

Auroville Today

SINCE 1988

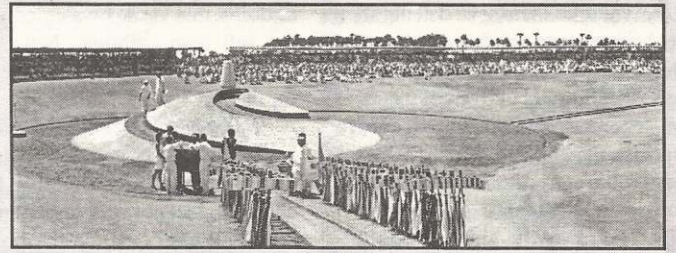
FEBRUARY 2001, No.145

COVER STORY:

Is Auroville international?

- To identify or move beyond?
- The meaning of the International Zone
- Making up Auroville's 50,000
- International Zone news

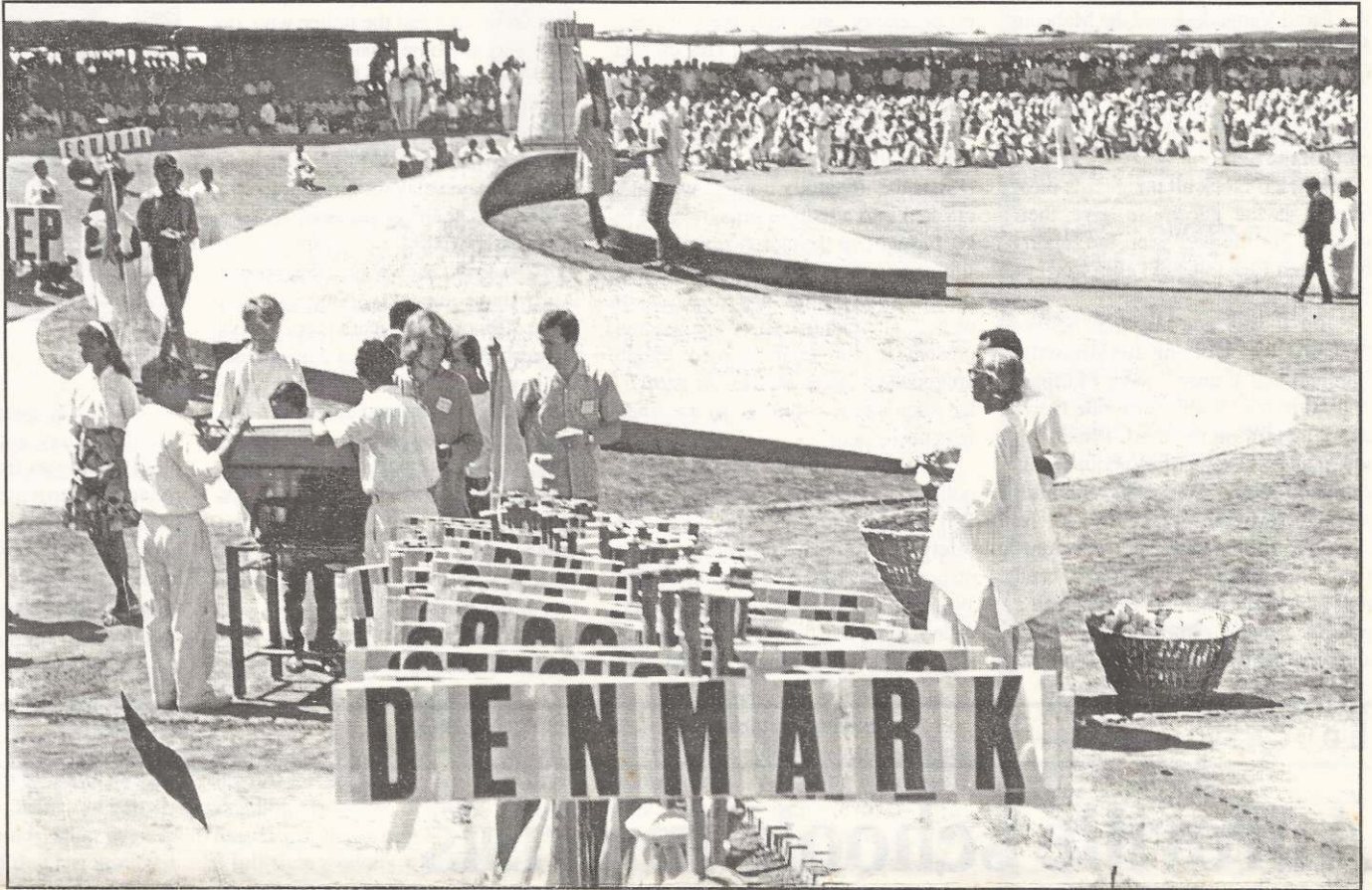
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On 28th February, 1968 representatives from 124 nations attended Auroville's inauguration ceremony. Since then many of our leaflets and brochures have stressed this international dimension. But what do we mean when we say that Auroville is an *international* community?

Is this a reference to the ideal ("Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole") or to the present reality (the mixture of nationalities represented here)? Does it indicate an internationalist tendency in terms of erasing distinctions between cultures, are we creating a cosmopolitan society, or do we simply use the term 'international' because it is attractive to donors?

In this issue we explore the international aspect of Auroville in an attempt to distinguish cliché from truth.



Placards of different nations at Auroville's inauguration ceremony

Is Auroville international?

It is time to review some of our assumptions.

Ask Aurovilians what they understand by the term 'international community' and (as always!) you are likely to receive different responses. Answers include a place inhabited by many different nations, a place of international culture, and a place which is doing work for the whole world. Each of these responses can be challenged. New York and London are far more international than Auroville in terms of the different cultures represented there; Auroville is often described as having a predominantly Westernized rather than an international culture; and it's not clear that much of what has been achieved so far in Auroville can easily be transferred to other parts of the world.

A universal town

So are we using the wrong terminology? Interestingly, Mother rarely used the term 'international' in describing Auroville. She preferred the term 'universal', clarifying the distinction like this:

Auroville wants to be a universal town. A universal town — not international: universal, where men and women of all countries will be able to

live in peace and progressive unity above all creeds, all politics and nationalities, straining to realize human unity. (7.9.64)

It's a point she makes again and again — that Auroville is a place for those who want to move beyond the particularities of nationality, caste and religion ("the first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances"). The term 'international' ('between nations'), on the other hand, still implies national structures of thought and being.

Yet Mother specified an International Zone for Auroville. Why? Mother's plan that the Zone

should house pavilions of different culture and nations is based upon an earlier idea she had wished to institute at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education as a concrete step towards Sri Aurobindo's concept of world union. "The most important idea," she explained, "is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification..." She proposed, therefore, to create "a kind of permanent world-exhibition...in which all countries will be presented in a concrete and living

way...to help individuals to become aware of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to bring them into contact with the ways of life of other nations, so that they learn to know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries of the world."

Here Mother implies a vital distinction between the 'genius' of a nation, which relates to the unique role it has to play in the world concert, and the superficial aspects of nationality which often feed divisive chauvinism. In an increasingly globalised culture perhaps the genius of a nation may be modified over time as waves of immigration and emigration change its constituent population. However, what is clear is that in the "straining to realize human unity" it is the chauvinistic aspect which has to be transcended. On the individual level, contacting the genius or essence of one's own culture is an important step in self-knowledge. And while it is not the ultimate step — Mother emphasized that the 'true Aurovilian' goes beyond nationality, religion and caste to discover their true being and a more universal consciousness — national character, purified of its accidental aspects, may be a powerful vehicle for the action of this consciousness. It is in this context that the

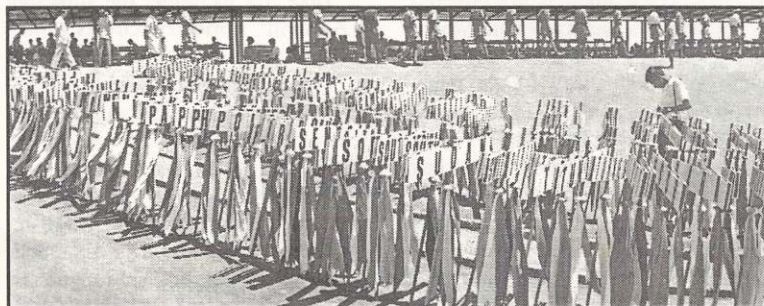
International Zone with its cultural pavilions has an essential role to play in Mother's 'universal' city.

Mother also explained what she meant by the term 'international' when she used it in reference to the Sri Aurobindo International University (as it was first called). This didn't imply, she said, that the university would comprise students from all nations of the world; rather 'international' meant a place where "the cultures of the various parts of the world will be represented here so as to be accessible to all." (August, 1952) Similarly, it could be concluded that Auroville's task is not to attract peoples from all nations to one township in Tamil Nadu, but rather to provide a place where all cultures can be understood, a place where, as Mother beautifully put it, people from all nations who want to realize human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo "would be at home".

Auroville and international politics

Having said all this, Mother stressed that Auroville had an important role to play on the international scene.

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Awaiting the inauguration ceremony

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What counts is the presence

Safety on the roads of Auroville is the responsibility of day and night guards.

Three or four men, one woman, all in their twenties or thirties: you find them seated at night on the bridge near Pitchandikulam; or where the tar road to Edayanchavadi meets the dirt road into Auroville; or at the 'eueces,' the eucalyptus grove opposite the road to Samasti. In the guard room at Certitude another young man is in attendance for telephone calls. The Auroville night guard, consisting of the Frenchman Philippe, the German Rosa, the Hungarian Laszlo, the Tamil Vengadesh and the Malayan Ramesh do that every night, seven nights a week. Elsewhere four Tamil Aurovilians, Narayan, Einyan, Manigandan and Arul, patrol different parts of the road.

At ten o'clock all the guards meet briefly at the eueces to give their reports. For the past year, the reports have been variations of "all's well" or "reasonable well".

But it was not like that before. "When I was working for Auroville International France," says Philippe, "I used to read in the Auroville News about attacks on the road. I made up my mind to do something about that as soon as I joined Auroville." So, after joining Auroville 4½ years ago, he started patrolling the roads, first alone, then with others. "There had been many previous attempts to organize a guard, usually immediately after someone had been attacked at night,

but they used to fade out after a few months. When I expressed an interest in doing this work I was gladly given the full responsibility. Now I have been guarding the road every evening for the last 4 years."

Philippe has a training in martial arts. The others too know how to defend themselves. But this knowledge is in fact not very important. Says Rosa: "What counts is the presence. The Aurovilians know that we are there, that they can call on us whenever necessary, and that they are not alone on the road at night. That creates a feeling of safety. We also provide an escort so that people get home safely; we help mothers who are looking for lost daughters; and we give accident assistance. Recently a guest who had crashed into a palmyra tree needed to be brought to Jipmer hospital for a life-saving operation. We also help people with petrol if they have run out of it." "The fact that there is a woman present in the team is very much appreciated," says Laszlo "in particular when we are contacted by a woman who needs help."

"But we are not the Auroville police," says Philippe. "There are over 100 communities in Auroville, and safety within each community is the responsibility of the community itself. We only come to help when we are called. But when people phone and ask if we can do something about the loud

party music at the neighbours, we politely decline. Our prime responsibility is the safety of the main roads at night."

Road safety has indeed greatly improved due to the visibility and presence of the night guard. Philippe recalls that, "Some years ago we had to prevent drunken people from Pondicherry coming into Auroville every Friday and Saturday nights. This doesn't happen anymore because people know that we are here; people like the taxi drivers and the police who, on their way to some business in one of the villages, often stop by to say hello. But though there has been no major problem for the last few years, I still advise any Aurovilian against taking the Bommayapalayam-Greenbelt road at night as there is no need to take unnecessary risks."

It seems, however, that fewer Aurovilians are travelling at night now. "Since 1½ years ago," says Ramesh, "you hardly see Aurovilians out any more after 9 p.m. Perhaps they are all clustered around the video? The only people you see are guests — who, as they are not always properly informed about us, sometimes are afraid of us — and people from the villages who know us. The local villagers, by the way, are very appreciative of our work."

The Italian Santo is, together with the Tamil Aurovilian Ashok, responsi-



The Auroville night guard

ble for the day-guard. Unlike the night guard, the day guard consists of six hired employees from the villages surrounding Auroville. "Since they have been guarding the road, nothing has happened, not even minor harassment," says Santo. "Their main task is to be visible, and to help whenever required."

Does the guard feel that it is on the

way to fulfilling Mother's vision of a "battalion of guards" for Auroville? "Perfectly," says Philippe. "The guard recently received a substantial donation which helped it purchase cycles and provide maintenance for the people doing this work. Now all we need is a few cellular phones to interconnect more quickly."

Carel

EDUCATION

Auroville schools in crisis

A substantial increase in the educational budget is necessary, but Auroville doesn't seem able to generate the money required.

In December last year the Auroville School Board, the working group that coordinates the work of all the Auroville schools, sounded the alarm. It announced that, from January 2001 onwards, there would be a severe shortfall of funds. It also announced that there would be problems admitting new students to the kindergarten crèche and to Transition primary school as some classes are full. In addition, a shortage of teachers prevents Deepanam crèche and primary school taking more children.

Admission problems

"The admission situation is serious. For the next school year, we have only just managed to find a place for all the children," says Kripa who is responsible for the coordination of school finances. "What we cannot foresee is what will happen now that Auroville is open again to newcomers. If newcomer families come, we may have more admission problems. Both the kindergarten crèche and most classes of Transition primary school are fully booked for the next school year. The new school Deepanam has a crèche, a kindergarten and a primary school but lacks teachers.

"The situation will become really interesting in about one and a half years as last year 25 babies were born in Auroville. Some parents have already tried to register their child at various schools, and often at more than one school at the same time, in order to secure a place. This is an absurd development! The School Board recently discussed the matter. As we regard all Auroville schools as being part of one institution, each having its own specific way of teach-

ing, we decided that all requests for admission will be centrally booked and that the teachers in the School Board will decide where a child will go, taking into account the preference of the parents."

Financial problems

If the admission situation is difficult, the financial situation which affects all Auroville schools is even more problematic. Teachers' maintenances vary from Rs 2000 (part-time) to Rs 4000 (US\$ 40-80) a month, while a maintenance of Rs 6000 (US\$ 130) is considered an acceptable minimum. There is no money to allow for an increase. In fact, it is difficult to avoid a decrease in teachers' maintenances now that the donation given by the Gateway Trust for the purpose of increasing teachers' maintenance has been exhausted. As Kripa explains, "The Gateway money provided immediate relief to the teachers, who often lacked money to buy basic essentials. It is simply unacceptable that they will have to make a step back now that this donation is exhausted. Immediate relief may come from the income-sharing experiment known as Economy 2000, but that is not a long term solution."

Otto, the manager of Auroville's Financial Service, says "We need Rs 46.2 lakhs (approximately US\$ 100,000) a year for teachers' maintenances at the present level. We have for the year 2001 Rs 37.2 lakhs (US\$ 81,000), which includes a committed donation of Rs 12 lakhs (US\$ 26,000) from one donor. So we still need 9 lakhs (US\$ 20,000) to maintain the status quo, and 26 lakhs (US\$ 57,000) to give every teacher Rs 1000 a month extra. While it is very necessary that the teachers' maintenances

are stabilised and even increased, the same goes also for all the others who depend on the community for their income. How can we increase the maintenance of the teachers while leaving those who work for other services at the same maintenance level?" As Kripa points out, "If you look at the larger picture of those who depend on community maintenance, the teachers are comparatively well paid. But it is a comparison between those who have a little and those who have a little more. Compared to what we believe is necessary, or to what self-supporting Aurovilians or unit executives take as maintenances, those who depend on community maintenance decidedly come off second-best."

Maintenances are not the only financial burdens the schools carry. There are also the running expenses, and the costs of school meals. Taken together, the Auroville schools take 26 % of the total monthly community budgets. These budgets are covered by Auroville's Central Fund, which gets its income from donations from commercial units, individuals, interest on capital and a few other sources such as guest contributions. But while the income of the Central Fund has steadily grown over the past years, so have its expenses. Says Otto: "The Economy Group, which manages the Central Fund, believes that we really cannot expect the commercial units, who already contribute 49% of the monthly income, to give substantially more to cover the schools' expenses, let alone the necessary increase. Efforts made by the Economy Group and the School Board to raise extra money within Auroville for Auroville schools have not yielded any significant results. We may have to ask affluent parents to give regular contri-

butions for the education of their children. But we may also have to raise additional funds from outside Auroville. Alternatively, in a worst-case scenario, we may have to look at cost-cutting devices."

Cutting costs?

The Economy Group, in a meeting with school teachers, suggested that the schools devise mechanisms to assess how many teachers are needed, taking as criteria the teacher-pupil ratio. At present each school determines the number of teachers it requires according to its own perception of its needs. But while this approach is understandable, some teachers consider it is essentially wrong. They point to the fact that Auroville schools aim at giving an experimental and integral education, which means that many more teachers are necessary than is the case in traditional schools.

Take, for example, the situation in Auroville's primary schools which have, in fact, partly a high school setup. There is one main teacher who is responsible for a class and teaches general topics, and there are many other teachers who teach special topics. At Transition all children are taught four languages — English, French, Sanskrit and Tamil — and children whose mother tongue is German are also taught German (children whose mother tongue is another language often get private tuition elsewhere). In addition to the usual topics such as maths, history, geography and sciences the school teaches music, graphic arts, computer skills, crafts and body awareness, while physical education and sports are also organised as a special programme. The teaching medium is English,

which sometimes causes problems for those children who have only recently started to learn that language. They need separate guidance. Then there are teachers who deal with children who have learning disabilities.

Another complication is that, like the children, the teachers come from many different nationalities. A teacher from France, for example, cannot be expected to teach English. This also contributes to a relatively large number of teachers. Then there is the experience that the maximum number of children per class should not exceed 20 if each child is to get individual attention. Also, most of the classrooms do not allow for larger student bodies. Lastly, there is the fact that the teachers wish to keep the schools manageable and maintain a good contact between the teachers and the children. Therefore the student body, in the case of Transition School, is limited to 160 children.

To avoid cost-cutting measures, the Auroville School Board together with the Economy Group plans to initiate a fundraising campaign for education. A demographic projection of Auroville's youth is being made, and the schools will provide detailed descriptions of their work in regular reports to show the uniqueness and relevance of Auroville's educational efforts.

But what if additional funds do not materialize? It is too early to predict. But if the teaching conditions become too difficult or if maintenances remain far below acceptable levels, Auroville may encounter problems in finding people to teach the Auroville children.

Carel

A good place to practice yoga

Bindu discovers Aranya, one of the least known of Auroville's outlying communities.

As you motor down the main tar road that curves from Thiruchitramabalm to Poothorai, you pass acres and acres of flooded rice fields with coconut palms standing sentinel at their borders, you pass plantations of casurina swaying gently in the wind, you pass the village tank of Kalasipalayam over-full with full-blown lotuses, you pass potters' wheels shaping earthen pots and wood-stoves from the Manaveli clay that is found in this region, you pass ancient temples crumbling down from the onslaught of steadily creeping Banyan roots, you pass brightly-coloured temples, impressive structures dominating each village, alive and proud with the worship of the people. Finally you come across the newly-built Auroville health centre that serves the adjoining villages of Kalasipalayam, Poothrai and Manaveli. If you now leave the tar road and turn right on to a dirt path, your wanderings, if you are lucky, will take you to Aranalaya, a one-man afforestation community of Auroville.

We were lucky. We ran into a group of young women, gay and giggling in their brightly-coloured half-saris who had not heard of Aranalaya, but yes, they could direct us to Saravanam, the young Tamil Aurovilian who lives alone in a capsule at the edge of a canyon. The neatly fenced 2-acre compound planted with fruit trees, guarded by watchdogs and powered with solar panels had the look of an Auroville greenbelt community. But as the sun was sinking low among the ravines we decided to take a walk before meeting up with Saravanam, the steward of Aranalaya.

The land

Aranalaya (meaning forest sanctuary) or Aranya (meaning forest) as it is better known, lies to the north-east of Ousteri, one of the biggest lakes in the

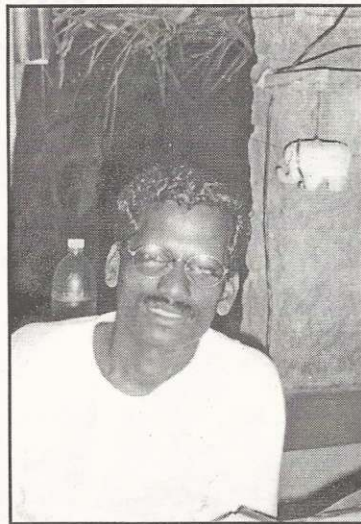
bio-region, and adjacent to the Lake Estate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Comprising about 100 acres, which partly includes "peramboke" or Government land, Aranya until recently was a wasteland. The land was purchased long ago, when Mother had thought of locating Auroville in this region. But when the centre of Auroville was moved eastwards, Aranya became so remote that it was left unstewarded for decades.

As we walked, the hardy grassland, here and there bearing young newly-planted trees, suddenly gave way to ravines, carved deep into the earth. The exposed rocks, pink in the dying light, were stark in their beauty. We clambered over earthen check dams and stone dams that were built to stop the erosion, and explored caverns that wandered into the belly of the earth. Here and there were ferns and creepers somehow thriving despite the harsh environment. We startled a great horn owl from its nest perched right over us on the cliff face and it hooted its disgust at us. For miles around there were no other human beings to be seen. Aranya is indeed a sanctuary, desolate and inspiring in its wasted beauty.

The land regeneration work

Later, as we met with Saravanam over tea and a simple meal, we learnt that the canyons actually housed several species of important medicinal plants, and at the last survey over 40 species of birds had been spotted in the region. "A newly-built earthen dam," Saravanam explains, "has created a reservoir that holds water even in the dry season. And that has attracted more birds, including migratory ones."

Aranya was taken up as a coastal afforestation project in 1994 by Aurovilians Nevi and Rauf. In the heyday of this project, with secure funding for 3 years, over 100,000 trees



Saravanam

were planted over the whole region. "I moved in here, on my own, in 1995 and took over the project," says Saravanam. "Guided by Rauf, I have been experimenting with planting indigenous trees that are native to this coastal belt. So far we have planted over 25 species of trees and shrubs. These trees are not watered, but depend on the rain for their survival. The growth is slow, and given the failure of the monsoon in recent years, many trees have died. Still there has been evidence of some self-regeneration. Scientists say that if the rains are good in the fourth year, then a forest of this type can regenerate in 10 years. So we will just have to wait and see."

"At present, one of my main problems, is guarding the area and protecting it from rampaging picnickers from Pondicherry who destroy our live fences and young saplings. I have only 3 full-time workers who help me with the weeding, mulching, fencing and raising saplings for planting in the nursery. The other major work we have undertaken is repairing check dams that were built by the Government and, as far as funds

allow, building new ones. As with many other afforestation projects in Auroville, there is always a shortage of funds, and I have gone into debt over this project."

The man behind the show

Saravanam's quiet determination in continuing his work is captivating. Hailing from a village near Tiruvanamalai Saravanam, inspired by his father and uncle, has always been interested in ecological issues. He has participated in many afforestation programmes in his native region, and it was on one such training course in 1989 that he came to Pitchandikulam, a forest community of Auroville. He was immediately inspired by the place, by the people he met, and above all by the Auroville charter. So when Joss invited him to join Auroville and help in the newly-formed Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre (AGRC), he accepted, only later to step out when activities at AGRC declined.

Part of his work in AGRC was to start ecological clubs in the villages in order to educate and inspire youth on environmental issues. "I still like doing this work, reaching out to young minds. Because of the ecological clubs I had started in the villages and the contacts I had established then, every year I have 2-3 camps of 40-50 children from the public schools in Pondicherry and villages who come out here to Aranya to explore the land and help in planting and bunding. For the rest it is a quiet life, with an occasional Aurovilian passing by. I have a cook and a watchman who lives on the premises, and the stewards of Lake Estate occasionally pass by for a chat. I rarely go out to Auroville, especially now that I don't have motorized transport anymore. But I don't mind. I like the atmosphere here. It is a good place to practise the yoga," he concludes with a shy smile.

In brief

International Advisory Council Meets

The International Advisory Council comprising Dr. Kireet Joshi (Chairman), Ms. Mary E. King, Prof. Norman Myers, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne had their first meeting this year in January. They took the opportunity during their visit to have an open and informal meeting with the Aurovilians.

Sanskrit Vadathu

Another "Speak Sanskrit" workshop was organized in January by the Language Laboratory and the Centre for Indian Culture. These workshops are offered by a national group called Sanskrit Bharati and are part of a Government programme to promote the revival of Sanskrit.

Tai-Chi Workshop

The Tai Chi Hall offered a 12-day workshop, "The art of Chi-Stevanovitch's method" in January. The workshop guided participants' mastery of the body through breathing and muscular relaxation, improvement of movement through balance and coordination, and learning to mobilize 'Chi' or the breath that flows in and out of the body.

Young Auroville Rider wins national awards

It was a moment of great pride to Auroville horse lovers when Jochen Bijlos bagged two gold medals at the children's show jumping in the United India National equestrian championship at Chennai this month.

Correction

In a letter in the last issue, Alain Grandcolas stated that the first foundation ceremony for Matrimandir took place on 21st January, 1971. This should have read 21st February, 1971.

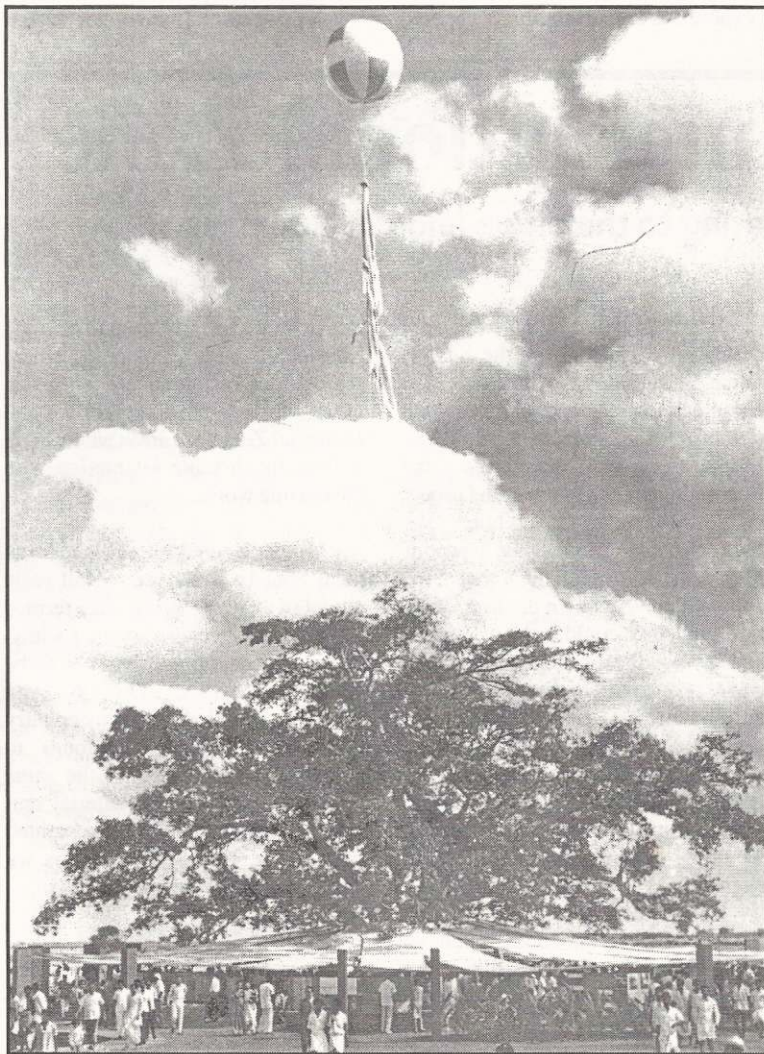
MATRIMANDIR

The Banyan Tree at the centre of Auroville

When Auroville started in 1968, at the centre there was just a lone banyan tree. The red laterite landscape was barren for miles. The banyan tree, which is now adjacent to the Matrimandir, was the only shade tree in this area and many villagers, especially the ones who had fields nearby, used to rest under it from the sun. Sixty years ago a villager from Kottakarai, in a votive offering for an answered prayer to the God Murugan, planted this banyan tree to provide shade for the place where pilgrims, on their way from Kaliveli tank to a temple in Pondicherry, paused to rest. Here they would drink plain water or rice water which was brought from the village. To this day the banyan tree is still called "Tanipandalaram" — the water-shade tree — in Tamil.

Ramalingam, a long-term Aurovilian who works at the Matrimandir recalls: "When I was about 10 years old, my sister and I had to walk to Pondicherry to sell firewood. We would leave our house near Alankuppam at 8 a.m. and on our way we would stop at the banyan tree, sleep there till 3 p.m. and then continue our walk."

"When the work started at the Amphitheater, before Auroville's inauguration, my parents set up a



teashop near this Banyan tree. We were all living there, selling tea to the workers. By that time I had become a tailor, but whenever I could I helped them. So actually I am the first Aurovilian who started living here! Later, in the seventies, Auroville kids from the youth community of Ami sold lemon juice under the banyan tree to tourists. The kids would borrow a zinc bucket and sugar from one of their parents, and either steal or somehow procure lemons, and sell their drink for Rs. 1. They were very proud of their enterprise.

"The villagers believed that a spirit lived in the tree," continues Ramalingam. "They would never sit under it or go near it at noon or at midnight. And they would always come in groups of three or four. They believed that the spirit would kill anyone who was alone. Another thing they did when a family member was sick — at that time there were not so many hospitals — was to take a hair from the sick person, tie it around a nail and put that nail into the tree. I still remember the tree being full of nails!"

The Banyan Tree on the day of Auroville's inauguration

There is another story connected with the spirit of this banyan tree. One night the spirit of the tree came to Mother in distress. She told somebody to go to the tree and find out what had happened. It turned out that someone had carelessly stuck a huge knife in the trunk of the tree the previous day (referred to in M.P.Pandit's "Sidelights on the Mother").

In the early days, this Banyan tree didn't have long aerial roots, unlike other banyan trees. Explains Ramalingam, "Whenever some roots started coming down, the cowherds used to swing on them. That's why they never reached the ground." Only later, when Narad set up the Matrimandir Nursery, did the tree get the attention and protection which allowed aerial roots to form.

Ramalingam remembers Auroville's inauguration. "There was a big balloon tied to the tree, there were lots of big brass pots surrounding it and a big copper ring was fixed around the tree". Engraved on the ring, in French and Tamil, was a message from the Mother: 'Auroville — the city at the service of the truth.' It was a fantastic day..."

Is AV international?

(continued from page 1)

One of her earliest statements referred to her wish that the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. "which are on a collision course come here (Auroville), and that both of them have a pavilion of their culture and their ideal, and that they are here, face to face, and shake hands." (23.4.66) And one of her first explanations of Auroville's *raison d'être* was that Auroville had the capacity to prevent a Third World War if the "seed of truth" which it embodied was allowed to flower. In the same conversation she explained how the decision of nations to participate in building Auroville would mean that idealism had triumphed over their pervasive fear of catastrophe: "if the nations collaborate, even to a very small extent in the work of Auroville, it will do them a lot of good — it can do them a lot of good, a good which may be quite out of proportion to the apparent action."

It must be said that while Mother was optimistic about being able to work through individuals like Kennedy and Krushchev, she could be scathing about international institutions. "Those people are so old-fashioned... still at the stage of the 'materialist anti-religious movement'", she remarked of the United Nations in 1966, and on another occasion she described UNESCO as being "two hundred years behind the earth's progress, consequently there isn't much hope that they will understand". "Understand" in this context meant understand what Auroville stood for.

Yet Mother was later to support contacts being made with UNESCO, contacts which resulted in UNESCO passing several resolutions of support for Auroville as well as the visit, in 1970, of an important UNESCO representative to the community. There were a number of reasons for this. According to her son, Andre, Mother was concerned that Auroville be "visible", well-known to everybody by the time of Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary year (1972), and UNESCO's support and international network were seen as a powerful means of achieving this. There was also the question of Auroville's status.

Mother made it clear, in response to a question about whether Auroville could be part of a UNESCO project, that "to hand over the management of Auroville to any country or any group however big it may be is an ABSOLUTE IMPOSSIBILITY (sic)." This seems to be the import of her description of Auroville as "the free international city", of her statement (reported by Roger Anger) that "it is only the internationalization of Auroville that will give it its true image and dimension", and of her wish that children born in Auroville's maternity unit should be recognized as "world citizens". But Mother was also pragmatic. She recognized that while India is the only country in the world with the wisdom and wideness to host a project like Auroville, it was not yet ready to accord the project a fully independent status. This was why she emphasized that Aurovilians must strictly observe the laws of the land.

Today

And the Auroville of today? In what sense, if any, can it be termed 'international' or 'universal'? After all, hardly any pavilions have been built in the International Zone, we have yet to evolve any kind of 'world culture', and Auroville's impact upon world affairs — as far as one can judge — seems to have been negligible. But perhaps this is looking in the wrong direction. For what is a daily fact of life here is the constant contact and interaction between people from very different backgrounds and cultures in a 'zone' which transcends nationality. We did not come here to create an international city. We were drawn by something else, an ideal which specifically requires us to go beyond division, and it is through this rather than through nationality that we relate to each other.

This is already a huge achievement. And if the adults are not yet fully there — for many of us still retain national and cultural characteristics, the national 'filters' which delimit our vision and responses — surely the Auroville children, in their mixing of languages and disregard of nationality, are well on the way to living that 'something else'.

Alan

To identify, merge or move beyond

Aurovilians from seven different nationalities explore what they understand b



AUROVILLE TODAY: When you are asked who you are how do you define yourself? By nationality, or by something else?

Younge: Since coming to Auroville I've discovered myself as a Korean. I never felt this so strongly in my own country or when I was living in Germany.

Carel: I'm Dutch. The longer I live in India the more I realize how profoundly my outlook is impregnated with the thinking and very pragmatic attitude of the Dutch people.

Ricardo: Although I was born and brought up in Argentina, I've never felt strongly Argentinian. I don't know if I can yet call myself Aurovilian — that term has a very deep sense for me — so maybe I would simply call myself a citizen of the world.

Bindu: I was born Indian, but after getting educated in the U.S. I think I'm more of a world citizen as I have come to appreciate the qualities of both cultures. I'm certainly a misfit in the urban middle-class India which I come from.

Emmanuelle: I don't know how to define myself. I was born in Corsica to French parents, but I don't consider myself French, perhaps because I've been living in Auroville since the age of five and been more exposed to Indian culture.

Jana: I was born in Germany to German/Dutch parents, but I don't really have any national feelings. I do, however, relate strongly to the German language and literature.

Amudha: When I'm asked who I am I usually say 'Aurovilian' rather than Tamil. I say this because I feel I was brought up in Auroville and because I really feel part of the dream, the ideal.

AVT: We often describe Auroville as being an 'international' community. What do you understand by this? Is it an appropriate description?

Emmanuelle: If 'international' implies many different nationalities, then Auroville is hardly special. New York and London have far more nationalities. Even the apartment block I lived in in France had people from twelve or thirteen different nationalities.

Bindu: I think Auroville should become more cosmopolitan. Auroville is not cosmopolitan at present because it doesn't offer a wide variety of cuisines, art forms etc. from many different cultures. There are only two dominant cultures: Tamil and European.

Younge: There are few



Aurovilians from the Far East: we have a different mind, lifestyle, way of thinking from both Westerners and Indians.

Sometimes I sense a gap: I do something in my 'Korean' way and I realize somebody is watching me and judging me as 'different'. So I withdraw and try not to do that again. But the sense of a gap remains.

Amudha: If 'international' means understanding different cultures, we are not yet truly international because many Westerners have not made the effort to understand Tamil culture. Some Western Aurovilians have been here for thirty years and still cannot speak the local language, while uneducated women from the villages have managed to pick up some English. If international means moving beyond nationality, we're also not international because it's difficult for some Aurovilians to leave their cultural traditions behind. This is particularly difficult for Tamil people because they still have families in the villages who expect them to keep up those traditions.

AVT: Does 'international' neces-

The meaning of the International Zone

Gilles Guigan, who has been compiling material relating to the origin and development of Auroville for many years, shares his insights.

Mother described Auroville as a 'universal' city, implying that it is a place where nationality is to be transcended. Yet she also specified that there should be an International Zone. Why? I think this is because in Auroville we are challenged to live both as a unique individual but also as a member of a particular culture or nation. It's not that we should deny our nationality: even Mother, on the occasion of the independence of Pondicherry, said that she was "French by birth and education... Indian by choice and predilection".

As I chose to be born French, this is a specificity which I must realize, and the presence of a French pavilion in the International Zone can help deepen my understanding of my culture. At the same time, the presence of pavilions from many other cultures and countries helps me understand



Gilles

the specific genius of other cultures and nations, and the unique contribution each makes. In this sense, we don't necessarily need people from all nations to come to live here, but we do need the opportunity to learn about all cultures.

Interestingly, Mother not only described each zone of the city as having a different function: She also explained that each zone represented one of the four great aspects of The Mother. For example, the International Zone is under the aspect of Mahasaraswati, while the Industrial Zone is under the aspect of Mahakali. It's clear then that each zone will have its own distinct vibration, and this could help us realize and develop the different parts of ourselves. For example, I'm French, I'm an engineer and many other things besides. So one could say that in the International Zone it would be my 'Frenchness' which I would be living, whereas in the Industrial Zone I would be experiencing myself as an engineer.

I think there is also another difference between the zones. I believe the Cultural Zone, like the

Residential Zone, is meant to be more 'insulated', a place where Aurovilians communicate with each other, whereas the International and Industrial Zones are areas where there will be much more interaction with the outside world.

Mother wanted Auroville to be an ideal society — to be a full-scale model of an ideal society. She termed it 'universal' because such a society, in its essence, should be able to be applied anywhere. This is why Auroville can't belong to any country or organization — it belongs to humanity as a whole. At the same time, for spiritual and material reasons, Auroville cannot be separated from India. This is the paradox we must constantly live and explore.

From an interview by Alan

Inter

The International Zone is the least developed of the four zones of the city. The large Bharat Nivas complex which was begun in the early 1970s is only now being completed, and the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture is under construction, but no other national and cultural pavilions have been constructed so far (although the International Zone does house the Visitors Information Centre and the partially completed Savitri Bhavan).

Why has it taken so long to get started in this Zone? Partly because of lack of funding, partly because the community has not accorded this zone as high a priority as the other zones, but mainly because there has been no clear understanding concerning what the International Zone is for, and how it should look and function. Some Aurovilians question the relevance of pavilions in a world where increased travel, migration, global markets and mass media have made many cultures more mutable,

and?

the international dimension of Auroville.



(from left to right)
Younge serving at the Visitor Centre
Ricardo at his carpentry workshop
Jana at home
Amudha at the Kindergarten

sarily imply giving up your own culture?

Younge: I don't think so. I'm proud to be Korean: we have our own beauty and I would like to keep it. But I mustn't insist too much on my own nationality because then I close myself off from other nationalities. We must open our hearts to others.

Carel: When Mother described Auroville, she talked about a place where you can go beyond nationalities and cultures. The only way I can do this is not to act from my mind but to go to another level of consciousness. This is what Mother described as the inner discovery, discovering who you really are beyond the outer national and cultural aspects. This is where we discover that we are one, that we are larger than nationality. Perhaps that's why she often referred to Auroville as a 'universal' township.

Jana: I think the definitions are perfect. We have an International Zone where we can learn about other cultures, but the next step is to go beyond cultures, to become universal. Auroville is a wonderful opportunity

to get rid of your identification with your own culture, because when you work together with people from many different cultures with many different patterns and outlooks, you become aware of your own patterns and can start moving beyond them. It's a difficult but fascinating work — to be constantly open, flexible, so that you can learn from others. In this my children are my teachers: they have no national feelings so they show up my own all the more clearly.

Bindu: People have been drawn to Auroville by motives beyond nationality, by an ideal. In this sense Aurovilians are already atypical of people from their own culture. When I lived in the U.S. I was aware of being defined on the basis of my skin colour. I think one of the strengths of Auroville is that here we don't judge or label people on the basis of their skin colour or nationality, and this allows us to develop more as individuals.

AVT: So should we drop the term 'international' and refer to Auroville as a 'universal' city?

Emmanuelle: I think we're on

the way to being universal, but we still have a long way to go. So 'international' is more truthful about where we are at present.

Ricardo: I think we should stop using the term 'international' because it keeps us fixed upon nationality. 'Universal' is much better because it breaks us out of those limited patterns of thinking. We have to become larger and larger, to become aware that even terms like 'Aurovilian' can become obstacles to progress if we become attached to them and wear them with pride. So 'universal' is perfect.

Jana: Maybe the best description of Auroville is what I write on my unfinished architectural drawings — 'work in progress'.

Amudha: The only truly universal place in Auroville is the kindergarten where I work. The children come together, work together, as one group without any thought of nationality. They are free. It's really only us adults who continue to wrestle with this issue of nationality!

Edited by Alan

International Zone news

less easily defined than before and where nationalism — at least in certain areas — is losing its grip. Other Aurovilians, while accepting the concept of pavilions, find it difficult to ascertain the genius of their culture and to represent it in a way which is not stereotypical or 'Disneyish'. Still others are concerned that the International Zone may become a kind of World Fair, or a dead zone of mausoleum-like pavilions.

Recently, Daniel Smith, a visiting architect who may assist with the design of the U.S. pavilion, suggested that the International Zone has to contain far more than pavilions if it is not to remain a 'wasteland'. He believes that it has to have a rich fabric of shops, meeting places and, above all, habitations if it is to be vibrant and have a life of its own. He also pointed out that the international flavour of the Zone could be expressed in many different ways. For example, the French, rather than erecting a pavilion, might choose to put up an apartment block in a style redolent of the best of French architecture,

while the Greeks could contribute a beautiful open-air amphitheatre.

But who would live in the International Zone? This raises the question of whom the International Zone is primarily for. Mother's original conception, which she wanted to be realized at the Sri Aurobindo University Centre in the Ashram, was clearly intended as a 'living' introduction to the cultures of the world for students of the Ashram School and for Ashramites. It could similarly be argued that the expressions of different cultures in the International Zone of Auroville are primarily intended to assist the Aurovilians in their quest for cross-cultural understanding and human unity. Yet, as an Auroville architect recently pointed out, the International Zone is now looked upon by some Aurovilians as a 'lost' zone, a zone whose primary purpose is to entertain visitors and keep them away from the rest of Auroville, rather than a zone which is intimately related to

the other zones of the city.

While the debate continues, there are new signs of life in the International Zone. Last year the striking Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity building was constructed in record time in the Bharat Nivas complex, and a new concept was proposed which may help break the mental gridlock over the pavilions. The 'Unity Pavilion' will be a transitional space and experimental ground for countries and cultures which are not yet ready to construct their own pavilions or cultural representations. The Unity Pavilion complex will provide office, lecture and exhibition space for any country and culture, as well as serving as a focus for the work of the International Zone Promotion Group and Auroville International. Piero has made a design for the Pavilion and already Rs. 11.6 lakhs (US\$ 25,000) has been allocated for the project which will cost Rs. 2.5 crores (US\$ 540,000) to realize.

Alan

OPEN FORUM

Making up Auroville's 50,000

Auroville is planned for an eventual population of around 50,000 people; but how about the composition of the 50,000?

Mother gave no specific guidance on this point. She made it clear that She expected people to come to Auroville from many different nations, and that all the major contributing cultures and peoples of the world would be represented here by way of pavilions in the International Zone, but she didn't speak about the composition of the 50,000.

Into this vacuum a number of different scenarios have been poured. One suggests that the inclusion of everyone in the surrounding villages would already give us approximately 40,000 people "in Auroville". However, this stems from misinterpretation of a memo written by Varadharajan in 1970, which was shown to Mother and included the statement: "The first citizens of Auroville are those Tamil people who live on the soil of Auroville."

Two important points here are:

(1) It was not Mother who used the words "first citizens of Auroville" in regard to the local villagers; it was Varadharajan. She merely endorsed his memo, with Her blessings, for use in liaison work between Auroville and the local villages at a time of tension and misunderstanding.

(2) At the time of the memo, and continuing throughout Mother's remaining life, no-one was accepted as "Aurovilian" without Mother's personal approval. In other words, even though Mother endorsed the concept of the local people being the first citizens of the land (of Auroville), which of course they were, and continue to be in a literal sense, it didn't make them Aurovilians.

A second scenario suggests that there should be some sort of proportional representation of all humanity here, continent by continent, or even nation by nation. It sounds reasonable, but what would it imply in the way of actual numbers?

By the year 2020, world population figures are expected to be as follows:

GLOBAL REGION	POPULATION (in millions)	PER CENT	Same % of 50,000 *
ASIA	4,493	59	29,500
AFRICA	1,222	16	8,000
EUROPE	521	7	3,500
STH AMERICA	414	5	2,500
NTH AMERICA	589	8	4,000
FORMER SOVIET UNION	318	4	2,000
OCEANIA, (INCL AUSTRALIA)	37	1	500
TOTAL	7,594	100	50,000

* the generally accepted eventual population of Auroville

Of the above total of 4,493 million Asians, some 1,289 million — or 28.7% — are expected to be Indian. For Auroville that would imply a total of 8,466 out of the expected township population of 50,000.

Although these percentage figures could theoretically be used to engineer a future representative population, it should be noted that:

1. Mother never suggested that the population of Auroville should be proportionately representative of humanity by nation or global region, only that She saw people from all different cultures and nations being drawn here.

2. For a long time to come it's highly unlikely that Auroville could attract people in sufficient numbers from areas like Africa and the poorer nations of Asia to create a representative balance.

On the basis of the above we can conclude that global representation, in any precisely literal sense, is unlikely to be a viable option, at least for a long time to come. However, in a looser sense there may be an argument for seeing some sort of general global representation in Auroville. In other words, we should at least see here a sizeable number of people from each global region or continent for Auroville to be representative of 'humanity as a whole'. What we should NOT see is the dominance — in numerical or behavioural terms — of any one nation, if Auroville is to remain truly international. This unfortunately means that Auroville might have to place limits on certain nations whose representation starts to become totally disproportionate, as could happen with India, France or Germany, who together already account for 66% of the present population.

A third and final scenario suggests that we simply take the first 50,000 people who seem appropriate material for the experiment of Auroville. The three main advantages of this are: (1) Auroville would be certain to grow faster and reach its 50,000 population sooner, (2) We would be more likely to draw people with a higher level of consciousness — true seekers — than if we limited ourselves to a global 'quota' system, (3) It feels more natural and appropriate to trust the Divine to select and bring to Auroville the right people.

There are some disadvantages to this view. Firstly, the non-Indian population would be likely to come mostly from relatively wealthy and well educated backgrounds, which generally means from countries with an advanced internal communication infrastructure (able to spread information on Auroville to the widest possible audience), thereby producing a socio-economic imbalance in a global sense. Secondly, with this approach there is a much greater risk of imbalance in global population terms, as growth could

become exponential among those nations with the largest population — currently the Indian, French and German — who would be likely to inspire more of their own countrymen to join them to the exclusion of less well represented nations.

It's a complex topic, but for the immediate future we are probably safe to continue with our present entry policy, which in essence means taking people from any nation who meet the criteria for acceptance. Meanwhile, we should never lose sight of Mother's wish that Auroville should be an experiment aimed at human unity "in diversity", and should ensure that the 'diversity' is represented both in human terms, by type of being, AND — as much as possible — in national, cultural and ethnic terms.

Tim

The Art of Light: a profile of Sathya

During January, an exhibition was held at the Visitors Centre displaying the creations of Corona: a new unit managed by Sathya and Rolf.

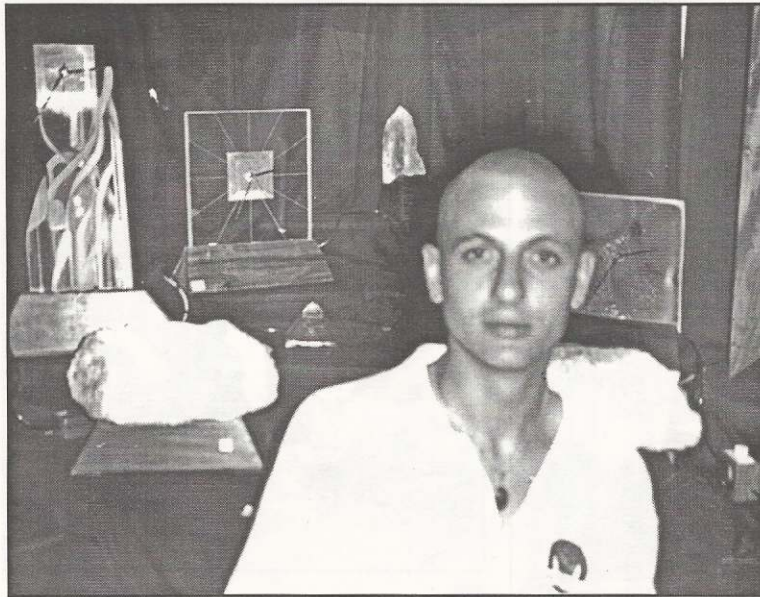
Sathya, 26 years old and of Dutch/ America parentage, was born in Dharamsala and moved to Auroville with his parents when he was three years old. He grew up here until, at the age of 16, he left to study at the Kodaikanal International School, from which he graduated two years later. He then left for the USA. He attended a few college classes there, but mostly he had "the western experience of survival", travelling around the country and taking up different jobs: he even spent a winter in Alaska. As he puts it, "It's crucial for young people who have grown up in Auroville to experience life elsewhere, at least for the sake of perspective and appreciation."

One year ago, Sathya returned to Auroville and decided to stay. "Auroville has always been home, and I figured I'd always end up back here." In March 2000 he started a unit with Rolf, a painter and sculptor, as a partner. Corona, the name of the unit, means the aura around the sun. Corona is "founded on the fusion of light and time with earth and space".

Their creations comprise two

lines. One is the acrylic/plexiglas line. 'Timestrands' are clocks made from frosted, carved out or sculpted material internally illuminated. "The material has fiber optic qualities, you can see straight through it, and light doesn't get caught or reflected in the clear areas until it's frosted or scratched," Sathya explains. 'Timestrands' include representations of star-spangled night skies, geometric designs and cathedrals made of three-dimensional towers of different heights arranged together. The other is the quartz and crystals line, 'Glowrocks'. These are illuminated crystals or raw quartz mounted on wooden or ceramic bases. They come in a variety of different shapes, sizes and colours. Sathya does a lot of the designing work in this line. "You are pretty much creating a sculpture as well as a lamp. The crystals and quartz are naturally sculptures in themselves, but you have to create a base that matches its shape, and light it up skilfully, so that the light is diffused and complements the beauty of the stone. I have received a lot of positive feedback in terms of the effect light has on crystal."

"I can tell you what started the whole idea. It all started with a peb-



Sathya

ble. One night I was walking, and I had a flashlight with me. There were many pebbles on the ground, I picked one up, this big, round, brown-red-dish one, and put it over the flashlight. It made this incredible red light. It was this most beautiful red, and I figured, why not see how far I can take this idea. The simplicity of

it attracted me. I've always loved working with stones, and I've always liked working with light too."

Corona has two full-time employees. The quartz and crystals are sourced from Carroor, in Tamil Nadu, and the acrylic/plexiglas is imported. Their creations are sold at

the Auroville Boutiques in Auroville and Pondicherry and the 'Naturally Auroville' Boutique in Chennai. There is not much demand locally because; Sathya feels, there is not yet sufficient appreciation of this kind of art. Also, the prices are relatively high. In the big cosmopolitan cities there would most probably be better appreciation and higher demand (already an exhibition has been held in Bangalore, and an order has come from Mumbai). Corona has applied for an American patent. It will take a year for it to be approved.

"Though there seems to be no shortage of challenges, Corona's potential is great: it paints a bright picture for the future," says Sathya.

He pauses. "I don't usually like quoting Mother too much but I heard that one day somebody was talking to the Mother about Auroville, and he asked her: 'How are we supposed to get this message out to the world?' And the Mother replied: 'Through art and light.' And that's exactly what we are doing at Corona: creating art with light."

From an interview by Emmanuelle

CULTURE

Award for sculptor

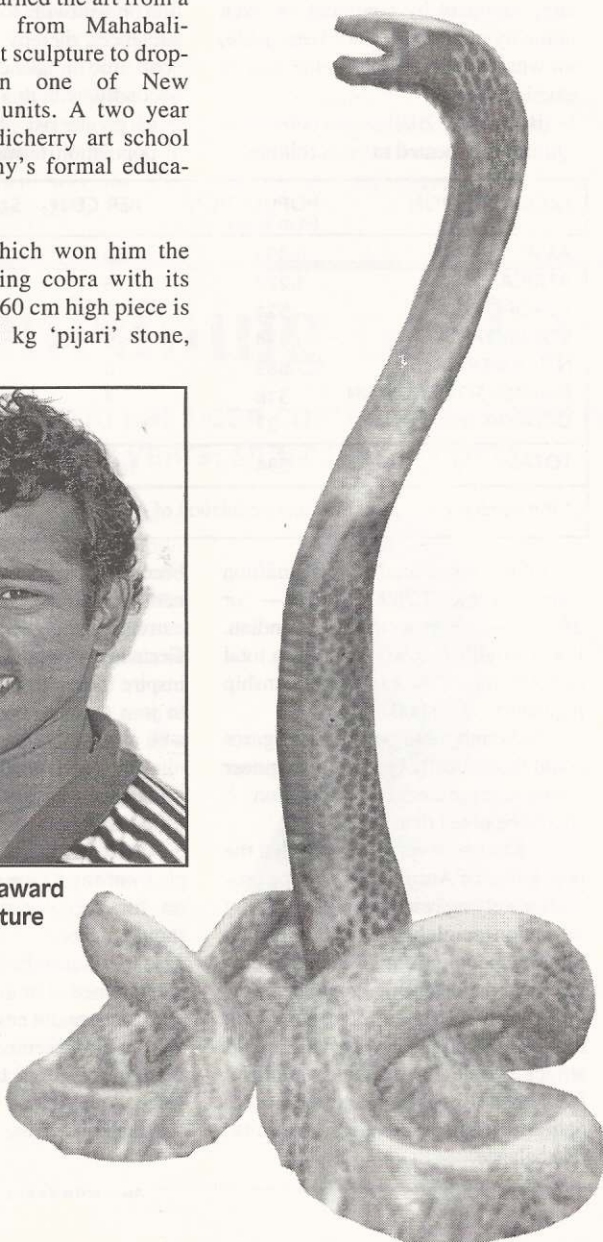
The National Award for Mastercraftsman, Tamil Nadu State, has been conferred on N. Murthy, a 26 year old newcomer to Auroville who hails from the village of Kuilyapalayam. Murthy, who quit New Creation School in order to fully dedicate himself to sculpture, first learned the art from a master sculptor from Mahabalipuram who taught sculpture to dropout children in one of New Creation's craft units. A two year course in a Pondicherry art school completed Murthy's formal education.

The piece which won him the award is a dancing cobra with its hood raised. The 60 cm high piece is made from a 25 kg 'pijari' stone,

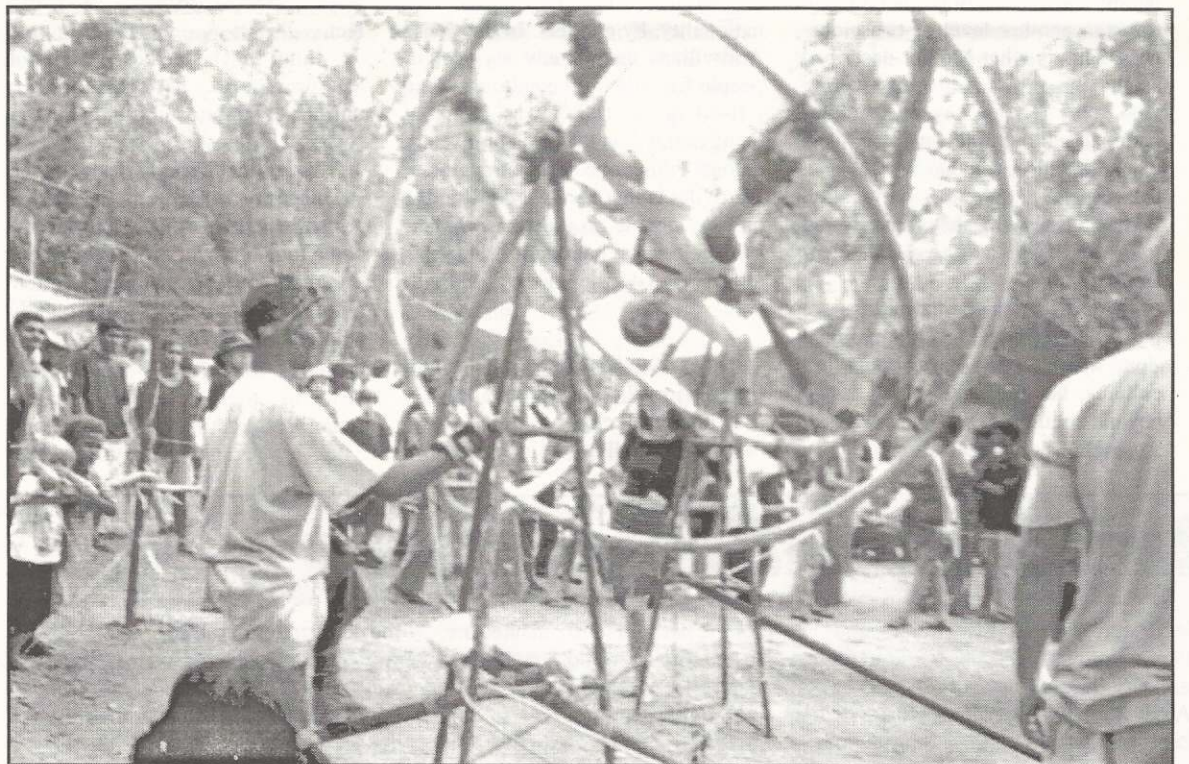
which he acquired from Jhansi near Agra. "It took me 40 days," says Murthy. "I was inspired because Lord Shiva traditionally has a snake around his neck."



Murthy and his award winning sculpture



The Peaceful City Fair



On the spinning machine

The Christmas 2000 fair, which was organized by Johnny and a group of young and older helpers, was held at the Youth Centre.

This "Peaceful City Fair" was named after the plot of land within the Greenbelt area which, earlier this year, had been bought by a Pondicherry real estate group, and which Auroville had finally succeeded in acquiring from them after much struggle. The Land Coordination Group thought that giving this name to a community event was inappropriate. However, the name wasn't changed, and the actual entrance even happened to be the gateway to the original Peaceful City site.

This year's fair was also called the "Interim Peaceful City Fair", alluding to the fact that in the present Auroville organization a record number of the working groups are "interim":

At 12 am, crowds of people started flooding in to join in the "Super Peaceful City Interim Xmas lunch". At the "Unreserved Peaceful City Bank", 10 Whoopees (the Fair's currency) were distributed to each child. Then the excited children started running all over the place, huddling around the attractions and participating in the activities.

The tried and tested regular attractions were offered, but there were also innovations. For example, there was an "upside down merry go round", where the children held on to chains attached to a metallic structure and went round and round, and a bowling game. Without doubt, however, the most popular attraction was a construction of three metallic rings with a bar at the centre, onto which the adventurous and courageous was strapped. When all three rings started

rotating in different directions the victim was sent spinning wildly about. The number of children running around with feathers, Chinese holograms or other beautiful designs upon them were sure signs of the popularity of Hufreesh, who was applying temporary tattoos.

After some lively dance pieces performed by the children of Isaimbalam school, a jam session by some young Aurovilian musicians and the ever-popular cake contest, came the Akademik Genius Brothers Show, followed by a "Super Interim Xmas Dinner of sorts". Finally, the Peaceful City Interim Allstars Rock'n'Roll band performed into the night while the young children slept soundly, tired out and content from the days bubbling activity, fun and laughter.

Emmanuelle

The Path of Love

On January 15th and 16th the Visitors Center became the venue for the first group theatrical production in several months. "The Path of Love" was the creation of Deborah Lawlor, who many remember as the dancer in Auroville's first performance piece in 1969 in Forecomers Canyon. Deborah, who left Auroville in 1975, found the inspiration for her latest work in the bhakti poems of Mirabai, Kabir, Rumi and Jayadeva. Working with the bharatanatyam dancer, Viji Prakash, in addition to actors and modern dancers, Deborah first staged the piece at her company theater in Los Angeles last year.

"I was not entirely satisfied with that production," admits Deborah. "After visiting Auroville in 1999 for the first time since I had left, I knew that I wanted to stage the show here. Unlike in Los Angeles, people here understand the meaning and importance of bhakti."

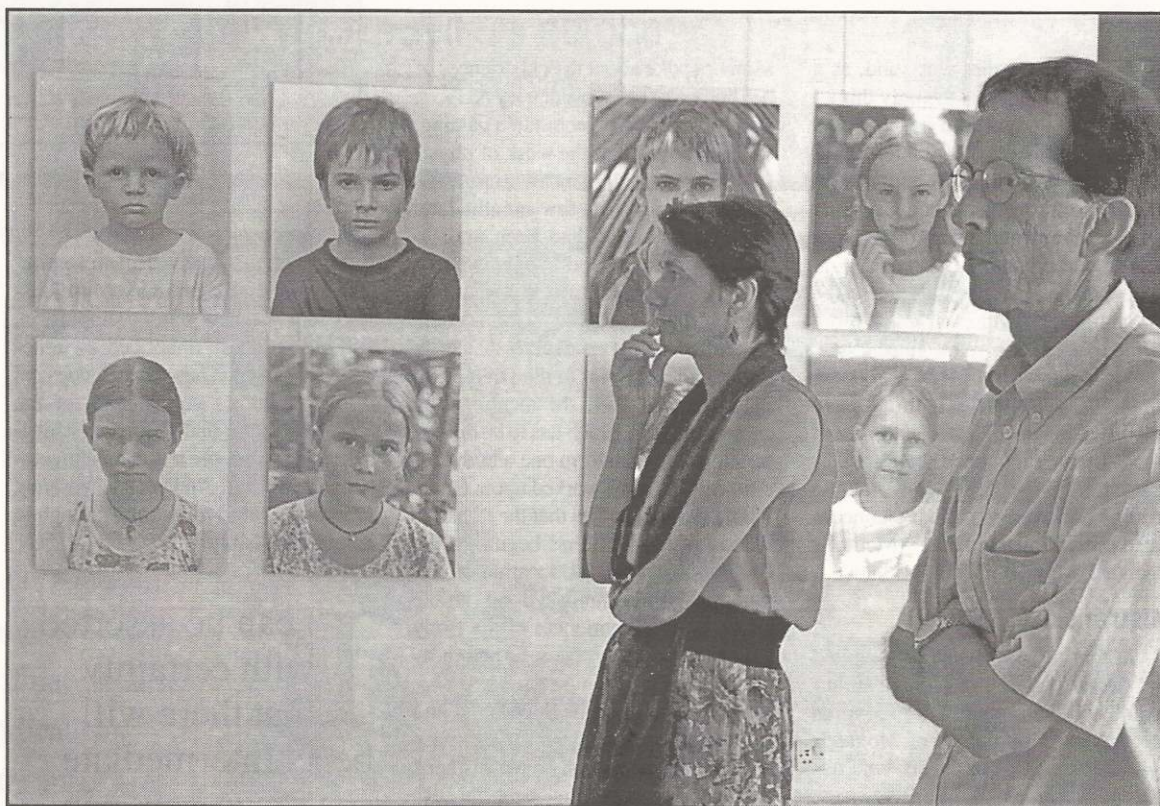
Deborah arrived in Auroville in December and set to work right away with Aurovilian actors and dancers, both adults and children. During the rehearsal process, she adapted the work to suit the local audience and the limitations on hand. One of the challenges to overcome was the need for a dancer to play Lord Krishna. The situation resolved itself when Srimoyi, who played the role of Savitri in a production last year, took the part with much aplomb.

The piece did not explore any of the complexities of the concept of bhakti, but rather aimed at striking a light tone that engaged the audience and kept them laughing. Through a weaving together of narration and humorous skits with both modern dance and elements of bharatanatyam, "The Path of Love" was a well-rehearsed example of the genre known as community-based theater. The musical accompaniment, provided by Devi Prasad on sarod, Brice on flute, and Rashmi on the tabla, was appropriate for the mood, as were the costumes designed by Uma.

Shanti

Aurovilians: a photographic exhibition

On December 25th an exhibition of photographic portraits of Aurovilians taken by Ireno opened in Savitri Bhavan. It was an exhibition with a difference...



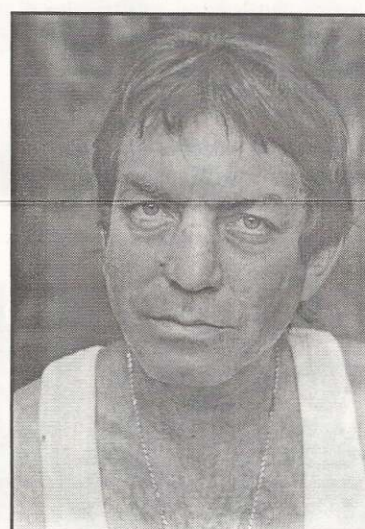
Face to face at the exhibition
Below two of Ireno's portraits: Aurosyille (left) and Bernard

On December 25th an exhibition of photographic portraits of Aurovilians taken by Ireno opened in Savitri Bhavan. It was an exhibition with a difference...

The announcement in the AV News was fairly innocuous. We were all invited to a new exhibition called "Photographic portraits" which "is maybe the first photo exhibition entirely dedicated to portray the Aurovilians." Nice, I thought, a kind of cosy Christmas celebration with upbeat or poetic images of Aurovilians at work and at play—the kind of things I associated with Ireno's previous work.

I couldn't have been more wrong. The thirty-two portraits in this exhibition include only two smiling faces. The rest of the larger than life-size faces stare out at you unwinkingly, challenging you to read them...and, in the process, read yourself.

It's an extraordinary experience because it's so unvarnished, direct. Ireno has eschewed any special effects and the sitters, with one or two exceptions, are not 'presenting' themselves. They are there, all there, in their tiredness, their courage, their dreams, their uncertainties. These are not the faces that I thought I knew — I kept being surprised by a quality or nuance I'd never noticed in that person — and I began to realize how superficially I'd been 'reading' these people before.



At one end of the room there are eight portraits of children. As expected here is something more inchoate, less fixed than the adult portraits, yet in these children's eyes there is an extraordinary directness and clarity. Across the room the adults stare back. There are suggestions here of disappointed dreams. Yet if the fire of the earlier years is dimmed, there's often a sense of something gained from the struggle: a quiet, undemonstrative certitude. These are eyes which have seen much, and still will not look away.

I left the exhibition feeling strengthened, strengthened by a contact with something which was real, irreducible, something which forced

me to look at myself afresh. In this sense it was a very Aurovilian experience. Ireno emerges from this exhibition as a very considerable photographer, not only on the technical level — for the majority of these portraits he took only one shot — but also through his ability to create a 'zone' in which his subjects can fall back to themselves. "I told them I wanted to get a little beneath the skin," he explained, "but for that to happen they had to open a window into themselves." In this sense, this exhibition is also a tribute to his sitters. For to really be before the unforgiving lens of the camera takes more than a little courage...

Alan

Exploring the future, reviving the past

If you walked upstairs to the exhibition room in the Visitors Centre in January and you walked into a world of fantasy, a cave of light, shapes and textures. Along two walls were light sculptures, illuminated crystals and futuristic clock designs by Rolf and Sathya (see article on opposite page), while in the centre of the room and along another wall are the creations of Shubha. Shubha works in coloured wax, which she chips like stone and melts with a blowtorch to create fluid variations on

the female form. Her other work employs acrylic and resin. The tree resin is first melted on to a plywood base and then mixed with acrylic and metallic chips and rings to create extraordinary semi-abstract designs which flash out light and colour, and play with texture and different dimensionality. I found the most interesting of these "explorations into worlds unknown" the one she calls 'Ecstasy'. In this a central female form radiates energy and bliss in a kind of subatomic explosion of light.

A short bicycle ride away in Pitanga Hall is another, but very different, exhibition. If the exhibition in the Visitors Centre is a celebration of new forms for a new millennium, "God has Many Faces" is a revival of an art form which had almost been lost — the art of Thanjavur painting. Under the supervision of a master in this style, Jocelyne and fellow students have created modern versions of Thanjavur art which combines painting with the application of gold leaf and semi-precious stones. There are

some very beautifully examples of this style in the exhibition. But, to this reviewer at least, there is something rather flat, almost 'posterish', about this technique which limits its impact upon the viewer. Interestingly, I found the most powerful work — a representation of Siva and Parvati — was one in which the finish was somehow refined, for this allowed something else to come through.

Alan

Short news

● Auroville exhibition in New Delhi

An Auroville exhibition was hosted at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi in January. The exhibition took for its theme the twelve attributes of the Mother: Sincerity, Aspiration, Goodness, Humility, Receptivity, Generosity, Gratitude, Progress, Equanimity, Perseverance, Courage, Peace. Personal mementos from Aurovilians that reflect one or the other of these attribute were presented as part of the exhibition.

● Once upon a time...

Paula Murphy, a long-time friend of Auroville from the USA, regaled the young and old with a delightful repertoire of stories. Paula had studied the art of story telling in Ireland and has a special interest in Celtic legends.

● Music Concerts

Rain washed away the first attempt of the "Vibration Society," a band of Aurovilians, to hold an open-air concert, but no problem, the next week they were back sharing time and space at the Visitors Centre with an Auroville group. The audience, a mixture of guests and Aurovilians, were delighted at the double treat and danced their way through the night. Such concerts are also used as a means to fund-raise for necessary equipment.

● Exploring "Nada" through chants

In India "nada" or the essence of sound is perceived to be one of the ways of growing in consciousness and uniting with the Divine. Shruti, a musician from New Delhi and a researcher into this branch of knowledge, offered a chanting session for Aurovilians in January at the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity.

● 2001 Light Mandala

Dark clouds did not deter Aurovilians from gathering at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture for a silent prayer and meditation on New Year's Eve. The Pavilion was lit up with over 2000 little clay lamps in the form of a Mandala. In the central courtyard, a Tibetan AUM made of small flames reminded all of the importance to keep our aspiration alive during the new year. A message from His Holiness The Dalai Lama to Auroville was broadcast towards the end of the evening.

● Sacred Dancing

The International Community of Dancers of Universal Peace offered an open dance session on a full moon night at Verite Hall in January. The dances, songs and chants are drawn from traditions all over the world and honour the diversity and unity of all human beings.

● Watercolours for land

Maggi from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram wants to sell some original signed Henry Miller watercolours and a number of letters to her from him. The proceeds of most of them will go to buying land for Auroville and other Auroville projects. For information please contact her at suramama@satyam.net.in

Overman: the Transitional Being

Recently, Georges Van Vrekhem spoke at Savitri Bhavan about the transitional being which will be the intermediary race between the human species and superman. Here is a summary of his talk.

Sri Aurobindo's concept that the mental being is a transitional species and will, in time, be surpassed by a being of a higher consciousness, is well-known. Those who have studied Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's writings know that they considered it their work to bring that higher consciousness down on earth, and thus to found on earth the Life Divine. This consciousness was termed by Sri Aurobindo "the Supramental Consciousness", or "the Supermind", and he named the future being the "Superman." This was a term he first used in the Arya, the philosophical magazine in which he published his major works in monthly instalments from 1914 onwards.

In December 1948, Sri Aurobindo dictated, at the explicit request of The Mother, a series of eight articles for the Bulletin of Physical Education, later published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. The series was probably left unfinished when Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5th December 1950. The articles are often seen as a sequel to Sri Aurobindo's philosophical magnum opus, *The Life Divine*.

These articles are of great importance. Already in *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo had indicated that the transformation of man to superman could take place through a transitional being, or through several kinds of transitional beings. In these later articles Sri Aurobindo indicates how could this transitional being, can come into existence. This new humanity would be "a race of mental beings on the earth and in the earthly body, but delivered from its present conditions in the reign of the cosmic Ignorance so far as to be possessed of a perfected mind, a mind of light" (CWSA 13, p. 578).

Mind of Light

The "mind of light" is a new term coined by Sri Aurobindo in these series of articles. Sri Aurobindo defined it as a subordinate action of Supermind, the lowest level of Supermind. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been supramentalised many years ago in the mental and vital parts of their earthly personality. From then onwards their whole effort consisted in bringing a supramental degree of consciousness down in matter by bringing the supramental consciousness into the cells of their bodies, as through them there is a direct influence upon matter.

Sri Aurobindo had, at the time of writing these articles, realised this mind of light in the cells of his body. Mother recalled in 1958 that, as soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body in December 1950, this mind of light was transferred from Sri Aurobindo's body cells directly into hers, and that he told her, "You will continue, you will go right to the end of the work." And Mother explained, "And actually, to do Sri Aurobindo's work is to realise the Supramental on

earth. So I began that work and, as a matter of fact, this was the only thing I asked of my body. I told it, 'Now you shall set right everything which is out of order and gradually realise this intermediate supermanhood between man and the supramental being' or, in other words, what I call the overman.' And this is what I have been doing for the last eight years, and even much more during the past two years, since 1956. Now it is the work of each day, each minute. That's where I am. I have renounced the uncontested authority of a god, I have renounced the unshakable calm of the sage ... in order to become the overman. I have concentrated everything upon that." (Mother's Agenda I, May 10, 1958)

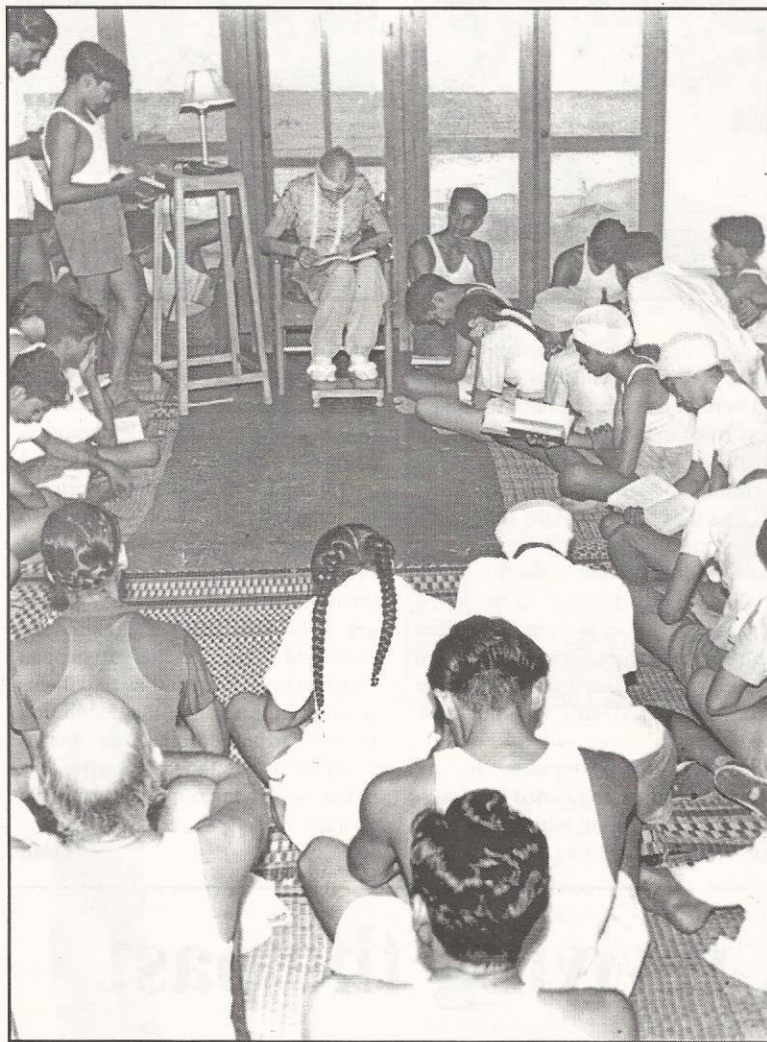
Mistranslation

In this respect it should be noted that Mother used the words 'surhumanité' and 'surhomme'. These words have, in the 13 volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, as well as in the six volumes of the *Questions and Answers* [the talks Mother gave at the Playground of the Ashram from December 21, 1950 till November 26, 1958] consistently been mistranslated as 'supermanhood' and 'superman'. This is a calamitous mistake because 'supermanhood' and 'superman' refer to the supramental being.

A careful reader of the *Questions and Answers* will notice how often

Mother spoke about the experiences of her body. As early as January 4, 1951, a month after Sri Aurobindo's passing, she mentioned that the work of physical transformation was the most difficult of all works. A few months later she said that what had been until to then a "psychological" yoga had now become a material yoga, a yoga of the cells of the body. Now the consciousness in the cells themselves began to aspire and surrender to the Divine. On February 24, 1954, she mentions the enormous work which has to be done if one hopes to transform one's body, for each cell has to be worked upon. On 21 April, 1954 she states that the transformation of the body has begun. In the Bulletin of Physical Education of that month Mother published an article called *Some Experiences of the Body Consciousness and New Experiences of the Body Consciousness*.

The descent of the Supermind into the earth-consciousness on February 29, 1956, must certainly have hastened the work in her body cells. On July 10, 1957, in another talk at the Ashram Playground, Mother explained how a new world had been born. "What has happened, what is really new, is that a new world is born, born, born. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world that is born. And we are now right in the middle of the period of transition in which the two are intermingling — in which the old world



Mother giving a class, 1954



Georges at Savitri Bhavan

still persists all — powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but the new one is slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed — unnoticed in so far that outwardly it does not disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing — until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly."

It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of overman...

Shortly afterwards, on September 25th 1957, she expressed a certainty. "It is quite obvious that intermediate beings are necessary, that it is these intermediate beings who must find the means of creating beings of the supermind, and, undoubtedly, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this ["From the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature." (CWSA 13, p. 585)] he was convinced that this is what we must do [to become the new race]. I think — I know — that it is now certain that we shall realise what Sri Aurobindo expects of us," she said to the children assembled at the Playground, and added, "Let each one do his best and it may be that not many years will have to go by before the first visible results become apparent to all. It is for you to know whether this interests you more than anything else in the world.... There comes a moment when the body itself finds that there is nothing in the world so much worth living for as this, the transformation; that there is nothing which can have as great an interest as this passionate interest for the transformation. It is as though all the cells of the body were thirsting for that Light that wants to manifest; they cry out for it; they find an intense joy in it and are sure of the Victory. This is the aspiration that I am trying to share with you, and you will understand that everything else in life is dull, insipid, futile, worthless in comparison with that: the transformation in the Light." (Questions and Answers 1957-58, p 190-191)

Defining the Overman

On April 16, 1958, the Mother announced as an existing fact what Sri Aurobindo had foreseen in *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. She affirms that "there is already a beginning of realisation. We have the proof that in certain conditions the ordinary state of humanity can be exceeded and a new state of consciousness worked out which enables at least a conscious relation between mental and supramental man. It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of overman who will still have the qualities and in part the nature of man, which means that he will still belong in his most external form to the human being [i.e. species] of animal origin, but that he will transform his consciousness sufficiently to belong, in his realisation and activity, to a new race, a race of overmen. This species may be considered a transitional species, for it is to be foreseen that it will discover the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method, and it is these beings — who will have a truly spiritual birth — who will constitute the elements of the new race, the supramental race. So we could call overmen those who, because of their origin, still belong to the old method of generation but who, because of their accomplishment, are in conscious and active contact with the new world of supramental realisation." (Questions and Answers 1957-58, p. 313 ff).

We may assume that The Mother fully realised the overman consciousness by about 1958. In 1959 she withdrew into her room, and from the conversations recorded in *Mother's Agenda* we may deduce that from that time onwards she worked to create the archetype of the supramental being. On January 1, 1969, the Mother announced that a new consciousness had manifested — "it spread out and went in search of people who could receive it" — which she defined a few days later as the consciousness of the overman. (*Notes On the Way*, CWM 11, p.153). What the Mother had realised in her own body in 1958 now, on 1 January 1969, became an integral part of humanity's evolution.

Edited by Carel

(Georges' views are expounded further in his latest book *"The Mother: The Story of Her Life"*, published by HarperCollins, India, in January 2001, and in his forthcoming book *"Overman"*.)

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