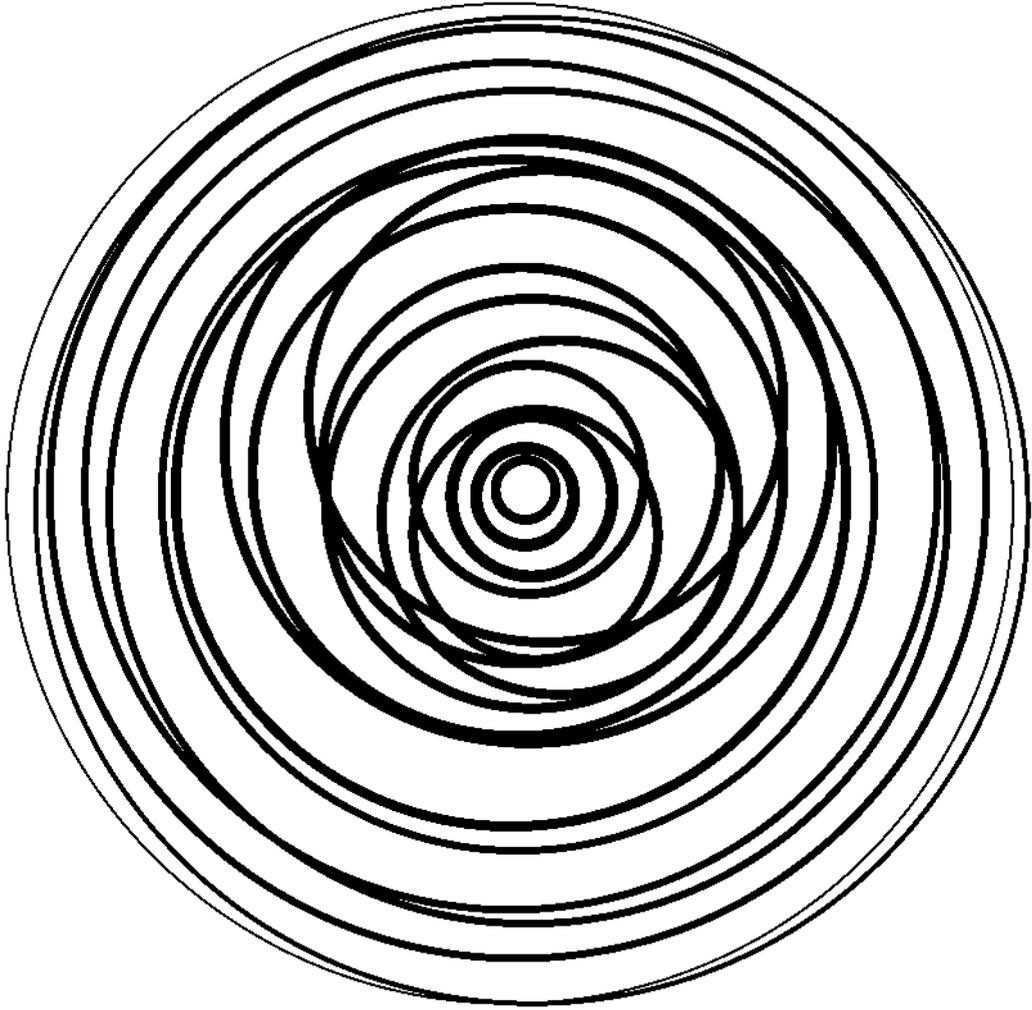


# ऋतम् • Ritam

Volume 5 • Issue 1 • May 2008



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**A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville**  
Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research

# ऋतम् • Ritam

Volume 5 • Issue 2 • May 2008



A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville

Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research

## **RITAM**

A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

### **Our aim:**

- This is a journal under SAIER connecting the various units under its umbrella with the focus on education and other related areas of research.
- The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.
- It will publish articles, interviews etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.
- This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.
- The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.

*Dear readers,*

*We look forward to your suggestions and comments. We would especially like to know whether you would want to continue to receive the journal by regular mail. All issues would also be up on the web at*

*<http://www.auroville.org/index/ritam.htm>.*

*If you are comfortable reading it there, we need not send you a hard copy. If you would like us to send a copy to others who may be interested in receiving one, do let us know. For the moment, we are not putting a subscription price.*

*Please email us at [saiier@auroville.org](mailto:saiier@auroville.org) in with your views and for any other information. We hope you enjoy this issue!*

*Editor*

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# *To the Children of the Ashram*

*The Mother*

There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavors to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it.

You have the immense privilege of having come quite young to the Ashram, that is to say, still plastic and capable of being moulded according to this new ideal and thus become the representatives of the new race. Here, in the Ashram, you are in the most favourable conditions with regard to the environment, the Influence, the teaching and the example, to awaken in you this supramental consciousness and to grow according to its law,

Now, all depends on your will and your sincerity. If you have the will no more to belong to ordinary humanity, no more to be merely evolved animals, if your will is to become men of the new race realising Sri Aurobindo's supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth, you will find here all the necessary help to achieve your purpose: you will profit fully by your stay in the Ashram and eventually become living examples for the world.

24th July 1951



# *On Indian Art*

*Sri Aurobindo*

All great artistic work proceeds from an act of intuition, not really an intellectual idea or a splendid imagination,—these are only mental translations,—but a direct intuition of some truth of life or being, some significant form of that truth, some development of it in the mind of man. And so far there is no difference between great European and great Indian work. Where then begins the immense divergence? It is there in everything else, in the object and field of the intuitive vision, in the method of working out the sight or suggestion, in the part taken in the rendering by the external form and technique, in the whole way of the rendering to the human mind, even in the centre of our being to which the work appeals. The European artist gets his intuition by a suggestion from an appearance in life and Nature or, if it starts from something in his own soul, relates it at once to an external support. He brings down that intuition into his normal mind and sets the intellectual idea and the imagination in the intelligence to clothe it with a mental stuff which will render its form to the moved reason, emotion, aesthesis. Then he missions his eye and hand to execute it in terms which start from a colourable “imitation” of life and Nature—and in ordinary hands too often end there—to get at an interpretation that really changes it into the image of something not outward in our own being or in universal being which was the real thing seen. And to that in looking at the work we have to get back through colour and line and disposition or whatever else may be part of the external means, to their mental suggestions and through them to the soul of the whole matter. The appeal is not direct to the eye of the deepest self and spirit within, but to the outward soul by a strong awakening of the sensuous, the vital, the emotional, the intellectual and imaginative being, and of the spiritual we get as much or

as little as can suit itself to and express itself through the outward man. Life, action, passion, emotion, idea, Nature seen for their own sake and for an aesthetic delight in them, these are the object and field of this creative intuition. The something more which the Indian mind knows to be behind these things looks out, if at all, from behind many veils. The direct and unveiled presence of the Infinite and its godheads is not evoked or thought necessary to the greater greatness and the highest perfection.

The theory of ancient Indian art at its greatest—and the greatest gives its character to the rest and throws on it something of its stamp and influence—is of another kind. Its highest business is to disclose something of the Self, the Infinite, the Divine to the regard of the soul, the Self through its expressions, the Infinite through its living finite symbols, the Divine through his powers. Or the Godheads are to be revealed, luminously interpreted or in some way suggested to the soul’s understanding or to its devotion or at the very least to a spiritually or religiously aesthetic emotion. When this hieratic art comes down from these altitudes to the intermediate worlds behind ours, to the lesser godheads or genii, it still carries into them some power or some hint from above. And when it comes quite down to the material world and the life of man and the things of external Nature, it does not altogether get rid of the greater vision, the hieratic stamp, the spiritual seeing, and in most good work—except in moments of relaxation and a humorous or vivid play with the obvious—there is always something more in which the seeing presentation of life floats as in an immaterial atmosphere. Life is seen in the self or in some suggestion of the infinite or of something beyond or there is at least a touch

and influence of these which helps to shape the presentation. It is not that all Indian work realises this ideal; there is plenty no doubt that falls short, is lowered, ineffective or even debased, but it is the best and the most characteristic influence and execution which gives its tone to an art and by which we must judge. Indian art in fact is identical in its spiritual aim and principle with the rest of Indian culture.

A seeing in the self accordingly becomes the characteristic method of the Indian artist and it is directly enjoined on him by the canon. He has to see first in his spiritual being the truth of the thing he must express and to create its form in his intuitive mind; he is not bound to look out first on outward life and Nature for his model, his authority, his rule, his teacher or his fountain of suggestions. Why should he when it is something quite inward he has to bring out into expression? It is not an idea in the intellect, a mental imagination, an outward emotion on which he has to depend for his stimulants, but an idea, image, emotion of the spirit, and the mental equivalents are subordinate things for help in the transmission and give only a part of the colouring and the shape. A material form, colour, line and design are his physical means of the expression, but in using them he is not bound to an imitation of Nature, but has to make the form and all else significant of his vision, and if that can only be done or can best be done by some modification, some pose, some touch or symbolic variation which is not found in physical Nature, he is at perfect liberty to use it, since truth to his vision, the unity of the thing he is seeing and expressing is his only business. The line, colour and the rest are not his first, but his last preoccupation, because they have to carry on them a world of things which have already taken spiritual form in his mind. He has not for instance to re-create for us the human face and body of the Buddha or some one passion or incident of his life, but to reveal the calm of Nirvana through a figure of the Buddha, and every detail and accessory must be turned into a means or an aid of his purpose. And even when it is some human passion or

incident he has to portray, it is not usually that alone, but also or more something else in the soul to which it points or from which it starts or some power behind the action that has to enter into the spirit of his design and is often really the main thing. And through the eye that looks on his work he has to appeal not merely to an excitement of the outward soul, but to the inner self, antaratman. One may well say that beyond the ordinary cultivation of the aesthetic instinct necessary to all artistic appreciation there is a spiritual insight or culture needed if we are to enter into the whole meaning of Indian artistic creation, otherwise we get only at the surface external things or at the most at things only just below the surface. It is an intuitive and spiritual art and must be seen with the intuitive and spiritual eye.

This is the distinctive character of Indian art and to ignore it is to fall into total incomprehension or into much misunderstanding. Indian architecture, painting, sculpture are not only intimately one in inspiration with the central things in Indian philosophy, religion, Yoga, culture, but a specially intense expression of their significance. There is much in the literature which can be well enough appreciated without any very deep entry into these things, but it is comparatively a very small part of what is left of the other arts, Hindu or Buddhistic, of which this can be said. They have been very largely a hieratic aesthetic script of India's spiritual, contemplative and religious experience.

Architecture, sculpture and painting, because they are the three great arts which appeal to the spirit through the eye, are those too in which the sensible and the invisible meet with the strongest emphasis on themselves and yet the greatest necessity of each other. The form with its insistent masses, proportions, lines, colours, can here only justify them by their service for the something intangible it has to express; the spirit needs all the possible help of the material body to interpret itself to itself through the eye, yet asks of it that it shall be as transparent a veil as possible of its own greater significance. The

art of the East and the art of the West—each in its characteristic or mean, for there are always exceptions,—deal with the problem of these two interlocking powers in a quite different way. The Western mind is arrested and attracted by the form, lingers on it and cannot get away from its charm, loves it for its own beauty, rests on the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic suggestions that arise directly from its most visible language, confines the soul in the body; it might almost be said that for this mind form creates the spirit, the spirit depends for its existence and for everything it has to say on the form. The Indian attitude to the matter is at the opposite pole to this view. For the Indian mind form does not exist except as a creation of the spirit and draws all its meaning and value from the spirit. Every line, arrangement of mass, colour, shape, posture, every physical suggestion, however many, crowded, opulent they may be, is first and last a suggestion, a hint, very often a symbol which is in its main function a support for a spiritual emotion, idea, image that again goes beyond itself to the less definable, but more powerfully sensible reality of the spirit which has excited these movements in the aesthetic mind and passed through them into significant shapes.

This characteristic attitude of the Indian reflective and creative mind necessitates in our view of its creations an effort to get beyond at once to the inner spirit of the reality it expresses and see from it and not from outside. ... Here the only right way is to get at once through a total intuitive or revelatory impression or by some meditative dwelling on the whole, dhyana in the technical Indian term, to the spiritual meaning and atmosphere, make ourselves one with that as completely as possible, and then only the helpful meaning and value of all the rest comes out with a complete and revealing force. For here it is the spirit that carries the form, while in most Western art it is the form that carries whatever there may be of spirit. The striking phrase of Epictetus recurs to the mind in which he describes man as a little soul carrying a corpse, *psucharion ei bastazon nekron*. The

more ordinary Western outlook is upon animate matter carrying in its life a modicum of soul. But the seeing of the Indian mind and of Indian art is that of a great, a limitless self and spirit, *maha atma*, which carries to us in the sea of its presence a living shape of itself small in comparison to its own infinity, but yet sufficient by the power that informs this symbol to support some aspect of that infinite's self-expression. It is therefore essential that we should look here not solely with the physical eye informed by the reason and the aesthetic imagination, but make the physical seeing a passage to the opening of the inner spiritual eye and a moved communion in the soul. A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things; but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one's self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life. That is why the Japanese with their fine sense in these things,—a sense which modern Europe with her assault of crowded art galleries and over-pictured walls seems to have quite lost, though perhaps I am wrong, and those are the right conditions for display of European art,—have put their temples and their Buddhas as often as possible away on mountains and in distant or secluded scenes of Nature and avoid living with great paintings in the crude hours of daily life, but keep them by preference in such a way that their undisputed suggestion can sink into the mind in its finer moments or apart where they can go and look at them in a treasured secrecy when the soul is at leisure from life. That is an indication of the utmost value pointing to the nature of the appeal made by Eastern art and the right way and mood for looking at its creations.

# Sri Aurobindo – An Eternal Birth

## The Mother

*You spoke of Sri Aurobindo's birth as "eternal" in the history of the universe. What exactly was meant by "eternal"?*

The sentence can be understood in four different ways on four ascending planes of consciousness:

1. Physically, the consequence of the birth will be of eternal importance to the world.
2. Mentally, it is a birth that will be eternally remembered in the universal history.
3. Psychically, a birth that recurs for ever from age to age upon earth.
4. Spiritually, the birth of the Eternal upon earth.

1957

*What Sri Aurobindo  
represents in the world's  
history is not a teaching,  
not even a revelation;  
it is a decisive action  
direct from the Supreme*

*Dans l'histoire du monde,  
ce que Sri Aurobindo représente,  
ce n'est pas un enseignement,  
même pas une révélation,  
c'est une action décisive  
venue tout droit du Suprême.*

## *Sri Aurobindo Comes to Auroville*

*Dianna Bowler*



Photograph by Giorgio

At 11pm on February 21st 2008, under the auspicious rays of ‘Guru Purnima’, the full moon dedicated to honouring our Teachers and Guides – which this year, unusually, coincided with the Mother’s Birthday – ten to fifteen people carried Sri Aurobindo’s statue, ignominiously lying on its back, head first, up the incline at Savitri Bhavan. It was then raised, with much shouting of instructions, waving of torches and deep intakes of breath, to a vertical position on a granite pedestal located in the centre of a circular lotus pond.

Sri Aurobindo was now standing there in full magnificence, his body powerful, beautifully draped, his hands and feet large, as if poised to walk to the horizon. His face was intense with a concentrated intelligence, his bronze patina contrasting with the white granite of Savitri Bhavan. He is poised there in front of the snow-white materialization of his epic poem “Savitri” for ever.

In the Indian tradition, a presence or a force radiates from a sacred object such as this statue

of Sri Aurobindo. To his devotees he is not seen just as a historical figure identified with name and life-dates on a plaque. He is, in the mysteriously suggestive words of the Mother ‘An eternal birth’. The power of Sri Aurobindo’s presence most people find in his eyes, each eye radiating a very different light. Like the Mother’s eyes, the right one is piercing, all seeing, while the left is remote, looking deeply inwards. As a Tamil lady said when she gazed up at the statue, “Someone is in there.” Somebody else said: “It is as if he was always there.”

Predictably in Auroville, people’s attitudes towards the erection of the statue varied. One lady’s immediate response when she heard about it was; “Oh no!” – as she imagined the statues of politicians to be found all over India. Many Aurovilians felt unhappy that they had not been consulted about it at all. And then, would Sri Aurobindo have wanted a statue of himself? Did it have to be at Savitri Bhavan? The decision was taken when the Chairman of the Auroville

Foundation, Dr. Karan Singh, was in Auroville in September 2007. He had informed the Working Committee beforehand that he would like to have a statue of Sri Aurobindo installed in Auroville, and asked them to suggest a suitable location. During his visit he was shown several possible alternatives. When he saw the lotus pond outside the main entrance of Savitri Bhavan he immediately felt that this was the most suitable place. Savitri Bhavan architect Helmut had already seen a version of the proposed statue, and admired it, so the Chairman's proposal was welcomed. The next day Dr. Karan Singh stated publicly that he wished to dedicate the statue on February 29th 2008. Lalit Verma, the owner of Aurodam Art Gallery in Puducherry, would be preparing the statue in his workshop garden.

Lalit is a child of the Ashram. He explains: "To be allowed to create this statue is a huge privilege for me. I am Sri Aurobindo's son and I want to express my love for my guru. The whole experience is part of a guru-disciple relationship. I had decided beforehand, that if I was not completely satisfied with the statue, I would destroy it.

"There are now four of these statues in India. One is in Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Calcutta, which is the house he was born in, one in the Parliament House in New Delhi, the other in Surat, close to where Sri Aurobindo's momentous intervention in the Indian National Congress took place in December 1907, and now in Auroville, a city dedicated to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



"The main problem in creating the statue was that there are only a dozen photographs of Sri Aurobindo, all but one of them showing him in a sitting position. They were either taken in his youth or in his old age, with a gap of nearly 50 years in between. We blew them up to a huge size and lived surrounded by them for months as we worked. I got craftsmen from Calcutta, devotees of Sri Aurobindo, who lived on the premises in my garden workshop in Pondicherry for the most part of a year while working on it. They submitted 9 different models, which we rejected one by one, until I was satisfied. We felt fully convinced, when the only person who had seen and worked with Sri Aurobindo still alive, Nirodbaran, at that time above 100 years old, gave his approval.

"For the casting we used various metals (mainly copper alloyed with tin) in the traditional composition used for South Indian sculptures – though nowadays many different metals are used. Helmut added some of his parents' gold jewellery to the mix as well as a few gold leaves from the Matrimandir gilding workshop, as it is said that gold gives a particular vibration.

"The process was laborious as we used the traditional, age old "*cire perdu*" or "lost wax" procedure, which today is essentially the same as it was in 2000 or 3000 BC. The principle is easily explained: a wax model of the sculpture is embedded in clay. Through firing in a kiln (more or less as it is being done for pottery) the clay gets baked and the wax melts and evaporates ("lost wax") thus leaving the negative hollow form of the sculpture within the burned clay, to be filled immediately with molten bronze. After a cooling time of a couple of hours the clay can be broken off the now hardened metal core, revealing the unfinished sculpture – solid bronze has replaced the former wax!

"In practical reality things of course are a bit more complicated, especially when huge sculptures above life size are to be cast: apart from subdividing it into parts, to be cast separately and joined later, special care has to be taken



to assure even and thorough filling with liquid metal. In order to avoid air pockets, vents have to be attached carefully at the right places, as well as canals and conduits to facilitate distribution and easy flow of metal. All this shows, after the removal of the clay, as a treelike network of metal branches, which, when invisible in the hollow inside of the statue, add to its structural firmness, but are very disturbing when visible on the outside.

“After casting, a laborious process of finishing will start. Vents and conduits have to be removed with a hacksaw and the different parts will be assembled and joined by welding. Where necessary, the surface has to be ground and polished and finally treated chemically in order to initiate the process of forming a patina.

“A lot of course can happen during this rather complicated process. One of the moulds might get damaged – at worst to become obvious only after removing the clay, in which case we would have to start all over again ; or, as happened to us at one critical moment when we ran short of high energy coal, hardly available in Puducherry, urgently needed to keep the metal in our improvised foundry up at a casting temperature of 1200 degrees Celsius!

“The ancient Greeks and Renaissance sculptors such as Benvenuto Cellini, were able to cast life-size statues in one go. They had perfected the technique of using just one mould from which the final statue would turn out with a perfect finish. This technique was also well established here in South India more than 1,000 years ago, and can be seen in the magnificent Chola Bronzes of Tamil Nadu.

“When the statue was completed in our garden-workshop in Kuruchikuppam (the actual casting was done in a backyard of the Ashram’s Coco Garden), a 30 foot palm tree in the adjoining garden crashed down during the night and landed a few feet away from the statue - it had literally fallen at Sri Aurobindo’s feet.”

Although the Savitri Bhavan statue is one of four in India made from the same master-mould, none of the others can compare with it, as it is the only free standing one. Sri Aurobindo stands proudly on a plinth in a lotus pond surrounded by the space and majestic proportions of Savitri Bhavan. We feel that he has come home to us.

Helmut, the architect of Savitri Bhavan, reflected on the statue as he sat on a bench under the trees gazing at the powerful figure in front of him.



Photograph by Giorgio

“As an urban designer I am happy to see that the statue provides a quality that architecture cannot. It gives an urban feel to this area, a sense of public space with a focal point, where people can meet, sit and meditate; a real step towards the future city.”

For the Aurovilians involved, the experience of participating in the process of the casting of the statue was fascinating and unique. Modern sculptors will normally just pass on their miniature clay or plaster of paris-models to experts in a highly specialised foundry, where – with the assistance of all kinds of high-tech equipment – all the necessary rest will be done. The casting will take place

without further involvement of the artist, who normally is not welcome to stick around. The finished and perfected product will just be delivered to his doorstep or put in place with the adequate lifting tools. Whereas for us the contact with the fire, the smoke and smell, the feeling of power to be able to melt metal with simple means and to transform it through casting it into the refinement of artistic form and beauty, as well as the team spirit and concentrated interplay of a highly dedicated crew of craftsmen, were glimpses into Hephaistos’ workshop on Mount Olympos or into one of the foundries of Vedic times along the Saraswati river – an experience that will stick in our memories for the rest of our lives.



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*Dianna has lived in Auroville for 3 years now and has great respect and affection for Savitri Bhavan. It was a great privilege for her to participate in the casting of the statue and be present at its raising up on its pedestal on that moonlight night in Auroville.*

# *Catching the Dream*

*David Nightingale*

*“Dreamcatchers” is an open forum which is actively exploring a range of collective processes with the aim of teasing out urban and architectural parameters for the development of Auroville, which when taken together might help us move towards the manifestation of the Galaxy plan as chosen by Mother. The following article gratefully acknowledges all the dreamcatchers who have contributed to this process.*



Over a period of two and a half years the aim of the *dreamcatcher* forum has been to help nurture the manifestation of the galaxy plan of Auroville in a spirit of Human Unity, whilst utilising the various ground realities to stimulate the emergence of all-embracing solutions.

The underlying belief is that through developing our capacities to listen to each other and to work together, we thereby create a more positive environment where win:lose situations

become simply unacceptable and where classic win:win solutions are transformed further into win:win:win opportunities. This initially requires participants to embrace the possibility of ‘both/and’ solutions as opposed to ‘either/or’ decisions and further that they remain open to key insights with which to ‘tai-chi’ difficult situations so that the resulting solutions transform a seemingly intractable problem into a profound opportunity.

The primary means used to achieve these ends is through the exploration of tools and techniques which can help to synthesise a positive group expression, which would delineate inspiring and uplifting architectural and urban design parameters to lead us inexorably in the direction of building a 'yogic' city. The hope is that the township might thus develop in such a way that it would nurture an increased awareness and consciousness in its inhabitants, and that at some point in the future it might be as obvious through perceiving its atmosphere that one is in Auroville, as it is obvious from its surroundings that one is in Venice...

The initial seed of this exploration was planted in the summer of 2005, when it became clear to a number of architects that although they were working on various studies to design large areas of the future township, most of these attempts were distinctly lacking over-arching parameters which might help to produce a cohesive final product.

After experiencing a number of 'more-or-less' typical brainstorming sessions, and partly due to the difficulty of finding a common time when all the participants were available, the *dreamcatchers* hallmark of holding sessions at sunrise on different rooftops around Auroville was born. Not only are most people available in principle to attend sessions at this time, but the half-light and subsequent sunrise also help to inculcate an atmosphere of receptivity to whichever glimpses of the higher vision wish to emerge.

Each session begins with the chanting of an 'opening' mantra and a period of silent contemplation. This prepares the space for an initial check-in round where all those who felt called to come that morning have a chance to share their insights on the theme at hand, after which the circle is open for further input. A 'talking ball' is used not only to help maintain a space for listening, but also to attempt to limit our tendency of rushing to speak as soon as someone else has finished, in that only the one holding it

may speak and it is returned slowly to the centre for the next one to take.

A few basic rules also help to guide our weekly explorations – the first being that there is no censoring of any idea no matter how unlikely it is (either one's own or anyone else's), secondly there is no discussion (which helps to maintain a quiet, introspective space) and lastly attendance is one hundred percent voluntary (so in principle everyone who turns up for a session really wishes to be there).

In the week between sessions everyone is free to write-up their perceptions and share them with others through the mailing list. Eventually the clearest of these 'pearls' (aka 'bullets') are written up as separate sheets for community feedback in the Dream Spaces.

Over the first few months of this experiment a wide range of topics were touched upon, covering all aspects of the future township, but at some point it became clear that when we allowed the same theme to run over a few weeks a number of more subtle insights began to emerge, and in many cases a point was reached where a particular solution or approach simply percolated through the filters of our perception. The experience is an interesting combination of 'fission' and 'fusion' reactions, where seemingly disparate and diverse pieces converge into a new sense of purpose and direction for the topic under consideration.

Since many planning themes in Auroville had become politically sensitive over the years, *dreamcatchers* decided to focus on the somewhat neutral theme of 'entrance' for their first public interaction, and it was at this point that the *dreamweaving* process emerged.

Since we needed a corollary to the morning sessions, we began to have 'sunset' *dreamweaving* sessions to explore more interactive techniques, with the aim of hosting the first Dream Space in the community. One approach the modern

world has excelled in its hierarchical structures, with a manager or visionary at the helm and an army of people doing their bidding; however in *dreamweaving* we wish to move beyond not only this paradigm, but also the resulting reaction to it of seeking watered-down consensual solutions. It is a case of seeking the 'highest common factor' through a synthesis of intuitions emanating from the hearts and minds of those present, rather than cobbling together the 'lowest common denominator' emerging from the suppression of individual expression to land up with that which everyone has been able to agree to.

As an example, after a fairly typical brainstorming session where each of those present sits quietly by themselves for fifteen to twenty minutes exploring ideas on how to present the Dream Space, people then come together to share their insights with the larger forum. In the ensuing discussion, the aim is not to see who fights hardest for 'their' vision or 'their' idea, but to truly aim for the emergence of that which wants to happen. This can of course sound not only somewhat esoteric but also rather unlikely; however a disarmingly simple formula has helped us move in the right direction.

Anyone who feels strongly drawn to a particular solution or approach, either their own or someone else's, can suggest its implementation to the others and offers to 'carry' that part of the process. This acceptance of this responsibility gives the person concerned the prerogative to guide it in the direction of their choosing; however if someone feels strongly that any aspects of this approach would be wrong they are free to express this, and the initiator is obliged to modify it in such a way so as to get unanimous support (or at least sufficiently to not have anyone feel the need to stop that particular part of the process). The key ingredient in this is not to just block something for the sake of it, but to truly feel into the veracity and strength of the proposal, and given both time and an open attitude our experience is that it invariably leads to richer more holistic solutions. The process continues

to build up layer by layer on its strengths until a final plan or product emerges.

I think it is fair to say that although none of our processes could yet be described as 'perfect', in each case beautiful environments have been created where various degrees of synthesis were achieved, whilst the sense has definitely grown of an improvement of our group decisions.

The first Dream Space occurred within the 'Certitude triangle' on the theme of 'Entrance', the second one was in Revelation on the theme of 'Green' and the third is already in preparation on 'Mobility' and will hopefully manifest somewhere on the Crown. In each case we have moved closer to the more practical issues within the township and the Zones, whilst using the opportunity to refine our techniques and build up a body of work and awareness as a strong foundation for the more challenging subjects.

Over this period of *dreamcatching* further opportunities have also emerged to help us move slowly in the direction of concrete manifestation. After the first 'Entrance' Dream Space we received an invitation from the Visitors Centre to explore the new visitor access, where it has been envisioned since many years that guests might park near the tar road and approach Auroville over one of the dams in the canyon below Aurodam. From this work a three-phase plan emerged, answering not only the short and mid-term solutions required in the vicinity, but also integrating a new 'public' entrance to Auroville at the edge of the Green Belt next to Irumbai village, as initially suggested in the Dream Space. This would not only help to stop a large percentage of the polluting traffic from entering Auroville, but would also provide the opportunity for visitors to experience different aspects of the Green Belt in an environmentally friendly way whilst simultaneously preparing them for a deeper experience of Auroville.

Highlighting the gradual transformation of a 'tabula rasa' into a 'tabula verdi' over the past

forty years, the Green Dream Space called for unique solutions to the challenge of interweaving a township into this verdant green carpet. To help in this task a 'Green Book' has been proposed, which would aim to be a companion to the 'Architects Book' and which would focus on the work of the 'green-belters' over the years.

All along it has been an important aim of dreamcatchers to create a process which is welcoming to 'non-professionals' in planning and architecture, but a big step has also been made to share these techniques with non-Aurovilians through a 'design studio' held over two weeks in March 2007 in Verité community. Twenty extremely enthusiastic 'guinea-pigs' gave themselves to a totally new approach to group design, and the feedback on this from both participants and observers was extremely positive.

On top of the techniques already mentioned, a tool was developed during this workshop through the adaptation of the well-known 'Conversation Cafe<sup>®</sup>' methodology to more design-oriented goals. The key elements in this remain the same as in *dreamcatching* – no censoring of ideas, respectful listening and a moving away from the ideas that this concept is "my" concept. However this is a more dynamic exercise and prepares one for actions to be manifested. It involved participants dividing up around tables into groups of four and then devoting twenty minutes to the exploration of different solutions to a specific design brief through sketches, doodles, quick models and write-ups, after which all but one person from each group

change tables. The ones who remained behind then take a couple of minutes to brief the new group, and the co-creative process continues from there. This process occurs three times over the course of an hour, after which the full range of solutions are presented to the whole room and elaborated further. This technique not only fired-up the enthusiasm of the attendees early on in the process, but in conjunction with the more introspective *dreamcatcher* process, offered a rich cross-fertilisation of ideas and possibilities from which to harvest more collective holistic solutions.

Last-but-not-least *dreamcatchers* have taken up the challenge to envision an alternative solution to the Crown, which we feel would not only strengthen the original form of the galaxy plan but would also encourage a greater interweaving of routes within and around the Crown area. It has been a great opportunity to use the tools we have developed collectively to incorporate a number of *dreamcatcher* parameters in one concentrated area of the township.

*Dreamcatching* or *dreamcatchers* as an open-source planning forum is very much a "work in progress", open to anyone for any amount of time. We have no fixed agenda or finished product in mind. As we evolve new ways of communicating and working together, it leaves the path open and flexible for greater opportunities and challenges, in researching a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity. If nothing else, the past two and a half years has brought much joy and learning along the way, nourishing our work and life in Auroville.



*One of many dreamcatchers, David has been a studying and practising architect since more than twenty years and has been a studying and practising Aurovilian since more than ten years.*

Several pavilion groups, promoting their presence in the International Zone of Auroville, have started holding educational and cultural activities to give life to their projects. One which has been particularly active over the last year is the Pavilion de France. They have launched a series of presentations on a variety of topics, given in both French and English, in a wish to honour their rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and to enable people from different fields to participate. All of them have been attended by large and appreciative audiences. Each of these presentations has been given by a French person living in Auroville. So far these individuals have been pursuing their researches privately, in the shade. These events have highlighted some of the wealth of human potential that exists here in Auroville.

This initiative of the Pavilion de France, spear-headed by Claude Jouen and Jean-Francois Durban, was inspired by a spirit of openness and the wish to create awareness of relevant cultural topics, provoking reflection and response throughout the community. The format of the presentations was interactive, with a question and answer session at the close of each event. Moreover Auroville Radio recorded every session for broadcasting over the internet.

The first talk, in August 2006, entitled “Un sens a l’evolution” (A direction to evolution) was given by Jean Laroquette (Croquette) who introduced and commented on a documentary film about the work of French paleontologist Anne Dambricourt, in particular her discoveries about changes in the position of the sphenoid bone in the course of human development. One month later Anne Dambricourt herself visited Auroville. In an informal and fascinating discussion she responded to the questions of a curious and attentive audience. More than two hundred people attended this talk.

## How does an ape become a man ?

By Jean de Laroquette (Croquette)

*Is there an evolutive program included in our DNA? Turning humanoid skulls upside down, a closer look at the butterfly-shaped bone at the base – the sphenoid – reveals a significant movement of “straightening” throughout the time of prehistoric human evolution.*

How does an ape become a man? And what – since *Homo sapiens* continues to evolve – will be the characteristics of the future man? The documentary film which we presented in Auroville explores some hypotheses that have been developed over the last twenty years of research, and raises some international discussions. Here is a summary of the film and of the base for some of these discussions.

Among what I would call ‘classical’ paleontologists, some follow the theory of **Yves Coppens**, a leading authority since the 1980s. This theory – the “**East-**

**side Story**” – holds that the great Rift Valley in East Africa is the birthplace of humanity, since there our ancestor *Australopithecus* stood upright to adapt to a new environment, the savannah. According to this theory, which has become dominant over the last thirty years, the motor-force of evolution is adaptation to the environment through natural selection of the mutations that are most favourable to the species. In this case, uprightness of body-posture and walking on two feet would thus have developed in hominids, giving them a strategic advantage: the ability to see above the long grass of the savannah.

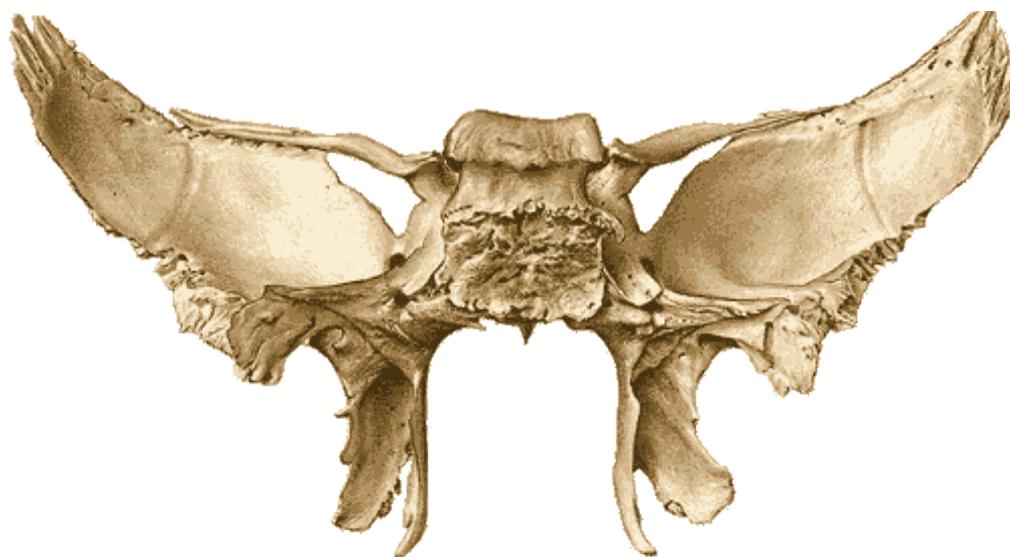
But in recent years, with the discoveries of **Toumai** and **Abel**, the East-side Story has come into difficulties. Its originator, **Yves Coppens**, has himself wondered about its validity, in the review *La Recherche* in 2003.

His colleague **Anne Dambricourt**, who guides us through this film, has proposed a completely different hypothesis, one that is supported by many other palaeontologists, some of whom are international authorities. She claims to have discovered the key-role played by a small bone at the base of the skull, the **sphenoid**, the first bone to form in the human embryo. She suggests that each major step in human evolution has been the result of a realignment of the sphenoid, each time in the same direction, leading to a gradually increasing uprightness of body-posture, and the development of the brain and mental faculties. According to this hypothesis, *Homo sapiens* appeared 160,000 years ago with a fifth realignment of this tiny bone, and today a new mutation is in preparation, on an as yet unknown time scale. This evolutionary process, it is proposed, is encoded in our genes and transmitted by DNA. This is the “**Inside Story**” – the hypothesis of a programmed internal mutation of the species. Anne Dambricourt points out however that the sphenoid bone is not, strictly speaking, the cause of the evolution of the body, but that it has an effect on the dynamic constraints of the tissues which form at the same time as it does, and based on that, a particular development of the brain of the embryo. And since it is a ‘**pivotal bone**’, the bones that will develop after it and around it will be affected by any alteration in its angle and position.

This hypothesis however remains to be validated, and **Philippe Tobias**, the father of modern palaeontology, who is following Anne Dambricourt’s research with a friendly eye, warns her “You still have a long way to go.”

A French orthodontist, **Marie-Josephe Deshayes**, has reached similar conclusions to Anne Dambricourt, while trying to understand why more and more children today show deformations of the jaw. Our teeth seem to be more and more out of place. At the present time the process of evolution is continuing, and each of us can measure the consequences quite simply. Human dentition shows an increasing instability. A generation ago, our parents experienced problems with the development of the molars, for which there was not enough room in the mouth. The new generation is experiencing the same kind of problem with the arrival of the premolars. This phenomenon is becoming more and more common, and is found in 70% of European children, 90% of American children, and 96% of Japanese children.

After this brief summary of current theories, let us take a closer look at the work of the two French researchers, Anne Dambricourt Malasse and Marie-Joseph Deshayes. With different research starting-points, these two women have come to



*The sphenoid bone*

the same conclusion: the important role of the **sphenoid**, this bone positioned at the centre of the skull, which they believe has played a key role in the evolution of our species, and particularly in our upright posture and bi-pedalism.

Basing themselves on the study of the fossil skulls of our ancestors, as well as on the present development of our species, they describe the internal process of evolution and **the history of the sphenoid over 60 million years.**

- 60 Million years ago, prosimians - the sphenoid is flat.
- 40 Million years ago, simians - the sphenoid flexes, the base of the skull is slightly tilted, the eyes shift from the sides of the head toward the front.
- 20 Million years ago, first primates - the sphenoid tilts further.
- 6 Million years ago, Australopithecus - for the third time the sphenoid tilts further in the same direction.
- 2 Million years ago, hominids - the body-posture becomes more upright and the little bone in our skull tilts yet more.
- 150,000 years ago, appearance of Homo Sapiens - 5th tilt, the brain grows more complex.

Amongst international scientists, we note very different and sometimes opposed reactions to this theory:

- The biologist **Jean Chaline** is highly critical of the classical 'East Side Story' theory. He points out that although there is natural selection by the environment it is secondary – it acts upon internal mutations.
- The palaeontologist **Yves Coppens** says that he is following the work of his colleagues, but that he “*continues to firmly believe that the role of the environment is considerable.*”
- **Pascal Picq** acknowledges that Mme Dambricourt has “*the merit of revealing*

*the tilting of the sphenoid in hominids.*” “*This bone is an important crossroads,*” he continues, “*where the areas associated with the development of the brain, of the face, and of locomotion, meet.*” But Mme Dambricourt, adds M. Picq “*trips up on interpretation.*”

- “*For some absolutely mysterious reason,*” **M. Ramirez-Rozzi** makes clear on his part, “*she has chosen to make this bone the centrepiece of the entire human anatomy. But since long we know that to define man by a single characteristic is absurd.*”
- For **Guillaume Lecoindre**, Professor at MNHM (Musée Nationale de l’Homme) and specialist in Systemics, “*the film presents the theory of Mme. Dambricourt as a revolutionary idea. This is not the case, because the architectural constraints of evolution are integral to Darwinism. This documentary is theology disguised as science, and the public is misled.*”
- Even more strongly, **Andre Langaney**, Director of the Biological Anthropology Laboratory at the MNHN and Professor at the University of Geneva adds that Mme. Dambricourt “*is dealing in purposefulness to please fundamentalists. What she writes smacks of falsification.*”

#### **And tomorrow?**

“Our evolutionary process could be the outcome of an internal logic which led our ancestors of 60 million years ago towards modern man, and is already impelling us towards the man of tomorrow”

It is imaginable that future humans will have a more and more domed skull and a smaller and smaller jaw.

Extrapolating from this, perhaps humanity might be the first species to be able to modify or intervene in its own evolution.

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*Croquette came to Auroville in 1975. He has dedicated his life to cultural and educational activities. Since a few years he keeps shuttling between Paris and Auroville*

# *Oliver! The Musical*

*Paul Blanchflower*

*Paul Blanchflower did not “direct” but “created” this musical show for Aurovilians of all ages. Here he reflects on the process of creativity that resulted in a resounding success on many levels.*



Photograph by Ireneo

When we wrote a project proposal to raise the funds necessary to stage the production we wrote: “All communities need to have events around which they can gather and put their energies in to. It provides a space into which people who normally do not work together can come, share and create some fun and enjoyment. The musical *Oliver!* will provide such a space where adults and children can come together.”

Now that the performance is over we can reflect upon this basic statement and be sure that we achieved this simple but extremely important function in Auroville’s community life.

For a community to find its identity there have to be moments of shared experience, something that is not the product of a single individual’s efforts, nor even the product of a single subculture’s endeavors. Auroville is a large and complex society that contains numerous subcultures that during daily routines have little crossover. Thus a production of this nature, particularly by involving both children and adults, manages to intertwine the different energies of the groups.

From the outset the aim was always to create a large production, that was enjoyable to be a part of and that was entertaining for the

audience. There was never an intention to reach any higher than fun, nor was there a perceived need to convey a message or a reflection to the community. These are valid and important functions for art and culture to perform, but for this particular project it was clear the experience was the be all and end all of it, especially with the children and youth involved.

The end result was a musical with a cast of 47 Aurovilians, an orchestra of 4 and a back stage crew of around 20. The two main performances played to a packed Bharat Nivas auditorium of over 700 people each night, with an extremely positive response from the audience, who clearly expressed their enjoyment of watching a performance by a group of people who were “obviously having a good time and enjoying themselves”. A similar sentiment was repeatedly expressed by the members of the cast, all of whom had had a positive experience of live performance.

*Oliver! The Musical* was originally written for the stage by Lionel Bart in 1960 and it was based on the original story of Charles Dickens. The story is of a boy orphaned at birth, who was raised in a workhouse. One day he is cast out and he makes his way to London. Upon arrival there he falls in with a gang of street urchins who make their livelihood by picking the pockets of the wealthy citizens of the city.

When Oliver goes out on his first “job” things do not go according to plan, the repercussions of which echo all around causing changes in many people’s lives, eventually leading to a happy ending for most involved. The production in Auroville was based on the musical but some of the events were changed, and the ending we gave it was quite different.

The production began in February 2006, with performance coming in October 2006. It was a slow and gradual build up with the initial work carried out by a small production team of 3 main people, which expanded as and when

needed. The auditions were held at the end of March and beginning of April, so that the casting was completed before the end of April, the time at which many residents of Auroville leave for the summer. The plan always was to begin intensive work with the children in July when school started again. Thus every Saturday the children came from 9.30 till noon and in this time began to learn the basic disciplines of theatre performance, as well as learning the routines that would eventually be used in the performance. At the same time singing rehearsals began in the music studios and eventually in August the main adult characters began rehearsing their scenes one evening a week. In this way many of the components of the performance were prepared, ready for a two week intensive rehearsal that was planned prior to the performance and scheduled to coincide with the school mid term break. It was during this period that the magic created the show. They were long days, from 9.30 in the morning until 10 at night, but the concentration of the group was high and rarely was any one late or absent without notice. The set had been created over the weekend before the intensive rehearsals, and although it was not finished until later in the week, the form and structure were present allowing the performers to find their spaces within it.

It was a time of intensive creativity, with many people coming and volunteering their help for the work, either painting and building the sets, helping the costume and prop team or providing sustenance for this large group of people.

It is difficult and perhaps a little dangerous to try and understand why the group functioned in such a harmonious manner. However perhaps a few simple observations might give some insight.

- Auroville is full of immensely talented individuals who excel in their own particular creative fields
- Everyone who has joined Auroville has within them the aspiration for working

together, the ideal of human unity

- In a short term project such as this people can give more than can be sustained over a long period.
- If people enter an environment that is already established as generous and giving they are likely to respond a similar manner.
- The aim of the “director/producer” in this situation is to create fields in which the individuals feel that they can contribute; in which they feel empowered.
- The more people feel that they are doing a good job the more they will give.

In the end the production far exceeded the expectations of the original production team, simply because Aurovilians came forward to offer services that had not been imagined in the initial concept. Particularly with respect to the documentation of the process, both photographically and on video, people came forward and offered to do the job with the end result that we not only have a photos and a video of the performance, but we also have a documentary about the making of the production. Also the production excelled due to the talent of young Aurovilians who having gone out to learn skills brought them back and were able to showcase them through the performance.

The other aspect of the whole production was that of education, of learning and sharing skills. Everyone involved was a part of this

process. To take a few examples; so many of us were happy to learn from the experience of Norman, an Aurovilian who has spent fifty years working as a professional actor. He coached the actors, young and old, and gave generously of his wisdom to the production team; whilst building the sets children worked alongside Auroville artists who happily came for a few days of intensive painting; and so many people benefited from the patience and professionalism of the musical team who worked with all of the cast helping to make this a musical in the true sense. Everyone has taken something away from being involved in this production, and it is so easy to see the results with the smiles on the faces of the people around.

Auroville needs community events that bring us together in one place to interact. It is difficult to appreciate the combined talent and skills residing in Auroville and in situations such as this we can get a glimpse of the collective. To create events that link different subcultures within the community also increases the respect we have for each other, when we deal with each other in other community activities, and this can help when we do find ourselves with differing opinions over some issues. The stronger the social fabric, the greater the empathy we will have for each other within the community and the more easily we will resolve the issues that inevitably will confront us as we progress towards our stated aim of human unity.

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*Paul Blanchflower is an Englishman who has lived in the Greenbelt for 12 years. His main love, and work, is Green Work, and he helped to create the Botanical Gardens. He used to relax with playing the fool in “The Academic Genius Brothers”, but when that broke up he indulged in his long time secret ambition of creating a musical.*

# *The Yoga of Work*

*The Mother's last message to Auroville, given on March 27, 1973 :*

Auroville is created to realise the ideal of Sri Aurobindo who taught us the Karma Yoga. Auroville is for those who want to do the Yoga of work.

To live in Auroville means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga.

*The state we aspire for is evoked by Sri Aurobindo in a sonnet*

## **The Divine Worker**

I face earth's happenings with an equal soul;  
In all are heard Thy steps; Thy unseen feet  
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front. Life's whole  
Tremendous theorem is Thou complete.

No danger can perturb my spirit's calm;  
My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;  
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,  
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.

In this rude combat with the fate of man  
Thy smile within my heart makes all my strength;  
Thy Force in me labours at its grandiose plan,  
Indifferent to the Time-snake's crawling length.

No power can slay my soul; it lives in Thee.  
Thy presence is my immortality.

20.9.1939

# *Writing in India: Between Tradition and Innovation*

by Anuradha Majumdar

A writer is an explorer of existence, not just its intimate chronicler, nor only its moral or political witness. Should we differentiate between men and women writers then, or shall we say that a writer is someone who chooses to be a human being. It is a fact that more women have been writing the world over in the last hundred years, in India definitely so, we have two Booker ladies to go by. Yet for some reason it is supposed that women write only about women's issues. That might lead us to conclude that men were only writing about men's issues for all those centuries. What a rip off for the human race. Arundhati Roy is not a woman writer, but a writer. *So much of fiction is a way of seeing, of making sense of the world*, she has said. Even as Salman Rushdie or Amitav Ghosh are not men writers, but writers. The arena of life is the same for them, what they choose to explore or focus on, is a matter of Time and their experience in it.

Before going on to the specifics of tradition and innovation in Indian writing today let us look at these things first from a more universal sense. By universal I do not mean some kind of uniform standard but a sense of belonging within oneself, and through that inner recognition, a sense of free belonging with the rest of human kind.

A tradition implies history. In India that history was imbued with a sense of the sacred. But history is an ever changing thing because Time changes and we are changed with it. The one certain thing about tradition is that it always changes or renews itself. When it doesn't, it stagnates. What is sacred cannot be throttled for it belongs to the universe. Tagore had said: *The tradition that is helpful is like a channel that helps the current to flow...* I refer here to his essay, *The Meaning of Art*, written in 1921, which I find relevant even today. Tagore influenced one of India's finest filmmakers, Satyajit Ray. Ray's artistic education at Shantiniketan was to leave a lasting impact on his work. He adapted five of Tagore's stories into films and produced a documentary tribute on him. Gautam Ghosh in

turn produced a documentary on Satyajit Ray, apart from other great films. The river flows.

Tradition in India is a complex thing. The earlier eras were marked by distinct schools of art and literature. Upon independence India inherited not one but three histories with three different cultures: the Hindu period with its offshoots, the Muslim period and the Christian or English period. All three became part of a new common fabric, at once rich, complex and challenging.

An important feature of the independence struggle was recovering a memory of our un-invaded selves, all that had been long lost or suppressed. This memory helped awaken a longing in the spirit to be free again. It brought about a renaissance, in Bengal particularly, with Tagore and the Shantiniketan movement. At the same time much of the old literature, art and music were being re-discovered. And suddenly, this was labelled tradition and it became sacrosanct.

But Tagore was the man of that moment, and even as a tradition was being redefined his concern was with the human condition around him: how would its chains be unshackled, how would its imagination be set free?

*When in the name of Indian art we cultivate with deliberate aggressiveness a certain bigotry born out of the habit of a past generation, we smother our souls under idiosyncrasies...* and he went on to say :

*So let us take heart and make daring experiments, venture out into the open road and in the face of all risks, go through experiences in the great world of human mind and life defying the unholy prohibition preached by prudent little critics...*

Modern independent India came to belong with the world. But that world was already in the accelerated throes of post-modernity. R.K. Narayan created a timeless oasis with his delightful Malgudi

stories, but Time is a movement and everything went up for question: the caste system, social hypocrisy, the position of women, corruption, poverty, religious fundamentalism – all explored by powerful writers in the regional languages: Amrita Pritam and Mahasweta Devi from Punjab and Bengal, and men like U R Anadamurthy, O.V. Vijayan or Sadat Hussain Manto. English became an Indian language too with Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Pankaj Mishra: from here the list is endless. India was suddenly a wide canvas, filling up rapidly with visions of itself – its confrontation with the human condition was renewed.

Women became visible on the Indian literary map like never before. Writers like Manju Kapur, Urvashi Butalia or Gita Hatiharan are those who identify closely with feminist ideas. Others like Anita Nair, Kaveri Nambisan, Rupa Bajwa or Kiran Desai have explored different concerns.

There is a crop of younger writers waiting to take over and to them I look with great expectation. There is Samit Basu, who is exploring science fiction, or Sarnath Banerjee with his graphic novels. Sonia Faleiro is a compassionate and lyrical writer and Tishani Doshi will be a voice to watch for.

In a collection of short stories, published by Zubaan, all by women under forty, one finds a coming to terms with a new sense of self: one that does not ask for emancipation, but assumes it. Many different trials are in evidence in these stories, some partly achieved some not at all, but there is an attempt to break through to somewhere further than all that has happened before. Is their writing *Indian*? The question of identity hounds the Indian writer. Let me return to Tagore's essay once again: *Our artists were never tiresomely reminded of the obvious fact that they were Indian and in consequence they had the freedom to be naturally Indian in spite of all the borrowings and variation...*

The freedom to invent gives a tradition greater anchor to widen its identity.

What is identity in a changing world? No nation lives in isolation anymore. A war somewhere else, fought by other people, affects us all as we are seeing everyday. The fixed homeland of history is inextricably tied up with the rest of the world. The lifestyle of a single country can now harm the entire planet. We share the same stratosphere, for this is our homeland, finally. It is no longer about being immigrants in a foreign land versus being home grown in curry powder. The world begins with each one, inside of us – that is the homeland we are all starting to reach, everywhere – that is, *if* we can avoid another stupid war.

War gave us heroes nevertheless. Traditionally a story was about hero warriors: Odysseus, Arthur and his knights, Ram and Laxman. Exile and homeland were often keys to the hero's journey. Rama and Arjuna of the Indian epics were exiled heroes. They were noble yet they traded their wife in dice, or sent her to the fire, ignobly. Those heroes went to war, sorted out good and evil, killed bravely, and finally regained their kingdoms. With time such models of heroism faltered everywhere, resulting in an ingenious comic creation, the heroic illusion of Don Quixote.

As war grew more sophisticated and technologically skilled that hero was usurped, just a soldier now, glorified but dispensable, often fighting someone else's good or evil, unnecessarily. The anti-hero spanned the early twentieth century literature with a sense of loss and confusion of values intensifying in a fast changing world. As the novel passed under the eye of Kafka and Orwell the old heroes disintegrated. They moved over to Hollywood and Bollywood where they continue to flourish.

What grew instead was the story of the human spirit. The ability of ordinary, vulnerable people to cross barriers or survive brutalities and their transcendence claimed in the crossing of tragedy with an inner strength, an unexpected liberty or joy.

Today we can watch people being bombed and tortured on state of art TV, in real time, while we sit back comfortably and eat ice cream. Terror is the new gladiatorial sport. This mass de-humanisation is now our unconscious collective exile.

What will happen next? What will literature invent in India or elsewhere?

Is there a new kind of protagonist in the offing? Is the novel going to drive us to them? What perspectives will it offer our collective exile? Will the novel need to create new modes, mix genres or combine media? Can literature be cinema; can cinema become literature? Will language become expressive of a greater experience? Will it explore existence further? Will it still have humour? It must, if we are to survive the world together. Will it reinvent reality from fantasy?

In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino speaks of his attraction for fairy tales because of their style and rhythm and the hard logic with which they are told. *Alice in Wonderland* still remains an astute instruction of reality. In India the storehouse of such stories stretch back to the *Upanishads*.

The original stories were not purely rational things, they acknowledged fantasy. Fantasy not as in 'fanciful' but as a capacity of permeating the human spirit with the imagination of the universe. The book of life still has to answer questions of existence. In the essay, 'Is Nothing Sacred,' in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie said: *The soul needs all these explanations – not simply rational explanations, but explanations of the heart.*

When Giorgio Manganelli went to India in 1975, following after Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, seeking the exotic and sacred world of another time, he was confronted with corpses and excrement and he asked whether the noble picture he was seeking was, in fact, honest?

Reality is a writer's burden, all of its anger, pain and frustration. In *The Curtain*, Kundera says,

Homer never worried if his warriors had any teeth left after their ferocious battles. But for Cervantes' Don Quixote, teeth were perpetual concern – hurting teeth, missing teeth, broken ones...

Teeth are essential. But how much space will reality permit existence? Literature lives inside the Book of Life. Rushdie has described literature as an interim report from the consciousness of the artist. Could art be the principle, he asks, *that mediates between the material and spiritual worlds; might it, by 'swallowing' both worlds offer us something new...a kind of secular spirituality perhaps.*

Let me return to Tagore's essay one last time. Under him Shantiniketan was a thriving artistic centre. Tagore became a beacon of the freedom struggle, a voice of the underprivileged and he also sang Bengal to life. Yet this is what he said:

*Let me take this opportunity to ask our artists to realise the greatness of their vocation: it is to take a creative part in the festival of life, the festival which gives expression to the infinite in man. In our everyday world we live in poverty, our resources have to be husbanded with care; our strength becomes exhausted and we come to our God as beggars. On festival days... we bring to Him our offerings and not our wants – and such offerings need Art for its vehicle...*

It is a call for the softening of frontiers between man and universe by a creative act that nurtures our humanity instead of depleting it. For that, tradition needs innovation, time needs eternity, reality needs imagination.

But the soul is always free. It can step across tradition; it can invent what the world spirit needs. It can begin new traditions.

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