

# AUROVILLE TODAY

September 1993, Number Fifty-Six

## Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him

NIRODBARAN was born in East Bengal in 1903. He first heard about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother while studying medicine in Edinburgh in the 1920's, and met The Mother for the first time in 1930. In 1933 he joined the Ashram and has lived there ever since. On the basis of an extended correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, and of being one of his personal attendants for many years, he has published a number of books. These include *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*.

On 14th August he came to Auroville and shared some of his memories of Sri Aurobindo with Aurovilians and friends. Speaking quietly and movingly in an overflowing Pitanga Hall, he brought for many of us the living vibration of Sri Aurobindo into our midst, a perfect preparation for the 15th August. Here are some extracts from his talk.

“YOUR invitation came to me as a mystic surprise—I call it ‘mystic’ because I feel that this occasion has been ordained by Sri Aurobindo—and I readily accepted it. I’m grateful for the invitation because it has made me think of Sri Aurobindo very often in the past month, and to pray to him to give me the inspiration so that I can truly convey to you something of what Sri Aurobindo is.

But first a little background. When I joined the Ashram in 1933, there were about

150 members. Most of them, including myself, knew very little about spirituality—we were like infants in this matter. But we were allowed to write to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother about the daily condition of our sadhana, with all our troubles and difficulties, and to ask them for guidance. Sri Aurobindo, who had been in seclusion since his great realization—the descent of the Overmind in the physical in 1926—would spend eight or nine hours a day in answering our letters. In the course of this correspondence, for some mysterious reason, I developed a personal intimacy with Sri Aurobindo, and he allowed me to ask him questions on any topic except politics; that was taboo! When I wanted to develop a literary faculty, he not only gave me inspiration, but he corrected my infantile work, swearing at my wrong rhythms! In this way, he made a poet of me. During darshans, however, he was a different person altogether. For there I perceived him as the great impersonal Shiva, sitting majestically in simple grandeur...

In 1938 he had an accident. Early one darshan morning, on his way to the bathroom, he fell down and broke his leg. The story behind this would take many hours to tell, but, in brief, it was the price he had to pay for delaying the outbreak of the Second World War until September, 1939. And this was the opportunity which allowed a few of us to enter his sanctum, and to live with him, day and night, for twelve momentous years. What, then, did I see?

What I observed of his outer life over these years—for I had no inkling of his

inner life—can be divided into two categories; the impersonal and personal aspects. In describing, firstly, his impersonal aspect, I’ll give you some living images. The first time I saw him was when I was called to attend him on that darshan morning. We found him lying on the floor like a helpless child, and it was a big shock for us. In fact, he had been lying there for two and a half hours before The Mother came in answer to an inner call. His thigh was fractured and when we moved him to his bed, the pain must have been terrible. But he made no sound, only answering The Mother’s enquiries in quiet monosyllables. I remember, however, that his body was glowing and very beautiful to look at.

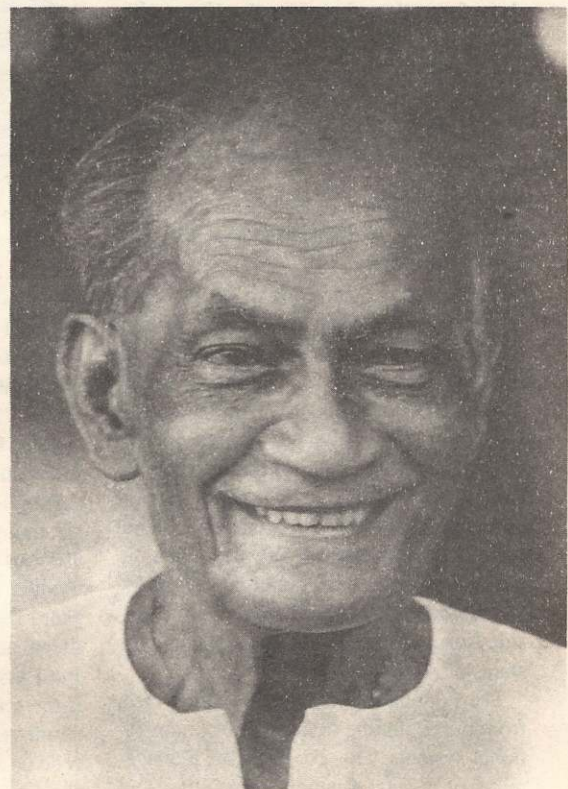
For one month he was confined to his bed, and was almost completely silent. Later he told us

what he had been doing. He had been trying to transform the terrible pain into ecstasy, *Ananda*. He had never experienced such a pain before in the physical, so it was a big job. But finally he succeeded.

After two months, The Mother—who always liked to set people to work!—arranged it so he could work again. And then we saw his wonderful manner of writing, described by The Mother as a process by which everything came down from a silent plane into his pen. For he started rewriting and revising *The Life Divine* for hours on end, without referring to any books, like a machine that had been set going. He did not notice us—we were like shadows—and he was completely impervious to his bodily needs or to the intense heat. In this way he completed the three volumes of *The Life Divine* before beginning to work again on *Savitri*. Even when he ate, he ate silently and slowly. In fact, his movements and his manner of speech were always very slow and very deliberate. Everything about him was conscious.

This, then, was the impersonal aspect of Sri Aurobindo, which was the hallmark of his being and consciousness. But there were also times when he came down from his high consciousness, and would talk and joke with us; and these, for us, were the most beautiful times. We could ask anything, and he would answer slowly, in a few words, with a very sweet smile. But he would never look at us, and hardly ever call any of us by our name.

His humour encompassed everything. For example, during the war, everything was rationed. And we, his attendants, among our other duties had to see that he cleared his bowels daily. One day, we noticed that he had passed very little. “Sir,” we said, “What is this? Please try harder.” “It’s war economy!” he replied. He was not one of these stiff, high and dry yogis!



Nirodbaran, after his talk on Sri Aurobindo

At the very end, his personal aspect was also there. Before he passed away, he embraced his great *bhakta*, Champaklal, three, four, five times in a vast recognition of his service. We were amazed. Then, a few minutes before the end, he called me. “Nirod, give me some water.” It was the first time he had called me by my name, and those few, sweet words are imprinted on my soul. And then, when he passed away, his whole body became crimson gold; we and thousands of others in the next few days saw it. And this wonderful vision washed away all my dejections.

Later, The Mother explained that he had been bringing down the supramental light and finally, at the cost of this holocaust of his own body, he had succeeded in establishing the supramental light in his body consciousness. This light is now acting vigorously over the whole world.

The Mother has said that Sri Aurobindo was the avatar of the supermind. Whether you accept him as an avatar or not doesn’t matter. But my personal view, after living with him and observing him for twelve years, is that he was truly a perfect man. He was always poised, serene, above all attachments, perfectly free. He himself said, “There is nothing human in me.” But it wasn’t inborn. He told us that he had had many faults in his nature, but he had transformed his nature by sheer *tapasya*, by the practice of yoga, by identification with the Divine. For nobody can become a perfect man by his own efforts.

So, brothers and sisters, you are indeed very lucky to have come to Auroville, to do Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s work through their Force. There are many wonders in the world today, but Matrimandir and Auroville will surpass all the other wonders because they are spiritual—and you will be the instruments of their creation.” □

THE PERIOD around the 15th August is always very intense in Auroville, and this year was no exception. Beginning with a meeting of working group representatives with the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation on the evening of the 13th, it progressed through numerous work group meetings with the Governing Board next day, causing a number of Aurovilians to question whether such a ‘business’ vibration was really an appropriate preparation for Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. Fortunately, another atmosphere altogether was created later in the day when Nirodbaran, a long-term member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and one of Sri Aurobindo’s personal attendants in his final years, came to Auroville to give us a talk on Sri Aurobindo.

On the 15th, the bonfire was followed by a community breakfast at Bharat Nivas and a ‘Savitri’ reading under the Banyan tree. In the afternoon, Bharat Nivas was also the venue for Indian Independence Day celebrations with songs, games and theatre.

As evening fell, the focus swung to ‘Pitanga’ where a wistful bamboo flute concert on the roof by Gordon Korstange preceded ‘Offerings’, a cul-

tural programme of personal offerings by Aurovilians to Sri Aurobindo. These included song settings of some of Sri Aurobindo’s poems, a dance interpretation of a canto of *Savitri* accompanied by Sunil’s music, and a pot-pourri of songs by the popular Auroville choir. Reactions to the evening were somewhat mixed; some of the audience felt that what was presented was predominantly ‘New Age-ish’ and insubstantial, others that a genuine *bhakti* (devotional) consciousness was expressed which had been suppressed or tabooed in the community for many years.

This four-page issue of AUROVILLE TODAY contains excerpts from Nirodbaran’s talk. It also, as promised in our last issue, provides space for the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to express his views on the Foundation and Auroville in general. Finally, we learn a little about Mr. Ajoy Bagchi, a relatively new member of the Governing Board who attended his first Board meeting in Auroville this month, and we accompany Yanne—one of our long-term team members who has just returned from a long stay in France—on a journey of self-exploration and discovery entitled ‘The Gardeners of the Unknown’. —The Editors



## INTERVIEW

## "I have come here with a view to serve"

In the last issue of AUROVILLE TODAY we presented a spectrum of views on the present functioning of the Auroville Foundation. Unfortunately the Secretary, Mr. L.K. TRIPATHY, was unable at that time to give us an interview due to pressure of work. On the evening of the 14th August, after an exhausting day of meetings between the Governing Board and Auroville work groups, he generously consented to give us his thoughts and perceptions on both the Foundation Act and Auroville in general.

**AVT: What, in your opinion, is the importance of the Auroville Foundation and what is its main achievement so far?**

Mr. Tripathy: According to me, the main importance has been to provide a legal framework which was missing before. The status of Auroville was in limbo, in a state of flux. By constituting the Foundation, the Government of India has recognized the importance of Auroville as an International Cultural Township, and by providing a Governing Board which is eminently suitable for this type of work, it has also given the necessary space to the community to grow in accordance with the Charter. People outside Auroville are now more clear about the status of Auroville.

The Foundation has been working right from the beginning to install new organizational systems. This concerns the management of assets, financial discipline and administration. Earlier, this organization was missing, and things were solved or not solved in a very ad hoc manner. The system was quite mystifying, and it was not really understood, even by Aurovilians. For example, the way money gets allocated, the way a particular unit decides to give money, the way a particular problem is solved. These were decided in an individualised way. If I may say so, Auroville was drifting more towards the individual than towards the collective. And in terms of the objectives of Auroville, if you go into individualistic ways of living in Auroville, then you are not building Auroville, but something else. My efforts have been to refocus the attention on the collective and try to help and strengthen that collective process. Since people were used to individualized ways of functioning, the necessity to relate themselves or the units to the Foundation first came as a shock, as a trauma. But once they had gone through the whole thing the majority of them found that there was no difficulty.

**Some Aurovilians feel that in the present implementation of the Act there is too much emphasis upon legalities, and that this constricts our freedom to experiment with new ways of functioning.**

I think that this is more of a fear psychosis among some members of the community. Let me give you an example, Office Order Number 5. Last month an Auroville working group, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC), has gone through it. They say they have consulted a lawyer, and have come to the conclusion that it is a necessary legal requirement. Moreover, they say that the experience over the last year is that we have never tried to interfere with the way the units and services have been functioning. One year ago this order was not accepted. Now it is, but it has taken the community more than a year to come to this conclusion. I would like to add that many Aurovilians have been in-

volved in the drafting of the office order, and that I have accepted any wording proposed as long as the legal requirements were met.

But you have to realize that if there are legal requirements you cannot ignore them. For example, in March last year I received a letter from the panchayat union commissioner telling me that we have not been taking building permission from them, that this is the requirement of the law, and that we have to do it. As per the Tamil Nadu State law, only the local body, the panchayat, is competent to give permission regarding building construction, not anybody else, not the Central Indian Government, nor the Auroville Foundation.

Auroville has never taken building permission before. But this is a requirement of law, and the fact that it has not been done does not make it legal to continue like that.

By the way, taking building permission is a normal requirement in any country in the world.

After talking to the Development Group last year, I went to see the Collector on Auroville's behalf, and said that we needed six months' grace from this regulation to allow us to set our house in order. Those six months became one year. Then after one year I realised that I was only extending an illegal activity, which I was opposed to do. But I assured the Development Group that if there is any delay in the granting of the permission by the panchayat, I would intercede on Auroville's behalf.

**Have you or the Governing Board ever received instructions from the Indian Government on how to deal with Auroville?**

The Government of India has not given any brief to the Governing Board or the Secretary. The only brief is the Foundation Act which says that Auroville should grow as an International Cultural Township and that the Governing Board should ensure better management with a view to secure the future Auroville in accordance with the Charter.

In reality it is the community which takes all the decisions. The Governing Board only comes in at the last stage, to approve this or that, we do not even participate in the process. Only we have to ensure that the processes are fair, equitable and just to everybody. We do not want to put everything in a strait-jacket. You experiment and tell me how best we can formulate the system.

The only point where we are very particular is that there should be no individual utilization of the resources which belong to the collective. There should be a collective mechanism which looks at the interests of Auroville as a whole, not furthering the individual's interest. Until recently, before the FAMC was constituted, this was not the case. Let me tell you, the accounts need a lot of improvement, there are a lot of leakages, a lot of money is being used by individuals for individual interests which is wrong. I want the FAMC to become aware of this matter so that they can apply the correctives. We do not want to apply them ourselves, we want the community to deal with this.

I have great faith in the collective wisdom which is why I want the collective to be active. I am aware that the collective mechanism is at a very weak, nascent stage, and that some people are resisting strengthening it because they have vested interests in keeping it weak. But it has to develop. However, there are objections



Mr. Tripathy, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation

even to the setting up of a system. "No, we want to do it our way": but nobody knows what that way is! Everyone says it is the way of the Divine, or of the community, but what the way of the Divine or the community is is left to each one's interpretation! This ambiguity is wrong.

But let me make clear, in respect to the Auroville Charter, that we are not touching the spiritual aspect of your work. That is left to the complete discretion of the Aurovilians. The point is that we must give you an environment in which this work is possible. If you do not set your house in order now, I am afraid that you will never succeed in building Auroville. In this respect, the Foundation Act can help speed things up.

**The absence of any enforcement system within Auroville puts the Secretary in a rather peculiar situation. From your recent actions it appears that you feel forced to take action yourself if the community does not take action in certain matters.**

Yes. I have observed that there is a tendency in Auroville to put things under the carpet if you cannot solve a situation. I believe this is wrong. You must face it, take a decision and move forward. The community has to give an appropriate response and deal with a problem in a proper manner. If it fails to do this, I am not going to sit back, because that is not my mandate. I'll see to it that whatever is lawful is being done. Unlawful activity cannot be permitted. But I must tell you that when aberrations have occurred, I have always dealt with them in an Aurovilian way, without taking them to an outside authority, except in one case where I was personally threatened and abused in front of villagers and my staff, and I felt that enough was enough.

The fact that as a community you cannot tackle individual acts of delinquency, like the unauthorized putting up of a check post or illicit felling of trees, shows that the community does not yet have a mechanism to deal with a type of behaviour that is not acceptable in any community in any civilized society. I feel that the majority of the community feels the need for such a mechanism and that they are working towards it; this is a very important and welcome step.

**Is there a disparity between you acting as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and as officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) of the Government of India?**

There is no disparity. The Secretary is an appointee of the Government of India as by the Foundation Act. He is bound to ensure that everything is done the way it has been contemplated in the Act. In this way I am

also acting as a IAS officer. While I am helping you, I am keeping the links with the Government of India. This should be seen as a help for Auroville. Many things have been done by me personally interceding on Auroville's behalf, using my influence as an IAS officer, such as exemptions for Matrimandir, getting special funds for the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas, or dealing with local authorities to obtain and speed up orders or exemptions.

**Before you came here, you held major posts in the Tamil Nadu government. In Auroville, you have, perhaps, not always been treated with the respect to which you have been accustomed...**

I never expected that. Basically I am a team man. I believe coordination and team spirit is more important than finding out who is where in the hierarchy. Hierarchy does not get you anywhere. I have not come here looking for hierarchy, I have come here to work in a lateral type of operation.

**Yet the fact that you have power, for example, in the matter of recommending visas is controversial. There is even a rumour that you have written to the embassies that no five-year visas should be granted without your permission...**

That's incorrect. In fact, individuals have come to me, saying that the embassy requires it. I have never on my own approached or written to any embassy. My recommendation for the issue of residential permits is due to a Government regulation which dates back to 1983.

**Auroville is certainly not Indian. Do you feel it is too Westernized?**

I should not like you to completely Indianize yourselves. Auroville is going to be a composite culture, which will evolve. To that extent, autonomy and freedom have to be provided. This should not lead to people forming national groups or behaving like Indians. You have come here to transcend those barriers, and you should promote something which inspires confidence irrespective of the person's nationality. You should realize that this is India, you live in Tamil Nadu, and that its laws have to be obeyed, but this is an international township. Let people forget their race and national background. Let them develop as part of an international cultural group. All Aurovilians have to make conscious steps to overcome their group and nationalistic instincts.

**You volunteered for this job. What has been your experience of these past 18 months?**

My experience is mixed. Firstly, I am happy that I have been able to do something for Auroville, for Matrimandir. And, on the basis of my contact with individuals, my experience has generally been very, very satisfying—I have met many Aurovilians with commitment and simplicity. At the same time, Aurovilians have to be more open, more warm—and I find there is too much politics here of a very crude type, which shouldn't have a place in Auroville. After all, people come for higher objectives, and if you get into this kind of politics it is very, very demeaning...

I have come here disregarding all my IAS privileges. I have come here with a view to serve. In terms of status, in terms of career and in terms of money, it is a personal loss to me. I have volunteered to work here because of my personal commitment to Auroville. I thought I would be able to help and get some satisfaction that in my career I have done something good for Auroville, because this is also one of the causes dear to my heart.

Interview by Alan and Carel  
14-8-1993



Introducing a new member of the Governing Board

## "I am basically an environmentalist"

For the first time since his appointment last year, Mr. BAGCHI was able to visit Auroville to attend the meeting of the Governing Board on August 14th. He stayed a few days after the meeting to get better acquainted with some aspects of Auroville, and during that time AUROVILLE TODAY interviewed him.

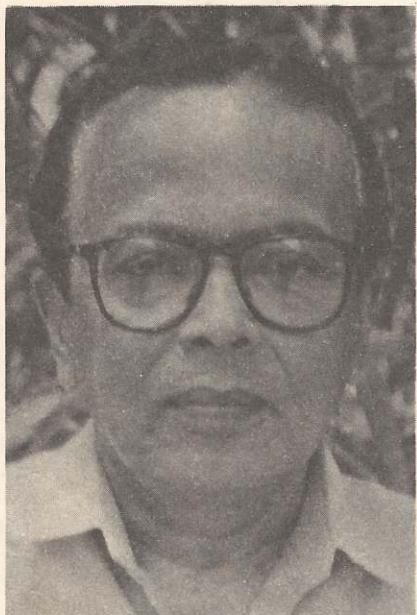
"I come originally from Bengal. I have worked for some time in the Central Government, and am now working for the United Nations as a specialist in organizational development, advising on the functioning of government organizations, particularly in countries in South East Asia. Apart from that I have been working for quite a long time in the area of environment, and am at present the Executive Director of the Peoples Commission on Environment and Development (PCED), of which Dr. Karan Singh is the Chairman. For this work, I travel quite a lot in India as we hold public hearings in various places.

Basically, I am an environmentalist and am happy to have seen for myself the amount of environmental improvement that

Auroville has realised. You can definitely be proud of that.

Public awareness of the environment is still at a very elementary stage in India. There are, for example, the problems associated with the proposed East Coast road. I share with Aurovilians their concern about this road, and I would like to do whatever I can to see that these problems are sorted out. While I've been here, I've taken the opportunity to see for myself the damage already done by the planned East Coast Road project. The alternative route which has been suggested is much better than the coastal road which is now planned. The attitude of the Central Government, in particular of the Minister of Environment, is very supportive of the alternative. The problem lies with the Government of Tamil Nadu, as this road is a Tamil Nadu State project funded by the Asian Development Bank. A lot of attention will have to be paid to change the views of the people in the Tamil Nadu government, including those of the technical people who are involved. This group of decision makers should come to see what their actions are doing, and how harmful the project is to the ecology and environment of the area. And if this pressure does not work, there is the option of court proceedings.

PHOTO LEO RAJ



Mr. Ajoy Bagchi, member of the Governing Board

I have accepted to be a member of Auroville's Governing Board in the belief that it is a good opportunity to be of service. I do not claim to know very much about the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but I have a sense of commitment and I would like to do more for Auroville than only attending the meetings of the Governing Board.

I look forward, on my next visit, to seeing more of Auroville's activities, such as the reclaiming of wastelands.

## IN SHORT

### Air-conditioning the Chamber

After a burst of frantic activity, the final components of the air-conditioning system for the Matrimandir chamber were assembled and the system was working in time for the 15th August. There are still a few 'bugs' in the system—not ably some vibration noise—but the air-conditioning team is confident that everything will be worked out in a few weeks.

### Bangalore Conference

Between 1st and 5th June, about 400 environmentalists, social workers, judges, tribals and trade unionists from all over India gathered in Bangalore for a national conference on the topic of Human Rights, Environment and the Law. Four Aurovilians attended, and the East Coast Road issue, which affects Auroville, was presented along with other major issues like the Narmada Dam project.

One of the most important decisions of the Conference was to set up a Permanent People's Tribunal on environment and human rights. The brief of the Tribunal is to investigate and make recommendations concerning projects which put the environment and basic human rights at risk. The participating Aurovilians pledged their support for the Tribunal, and are attempting to raise funds in the community to help get the project off the ground.

### International Seminar in Auroville

A UNESCO-sponsored seminar on the theme of 'Humanity at the Crossroads: Evolution of Consciousness' will take place in Auroville on 25th and 26th February, 1994. A small group of Aurovilians has been working on preparing the conference and has now, in consultation with the Governing Board, finalised the list of international and national invitees, all of whom are eminent in fields relating to evolution and consciousness. It is also proposed to hold an internal Auroville seminar on the same topic a few days prior to the international one.

### Altecs moves to new premises

The Industrial Zone is expanding. On August 15th, Altecs, one of the Auroville electronics companies, celebrated its move—in record time—to new premises next to 'Filaure' workshop.

AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan.. Printed at Auroville Press.

## Peace Table for Auroville

"A short while back there appeared a great bole of a tree, a Walnut. In size it was about the largest I have seen, five feet in diameter (1.5m) at the small end, about seven (2.1m) at the flare, and twelve feet (3.6m) long. Its character seemed extraordinary....In a small but firm voice the bole asked to be realized; two adjoining slabs opened to match to make an extraordinary table, roughly twelve feet (3.6m) long by the same dimension wide, weighing almost a ton. It was a dream—An Altar for Peace!... Advisors have suggested we make six Altars, one for each continent... —Georges Nakashima, 1985.

In his early life Georges Nakashima was involved with the construction of Golconde for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. During the Second World War he emigrated to the U.S.A., where he created a wood workshop, and finally became a celebrity for his innovative and beautiful furniture. The first Altar of Peace was installed at the foot of the nave in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1986. He passed away in 1990, after a lifetime listening to the voices of wood. The legacy of five Altars was left to his daughter, Mira.

Mira visited Auroville in 1992 and offered one of these Altars to Auroville. Gratefully accepted, the Peace Table will become the focal point of a Hall of Peace, a conference centre for all kinds of meetings, located in the vicinity of Matrimandir. Fundraising for the Table and the Hall will be coordinated by Mira. Piero, the architect, has meanwhile begun designing the Hall.

Carel

### We got it wrong...

In the article 'Getting it right' by Tim in the previous issue of AUROVILLE TODAY there was something we did not get right. As Tim kindly pointed out, Rs. 20 lakhs is equivalent to \$ 66,600 and not \$ 666,650 as inserted by us. And Tim's inspiration for the various uses of the palmyra tree came from Mahalingam, not Ramalingam.

In the same issue, in the introduction to Ulli's (Aurelec) view, it was erroneously stated that Ulli is one of the three trustees of Aurelec Trust. This should read: one of the three executives (there are four trustees). —The editors



CARTOON BY LAURA

### Foundation stones in International zone

On August 22nd, the French Ambassador to India, Philippe Petit, laid the foundation stone for the French Pavilion in the International Zone, on a plot of land opposite the Visitors Centre. Funds for the project, which has the support of the French Government, have been raised in France.

Other pavilions are also being 'grounded'. In December, for example, the Dalai Lama will lay the foundation stone for the Tibetan Pavilion.

With regard to the Indian Pavilion, Bharat Nivas, it is hoped that most of the major work on the Auditorium will be completed by February 1993.

### ❖ How To Subscribe ❖

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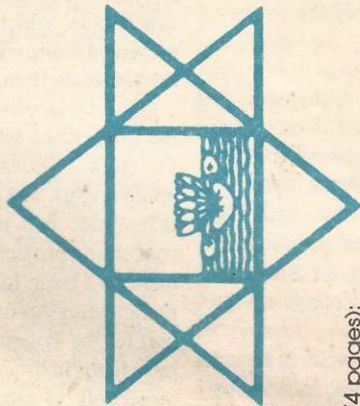
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September 1993

Number Fifty-Six

In this issue (4 pages):  
A talk by Nirodbaran; an interview with the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation;  
introducing a new member of the Governing Board; news in brief.

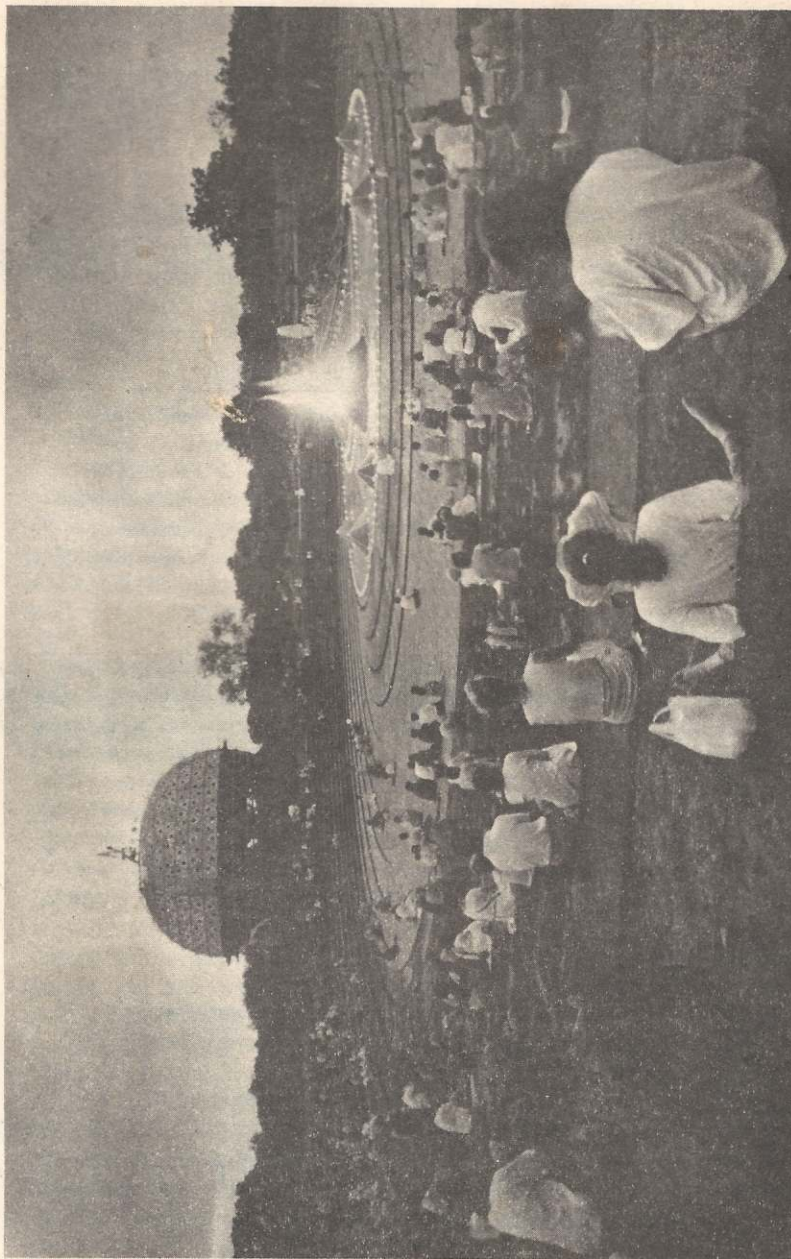


PHOTO RENO

BONFIRE AT DAWN, ON 15TH AUGUST, 1993

## BACK IN INDIA

### Gardeners of the unknown

Yanne, a member of our editorial team, recently spent a year in France after living in Auroville for eighteen years. Here are her impressions of how it feels to be back.

In order to experience the joy and emotion of coming back, there comes a day you need to tear yourself away from Auroville's red soil, and set out, with mixed feelings and a stone in your heart, to the airport in Madras.

The world outside offers itself generously to you—and day by day, the beautiful memories of Auroville intensify and gradually replace the heaviness deep inside. A year is long and short at the same time—it's a lifetime to let the need for Auroville grow within. And then, one day, you are there again. A distant recognition, a millennium of memories—of love and of struggle—suddenly surge up, explode, and you find yourself embraced.

The morning of the second day it's still happening. You are there, the birds have resumed their old rhythm, and so have we. The wash basin is still leaking and it is terribly hot and humid, but our way of looking at this reality has changed. The trees seem rooted for eternity. When finally, a few days later, I felt like going out of Dana, I took my old red-and-green bicycle. I needed to reconnect with the earth before meeting its people and I set out to rediscover it via the new cycle paths.

How beautiful that earth is, just after the summer, still hot from the sun's clasp, red, dry, vibrant. I caught a glimpse of mongooses and rabbits, a lone jackal and enormous monitor lizards, and almost ran over a snake as thick as my arm. Finally I drifted into the area designated as the 'Industrial Zone'—an unattractive name for what is meant to become a concentration of energy. I saw beautiful buildings surrounded by magnificent gardens, and I had to think of all those millions of people elsewhere living in insalubrious shanty towns...

As the sun was setting, everything turned a glowing red. I had lost my way—in an infinite sweetness. A worker passing by showed me the way to the Matrimandir. I left my bicycle at the entrance of the Matrimandir offices and headed towards the 'globe'. I remembered the various stages of its construction, the meetings, the concreting of the first pillars. I felt a kind of pride in having been a witness to the patience, the ardour, the despair, the struggles of the Matrimandir workers.

I came to the ramp leading to the Room, and someone was there to receive me—sitting quietly on the parapet, book in hand. We smiled at each other—we had seen each other around for almost 20 years not knowing anything about each other, and that had created bonds. Time seemed to have barely weathered him, like all of us. When the Matrimandir is finished, who will bother about those twenty years? They will seem like nothing at all... Suffering from vertigo, I climbed that ramp about which I had dreamed so much. I was back where I belonged. There was nothing sacred in this reunion, rather a kind of stubborn pride. Against all logic, and the madness of technology, the Aurovilians had succeeded. In the middle of nowhere. "The most beautiful temple in South-India", some might say. For me it is a concentration of consciousness, a ball of energy. I entered the Room; the late afternoon light reflected by the crystal greeted me. Attracted by this luminous spot in the centre of the Room, I could not see who the shadowy figures were, sitting far apart and in silence. The Room of Silence. A lot has been said about Matrimandir! For me it means silence, immediate concentration, an absolute, primordial security which I have felt nowhere else, that of a child in the womb. Upon leaving, I uttered a little innocent prayer as I looked at the landscape around with all its vegetation (a small miracle), "May the Matrimandir never become a temple that the tourist agencies put on their itinerary."

I came down and paused under the Banyan tree; how strong it looked and how full of sap. A man was there, radiant, with a child on his arm. One of those first Aurovilians who never doubted, never left the place. His daughter was born 24 years ago in Auroville's first maternity clinic at Promesse. She is a mother now, and he a grandfather. I was touched—those arms had taken part in so many struggles, planted trees and transformed a bit of desert into a paradise. And now they held a plump, six-month old child... I was right not to have doubted. This 'grand-child' is more symbolic than any Foundation—a third generation of human clay offering itself up to the transformation.

I came to the Urn. How many times had I not come here to make peace with myself or with other Aurovilians. For you cannot stay indifferent. You love each other, hate each other, tear each other apart, find each other again—a love-story that is ever begun anew. I now looked at the faces of fellow Aurovilians, and saw weariness and lassitude, as well as hope and enthusiasm mixed with a lot of frustration. Frustration due to having an ideal placed so high that it is unattainable. Weariness because of never-ending internal struggles, clan struggles, judgements and rumours. Weariness because of errors and failures, because of the climate that wears you out, weariness with one's self that one thought more grand. Yes, those 'mutants' seemed tired to me because they judge themselves and are judged by the ordinary mentality that compares, judges and tallies up failures. Because, little by little, everything pushes them to become ordinary, polished and neat, to establish order, to look like everybody else, to make people less afraid. It's true that 'mutants' are not a very reassuring phenomenon. But is an Aurovillian not different? Who cares about the scoffers, those who know what to do and how to do it, those who have lost their innocence. If being an Aurovillian offers little scope for arrogance, there is nonetheless a difference: the Aurovilians are OF THIS PLACE. They will perhaps come to understand the beauty of that fact when they will begin to respect one another, to trust one another, to foster each other's difference and richness rather than stifling it, rather than destroying one another.

Coming out of a meeting, I felt like telling them: "Stop assassinating one another, you're doing harm to the body of Auroville, you are squandering your wealth."

Let us hope that Aurovilians will never be like 'everybody else'. If Auroville becomes like 'everywhere else', the experience will be over. We would have chosen the wrong road. Instead of exploring the way to become human beings of the future, we would have turned back to the people of yesterday. Again a little prayer: "May the Aurovilians remain different, may they cultivate their candour." They are the gardeners of a flower yet to bloom, and they do not know its beauty yet; they dream... and cry because they wake up being what they are: "gardeners of a yet unknown world."

Yanne