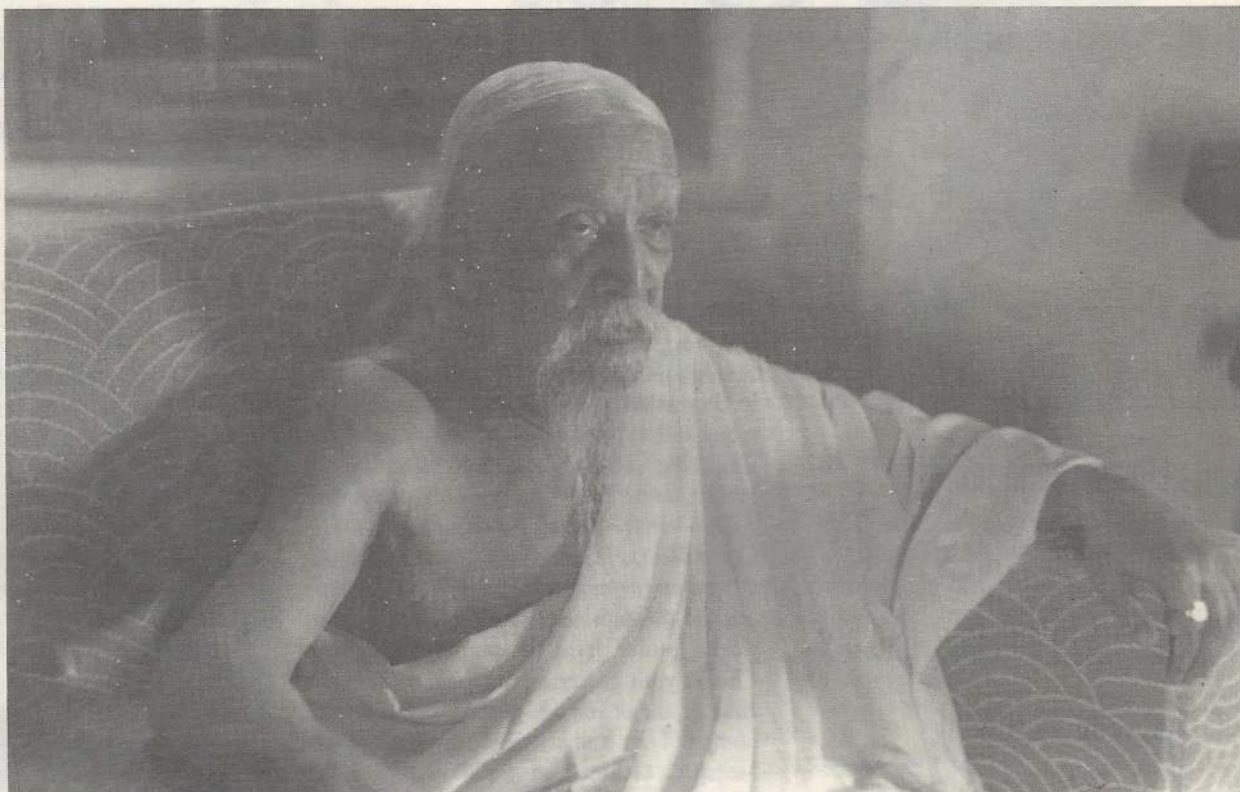


AUROVILLE TODAY

Number Ninety-one August 1996

SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE

broadcast on the occasion
of India's independence by
All India Radio is well-known.
Here, on the occasion of
Sri Aurobindo's birth
anniversary, we publish the
less familiar original version.



Sri Aurobindo: 15th August 1872 - 5th December 1950

August 15th is the birthday of free India.

It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural, and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence of fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my life-time, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,— though these too she must not neglect,— and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals

were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go,— it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive unders-

tanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measures of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The unification of mankind is underway, though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure. India, if she remains divided, will not herself be sure of

her safety. It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

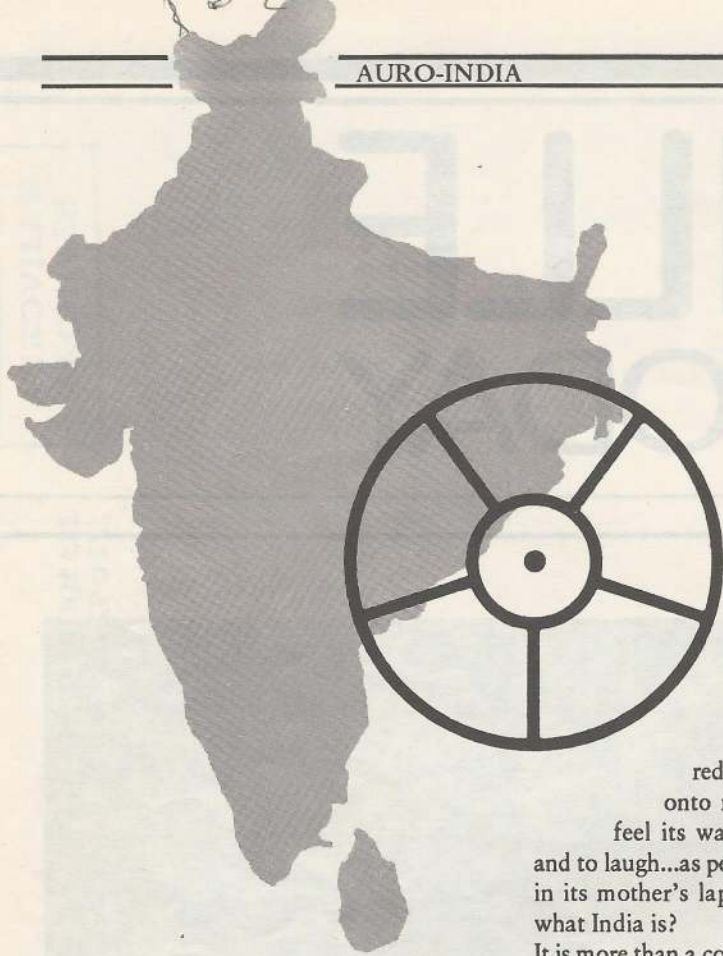
The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon this connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India.

The fifteenth of August, 1947.

Auroville

More than a country



What does India represent?
Why is Auroville in India?
What should Auroville's relationship to India be, and are we matching up to that at present? These are some of the questions we have been asking Aurovilians in the light of concern that Auroville's relationship to the country which is its physical and spiritual home is not as conscious, as dynamic, as it could be.

On these pages, Indian Aurovilians consider the issues; overleaf and on the back page are the views of some Western Aurovilians. None, of course, would claim to be definitive. But they do give some idea of the rich and varied responses, and of the depth of feeling, that this topic evokes.

Once when travelling through the hills of Maharashtra, I had this crazy urge to grab handfuls of its red upturned soil and smear it onto my body; to roll in it, to feel its warm, comforting embrace and to laugh...as perhaps a child would laugh in its mother's lap. How do I ever explain what India is?

It is more than a country. And definitely more than doomsday statistics— of its population, its decreasing forest area, its unending bureaucracy and corrupt officials, its women suffering from abuse and its children in bonded labour, its people lying in poverty or dying of AIDS — that often seek to define it. In the West, I feel like an automaton in a sterilized environment. Like a product being pushed through an assembly line. Get your ticket, punch it in the machine...get out. Choose your groceries, run them through the counter, thank you and get out. In India, I feel human. Time and efficiency are not the sole measures of life. You are allowed to make mistakes. For everybody is making mistakes and everything is going haywire. But everybody smiles and everybody is infinitely patient — what's the hurry all about anyway?

What amuses me most about India is that it seems to twist or thwart any movement that seeks to modernise it, that seeks to make it efficient by curbing its essentially human exuberance...like air-conditioned luxury cars having to jostle for space in narrow streets filled with cyclists, rickshaws, pedestrians and the odd bullock-cart; like "automatic" coffee and soft-drink dispensers that always have to be manned by somebody; like the boy I met in the streets of Bengal, playing with a condom puffed up like a balloon, unknowingly making a total mockery of the institutionalised family planning programmes. Sometimes, pushing through crowds in the narrow streets of Indian cities, I despair...in another half century India will be the most populous country of the world with over 1.5 billion people. Can these surging masses ever be awakened before we are all swamped by the dark forces of poverty and ignorance? But at times I feel all it would take is a single spark to set aflame the hearts of millions of Indians, the soul's desire for Divinity....never in my brief forays into the world, have I come across people who are so human, so resilient to changes, so joyously simple, so close to God...But will this awakening come in time? One can only hope and pray.

In the meantime, there is always space for one

more rickshaw on those narrow streets, one more beggar on the railway platforms, one more dirty and yet so delightfully blessed child in those dingy shacks...and India continues to move forward like a juggernaut, seemingly forgetful of itself but with sure and patient steps.

India, and by India I mean both the land and its people, is an experience that one does not easily, if ever, forget. It is a Force, a veritable Shakti that is distinct from any other and complete in itself.

And Auroville? Auroville is not India. Nor is it meant to be India. Its purpose is to bring together all the diverse notes of the world and to weave them into a single, harmonious song. And yet, I can't help thinking that the essential tone in this melody, the ground note that holds and gives meaning to all the other tones, has to be that of India. Not India's culture, her ancient traditions, or even her quiet, humane and graceful spirit, but the deep and still unsounded note of her spirituality. Now and then, one gets the feeling that Aurovilians are tuned into this deeper music, but by and large, the outer cacophony of Auroville's world drowns it out. It is to manifest this that Auroville and India need each other.

Bindu

AUROVILLE COULD PLUG A GAP

Anbu, along with her husband Morris, has worked for Village Action for many years.

"If we ask what Auroville has done for India, firstly we have to see that Auroville cannot be expected to fulfil all the aspirations and ambitions of this country. And, secondly, that Auroville is still a young community, a community that spent many years fighting for its survival: it's only in the past ten years or so that its energy has been directed outwards. Considering this, Auroville has achieved a lot. Many people in India have been inspired by its environmental work, and technologies pioneered in Auroville, like that of Compressed Earth Blocks, are now arousing much interest.

"At the same time, it's clear that Auroville can do much more for the local villages, particularly regarding social issues. You see, the villages in this area are quite different from many other villages in Tamil Nadu because here they are more dominated by a materialistic culture. The former agricultural-based society, in which people were interdependent, helping each other, has been replaced by one in which there is more money, but also more selfishness and less community responsibility. In addition, there remain big problems in the local villages concerning dowry,

alcoholism and the ill-treatment of women.

"The Indian education system only prepares people for employment, it doesn't teach them the social awareness which could prevent such problems. But Auroville could plug this gap. How? In Auroville there are people from many different cultures and backgrounds who have a daily contact with many local villagers through work. If, for example, some of the non-Indian Aurovilians could explain to the villagers who work for them that, "in our country we fought against corruption, or treat women, in this way..." it could open up new possibilities to the villagers. For the villagers don't believe anything can be done about corruption and such things — even though they see different role models in Auroville they believe these are for Western people, not for them.

But it must be a real dialogue: there must be no teaching or preaching, no attempt to impose anything upon them. They must merely be given the opportunity to make a choice. But if changes do take place, it could make these villages a very powerful model for other villages with similar problems.

"I think dialogue between the Aurovilians and the villagers is also important in other ways. There is a big communication gap at present, and many villagers make assumptions which are not necessarily true: for example, that all foreigners are rich, and foreign countries are heaven! I know that many non-Indian Aurovilians experience many difficulties — both inner and outer in living here, and if they could share some



Anbu

of these difficulties with the local villagers, the villagers would understand them better, and be more willing to support them when there are problems. For without their support, you are in a vulnerable situation. "If all of Auroville (because Village Action cannot do this alone) put the same coordinated effort into solving these social issues as it has put into afforestation, it could transform the local situation — and, through this, Auroville's image in India."

From an interview by Alan

and India

"We haven't come to grips with the reality of where we are"

Angad manages Mantra, one of the largest Auroville potteries.

"A lot of Aurovilians say that they are here because of Mother, not because of India, and they seem to feel that Auroville should be isolated from India. In the early years, it may have made sense to have 'walled off' Auroville a little to protect it, but now it's too late, the walls are being taken away; there's no longer any boundary between India and Auroville. I also find that India is often looked at in a negative way by some non-Indian Aurovilians. They complain that, in comparison with the West, things don't work, quality is inferior, buses don't run on time etc. This drives me crazy! If people who have been here twenty years are still repeating this, it means that they have decided to remain obsessed with the material level of things here rather than getting beyond it into something else. It also means that Aurovilians don't seem to appreciate that there's a lot to learn from India; from the abundance, for example, of affection, joy and simplicity that is around us.

"I was delighted to read recently Mother's statement about the real reason she had to create Auroville:

'India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the...cure. And it is for that — it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville.'

"But what is Auroville doing to further this? How does Auroville relate to India? I was struck by what members of the International Advisory Council told me recently. They said they did not see anything in Auroville that made them feel Auroville is in India; that Aurovilians haven't come to grips with the reality of where they are. And you can see this failure to deal with the reality, the real problems of India, in many areas. We've grown many trees, for example, but not in a way that can be readily replicated in the rest of India because we are rich in resources, we can fence off big areas of land, and not worry about providing pasture for cows and goats. "What are the big problems that India is facing today? One is the massive migration from the countryside to the cities. We in Auroville could do something to reverse this. For example — and here I simplify — we could set up a system whereby village farmers could grow organic produce and sell it to us at premium prices — after all, we're crying out for more organic food — so that they don't need to sell their land and go to the cities for work. Or we could really help develop the villages in the Auroville area. We've done something in Kulapalayam, but otherwise very little. Some Aurovilians are even talking about relocating the 8,000 or so villagers who live at present on land designated for the City Area and the Greenbelt. This would be very, very expensive. Wouldn't it make much



Angad

more sense to improve their present environment and make it a model for the one million other villages in India?

"You could look at this as self-interest, as political insurance, because any government would be happy to have us here if we could deliver aspects of government that the government — for one reason or another — is unable to deliver. Like better schools, health care, sanitation, drinking water, decent bus services for the villagers. In this sense, we ARE doing some of the right things — the Health Centre and Village Action are shining examples of what can be done, as is the lack of casteism in the community which provides a powerful model for the village; but we need, as a community, to be more co-ordinated, more focused upon this work. We need to consciously acknowledge that the local people have a role to play in Auroville beyond just providing labour.

"As to the image of Auroville in the rest of India: it's generally negative. For many upper-class Indians, Auroville is seen as a place where Westerners with little motivation and resources can have a good time while doing very little. I have friends who felt like this. When they actually visited, this changed: they appreciated the environment, the quality of the handicrafts. But still, it's not enough. "Auroville seems to lack a cohesive and positive direction at present. Looking for concrete ways in which Auroville can find meaningful solutions for some of India's problems may not only be invaluable for India: it may also be the catalyst for bringing more cohesiveness into our own lives."

From an interview by Alan

"ONLY INDIA HAS THE SPIRITUAL CAPACITY TO SUSTAIN SUCH AN EXPERIMENT"

Arjun and Deepti are long-term Aurovilians. Arjun is a member of the Matrimandir co-ordination group, and Deepti works at Last School.

DEEPTI: Generally, Auroville's image is bad in India. There are those Indians who feel the deeper aspect of what's going on, but many others have a strong reaction against the community because it is perceived as being a society where people's way of being is totally without refinement. And for some Indians, refinement as a reflection of inner development is important. If anything, in Auroville we've dismissed refinement as a mannerism and made a fetish out of being our selves, our lower selves.

ARJUN: I think one of the problems is that, during the fight with the Sri Aurobindo Society, we came to believe that if we didn't shout at the top of our voices and thump the table, we were not going to get our way with the Indian Government. It is true that the Indian temperament sometimes buckles under a forceful approach. But if we made short-term gains, in the long term it was disastrous because we created so much resentment against us.

DEEPTI: The result of all this adolescent behaviour is clear: we've lost, turned away, all our friends or those who could have helped us. In the Central Government, for example, there was a time when we had lots of friends... today hardly anybody wants to talk to us. In fact, our poor relations with the Government of India are an illustration of our larger incapacity to deal with India. Regarding how we might relate to the government, I'm reminded of a passage where Mother describes how she prepares to meet an official; how she prepared the room in advance, creating a concentrated atmosphere, to ensure that the meeting took place in the best possible circumstances. She knew it was useful that she had 'instruments' in the government supporting what she was doing. We in Auroville don't put any consciousness into such meetings. Yet if, as one of our friends in Delhi put it, our interaction with the government may be an occult necessity for the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to be furthered, we should try to create the best physical and psychological space for these interactions, an atmosphere which clearly expresses that this is a community which is based within.

ARJUN: The attitude in which you approach things is crucial. If you act from the heart, there is no power in this country which can deny you your visa or make you leave — because India, Mother India, has been home to all the persecuted of the world, and she takes everybody into her embrace. In India, if your pursuit is Consciousness, if you are really working at it and there is some palpable

evidence of what you have achieved, you will be recognised, you will be accorded a level of acceptance not granted to others precisely because you are pursuing a higher truth.

DEEPTI: And this is why Auroville could only be in India, because only India has the spiritual capacity to hold such an experiment. Yet I'm not sure this is well understood in Auroville: in fact, there is prejudice against India and Indians. It's not necessarily conscious: rather, I'd call it a lack of consciousness, a failure to deal with certain atavistic presuppositions which some people carry with them. More introspection is needed, because until those presuppositions have been examined in the light of day, they haven't been dealt with and remain a subconscious factor influencing life in Auroville. My deepest belief is that India is everybody's 'soul country'; we cannot find ourselves and not at the same time find her. And I'm speaking of India as a living goddess — Mother Durga as Sri Aurobindo called her — and not in a nationalistic sense.



Arjun and Deepti

ARJUN: I think that all of us, including the Indians, need to get to know better, to imbibe Mother India. How many of us have read of the Vedas, the Upanishads, how many of us have made, like Sri Aurobindo, that voyage? If we could discover that thread, get to something of the essence of India, and then bring that to our process in Auroville, I think a lot of things would change. Moreover, it is only when each one of us gets an understanding of that India that Auroville will be able to really contribute something to India and to the world.

From an interview with Alan

Auroville and India

Dancing around each other



It is a curious thing being a visitor in India — because I don't look Indian, I cannot simply disappear into the crowd. I am not only watching, but I am being watched. Sometimes, like in Auroville or even Pondicherry, I can forget that I am different. But leaving this area and going to Kerala, as I did in April, reminds me once again that I am still an object of curiosity, an unknown quantity, and my habits, my movements, my way of being are all subject to gaping and giggles. I went to Kerala to offer a six-day workshop to members of a class studying both Western and Indian acting performance techniques. The director of the group is an energetic young man named Vekkan and we arranged for me to stay with his family for the duration of the workshop.

Staying with Vekkan and his family was an interesting meeting of two different cultures. As a guest, I was treated with every kind of consideration and respect. Vekkan's wife, Rani, was truly the queen of her domain, cooking for two boys, ages 3 and 6, her husband and now for me as well. The food was marvellous, and I had to beg her not to keep putting more under my nose. Actually, my relationship with Rani proved to be one of the most interesting experiences of my stay there. Rani is a very proper Christian lady. She is 29 years old. Her life is her family, caring for her children, one dog and one cat and the many visitors that come to Vekkan. The family lives in a small, one-bedroom house, with a separate toilet and shower outside. Behind the house is the kalari — a hall about 5m x 4 m. with a traditional keel roof and walls of various coloured cloths. The floor is cement. This family compound is Rani's world. When she leaves it to go shopping or take a trip to see her parents in the hills, she dresses demurely, keeps her eyes down and her voice low. She has great dignity and presence. She knows the rules of her life and tries to follow them. Of course, being married to an artist, there is a constant inner struggle to maintain herself amidst a lot of spontaneous behaviour and loud noise. And then I invaded her home, like a visitor from another planet, wearing Western clothes, laughing loudly, carrying myself without the usual restraints imposed on women in her society. We kind of danced around each other at first, being respectful and yet fascinated by the other. We were two women living in close quarters who had never met and were learning the rules of conduct in this rather special situation. Luckily, we both have a sense of humour, or we would have been lost. With little English on her side and no Malayalam on mine, we communicated mainly with looks and gestures.

As my hostess, she expected to take care of me, to feed me, to walk with me in the village, to be my guide and protector. While I worked with the actors, she kept inside, just venturing to the doorway of the kalari. She brought us tea, but never entered the work space. The

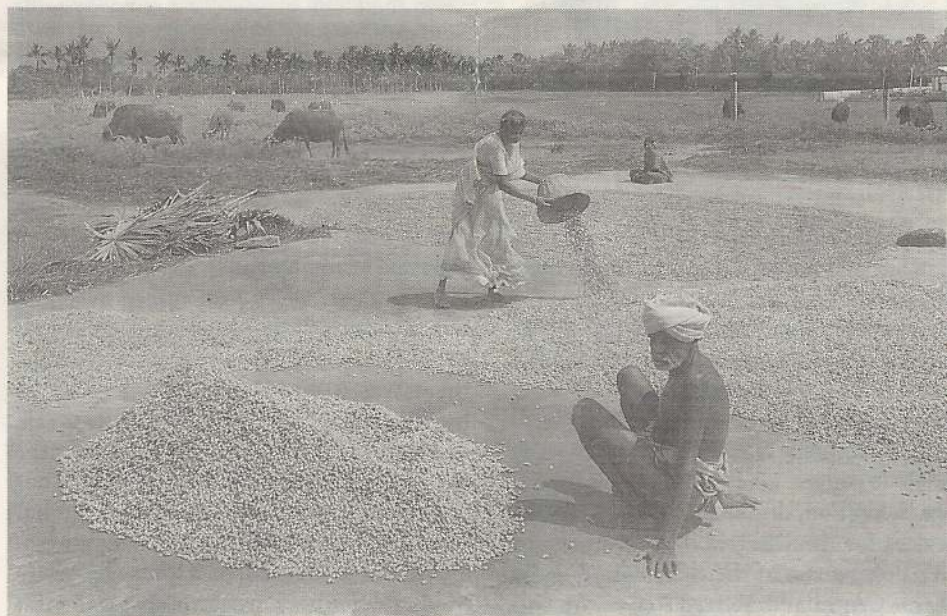
world of theatre was her husband's world. She was in the house, taking care of the children, cooking, cleaning, shopping. She did come, looking very beautiful in a rich blue sari, to the opening ceremony of the workshop. She put the wreath of flowers around my neck. When we walked in the street, she would take my hand, and caution me against being too loud. Her watchfulness was very instructive, but at the end I felt stifled. Protected, but restrained. I couldn't wear my usual clothes in the street. I couldn't talk or move freely. I tried to take it as a lesson in being an Indian woman — I was learning in my body how it felt, but I was also bridling, too uninhibited to withdraw easily into myself, to become small. To be always on guard. It was suffocating.

Then Vekkan and his family came to visit me in Auroville. While touring Tamil Nadu, the family arrived and stayed in my flat for four days. Now it was my turn to play hostess — to a family of four. Luckily, I have a two bedroom flat, and we managed to find another mosquito net. I have no fans, and this was one of many adjustments. I also don't cook a lot. I'm a working woman, not a housewife, I explained to Rani. They saw me as I am, and they had to adjust to my lifestyle. This was difficult for Rani, as her experience was limited. She kept the children

bought enough rice for their stay. Rani quickly cooked up rice every evening. They met me at work, and at lunch we would eat at the Information Centre.

I could feel her cultural boundaries, and I tried to respect them, at the same time giving her opportunities to break free and try something new. With food it was virtually impossible, so connected was she to her usual fare. On Sunday, before leaving, we all went to Repos beach, where Aurovilians and guests go to swim and relax. This was another shock to Rani. She had never seen a beach with half naked people on it before! I could see her eyes open wide, but she maintained her dignity and walked through the lolling crowd of sunbathers down to the water's edge. The children ran happily through the surf. The older boy came face to face with a nude little girl, about 10 years old, running towards him from the water. At first he smiled, thinking it was a boy. Then when she got closer, he suddenly realised it was not a boy at all — his face was a mixture of shock and curiosity, and I had to turn away to keep from laughing. I wonder what Rani took away with her, what thoughts, what emotions, on her return to Kerala. Maybe next time, I'll ask her. We will see each other again I am sure. And we will both keep learning about the other.

Jill



under control, always had them looking neat and clean, and worried about what they were eating. Food is a big part of any culture, and you realise it most when you are visiting another world. The noodles that I served up were completely foreign — where was the rice three times a day? I had to explain that I eat only a small meal in the evening, mainly fruit and cheese with bread. Luckily, I had

And my body so white

Since 16 years I, a white woman from Holland, have been in Auroville. Auroville lies in India, in Tamil Nadu to be precise, but does that mean that I live in India, that I am part of the life in India? How much do I know about this country, about the state in which I am living? After all these years, I still can't manage to speak the local language properly and trying to read signs in Tamil is impossible.

Most Western Aurovilians continue to live according to the culture they grew up in, but I feel comfortable here. Comfortable in the protected environment provided by our community. There is enough space to move about, more than most inhabitants of our planet will ever have. I have a garden around my house. There is fresh water, shade, green forests... an ideal setting for a comfortable life.

But as soon as I venture beyond the boundaries of our community, I am confronted with India — the noise, the dirt, the different expressions of the various religions, the many people, all the sacred or simply numerous animals, the foreign sounds. And how do I, the foreigner with the light skin and blonde hair, relate to this world? I am different — that is an inevitable fact. After all these years I still get easily disturbed and annoyed by the extremely loud film music blaring from the loudspeakers mounted on the village temple nearby at five in the morning. The garbage strewn all over streets, fields, backyards and over the wall behind restaurants drives me mad.

But...I don't want to go back to where I came from. I try it again and again every two years for a few weeks. After a few days of potatoes and vegetables with gravy, I crave for rice and dal, mango pickle and appalam. I miss the warm smiles in dark faces. I miss the smell of the spices and flowers in the bazaar.

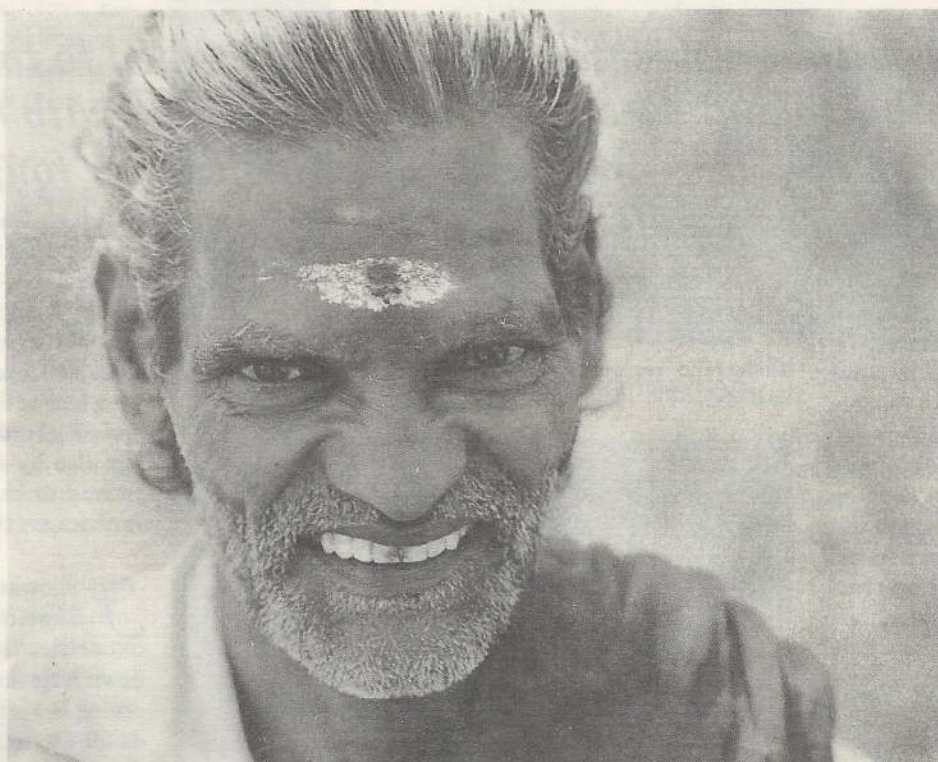
Recently I travelled south. It was the first time in 16 years that I had slept on a train or sat in a crowded village bus. And to my surprise it felt very natural, as though I always travel by public transport. Squeezed between polyester saris, baskets loaded with vegetables and fish, crying or sleeping kids, I felt utterly content. So why did the children scream when they saw my white skin? All of a sudden I became the foreigner again.

Tineke



Images of Village life

Tineke was born in The Netherlands and came to Auroville in 1980. She manages Centre Guest House with her partner, Silvano. In March of this year she accompanied a group of 6 German guests on a tour to a nearby Tamil village. Below are her impressions of this visit.



Vijayrangam, the village priest

Caste Divisions

Today, Sundaram will lead us through the village. Walking through the organic vegetable gardens of Kottakarai community, which also serve as demonstration plots for villagers, we reach the main road. This tar road divides Kottakarai village into two sections: one side, the "colony", belongs to the "scheduled caste" (or Harijans, or outcastes, depending which name you prefer); on the other side members of various castes, but mainly Vaniyars (the farmer caste) live. We cross the road and start our visit in a small house which doubles as a crochet workshop. "This woman who is from the colony," says Sundaram, "was trained by Ivar (an Aurovilian who worked with Village Action Group and managed a crochet workshop several years ago). One boy from the other side of Kottakarai fell in love with her and she got pregnant. He wanted to run away, but somehow a small group of concerned people convinced him of his responsibilities as a father and persuaded him to marry her. Now they live here with their kids on this piece of land which belongs to neither side of the village. Officially his children belong to the farmer's caste, but we will have to see whether they will be accepted by the village, because of the caste of their mother." The woman smiles all the time while Sundaram tells us her life story. She then shows her crochet lamp shades and her kids, her mother, and her cats, dogs and chickens, all of whom are roaming around the house. She seems to be happy with her situation.

We proceed to the rice mill. The rice mill is one of the most important buildings in any village. Instead of manually grinding rice on a special granite stone as has been done for centuries, the women now bring their rice and pulses to the mill to be ground mechanically. Next to the mill some abandoned grinding stones stand, symbols of a bygone era. The owner proudly gives us a tour of the rice mill. It belonged to his

father, who purchased an English cast-iron diesel engine made in 1947. "It hardly needs servicing," he explains. "Once in a while I oil it, and if something breaks down, I can repair it myself. Those modern Japanese machines last only ten years. No good!" When the mill runs, he uses the engine also to irrigate his vegetable plot behind the building. The only manual labour seen around this building is done by his mother. She is sitting on the ground, carefully sorting out black rice from the white grains and taking out small stones.

Our next stop is a visit to that part of the village where the Harijans or outcastes live. A clearer division than the tar road which separates them from the rest of the village is hardly imaginable. We stop at the house of one of the people working at the Centre Guest House. His mother, wife and children are home. It is Saturday morning and there is no school. The women are all nicely dressed, their faces powdered and flowers in their hair. Sundaram explains that none of these women, except the grandmother, know how to separate white and black rice, like the mother of the rice mill owner was doing. According to him this is a skill which is almost dying out.

The past... and the future?

Across the alley, two men are repairing a roof. The oldest one perched on top of the beams, looks so old and decrepit that he could fall down any minute. Together with his grandson he is tying palmyra leaves onto a structure of palmyra (the local palm tree) and bamboo beams. How long will this trade continue to exist?

We take a walk through the colony along a street which is lined with "pucca" (permanent) houses, financed by a Government scheme for housing for the poor: the walls are made out of bricks instead of rammed earth and the roofs from prefabricated ferrocement channels. "These are well built because the construction was supervised by Aurovilians," says Sundaram. "Usually a large amount of the money disappears into the pockets of supervisors and middlemen. By the time the houses are ready, they are

about to collapse!"

Around the corner we hear film music emanating from a house. We peek inside and find a small group of women sitting on the ground with knitting needles held tightly under their arms while they all stare at a movie on television. "They are knitting sweaters for an Auroville unit," explains Sundaram. "They get paid per piece and I hope their work is good because they watch television at the same time. For them the entertainment is almost more important than the payment."

The noon meal scheme

We walk across the dividing road and enter the other part of the village. We pass small shops selling spices, rice, dal, vegetables, sugar, biscuits, oil. We meet the tailor who proudly shows us all the sari blouses he makes. Like colourful flags they line the wall of his little shop. After taking several photos of the smiling tailor, his mother, and his two helpers, we walk to the village square which has a peepal tree (one of India's holy trees) in the centre with a sitting area all around it. It is surrounded by the school, the Health Centre which is supported by Auroville, several houses and huts, and a temple on the corner. The school is a solid one-room building, built in the traditional unimaginative style of South Indian schools — rectangular, with high barred windows. There are no desks or chairs for the students, only one for the teacher. There is a blackboard along one wall and a few posters on the other walls. Along one wall there are big jute bags standing, full of rice and peanuts. The room also gets used as a store-room! The headmaster and only teacher for ninety-five students is a friend of Sundaram's. Although it is a Saturday morning and there is no school, he is in the classroom, eating his lunch. He is happy to see Sundaram who tells us that when he was a kid, he once beat this teacher and then ran away from school! But now they have become good friends.

Outside on a simple wood stove a few women are cooking the "noon meal" for the school kids, though there is no school

today. This free lunch system was introduced by one of the previous Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu. Every child of school-going age gets a free lunch, consisting of rice and lentils. If you travel in Tamil Nadu around noon-time, you'll see many youngsters with stainless steel plates in their hands standing in line, waiting to have their lunch served. Sundaram points out a skinny looking woman with her even skinnier toddler who are waiting next to the cooking pots. "She got pregnant by a man who promised to marry her, but as soon as he found out, he left her. Nobody wants to marry her now. Her family is too poor to maintain her and the baby; so they sent her away. She cannot find a job and she has to find food from the leftovers of the school lunch. But some people in the village help her out with clothes and sometimes some food."

The village priest

Next to the peepal tree we see several men sitting and talking. Here, we find the man with his cart and big brass charcoal iron, who goes from village to village to iron the clothes of villagers. Indians like to dress well, and although some clothes are not new, ironed they should be! Next to him sits the village priest. Sundaram calls him and we all walk to his house, opposite the tree.

Vijayrangam is the priest of the village temple and also the small Kali temple beneath the big Banyan tree between Kottakarai and Centre Field. He is not a Brahmin (priests are almost exclusively Brahmins, the highest caste), but he is the only one in the village who can perform all the rituals belonging to the Hindu religion. Besides that he also rents out marriage-decorations. We all sit down, huddled together on his front porch which is made from rammed earth and polished with cow dung. He disappears into his house and comes back with some large, carefully wrapped cloth bundles. Almost with reverence he opens them to show us the decorations: square, triangular or moon shaped pieces of cardboard which are covered with red, blue or green velvet on which patterns of silver coloured beads are sewn. "The beads come all the way from Bombay," he tells us, "and me, my wife and my children all make them together." He has about a thousand pieces. They are beautiful, not only physically but also because of the care and love with which they are made. With the money he earns from their rental, he plans to make another thousand pieces which will then be enough to sustain his family.

After explaining all this he closes his eyes. We stare at his smooth, thin, ageless face, wondering what is happening. He takes a deep breath and starts singing for us. His clear voice tells us about the Banyan tree near the Matrimandir. Then follows a song for all the mothers of the world. We are happy. But then comes a song for the fathers as a counter balance. He opens his eyes, looks at us, smiles, and it is all over. With difficulty we get up to leave, pulling away from the special atmosphere this outwardly simple man has created in a few minutes.

I am tired after the long walk, but grateful and enriched for having witnessed the richness of life in a very "simple, ordinary" village in Tamil Nadu.

Tineke

Leap Year's Return

Savitra, one of the earliest residents of Auroville, relocated to the States in 1990. He presently lives in Ashland, Oregon. This year — along with his wife and son, Soleil and Sundaure — he revisited Auroville after four years. Auroville Today asked him for his impressions of this experience.

I reluctantly got into the taxi feeling the undertow of my past like a great tide rushing back to reclaim me. The driver slammed the door and the vehicle began to move. I accepted the inevitable, not out of courage but numbly. My three-year-old son, Sundaure, was waving animatedly out of the back window. I turned to see his young comrades Aditi and Samarpan gleefully chasing the taxi shouting "Sunny" — the name everyone called our son — until they reached the gates of Samasti where they fell back with Aurelia and Daniel, unable, I reasoned, to follow us all the way back to America. But we would bring them with us anyway, these kids who seemed to spontaneously appoint themselves the farewell representatives for all the other Auroville children who had befriended Sunny. Yes, we would stow them away in our hearts, smuggle them past customs in our dreams along with their parents and all we met in Auroville's extended family tree. As the taxi turned onto the trunk road heading toward Tindivanam and the Madras Airport, I began to retreat from the departure, buffering myself in recollections of the last time we left. That too was just after the leap year's day, in March of '92. Only then, I was alone in the taxi with Soleil, carrying an embryonic Sundaure back with us.

...a youth that never ages...

The phrase hung there as I looked back at Auroville from the States through an empty computer screen. Maybe that was the theme of this last journey and of this article. A place for a youth that never ages. I had in fact felt younger in those brief six weeks in AV. Not just in some psychological sense but — pardon the cliché — in my body. As if it remembered something it had not felt for four years, breathed a lightness that actually, as I recalled it by contrast from here, might have been a background of... of... The only word that comes to mind is joy. A very humble and anonymous joy, mind you, so natural as to be unnoticed at the time. In fact, I only recognised it by its absence here. In any case, whatever it was, no amount of tea or walks in the park or brisk spring air here seemed to recreate the sensation. I found myself humming a refrain from The Dream Boat, a poem of Sri Aurobindo's set to music and sung by the Children's Choir on February 29th. "Is the heart's fire ready?"

Yes, this had definitely been a visit in the key of C. C standing for Child, I thought, as their voices and the image of that "boat made of dream-fire" drifted hauntingly through my mind.

In fact, I had only attended part of one collective meeting and two working group meetings in six weeks, virtually surrendering the adult AV — the verbal and cerebral-vital AV that part of me used to find so satisfying — for the more purely physical AV plotted by my son: a conspiracy of playgrounds and beaches, pony farms and motorcycle rides in the greenbelt.

Re-entering the world of AV this time, though radically changed in certain outer stages of development — far busier and more 'town'-like, with more people, projects, constructions, telephones, traffic and monetary exchange — still felt like slipping back into a skin, a field, a time that finally fit. After the initial shock and friction of re-entry, a core part of me simply remembered it had never left. AV, I understood, reconciling and releasing a great tension built up over the years as an 'expatriate', was not something you simply leave, something you can ever really readjust from. Certainly not after twenty-one years there. It is a part of you that you inescapably carry with you wherever you are, like it or not. For it is not only a place but a way of seeing and becoming. Which explains my permanent alien status in this other Culture out here that at every turn tries to reclaim and reconvert me, failing to understand that I belong to Nobody in Particular. That She has put Her indelible red mark on sole and soul. This core personal recognition and reaffirmation then —

which I could only know by physically returning — became the essential reference point for me of this journey, underlying all the other perceptions and experiences this writing attempts to distil...



Daniel (left) and Sunny at the Certitude Playground

Beginning with the children, since that was my primary window on things.

In the early years, we used to portray AV as a wonderland for kids. A place where education and adventure were inseparably linked. Where school and community were synonymous. And to a certain extent that was true. Certainly as a shared ideal. But at the same time, in reality, it easily became a line we fed ourselves. A phrase for the brochures and that growing lexicon of AV rhetoric we fell back upon in hard times to cover over the shadows.

For, in fact, AV was often a very difficult place for its first generation of children. A place where freedom not only meant exploring the canyons or foraging for nungoos (palmyra fruit) but lack of structure and direction, sometimes verging on chaos. It was one thing for the adults to willingly undergo this Experiment, this Applied Evolutionary Research. It was another to subject the children as guinea pigs to it. For what we called the Privilege of Being Here or The Birth of a New World was often the ignorance and arrogance of the old one we still carried with us imposing its whims and pretensions of 'new' education and 'freedom' on the kids.

As I remember it from both sides of the classroom then, not only was it an era of great Adventure but of Great Instability as well. Of families in flux and a struggling community that — with notable exceptions — hardly had time, patience or resources for positively engaging the kids.

But if children are a barometer to gauge the inner state of a society, transparently (and unnervingly) revealing the weaknesses we would rather hide, they also light up its strengths and progress. And they certainly did so for me on this return. Clearly confirmed by my son who, despite his initiation of tummy aches, simply didn't want to leave.

I saw this time both the grounding and sweetness of the kids. Not that they had lost their child-wildness or will, their eye for mischief or caprice — like slipping a few firecrackers in the 28th February bonfire — but it was channelled now. Disciplined even. Not by repression but by embrace. In a much more palpable and — despite the daily friction and insecurities — secure field of what I could only call love.

I was particularly struck by the intermingling of age groups — the openness and generosity of the older youth to engage and 'adopt' the toddlers and younger ones, showing no hesitation to assume free-form brother-sister roles and responsi-

bilities. Sunny made as many friends among the six to twelve-year olds as among his peers. And these were genuine affections and relations, motivated by the children themselves who had somehow finally outgrown the old ego-divisions and social orders that segregated not only by race and gender but also by age. Something I had not seen before in any society of children. Not in the previous AVs. Never in America.

Following the thread of kids, I find myself bridging to Samasti, the community we stayed in for the latter half of our visit. I remember that day we arrived there, walking down AV's first pedestrian version of 'Main Street' in the golden late afternoon light with the cries of peacocks perched on the rooftops and the laughter and squeals of kids — including my own — as they ran and cycled down the road and around the plaza in front of Ila's house. I remember the magic then, the warm smile of recognition and ease that filled my being at the sense of being 'home'. Home — pardon the apparent sentimentality — in a way that I recalled from my deepest childhood memories and longings.

"Is the heart's fire ready?", The Dream Boat's refrain returned, filling the image with the soprano of young voices and their distinct AV accent. For it was also that same day there that I first heard the children's choir practising.

Samasti represented something truly unique, distinct from all my former 'residential' experience of AV: the first time I felt like I was actually living in a 'neighbourhood' — in a community that, in seed at least, integrated and juxtaposed the various elements of life in proximity to one another.

Here, one found not just a collection of houses — which somehow satisfied our prior definition of community development — but an emerging architectural, social and environmental whole. A pattern of closely-linked housing with 'shared' backyards, trees and gardens; a small plaza and commons; a badminton/volleyball court; a guest house; a recycling area; a waste-water treatment pond; and Pitanga Cultural centre.

These Samasti reflections contrasted sharply with the AV of scattered houses and settlements separated by vast distances, for so much of the AV I grew up in had developed 'space' and 'insularity' as primary concerns and criteria. The only attempts at residential 'density' were Aspiration, Auromodele and Certitude (and the workers camp at Matrimandir).

Samasti, on the other hand, rather than repeating that impulse to 'get away from' was willing to attempt the other direction: to live in closer context, in walls less impervious to the life around. And the composition of the residents rather than forming a clique around a predominant nationality was relatively multi-cultural.

Ironically, Samasti became de facto the living model that Auromodele was 'planned' for, leaping defiantly from the fringes of The Town Planner's Map smack into the sacrosanct territory of the Residential Zone. Finally breaking open that twilight Zone where no one dared to live for fear of blocking or deforming The Future waiting to descend there.

I found myself constantly getting lost on greenbelt roads. I thought I knew by heart, on footpaths I had walked for years. Mostly because I could no longer see familiar reference points, because everything was shrouded in trees. But aside from the disorientation and the occasional horizon-craving, it was such a relief to be able to ride at high noon in the shade.

It is impossible for me to know what AV would be today if it had only been left up to its First Planners. If they had got their way, their buildings, and kept the pesky and persistent greenbelts from cluttering up the place with so many damn trees. I see an uninhabitable oven, a landscape only fit for photos. With no topsoil, no wildlife, no birds or birdsong, no sound of wind rustling through leaves, carrying their fragrance: a

silent dust-filled landscape where only models could survive. Thank god that plans — to paraphrase Her words — are in the hands of larger forces. That is why, She reminded us, one can laugh.

And one must retain that smile — that sense of not taking oneself too seriously — if one is to stay healthy and balanced in this place of anvils and hammer blows. For beneath all of its particular projects and personalities, AV remains an intense impersonal field of transformation. And anyone that enters that field — whether conscious or not — is exposed to that Pressure...

...which for us humans not only brings out the light but dredges up all that resists the light, the latter often preceding the former. And whether visitor or long-term resident, this is hard at times to recognise, remember or accept gratefully.

I recall a conversation with a newcomer-to-be who was expressing her hesitations about 'committing' to AV. She was seeing — I guess the honeymoon gloss had worn off — all the collective shadows, contradictions and aberrations. And she was wondering how to put that together with AV's professed ideals. Were we all just hypocrites or what?! It was easier for me to be more generous — to look at things with the relief and clarity-by-contrast that comes from just having re-entered from 'outside'. And I found myself responding with something like:

AV is not a showcase for classical notions of 'what is spiritual'. Not a place for transcendence, hardly even for meditation. (Witness the growing trickle of Aurovilians who must go out for 'meditation retreats'). No, here in this field of inescapable and often unbearable transformation, the Emperor has no clothes. And if you took everyone out of AV, erased the place clean, and replaced them with any other combination of humanity — even hand-picking the 'best candidates' from the New Age circuits — you would still find the same flaws, the same contradictions eventually emerging between image and raw reality. Because if transformation is truly the goal, then everything that stands in the way has to come up.

Outside, on the other hand, there is not this concentrated morphogenetic field, this atmosphere charged with decades of a collective call for the Truth to descend. So there is less pressure to expose what is under the surface. It's still much easier to get away with appearances. For there is always the luxury and convenience of being able to go home, to split, taking off for another diversion, exiting when things get too tough or too revealing. But in AV, where do you go when you are already home? When there's no place to hide? And when the shadows come up — as they must if transformation and not transcendence is our goal — then what to do? Repress them so that things look better?

Or offer them up? Accepting to see ourselves and each other (compassionately, mind you) for what we are: human. Aspiring, yes, for the Divine — which in this sense is both the cause and solution to our dilemma — but human nonetheless. With this in mind, there were a few things in my own brief six weeks in AV that — try as I did to stay judgement-free — simply felt uncomfortable. One was money, its prevalence as the standard currency of exchange for just about everything, making AV accessible to those who have it. Another was the mind-boggling 'complexity' of design overlaying the stunning 'simplicity' of the Matrimandir, creating a sense of disconnection I had never felt before. And finally, the small but persistent pockets of cult-like behaviour, where the aspiration to stay true and sincere slips into intolerance, becomes rigid and severe, losing a sense of one's relativity.

All of these represent stubborn archetypes that AV must confront: the Power of Money; the monumental nature of Mind to control and complicate; the human tendency to dogmatize, whether political, ideological or spiritual. Archetypes, I am humbly reminded, that all of us must deal with, from which none of us are exempt.

And yet despite the contradictions, AV has had the courage to openly challenge and expose them, painful as it is. For when I look around me here in America I see a world which still not only accepts its chains but defends and worships them. A world awash in dogma and denials, run by Marketplace Rules of Reality reinforced at every street corner, in all the mass media from newspapers to television.

So it is understandable why I had such a hard time getting into the taxi and onto the plane. Or why I felt younger in those brief six weeks in AV, in that atmosphere which despite all the difficulties and disharmonies-along-the-way made me feel alive, joyful even, among my true family, even those of us not on speaking terms.

For somewhere deep in our heart that knows without explanations, we are those Nobodies in Particular who, despite all that resists us, belong to Her. Come what may!

Savitra. (5th May, 1996)

BRIEF NEWS



Photo: Alan

Sunday work in the Garden of Light

Auroville International meeting

During the last week of June, the annual meeting of Auroville International took place in south Sweden. About 40 participants attended, including seven Aurovilians. Topics discussed included Matrimandir, Auroville's bioregion outreach and the great need to secure Auroville's land. Our next issue will include an extended report by one of the participants.

Summer Camp at New Creation

New Creation hosted their third annual summer camp in June. About 60 children from New Creation and from nearby villages participated in this event. Activities at the camp included embroidery, carpentry, mask-making, science and computer projects, theatre.

Auroville art goes international

Tapas of Auroville's cultural organisation, Kalamitra, represented Auroville in Res Artis' annual conference held in early May in Dublin. Res Artis, based in Berlin, is an International Association of Residential Arts Centres that helps to connect arts centres that have the same established international character to hold resident exchange programmes for artists. Tapas presented a small paper on the trials and tribulations of giving birth to a nascent residential arts centre within Auroville. The 60 participants from 48 countries all expressed a keen interest in Auroville and some of the Irish artists have already decided to visit Auroville soon. Auroville, now a member of Res Artis, is listed in 'Guide to Host Facilities for Artists on Short-Term Stay in the World'.

Auroville art goes local

The Auroville Art Association is being organised by Nolly to give Aurovilians an opportunity to rent pieces of artwork from Auroville artists, with an option to buy. The Association wants to promote connections between artists and art lovers, with the hope that this interaction would be the first step towards establishing an art gallery in Auroville.

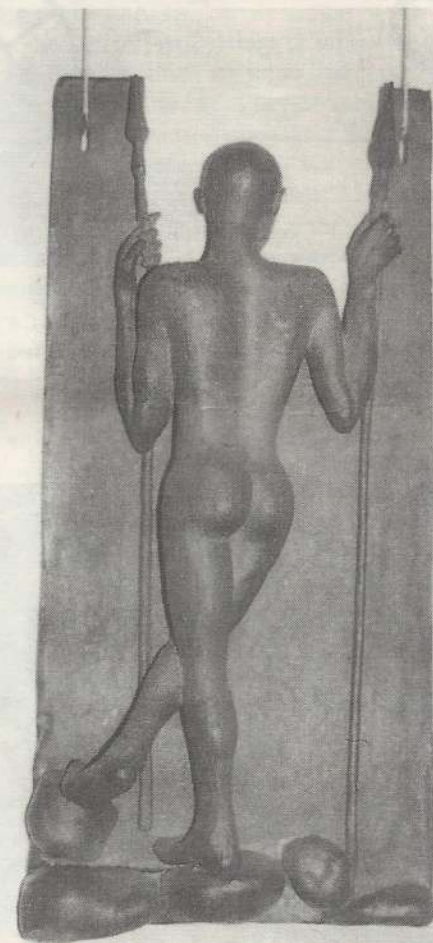


Photo: Anita

Sculpture from Helga's first exhibition at Pitanga.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

To cover our costs, the suggested new subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

Addresses of Auroville International centres:

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Spain: AVI España, c/o Kitxu and Yolanda, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra. Tel. 048 50720.
France: AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris. Tel. 33 1 40364367, fax 44729467.
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U.S.A.: AVI USA, c/o Megan Thomas, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. Tel. 0916 452 4013

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AUROVILLE & INDIA;
PORTRAIT OF A VILLAGE;
SAVITRA REFLECTS;
PROFILE OF SVEN.

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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES
C/O KRISHNA T.
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PHOTO: SVEN / JOY POSTCARDS



photo: Alice

INDIA from the HEART

Sven Ulsa, a descendant of the Vikings, was born in Indonesia and grew up in Australia. In 1975 he moved to Holland where he stayed for 12 years working as a photographer for the Netherlands Dance Theatre Co. He has also worked as a set designer. On his way back from Holland to Australia in 1988, he decided to stop in India, in Auroville. And stayed.

AVT: WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO INDIA?

SVEN: So many things. Especially in the south, the people are so friendly, so direct. I can get up close and be a part of what is going on. The Tamil people allow that. They don't have the same sense of privacy as we know it. And people are fond of being photographed.

I wanted to leave behind that whole way of life which was predictable. There wasn't any spark any more. I was looking for myself and for more spontaneity. I wanted to be in a place which was more in tune with things of the heart. I like the sense of friendship that's here. In Indian terms, it's the family — the family of man, the human family that you feel a part of. And perhaps more strongly in the South of India. I found the North more mentalised, more ambitious, more like the western world. Here, in Tamil Nadu, you can look people in the eye. It's very simple, not loaded or charged with anything. It lets you feel more a part of something universal. The communication is really open. The feelings come, unasked for, sometimes and the sense of the Divine is so much related to that. Like the gardener at Ekta community who came when Helene's dog died and had buried it and put flowers on the grave. He and his wife had just lost two children and he was in great pain. He did a puja (worship) at the dog's grave, and told Helene who was overcome with tears, "Don't cry, Helene. God gives and God takes." I feel they are conscious of the Divine and their relationship to Him.

YOU ALSO ENJOY YOUR CONTACT WITH THE CHILDREN.

They are so spontaneous, so free and full of beauty. There's a lot of humour in them. For example, I spent time with Village Action and they often organised films for children. When they saw a silent Charlie Chaplin for the first time, it was wonderful. They laughed at all the right moments — they connected with the humour even though it was from a completely different world and time. Of course, because I run a unit, Joy Postcards, I also come up against the negative side of India. The Indians who manage some of the offset printing labs are not perfectionists, for instance. When I work with them, I can tell they have never experienced the joy of working for the work. The printer will tell me,

"Look, look," when he's printing my cards, "it's the same colour," when it's not at all the same. There's always something unexpected, or horrible. They'll cut the positives in the wrong place, lose the original transparencies, use paper of varying thickness and quality, add the wrong text, damage the plate, or they've planned another job in between and you have to work all night.

But I love my daily contact with the people. I cycle and I watch everything. On the road from Auroville to Pondy you pass the whole human parade. Every corner there's something else. It's all present and visible and not rolled into an anaesthetised jacket of some kind. People live for the moment. And there's great beauty all around us. It's in their way of moving, the wonderful grace of people. I'm surprised at how calm, collected and well-dressed people can look in the midst of utter chaos. There's also beauty in the way the local people speak. People here often say things that you or I would never dare say to anyone. When I was sick some of my Tamil friends said, "You look so dull!! Why is your skin going like that?" (Pointing to some wrinkles). I enjoy it because it's something truthful and naively direct. Said that way the truth doesn't hurt!

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH PICTURE TO TAKE?

I take pictures of things I enjoy. I like to share with people what I enjoy. I'm the medium for these moments. Actually, my postcard business came through my interest in social work. Originally, I was taking these shots of greenwork, of farming, for Village Action documentation and for Auroville Today. Out of this work came the cards. And people seem to enjoy my work. It's always nice to see and hear people when they're looking at my cards and then they see something in them and they share their feelings with their friends. That's why I do it. Because even with the difficulties, India inspires me. I discover other aspects of myself here. So many people have this experience, I think. You face the other culture and you have to respond to it. Sometimes without words. But I enjoy it, it's easy to communicate without language, if you can touch the level of good intentions — if you can speak with the heart.

Jill