

AUROVILLE TODAY

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"RELATED" ISSUES



Photo Sven

*A fourth dimension of the aesthetic sense
Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all,
To the cosmic wideness re-aligns our souls.*

Sri Aurobindo, Savitri

Like the waves that make toward the sandy shore of Auroville's beach, so do the themes of *Auroville Today* endlessly relate. Whether we explore a "nobler pragmatism", bhakti or dharma, service or experience, always and everywhere there is something fundamental in our necessary superficiality – that connection to the living process called relationship. Auroville's alchemy bubbles with relationships. "My" relationship to the Divine, my lover, my work, my parents, my children, my friends, my enemies, and my cat; it can be everything from an endless preoccupation to a suppressed whisper, from a tolerance to transformation. *Auroville Today* rushes in with the millions of publications who have not feared to tread on the topic of relationships.

One visitor offered the observation that Aurovilians are schizophrenic because the idealism in which they have invested their faith is so far from their present level that they go about trying to maintain their dignity while suffering from acute frustration. We didn't find anyone suffering from the delusion that the ideals had been reached or overwhelmed because they hadn't. Most seemed at the stage of "work-in-progress", aware that most pretensions are too difficult to maintain. But we didn't talk to everyone.

The grounding of Auroville in the vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother seems to act as an inspiration and not a frustration. Their writings on human relationships clearly stress that the relationship with the Divine must be absolutely central and all other relationships that do not come under that influence may become more or less barriers to progress in our lives. Before Auroville even started, early in 1965 in a list of questions about life in Auroville, Mother was asked whether one must be a student of yoga to live in Auroville. She answered: "All life is yoga. Therefore one cannot live without practising the supreme yoga", and to the question about whether family and social life would exist in Auroville, she replied: "If one has not gone beyond that." We have not gone beyond these relationships. Sri Aurobindo in his *Letters on Yoga* under the section "Human Relationship in Yoga" clearly centralizes the Divine as the focus of the only true relationship, but dispels all notions of withdrawal from life, of aloofness or aversion for others or for the material life. He emphasizes the psychic development as the lever for transformation. He cautions: "I must repeat also that each case differs, one rule for all is not practical or practicable. What is needed by each for his spiritual progress is the one desideratum to be held in view." When the soul or psychic is in front, to speak of relationship is no longer relevant. But we're not there yet either.

In relationship, the key word is, of course, love. "Inevitably, love between two human beings, whatever it may be, is always made of ignorance, lack of understanding, weakness and that terrible sense of separation." Still, as Mother points out trying to get rid of it is another folly: "If one makes an inner effort to reject it, one usually rejects the entire capacity of feeling love and becomes like a stone, and then sometimes one has to wait for years or centuries before there is a reawakening in oneself of the capacity to receive and manifest love". This brings us back to the process of learning to love, the discovery of the soul: "When the psychic loves, it loves with the Divine Love". What is true love? Mother replies "There is only one true love, the love from the Divine. Which in human beings turns into love for the Divine. Shall we say the nature of the Divine is Love.... (indeed all life is love if we know how to live it.)"

Such ideals do not appear as a condemnation of the present situation, but as light by which to read these current notations on the state of the experiment, and to guide the moment to moment choices with an equanimity that will evolve with each new breath. □



RELATIONSHIPS ABOUND

Many in Auroville tend to be very occupied with relationships. Why? Is Auroville in any way different from 'elsewhere'? We discussed the matter one evening with one of Auroville's "therapists", who was willing to give insight into the matter, on condition of anonymity. What follows is the private opinion of one Aurovilian.

We are occupied with relationships because we feel a lack of something.

I have observed that most people try to live the image of themselves they want to be. As people in Auroville go through similar processes they look through these kinds of things, and recognize when someone lives an image of himself. They react to that and one is forced to deal with it.

In many cases the mother or father is behind that self image. It might even have been imposed on the child when he was still in the womb, at the time of pregnancy: 'Be my strong hero', or 'Live my unrealized life for me'. It can also be a cover for inner desires that are not allowed to manifest for some reason, for reasons of education, or with our roots, moral or otherwise. More often than not that creates guilt complexes.

Relations between men and women that fulfil everything, that encompass the entire being, can only happen when each knows and lives the realization of the Divine in the other.

Many have, as it were, two souls in their breast, two parts in their being that cannot be reconciled. The part that is not yet awakened or cannot be accepted is then projected outwards, everything that one does not want to accept in oneself, or that one does not want to recognize as being part of oneself. It gets covered over through their preoccupation with their work.

And much of that is projected onto their partner. Normally, the partner accepts this to a certain extent, perhaps because some of it is desirable, in many cases unconsciously.

For example, a woman projects onto a man the supertype, and he likes it until the limit is reached, and then it breaks. In Auroville these things break down quickly, probably much sooner than elsewhere, under the pressure for integral development, the pressure to change.

The basic problem is that we have the wrong idea about finding the ideal relationship. We think that we can realize something or find wholeness in another person, mostly of the opposite sex because the attraction is there, that actually should be found in our relationship, in our friendship, with the Divine.

That is the main mistake! We are instruments for divine aspects, and ultimately everything is a relation with the Divine. But if we are not able to contact the Divine in ourselves, we try to find it in others insofar as that is possible. But Mother has said quite clearly that it will never be realized. Relations between men and women that fulfil everything, that encompass the entire being, can only happen when each knows and lives the realization of the Divine in the other.

As long as we have any expectations or possessiveness, or use the other, it will always end up in a drama. The vital wants to have and to possess. And that is the origin of many problems in partnerships: one partner is in the process of freeing himself from possessiveness, while the other is still in the phase of needing to possess.

We are in the process of going towards another kind of relationship in Auroville, something else is developing. This is manifesting in an unbelievably strong way now.

Many try not to live an image anymore, in so far as one knows oneself and accepts, tries to understand oneself for what one really is, bringing out one's shortcomings, weaknesses, loneliness, recognizing the emotional void that nearly everyone here has, seeing one's needs. And then, of course, an enormous process is started. On the one hand, there is an increasing descent of light, and there is a process of purification going on; on the other hand, that very process illumines the darker sides of one's being, the hidden



fortifications, the protections. Gradually, one starts opening up, first to oneself, and later to others.

It starts with the recognition of one's different needs: you are not a ghost, you have a body. You have your mental, emotional and also your sexual needs, and it serves no purpose to bar those or to repress them. To recognize this is to accept yourself. It is futile to keep up the image that 'you have already passed this, you do not need this anymore', which is a hidden refusal to touch it, and which prevents you from dealing with it.

Take for example the matter of sexuality. Many have feelings of guilt on this matter, because of the high ideals expressed by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and the level on which one finds oneself. The guilt feelings are often the cause of many distortions. The sexual center should be open and free, and seen for what it really is, as a center of power, of energy. We have to learn, of course, to make this energy available to our entire being, but for that one has to acknowledge it before one can try to channel it, pull it up towards the heart, and then transform it.

But before trying to deal with the manifestations of the sexual force, one should deal with the expressions of the lower vital, such as fear, anger, possession, jealousy, all that. Many jump this stage. These blockages and complexes are then partly compensated by the sexual energies. For example, emotional insecurity gets ex-

pressed in a sexual relationship, and everything gets mixed.

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that it is dangerous to deal with the vital before you have established peace in the mind and love in your heart. It needs the quietude of the mind and the concentrated power in the heart upon which you can call any time if you want to work on these things.

It is also very true that many Aurovilians now are in the so called mid-life crisis. For men this is tough, when everything comes up once more, in particular if their creativity is very strong. This is the time to work things out, or live it. It would be more painful when it happens when they are 50!

With women it manifests in another way: when they cross 40, they have to develop other qualities besides a beautiful body. What you see happening often is that they start concentrating on their children, instead of working on themselves. All the energy is then projected on the children, and they live only for them.

There are many women who try to be young again through their children, to find a meaning in life through their family, their work, instead of looking inside themselves.

The motivation to have children is often linked to the feeling that one does not progress anymore. When a relationship is really o.k., when both persons work on their 'whole-ness', then they do not need any children. Sri Aurobindo says children are to

our delight, in other words the crown on top of the relationship, for people who understand themselves, who have the feeling that they have so much to give and to present that they can have a child. But many children are made because the relation is actually at the end, or because there is a block, a dissatisfaction, and neither partner can progress anymore. What happens is that the energy which could be used to make the relation go ahead again, is used to make a child. That is really incredible. And this is something you cannot even say to parents, it is too painful, too cruel.

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that it is dangerous to deal with the vital before you have established peace in the mind and love in your heart. It needs the quietude of the mind and the concentrated power in the heart upon which you can call any time if you want to work on these things.

We may call children for delight and joy, not out of the desperation and frustration of the parents.

Split-ups are happening now increasingly all over the world, not only in Auroville. The earth is really in transformation. The souls who are incarnating right now, the children being born now, come very consciously to participate in this transformation. They look for those who can give them what they need. They find it in someone who teaches, a family friend

... Auroville's children live a tough life, as many do not have the traditional basis anymore. They have come to find a universal family here, they are less bound to the old structures than we are. You can see that clearly. They learn to be flexible in their relations. But it is not easy, and that is one of the

reasons why there are so many children here with asthma or eczema and so forth.

Couple-relationships are no longer stable. Most people are frustrated with them, and so open up to other kinds of things.

Aurovilians, generally speaking, are not 'loose' as some would like to believe. Rather, they are rigid. You could say 'loose' in the sense of not being connected to their center, but if there is any looseness in the other sense, it is due to being in a transitional stage.

I have noticed that relationships that have some higher vital or even psychic element, where you can really open your heart, where you are able to let your true emotions flow, are increasing in Auroville. It is very difficult to describe this, precisely because it is a non-mental experience. Compassion, love flow straight from the heart, and can be accepted by the other and just flow through, without an attempt to hold them. There is then the consciousness on both sides that it is a present, a divine emotion that you are allowed to experience.

There is really a deeper soul contact happening now. And that brings a crazy hope that once we will all be able to meet in the same way.

And that washes away all the problems with different characters, with temperaments, or matters of principle, or even likes or dislikes. Soul meets soul.

Auroville is really something collective, and you could say that we all go through various phases together, each of us in his own unique way. If you look at yourself, you can understand what the 'theme of the week' is this time. For me this coincides many times with the text of Sri Aurobindo or Mother that is published in the Auroville News every week. If you connect fully to that, then it is really beautiful, and you can only say "thank you". But that is in the process, and that has not fully realized itself.

By the way, if you are really into yourself it is easier to contact the Tamil people than the Aurovilians, that's unfortunately a truth. They are more direct, connected, by themselves, instinctive and a therefore a good mirror for us.

The ideal Auroville is here already on another level, you can contact that. There is also the Auroville which is manifesting here physically, and which is in no way different or more transformed than anywhere else in the world. There is no one here who is so far as to work in the physical, in the material level. What you see happening at present is that the energy is pressing downwards, and

that because of that the entire vitality comes up. But I am absolutely certain that we are on the road, on the way to the true Auroville. Sri Aurobindo said that 10 to 20 years of preparation are quite normal to start his Yoga. On the collective level we are still preparing and have not yet really started to do yoga.

Telepathy, the conscious emission and reception of thoughts, is also a form in which relationships can manifest. That is a field in which we have to start experimentation, for what is happening right now is absolutely boring. I have the impression that people who come from California or Findhorn are much more advanced than we are. I must add here that many Aurovilians have the experience that, in case we need to see someone, we do! We are all connected, but not really consciously.

The spiritual guidance is very much present in Auroville.

If people could realize that they have only to open themselves, and that that is sufficient!!

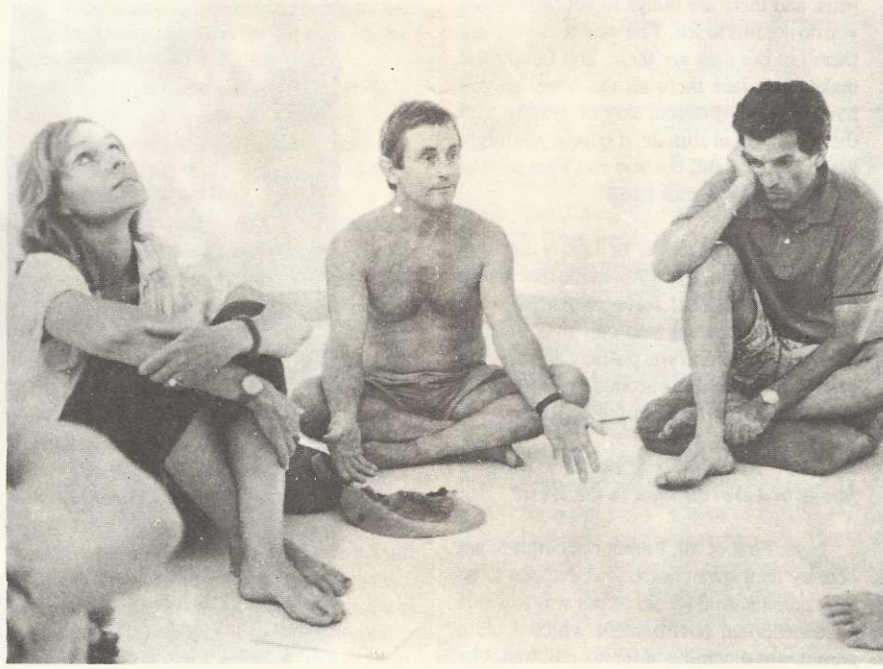
Through – or perhaps notwithstanding – our process there is something completely new and unexpected evolving. One can feel that She is there right here in the physical, and that an energy is at work which gives one the feeling of being filled with light. The cells are in a permanent exchange with this energy, which is Her working. Increasingly

The basic problem is that we have the wrong idea about finding the ideal relationship. We think that we can realize something or find wholeness in another person, mostly of the opposite sex, because the attraction is there. This actually should be found in our relationship, in our friendship with the Divine.

people in Auroville experience this. One can't describe it, only experience it.

We only have to open, She is here!

Interview by Brigitte and Carel





A GARDEN WITH FLOWERS

Jaya and Nico have a family of four children, one cow, several chickens and a few dogs and cats. They also manage a woodcraft unit called "Decauram". In their almost finished house, Bill interviewed them over lunch.

AVT: Sometimes people say that to do yoga you have to be single. In Auroville we have all kinds of approaches. Why did you choose to raise a family?

Nico: You get a choice, more or less. You've been put in a situation that you can accept or refuse. Then depending on your own personal development and what you've been through before, you make your choice. You decide to go into the relationship and one thing follows the other – it's a package, the situation includes these things. You simply don't exclude parts of it.

Jaya: It isn't that you just choose something, because when we got into the relationship neither of us really wanted it. Every time it looked like it wasn't going to happen, we were relieved but something kept pushing for it and finally you just had to say to yourself, 'this is something that has to be done'. So you just throw yourself into it. It might sound strange but it seems a typical Auroville thing. You feel it is the right thing to do, something you have to do and it doesn't matter if it is not to your liking. You're put in front of something and it's shown to you, 'this is the way you have to go'. You can say I don't like to go that way, I want something else, but when it's put so strongly in front of you – and it's not that it's done without joy, because joy is also there, that comes in – but your own personal feeling is, let me not have this, somehow. You cringe in front of it.

Nico: You also know subconsciously that it implies problems, maybe many problems.

AVT: How do you see the children as part of your path?

Jaya: It's a different path for everyone. I, for example, like very much to have children. I wanted to have a family.

Nico: The same for me also. Part of me wanted this whole family thing very much, very strong. It is now more obvious than it used to be. So there it is now – no rest! I got what I wanted and needed.

Jaya: You have to face all your difficulties. Everything you're put in front of in Auroville, like the relationship, the children, the work, or whatever comes to you, you deal with it. With the workshop (Decauram), it is not at all something I would have wanted and chosen to do but it was put in front of me. I only wish I hadn't been put in front of that choice because it was so hard to take, it wasn't something I was asking for. Then you say yes and you see when you go into it that you are facing all your problems: everything you don't know how you'll ever be able to overcome in yourself, is put on the table.

Nico: It becomes your field of work. The workshop is one thing as well as the family. It is the same thing. It becomes your field of experience and progress.

Jaya: Maybe some people would feel that family is a burden but it's an asset, you see that when you go through it.

Nico: You go through many things and what you would like not to see happen happens, and there are things in yourself which you do not like to see. You would like to push them out but they are there, and family life makes you face them all the time. So you have to find a different way of dealing with them, a different attitude; it grinds, you might get angry, uptight, but you can't get around it because it is in your family.

Jaya: It's not single or family life that makes a difference, it's Auroville that makes the difference. That force of Auroville or Mother or whatever you call it is always, always there behind you pushing and holding you, using everything around you and every means – that's why I want to be here.

AVT: For you is it easier to raise a family in Auroville than in the West?

Jaya: First of all, I think the children are here by their own choice – we happen to be their parents. And we are on our way towards an educational environment which I, as a parent, was dreaming of for my children. The

difficulty is economic, unless you have your own means to rely on.

Nico: Everyone should know by now, whoever has been in Auroville for some length of time, that you get what you need – one way or another. You get what you need. You can say it is very difficult to raise a family because you need this and that for the children etc. but I can say from my experience that once I had taken the step, we had everything we needed and more.

Jaya: Yes, it is true.

AVT: You had a difficult situation and Nico had to go outside to work for three years.

Nico: That is part of the thing. Again also in that situation I was put before a particular choice; but the way it was coming to me – on a platter, 'Do you want it or not?' – of course,

because it is the next step to take. You cannot say no. Though what it meant for me, being so attached, made it hard to take. It was not easy for me to be separated from the family but once again the job was there and we got the money to get this house together, etc. – it's all in the game.

Jaya: It was like that with the workshop. If we were of a sane mind we wouldn't even have thought to take it up. We've never done carpentry, didn't know anything about it, or about keeping accounts either, and our house was still unfinished, Nico had not even come back at the time, the kids were more or less a full time job and still. . . Like this house, I didn't know anything about construction and here it is, but still now with its faults and all it's like a miracle for me because we would not have dreamt of such a thing. We didn't have much and now even the workshop is there, and now maybe we can find a way so that Nico doesn't have to go outside anymore. We feel that it was a gift that Nico could go out then. We could have gone to Sweden with the whole family for ten years and earned the money and then come back. But we made the decision to stay in Auroville, and that meant splitting up the family and it was not easy for everybody. But when you look at all the things I learned as a woman, being alone for three years, that was a gift that I would not like to be without. This, of course, is because of Auroville and how it is here. You have a lot of support, both inner and from your surroundings. When you're in it, it's incredibly hard and you don't wish anyone to go through it; but when it's over, you're so grateful that you went through it because it has given you things that were sorely missing, and I'm not talking about material things. I'm talking about the personality, the learning to cope with things, being independent and how to be a bit more your own self.

AVT: Are you saying that the Auroville situation somehow provides the conditions you need for growth and the question of relationships is somewhat irrelevant?

Nico: Yes it is. This thing of making a distinction between family or individual doesn't hold for me really, because what is the difference? You have to go through your path and this is the path for us. Even the family thing is a phase, maybe for twenty years and then you're ready for the next phase. The kids will be out and doing their



own stuff. It is still an open question whether we will still be together. We may have fulfilled our function of living together like this – it's all open, it's not an end in itself.

Jaya: This is typical of Auroville. You never know what happens tomorrow. You never have any idea what is going to happen. The only security which you have is this force which is always pushing and that is a total security because so far it has always carried us and made us do things which we could not consent to do by ourselves. It's like the image of Mahakali who pierces with her sword everything which is ignorance and that is somehow how it works. Things where you would shrink back and say I can't cope, at the same time there's this grace which saves you when it gets too much, you're never crushed by it. It is the utmost you can deal with because with your fears you always put your own boundaries shorter than they actually are.

AVT: Don't the children make a significant difference?

Jaya: I must say it's very nice to have children. It is very, very nice. There are difficulties but it's an incredible gift to have these people come and live with you. You see them from when they are absolutely newborn, even before that; as infants they are so transparent and you have this incredible intimacy. They are so beautiful and you see them going through their motions and developments. I think most parents here would agree with this. It is a grace and I would have been happy to have more children because each one is so different from the other one. Also now everything is improving for children in Auroville, it is an environment for children. Children are an asset for all of the grown-ups. The children need to interact with people who have no children. In Auroville, there is a lot of interaction between children and adults, both in educational activities and in daily life. This is very enriching for everybody.

For people who complain about the children of Auroville, what if the children went on strike for a couple of months and disappeared? Do you think anyone could live in a place like that? It would be like having a garden without flowers. □

**photo top left: Jaya and Nico with their children enjoying the farm animals.
photo below: Jaya and children in their spacious dining room.**



Sundaram was born in a local village and first worked for Auroville as a young boy, helping excavate the pit for Matrimandir. After working in a number of communities, he was invited to live in Kottakarai and subsequently became an Aurovilian. There, while recovering from a bad accident to his eye, he helped set up the first Auroville bakery, remaining there for 13 years.

At present, he works for 'Village Action', mediating in disputes between Aurovilians and villagers, and providing an informal counselling service for villagers with personal problems.

Auroville Today: What training did you receive for this very important work?

Sundaram: None! But I don't need courses because I'm a local person and I know how the villagers feel. I've learned, though, to be quiet, to listen and observe and to speak simply. And never as a social worker to expect to be satisfied or to get sympathy!

What are the kinds of problems that arise between Aurovilians and villagers?

A typical problem results from Auroville trees shading village land and affecting the farmers' crops. Then there are misunderstandings between Aurovilians and their workers. It sometimes happens, for example, that a long-time worker is dismissed on the basis of wrong information. Then he goes to the village and rounds up his friends, and the Aurovilian may suddenly find himself in a fight.

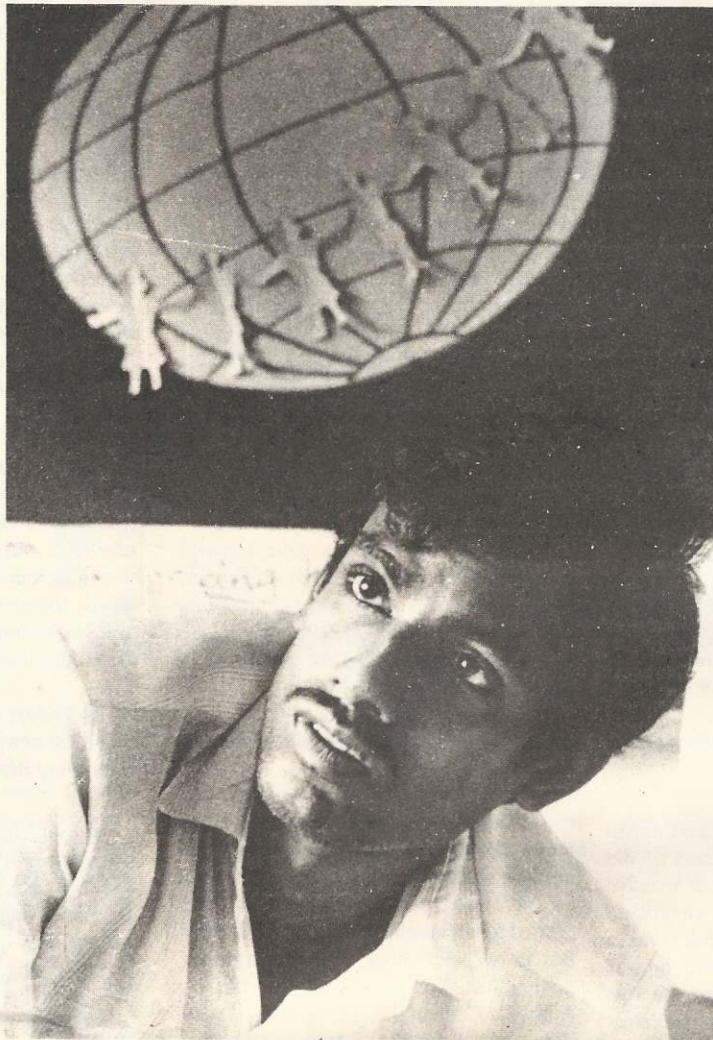
Then again there are those newcomers to Auroville who idealize the villagers and trust them with everything. Of course, they get something stolen. So then they swing to the other extreme and trust none of them.

How do you handle these problems?

It's a matter of helping people understand the situation better. For example, if a village farmer comes to me to complain that an Aurovilian won't cut trees that are shading his field, I go to the Aurovilian and quietly explain why the farmer is so concerned. If the Aurovilian still won't cooperate, I point out that if he doesn't do something, the villagers may come and cut down all the trees by that field. Is it worth it? Generally he understands.

Actually, the relationship between the Aurovilians and the villagers is much better now than it was a few years ago. At the beginning, many villagers saw the Aurovilians as a source of easy money. But now they see that many of the Westerners are not rich, and they know which ones treat their workers well. So if one of these Aurovilians has something stolen, their workers will keep

Mediating the Future



dance studio coming up in Auroville and ask, "Why can't we get a bus-shelter?" When they want expensive stereo equipment etc. for the village school, I point out that they first have to learn how to maintain and repair it. Why should they always rely upon Auroville to do everything? And I point out that Auroville doesn't waste money, whereas they will spend Rs. 20,000 just on fireworks for a temple festival.

What do the villagers know about Sri Aurobindo and Mother?

Even some of the Tamil Aurovilians don't know anything. So how can you expect the villagers to know? We need translations of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's writings, and then workers in different areas of Auroville could come together once a week to read and study.

And how can Westerners learn more about the villages?

This is very important. One way would be for the Tamil Aurovilians to explain to their Western friends about the villages and to take them there. Unfortunately, some of the Tamil Aurovilians want to become more westernized than the Westerners, and they are ashamed of or have no respect for the villages where they were born.

How can we expect others to understand the villagers when nobody from the villages is willing to explain their customs and concerns?

Interview by Alan

their eyes open in the village. If they catch someone with the stolen goods, they will take them to the head men, and they will punish them. In this way, the villagers support the Aurovilians. This is a big change.

What do the villagers expect from Auroville?

To help develop their villages. In other words, to provide better roads, wells, houses. This is already happening. But people in my own village, for example, see a big new

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

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♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs. 100, for abroad Rs. 450, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. 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%) or 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 avoid postal orders.

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MEMBER OF THE WORKING COMMITTEE

Ananda is one of the seven members of Auroville's first Working Committee. AVToday asked him his views on the role and functioning of the Working Committee over the past four months. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views held by the Working Committee or any of its other members.

Finally, after a long journey that brought him as far as Japan where he met Michiko, Ananda arrived in Auroville in 1982. They settled in Fraternity, where they have lived ever since. In 1988 he became the manager of Lotus, a handicraft unit, and developed an interest in the welfare of his employees, in particular of their children: he now teaches the principles of computerized administration to the older ones, and devotes his Sundays to the cultural awakening of the younger ones. In 1989 he joined the Auroville Council. At present he is one of the members of the Auroville Working Committee.

Our interview was interrupted by a remarkable guest who claimed his meal. In a tree near Ananda and Michiko's house lives a family of tame squirrels who indulge in giving true circus performances: they bend over backwards to take a small piece of bread out of Ananda's hand or from between his teeth. As if to show how you can be responsible and funny at the same time.

AVToday: You were a member of the two previous Councils.

Ananda: Yes, I was asked by the Council members to join. During that period we did not really have the confirmed or massive support of the community, and we worked together with or parallel to the Task Force, a group that was responsible for the contacts with officials. The need to fuse the two bodies together became apparent, and elections took place. This was the last Auroville Council in which about 20 people were chosen. However, in that Council there were in reality two tendencies: one that wanted to administer and organize with feedback of the community, the other which had a more authoritarian attitude. They not only wanted to administer Auroville but also give moral, psychological and even spiritual guidance. Notwithstanding these difficulties, this Council tried to work on a consensus basis, but on certain principal questions the gap became visibly larger, and that created a tension in the community.

When the Auroville Foundation came into existence, it was necessary that the Working Committee be formed. We would have liked to do this by consensus, but that proved not to be possible and it was necessary to hold elections.

Four candidates who had been part of the Council and had represented the "authoritarian" side, were not elected by the majority of the Aurovilians.

AVToday: The Working Committee has been functioning for about four months now. What is your impression?

Ananda: I should start by saying that the Working Committee consists of seven people, and that more often than not one or two are absent for one reason or another. So our meetings are normally with only 6 or 5 people. That is a very small group. We do

not have a chairman, unlike previous Councils. The discussions are, generally speaking, very supple. The process is very quick and efficient, which shows both in the discussions and in the organization or sharing of the work. The group is more homogeneous, and the different tendencies are, for the moment at least, more enriching and consensus is easier to obtain. Our relationships are harmonious, and I do not remember one meeting where someone left banging the door!

AVToday: Did you have to deal with new problems?

Ananda: Yes, essentially administrative and technical ones to do with the Auroville Foundation Act. A secretary to the Auroville Foundation will be appointed by the Government of India, and the second meeting of the Governing Board will take place on August 17th here in Auroville. That gives a lot of work.

AVToday: The Auroville Council still exists...

Ananda: Yes, it soon became very obvious that a new Auroville Council was needed to solve internal Auroville problems, conflicts and so on. A Council has been created for an interim period, till September. But in my view, none of the two groups, neither the Working Committee nor the Auroville Council, has yet started to tackle the real problems of Auroville, and that nags me somewhat.

AVToday: How is your relationship with various authorities?

The present members of the Working Committee certainly have a tendency to be straightforward and direct, and wish to establish simple and frank relationships with the different authorities. We have been criticized in this regard, but we do not want to confuse harmony with a 'let go' attitude. We are all for harmonious relationships, but not at any costs. When it is necessary to be firm on Auroville's principles, we are. It is for this reason that we have, in a few cases and on

our own initiative or in response to questions, been rather firm.

AVToday: You have very much tried to decentralize responsibilities in Auroville, by asking various working groups to publish regular reports of their work and their meetings in the Auroville News (the internal newsletter of Auroville) and it seems to me that you have encouraged the coming together of working groups. That can be very beneficial for the community.

Ananda: We have not done much more than allow a spontaneous decentralization develop itself further. The decentralization was always a fact in Auroville. Aurovilians take up a certain work, individually or in working groups, and if you let things develop quietly the need to meet with other working groups develops. Auroville has always functioned like that.

AVToday: What is the relationship between the new Working Committee and the Governing Board?

Ananda: In June this year a group of three members of the Working Committee met with the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Karan Singh, and other Governing Board members in New Delhi.

Personally speaking, I think that it is very difficult to carry the problems of Auroville into the offices in New Delhi, in particular as certain Governing Board members have not yet been to Auroville, or have but only for a few hours. I believe that as far as possible the meetings between the Governing Board and the Working Committee should take place here in Auroville, even if that is not in accordance with protocol!

AVToday: And the Secretary of the Foundation?

Ananda: For the moment we do not know who has been appointed, but it seems that a Secretary will come to live in Auroville permanently. We have proposed that for his administrative work he uses the existing Auroville secretariat, which would avoid two

secretariats existing side by side, which is the case at present.

AVToday: Do you have a feeling that you have progressed with major problems of Auroville, such as Aurelec, visas, land purchase?

Ananda: We have not yet come to a concrete solution for the Aurelec problem, but we would like to solve it as amicably as possible, and to stop regarding it as a major problem.

It seems that several members of the Governing Board are also interested in a solution that would satisfy everybody. It will take time to solve the other problems you mentioned. All of them are on the Agenda of the Governing Board meeting this August.

AVToday: There is only one woman member of the Working Committee, while women were in the majority in the previous councils. What is the reason for this change?

Ananda: I would like to express two disappointments: first that there are not more women members of the Working Committee, as women have a tendency to approach a problem very pragmatically; being in continuous contact with the daily reality, they have a practical efficiency. They also have a preference for harmony, for creative processes, which might work slower and require more patience, but which are less destructive in the short term and more constructive in the long run. And second, that there are no women members with origins in the surrounding villages. That would enable us to have a constant relation with our neighbors, and also with the Tamil Aurovilians, so that they can feel more a part of Auroville's movement. That would prevent us from falling back into the usual scheme where Western/North Indian men assume the places of responsibility and decision.

Probably the reason is that the AV Foundation Act limits the Working Committee to seven members.

AVToday: We can only hope that, as all members are conscious of the weaknesses of this Working Committee, they will be able to compensate for them.

Ananda: Yes, probably. But I frankly say that I have no intention to let myself be absorbed by the work of the Working Committee. If I would feel that my attention was absorbed in administrative details that would estrange me from the 'why' of my being here, then I would withdraw without noise.

Interview by Yanne



The Working Committee, from left to right: Jothi, Joka, Ananda, Carel, Guy; front: Sanjeev; absent: Gilles.

THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING! are they?

Drawing by Karina

About one and a half years ago, in *AVToday* No. 16, we wrote about the overwhelming interest in Auroville that was suddenly sparked in Russia when a journalist wrote a very enthusiastic article on Auroville in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The result was a steady flow of letters from hundreds of people for more information. Many expressed a desire to visit or live permanently in Auroville. We wrote about a plan for 15 Soviet citizens to come to Auroville for one year through the Russian Foundation for Social Innovation, but this never materialized.

Silence has reigned since that time. We learned that many people in Russia have problems to obtain a passport, an exit visa or even the visa required to come and live in Auroville. Still, there are those who are not daunted by all these problems. At present, Auroville shelters 6 Russians who have managed to come here, even if on the wrong type of visa. They have meanwhile been accepted as Newcomers, and the Indian Government has been requested to grant them a residential permit by way of exception.

Such unprecedented interest...it gave second thoughts to many Aurovilians. Are these Russians really interested in Auroville? Are they not simply trying to get out of Russia for whatever reason? Worse, if they would like to come and live here, where are they going to live? Houses are scarce. How do we manage with people who cannot bring money to support their stay here, because they happen to live in a country that does not have a freely convertible currency? Shouldn't we make a tough selection on the basis of the contents of their letters? But is that at all possible?

Auroville Today spoke to two of the Russians, Karina and Nicolai, who gave another picture.

"Yes, it must be a terrible image to suddenly have a thousand or more Russians here, none of whom speaks English, all of whom come without money, while Auroville has no houses and no possibility to put them to work. It would turn Auroville into a refugee camp, no?"

"But we do not believe in this story. Indeed, there are many people in the U.S.S.R. who would love to leave, but that does not mean to come to Auroville. Most of those who want to leave do so for economic reasons, in order to improve their living conditions. They move to Europe or to America, or, if they are of Jewish origin, to Israel. Auroville has nothing to offer them: there is no material comfort, the climatic conditions are difficult, and there is no possibility to earn any substantial income.

"So who would come to live in Auroville?"

"Of course, there are many in Russia who are searching for another type of life, and find something in mystical movements like theosophy and anthroposophism, Nicolas Roerich and so on. There are even many Russians who come to India because they are interested in Yoga, in the Hare Krishna movement, or in Indian culture or language. But there are few who come to India to live in Auroville.

"We believe that young Soviet people might be challenged by Auroville. Those who are tired of the steady pressure of the community, of the repression of the personality, of the empty ideals of the older

generations. But that is not particular to Russian youth only.

"The article in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* has made Auroville look like a kind of paradise, a city without problems, financially fully supported by UNESCO and other organizations, where money and houses are freely available. No wonder that people got interested! But when we read some of these letters we noticed that many people are not really interested to come to live here, but simply need some human contact, warmth, friendship and hope. It does not mean that they all stamping their feet at the border of India to come here! The same type of person might also write another letter when he reads about another kind of spiritual ideal!

"No fears, please. We come from a country in turmoil, tired, where a social experiment has been lived to its conclusion; others in Auroville come from the West, also tired, where a consumer society is running towards its end. We are brothers.



"Like many who have come from the West or from India or from elsewhere and have turned their back on Auroville after a living experience here, there will be many who will come from Russia and will not find here what they expect from it.

"'Fear has large eyes' says an old Russian proverb. Certainly, more Russians will come to share in the experiment of Auroville...but there is no reason to believe that Russians will flock to Auroville in larger numbers than any other nationality." □

YOUR SOUL FEELS FREE!

Gopa was born in India but recently she has been teaching in the U.S. After visiting Auroville many times over the years, she finally came to stay in November 1990, accompanied by her son Tulshi. At present, she is teaching young Tamil children at Transition School.

Auroville Today: When was your first contact with Auroville?

Gopa: The first time I came to Auroville was in '68. I was quite little then. The second visit, which I remember vividly, was in '73, I was 13. But the time it really clicked was in '86 when I stayed at the Centre Guest House. The whole time I felt at a higher level. It was difficult to go back to Delhi where I was teaching. Also when I went back to the States, all the time the only thing I could think of was coming back here. I couldn't believe how important that had become in my life. There were lots of obstacles, but somehow I worked through them all.

What do you see as the difference between teaching in the U.S. and here?

I did a very specialized kind of teaching there, I taught slow learners. I had small groups and we worked very intensely. They got a lot of attention and they improved very quickly. But here I have a class to myself which is much nicer. I have a whole day with them. I teach them math, English and some preliminary science. Working here in Auroville is special. I don't say that the children are different, but the environment is special. Here they have an environment which allows them to be as free as possible. Which means in some ways also that they can be very nasty and they can be as bad as they can possibly be. For me it is very interesting to be in such a place and see how this process

works, how to develop decent human beings. For me the big fun of teaching is observing the kids and learning from them and seeing what role I can play. Being in contact with children means you can let go of all the layers and barriers and you are really in direct contact with each other. There are some children who try to please a bit but it falls away after a while. It is hard to express... you get something solid every day. While I'm with the children, I feel I can completely lose myself. In America I experienced it a bit, but there were always structures that did not really allow for it. Here we have a kind of common basis without talking about it, which creates a free-ness. Your soul feels free!

What methods do you use in the classroom?

There is usually so much anxiety about reading and writing. The way I teach language is not through the mechanics, but the meaning. In America there is a huge problem with comprehension. There are lots of children who can read but don't understand what they are reading. When I came here, this was one of the first things the teachers told me—that many of the students don't understand what they are reading. And that grabbed me very much because I had similar problems elsewhere and here they had the impression that it was a specific Auroville problem. And it is because of how the children have been taught reading. If you break language down into almost meaningless sentences, the students just concentrate on the mechanics. Where is the meaning coming from if you don't give them any meaningful literature?

My approach is to read good literature to them. It is meaningful, exciting, interesting and they can follow. Some teachers were

hesitant about me using Western literature, but I find the themes are universal, and they really get into it. For instance "Little Red Riding Hood". Children are versatile. They like to get into a new language.

I don't rely any more on basic readers of grammar text. We do a lot of lessons based around a book or a story, a poem, a rhyme. What also really works is project based lessons like plants, insects. It is a very natural means of covering a lot of vocabulary, things happen in a sequence. I see language as that, as a means of communicating, a means of expressing yourself, a means of learning. It is a tool and they should know that they have the capacity to use it. Also in their writing. They keep journals. It is their private thing. I don't correct spelling. They write about their life, and the minute they understand it's private, they write such incredible things. I see that slowly they are learning to formulate sentences and even here and there a paragraph.

We speak a lot. The first 15 minutes we talk about the day. What I found amazing is that they have so much to say. I've learned so much about life in the villages.

When we did an Auroville project, my goodness! I was taken aback by their reactions, by how strongly the children felt about Auroville. For them the Matrimandir, the trees, the flowers, the birds, the place they live, the swimming pool, the sports ground, — how much they love these places! Somehow I could totally identify with that because I grew up in a beautiful place in India. I remember being so much in love with my environment. It was really nice to see the kids here respond in this way, because I know what it means. It stays with you all your life.

Interview by Tineke

AUROVILLE TODAY

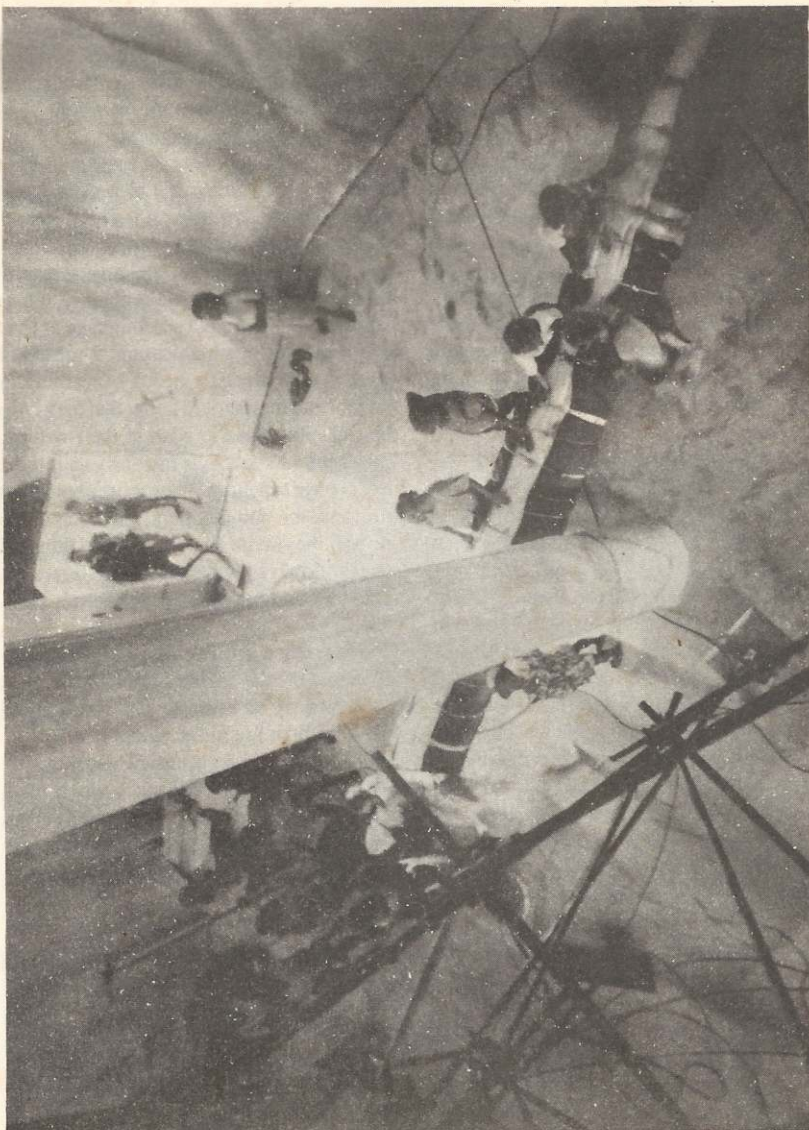
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ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE

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In this issue: Relationships, Russians, Auroville Foundation, etc.



Matrimandir: the last column going in.

Photo Sven



Drawing by Karina

CAT

One evening, a visitor: 'You live so alone, no one to greet you when you come home, not even a cat. Don't you want one?'

Me: 'No thanks!, quite happy without, all that bother...'

Next evening: an uninterrupted series of tiny meows pierces through the rhythmic thud of the rice mill in nearby Kottakarai, disturbing quiet reading. 'Cat in emergency', was the message that flashed through my mind, and emergency it certainly was. Though 'cat' was perhaps an exaggeration. 'Cat-to-become' would be a much better description for the meagre, barely 3-week-old kitten standing there in acute threat of starvation, fearing the unknown. It rushed into the thicket when a small plate of milk was proffered, and attempted the venture only much later, when no one was in sight.

Silence again. However, not so the next evening. Staccato meows again indicated the presence, and another plate of milk, together with some small pieces of dried fish purchased in an unguarded moment in the Pondy bazaar, were consumed by the vanishing shadow.

The tactics worked, and ever so slowly the approach between man and animal started to become serious. In other words, the animal started to realize that it had secured board and lodging, and the man that he had embarked upon a long term relationship.

A happy mewling now greets me whenever I shut off the motorbike, and a joyful cat attempts to make me stumble in happy anticipation of immediate provender. In case I am too dull, it will run around at top speed to convince me of needs and urgencies. Feeding time over, cleaning and then playing time

starts, during which I am expected to scratch at the right places to obtain the satisfying purr. Add to this a thorough investigation for the presence of ticks, the claws and jaws that are - mostly unexpectedly - impressed in the more tender parts of my being, and the expeditions it undertakes in the keet roof at night to frighten away the squirrels and mice, and the picture of the true relationship is complete. Or is there a beyond?

Mother, asked about the relation between animals and men, spoke about the possibility of love based on trust. She also mentioned the exchange of psychic and vital forces, an exchange 'which becomes for the animal something wonderful, giving it an intense joy. When they like to be quite close to you in that way, when you hold them, it is that they vibrate internally.'

Musing on Mother's experiments with cats and on the lines from Sri Aurobindo's magnificent poem 'Despair on the Staircase',

*...an animal creature wonderfully human
a charm and miracle of fur footed Brahman..*

I realize that the cat has its place in spiritual research in India. And that is nothing new. In Mahabalipuram there is a big stone relief called "The descent of the Ganga", covering a rock face over 80 feet long and nearly 30 feet high. It shows the descent of the Goddess Ganga to earth, amidst a crowd of worshipping ascetics....among whom is a cat; whether it is performing penance for a better incarnation next time or for luring mice to their doom, is a matter of conjecture.

Carel