



THE STRANGE GOD IN ME

Monday, 24 July, 2017 – Auroville (India) Matrimandir

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I close my eyes a little, and the world before me turns into a blurry mush with golden pearls in the centre. This then is how a frog can see the lotus blooming in the middle of the pond – at least in my imagination. I do not know anything about frogs, but I like to ponder about them. Because no other animal hops with such naturalness, at least as I see it, onto a leaf; none jumps with such confidence into the next life situation. I often wish that I could be exactly as human a human as a frog is a frog.

I am sitting on a comfortable stone, shaded by a vast raintree and refreshed by a breeze that rustles my shirt gently every now and again. On my right, two young Italians are sitting cross-legged on the ground, their hands relaxed in their laps, their eyes closed. On my left, sits a teenaged Indian cou-

ple, stealing shy glances at each other, waiting for romance to spark; not knowing how to proceed, probably hoping someone will take the initiative and tell them what to do. Before me, Auroville's holiest of holies glistens in the sun: The Matrimandir – named after the «Mother» and founder of the ideal city, which was established in 1968 a few kilometres north of Pondicherry. Mirra Alfassa, to use her real name, came to Pondicherry in 1914 for the first time. Here she met the philosopher and yogi Sri Aurobindo. In 1920 she settled down in his ashram and took over the leadership of the organisation. She eventually selected a nearby tract of land, meant for the creation of Auroville, by simply finding a spot on a map with her finger, which was guided by sheer inspiration. The Matrimandir is meant to express what Auroville aspires to be:



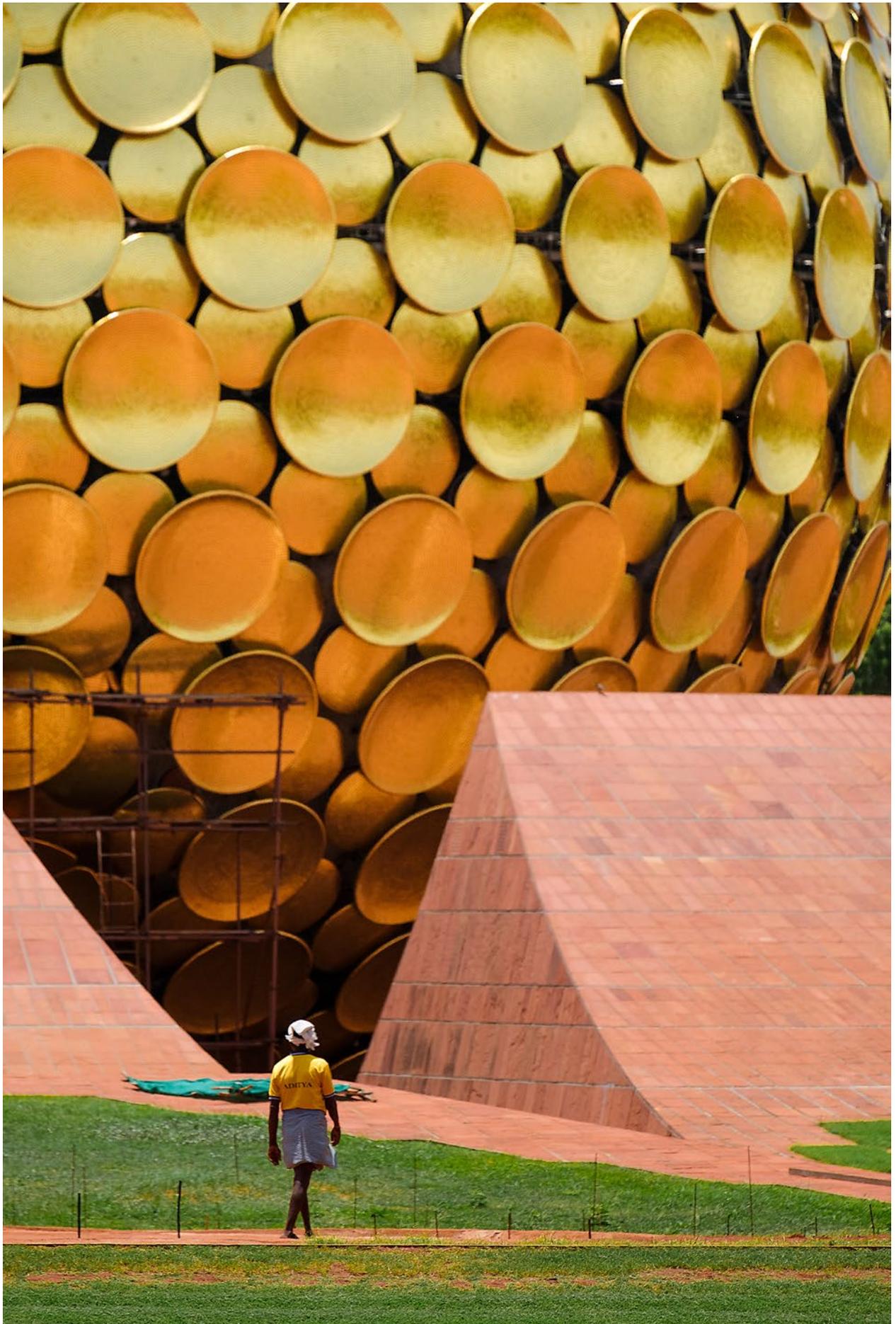
a universal city in which men and women of all countries move beyond all faiths and live together in peace and «progressive harmony». Auroville is actually less like a city and more like a conglomeration of small villages, scattered farms and houses. The Matrimandir serves as its meditation centre. The temple is inaccessible to outsiders, but visitors can see it from a viewing platform.

To get into the mood, I read the little book I bought at the Visitors' Centre in Auroville. In it M. P. Pandit explains to novices the practice of Integral Yoga, the way to «holistic spirituality». Pandit lived in the Aurobindo Ashram for fifty years, and was long-time personal secretary to Mirra Alfassa. He speaks of a «divine consciousness» that is located «in the heart of our heart» – and calls the «deification of our nature» the central goal of human endeavour. Such statements are somewhat familiar to me – and that has to do with the fact that such ideas were widespread in Europe during my youth. In the seventies and eighties, for example, there was hardly a record of rock or pop music that did not convey a spiritual message. I grew up with such ideas, so to speak, and I absorbed them, so to say, with the first worldmilk. At the same time Pandit's sentences

are also foreign to me – because in all my life I have never felt anything within me that could be even remotely considered «divine». So, if a god resides in the sanctum sanctorum of my heart, as Pandit notes, he can only be a strange devil to me.

«The divine is something for the advanced,» is an line that flashes through my mind. Of course, I do not believe that there are people who are fundamentally more advanced than others. Or are there? «In any case, I cannot count myself among the advanced ones,» the thought whirls in my head. «I am over 50, but I still do not know what existence is all about.»

I am amazed at my thoughts. I am amazed at the sentences that go through my mind. Essentially, they mean that I do not believe in Pandit's construct. But I am loath to admit that straight-away. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that a part of me regrets not having access to spiritual things. Another part, however, wonders rebelliously how adult humans can believe in such nonsense. Pandit speaks of «fundamental, eternal, truth-based values that hold for all time.» I want to be as human a human as a frog is a frog. That's my fundamental truth. And that's why I close my eyes to throw another look at the obvious.



«Everybody is a mixture of some qualities that contain the heritage of the animal past and some that are seeds of a more divine future,» writes Pandit, outlining the prime objective of silencing the animal within us. But I have nothing against the animal in me; on the contrary I would like it if it surfaced a bit more often. I would like to nurture the tendency rather than destroy it. And I would be only too happy to counter Pandit's lofty words with wild, rebellious sentences such as: «The frog in me is God!»

According to Pandit, everything that is connected with the «desire-ego» is animalistic – and this requires to be eradicated. And, if we desire to find the «higher energy» within us, «egoism, self-aggrandizement, selfishness, greed, anger, violence, passion and their ilk must be rejected.» To vanquish the «desire ego», he recommends cultivating emotions that oppose it: «Incomprehension must be replaced by generosity, anger by forgiveness, hatred by love, and so on.» It's about making the right choice. «To choose the hard way and to come closer to the divine, or to opt for the easier way and slide down the ladder of evolution, animal-wards.»

Pandit's advice on how to become a higher being are holistic in every respect. They affect all aspects of life, encompass the entire universe and apply to all 24 hours of the day. His tips are detailed and concrete. In his fourth chapter, for example, he devotes himself to sleep and recommends: «Lie on your left side.» Above all: «Do not sleep on your back. This is the wrong position. It hinders the natural digestive process, puts pressure on the kidneys. And, in men, this is the most favourable position for wet dreams.» Again the frog in me hops into the air, up in arms – because I love wet dreams and

am only too willing to let them enchant my nights, as well as my days.

I am very likely a hopeless case, though: one who is perhaps trapped also during the day in the «wrong position» and therefore prone to doing inappropriate things. Sitting near the Visitors' Centre in the Right Path Café, which offers international snacks made from locally grown organic ingredients, I notice the tormented faces of many sitting next to their rolled-up yoga mats, spooning broccoli quiche or dosa with sambar into their mouths. There are more people here with morose faces, I think, than for example in a shopping centre. Does that mean that shopping makes you happier than yoga does? Can it be that the human soul finds consumption-triggered intoxication sweeter and more digestible than the «inflow» of «future» higher consciousness?

Clearly, such ideas thrive in my head and lead me to invariably stray from the right path. I'm probably one of those people Pandit warns his followers about: «There are those who wallow in an atmosphere that impairs spiritual pursuit. In words or in other ways they create doubts, trigger strong imbalances [...]. You must be vigilant and avoid the company of such people. Then, there are those who are akin to vampires; they suck out your vitality and leave you weak and exhausted. In conversation they may be interesting, but ultimately they induce fatigue. You must make it a rule to stay away from them.»

I do not want to be a vampire. The frog in me just says «hmm» and is all set to jump onto the next leaf. But then, all of a sudden, I am seized by uncertainty: Is what the frog sees glowing in the depths of the pond really a lotus flower?

Translated from German by Gunvanthi Balaram.