

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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**S**ri Aurobindo and Mother never made it easy. "The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught", wrote Sri Aurobindo. "The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth", so that the child can be "induced to expand in accordance with his own nature". And Mother said that teachers should be yogis!

The more organized forms of education in Auroville have always been a fertile mix of inspiration, improvisation, and, at times, despair; of responding creatively to particular needs as they arose. The first serious attempt was Aspiration School, which, between 1970-76, began struggling with issues that have remained central to the Auroville educational experiment ever since. How to create the optimum conditions for the free growth of all individuals, whatever their background or race? What is the proper subject matter for study in Auroville schools? What role should the community as a whole play in the education of the children? What does education for human unity really mean?

In 1976, Aspiration School closed, and for almost 8 years there was no organized structure of education in Auroville. This was welcomed by some. "School as such is dead in Auroville, and so much the better", stated the *Auroville Review* in 1978, reflecting a feeling that something new and closer to the spirit of Auroville's purpose needed to emerge. But others were concerned by the educational hiatus, and a number of small centres evolved - Ivar's school in Kottakarai, Meenakshi's 'after hours' school for Tamil youth and workers, Croquette's school in Douceur which later moved to the Centre, and Johnny's incomparably off-beat and inspirational happenings at 'Fertile'. But the older teenagers, in particular,

were deprived of stimulation at a critical stage, and a number of them began to seek further education elsewhere in India and abroad, a trend which has continued.

On hindsight, 1984 seems to have been a critical year in Auroville's educational development. On 28th February, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIR) was founded to coordinate and stimulate research into education in Auroville. That same year, the young adults who had been in Aspiration School began pressing for a High School, André Tardeil's 'New Creation' experiment for village children began, and a new school complex for the primary school children - 'Transition' - was completed with funds from the Government of India. This enabled the Centre School facilities to be devoted to the Kindergarten. In 1985, the new high school - called 'Last School' - opened in Aspiration and Ivar's school, renamed 'Isai Ambalam', began to develop into a colourful, multi-activity learning and training centre for villagers and village children.

Today, Auroville has an organized structure of education. But within this framework, new experiments are continuously taking place, and new centres responding to fresh needs - like 'Mirramukhi' - are evolving. This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY is an introduction both to the varied Auroville education scene, and to those who will play a key part in Auroville's future, the next wave that is already breaking upon our shore - the Auroville youth. In two issues' time, we will explore these topics further, fertilized, we hope, by your ideas, dreams and practical proposals.

## "A Living Centre of Research"

*An interview with teachers of Last School.*

In 1976, the Aspiration school closed. As a result, a generation of Auroville teenagers went for many years without formal education. In 1984, these young adults were the driving force behind the creation of a 'high' school in Aspiration. In 1985, it opened and was called 'Last School'.

Today, Last School is more a middle-level school, taking children between 12 and 16 years old. AUROVILLE TODAY recently interviewed three of the teachers - Deepti, Lisbeth and Georges - who have been teaching at Last School from the beginning.

**What does it mean to each of you to teach at Last School?**

**Georges:** I've always felt a strong tie with young people, but the children here were a discovery for me. They have something very special, and to work with this living material, to help it develop in whatever way possible is what interests me most. And what I appreciate here very much is that the teachers are so positive towards every child.

**Lisbeth:** I'm very enthusiastic about teaching here. I love to work with these children because they're very open and very beautiful. They're wild, but over the years I've made a contact with them that's very precious to me.

**Deepti:** I've enjoyed doing many things in Auroville, but I've never enjoyed myself so much as when I'm teaching at Last School. Working with Auroville children is different, in my experience, from working with other children. Auroville children have a deep honesty and frankness. Because they've never had to fear punishment, they are very direct and give you immediately feedback. And when the teacher is given honest feedback, it totally changes the approach. Of course, these children have their outer crusts, but if you just scratch the surface you find this sweetness and soul

quality, which is much more disguised in more 'sophisticated' children.

**So teaching here is very much a process of discovery.**

**Georges:** Last School is a living centre of research - on ourselves, on the children, on education. For example, this school is a crucible, a testing ground for attitudes the teachers have acquired in their own education. Here they discover what is true and what is irrelevant, and how they can do their best with the few means at their disposal. And they are confronted by the challenge of working with many different cultures and backgrounds.

One thing you learn here. You cannot fake it! However old you may be - and the children here see me as some kind of dinosaur - if you remain sincere and young in heart, and if you contact them as adults, they will listen to you.

**Lisbeth:** And here they know everything about you anyway. So you can really be yourself. For example, if something happens in Auroville, they immediately ask you what you think about it. I try to present all the points of view, but if I have strong feelings, I express them. And they appreciate this.



**"None of the usual things work here. There are no punishments, no accepted authority. You're flung upon your inner resources, you have to seek a deeper support if you are to act correctly."**

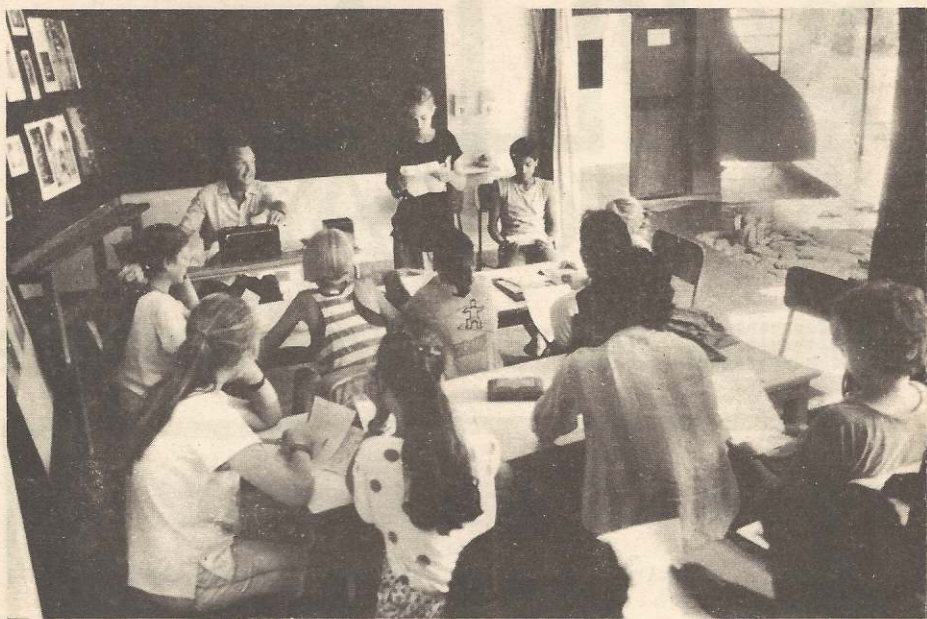
**Deepti:** They like to discuss everything that's going on in Auroville, and they often come to their own, deeply wise, conclusions. They go right to the core! I simply try to make sure they have all the necessary information. Then I tell them to work it out themselves.

Of course, like children everywhere, they test you out first. A few years ago a student came into my class who, for one term, questioned everything I said. He questioned my accent, my spelling, my capacity to teach. I decided I wasn't going

to be sarcastic - Mother said that sarcasm was a terrible weapon to use against children. But then, what do you do? None of the usual things work here. There are no punishments, no accepted authority. You're flung upon your inner resources, you have to seek a deeper support if you are to act correctly. And one day, this student changed and suddenly became very sweet. I don't know how it happened, but I was grateful to him for teaching me so much.

*It's been said that Auroville children*





Georges and some of the Last School students.

Photo Sven

### "The school is providing a structure, an order, that many students do not experience outside it."

(from page 1)

*should not be 'structured'. And that they shouldn't be taught about the 'old' world but only be prepared for the new. What do you think?*

**Deepti:** I'm convinced we need structure in education, because the rest of Auroville is so unstructured. And the children want it, they respond to it. They need to feel they have a frame and a goal. It's only a problem when these become an end rather than a means.

**Georges:** The school is providing a structure, an order, that many students do not experience outside it. They need models, and the teachers can be role models for them. That's why we need more Aurovilians to come and teach here. To provide more role models and to show that more adults care about them.

**Deepti:** We try to encourage in the students a sense of culture, which brings refinement to a human being. I think there's some confusion in Auroville when people say of the students, "Leave them free and they'll find it". They won't! Because the external personality has first to be developed and refined. One thing all the teachers agree upon — our work is with that external personality. An Aurovilian said recently, "All we need are awakened souls". But the souls are already awakened.

Recently, a French teacher was reading a text to a class when she came across the word 'sin'. They immediately asked her to explain. She didn't know where to begin — but it was clear that they needed to understand in order to understand the whole text. The children need to know these things not because they need it in their own lives, but because they need to understand why people behave in a certain way.

**Georges:** This anti-cultural, anti-mind

### "When the teacher is given honest feedback, it totally changes the approach."

ideology is very dangerous. Educationally, we almost lost a generation in Auroville when this attitude closed down Aspiration School fifteen years ago. Some adults were merely reacting against their own distorted education and throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

In my teaching, I work with film. And I am convinced that these children can be shown any video film — excepting horror — if they are provided with an introduction and guidance. Of course, it would be nice to show only images of a beautiful world. But the world is not like this, and they know it. And they'll see all the other films anyway.

So to stop them from gulping them down, I try to give them a perspective. I tell them there are many worlds, and the film they are going to see shows them what happens in one of them. That human beings are like that, and you need to know about it because one day you'll be confronted by it — because it's in you too. After this, they watch the film in a totally different way.

**Deepti:** Recently we began a history course which included a course on the

When you take the children very young, it is wonderful. There is so little to do: it is enough to be.

Never make a mistake.

Never lose your temper.

Always understand.

And to know and see clearly why there has been this movement, why there has been this impulse, what is the inner constitution of the child, what is the thing to be strengthened and brought forward — this is the only thing to do; and to leave them, to leave them free to blossom; simply to give them the opportunity to see many things, to touch many things, to do as many things as possible. It is great fun. And above all, not to try to impose on them what you think you know.

Never scold them. Always understand, and if the child is ready, explain; if he is not ready for an explanation — if you are ready yourself — replace the false vibration by a true one. But this... this is to demand from the teachers a perfection which they rarely have.

But it would be very interesting to make a programme for the teachers and the true programme of study, from the very bottom — which is so plastic and which receives impressions so deeply. If they were given a few drops of truth when they are very young, they would blossom quite naturally as the being grows. It would be beautiful work.

*The Mother, On Education, page 405.*

great religions. One of the teachers was presenting Judaism and an Aurovilian said, "Why do you do this? It's so old." But at the end of the course, the teacher brought out what Sri Aurobindo had written about it, and quoted the wonderful passage where he says that truth cannot be contained in a single book or religion. Truth is evolving. And the children responded very well to this approach. I've discovered that as they learn more about history and culture, they understand current affairs much better.

**Lisbeth:** It helps make it living for them. I was doing the Middle East with them in Geography class just after the Judaism class. And it really made it click for them.

*What are the challenges involved in teaching children from such different backgrounds?*

**Lisbeth:** In my class in 'Transition' [Auroville school for children from 6 to 12 years — eds.] I have some Tamil children from the village. And it's very clear that they lack the mental and cultural stimula-

IN 1985 Last School opened. To start with, it catered for an age group that was by and large above 16 years but required basic skills in language and other subjects. Gradually, younger students began to arrive, most of whom had had a more systematic schooling from kindergarten through to Transition. With time, the older students were encouraged to find work in Auroville. As they 'graduated' to become responsible citizens of Auroville, Last School took on a younger appearance. Today it is much more a middle-level school with children ranging between 12 and 16 years with the majority around 14 years of age.

All the subjects that a normal school curriculum offers are available, but the orientation is different from the traditional model. As the teachers expressed it recently, "Education in Auroville must primarily awaken the inner spark without compromising the material base — and the confidence that this can be done is there but it needs the collaboration of all the members of the community of Auroville."

tion at home that so many Aurovilian children take for granted. And this separates them from the others. Now we are trying to change this by starting all the young ones together in the Kindergarten.

**Deepti:** In the early days in Aspiration we had European and Tamil children growing up together. They were like brothers, always visiting each other's houses. But the sense of brotherhood, which is fundamental to Auroville, is a casualty of the recent trend towards individualization. People have retired more into their own houses, and the younger Auroville children don't visit the village or mix much with the Tamil students. And there's much more a sense of a material hierarchy based on money. Recently, when the bakery closed temporarily this material inequality became very clear at the school. The white children were sitting at break-

time eating biscuits and buns, while the Tamil children had nothing. When I pointed this out, my group was astonished. They hadn't even thought about it! It's just lack of consciousness.

That's why a hostel where young people from all cultures can live together would be a solution. They have to grow up equal. At the moment, we are perpetuating our own inequalities.

Recently, all the students were asked to comment upon their classes and teachers. One thing that emerged was that three or four Tamil children felt they'd been slightly discriminated against in terms of how they'd been taught. We pinned up all the responses on the board and allowed the children to discuss it. I wanted them to deal with it. Basically, I felt very positive because the Tamil children had had the courage to express it, and when something is out in the open, it can be talked about and changed. And that awareness of the problem is definitely growing in the children.

**Georges:** These kind of problems can't be solved quickly. The adults have to give a lead here and create the right environment for the children to grow up in. The children here are still very deprived culturally. If there is nothing positive, they will soak up the negative. At the moment, Auroville as a whole does not give a high enough priority to this, and the schools receive too little support from parents and others.

**Deepti:** And we *have* achieved something concrete here. During the past five years, while the community has gone through a process of deep self-questioning, the school has provided a stable and harmonious environment. And in spite of a certain impression that academically we are not quite up to the mark, every child who has left to study elsewhere has immediately fitted in and done well.

There is now an older generation that wants to pursue higher education in Auroville. We badly need teachers to help them in this. □



Auditorium floor mosaic, Last School

Photo Dayini



## Radha

Radha is originally from Kuilapalyam village where he was born in 1972. After attending a couple of schools outside Auroville, he joined the community in 1978. He has studied in several different Auroville schools and has been attending Last School for the last five years. Roger found him in the Last School computer room.

*How would you describe your years in the different Auroville schools?*

I've gone to schools outside as well. There you have to memorize stuff but without understanding. In Auroville schools, you really learn things. It was then that I decided to come and study in Last School.

*Is there a motivation to learn that is different here from outside schools?*

In other types of schools you specialize in one subject with the idea of a career in mind, but here you study what interests you.

*Do you feel disturbed that there are some young Aurovilians who are leaving?*

Yes, but they have to. Also—it is not their fault, it is their parents' fault. They introduce them to outside education and say, "You better get a degree". It is as if they have no faith in Auroville.

*How did you choose Auroville?*

I was living with my brother and he

level they are low—they go to the outside schools and are not educated very well. We do sports and they like to join in on the sports. Their standard of living is not as good as it is in Auroville. I have a few friends who would like to join Auroville and some are in the process of applying.

*Do you think that there is a cultural barrier between the Westerners and the Tamils within Auroville? And if so, does it bother you?*

I'd say it's working out well, given all the different cultures and everything. I'd say our kids, the Tamil kids, can easily be influenced by the Western culture, but the Westerners are less influenced by ours—they stick to their culture. For instance, a girl doesn't kick a boy in our culture, but it happens very commonly here.

*What about the way Last School functions? What could be improved?*

Some say that there is a division between whites and blacks in our school. That should not be allowed to emerge here. Elsewhere in Auroville the problem of division exists, but in our own school it should not exist. Some feel that the Tamils aren't given enough attention—but I am given enough attention. I personally feel that there is no division; it is not a major problem to solve. Perhaps one should talk to those students who feel that there is division and try to work on solutions.

Otherwise the school functions quite well, but we need more materials in the science and physics labs and there is a lack of teachers.

*Could you see an Auroville culture emerging, that would draw upon all the elements here? A culture that wouldn't be Western or Tamil or North-Indian, but distinctly Aurovilian?*

Yes, sure. Even now, I think it exists. When we go to a surrounding village to play cricket or basketball, they immediately recognize us. They look at us and say, "You are from Auroville".

*What is it that they see?*

I think it is the way of behaving, we're freer.

*And your language? Is the Tamil you speak here different from the Tamil spoken in the village?*

When we speak amongst ourselves we speak in Tamil, French and English. We mix different languages in the same conversation. For example, when we in the basketball team go outside we speak a mixture of English and Tamil. When, for instance, we go to Chidambaram to play a match, we'll go to eat in a restaurant and talk freely, using French as well, and the rest of the room slowly becomes quiet as we get louder. They listen to us and just stare.

*What would you like to see changing in Auroville in the years to come?*

I think that there should be a common place for youth where they can just drop in. Also the problems emerging in Auroville are disturbing to hear because we say we are here to create peace and we are working for that, but we fight amongst ourselves. For instance the town planners and the ecologists. I would like to see people with opposite opinions working together. □



Radha

Photo Sven

brought me to Udayam. I didn't have much choice at that time. There I saw the way people lived and I said O.K. Compared to the village life, Auroville offered better chances for education and sports.

*Do you believe Mother's aims for Auroville are being fulfilled?*

An aspect of human unity is here, and it is growing. For instance the *Peace Trees* event showed something of that. But if one goes by what Mother said, it is going slowly.

*In what way can Auroville progress?*

A stronger sense of togetherness, of collectivity is necessary. At present things are far too individualistic. Too many of our problems are unnecessary. I feel people see things too much from the perspective of their own lives and ignore the rest.

*What would you like to see occurring in Auroville ten years from now?*

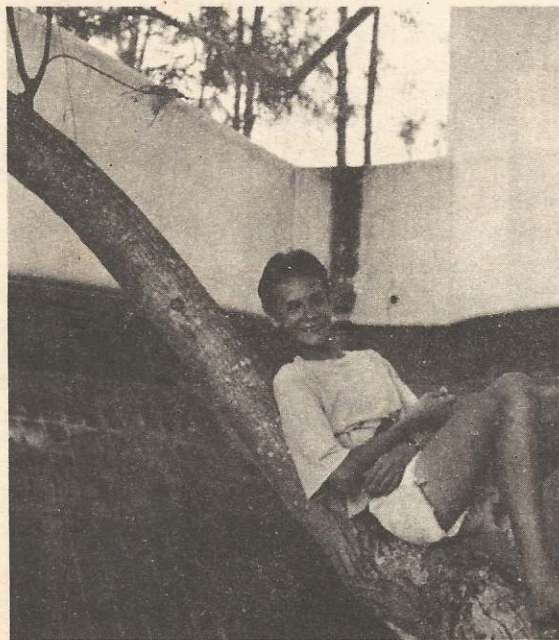
I would like to see less of a gap in living standards amongst Aurovilians.

*How do you relate to your own village, living next to it, but being in another environment?*

I can visualize the problems of my friends in the village. They are not so educated, and even if they are, compared to my

## Baba

I was brought to Auroville on my first birthday fifteen years ago. I grew up in Auroville and I was one of the very few of my generation to have had a kind of education from the beginning. All that thanks to my parents. They went against the current of that time which was: "No educa-



Baba

tion. Freedom and fun for our kids".

I had freedom and fun, but I also had education. For many years my father was teaching us in our small school in "Douceur". When I was around eight or nine my father moved to Center School. We stayed there for about two years and then moved to Transition School. After two years in Transition I went to Last School in Aspiration. I finished two years in Last School and then the question came from my father: "Do you guys want to pass an exam at the level you've reached?"

We all wanted to and all succeeded very well.

## Nilauero

Nilauero was born in Auroville in 1972. In October 1987, he left India for the first time to do his second year of High School in the American system in California. He returned to Auroville in August 1988 and was interviewed by Bill last year. He and his sister are now both in University in America.

*So, what about America? How was it for you in the beginning?*

For the first two months I was out of place and homesick. You shouldn't dive into a one year trip, just like that! You should go for three months to feel it out first. It's a big shock. Not knowing anybody is a big difference and a difficulty.

*The difficulty was more with the people than with the place?*

Yes, America was what I expected from seeing films and videos. The people there are distant and aloof. If you don't know them, they don't socialize at all. They are very cautious. The boys and girls there are all trying to be 'cool' or 'in it'. Most of them have the same attitudes towards things—no individuality. Many don't have a sense of responsibility. There they do things because they have to. After I accepted the typical character of the people, I fitted in better, but I always looked forward to coming back to Auroville.

*How does Auroville look to you now?*

I appreciate Auroville more now that I have something to contrast it with. Then you can see how special Auroville is in a way. I took Auroville for granted and didn't know where I was, and then I went out: wow, what a difference! America is good and it might be a place to go to later but I'm really glad I grew up in Auroville. Auroville

Now came the problem that I thought over and over in my head. I knew if I wanted to go on following an educational programme, I couldn't do it in Auroville. So we had a kind of family meeting and after having looked at the good and the bad I decided to go to the French College in Pondicherry.

At first I was apprehensive about leaving Auroville and with it all my friends. I adapted myself very fast to my new school but for sure I always missed the character of Auroville. Because, even if the people of Pondy accepted me very well it was a very different scene. As an example, the way we dressed in Pondy was different, the subjects of conversation were different. In Auroville I was myself, but in the Lycee I had to show an image that represented another me. There I was someone who would joke with everyone and I was always laughing. As I could never be myself I would always talk about things I knew they wanted to hear so that they would think well of me. But soon I got bored of that game and I thought: "Scram to the reputation. I'll be myself and if they don't like me this way, too bad". Actually it changed nothing except that I wouldn't say

things that I didn't want to say and I wouldn't shut up if I didn't want to. I became myself again.

In the beginning I was still very much in Auroville but slowly I drifted away more to Pondy. There was a long period in which I felt pulled apart between my homeland and my study-land. When I would bring friends from Pondy, they and I would feel very uncomfortable. Then I understood that Pondy and Auroville didn't go together, so I decided that if I am in Pondy I can't be in Auroville and vice versa. And that's how I came to be myself—a true Aurovilian. □

kids have a much better possibility to develop their individuality.

*Will the educational situation of Auroville today be sufficient for you?*

The schools are really good now. Last School is a good school and adequate if you want to learn. You can get as much out of it as you want to. I only actually started to really read and write at thirteen. Then I went fast. You can learn at your own speed here, that's important. At thirteen I decided to study seriously. When I got to America, two years later, I wasn't behind in anything. I was actually surprised how much I knew. I finished the tenth grade there on the college preparatory level.

*Would you like to see things done differently in the school here?*

It needs more structure. The students should be organized into classes and have a syllabus that is followed. You should advance from class to class and graduate so that there is a sense of progress.

*How did the people you met in America respond to your being from Auroville?*

They couldn't understand what I was doing in South India. Auroville is not a perfect conversation piece. People would say things like, "Why do you want to live in a place like that?" I basically gave up telling people about Auroville because they just didn't understand. After a while I'd simply say I was West German. Only a few older people were interested to talk to, but these kind of people were scarce. They were fascinated that such a place could exist. Most people, though, thought it was a crazy place and pretty absurd. They couldn't understand how a place like this can keep running. □



# "Auroville is a marvellous place for a child to grow up"

An interview with Jossy, a mother and a teacher in Auroville.

**What is it like being a parent in Auroville?**

My daughters are 15 and 13 years old now and both were born here. I came here when I was pregnant with Dayini and it was one of the reasons I came just then. I had lived in Auroville before for half a year and already then I wanted to be able to raise my children here.

For me it is a marvellous place for a child to grow up. As a parent I found it also very interesting, because here we really could take care of them when they were very young, without having the pressure that you have outside. For example, you could decide how long you wanted to work for the community. At that time there was some kind of agreement that if you had young children, you could stay at home. And then we had a collective economy with a food basket provided, so economically it was not a problem. If you lived simply you could manage and raise your kids the way you wanted to. Our children were born close together and for two years were quite a handful. So Patrick left his work at the Matrimandir for a year and took over the care of the oldest one. I don't see where else this would have been possible and understood. Now the economic system has changed but there are also more child-care facilities such as the crèche.

In terms of the children's education, everything followed their growth. When we arrived there was no crèche, kindergarten or school because there were not enough children for that. But more and more came and we had to face the problem, "How do we do it?" Then the creation followed. For me that is really how Auroville should be. When there is a true need it gets provided for.

**"We were not dogmatic at all about what their education should be. We just listened to them."**

Now we have quite a lot of older teenagers who need education facilities. And in the same way, we will find the answers.

At the moment there are a lot of possibilities for educating the younger children. The parents can choose what they want for their children. There is 'Mirramukhi', where the child chooses its own pace and materials, or 'Transition' where the child works within small groups. I think for a child it is positive to be in a group because only when you work with someone you discover what you are able to give.

My daughters enjoy an extraordinary freedom of action within the Auroville boundaries. They choose to sleep in houses of friends and adults and we parents feel that the children are safe as we know each other very well. This security is very important for their development.

In a way they become mature quite fast here. Dayini is 15 now and when we talk together and when she expresses herself I feel I am facing a young woman. She knows already what she wants to do — she wants to teach English and she is ready to do anything that is required for it. The young one says she is the artist of the family and this confident self-image can give her a direction.

For myself, it took me a long time to discover what I really wanted to do, and how interested I was in education.

**Was it because of your children that you got involved in education?**

No, it was the opposite. A few times, when they were younger and in kindergarten, I tried but could not do it. My own children claimed me too much and I was not free for the other ones, so I saw that for their own development it was better if I was not part of it.

**Did you miss the presence of family for advice and assistance?**

No, we didn't need so much help. I knew I could rely on my friends, but we didn't need it as we never had big emergencies. When we got the children it was obvious that our life changed but it was not a frustration. We were ready for it.

We had very clear ideas about how we wanted to do it. Patrick delivered Jyotis and we were very confident that everything would be o.k. And everything went so well. Life here needs a certain surrender, and so do the children. We didn't have any expectations. We were not dogmatic at all about what their education should be. We just listened to them. And that is also the way I teach.

**Do you feel the education in 'Transition' is sufficient for your children?**

It is quite nice, but we are always looking for new things. We are now trying to have more continuity during the day. Instead of breaking up the day into hours, we want to focus on one topic. We studied the environment last month and next year we will take the human body. All the other activities like dance, movement, science, English and grammar are concentrated around the topic so the children can connect it all together. They really involve themselves and get enthusiastic. They work in groups of two to three children and do the final write-up by themselves to help their concentration. In this way there is a good balance between teamwork and the individual work.

**What about the values of Mother and Sri Aurobindo?**

We don't say much to them, because you can't teach or fool them. They only see what you are and I don't want to indoctrinate them. But it comes quite naturally if you yourself live by a certain aspiration and values.

Even Jyotis took the *Agenda* one day and said, surprised: "Hey, I can read this!" She can only read a bit at a time. But she knows it is not so difficult. When she wants it, and it comes from herself, it clicks...

Sonja



Jossy

Photo Dayini



## "I Learn So Many Things From Them"

Meenakshi talks to Sonja about Ilaignarkal School—an evening school for Tamil youth.

Ilaignarkal (meaning Youth) is one of the oldest schools in Auroville—13 years now. In 1976 when I was working with the Tamil Fund I recognized the need for contact and resource people in the village, and I thought the Tamil youth could link Auroville to the village. I started a day school and a lot of Tamil children who were already living in Auroville came. At that time the Aspiration school was breaking up so they were looking for teachers. Then slowly young workers wanted to learn more English and Tamil and it became an evening school to cater to the needs of the youth.

Today there are about 30 boys and 20 girls. However, when there is an agricultural season like neem-berry picking or cashew harvesting, some children may not come. Half of the students are young Auroville workers. From the age of 13, they help their fathers as assistant carpenters or masons or work in the forest or gardens. The other half are cow-herds, or during the day they have house or field work and in the evening when their parents return home they come to school. And recently again young Tamil Aurovilian children came to join us after sports and their day in school.

Ilaignarkal creates a centre for group activities where the students support each other and share their experience.

I never call myself a teacher—they call me 'Akka'—older sister.

We sit together and we learn together. I share my experience and I learn so many things from them. It is a two-way process. For example, they know so much about the local things like herbs and leafy vegetables and the names of many plants, birds, insects and trees. They can name up to 200 trees!

Through them I started learning about this place and I even started to discover the very old Tamil root words, which are still used in their spoken language. I used to feel really proud. I come from Madurai, the seat of Tamil culture, so I have a good knowledge of Tamil. But certain root words we have lost—words that we have in ancient literature. I was so happy to discover a real connection between the ancient literature and their culture.

Then, when they started to have confidence in themselves, they started to think, "We also know something. We are not that idiotic. We also have brains and we can sing!" For many folk songs and dances that the people know have also come to light now. Some songs are really old and have been handed down over eight hundred or thousand years. I know it is the old language because there is not even one Sanskrit word in them. Romantic songs, harvest songs...

And we also create new songs. For instance, they made up this song about the parts of the pine-tree:

*"Pine tree, Pine tree, how are you doing?  
My mother took your needles and used them  
for fuel for the cooking  
My brother took your branches and used it  
for fencing  
My father took your trunk to sell and  
drink..."*

So even today Ilaignarkal is a place where Tamil people can come and share and forget the drudgery, smile, laugh, play...

Then, slowly, when they feel they would like to learn, we help them to pick up reading and writing in Tamil and English, and applied mathematics. Their own language is given importance, but English also is in great demand. They feel that if they know more English they can communicate well with the Aurovilians and learn more skills from them. We keep the school very simple—it's only a desk under a tree. After all, these children are used to being outside amongst nature. They do not like to spend time indoors in a classroom. And at the same time we have the use of a video system to watch art and nature movies; that provides us with a lot of opportunities for discussion and acquiring fluency.

The senior boys help the younger ones and we teach them through project work. For instance, we take the topic of the environment and pollution and we connect the learning of reading, writing and English with whatever comes up concerning the subject. Then we hold exhibitions. We have handicraft classes and organize seminars. And whenever there are problems in this region we discuss them.

Ilaignarkal has an exchange with a Dutch school. The children write to each other and the way our children respond is wonderful. And once a year the Dutch school has an "India" day when they put on an exhibition and do little jobs, like shoe-polishing, to collect money for Ilaignarkal school. We have used the funds for the roof repair or little excursions, things we could not have covered with our normal budget.

Ilaignarkal is also a boarding school that accommodates three boys. They attend the evening-school and take up an apprenticeship in Auroville at places like the Electrical Service or the Matrimandir Nursery. Then, after a few years if they really want to, we help them get into the mainstream of Auroville, and others will go back to help their parents. This youth hostel needs to grow because there is a great need for the village youth to experience Auroville. We hope to set it up one day in the cultural zone.

And what we still need in Auroville is a kind of technical college or an apprenticeship system under which the children can learn skills like pump-repairing and windmills construction, skills that they can use to improve the living standard in the village.

□



# “How were we going to keep up with them?”

## Shraddhavan talks about Aspiration School: The first educational experiment in Auroville

Shraddhavan was born into a family of teachers, “And the one thing I never wanted to do was teach! But after finishing university, I did find myself for a short time working in a government school—and being very bad at it.”

She didn’t have to do it very long, however. With a partner she spent some years living in communes and communities in several different countries, as well as passing a couple of years in Australia, where she studied librarianship. “We called ourselves anarchists. For us as anarchists the problem has always been how to bring about a free society when all the people were slaves: how to allow the children to grow up free? I’d always seen education as the key, but I couldn’t see any answer.”

Then in Spring 1969, in a friend’s flat, she heard someone talking about a revolutionary who had realized that true revolution is only possible through a revolution in consciousness. “It was as if doors were opening in all the little rooms inside my head... suddenly everything rushed together into a coherent whole.” At the end of the talk she asked the name of this ‘revolutionary’: it was Sri Aurobindo.

In November 1970 Shraddhavan arrived in Pondicherry. At that time people wishing to join Auroville were asked to fill in a form giving details about themselves, which would be shown to Mother. When he noticed that she had spent some time working with children, Roger told her, “Mother is pressing us to start a school in Auroville. Perhaps you can help.” He took her next morning to the Mother, and, when she left the room in a daze, ran after her to say, “Mother agreed—go to Aspiration and start a school”. She had been in India less than a week.

“I was relieved to find that a school was already functioning in Aspiration, run by Rod and Ursula in one of the round thatched huts which still stand in the grounds of ‘Maroma’. And the business of ‘starting a school’ was done from Pondy, with very little participation from them. Norman Dowsett of the SAICE (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) was put in charge, a large keet structure which had been used as a workshop was hurriedly prepared, and on December 16th André (Mother’s son) came to cut the ribbon and give the Mother’s messages for the inauguration of Aspiration School:

*“A sincere will to know and to progress.”  
(Languages to be studied at Aspiration School)*

- 1) Tamil
- 2) French
- 3) Simplified Sanskrit to replace Hindi as the language of India
- 4) English as the international language.

“The emphasis on languages was appropriate: the next morning at eight o’clock the Auroville bus disgorged our first students. We had almost no equipment, perhaps ten totally inexperienced ‘teachers’, and thirty-five children—and most of us couldn’t understand a single word that any of the others were saying.” The early days were chaotic, and the whole of the first year—up to October 31st, 1971—was spent in establishing communication, in whatever ways they could devise to hold the children’s attention. “The moment we lost it, they would rush off into the landscape—

and often enough we would heave a sigh of relief, confident that they would be back at lunchtime. I remember the despair I felt when Norman, on one of his weekly visits, brought the message from Mother that one of us should be with the children at all times... She must have heard some hair-raising reports!”

By the beginning of the second year, they were much better organised in terms of buildings, equipment and staff—which was fortunate because, almost without warning, the student population doubled. Most of the newcomers, among them twelve Tibetan children, and several students from Bengal already in their teens, were totally new to Auroville. The teachers made a strong request to the ‘office’ in Pondy never to do that to them again.

It was in the course of that second year that Yvonne Artaud replaced Norman Dowsett as ‘Director of Education’. “In one sense it didn’t make much difference: Norman had come out from Pondicherry once a week, given us a pep-talk, and then disappeared, leaving us to cope with the realities. Yvonne did the same. But her talks were very inspiring, not only to the people directly involved in the school, but to many others in the community, too.” One concept that Yvonne emphasised very much was that Auroville should be a total learning environment; that the children should be able to go anywhere and share in and learn from the experiences of the Aurovilians in life and at work. “And so we tried to find places where we could send the children, and people who would be willing to work with them. For a period of several months each morning children would scatter to different parts of Auroville. It was most successful when an educator could accompany them, and a person at the workplace was able to act as a guide and liaison.”

But by the time the school re-opened for its third year, in December 1972, many of the school buildings, including the kitchen where the children took their meals, had been severely damaged in a cyclone. As a result, for three or four months, there was school only from 8 to 11.30 each morning. “I remember it as one of the very best times... for once we weren’t constantly overstretched. We had time to prepare, time to maintain the environment, and the energy to establish a very concentrated learning atmosphere in the few hours the children were all with us.” It was during this time too, that the team working in the Last School building were able to set up a small version of the “World-Game”... a room filled with an array of symbol-objects, and some rectangular trays of sand in which each individual could arrange his selection. “I remember some sand-trays which were truly turning-points for those who made them; and one or two which gave a very intense, wordless communication between the child and the adult he chose to share his creation with. For example, those Tibetan children who had been taken away from their families so young, and who lived in appalling conditions in Pondicherry, always arrived fighting, and fought through the morning, fought at lunch. Only by mid-afternoon, when they had exhausted everyone, did they feel like sitting down to study anything. So I often took them down to the beach, where we had a house for the children. One afternoon they brought back a lot of pieces of coral, and shells. One boy

went straight to the sand-tray. He built a high dense hedge of coral all around the left hand half and inside it put everything he could cram in: animals, shells, people, trees, jewels... The right hand side he left a total desert. You don’t have to be a depth-psychologist to know that the left side is



Shraddhavan

Photo Sven

associated with the unconscious, the right with the rational, mentalised consciousness. What he was telling me was that he had immense potentialities packed within him—and that he wanted my help to break down the fence. I found that very moving.”

Nevertheless, the people working in the school had an aspiration for 24-hour education. From the very beginning, a few children had been ‘boarding’ in Aspiration, away from their families. In June 1974 it was possible to open a long-awaited hostel for the Tibetan children, in the area that is now ‘Protection’. Shortly afterwards, a similar hostel for Tamil children was started nearby. In these efforts to provide total learning-environments, the kitchen and dining room built up by Alain and Eliane Monnier in the ‘Jardin des Enfants’, was an immense help. “They managed to provide, on a large scale, the atmosphere of a caring French family. And instead of the enamel plates and low tables normal in other Auroville kitchens in those days, the delicious food was served on polished wooden tables, with white earthenware crockery and glasses to drink from... As a civilizing influence it was wonderful.”

By the end of 1975 there were more than 150 students, consisting of three roughly equal groups from very different backgrounds: one third of western origin, one third local Tamil children, and one third whose parents were from other parts of India, and mainly middle-class. During the day’s activities these children split up into small ‘compatibility groups’—defined by their capacity to work together, and usually under the guidance of one or sometimes two adults. These groups, besides having a room of their own, moved around to various specialised ‘areas of work’ that had been set up and were cared for usually by one educator—the science laboratory, the library, the handicrafts area, and so on. These locations were spread out over the area from ‘Protection’ to ‘La Ferme’—and there was also the environment at the

Beach. But cohesion was provided by three things: the early-morning ‘concentration’; the dining room; and the sports-hour, last thing in the afternoon.

What did this first sustained experiment in Auroville education achieve? “Every day, in front of our noses, we saw certain needs, and we tried to fulfil them. I don’t claim that we were very good at it. But something was established. And I think there was a lot of honesty between the adults and the children. Whenever a child came

“Every day, in front of our noses, we saw certain needs, and we tried to fulfil them.”

from outside, it was immediately obvious: in other schools the lesson they had learned was to deceive their teachers. Here, they didn’t have to, and partly because of this the children’s individual capacities were really able to develop. And on our side—we found it was completely out of the question to ‘put anything over’ on the children—they rejected it immediately.”

In 1970, when the school-buildings for Auromodèle were being planned, Roger had asked the Mother to name them. Apart from the Sanskrit School, she gave the names ‘Last School’, ‘After School (One, Two, Three)’, ‘Super School’ and ‘No School’. “We took these names as an inspiring programme of educational evolution. And by October 1976 there was a widespread feeling among the educators that we wanted to move on—to take a big new step forward. Unfortunately, it seems as if we didn’t know, while moving forward, how to hold on to what had already been gained. By the spring of 1977 Aspiration School had ceased to exist—and I think that was very painful and bewildering for many of us, both adults and children.

That is not to say that education stopped in Auroville. Here and there individual educators went on doing what they could for the children; and gradually a new cohesion has been built up. But I can’t help feeling that the spiral of evolution has some way to go before it again reaches the point where we felt we stood in October 1976—having established ‘Last School’ and ready to move towards ‘After School’. Of course today the problem is much more complex—Auroville is much more complex. The social structure, the economy, education, are all interconnected. In those days all our material needs were provided for, and we could give all our energies to the work we were involved in. And Aspiration as a whole was a sort of extended family for the children in a way that would be difficult to duplicate today. But the programme still holds, and I think the aspiration towards it remains the same in all who are concerned about education: the dream of all Auroville as a total, rich, fantastically varied and rewarding educational environment... the dream of No School.”

From an interview with Alan



## YOUNG AUROVILLE SPEAKS:

## Auradha, Aurosylle and Shanti

**Aurosylle** was born in Auroville in 1975. Her parents are Swedish and German. She has been out of Auroville twice studying in Ooty and California. She is presently helping Charlie at Aurogreen learning how to milk cows, plant trees, harvest peanuts and muck out stables.

**Shanti** was born in France in 1973. She grew up in Spain, Italy, Germany, France and England. She came here with her mother in 1987. Her mother left and Shanti decided to stay.

**Auradha** was born in Auroville in 1976 of German parents. She has always lived here, but will be going for a short trip to the U.S. this summer to visit her brother and sister who are studying in California.

Auradha, Aurosylle and Shanti all study at 'Last School', and it was there, under the trees in one of the outdoor classrooms, that Roger spoke to them recently.

**Auradha, how would you describe your experience of going to a school in Auroville?**

**Auradha:** Well, I find that the education is very good the way it is being done, in Last school especially.

**What aspects of it do you like?**

**Auradha:** I like the way subjects are taught and the atmosphere around Last school.

**And what about the next 5 or 10 years, do you want to stay here?**

**Auradha:** Yes, I think I'd like to finish my studies in Last School and continue if there is another school after. I'd also like to travel a bit, and then come back and live here.

**Shanti, you came to Auroville three years ago and you've stayed. Why have you decided to stay?**

**Shanti:** Personally I like being in Auroville because there is freedom and there is time. Outside you are always stressed, you have to do things, you are always running around and in Auroville you have more time for yourself. If you want to study you can do it in your own time. In Last School it is quite free, which I like after being outside.

**What about in terms of direction? Do you feel that you're sufficiently guided?**

**Shanti:** Yes, I think I'm guided. The biggest problem in Last School is that there are not enough teachers for all the subjects and all the students. There are a lot of students who would like to do other subjects, but they can't because of a shortage of teachers and material as well.

**Do you see yourself staying on?**

**Shanti:** For the moment, yes. I don't know what will happen, but for the moment I love Auroville and want to stay here.

**What was it that attracted you to Auroville?**

**Shanti:** For me it was always a dream to come to Auroville. I love the place and when I was outside I wasn't able to talk about Mother and Sri Aurobindo. No one would understand. Here everyone knows about it and you even learn about it which is one of the things I really love about being here. Before I lived all over Europe. Elsewhere you can't really communicate it. Here you talk about it and learn.

**Aurosylle, you have been out and back a number of times. How would you describe your feelings as regards living and going to school in Auroville now?**

**Aurosylle:** From my experience of all the schools outside—boarding in Ooty and going to public school in America—I've probably learned the most here, because there is an atmosphere here where you realize that you're studying for yourself. Outside it is either for the teacher that you're studying or for your parents, but in Auroville going to school is always your own choice, so you learn a lot more from within.

**Do the teachers encourage that approach?**

**Aurosylle:** A lot. Outside teachers give you the impression that you should do the schooling for them, but here the teachers are constantly telling you it's for yourself.

Here in Auroville education and life are less separated. This has something to do with the fact that the teacher and students know each other so well. They also relate to each other outside school. While abroad in America or wherever it's like school hours and then it's forgotten about. And then there is life. But as one never learns anything out of school, one doesn't learn what life has to teach and they are two totally different things. It makes it hard to



Shanti

Photo Ritam

connect both of them.

**Do you see yourself staying in Auroville?**

**Aurosylle:** For sure. That has always been a very strong point for me, ever since I can remember. Auroville is my home.

**Is there any aspect of Auroville you would like to see developing in the years to come?**

**Aurosylle:** It's hard to say but I wish we would all get more focussed on realizing that we are here not for ourselves but for manifesting Auroville, the dream that is still to be.

**Auradha:** Like Aurosylle, I feel very strongly about my future here in Auroville and I think most kids in Auroville actually do. Especially the kids who were born here.

**What would you like to be involved with in Auroville?**

**Auradha:** Something close to the Matrimandir near or around it.

**Matrimandir is an important symbol or focal point for you?**

**Auradha:** Yes, I feel that every Aurovilian should have something to do there and should help a bit somehow with the building.

**Do you see the building of Auroville as a long process?**

**Shanti:** In a way yes. Everyone has their own ideas and they're deciding with their own ideas—it is as if they are nearly forgetting what actually had been said we should do and they're saying, "No, I want it this way, I think it should be this way". If it goes on like this it will take a long time.

**Auradha:** I also think that the majority of the population of Auroville at present is a mixture of French, German and Indian and I would like to see more representation of different cultures; particularly more variety of people like Africans and people from other continents. A much richer cultural variety would help Auroville become more alive and help it to grow.

**Shanti:** If Auroville is to be an international town, it should get a little more united with a few more countries and with India. We are in India, after all.

**Aurosylle:** But I definitely see that when our generation has kids there will be more of that. When I go abroad and people ask

me, "Where are you from", and I say, "Aurovilian", I do it partly as a joke, but I really see my children saying, "No, I am not German, I'm not Indian, I'm Aurovilian".

**Perhaps Auroville's culture will be stronger ten years from now.**

**Aurosylle:** Yes, that is what I think.

**Shanti:** It could happen when Auroville becomes its own self: an Auroville with Aurovilians.

**Aurosylle:** If there were more different people from different nations, then the cultural side of Auroville would develop much more. I think that is needed, and they should strongly represent their own culture.

**Shanti:** But there should be a mixture. The new people coming should have both sides—their cultural side and the strong side for Auroville.

**Aurosylle:** I also think Auroville should get a language! (laughter)

**Shanti:** It already has it in a way. When I went back to England just for a holiday, at first hardly anyone could understand my English. They'd say, "Hey you've got a really weird accent." It's such a mixture of everything, French, Indian, American. In a way it's an Auroville accent. It's how people talk in Auroville.

**Aurosylle:** That reminds me, it's quite funny. When I went for a year to the USA with my mother I'd constantly have all these kids from my class ask me, "Say the alphabet", because they'd love to hear my accent, it was so different! So I kept going A...B...C...

I'm learning French, Tamil and English, and my parents are German so I know a little bit of German—somehow different languages are very important.

One thing I love about Auroville is that you can do anything, anything is possible and I get these weird ideas out of nowhere and I think about it and Auroville is really the only place where I could carry them out.

**Shanti:** Yes, elsewhere you can't just say, "Oh, tonight I am going to sleep in the fields—you can't do that in the middle of New York—there's only one place you can do that and that is here."

**So, you'd like to see a lot of nature remain in Auroville?**

**All three:** Yes!

**Shanti:** It's true that for Mother, the plan of Auroville is a city, but in a way I can't imagine Auroville being a real city. You wouldn't call it the 'City of Dawn' if there were highways and Mercedes driving down them...

**Aurosylle:** But I also don't think it is meant to become a real city.

**What type of city would you see if let's say there were five or ten thousand people living here?**

**Auradha:** I think that the new people coming might not be as much in touch with what Auroville really is; they might not really understand what Mother and Sri Aurobindo tried to make with Auroville.

**Aurosylle:** It's important for all of us who are here to remember, and not just remember—to keep it alive. It's funny, five years ago I'd know everybody whom I passed on the road, but now it's like you ride on the road and nearly every person you pass you ask yourself, "Who's that? I've never seen them before". I wonder if he really likes Auroville? It is kind of disturbing. But I also understand we're going to have to get used to more people coming.

**Let's imagine the beginning of a small city of five thousand people. What would you like to see in terms of nature?**

**Aurosylle:** Nature cannot be destroyed here the way it's happening all over the world with the rain forests. When we get more people, it has to be more and more one, nature and us.

**Shanti:** When you think of the first Aurovilians, the main thing then was to plant trees, make forests and today Auroville is so green! When you go on top of Matrimandir you can see where Auroville ends, it goes from green to plain earth. It would be quite ridiculous if people said, "We've got to make a city so we have to cut the trees", it is not possible. It would be breaking the whole thing that Aurovilians did before. It needs to be a new city; we have to find something new, something different.

**Aurosylle:** I hope there won't be a lot of cars and trucks. None of these, let's all go around in vandi's (bullock carts). It's much better. And no polluting factories.

**One last question. Do you see Auroville growing into something that remains in touch with the original raison d'être of this place?**

**Auradha:** Yes, it has too.

**Shanti:** It must. It has to grow into what it is supposed to. Not just some weird thing. Like we were saying we don't want some stupid city, with no real spiritual point to it.

**Aurosylle:** But I don't even think that is possible.

**Shanti:** I don't think so either. There are too many people who love this place. It's protected.

**Aurosylle:** And the Mother must be looking over it, so it must have some power.



Auradha and Aurosylle

Photo Dayini



## A Moment Between Two Breaths

Aurora was born in Auroville and received part of her education in Holland. Selvaraj is from Tamil Nadu and grew up in Auroville. He has visited the USA. Aurora and Selvaraj live together in Aspiration and work in education and administration. Bill interviewed them at Last School. Here are some excerpts.

**Aurora:** Many youth have left in the past because maybe there was nothing for them — from their point of view. Now we're having more interaction and trying to find ways to help the youth find out what their interests are. More parents, teachers and people have to know what's going on and what the youth are thinking, what their needs are.

**Selvaraj:** Last School re-started be-

**"Only when the need and determination to create the 'higher education' is expressed by the youth themselves, something will come."**

cause a few of us who were working in Aurelec decided to create a school, together with a few volunteer teachers. That's how we have something now, but we have to go for the future level of a "college" so the ones that grow up here would feel they have a programme after Last School. Only when the need and determination to create the 'higher education' is expressed by the youth themselves, something will come. Because Luc went through a correspondence A-level course, now he's pushing for a further learning centre for other students in Auroville.

**Aurora:** The kids need a more structured, safer 'system' that they can relate to. If we offer more structure it helps because if parents and teachers just say, "You have to find your own direction", it doesn't work.

**Selvaraj:** As for youth, there's a lot of energy but it has to be channelled. Sometimes even parents have to leave because of the need of the children's higher education.

**Aurora:** This energy which goes into education outside could better be used here to help education in Auroville.

**Selvaraj:** When I talk to adults they say things like, "You can learn a lot and do a lot in Auroville but no youth is interested" and "If you are interested you can do it". It is not that simple for young people. They need proper guidance and to be informed about what is available. This is what is done everywhere else. How can you expect youth who grow up in Auroville to be any different?

**Aurora:** Some kids worry about whether they can manage with an Auroville education, where there's no certificates, because recently a few have left Auroville for education elsewhere. This makes the others feel insecure about getting the proper education. Of course it is important for the youth to go out for an experience, but not because Auroville has nothing to offer to them. Once there is enough going on in Auroville for the youth we will certainly support the idea of youth wanting to see the other side of the world. But at the moment there are still parents who stand behind the kids who want to go out because they don't have enough confidence in the education happening in Auroville.

**Selvaraj:** Some people are getting together to form something that would offer higher education. I would like to see something like a catalogue with course



Aurora and Selvaraj

Photo: Sven

descriptions. After Last School, students for a year or so could have a general introduction course on things going on in Auroville like art, afforestation, alternative technology, computers, publications, construction and architecture etc...

Later they would choose their field of study and do it for as long as needed, half day theory, half day practice. The 'catalogue' would offer things both to the people inside and outside. Even in Auroville, people don't really know how things actually function and what is available and what is happening. It is very important to make this known.

**Aurora:** People are so involved in many things... which is good, but they don't have time or enough time for the youth. So many of them are very qualified and could offer so much — even a few hours a week could do marvels. This has to be researched and courses could be organised for a few weeks in different units and places.

**Selvaraj:** People who come back say how wonderful it is here, but they tend to stay away because it is hard to come back. They get caught and involved and never come back. But Auroville needs these people. If we believe in these ideals there's so much to be achieved, we need more people.

**Aurora:** Some students have a hard time to relate to teachers and parents, but they can relate well to those of their age who are already working in Auroville. If grown-ups and youth can come together about what to do, not just high ideals but something practical, something will emerge.

**Selvaraj:** This year will be a hard year but it will be a turning point because something is moving, people are going out and coming in.

**Aurora:** It is like a moment between two breaths. It might happen very fast. More and more youth are going to make it happen because Auroville's their base and their future.

**Selvaraj:** Auroville has taken twenty-two years to get established. Now it has to offer things. This has to be made known to people here and outside. We have to be ready to accept that Auroville has things to offer.

**Aurora:** I would like to see excursions and exchanges of people from other schools from all over the world. Only when I went to Holland could I appreciate Auroville and what I had. In the West there is much more competition and many people are lost. Kids here don't realise what they have. They have nothing to compare it to.

**Selvaraj:** I hear from people that to go outside is good and when I went to the USA it was good for me. But going out can only serve to get an experience — it can't be a base. Why do parents send their children away for education that they themselves have rejected? One has to make a choice:

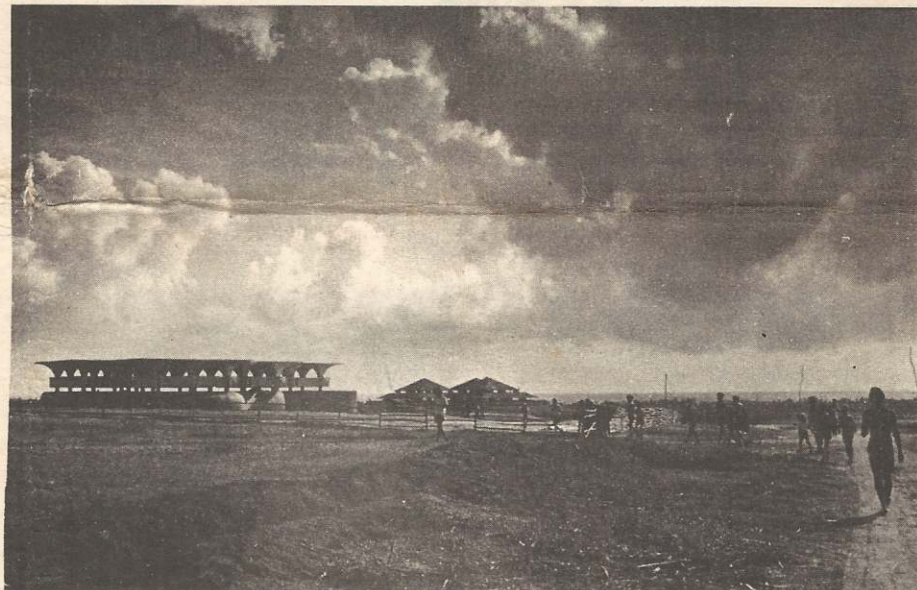
Auroville or outside.

**Aurora:** Here you can experiment with things but in the West you can't without the risk of ending up on the street. Looking at the kids here, I feel very concerned for them and it's a pity we can't create more for them. We have to help them if we can. We're trying to raise the consciousness of the youth and a new group is forming.

## LOOKING BACK: Sports in Auroville.

Did organized sports and physical education start on that dry and wind-swept slope from Aspiration down towards the sea? Look at those old photos. They could come straight out of the Ashram Bulletin. The kids in their uniforms and us so-called teachers were all lined up just like in the Ashram Playground. There was, for example, Shrudderdal, one of the teachers from the Ashram. Very nice, but also very helpless with these Auroville rowdies, particularly with the Tibetan kids. He insisted that the reverential suffix *da* (elder brother) be added to his name, which only resulted in him being called "Dalda" (tradename for a vegetable fat on the market). He had a complicated scheme of dividing his group into three divisions: 1) those with no lice, 2) those with only eggs, 3) those with lice. The first group could get a sip from the water which he had carried from the Ashram, the second were given a stiff warning, and the third had to get rid of their lice and learn a page of *Savitri* by heart. There was both an innocence and a wildness in those days...

(extract from an article written by Frederick)



"On that dry and windswept slope..."

Dayini and Ritam, whose photos are included in this issue, are studying photography at Last School with John Mandeen.

Auroville Today tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad.

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# AUROVILLE TODAY

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In this issue: Education and Youth

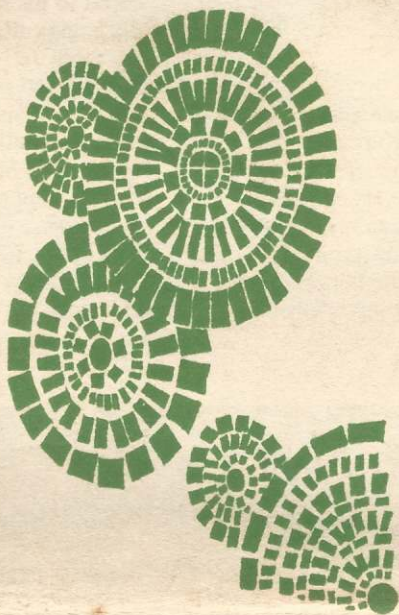


Photo Dayini

## City With a Heart

**I**mpressions from my youth surfaced when recently a journalist from my home-town parked his bicycle in front of my doorstep and asked me: "How did you get here?"

Down-town Rotterdam was my playground — by then the bomb-craters from the war had turned into wild-lands with water, reeds and ducks, dominated by the remains of the old city church.

At the harbour there was the cubist statue of the man without a heart calling in agony up to heaven — symbol of the destroyed city.

"We have to build up a city with a heart", my mother explained.

Slowly, over the years I saw more and more steel and glass, banks and insurance buildings replacing the wild-flowers.

"All things of value are vulnerable", says the motto in neon-lights on one of them.

"Economy" was the magical phrase which I learned to understand when my hard-working father came home too tired to hold me on his lap, an image of the struggle and the dignity on our side of the street to build our future.

The education of the children was the priority and explained the worn-out furniture, and the nails that scratched my back when I crawled under the heavy old-fashioned table.

O, Justification of mind over matter.

My mother sighed, watching the whores on the other side of the street throw out the furniture from their three-storey high windows once a year.

They closed their door impatiently on their small children, while I danced my dreams to classical music on the gramophone as my mother ironed.

There was a never ending urge for light in our dark back-room, and a dark-skinned baby-doll that I wouldn't sleep without, even when it was missing an eye.

My roots and values began there.....

Beginning of puberty — watching a passionate embrace between a prostitute and her pimp in a lit-up kitchen window.

My broken-hearted brother who jumped through the glass window the moment I returned from my ballet class.

We moved, and the man without a heart got moved to make way for the metro-building.

In school I was interested in all the subjects they never taught like psychology and spirituality.

Accounting classes were spent writing poems and contemplating clouds.

Then the boy I fell in love with introduced me to *The Adventure of Consciousness* and Sri Aurobindo. At sixteen I tried very hard to read it, not understanding but liking the feeling of it.

Later discovering the 'Light'. An experience of being an instrument and challenging the 'dark side' of town.

A little bottle of red earth from Auroville was brought by my friend. With the earth he placed a spot between my eye-brows as a wordless explanation of his experience.

My horizons expanded in light for three days.

Coming home now in Auroville when I sit on the piles of marble pieces in the 'inner room', I feel the heart resonating right here in my body.

I tell my daughter, "We will build the most beautiful town on earth. A city with a heart." And she, she dances among the flowers.

Sonja

