

**National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi**

**and**

**Presidency College, Kolkata**

Cordially invite you  
to

**SRI AUROBINDO MEMORIAL LECTURE**

Organised under

**MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES**

**Shri Manoj Das**

**International Centre of Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry**

has kindly consented to deliver a talk  
on

**Education for faith in future**

**Prof. Sanjib Ghosh**

Principal, Presidency College will chair the session

**Date : 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2008**

**Time : 11.00 A.M.**

**Venue : Derozio Hall, Presidency College**

R.S.V.P.

Head, P.G.Hindi Deptt.  
Presidency College

Head, DTEE, NCERT  
New Delhi

Director  
NCERT, New Delhi

## EDUCATION FOR A FAITH IN THE FUTURE



**(A proposed talk by Manoj Das)**

### ABSTRACT

In the history of recorded time there had never been another century more dominated by paradox than the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the formidable backdrop of the current decade. Great adventures and explorations were contrasted by devastations and disillusionments. While the evolutionary spirit seems intent upon opening up a vast avenue for a new humanity through scientific, technological and progress in human relationship, an ominous sense of uncertainty and anxiety characterize our life – a situation that has brewed confusion in practically every aspect of our existence.

Education is that which liberates – had been a cardinal doctrine in Indian prudence. Has that doctrine grown anachronistic? Is the sweeping spell of pragmatic, if not totally utilitarian, forces at work in the field of education necessarily the highest ideal because it is modern?

It is time to have a deeper look at the very purpose of education – a question that spontaneously leads to the far more profound issue of the very purpose of life. Is there an ideal or a vision that can challenge the prevailing trends and offer us a way out of the present gloom?

The talk will attempt a brief examination of these issues in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision of human destiny and education.

## About Manoj Das (An Outline)

Born in 1934 in a remote coastal village of Orissa, India, Manoj Das grew up amidst loving rural folks and Nature's splendours – evergreen meadows containing primeval lakes abounding in lotuses, and the sea – but also had the horrific experience of a devastating cyclone followed by famine crushing his locality. At the age of eight he stood witness to his affluent home on the sea being plundered by savage gangs of bandits, not once but twice.

In town for study, writing came to him spontaneously and his first book in Oriya was published when he was fourteen. At fifteen he launched *Diganta*, which, in course of time, grew into a significant literary journal in the state. In search of some panacea for human suffering he became a revolutionary youth leader while in college, leading several agitations, courting jail, becoming unopposed President of the University Law College Union, General Secretary of the Students Federation and playing an active role in the Afro-Asian Students Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1956.

His quest, however, led him to mysticism and, after serving as a lecturer in English at Cuttack for four years, he, along with his wife, Pratijna Devi, a scion of the Raj family of Kujang whose parents were renowned freedom fighters, joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963 which became their permanent abode. He teaches English literature as well as the works of Sri Aurobindo at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and Pratijna Devi teaches psychology.

His research in the archives of London and Edinburgh in 1971 brought to light some of the significant glimpses of India's struggle for freedom led by Sri Aurobindo in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He received the 1<sup>st</sup> Sri Aurobindo Puraskar for this pioneering work, by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata (the birth place of Sri Aurobindo), supported by the Government of West Bengal.

Though outside his home state he is widely known as one of the best-loved and serious among the Indian writers writing in English, he is also probably the foremost successful bi-lingual writer in the country, with about forty books in English and an equal number of books in his mother tongue. He had been a regular columnist for some of the major newspapers in India such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* and major Oriya dailies like *The Samaj* and *The Dharitri*. He was the editor of a prestigious monthly, *The Heritage* (1985-1989), and an author-consultant to the Ministry of Education, Government of Singapore (1981-1985), visiting the island nation twice a year for taking classes of a hundred teachers.

A number of his short stories have been translated into major languages of the world apart from those of India and they are highly appreciated in the academic circles in the West. The numerous accolades he has received include India's national award for creative writing – the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award

(twice), the Sarala Award, the Sahitya Bharati Award (by now Orissa's premier award which began with him), the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad (Kolkata) Award, the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar (Kolkata), the BAPASI (Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India) Award as the best writer in English in the South for the year 1998 and Rotary's 'For the Sake of Honour'.

He was the leader of the Indian Writers' Delegation to China in 2000.

The President of India decorated him with the **Padma Shri** on the Republic Day, 2001. This was followed by India's most prestigious award for literature, the **Saraswati Samman**. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, the hoary literary organization of his home state, Orissa, bestowed on him **Utkal Ratna**. While the Berhampur University offered him the status of **Professor Emeritus**, the Utkal University of Culture, in its very first convocation in 2004, chose him alone to receive the **D.Litt.** (Honoris Causa). Once again, the Utkal University, the oldest university in the state, bestowed **D.Litt.** on him in its 2006 convocation. For the third time, the Fakir Mohan University of Balasore conferred **D.Litt.** on him in 2007.

Lately, the Sahitya Akademi, our national academy of letters, has conferred on him its highest honour, **Fellowship**, which, according to its constitution, is "reserved for the immortals of literature".

While his admirers in the West included Graham Greene and H.R.F. Keating, scholars have found in his short stories and novels the Indian ethos at its authentic best. His latest publications are: *Selected Fiction* (Penguin), *The Escapist* (a novel) (Macmillan), *My Little India* (National Book Trust, India) and *The Lady Who Died One and Half Times and Other Fantasies* (Rupa) and *Chasing the Rainbow* (Childhood memoirs) (Oxford University Press).

Among his major works in Oriya are *Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani* (the first Oriya short story collection to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award), *Shesha Basantara Chithi*, *Dhumava Diganta*, *Lakshmira Abhisara*, *Antaranga Bharata*, *Kete Diganta*, *Satya Asatya O Anyanya Prasanga*, *Prabhanjana*, *Godhulira Bagha*, *Tandralokar Prahari* and *Amruta Phala* (Saraswati Samman).

He is acknowledged as one of the ablest interpreters of India's literary and cultural heritage.

(The End)