

# Foreword

## Organiverse and Gitanjali, A Special Issue of Gitanjali and Beyond, Issue 7

When Natasha van Bentum first wrote to me about her husband, Henri van Bentum's 100 Mandalas which have been structured as reflections on Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali poems, I was intrigued. I asked Natasha to send me samples of this project, and she was willing to send me the entire opus of Organiverse and Gitanjali. The compositions, created in 1972 and using pointillism in water colour, are intricate and intense. The idea of mandalas with their Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, signify a universal search for release from suffering, reaching out towards an unutterable joy. This expressive art form resonates with Rabindranath's own search throughout his long life for the meaning and purpose of life in the face of the death of many of his loved ones that he experienced, including that of his wife and three of his children and the threat of destruction of the world that he witnessed during World War 1, the rising turmoil of the Inter-War years and the culmination in the outbreak of the Second World War. WW2 distressed Rabindranath and disturbed his faith in the West as he looked to the East for a message for the world. This is something he had gleaned from the Upanishads and from Buddha's teachings. In Henri's mandalas, we witness a unity of the East and the West, which accounts for their universal appeal.

Henri's mandalas, with their perfect circular pattern, encompass and visualise worlds that unfold from the first blue representation of the pondering universe and go on to explore and explode in colours that come together like the rising sun, the colours of the rainbow, unfurling petals, swirling dreams, bursting stars, crystallising shapes which are infinite in their possibilities and suggestiveness, till the final ones that speak of life's fulfilment reflected in the image of the rising sun, meditative and expectant in its promise of life's continuity. Some of Rabindranath's Gitanjali poems are selected and arranged by Henri's friend, Brian W. E. Johnson, to corroborate Henri's theme and message in each of his mandalas, though much of the sequence in Organiverse reflects the order of poems in the original Gitanjali in English, which is appropriate for this special arrangement .

Henri's positive approach to life in spite of the many obstacles he encountered, his courage and success are apparent in these mandalas which defeat the idea of chaos with their cosmic energy that is both transformative and transporting. They represent life itself in its many manifestations and speak directly to the viewer with an appeal that is mesmerising. There is something sacred about their affirmation and celebration of life, a sense of inclusion that is compelling. Just as Rabindranath in Verse 10 in Organiverse finds the Creator with 'the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost' or 'where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones' (Verse 11), we find the mandalas enfolding life in all its variety and diversity.

Rabindranath says, 'I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight' and affirms, 'illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love' (Verse 73). We experience a similar joie de vivre, born of love of life itself, in Henri's universe, captured and reiterated in his mandalas, with the aesthetic and the rational meeting in a union that reads like an imaginative retelling of the Truth.

In Verse 89, Rabindranath looks towards a time when he will not be in this world, 'I know that the day will come when my sight of this earth shall be lost, and life will take its leave in silence, drawing the last curtain over my eyes.' And in Verse 93 his message is clear, 'When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.' While Natasha, Brian, Alex Dunedin, our Managing Designer and I corresponded and planned this special issue of Henri's Organiverse and Gitanjali, Henri left this world. But Henri's 100 mandalas defeat the silence as his presence is felt in spite of this absence through his artistic confirmation of life as he has seen and experienced it, which is 'unsurpassable'.

This special issue of Gitanjali and Beyond owes its inception and compilation to Henri's friend, Brian W.E. Johnson, along with Natasha's (Henri's partner for fifty one years) initiative and cooperation. The Gitanjali poems read by Brian, bring the philosophy and rhythms behind the compositions to the listener, in renditions which are sensitive, mellifluous and deeply moving. The multimedia presentation in YouTube links which present the mandalas and the poems in sets of 10, are like the tracing of decades through time. The whole issue has been designed and artistically put together by Alex who has worked closely with Natasha and Brian to bring out this unique issue which reverberates with the cyclic reality of cosmic energy expressed by Henri van Bentum with its positive portrayal of life, love, joy and above all, hope. The mandalas, poems and readings with music, incorporate and embody Rabindranath Tagore's conversations with the Maker of the Universe. Like Gitanjali, which is an Offering of Songs, Organiverse is an Offering of ineffable beauty.

**Bashabi Fraser**

Editor-in-Chief

Gitanjali and Beyond