stories, poetry and in organising exhibitions. Though Auroville is relatively small, it is at once microcosm and macrocosm, offering an unique vantage point on the world, human nature and divinity — exactly what a writer needs.

The books were just a consequence of this different vantage point and so, *Refugees from Paradise* came out of a reflection on religious fundamentalism and unity, while *God Enchanter* came in the aftermath of the Iraq war that has affected the world, while the *Infinity Adventures*, a series for children is a dive into the unknown, into mysteries that seem hidden but are, in fact, open and all around us.

Auroville is not a hidden universe, no mystical Shangri-La. *A less discreet revelation prepares, a more concrete force manifests,*<sup>16</sup> as Sri Aurobindo had signalled as he sailed for Pondicherry in 1910.

Auroville is an open experiment and part of the struggling world. The scope for a writer is immense and challenging because the protagonist here is not the individual, nor the collective, it is the divine. For this city is a catalyst for the future.

CRADLE OF THE SUN  
 HANGS LIKE A BRIDGE  
 CORD OF UNITY  
 UNIVERSAL CHORD  
 BIRTHPLACE OF A NEW WORLD.

## 15 . BEYOND OPPOSITIONS

*Q. How dependent is the building of Auroville upon man’s acceptance of spirituality?*

16. CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 465.



M: The opposition between spirituality and material life, the division between the two has no sense for me as, in truth, life and the spirit are one and it is in and by the physical work that the highest Spirit must be manifested.<sup>17</sup>

\*

The Aspiration group that met the Mother once a week, said that people wanted a more inward, peaceful life, to garden and plant trees, things good for their yoga, rather than get into ‘outer’ concerns of city building and generating of money which, they told her, did not seem right. She would reply to them with an amazing patience.

To be practical, you must first have a very clear vision of your goal . . . money should be a power which belongs to nobody and which should be controlled by the most universal wisdom present.<sup>18</sup>

Auroville was an ideal several hundred years ahead of its time, she admitted, and we are not there yet.

. . . there is a long way to go between what we are and what must be. And for that we must be very flexible, never losing sight of the goal, but knowing that we cannot reach it at one bound and that we must find the way. . . . that is . . . even more difficult than to make the inner discovery. Truly speaking, that should have been made before coming here. . . .

To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be . . . now there are thirty of you, it is difficult, isn't it? When there are thirty thousand of you, it will be easier, because, naturally, there will be many more possibilities.<sup>19</sup>

Still, there were those who simply refused to believe the Mother had said that Auroville was for work, to build a city, and that drugs were not allowed. In 1971, a message was circulated finally:

Auroville is in full construction stage and disciplined workers are needed. Those who do not want, or are not able to follow a discipline should not be here at present. Goodwill, sincerity and discipline are indispensable qualities for those who want to be ‘Aurovilians’.<sup>20</sup>

\*

17. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 197.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

20. *Mother on Auroville*, p. 86.



Antonin Raymond was a Czech-American architect who had worked with Frank Lloyd Wright in Japan before setting up his own architectural office there.[. . .] Raymond was corresponding with Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire, one of Sri Aurobindo's early disciples, otherwise known as Pavitra in the Ashram.[. . .]

St. Hilaire wrote to Raymond about a modern dormitory that Sri Aurobindo wished to build for his disciples along with images of Pondicherry and its colonial architecture. Soon, Raymond sent back a concept accompanied by drawings, done in *a fire of a first inspiration. I think we have found something very beautiful, a solution of great simplicity.*<sup>21</sup>

\*

Years later, regarding Auroville, the Mother would say, “All those who participate in the experiment should be absolutely convinced that the highest consciousness is the best judge of the most material things.”<sup>22</sup>

\*

In 1969, Raymond wrote to the Mother congratulating her for Auroville, and here finally, we get a first indication from her: “Raymond is a great architect. When they came here and built Golconde, I asked Raymond to prepare the plan for the First Auroville — that was when Sri Aurobindo was still alive — and it was magnificent . . .”<sup>23</sup>

\*

Even as she wrote the ‘Dream’ in 1954, she began circulating a repeated message: “New forms are needed for the manifestation of a new Force.”<sup>24</sup> Once her focus returned to the ‘model town’, she began looking at a different plan, one more suited to the general conditions of the earth. This time she did not contact Raymond, she had another architect in mind, Roger Anger. “It is with a real joy that I read your letter of the 24<sup>th</sup> in reply to my project of the ‘ideal’ town. With joy, but also with no surprise, as I always felt you as the man of this project . . .”<sup>25</sup>

\*

21. [http://motherandsriaurobindo.in/#\\_StaticContentSriAurobindoAshram/-03%20The%20Asram/Departments/Golconde/-01%20Golconde\\_Construction\\_Part1.pdf](http://motherandsriaurobindo.in/#_StaticContentSriAurobindoAshram/-03%20The%20Asram/Departments/Golconde/-01%20Golconde_Construction_Part1.pdf) p. 9, last accessed on 26 September 2016.

22. *Mother on Auroville*, p. 28.

23. The Mother's conversation of 11 June 1969; *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 10.

24. CWM, Vol. 15, p. 91.

25. Gilles Guigan (ed.), *History of Auroville*, Book 3, Auroville: Auroville Archives, 2016, p. 6.

*Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.*

*The Charter*

A city is regarded as a ‘centre of population, commerce and culture’ but no other city in the world has such a Charter, nor such an unusual downtown in its city plan, the Peace Area. Where does the bridge from the past to the future lead, to what future does it leap? From where does the city plan take source and spiral out dynamically?

The future is a place without ego. *We want a race without ego,*<sup>26</sup> implies an extraordinary city: *where human beings can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness that is seeking to manifest.* She had made sure that we had a city plan so that we would not flounder around and develop in any old way.

\*

I began to discover that the galaxy plan which had once given me goose pimples was an experience that many other people had had, like Joseba and Anandi in Spain. But I often wondered if this experience was limited to people who came to Auroville in the first ten to twenty years, because, by the year 2000, the Galaxy was almost taboo. Then, a few years ago, at a meeting, I heard Jean L. talk about an experience he had in the late 1990s, on a flight home after a few weeks in the West. Looking out of his window as the aircraft flew over cities through the night he was taken aback by what he suddenly saw: sprawling, expanding, voracious development, glittering maps of humanity’s never-ending greed and equal suffering. It was as though he was suddenly witness to the horrific cancer driving humanity that could only grow out of control. And for no reason at all, he felt an unexpected longing to see the Auroville galaxy lit up below and its swirling embrace of oneness. That is when it came to Jean L. with an absolute certitude that that galaxy had to be, “That plan carries the hope of our future.”

Much more recently, as I sat talking to Sam, over lunch at Citadines, I asked what brought him to Auroville. He seemed surprised, even embarrassed by the question at first, as though it was a secret best left unspoken; but then he shrugged it off. Sam was studying law and finance in France, and working at the same time to sustain himself and his studies. There were delays and hurdles in clearing exams because of his job and he was starting to get quite fed up. One evening he went to see a friend, feeling rather frustrated and disoriented about where his life was going.

26. The Mother’s conversation of 2 April 1972; *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 13.

But his friend was stoned, watching an utterly brain-dead programme on TV, and totally uninterested in Sam's existential crisis. Even more irritated now, Sam picked up the remote and switched channels at random, when an image swirled on to the screen: a round, spiralling thing, which made him pause on the button and stare. What was it? But he couldn't quite make out, and that was it, the programme was over and his friend switched off the TV in a huff. Sam had no idea what he had just seen or on which channel. That night, for the first time, he had a vivid dream about that spiralling thing. The next night too, and the next. Sam was not used to having dreams, let alone remembering them, but this went on for nearly a month. Maybe it was some science fiction nonsense? Maybe some film he had seen? Maybe a real city . . . Sam finally googled 'spiral city' and there it was, the Auroville galaxy plan, *the city the earth needs*, and there we were, having lunch . . .

## 16. NEW FORMS FOR A NEW FORCE

*Auroville wants to be a new creation expressing a new consciousness in a new way and according to new methods.*<sup>27</sup>

The Auroville symbol is a good starting point, for it offers a simple summary of the city plan that any child can understand and draw. So is the Mother's explanation of the symbol given in August 1971:

The dot at the centre represents Unity, the Supreme; the inner circle represents the creation, the conception of the City; the petals represent the power of expression, realisation.<sup>28</sup>

We have it all there: the Matrimandir at the Centre, the Crown circle that holds all four zones together and prevents them from falling apart in a sprawl, and there are five petals, not just four as in 1965, because by 1968, the Greenbelt was introduced by Roger, a fifth zone, that is an integral part of Auroville's realisation.

Talking to *Auroville Today* in December 1988, Roger said:

I strongly wish that we would stop referring to the Galaxy Plan as Roger Anger's plan . . . It is not my vision, but the logical result of the research . . . and the Mother's presence in particular. Her inspiration and influence gave birth to the concept of the Galaxy. This concept contains in its entirety the message of the Mother and the Dream . . . (she) gave sufficient explanations concerning the

27. *Mother on Auroville*, p. 28.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

basis of her concept of spiritual urbanism . . . I'd say it is not the image of the Galaxy that imposes itself on Auroville, it is the necessity of the city corresponding to Mother's guidelines that leads us to the Galaxy.<sup>29</sup>

\*

The Galaxy is really an environmentally sustainable plan if you look at all the different parameters it covers and how sustainable cities are now being looked at . . .

Roger was not concerned only with buildings, but with everything that surrounded them, gave them life and new possibilities. . . .

Ideas were fast and free flowing: how high buildings should not become opaque and dense but offer trans-sections; solar panels on the roofs for energy self-sufficiency; use of water to bring a sense of fluidity and peace, at the same time how to solve the water problem once the population reached a certain density; solutions for quieter traffic and circulation. In the *Equals One* interview on the city in 1968 he would elaborate: *Auroville will attempt the rehabilitation of streets: a change from rushways to a satisfactory and happy system of circulation for man, from meeting place to meeting place: squares, fountains, gardens, pools, staircases, wings of shade, sudden shafts of light.*<sup>30</sup>

“You must remember,” Toine points out, “that these plans were made in the '60's and Roger was already talking about a green city, solar energy, humanity, avoiding an urban sprawl.”

The problem of density was the hardest to solve and yet leave enough open and green spaces in the city. The spiralling Lines of Force helped achieve this . . .

I would like to suggest here that the Lines of Force meant to resolve the population issue are actually a major urban invention, not yet equalled or achieved anywhere in the world at the scale of a collective life. Development today has come to mean high-density, high-rise towers that scar skylines everywhere and has made urban life faceless, aggressive and sterile. The Lines of Force offer the possibility of phased levels that gradually harmonise with other levels around it and even dialogue with the natural environment as it curves down to ground level. Their height peaks only to one end while their length opens many possibilities for collective and urban living and working patterns. Given that the Lines of Force are to be found in the residential and industrial sections, Auroville's town-planning group still has a lot to explore.

29. 'Pushing the Future Forward', interview with Roger Anger, Auroville Adventure, *Auroville Today*, December 1988, p. 110.

30. 'Meet the Architect', interview with Roger Anger, in *Equals One Newsletter*, Auroville Architecture, 1968, p. 17.

In 1968, the Matrimandir had not yet come into the picture. But once it did, it brought the inner dimension right into the heart of the city and the spiritual anchor was cast in the city's final plan. The luminous eddy spiralling over the earth's atmosphere clearly leaves an imprint . . .

Toine says with a whopping grin: "A city with a soul at its centre. Auroville should be upholding the Auropolis to the world!"

*"When Auroville is ready it will be a city among cities, and it is only its own capacity for truth which will have power . . ."*<sup>31</sup>

Let us see how it can get there, despite us.

\*

The 1968 interview is presented in the book, *Roger Anger: Research on Beauty*, by the architect, Anupama Kundoo, and provides a comprehensive and insightful document on the brief given to Roger as Auroville's chief architect. For him, *the first 'face'* of Auroville would be visible only after the town reached a population of 5,000 to 10,000. A *second 'face'* when it reached up to 25,000 people and, at 50,000, Auroville would reach its 100<sup>th</sup> monkey moment. The experiment would not need to grow further but neither would it need to reach completion in the conventional sense, for once the experiment was completed it would serve as a real model: "New Aurovilles will start being built," Roger said, "to solve community living problems all over the world."<sup>32</sup>

## 19. DIVINE ANARCHY

*The problem finally comes down to this: to replace the mental government of the intelligence by the government of a spiritualised consciousness.*<sup>33</sup>

— The Mother

Part of Auroville's problems with governance comes from an ambivalence about *authority*. Who is the client body? Who authorises Auroville, its building, its life, and will continue to do so, hundreds of years from now? In another response the Mother was more explicit: *The conception of Auroville is purely divine and has preceded its execution by many years. Naturally, in the details of the execution the*

31. The Mother's conversation of 21 September 1966; *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 7.

32. 'Meet the Architect', *Auroville Architecture*, p. 18.

33. The Mother's conversation of 30 December 1967, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 8.

*human consciousness intervenes.*<sup>34</sup> Which pretty much sums up the situation.

Auroville was born free. The first segment of the Charter states that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, it belongs to humanity as a whole. The first part of the ‘Dream’ affirms the same: a place where people can live freely as citizens of the world. That said, one must continue reading to the end of both segments, which tend to get deleted.

The first segment of the Charter ends with: *But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*

In the ‘Dream’: *where people can live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the Supreme Truth.*

Whoever we may try to fool, including ourselves, that we cannot. Our freedom is directly linked to our surrender to the Divine.

Standing up *for* that authority was at the core of the struggle with the SAS. Under the Auroville Foundation we do have a freedom, but we also have a more formal organisational structure. Real freedom is the toughest challenge of the Consciousness. What kind of organisation had the Mother envisaged for Auroville?

“An amusing definition occurs to me: a divine anarchy. But the world will not understand. . . . For this, one must be in contact with one’s psychic being, one must be guided by it and the ego’s authority and influence must disappear.”<sup>35</sup>

She answered a further set of questions put to her later. Obviously Auroville’s organisation is not a standard, rational process.

*Q: What should be the nature of this organisation, in the present and in the future?*

A: Organisation is a discipline of action, but for Auroville, we aspire to go beyond arbitrary and artificial organisations.

We want an organisation which is the expression of a higher consciousness working to manifest the truth of the future.

*Q: Until this group consciousness appears, and until we can work collectively in the true and right way, what should we do?*

A: A hierarchical organisation grouped around the most enlightened centre and submitting to a collective discipline.<sup>36</sup>

34. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 201.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

While we hankered after equal rights, consensus and democratic principles, she was proposing a hierarchy of consciousness, both flexible and progressive, of service to the collective. “What is needed to administer Auroville is a consciousness free from all conventions and conscious of the supramental Truth. I am still waiting for someone like that. Each one must do his best to achieve that.”<sup>37</sup> It was a very tall order. We were being encouraged to pull ourselves up, not wallow in a flatland.

But reality was far from perfect. We had been thrown together in a cauldron of change. When in duress we pressed the help button for the Divine, but when complacent, in doubt or in complete certitude, the divine often stepped back and watched us amused. Our collective life, though chaotic, had a charm that was memorable. Here is an extract from Roger Harris’s extravagant, tongue-in-cheek take on the Pour Tous meetings, the general meetings of the 1980s that appeared in *Auroville Today*. The piece offered a heady glimpse of the collective atmosphere of that time, with people arriving from all parts of town, in all manner of transport or else, walking. This was before the Auroville Foundation set in. We were less than 600 adults then, conditions were still very basic and rough, and where the inevitable fallacies of a democratic system collided with human nature:

There’s been a lot of debate as of late — much of it strident — in our general meetings and in the pages of the *Auroville News* — the equivalent of our weekly community bulletin board — as regards meetings, assemblies, decision-making quorums, democracy and rights of oppressed minorities and hierarchies . . . In this arena of conflicting views one issue (is) . . . the non-attendance of meetings, on a regular basis, by a large majority of the residents . . . I am a sporadic meeting goer these days which for some is a symptom of advanced civil delinquency and for others an illumined political statement . . . In this age of democracy you just go to a meeting and raise your hand to nominate your best friend or worst enemy — depending on the job to be filled. I, like many others, was a regular card-carrying meeting wallah back in the ’80s, a period some of today’s historical revisionists equate with the dark ages . . . those were the days when meetings were meetings and chairmen (even if they were women), were men, not facilitators trained in Findhorn . . . There were many memorable meetings but it was the Matrimandir Marathon of ’87 — billed as the clash of Titans — that had the highest rating ever. Historically entertaining, it was *nec plus ultra* as far as meetings go. The organisers outdid themselves in putting on a seven hour extravaganza that left even the most famished of our imperial and plebeian appetites sated for months . . .

37. *Ibid.*, p. 209.



The Auroville Foundation made a formal entry on 29 January 1991 with the establishment of the Office of Secretary, Auroville Foundation. The Foundation Act has three main bodies: a Governing Board (GB), an International Advisory Council (IAC), and a Residents' Assembly (RA) comprising the residents, the Aurovilians. The role of the Foundation has been to ensure Auroville's growth and development along the lines of the Charter: to structure and regulate its financial functioning within a valid legal framework: recommend visas for Aurovilians from other nations and to maintain a master list of residents.

This meant that we, ostensibly the RA, who now had a legal presence in this Act, had to become accountable, be responsible for policies of internal functioning, ensure there was development, select working groups and so on, while the GB would supervise, examine, approve and make sure we were properly managed and the IAC maintain an advisory role to ensure that Auroville was free to develop along the lines of the Charter.

Although this was a benign framework it was still a tectonic shift psychologically. That is not how the collective had functioned so far. The modalities of a government system seemed alien, even contrary to the kind of organisation expected of Auroville. We had, after all, set up some frameworks suited to our situation that were more supple and which worked well. It was a shared system largely based on trust. The government's system of accountability seemed diametrically opposite to the organisation we were meant to create. We seemed to drown in vouchers and it took us several years to get used to its logic and patterns of functioning.

Things were still in an ambivalent zone when I got elected to the second Working Committee. This happened by walking into a meeting by chance, in the Bharat Nivas library where I had gone to return some books. I was nominated as soon as I stepped in and though I thought it was a really bad choice there was no way out. Our team came to be known as the Working Committee of the Heart, a kind way of saying that we were an idealistic and inexperienced lot. The new secretary then decided to start introducing a few needed regulations, like an office order, and before long, we had a thundering revolt on our hands. It was as though the sky had finally fallen on our heads. Today, that particular regulation is routine. No one even blinks at such things any more, but it was a transition we had to go through.

Judith looks back at that moment with some regret. As Auroville began to slide into an inevitable bureaucratic groove, the collective first met it with an emotional reactivity. Instead, there should have been a much stronger assertion of faith, she tells me, "that we do this work as a sadhana. We should have been better at convincing them that finding another way of doing things was central to the experiment and our *raison d'être*. Of course we did not have the vision yet. We were looking for a collective economy, for unity in diversity, but all this is basically a question of consciousness. Yet, so much had gone into trying to find ways to work together and create systems that suited us." The fact that the Foundation did not take that into



account at all then, made things harder, but these are, she grins, “our occupational hazards. But still, those who represent Auroville to the Foundation or to the outside, should speak up for Auroville’s vision, because the normal criteria of organisation doesn’t always work for Auroville. Not because they are wrong, but because our goal is different. Look, for example, the Residents’ Assembly, it has definitely destroyed Auroville’s collective.” This is a concern voiced by many. “So many people seem badly cut off from that energy we had. It didn’t matter if you were hungry, the energy, the joy was there, and it carried us through all hardships. Now all that seems to have sunk under a deadweight of process.”

It is true that a large number of Aurovilians gradually stopped attending the RA meetings, so did I. First it had to do with a sense of officialdom creeping into our affairs but, in fact, it had more to do with the ways *we ourselves* were changing and becoming more officious with a new-found sense of democratic rights. Our meetings grew more organised, better facilitated, better behaved, but increasingly uninspiring and prone to conflict. They rarely unified us, and people dropped out. Everything could be contested now, sometimes even the Charter. Elections and votes became a tedious routine that often left working groups dysfunctional. “Why can’t we let people work!” was a refrain heard from many in the last years, while a self-appointed lobby of ‘concerned citizens’ ran roughshod blocking people, projects, even a proposal for art at a roundabout. Instead it proposed a tree. Art and culture get knocked out by oil and power in some parts of the world, in Auroville by an active environmental lobby. Either way, it is a matter of concern. More and more people stepped away from meetings still hoping for a collective body governed by the soul.

After his talk on the Auroville Foundation Act, Alain Bernard was asked why Kireet had given importance to the Residents’ Assembly in the Act. To begin with, Alain B. clarified, Kireet was not even sure it would be accepted. “I would not like to create a democratic system in Auroville with votes and the rest,” Kireet had said. What was more important for him was that the Assembly of Residents be recognised and to give “a legal status to the Residents’ Assembly, without specifications . . . so as to give the Aurovilians the possibility to evolve and gradually find the proper governing method. As it is, if the Aurovilians are united, they practically have the power.”<sup>38</sup>

It always comes back to Unity. In other words, to Consciousness. Could something better emerge? This led to an exercise called the Retreat, bringing an opening of energies. The Retreat brought a wide participation and welcomed the youth. It was an attempt to look at issues afresh, specially in education, governance, the environment, but again, there was no space for the city, which ironically holds the

38. Alain Bernard, ‘Genesis of the Auroville Foundation Act’, *Gazette Aurovilienne*, Pavillon de France Publication, Auroville, 2014, p. 57.

missing link to all other issues. Instead, an organised road blockade was orchestrated, alongside the Retreat to gain attention. This was a radial road in the Industrial Zone, one of the two high-density areas of the city which certainly needs proper access to grow. As long as the city remains a persona non grata, and manipulated out of collective platforms, real collective solutions will continue to elude us.

Apart from the changes the Auroville Foundation brought into our collective functioning, other factors entered that were strongly revisionist.

The second resulted from a court case registered against Auroville International, Germany accusing it of being a sect. This was horrific and embarrassing. Religious we were not, it went against the grain of Auroville, and a sect we had no intention of becoming. It brought an extreme reaction and somewhere, consciously or unconsciously, quite a section of people went into denial. We began to delete all mention of the Divine, the Consciousness and the Truth, lest people thought we were a sect. Quoting the Mother or Sri Aurobindo now met with reprimand. Schools were advised to stop ‘indoctrinating’ the kids. Instead, children grew up aware of many cultural and environmental concepts but very little about the adventure they lived in. In a sense, both our ‘maps’ — the city and the Charter — had been affected. Yet, strangely enough, this period saw a rapid proliferation of New Age ideas and workshops.

All kinds of gurus came into vogue: spiritual, organic, environmental, architectural, everyone except the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Shoved underground, they carried on despite our hang-ups, made clandestine appearances, and even embarrassed us publicly now and then. It was their city after all. But with them relatively out of sight, we started to assume that we were in charge, and Auroville started to project itself as a predominantly environmental, socio-economic model to the world.

Certainly, all ‘original’ visions evolve with time and circumstance. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that the founding vision of Auroville lies in front. It was created for the future, and is yet to be fully tested, experienced and accomplished, and made physically manifest to some substantial degree, by a substantial population that has lived the experiment and endured the demands of the consciousness sufficiently to testify if the experiment is a success or a failure. That much needs to happen before we blithely consider rewriting the Charter or discredit the city.

An organisation meant for divine anarchy is often confused with basic anarchy. Someone wrote to the Mother that he had come to Auroville to obey only himself, and he found there were rules and laws, which he refused to follow. “I’m free.” To which she replied:

“One is free only when one is conscious of the Divine, and conscious that it is the Divine who makes the decisions in everyone, otherwise one is a slave of one’s desires . . .”<sup>39</sup>

39. The Mother’s conversation of 7 February 1970; *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 11.

“. . . It [the anarchic state] will be the perfect government when everyone is conscious of the inner Divine and obeys Him and Him alone.”<sup>40</sup>

\*

The real authority, however invisible, continues to rule over dozens of working groups, committees and councils, the Foundation and other bodies, and over each and every one, through turmoil and harmony, down to the littlest detail of our life, slowly shifting emphasis from the small ego-self to the greater Self of the soul, learning to surrender and to be truly free. All organising or governing bodies of Auroville exist to facilitate this overarching ‘authority’.

In a first interview with *Auroville Today*, the chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Karan Singh, likened the Foundation to an aircraft, ready for take-off. “And who are the pilots? Clearly, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the pilots of this unique undertaking.” He saw the Foundation members as the cabin crew, who facilitate the passengers, the Aurovilians, to shoot an arrow into the future.<sup>41</sup>

There was pertinent advice from J.R.D. Tata as well, then member of the International Advisory Council: “I would like the Aurovilians to keep their freedom. I don’t mean a legal freedom, but a soul freedom,” to safeguard the freedom of thought and the right to pioneer, from any type of interference or institutionalisation. “Auroville is not just an idea. It is the future, the future of the world.”<sup>42</sup>

More recently, at the Auroville Festival in Chennai, 2015, Dr. Karan Singh referred to two philosophers to draw attention to Auroville’s intention: First, Arthur Koestler’s theory, in which human beings are programmed to self-destruct and then, Sri Aurobindo’s theory in which human beings were programmed to evolve — which was Auroville’s main business in all areas of life and work.

“Auroville has reached a plateau,” Dr. Karan Singh remarked at the Retreat, held soon after, in February, “and it’s either a time for a breakthrough or a breakdown,” signalling the need to find new ways forward, encourage youth to come and participate in the experiment and to start building that ‘mythical’ city with the full cooperation and goodwill of the Aurovilians and “highlight that Auroville is specifically a place of spiritual growth and transformation”.

Auroville has been immensely fortunate to have people with wideness and vision to help foster this experiment: to allow it to make mistakes, yet insist on accountability and encourage it to grow according to its aims.

40. *Ibid.*

41. ‘The Foundation: An aeroplane not a bullock cart’. Interview with Dr. Karan Singh, Auroville Adventure, *Auroville Today*, September 1992, p. 103.

42. ‘Don’t lose the pioneering spirit’. Interview with J.R.D. Tata, Auroville Adventure, *Auroville Today*, September 1992, p. 147.

I spoke with Mr. Srinivasmurthy, who joined the Foundation office as its finance officer in 1995, and was recently promoted to undersecretary. He is well aware of our challenges as well as our fears regarding the role of the government, given that Auroville was created as an experiment beyond borders.

“First of all,” he tells me, “I am a devotee.” He comes from Chennai, where he worked in the finance sector, and had been visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry since 1985. “It was the Mother’s Grace that I was offered this position.” For years we have seen him volunteer for duty at the Matrimandir. Mr. Srinivasmurthy recalls coming to work under Dr. S. C. Dey, the second secretary to the Foundation, also a devotee, under whom he learnt a great deal, and particularly, under Bala Bhaskar, who helped establish the bridges of goodwill with the community.

The thing to understand about the Foundation, he explains, is that the government is an established system and it functions according to the act passed by parliament and rules established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development under which the institution falls.

I ask him if any other government would recognise a Supreme Authority higher than itself, as the Indian government has done, from the start.

He smiles. “The Foundation has tried to offer Auroville the protection for its lands and assets and facilitation that a democratic government can. In such an experiment, any enforcement becomes an ethical dilemma and there is a wise and mature non-interference on the part of the Governing Board, yet supportive, so that you can create your own initiatives and efforts to build goodwill. Don’t expect the government to do the yoga for you, but it will exceed your expectations of help and benevolence if you are sincere about achieving your goals.”

Why then has Auroville become over-bureaucratized? Was it necessary to make things so complicated? Can it one day achieve self-determination as intended?

“See, certain things have to be ensured, certain conditions met so that you have a credibility and transparency in your functioning for yourself and before the world. That trust is important. Beyond that it does not have to be more complicated. Of course, positions of power and authority anywhere are not easy to let go of, and it complicates things; even for you. For external relations you need to follow some official procedures, but internally, you don’t have to do the same things, then you will be perpetuating the old system. You all have a vocal minority and a silent majority. These are the people doing the work, doing the sadhana. They may not advertise this, are not even known, seen or heard, but there is a sincerity and an aspiration. These are the people really holding Auroville together and that is why it has to be protected. If the youth and other Aurovilians, who have some capacities, are trained to work with the government, one day that presence can be minimised. To work with the government, be part of it, you have to let go of some fears. One day, you can bring something new to it, who knows? If you are able to master the fears and think creatively, it can be done, even if it sounds a bit philosophical. A

little gratitude helps.”

The broad range of administrative and working groups include the Working Committee, the Auroville Council, the Finance and Assets Management Committee, Aurofuture, or the Town Development Council (TDC), Housing Group, Land Board, Green group, Farm group, Forest group, International Zone group, Village Action group, Residents’ Assembly group, Outreach group, Facilitating groups and sub-groups, ad infinitum . . .

*No more committees. No more useless talk.*<sup>43</sup>

The Mother’s recommendation haunts us often, It sounds like a dream. Imagine: no need to argue, debate or veto things forever. To be able to trust the Divine completely, and each other. To let people find their place and let them get on with their work. Instead, we have over a hundred groups, each with a set of policies that often get in each other’s way and plenty of useless talk.

“We have to simplify,” Nathalie throws up her hands. “How much administration do 1,500 adults need?”

\*

Nathalie came to Auroville in 1971 with her mother, when she was seven years old. She lived in Promesse, in Aspiration, and later moved to Slancio with the older kids when she was in her teens. “It was incredible to be a child then, we had a beautiful school and there was such a mix of kids in Last School. Children came on the bus from the Ashram, there were the Tibetan kids, the local Tamil kids, and the mix of Auroville kids, Western and Indian. We never felt we were different. We just belonged.” Nathalie went back to Europe for some years and returned again in the mid-1990s and has been working at Udavi School for some time now. A few months ago, the Auroville roads suddenly surprised us with a set of beautifully designed, humorous wildlife road signs, featuring mongooses, porcupines, ants, chameleons and more that Nathalie put together with a few friends. Typically, the signs brought a fair amount of debate: Were they politically correct and roadworthy? Did they distract drivers? With whose permission?

“It is surreal sometimes,” Nathalie says, “but sitting in a meeting as a silent observer can sometimes be a very good school, you know? You learn about human nature, the power struggles people go through. We need to go beyond the democratic process, which is endless. For myself, I sometimes think I haven’t progressed at all! I can still get hurt or angry and upset with things. Not yet the inner psychic poise,” she grins, “I’m still an aspiring Aurovilian. If the collective could really have that

43. *The Mother on Auroville*, p. 84.

psychic quality that is spontaneous, inventive and joyful, but we seem stuck in conflicting mental contradictions.”

Given how contentious the city has become, Sonali, an architect who came from Pune, decided that the only way is an acceptance of all human reactions, not to push but to go step by step. She came to Auroville drawn by the image of the Galaxy plan, its experimental ideas, hoping to see something of the city. She worked with Anupama for some years and eventually set up her own practice, even though both of them continue to collaborate.

“I stay here for the inner anchor. Even when it was difficult and I’ve had no projects to work on, I stayed, because Auroville is more important than all that and there is a real satisfaction working here. So I try not to push and let things come. In collective projects there can be a lot of stress over little details and it can get very competitive and pushy, without the larger view or the larger good.”

Sonali has worked on collective housing projects and public buildings, but is very happy now to work on a project to complete the underground Amphitheatre rooms in Matrimandir with another architect, Ganesh. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to work for Matrimandir and I can work on it the whole day. I would love to see the Matrimandir Lake happen and more public spaces where Auroville’s life can manifest in beautiful and consciously designed spaces. I think with all these years, though one gets more attached to Auroville, at the same time one grows a little detached from oneself and the ego also goes. Now I enjoy the process of my work more and more.”

Such detachment will be necessary through the ping-pong of blame till we reach a collaborative system of governance to help break the logjam. “Good governance enables a city,” Anupama reflects, “that has been the case historically and even now. Auroville needs an organisation that can make things happen in a collaborative way, in a spirit of non-rivalry, among architects and all concerned, because the city *is* the collective being.”

Sindhuja, a young architect from Chennai, is a new-generation Aurovilian, who landed here on a weekend college trip to see a fashion show hosted by Colours of Nature and was just blown away. The atmosphere of the place, the dense green, the non-religious context and the freedom to experiment in architecture, it all felt like a dream. After graduating she returned to intern with Andre H. and worked with him for some years. Discovering his process with the Mother was a mind opener and, reading through the *Conversations with the Mother* one day it was as though “she was answering all the questions that I did not even know I had inside me. It was incredible, and there she was, answering them.” Sindhuja is now actively involved in many areas of Auroville life. Apart from her own architectural practice, she serves on the Auroville Council and is part of the Youth Link team, all of which makes her both a witness and a participant in a wide cross-current of energies, controversies and challenges.



“It is a pity that new people have to take sides which they did not create, instead of putting all their energies to make Auroville happen. I don’t know why we keep wanting to put ourselves above the vision, it is like nurturing our collective ego instead of our collective self. There are too many checks and balances in our functioning with which we block out each other. It’s like trying to build with fear. You can’t. Often, the problem is with those who have lost the dream. The negativity they project on the collective is very heavy, even destructive. Some just want to settle scores. In recent years so many people seem to have come here for all kinds of things: trees, sustainability, business, financial gain, status, but not for Auroville. It’s at a very human level now, very basic, less and less trust. No amount of meetings and groups will bring us the answers. The only thing needed is a surrender, a will to make things change instead of using our energies to block each other.”

I ask her how she sees the city and the resistance towards it. “The city is happening while we argue, simply because there is a need for it. The choice is whether we keep up with the old battles or let it happen. The opposition is really a mental one, the mind hardening to make itself resist. But the Galaxy is not in the realm of the mind. Being for or against means nothing for it. But the mind is not willing to let things through, not willing to be quiet and see what can come. Things become insincere and political when we want to remain stuck, which is disturbing. Then there are people who want to project Auroville as some grand lifestyle project, the good life and so on, and there are those who feel it is their ‘right’ to have everything.”

More recently there have been discussions about forming New Town Development Authority (NTDA) in a way suited to the Auroville experiment in order to protect its lands. But this too has met with resistance and some, like Pashi, worry that we are losing precious time and opportunity and goodwill offered to safeguard the land for the city and its green belt. “Look, if I think about it in the normal way there are all kinds of fears,” says Sindhuja. “But Auroville is not ‘normal’. Some Grace must have been protecting Auroville through all those difficult years, no? People also had a resistance to the Foundation. It is important not to get stuck on the ‘no’. Otherwise our supposed fear will block the protection Auroville needs for the land. It might even help us get our act together.”

“I love being here,” Sindhuja tells me with an assurance that bodes well for Auroville’s future. “I would not be anywhere else for anything! We can ponder about our problems forever, but answers won’t come that way because Auroville is made differently. It just needs our will to make it happen.”

For someone who built Golconde in the 1930s, started a city in the 1960s, in the middle of nowhere, planted its soul at the very centre and was reportedly in a hurry to get the city going, the bold spring towards future realisations was never going to be a half-hearted affair and many new energies are still needed to fulfil it.

While all other areas of Auroville are moving along, it is only the city which

appears to bring the greatest difficulties and resistance, so there is a mystery here. While all other things bring us to an individual transformation, the city is a collective catalyst shaking us up through our resistance and hope and surrender, to change, to learn, to let go, and to grow. It is both catalyst and cauldron in that sense, but also the swirl of a greater dream pulling us forward.

One ray of light in all this has been a need felt by some to go back to source and relearn Auroville. It was initiated by Mita D. very recently as a series of knowledge-based presentations which she felt were absolutely needed. She was joined by Inge and Sandrya to create the CAT sessions, an acronym for Create Auroville Together. CAT has been re-exploring a variety of subjects starting with the city and onwards to economy, education, town planning, the Charter and more, where the meeting is an opportunity to learn and share ideas rather than flounder in preconceived debate and half knowledge which tends to create misunderstandings and divisions. Though still young, the CATs have a potential for being a collective catalyst.

ANU MAJUMDAR

(Reproduced in arrangement with HarperCollins *Publishers* India Private Limited from the book *Auroville: A City for the Future* authored by Anu Majumdar and first published by them. © Anu Majumdar, 2017. All rights reserved. Unauthorised copying is strictly prohibited.)





*an honest business for honest people*

*With Best Compliments from:*

## **S. N. Sunderson & Co.**

**1, Deshbandhu Gupta Road  
Post Box No. 5713  
New Delhi - 110 055**

E-mail: [contact@snsunderson.com](mailto:contact@snsunderson.com) Telephone: 23612776, 43750060  
Fax: 011-23620632

### *Our Lines of Business:*

- *Limestone and Dolomite*
- *Coal Handling Agents*

### *Branches at:*

**Kolkata, Dhanbad, Katni, Jukehi, Niwar, Lucknow, Varanasi,  
Singrauli, Asansol, Ranchi, Bilaspur, Nagpur, Ramgarh,  
Khelari, Manindergarh, Guwahati and Puducherry**

**Completed 93 years on Basant 2019**

---

*“Generosity is to find one’s own satisfaction  
in the satisfaction of others.”*

*THE MOTHER*

## **Blue Star Diamonds Pvt. Ltd.**

Tower “C” 9010,  
Bharat Diamonds Bourse,  
Bandra-Kurla Complex,  
Bandra (East)  
Bombay - 400 051 (India)