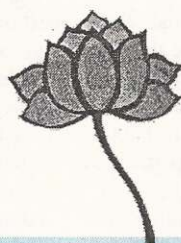


Auroville Today

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MAIN THEME: Sri Aurobindo's Action

- The influence of Sri Aurobindo
- Building bridges
- A new psychology?
- Searching a national identity pages 1,4 and 5



The influence of Sri Aurobindo has to permeate more

Dr. Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council, was in Auroville again recently. He met many individuals and work groups and addressed the Residents Assembly. Towards the end of his stay he agreed to an interview with Auroville Today. Unlike previous interviews we have conducted with him, this time the focus was upon issues confronting India as a whole.

AVT: What do you think are the major problems facing India today?

Kireet: There are many. India is fragmented – when India became free, the Hindu-Muslim problem was already there. Then there are the problems of casteism, superstition, poverty, the relativism of ethics, and a pervasive incapacity at all levels – physical, vital, mental, spiritual.

Once I asked the Mother, "What is the most important problem of India?" Mother said, "The constitution of India". It was a revelation to me! Mother told me India should so change its constitution that only the people who are capable and honest come to power. This does not happen anywhere in the world at present! But in India we have to arrive at a new situation more quickly than anywhere else in the world because we have taken over from the British a parliamentary system totally unsuited to our nation. This problem pervades all other spheres of life, so I fully see why Mother said this is the most important problem.

Compounding all these problems, when India became independent we had a very great lack of vision for the future. Our leaders were mainly socialists, the rest were religious. Even today there is no other vision.

You mentioned that Mother told you to go out and make people aware of Sri Aurobindo's solutions to the predicaments of India. What are those solutions?

When Mother told me this in 1971 I began to study Sri Aurobindo from a new angle. The inner solution to the panorama of problems facing India lies, to my mind, in three sentences which he wrote indicating what India has to do if she is to be able to help herself and be of service to the world. The first task is the recovery, in amplitude and fullness, of the ancient spiritual knowledge which India has accumulated. The second task is to allow this ancient fund of spiritual knowledge to percolate and irrigate various streams of inquiry in the humanities, philosophy, science, technology, art and crafts, so as to give a new vibration and fresh impetus to these disciplines, while developing the critical knowledge to deal with contemporary problems with originality. Thirdly, a synthesis of all fields of inquiry should be developed

and, particularly, a synthetic base for a spiritualised society.

How do you communicate this to people with no background in Sri Aurobindo?

For those who have no background at all I often analyse certain problems for

only when the world becomes one that the real economic problems of India and the world can be resolved. I don't deny the value of programmes of development, of progress in science, technology and education which benefit the poor, but these will be accelerated and, ultimately, only bear fruit in the context of the driving forces which are trying to bring about the unity of mankind. Now this dimension is clearly available in Sri Aurobindo. The reason he did not write any book on the economic development of India is that he saw that economic

cult problem to solve. It involves a very deep study of Hinduism and Islam, and the ways by which the two can be harmonized. Unfortunately, such a study has not been made. Instead certain clichés have been developed which do not engage with the fundamental issues. Then there is a historical aspect of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India which is very often put under the carpet because it is feared there may be major conflagrations if certain facts are brought out. There is a danger that if these facts are brought out in an unintelligent manner it may create lots of prejudices. Yet the psyche of India continues to be greatly shaken by some of the things that happened from 10th century onwards when Islam entered the subcontinent, and scholars and thinkers have to come together in a serious manner and squarely confront the deeper problems which are not allowing a real union of its people.

Kashmir has been a constant problem for so many decades now, but we have not confronted the problem squarely. In Kashmir the problem is connected with Partition. Unfortunately, the same applied to justify Partition continues to be applied today—the idea that religion is the basis of nationalism. This is the basis of the whole conflict. Yet from early times there have been many religions in India. When Buddhism came, India was not divided on the basis of Buddhism and Hinduism, when Jainism came there was no such division. If religion is the basis of nationalism, every country should be divided. Therefore the whole theory is false.

Do we not need to move away from a society based upon religious differences towards a spiritualised society in which such differences are transcended?

That's true, that's very true. But for many people such a solution seems too abstract, whereas if you speak to them about nationalism it is understandable. In what, then, consists nationalism? This is the basic question which India, even after becoming free, has not been able to answer. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that nationalism is defined by certain elements. A nation has recognizable geo-

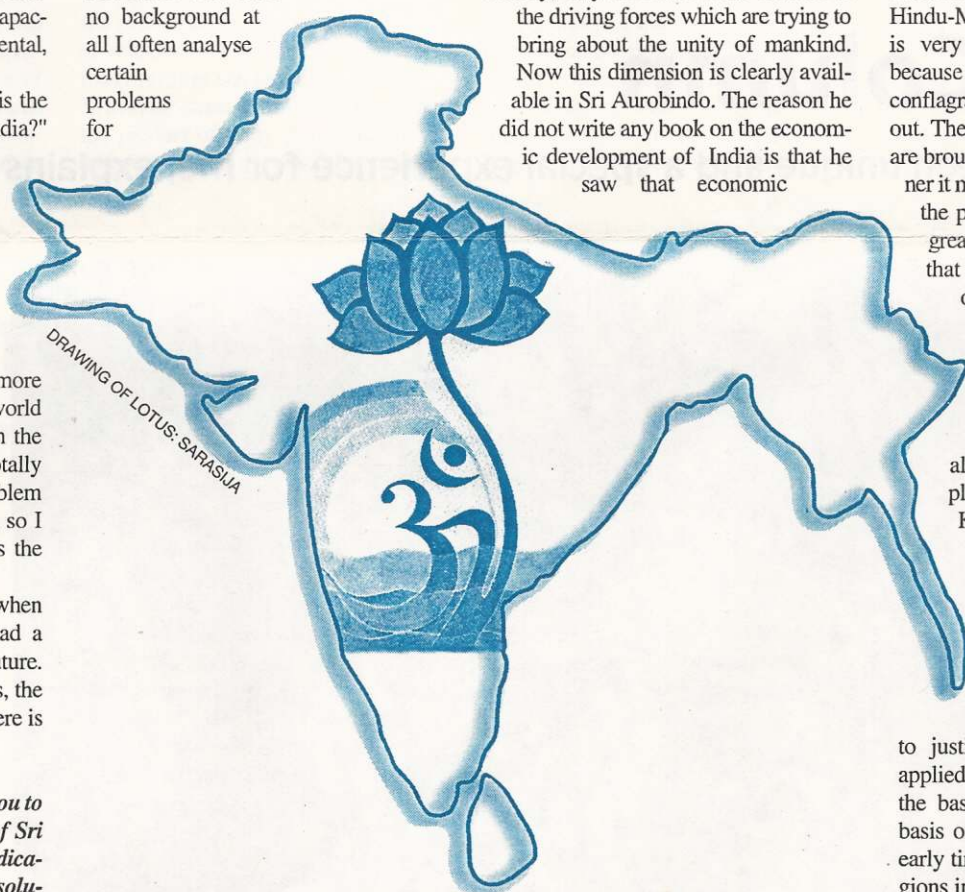
For most of us who are struggling in the kindergarten of the yoga it's difficult even to begin to comprehend the magnitude of the achievements of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Yet it still comes as a shock to realize that, even in India, knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is limited and partial: If Sri Aurobindo is remembered at all in India on his birthday, August 15th, it is more likely to be as a leader in the independence struggle against the British in the early 20th century than as one of the first great anchoring points of a new consciousness in the evolution of the earth. Does this matter? After all, his influence is all-pervasive, not confined to those who read his books. And he would have been the last person to have bothered about the shifting sands of reputation. Yet, as both Sri Aurobindo and Mother make clear, the evolutionary work will progress faster if it finds willing and conscious collaborators, and in this context knowledge of what Sri Aurobindo and Mother achieved seems, at the very least, to be important.

In this issue we examine the relevance of Sri Aurobindo to certain aspects of India and the modern world. We also highlight some of the challenges involved in bringing him to a wider audience.

graphic boundaries, a common history and, as a result of this common history, a common aspiration, drive, which is shared by its people. This aspiration is based upon the highest ideals, ideals which are cherished, formulated and progressively reformulated, so bringing about cohesiveness in the whole population because they enable people to transcend their narrow personal interests. These are the things which to be emphasized if the national spirit is to be nurtured. However in India at present no national spirit is being nurtured, which is a very pitiful situation. Today if you look at any textbook on India you will find it very difficult to find a real national history of India based on this large view. What is it, then, that has unified India throughout the ages? Sri Aurobindo revealed that it is its cultural not its political history.

If you read the history of India, political divisions persisted, yet a cultural unity of India was achieved long ago.

continued on page 5



India of the ages is not dead

Nor has she spoken her last creative word;

She lives and has still something to do for herself

And the human peoples.

Sri Aurobindo

their consideration. For example, one of the most important problems facing India is that of poverty. I've made some study of the many suggestions proposed to solve this and my conclusion is that these studies leave out a very important element. There is no perception that unless there is a tremendous drive in the world towards world unity you cannot resolve economic problems; that it is

problems rest upon the more fundamental problem of human unity.

Do the present very pressing problems in Kashmir and Gujarat spring from the same root cause?

The present situation in Kashmir and Gujarat is basically a problem of Hindu/Muslim unity. This is a very diffi-

• International Zone thoughts
• Spiritual column

page 2

• Restoring the earth
• New language lab

page 3

• New books: reviews

page 6

• World Cup fever
• Courtesan and King

page 7

• Profile: Nergez
• Remembering Dimitri

page 8

Towards Human Unity

Bindu discusses the deeper rationale behind the International Zone

The tragedy of September 11th, the stark retaliation of USA in Afghanistan, the ruthless attacks by Israel, the terrorism in Kashmir – such are the horrifying political events of the past few months. On the one hand, these events have not changed our life in this little corner of South India. Yet, on the other hand, they are of significance given our ideal of human unity. I believe that the key to achieving this ideal lies in the International Zone. Properly conceived and manifested, founded on the soul-power of nations, the International Zone of Auroville could be a much-needed antidote to the uneasy political equations of the warring countries of the world today.

While various national pavilions have begun work in earnest, there is not yet a collective vision about the deeper rationale of the International Zone. The Mother's ideas for the International Zone and Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on human unity need to be studied with a view towards practical manifestation. The very concepts of "culture," "countries" and "soul of a nation" need to be defined. Do the Kurds, the largest ethnic group in the world without a homeland, have a defined culture? Should

they be accorded space in the International Zone? What about the Palestinians? Such questions are of immediate significance, given the limitations of land available in the International Zone and the fact that there are over 200 nations in the world. It is important to distinguish here between the country as a political state and the nation as a representative of a deeper spirit or soul. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the nation is a persistent psychological unit which Nature has been busy developing throughout the world in the most various forms and educating into physical and political unity. Political unity is not the essential factor; it may not yet be realized and yet the nation persists and moves inevitably towards its realization." This implies that there are nations with distinct group-souls, not yet politically recognized as countries, that have a role to play in the human destiny and accordingly should be represented in the International Zone.

The deeper reality of a nation's soul is also reflected in the Mother's declaration about the map of true India which includes other countries of the sub-continent: "It is the map of true India in spite of all passing appearances." This

quote shows that the soul of a nation encompasses religious and cultural differences that prevail amongst countries. Thus one would have to determine what countries comprise a single soul and share a single pavilion.

While discussing the souls of nations, we often sink into wistful nostalgia for the past glory of our respective countries, or merely celebrate certain cultural traditions. One is reminded here of the recent visit of a British diplomat who rudely shook the dreams of British Aurovilians of establishing a pavilion on the lines of "olde England" saying that modern Britain was a forward-looking, multicultural and racially diverse country. We rarely seek to consider the present development or intuit the future development of a nation on the basis of the evolving power of the soul. What Sri Aurobindo says about India's soul is true for all countries: "A reshaping of the forms of our spirit will have to take place; but it is the spirit itself behind past forms that we have to disengage and preserve and to give to it new and powerful thought-significances, cultural values, a new instrumentation, greater figures."

At present, the soul of a nation rarely finds expression given the fact that all

countries are ruled by governments with narrow, selfish interests, much like the human body is ruled by its ego and not its psychic being. The actions of governments, largely driven by economic and political ambitions, has resulted in a world of discord and strife. As a counterpoint to this, the International Zone could be a first step in allowing each nation to express its soul in matter and thereby the ideal of unity.

The International Zone can indeed be viewed as a symbolic manifestation of Sri Aurobindo's idea for a federation of free nations. Such a federation would manifest the third ideal of the French Revolution, that of "fraternity." Currently, all the global federations, such as that of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, are dominated by the economic considerations of rich nations. The world needs a global forum based on liberty, equality and above all fraternity. Says the Mother, "The most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to

play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification which has any chance of enduring." Indeed, the very layout and architecture of the Zone could embody this principle of unity amidst diversity.

Envisioning an educational role for the Zone the Mother says that pavilions will "help individuals to become aware of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to bring them into contact with the ways of life of other nations, so that they learn to know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries of the world." What seems to be asked of us is that we truly become global citizens, or as it is expressed in the Charter, "a living embodiment of an actual human unity." To conclude, Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's words give scope to a multi-faceted International Zone that is at once a living cultural university and a symbolic federation of nations, that gives a material manifestation to the souls of nations as well as bridges the past and the future. The task is not easy, for ultimately it requires us to transcend our mental ideas and share a spiritual vision of the Zone, but nothing less than this would achieve the goal of an actual human unity in the world.

MATRIMANDIR

The Spiritual Column

Visits to Matrimandir have always been unique and a special experience for me, explains H.S. Prasad

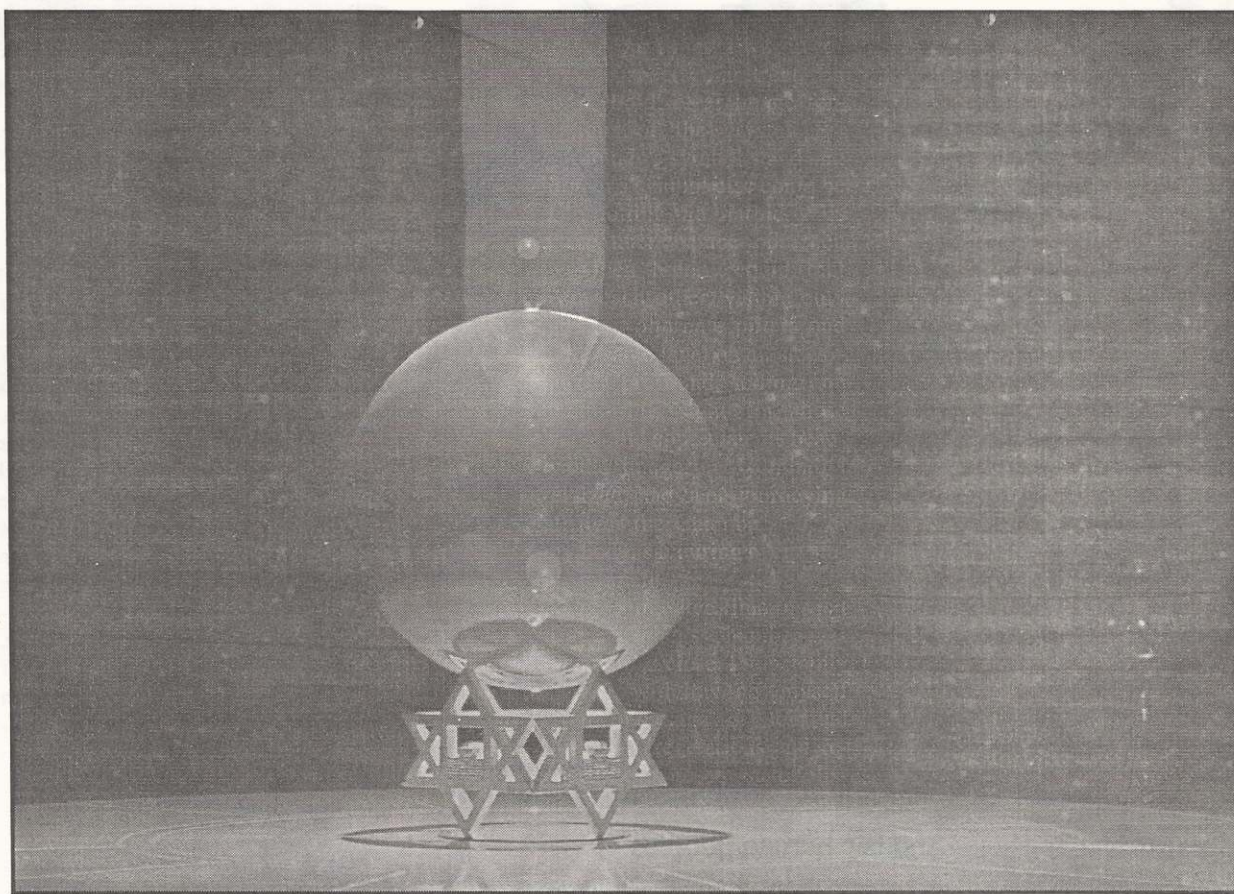
The ones in February 2002 were most unusual and revealing. It was for the first time that I felt a very strong urge to visit this 'House of the Mother' frequently and continually throughout the month and a half of the next.

As I sat down for Dhyana, the serene, quiet yet spiritually vibrant atmosphere engulfed me. I could feel it wanting to penetrate every single pore in my body as usual, but I was unable to let go – concentrate or meditate and let myself get submerged in the enchanting surroundings – this has not happened for a long time.

I kept trying to gather my thoughts, align my consciousness and make my mind accept and appreciate the beauty, ambience and importance of where I was, but I seemed to be making no headway. My eyes kept roving all over the Chamber, perhaps in search of something unusual to attract my attention and bring my mind out of what it was entangled with, to the present.

I had just started to study the twelve pillars within the Chamber, when unconsciously at first and consciously later, I spotted the column of light descending from top of the Chamber onto the Crystal, kept in the middle of the Chamber, sitting on a four legged stand designed with Sri Aurobindo's symbol. I decided to explore it and in doing so, I was finally able to coax my mind to the present and surrender myself to the sublime and omnipresent.

For a moment I felt that Mother had sent this special column of light enriched with Her blessings, radiating an aura of hope and prosperity; spreading confidence, warmth, vitality and peace. It also brought with it fresh air containing natural elements necessary for healthy sustenance and an uncharted vision of the future. This was the spiritual



column.

The study of this column, right from how it came into existence with the start of each day, how it grew from a small thin ray of light, and what it had to offer, made my mind traverse the world in between the sky and the earth; the roof of the Chamber, the Crystal and the base of Matrimandir – very enlightening, very captivating. Unlike the symmetry and stillness in the other twelve columns, the spiritual column was never still. Narrow at the top and engulfing the Crystal at the bottom of the Mother's Chamber, it kept growing, spreading light, radiating energy, absorbing and encompassing every single

thing.

With the increase in the intensity and vigour of this column, I could feel each and every marble slab inlaid in the walls of the Chamber come to life as if Mother had come to wake them up in order to perform the day's chores – to treasure the revelations of the devotees through their thoughts, feelings and expressions being let loose amidst them and perhaps measure, fathom and convey them to Her as She retired in the evening to assess, assimilate and chart a path for each a better tomorrow.

As I was cherishing these visions and revelations, I became aware of

the progress in formation of an umbrella of shadows of Sri Aurobindo's symbol spreading in four directions, on the ceiling of the Chamber. With the passage of time, three symbols remained subdued but the fourth grew into a very strong and clear shadow. This was not all. A closer and more detailed study revealed the existence of another shadow of another symbol in the background, which was projecting, encompassing, enriching all four symbols of Sri Aurobindo – it was that of the Mother.

As my eyes travelled downwards from the ceiling of the Chamber, beholding the play of the shadows

of the two great spiritual symbols of our times, I was in for a more spectacular treat. Lo and behold, clear image formations of the crystal, Sri Aurobindo's symbol stand and Mother's symbol disc could be seen dotting the marble walls of the inner chamber one, then two, then three.... equidistant from each other, visible only between alternate pillars and at the same level on all sides – a very profound, telling and enrapturing sight for those who could appreciate its beauty and imagery. My mind, I realized, had been journeying all over the Chamber, out of my body, savouring every single moment.

As my stipulated time of visit to the Mother's Chamber was coming to a close, I reluctantly started withdrawing myself from this saga of spiritual quest and revelations and re-entered the present materialistic world.

While preparing to leave the Mother's Chamber it dawned on me that the work of this column did not end here. A

part of it travelled deep down into the womb of Mother Earth to provide solace, comfort and rejuvenate those inhabiting her various strata, only to bloom back on her surface in the form of exotic flowers, trees and greenery before returning to the skies and start its journey all over again day after day, year after year – into eternity.

I eagerly look forward to my next visit and anxiously wait to find out what might be in store for me at Matrimandir. It is just possible that I may not get to 'see' beyond but I will always pray that I do.

How to Restore the Earth?

Paul Blanchflower reports on an environmental conference in Findhorn, Scotland in which Auroville participated

How to Restore the Earth? It is clearly a job that needs doing. Many people feel the need and yet the concept seems overwhelming due to its enormity. Even to stand up and say to the United Nations that this is the imperative and we think that the Twenty First Century should be dedicated to it would be considered by many to be a gargantuan task.

Alan Featherstone Watson from Findhorn has stood up to this challenge and begun the process, part of which was calling people from all over the planet together to gain an understanding of the reality and the possibilities. Alan has visited Auroville a few times over the past twenty years and is known to many as the man who produces the beautiful Trees for Life calendar, that can be seen in various houses of Auroville. It was here that he gained his inspiration to begin his project to restore the native woodlands of Scotland. So, when his vision widened to encompass the planet, he was keen that a delegation from Auroville participated in the "Restore the Earth" conference that he had called. Thus, along with 200 other folk from all over the planet, Joss, Anita and Paul went to Findhorn and took part, presenting the green work that has been ongoing here for the past thirty years.

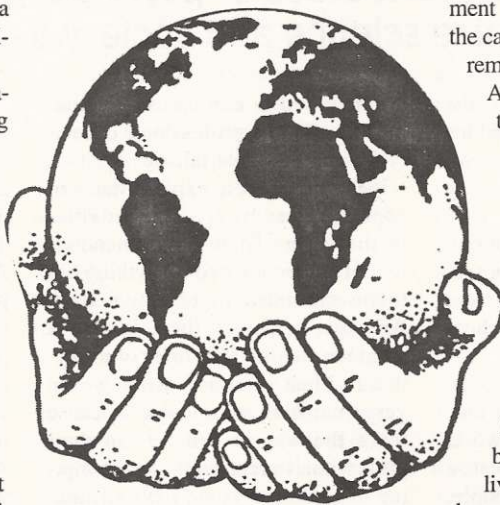
To address the topic of restoring the earth within the space of seven days was in itself a challenge. To pull all the components together, to gain a balance of perspectives and then to move towards an achievable outcome was an incredible feat. It was not achieved by Alan

alone but by a vast organizational team that ran the conference and managed to imbue the event with the love and compassion that Findhorn generates within its community. They were able to collect diverse and inspiring speakers from every corner of the planet and weave this together with songs and stories, drama and poetry, from the folklore and traditions of Scotland and abroad.

It began with a poet's tale of transformation, of renewal, which was everything that people hoped for, but this was only the beginning of the week's offering. From this followed facts and figures recounting the story that everyone knew, setting the stage with rates of extinction, percentage decline in forest areas, the rise in human population, descriptions of the bureaucratic process of the UN together with the cynical attitude of governments and corporations towards indigenous cultures and people. All this led to the realization that there has to be a shift in humanity's imperatives and perceptions if the task is to be achieved in the ever diminishing time frame. It was nice that the Auroville story was recounted on the first evening, and was consequently the first ray of hope that shone upon the conference floor. Everyone was visibly moved by the pictures of early Auroville and then the present day reality of Matrimandir surrounded by a sea of mature trees. For many pictures can be showed of recently planted forests of small saplings, but the product of thirty years enthusiasm and protection is the proof that it can be

done and sustained.

On each day of the conference, the frame was filled out, with each speaker adding another facet. The possibilities and successes of conservation in the vast wilderness of America, balanced the sad picture told by Vandana Shiva of multi-



national infiltration into the world of Indian agriculture. The practical steps that have been initiated in Vietnam post Agent Orange gave everyone a sense that even after the worst expression of human nature the possibility remains to renew and restore. This was a welcome counterweight to the reminder of the horrendous legacy that we leave to the planet in the form of nuclear waste. The story of the Gaviotas Community in Columbia was like hearing the tale of Auroville's long lost sibling, innovative people, working with

alternative technologies, and reforesting a depleted soil. And so it went on.

It was not only the speakers who had remarkable stories to tell, but each and every participant came with something to share, news from around the planet: Costa Rica and the movement to implement the Earth Charter; Australia and the campaign to restore Lake Peddar by removing a hydroelectric dam; South Africa where they are preparing for the Earth Summit; Terra del Fuego where successful attempts have been made to save forest from loggers; Iran where attempts are being made to restore the fragile forests of the arid regions. Young people burning with enthusiasm, beginning the processes that they hope and believe will really make a difference in their homeland. Inspiration from elders who have been involved for much of their lives, and within their own spheres have had an influence for the good, and people with the global vision reaching out to connect and empower folk, providing the channels and vessels for people to communicate and gain sustenance, aiming as high as they can, way beyond the limits that they should dare. As the days passed, within the magical web that Findhorn knows so well how to create, many possibilities and seeds emerged. Connections made, inspiration gained, and commonality created. From the initial feelings of being overwhelmed by the immensity of the task, a renewed sense of self respect in the work

that we are doing emerged. A realization that the task is far too massive for an individual to embark upon, but that out there, there are so many good souls plugging away at taking responsibility for their own work, and together there is at least one person covering each base. It is a matter of encouraging and supporting them, be it through lobbying governments about their carbon emissions or ordaining trees in Thailand to afford them protection, trying to convince business and governments to create earth restoration budgets or working on recycling projects in small Scottish towns. It really came to the fore that people are trying, and more importantly people are having fun doing it. Leading fulfilling lives, enjoying themselves without relying on the consumer society to provide the source of entertainment and satisfaction, and that in itself is the one sure sign that it is possible.

As the conference drew to a close, and attempts were made to see the collective step forward, a declaration was drafted and approved. People began to focus on the UN summit in Johannesburg this summer as a place to lobby the governments and try to bring a raised awareness to the situation. So the next steps have begun, and people are engaged in the task. Let's hope that the ears of the bureaucrats will open to the chorus of hope and joy that was generated at Findhorn this Easter, and that they can recognize the imperative of declaring the Twenty First century, the Century of Restoring the Earth.

EDUCATION

Of Languages and Learning

The Auroville Language Laboratory project makes progress

The Auroville Language Laboratory started taking a more concrete shape in 1999, when individuals giving language classes in Auroville came together to interact and share their experiences and ideas. Since then, the core group, comprising Tapas and Mita, (who are also the project coordinators), and Shankar, have worked diligently to realise this dream of establishing such a learning centre. Roger and Jyotiprem too have been part of the group since its formation, and a number of new language teachers have recently joined.

What inspired the members to begin such a project was essentially the Mother's statements on language. The Mother had indicated that English, French, Tamil and Sanskrit should be taught in Auroville. Therefore, much emphasis is given to those four languages at the Laboratory. "While English and French are presently international languages of communication," says Mita, "Tamil and Sanskrit are India's, and possibly the world's, most ancient ones."

Tapas, who offers French classes, works in such a way that learning is really an individual experience and students can study the lessons at their own pace. She uses a modern, multi-media teaching method, and students are welcome to come and watch instructive videos or borrow CD-roms of relevant lessons. A range of supplementary material is made available to students. "It's really about free progress," says she. Conversational French is offered by Elie.

Shankar has been giving Tamil classes

for many years, not only to the Last School students, but to all interested adults as well. He has written a book for learning spoken Tamil, which the Language Lab is in the process of editing and publishing. It will be supplemented with an audiocassette and CD. He evolved and developed this particular teaching method on the basis of his own day to day experiences in teaching the language.

Spoken Sanskrit camps, where the language is taught using an innovative and interactive method, are also organised by the Language Laboratory, in addition to classes in Vedic Chanting and Sanskrit Grammar led by Agni. English is taught by Jyotiprem, Roger, Auralee and Rani. Students include both Aurovilians and people from the surrounding region.

Although languages have been taught in Auroville throughout the years, it was mostly done in an ad hoc manner, and classes were mainly given in people's own homes, as there wasn't any public space available. These limitations pushed the language teachers into conceiving the building of a centre which would be solely dedicated to languages. Such a centre, unique in India, would dynamise and bring new energy into the language teaching and learning process.

After a series of meetings with Auroville language teachers and others involved with the project, architect Jana came up with a detailed plan of the projected Language Laboratory building. It consists of a two storied structure with half a dozen classrooms, teaching spaces opening out to outdoor patios, an

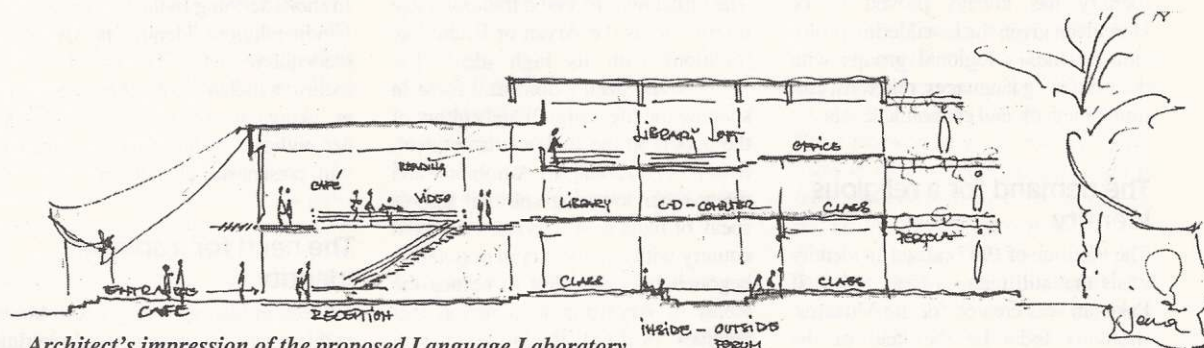
amphitheatre, computer rooms, as well as a modern, well equipped multimedia language resource centre and a library.

The last two years have involved solid work towards establishing sound foundations for the future Laboratory. This has meant expansion of activities from language classes to extensive research, communication, and production of

Devanagiri as well as the Roman alphabets. Explains Tapas: "The aim is basically to develop language teaching methods, focusing on visuals and sound, which are simple and interesting. In the same line, in the future we are thinking of developing such teaching methods in the form of flash cards and creative and lively games. These methods could then also be used in

Laboratory."

The building of the Language Laboratory, and the collecting of teaching materials, requires significant funding. In the beginning, mostly personal money was invested, then, funds started to be received from various individuals and organisations. Last year, thanks to the efforts of Cdr. N. Radhakrishnan, honorary fundraiser, an Indian Fortune



Architect's impression of the proposed Language Laboratory

quality language learning material. Research, mostly through the Internet, on the activities of other language laboratories throughout the world has led to the establishment of contact with various language institutes, within India and abroad, and this communication and interaction are proving to be enriching in many ways. Research into audio-visual and other language learning methods/aids, such as the Tomatis Electronic Ear, is also expanding the dimensions of the Laboratory.

Tapas is presently working on a software programme for learning the Tamil alphabet. In the future, there are plans to develop such a programme for the

schools in Auroville and Tamil Nadu." Another heartening aspect is the participation of Aurovilians in the elaboration of the Language Lab. In its first phase, about 125 Aurovilians contributed energy in one way or the other, whether it was translating the project proposal into more than 7 languages, proofreading the Spoken Tamil Book, or providing computer programs, CDs, books, etc.

"We aim at developing an atmosphere which gives people the opportunity to learn, to fulfill their very different need. We want to be able to provide for all," explains Mita. "Ideally, all the world's languages should have their place in the

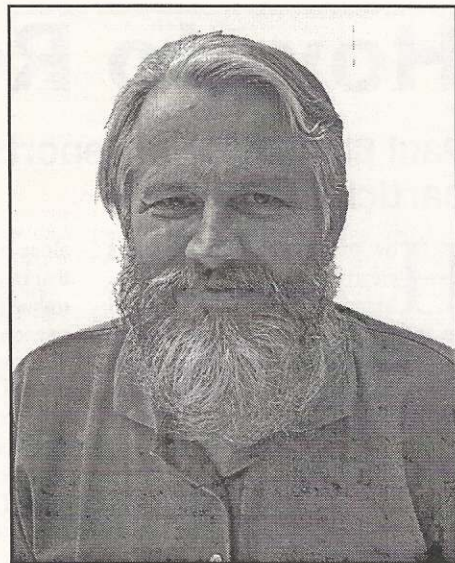
500 company became a significant sponsor of the Language Laboratory. The Dutch Foundation Stichting de Zaaier has also, for two consecutive years, given financial assistance to the project, allowing it to establish a base. Fundraising efforts towards the building and equipment continue.

"The work we do, with the different languages, allows us to really reach out, to touch so many people," says Mita, "Languages are the key towards human unity and a next step for Auroville. And the building of the actual Language Laboratory will be a big step in that direction."

Emmanuelle

Sri Aurobindo and the future of psychology

Matthijs Cornelissen is a physician who lives in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Last year he organized an international conference on Integral Psychology in Pondicherry. Subsequently he was invited to give talks in a number of Indian universities and institutions on the thought and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Here he reflects upon the present state of psychology and the changes that will eventually revolutionize science and society as a whole.



Psychology, as it is taught at Indian universities, is largely Western psychology.

Occasionally a lecture or side course on Indian philosophy or psychology is given, but it is always viewed as something of the past and of little relevance to today.

Recently, however, I was asked to give a two-day workshop on Sri Aurobindo for the Psychology faculty of Delhi University: it was the first time they had ever had a workshop devoted exclusively to Indian psychology. I had invited Soumitra Basu from Calcutta and Alok Pandey from Bangalore to join me, and together we spoke about those ideas of Sri Aurobindo that are directly relevant to psychology, like the planes and parts of the being, the evolution of consciousness, and the fact that an individual's motivation and growth are a reflection of the vast movement of nature.

Initially there was interest but also quite a bit of apprehension: many of the faculty members feared we might try to promote some narrowly sectarian viewpoints. But by the end of the first session the skepticism had dis-

appeared and during the rest of the workshop there was a tremendous atmosphere. The feedback we received from several participants was that this was the first time they had understood that Indian thought, as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo, could provide a meaningful and enriching framework for the whole of modern psychology.

Academic psychologists are very scared of stepping outside their narrow methodological framework. Practicing psychologists, because they are dealing with actual people, are much more flexible. Many organizational psychologists and psychotherapists, for example, hold alternative worldviews to the scientific paradigm. The strange thing is to what extent psychologists (and not just psychologists!) have two entirely different mind-sets. In their private lives they follow religious or spiritual practices, but in their professional capacity they try to be rigorously scientific and materialistic. This is not particular to India. It's a similar situation in the U.S. Many psychologists pursue some form of spiritual practice, yet even those who

are involved in consciousness studies take, in their professional capacity, an entirely materialistic approach – ie they attempt to explain states of consciousness by specific activities in the brain. There's a tremendous fear of subjectivity so everything has to be grounded in objective data. Amongst scientists there is also a great suspicion of 'theories of everything'. Most scientists work within very narrow parameters because that's the way to progress in their profession. In fact, anybody attempting to buck the system risks vilification.

In other words, many psychologists suffer from a form of schizophrenia: they adopt very different mind-sets in their professional and their private lives. This, of course, is actually a reflection of a schizophrenic society. And this is why I was so happy with the feedback we got from the Delhi workshop that Sri Aurobindo provides a solid framework, which in being both systematic and yet comprehensive, has the potential to bring these two mind-sets together. For while nothing in Sri Aurobindo's writings contradicts what physics

says, he makes clear that there are many other dimensions to reality and that the approach adopted by physics applies to but one segment.

The problem is that reading Sri Aurobindo represents, for many people, a very steep learning curve. Consequently there may be some place for mediators, those who can communicate something of his vision through forms that may be more immediately understandable. Actually, anybody who talks or writes about Sri Aurobindo and Mother is a mediator. The danger, of course, is deformation. This is why, for many years, I thought I shouldn't do it at all because the moment you compare what you write or say with what he has written you feel utterly foolish. One tries one's best to be precise and not to simplify things, but even now I'm sure that when I talk about Sri Aurobindo I often misrepresent him...

In the end, does it really matter if academics and practicing psychologists remain ignorant of Sri Aurobindo? After all, his force is working whether they are aware of it

or not. In this sense, the type of thing I'm doing in my workshop presentations is not causing any change in itself. It's rather an expression, one more form in which the change they have caused is taking shape.

I am quite sure that science will eventually recognize the role of consciousness. But that change will only take place when sufficient people have a true and sustained contact with their soul. What is needed is that consciousness is experienced as a power in itself, the 'big' thing, instead of being merely an epiphenomenon of our outer nature. Once that happens, it will become obvious that the existing theories of science are totally inadequate. In fact not just science, but the whole hierarchy of society will undergo a profound change when it is recognized that those with a higher consciousness are actually the most knowledgeable and effective members of society.

From a conversation with Alan

In search of a national identity

This essay discusses the need for a national identity from the perspective of religion and spirituality, which are indeed intertwined with the very concept of India as the warp and woof of a fabric.

15 August 2002 marks the 55th anniversary of India's independence from Great Britain. For a civilization that is believed to be almost 5,000 years old, 55 years is but a blink of an eye. Yet, the changes in India in these past five decades have been swift and momentous in that they seek to redefine the concepts of "India" and "Indian." The task of establishing a common Indian identity has always proved to be Herculean given the bewildering profusion of India's regional groups with their differing languages, religions, cultural practices, and economic levels.

The demand for a religious identity

The Partition of 1947 caused an identity crisis that still plagues India today: If Pakistan was created for the Muslims, shouldn't India be the land of the Hindus? Religious fundamental political parties seizing on this argument are increasingly demanding that India be a Hindutva or a nation for Hindus. Actual historical facts are conveniently forgotten as these religious fundamentalists view India as having a glorious Hindu past that was sullied by Muslim invasion which in turn led to the ignominy of the British colonization. The truth is that even prior to the Muslim invasions, there was a long period in Indian history where Buddhism was the predominant religion and Jainism also had an important say.

Hinduism itself started out not as a religion with a fixed doctrine but as a code

of life that was steeped in spirituality. Hindus are regarded as among the early inhabitants of India (historically, the land south of the river Indus) who had a common spiritual heritage in the Vedas and other allied scriptures. But the Hindus did not subscribe to a common identity. They distinguished themselves from each other on the basis of religious traditions and ritualistic practices such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Tantric etc. The millennia-old Vedic tradition (also referred to as the Aryan or Brahminic tradition) with its high ideals has undoubtedly been a dominant force in shaping the life, religion and culture of the people in the Indian subcontinent. Swami Vivekanda, Sri Aurobindo and many other towering spiritual figures speak of India as Aryatvarta – a sacred country with a noble Aryan population begotten by rishis. But to reduce the ideals of Aryatvarta to a nation that believes in Lord Rama or to turn Ayodhya, Lord Rama's purported birthplace, into some sort of Vatican City, as religious fundamentalists would have us do, is to demean the spiritual heritage of India and reduce its universal message to a monochrome definition.

Secondly, to define India solely on Aryan ideals on the claim that it was one of the earliest civilizations is to overlook the fact that antedating the Aryan civilization, or at least contemporaneous to it, there existed and still exist in many parts of India, tribal cultures. Called "adivasis," literally meaning the "first people," these tribes, and not the Aryans, are believed to be the indigenous people of India. Like else-

where in the world, these indigenous tribes have been oppressed by the dominant culture. Compared to the unparalleled spiritual heritage of the Aryans, the belief-systems of the adivasis could be dubbed as primitive. Yet to exclude them from an Indian identity or to reduce them to a minority in a Hindutva, is to disempower over 14 million people who were the original inhabitants of the country.

In short, defining India on the basis of a Hindu religious identity proves to be inadequate so far. The search for an inclusive Indian identity has to go deeper, taking into account India's evolution, her enduring values, and her struggle with present-day challenges.

The need for a spiritual identity

To seek guidance from Sri Aurobindo in this regard, it is clear that only spirituality can harmoniously unite all the diverse strands and competing identities of India. Sri Aurobindo's concept of India transcends that of its territorial boundaries. He worshipped India as a living Goddess, "the Bharata Shakti" that embodied spirituality on earth in the form of this subcontinent. In an inspiring message to the youth of India, Sri Aurobindo spells out India's mission thus: "as she [India] discovered the inner spiritual life for the individual, so now to discover for the race its integral collective expression and found for mankind its new spiritual and communal order."

But to insist that this spiritual identity

can be founded only in the Brahminic tradition of Hinduism is to miss the point. Of the Brahminic tradition, Sri Aurobindo says: "Modern Brahminism developed into existence at a definite period in history. It is now developing out of existence; its mission is done, its capacities exhausted..." What Sri Aurobindo cherishes is the unceasing quest for Truth that marked the Vedic tradition.

That India has in the past been guided by such a quest for Truth is revealed in its religious history: India is the birthplace of four major religions. Two other dominant world religions, Islam and Christianity have had an impact on Indian society not only through conquests but also through peaceful means. The Syrian Christians of Kerala have a religious tradition, centuries older than the colonizing powers and their missionaries of the 16th century. India has had a strong Sufi tradition from 15th century onwards when many Sufi saints escaping the fanaticism of Timur settled in the subcontinent. Over the centuries, persecuted Jews, Zoroastrians and more recently Tibetan Buddhists have similarly sought refuge in India. No other country in the world has embraced so many religious faiths. Indeed other than Hinduism no other religion in the world perhaps could have absorbed so many spiritual traditions.

These diverse religious doctrines and communities were not confined to separate enclaves, but grew by a mutual search for Truth and cultural assimilation. Many Hindu spiritual texts including some of the Upanishads were born

out of debate and discussion with Buddhists. Shia Muslims and the Bhakti tradition in Hinduism similarly influenced each other. In Kashmir despite the militancy, there persists an enduring cultural and spiritual identity called Kashmiriyat that Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists subscribe to. Indeed all over India, and ironically, particularly in Gujarat, there are hundreds of communities that are pluralistic simultaneously being Hindu and Muslim, Hindu and pagan. All this speaks of a spiritual outlook in India that transcends narrow religious definitions.

Is India and the world witnessing today the dying throes of religion, even as thousands of people are being murdered in the name of religion? The Mother says, "the old world...was in a characteristic way the age of gods and therefore the age of religions." This needs to be replaced by the spiritual harmony of the Supramental Consciousness where "all life will be the expression, the flowering in forms of the Divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will be no more what men now call the gods." Sri Aurobindo and the Mother deemed India with its ancient spiritual heritage capable of leading the world to this higher Truth. And by doing so, India can secure her own existence. For only a wide, universal concept of spirituality can give definition to a national identity that harmonizes and unites all of India's diversity.

Bindu

Building bridges

There are many photographs of Mother, few of Sri Aurobindo. When Cartier-Bresson photographed him in 1950 they were the first photos taken of him for almost thirty years. This, of course, was a result of Sri Aurobindo's decision to seclude himself to concentrate upon bringing down the supermind..

One consequence of the dearth of photographs is that Sri Aurobindo's image has tended to be defined by how he appeared in those final portraits: exalted, detached, Olympian. Even the liveliness of his correspondence and later conversations as revealed by, among others, Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, has failed to supplant that magisterial image – "Lonely his days and splendid like the sun" – which is further reinforced by the uncanny resemblance between those final photographs and traditional representations of God the Father in Christian iconography.

Does this matter? Some would argue that it is a positive advantage as it leads us to approach him with the proper *gravitas*, reminding us of how much he exceeds our understanding. Yet I believe there's a considerable downside to this. For not only does it sell short his multi-facetedness and the playful aspect of his nature, but it may also lead us to view him as a 'singularity', untrammelled by the tides, emotions and preoccupations of ordinary humanity and thus, perhaps, less immediately relevant to lives lived under the shadow of a mortgage or the break-up of a relationship.

If one adds to this the difficulty even native English speakers have in understanding his extended Latinate constructions and etymologically-derived archaisms – to say nothing of the many-sidedness, subtlety and depth of his thought – one can understand why Sri Aurobindo's worldwide fan club is not exactly overpopulated.

"And a very good thing", goes the orthodox response, "for he was quite clear he was not interested in beginning any mass movement. Moreover, those whom he calls will be lead to him by one means or another, so we don't have to worry about making him better known." Well, maybe. But, having used the same argument myself, I'm aware it can also be used as a guise for lazy thinking. The assumption, for example, that it's all taken care of by a higher power so we don't need to do anything undervalues the importance of each one of us as potential agents in the process. If someone ends up in Auroville because he saw a photo of Sri Aurobindo on the wall of a dusty teashop in Madhya Pradesh, it's at least partly because somebody somewhere took the trouble of putting an image of Sri Aurobindo on a calendar.

The whole issue of communicating Sri Aurobindo and Mother to a wider audience is a complex one. Mother herself made a careful distinction between information and publicity.

Publicity does not discriminate between the persons to whom one speaks. Publicity means addressing a public which cannot understand. What we try to do is to carry the Light where it can be understood and received. It is a question of discernment and choice. It is a question of selection: not to spread the thing without discernment. It is to choose which milieu, which people, which conditions can understand and to act there only. In publicity, to make the ideas comprehensible, one lowers them while we

keep our teachings at the height...The selection then takes place of itself. It is the comprehension which makes the selection.

Well and good. However, such guidance appears to have been interpreted in a way which may not have been exactly what Mother intended. For example, the vast majority of books on Sri Aurobindo and Mother are overtly devotional. This makes for a ready readership among devotees, but tends to leave the uninitiated reader out in the cold, contemplating a cosy club of believers warming their hands at the fire of their faith. In other words, there are no bridges, no ropes flung out to help the inquisitive across the chasm of doubt. Instead they are confronted with a host of cast-iron givens. Sri Aurobindo and Mother are avatars. They are battling the hostile forces. They are precipitating the next stage of human evolution. Take it or leave it.

Partly, no doubt, this uncompromising approach is born of a wish to "keep our teaching at the height". Hence the copious quotations. But how to get non-devotees to the point where they want to read them?

Two bridges spring to mind. The first is the use of language and forms which are more immediately understandable by the modern reader. No doubt, the primary texts will remain primary, irreplaceable. But it should be possible to communicate something of their essence to readers unfamiliar or uneasy with terms like 'the Divine', 'Supermind' and 'cellular transforma-

tion' without dilution or cheap popularization. A recent article in a U.S. magazine is a case in point. Entitled "Why Sri Aurobindo is cool" and catchily subtitled "Even dead gurus kick ass", it conveys a surprising amount of information about Sri Aurobindo, Mother and the descent of the supramental in language understandable by members of even the hip-hop generation.

The second bridge is, perhaps, more controversial. For it requires the writer about Mother and Sri Aurobindo to bring themselves more completely into the frame. Many of those who write about Sri Aurobindo and Mother appear to have emerged from the womb as full-blown devotees. With the possible exception of Satprem, there's never a moment of doubt, never a questioning of the Masters, never a sense of the writer being a three-dimensional being, someone who catches colds, gets angry, frustrated, swears, falls down and makes a fool of themselves, of someone who sometimes makes remarkable discoveries in seemingly the most unpropitious of circumstances. When did you last read of someone suddenly comprehending something about the new consciousness while buttering toast, changing the baby's diapers or even – God forbid – making love?

Does this never happen? Or, more likely, is it edited out as being somehow illusory or unworthy of the great topic at hand? For here, I suspect, we stumble upon a number of tacit yet seminal assumptions made by writer-devotees, the most important of which

is that only Sri Aurobindo and Mother have had the major experiences of transformative evolution. Secondly, and allied to this, is the assumption that such experiences can only occur in the manner already described by Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Nobody seems to conceive of the possibility, for example, of a wino sleeping on the banks of the Thames being brushed by the wing of the new consciousness.

But exactly why does this sound so outrageous? Partly it's because it's almost impossible, given Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's descriptions of the enormous travails they had to undergo, to imagine ordinary mortals stumbling upon even the hem of the supermind as if by chance. Yet Mother has pointed out that the new force is now permeating everything, everywhere, and that its future working is unpredictable (she herself was surprised by hearing of the experiences of 'quite ordinary' people which were similar to her own). But there's another reason why I think it's difficult for many sadhaks to conceive of 'ordinary' people being in some way involved in the transformative yoga. And that is because, I suspect, there is an enormous yet unacknowledged element of elitism in this yoga, reflected in a feeling that we are the chosen few, that the yoga is not meant for the masses and that here (the Ashram or Auroville) is the only place it's happening and will happen.

You know, we may just be in for a big surprise...

Alan

The influence of Sri Aurobindo

continued from page 1

All religions participated in this. All amalgamated into one unity which is the cultural unity of India expressed through dance, music, art, architecture, literature – the fundamental rhythm of the literature of India whether it be Tamil or Hindi or Sanskrit or Bengali. It is this fact which has to be brought out very forcefully today.

How successful have you been in communicating Sri Aurobindo's ideas in India?

It's been a painful experience for me. Sri Aurobindo wrote a very small article entitled "The Brain of India". In it he said that what India needs most urgently is brain, brain-power. Unfortunately for the last 100 years if there is one thing which has not been developed to the required degree in this country it is brain-power. The robust intellectuality which was a very important characteristic of India has not been allowed to manifest because the scheme of education introduced by Macaulay in the last century has denationalized the nation. (Baron Macaulay was instrumental in advocating the spread of Western knowledge through the medium of English in Indian educational establishments eds.) Our lack of intellectuality can also be ascribed to the influence of some of the leaders of India who chose to influence and awake the

masses through mass media and mass language, and to a mindset which questions the usefulness of any study which does not contribute directly to economic development. The result? If you speak to Indians today on any difficult subject at a deeper level, most of the audience will begin to yawn. If you talk superficially, you'll be applauded. This is why the influence of Sri Aurobindo has not permeated more, because to read Sri Aurobindo requires tremendous brain power.

How can this situation be changed?

First of all we need to create at least a hundred expert exponents of Sri Aurobindo who can expound him in the true light. Not in the religious, dogmatic kind of way which many disciples and devotees adopt, but as a thought movement. This requires some preparation. Mother once told me, at a time when I was teaching Sri Aurobindo in the Ashram school, that a teacher should not be an intermediary between the student and Sri Aurobindo. Rather, Mother said, a student should be given the entire background to an issue, the problems should be pointed out and then the student should be encouraged to find out the answers to those problems in Sri Aurobindo's writings. I think the hundred experts, in addition to being able to communicate with different audiences in different ways, should have this capacity – to take their students or audiences to deeper and

deeper levels, and then give them one or two lines from Sri Aurobindo as a key. Afterwards those who are interested will study on their own.

Secondly, we need to prepare new educational materials which will assist people to get to grips with the essential problems. Thirdly, those who have a good understanding of Sri Aurobindo should participate fully in the development of science, philosophy, and all areas of critical knowledge in India so that Sri Aurobindo's influence can percolate into these movements of thought.

Fourthly, our own experimentation in the Ashram and Auroville has to be exemplary. It's not merely that India needs successful models to emulate. It's also because people who have passed through great difficulties and arrive at solutions are the vehicles through which great forces of thought are released. Unfortunately this is not happening at present. We often tend to say in Auroville 'Oh this is not possible, we've not reached that level, it will happen in due course'. This is entirely inadmissible. Our path is a steep path, but Mother will not propose something which is not implementable. It requires a higher level of consciousness, but that can be developed. We have extraordinary conditions here. No other group in the world has the possibility of experimentation that we have got here.

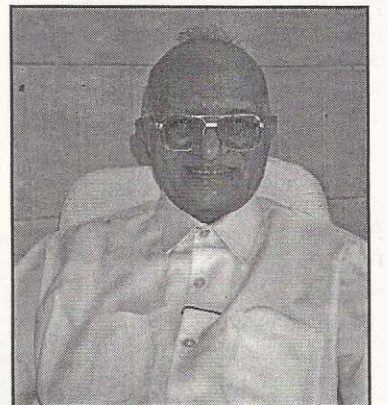
The connection between Auroville and India is very intimate. If we don't take up the work Mother calls us to

do, the imperfections will invade us. Even the provisions of the Foundation Act will not save us from the various forces in India and the West which are bound to invade, and which have begun to invade, this little place. Therefore we are at a critical juncture, and we have to succeed. If India is to move forward, it can only move forward only on the basis of the example which Auroville can provide.

How optimistic do you feel about a new movement, a new consciousness prevailing, both in Auroville and India as a whole? Will we have to go through many difficulties before it is established?

I'm guided by what Mother told me in 1973. When the Dalai Lama visited, I had the privilege of going with him to the Mother. He put a question: according to him, the ideal would be if communism could be combined with Buddhist compassion. Could this happy dream be realized? It will be done, she said, but if all goes on as it is going now, it will take hundreds of years. However, if the supramental manifests it will happen much more quickly. Then I interjected, 'But the supramental force is now working very powerfully'. Mother said yes, but then she reminded me of a message she had given me a few days before:

Before dying, falsehood rises in full swing. Still people understand only



the lesson of catastrophe. Will it have to come before they open their eyes to the truth? I ask an effort from all so that it has not to be. It is only the Truth that can save us; truth in words, truth in action, truth in will, truth in feelings. It is a choice between serving the Truth or being destroyed.

This message has become my guiding force. I simply say to myself, the supramental force is working very powerfully, therefore a new turning point has been achieved in world history. If falsehood is rising in full swing it means now the time has come for it to die. From that time onwards I've observed falsehood after falsehood first rising then dying. And this has been my reading of the whole history of India, of Auroville, the Ashram, and of my personal life. So my answer is I have great optimism: in the inner condition of my life I feel very happy because I have no doubt that the supermind is at work.

From an interview by Alan and Abha

Passage into a New Age

Bhavana reviews the third volume of Maggi Liddchi-Grassi's retelling of an Indian epic

Maggi's third volume retelling the Mahabharata is, like the third stage of life according to the Vedic civilization, Vanaprashtha, which it depicts, full of searching and learning. Of the Mahabharata it has been said, "Whatever cannot be found in the Mahabharata, doesn't exist." In the scope of its descriptions of the great war at Kurukshetra where the great kings of the "Treta Yuga" massacred each other, clearing the field for the transition into the "Kali Yuga," all aspects of life and human relationships as well as divine personalities are touched upon. All life is there, and if all life is yoga, this is a textbook of yoga.

Maggi's *Great Golden Sacrifice* serves as a book of transition between two different ages. The original Mahabharata was written thousands of years ago at the threshold of a new age when the strengths and weaknesses of a society led and dominated by brave and dedicated heroes crumbles. The heroes are exposed 'in their underwear as well as their armour, in their weaknesses as well as their strengths. The black and white

colour-coding blurs, and villains and heroes are revealed to be at certain moments interchangeable. At the end of the age of heroes, they all lie bloody and dead on the field of Kurukshetra, or are reduced to caricatures by their own perfidy.

Maggi speaks to us about the passage into a New Age, through the singing of these old heroes, their bravery and their skills as martial artists, their stubborn adherence to the Dharma, a code of conduct which reinforces reverence for the highest ideals of social conduct – courage and loyalty to the eldest, keeping one's word, never telling a lie, love and obedience to parents, striving for perfection, strength and victory. In two previous volumes she has told the story leading up to the battle, how the five brothers, the Pandavas, supported by Krishna, are mistreated by their cousins and deprived of their royal inheritance, and then involve all the kings of Bharat (India) in the battle for right. This third volume, which begins after the war has ended, is told through the eyes of Arjuna. Arjuna has been the arch-hero during the whole story. He has won the hearts of all – his archery

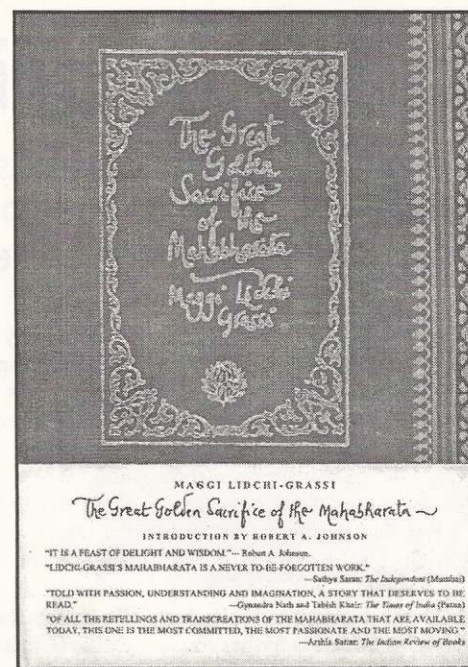
teachers, his mother, his brothers, Draupadi and his other wives, the subjects, and especially Krishna, who is the Narayana to his Nara, the divine and human aspects of the avatar coming to usher in the new age. He has not only excelled in archery and the martial arts, but through devotion and austerities won the special magical weapons, "astras" which work on the occult planes. He is the son of the king of the Gods, Indra, and he has visited him in heaven and helped him win battles there. He is the perfect hero.

Maggi's retelling gives great emphasis to the third stage of life, when the major accomplishments of adulthood are completed. Families have been made, children grown, battles fought and victories won – then comes the tasks of maturity, the challenge to accept the post-peak decrease of physical prowess as well as loss of fame and recognition. Arjuna finds himself questioning accepted customs and rituals, becoming part of the evolving and reforming of a new culture that sees the inner meaning of sacrifice. As he moves through the tasks before him – rescuing the clans

of Krishna after the deluge of Dwaraka and installing new young princes on thrones emptied by the bloody battle – he reflects on many of the puzzles of his life, and comes haltingly to understand the deeper meanings of the paradoxes of his experiences so far.

Maggi's language is poetry, her imagery is vivid, her style fresh and compelling, and she weaves in Sri Aurobindo's translations of the Vedas like an ancient Greek chorus. To cite an example, the sun, "Maker of Day", which is worshipped as he appears each morning to shine on the changing world, illumines Arjuna and his brothers as they depart again from the comforts and pleasures of the royal palace, this third and last time to wander in the forest among the trees and the sages and take in the subtler, rarer learnings of vanaprashtha.

This is a story of Arjuna's intimations of a world where ritual and ceremony



give emphasis to a daily life noble and consecrated to That, which is beyond the highest, interpenetrated in all, awaiting our recognition and willingness to surrender and be led by it. Death as a reunion with That which has led one's days always, and continues, resplendent from life to life, containing us as it dreams us forward.

The Great Golden Sacrifice of the Mahabharata
Kolkata: Writer's Workshop.
HB: Rs. 400/- PB: Rs. 300/-

"Freed Of Frontiers"

Roger samples the diversity of India's spiritual traditions in Peter Heehs' new anthology

The unparalleled richness, vitality and vigour of spiritual experience on the Indian sub-continent – stretching back many thousands of years and still vibrant today – is well represented in the new anthology: *Indian Religions: The spiritual traditions of South Asia*, edited by Peter Heehs.

"Foundations", the first of the five sections of the book, covers the early classical sources of Indian spiritual experience and thought. This section contains extracts from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Pali canons of Theravada Buddhism and Jainism, Patanjali and the Samkya system of yoga. Further sections cover the Gita and Puranas, the medieval bhakti movements, Tantra, and the related Vajrayana traditions of Mahayana Buddhism, Kashmiri Shaivism, Indo-Persian Sufism, and a generous section devoted to modern poets and mystics.

The editor does not divide the texts monolithically according to their religious tradition but chooses a more subtle presentation, classifying the material as either orthodox, heterodox, classical, popular, public or even transgressive. By so doing he successfully underlines and brings out how parallel developments have occurred, and continue to occur within different religious traditions. The editor highlights the importance placed on direct experience of liberation, perfection, or spiritual realization by different traditions and the texts have been chosen with refreshing emphasis on the subjective and experiential nature of religious experience. The editor's notes and introductions on individual authors or subjects, whether on the different schools of yoga, or the historical background to religious traditions, are concise and elucidating and provide essential historical

and contextual information.

If the texts from the early classical phase of Indian spirituality were mainly preserved in Sanskrit and Pali, mystical and religious experience have, over the last 1500 years, been expressed through a wide variety of local vernacular languages – many, if not most, of which are still spoken today. Of particular interest in this anthology is the generous selection of the vernacular Bhakti movements of devotional mysticism that flowered in different areas of the subcontinent over a

period of six hundred years. "Bhakti was born in the Tamil country and attained maturity in Karnataka to then migrate North in the later Middle Ages," writes the editor. This movement starts with the songs of the Shaivite saints – wandering mystics and poets of sixth century Tamil Nadu – some of whose songs are still sung or broadcast in temples of the South today. In these poems of devotion to Shiva religious emotion based on a personal relationship with the God is

allied with a keen local sense of nature and place. The influence of early poets like Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar (quoted below), was such that Buddhism and Jainism soon all but disappeared from Tamil Nadu.

"O madman on whose locks rests the crescent moon
Sovereign Lord
Of grace abounding
Never more
Will I forget you
You are enshrined
in my heart and
in my mind.
Father
No more can I deny you
To you I have surrendered."

The imagery of the Vaishnava poets of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh – a number of whom were women – is more erotic, and express moods of absence, nostalgia and longing for the loved one, as in the 12th century women poet Mahadeviyakka:

"He bartered my heart,
Looted my flesh,
Claims as tribute
My pleasure
Took over
All of me.

I'm the woman of love
For my lord, white as jasmine."

Devotion to Krishna or the dark goddess Kali characterised the Bhakti movement that was to flourish from the late Middle Ages onwards in Eastern India, particularly in Bihar and Bengal. It is represented with selections from, amongst others, Vidyapati, Govindadas and Chandiddas. Many of these poems celebrate the love of Krishna and Radha in sensual terms as in the following extract from 14th century court poet and scholar Vidyapati.

"Freeing my skirt,
He snatches at my garland.
My downcast mind
Is freed of frontiers,
Though my life is held
In the net of his love.
I lose my body
At his touch
And long to check
And grant his love."

This tradition of devotional poetry was to continue well into the 18th and 19th century when Ramprasad in a hymn to the goddess Kali exclaims:

"A man has come to me from a country where there is no night,
Rituals and devotions have all grown
profitless for me.
My sleep is now broken: how can I sleep any more?
For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of yoga."

The modern section dedicated to twelve mystics and four poets provides, along with informative introductions to their – frequently unconventional – lives and thought, an eclectic selection from the writings and sayings of many great spiritual figures of the last 150 years. As the editor remarks, "A striking feature of nineteenth and twentieth century spirituality has been the appearance of mystics who disclaim any connection with organised religion." The section starts with Ramalinga Swami and Ramakrishna Paramahansa in the 19th century, and goes on to include Yogananda's description of his experience of cosmic consciousness taken from his famous *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and conversations of Anandamayi Ma and Ramana Maharshi with their disciples. There are also extracts from the early speeches and later notebooks of Jiddu Krishnamurti, parables and sayings of the benevolent Shirdi Sai Baba – a mysterious fakir who lived in an abandoned mosque and whose popular appeal continues to transcend artificial

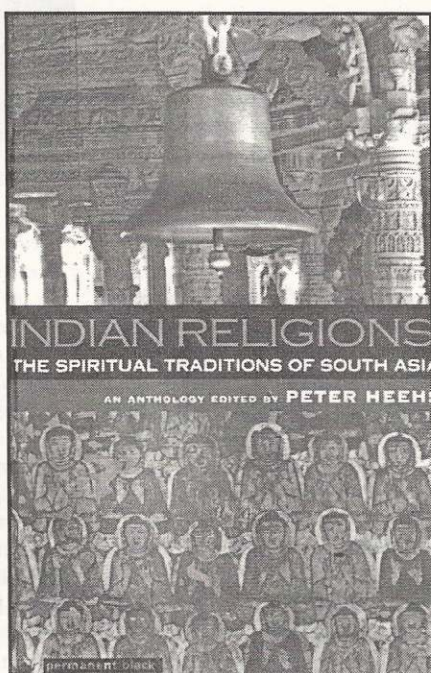
religious divides – Nisargadutta Maharaj, a Jnani who ran a "beedi" (tobacco) shop in Bombay, and Swami Ramdas from Kerala. Sri Aurobindo is represented by his early Uttapara speech, an extract from the Life Divine, as well as by selections from his letters on yoga to his disciples and four sonnets, inspired by or referring to his spiritual experiences in the thirties. Indeed this modern spirit of spirituality is far from being divorced from a scientific sense of objectivity. It is both wonderful and inspiring to read first-hand descriptions from modern yogis of their spiritual experiences and realisations. For instance, Sri Aurobindo when asked by a disciple what happens when the human consciousness is replaced by the divine consciousness replies:

"One feels a perpetual calm, perpetual strength, one is aware of infinity and lives not only in infinity but also in eternity. One feels immortality and does not care about the death of the body. And then one has the consciousness of the One in all. Everything becomes the manifestation of the Brahman. For instance, as I look round this room, I see everything as the Brahman. No, it is not mere thinking, it is a concrete experience. Even the wall, the books are the Brahman. I see you no more as Dr. Manilal but as the Divine living in the Divine. It is a wonderful experience."

In fact, reading through this last section of the anthology one is left with the feeling that it is only a dynamic, world inclusive and life-embracing spirituality that can redeem our so-called civilisation.

Roger

Indian Religions: The Spiritual Traditions of South Asia. An Anthology edited by Peter Heehs, Permanent Black: New Delhi. Distributed by Orient Longman 619 Pages, Rs 795



The Courtesan and the King

Why would a sixteenth century courtesan build a water-tank for Pondicherry?

King Deva Raja (1509-1530) had large swathes of South India under his sway and he enjoyed travelling through the different parts of his kingdom. On one of his tours through the South he was staying near present-day Villianur, 8 kms west of Pondicherry. He was returning to his residence at dusk when he passed what he took to be an illumined temple or shrine from where wonderful scents such as perfumed sandalwood emanated. A devout man, he dismounted with his attendant and offered prayers on the spot. A passer-by however soon informed him that the place was not a temple but the house of a courtesan by the name of Aayi who was getting ready for her evening's work. The king was furious at his mistake and in his anger ordered that the house be demolished and a tank dug in its place. Aayi implored the king's forgiveness and offered to do the task

herself. Having obtained the king's forgiveness, she built the tank with her own earnings.

Hundreds of years later, the French residents of Pondicherry were suffering from a shortage of safe drinking water. The French Emperor Napoleon III sent an engineer to Pondicherry to try and find solutions to the problem. Monsieur Lamaisse, the engineer, conducted a thorough study of the village tanks and wells of the region. He finally settled on a tank called Aayikulam in the village of Muthirayarpalayam five kilometers west of the town at the time (near Tattanchavadi today) as the starting point of a canal that was then dug and which runs all the way to near where the central park of Pondicherry lies today. The original Sixteenth century

LEGENDA

REMOTISSIMO TEMPORE, KICHNARAYER CUM APPAZIAYER MINISTRO VESPERTINUM ITER FACIENS, AYES BAYADERÆ DOMUM SPLENDIDISSIMÆ ILLUMINATAM PROXIME ASPEXIT ET TEMPLUM ESSE CREDENS, ADORAVIT.

ERRORIS. PAULO POST CONSCIUS, DOMUM EVERTI JUSSIT. ET STAGNUM IN IPSO LOCO CAVARI QUOD MOUTREPALEONIS STAGNUM ET PUTEUM DE SUO INSTITUENDI ET NOMEN FONTIBUS IMPONENDI BAYADERÆ AYES SUPPLICITER DEPRECANT VENIA DATA EST.

FATUR QUOQUE BANGARVAIKAL CANALEM BANGARI BAYADERAM ET BAHUR STAGNUM IPSIUS SOROREM SINGARI BAYADERAM EXCAVASSE.

Latin plaque in Pondicherry's central park recounting the legend of Aayi

inhabitants of the village were Telegu, employed by the Vijayanagar kings to defend their frontiers. The engineer was then informed of the origins of the tank. The legend of Aayi so charmed the Emperor when he heard of it that he commanded that a monument be erected in her honour in the centre of Pondy's central park. Plaques in Tamil and latter-day Latin

recount the story and also mention the name of Bangari, another courtesan of the time, who along with her sister Singari, also built tanks and wells. The Aayi monument in the Central Park used to contain a statue of a woman with a pot from which water used to flow. However, that has since, strangely enough, disappeared.

Roger

COMMUNITY

Football fever

In June this year, the four-year cyclical football fever hit the community again with the the World Cup tournament. Three times a day work had to wait while Aurovilians, men in particular, had a more important thing to do: cheering on their favorite football teams. . .

Football mania in Auroville started in 1990 when the World Cup took place in Italy. Enthusiasts installed a TV set at the Visitor's Center and saw Germany beat Italy in that year's final. Four years later, a very dry interval for football fans, Samriddhi

screened the biggest football event. In Diego's old house, an aerial antenna on the windmill, one battery and two solar panels with a small 200 watt inverter, brought the 1994 World Cup to Auroville. A handful of devoted fans stayed up until around 4 am, when the final whistle sent them to bed.

Finally Brazil won the coveted Cup and put an end to those exhausting nights.

Next time round, in 1998, Diego had a bigger house in Samriddhi and a new color TV set. This time it was Doordarshan, the national TV channel, that broadcast the event which culminated in France

booting out all the opposition, including world champions Brazil in the final.

This year football fever raged more intensely than ever. TV sets had been put up in Aspiration and a new youth community called Miracle, which had a hand-assembled Russian dish. The Aurigal Pizzeria opened their restaurant the whole day so that anybody could drop in and watch the games which took place at 11 a.m., 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. The Pizzeria hosted a big crowd, including screaming babies and kids. Juergen, a German Aurovillian, put up his video beamer and a big screen to bring the audience closer to the action.

The only drawbacks this year were the constant power cuts. Sometimes the cable operator didn't transmit the signal for some time, and frustrated faces sat staring at the black screen until the signal was back, desperately hoping no goals had been scored in the meantime. On one occasion time it took so long for the connection to come

back that some really impatient people rushed to Pondicherry to the Auroville-owned Satsanga Restaurant, which had their own cable connection, to see the last eight minutes of the quarter-final game between Germany and Turkey.

Meanwhile, Diego and his friends had squatted an empty house in Arya. The caretakers, Eugene and Marijke, were out of town. As Diego recalls: "They allowed us to use the downstairs room, but of course we had to leave the place clean. The cable had to be reconnected for Rs 650. Actually at the end, the costs were Rs 3,000. This included furniture repair, as Patrick collapsed onto a bench and broke it. We had a steady crew of fans who watched every game and for the final we had a full house with 39 watchers. All cheerfully contributed to the costs."

Brazil's win saw some sad Germans, two smiling South Americans and one man with one tearful and one laughing eye - Peter Holl from Germany who is married to Eliane from Brazil. When he called her up in Brazil after the game, he heard through the phone the roaring noise of the celebration in the Brazilian streets. Says Peter, "For me the World Cup was a world party. The one positive world event that has happened in the last months."

In Auroville, every four years, football gives a tangible reality to the ideal of human unity as Aurovilians of 30 or more nationalities jostle for space around a TV set, root for their national teams, and yet, regardless of who wins, celebrate every goal and the final victory. The stage is already being set for the next World Cup in Germany with Diego and Bobby promising "a big screen with our own Auroville cable system".

Julietta

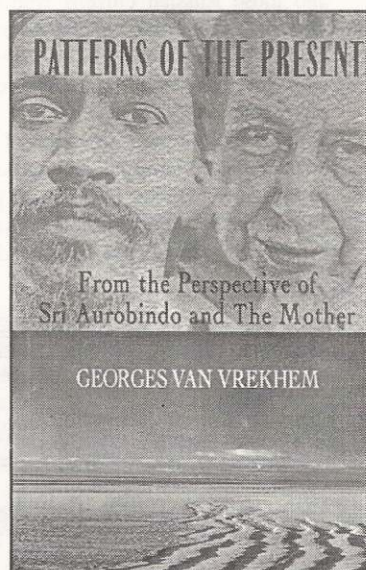
Patterns of the Present

The latest book from Georges Van Vrekhem, the author of Beyond Man

A companion volume to *Overman: The Intermediary Between The Human and The Supramental Being* by the same author, *Patterns of the Present* is a profound and enjoyable account of the present situation of mankind and the world it lives in. On the threshold of the new millennium, countless pages have been written on the meaning of our world and its possible development. The conclusion in most cases was depressing - man would become an automaton in a sci-fi world. The author puts the present situation of humanity in the perspective of the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The result is a positive interpretation of the global situation.

The meaning of history, the globalisation of our planet, the values represented by East and West, their meeting and reciprocal fertilisation, the future evolution of mankind - all these topics and more are presented here in a fresh, often surprising, perspective.

Patterns of the Present: From the perspectives of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother
New Delhi: Rupa
Rs. 150/-



In brief

On the road

Auroville's Future is hosting roving exhibitions in selected Indian and European cities till September. A part of their City-Networking project with Asia Urbs, the exhibition profiles innovative urban management practices of Asian and European cities including that of Auroville.

Village self-help project

The Central Government has agreed on a grant for a 'handicraft village', comprising of a sales centre surrounded by manufacturing units. The Collector is in charge of finding an appropriate location. For these projects, government (peremboke) land is normally used. The sites proposed included peremboke land near the Matrimandir and nearby the Visitors Reception Centre. After much negotiation, there appears to be a tentative agreement to locate this project near Siddharta Farm, in between the village of Edayanchavadi and the Reception Centre.

Bommayarpallayam School

To cater to the needs of children in the village of Bommayarpallayam, a school under the Kuyilapallayam School Trust has been started by Kireet, a Dutch Aurovillian who lives in the vicinity of Bommayarpallayam. The school, located in a mango grove, currently comprises kindergarten and first grade, but it is envisioned that in the future, it will offer primary-level education.

Art Exhibitions

J. Jegatheesan, an award-winning artist from Pondicherry, recently mounted a series of water-colour paintings at an exhibition in Pitanga. Samya, an Auroville artist, also displayed her work in pastels in an exhibition called "Looking at the Soul" at Pitanga.

Mayaura, another accomplished Auroville artist, had a grand opening of her painting exhibition at Allaince Française in Pondicherry on 25th July. Stefano, another Aurovillian, played his music at the opening.

Land Fund News

In their last newsletter, the Auroville Land Group appeals for donations to purchase the remaining 40 acres of land in the Cultural Zone. Some of these 40 acres which are located along the road are vital for the consolidation and development of the Cultural Zone.

National Basketball Tournament

Since the early years, basketball has been a passion for the youth of Auroville. There are over a hundred registered basketball players in Auroville who belong to ten teams that are affiliated to the Pondicherry Basketball Association. This affiliation allows Auroville players to participate in regional and national level tournaments. This summer Auroville, in collaboration with the Pondicherry Basketball Association, organized an All India Invitational Basketball Tournament in which over a dozen top national teams participated. The result: a breathtaking display of basketball prowess, the likes of which had never been seen on Auroville courts before.

Departed

Valentine, a Russian Aurovillian, passed away on 23 June at 87 years of age. Valentine joined Auroville five years ago and is survived by his son, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who are all Aurovilians.

Traversing the past with Nergez

Nergez, a long-term Aurovilian, shares her life with Abha

Few Aurovilians would have experienced a time in India when a meal in a Chinese restaurant cost less than five rupees and a haircut in an upper-rung salon only three. Not many would remember the time when three ships, docked in the Bombay harbour, with one of them carrying cotton, ammunition, and surprisingly enough, ninety gold bricks, exploded in a literal shower of gold. One brick came flying through the roof of the Motiwallah family home, narrowly missing Nergez's head as she stood day-dreaming in the gallery. For her father, the head of the Parsi joint family, his daughter's life had been spared by a divine miracle. The 22 carat gold brick, with the Bank of England stamp on it and worth about 90,000 rupees was of little value in his eyes. The following morning, amidst much neighbourhood speculation, he returned it to the police who came to pick it up in the official van. The year was 1944, Nergez was twenty-three, and there were still twenty-eight years to go before she met the Mother and decided to join Auroville.

Following the curve of Nergez's life is much like traversing a multitude of terrains, some smooth, others uneven. What is remarkable is the spectrum of personas – the traditional Parsi girl, the fun-loving college student, the sophisticated and glamorous hostess, the insatiable traveller, and the undaunted peace-seeker – that she has inhabited over the

years, dropping a few as she ventured further and further away from the closed circle of Parsi culture towards the realization of her truer self. The composite picture of Nergez, however, would not emerge if any of these pieces of her self were negated or lost. They are reminders of the transformative process that she, like countless others, has undergone, before reaching a state of contentment and unity within.

Born on November 3, 1921, Nergez's travels began in 1951 when she visited Europe with a group of seven friends from Bombay. With a budget of 5000 rupees each, they travelled through England, Scandinavia, France, Switzerland and Italy. In the years that followed she continued to reside in Bombay where she learnt Hatha Yoga under B.K.S. Iyengar, and became one of the first teachers at a professional level. Marriage came later in the 1950s. And then she lost her husband in 1968. Nergez arrived in Pondicherry in 1972 with a group of 18 people, most of whom were devotees of Sri Aurobindo, and the Mother. Having little prior knowledge of their work, she briefly met the Mother at the Ashram, after which her growing interest prompted her to visit Auroville. She returned for short periods of time in 1974, 1975, and 1976. In 1977, in the face of stern opposition from her brother, she settled in Utilite Auroville, for the next three years helping out with the various communal

efforts that were being made there.

The experiences in Utilite remain close to Nergez's heart. Her various encounters with snakes in her keet-roofed makeshift home, the experiments with biogas, the friendships she formed in those early days, evoke the memories of enthusiasm, challenge, and adventure that coloured her pioneer days, and that continue to motivate her even today. But Auroville of the early days also contributes to a sense of regret. The memory of the power conflict between the Sri Aurobindo Society that wanted continued control over Auroville, and the Aurovilians' striving towards greater autonomy with the resultant divisive politics that drove them into opposing camps still hurts. But her sense of optimism is undimmed. "Those wounds are healing. There is greater harmony among Aurovilians today."

I persuade Nergez to tell me more of her life before she came to Auroville. "My memory is like a sieve, I can remember some things, not others." She smiles. Remembers a Bombay of long ago. The bustling joint family of seventeen people that lived in the Motiwallah house with its large courtyard. Her schooling in Alexandra Girls English Institute, and the quick imbibing of an alien language, that washed as a wave over her whole consciousness, that overran other alphabets, other worlds, almost drowning out the Hindu culture that flourished in all its diversity outside the guarded gates of her

home and her school. Interestingly, Nergez discovered this fecund cultural landscape through the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Savitri, for example, was an eye-opener for Nergez. She read the book, she says, "like a novel. The language was something that drew me. The similes elaborated a world that I knew very little about. Hindu mythology was always something that was outside. Outside the family fold, the school premises. I still feel sad that I don't know Hindi as well as I should. But I'm so grateful for knowing a tongue that helps me to read Sri Aurobindo, and to appreciate the nuances of his style, the beauty of his thoughts translated into words." Having read Savitri more than thirty times, Nergez is an active member of the Savitri Bhavan study group that hosts many activities during the year. At eighty she still has a busy life, and is difficult to catch at home. Nergez enjoys socializing and has always liked community living. Having contributed in a significant and consistent way to the evolving city of Auroville, she has served on several important committees for many years. In the past ten years she has been part of the Entry Group and taken a prominent interest in formulating the new entry rules for those joining Auroville. Presently, she works for the Housing Group, which continues to face the challenge of providing viable solutions to the acute housing shortage in Auroville.



After more than 25 years of living in Auroville, during which time she also briefly visited Russia, Africa, Iran, and North America, today Nergez lives in Samasti, after having moved house several times. But if you thought Samasti would continue to always be her home, think again. "I'm moving to Creativity soon" (a new community that combines communal facilities with private living space), she says with her characteristic sunny glee, "and I will move on to Arka (another innovative residential-cum-research project that seeks to create a protected, yet active environment for people above a certain age) after that!" Nergez's journeys continue, and who knows one day we may even catch up with her.

PASSING



Remembering Dimitri

Dimitri von Mohrenschildt, my beloved friend and fellow sadhak for 40 years, passed away peacefully in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram nursing home on Sunday evening, June 9, 2002 at 5:55pm., writes Anie Nunnally

Divine Grace that had spared him and he later came to realize that it was indeed the 'hand of the Divine Mother' guiding him throughout all these events.

He eventually joined the Merchant Marine and boarded a ship bound for the USA. Ultimately, he graduated from Yale University, married and became a Professor of Russian History and Civilization at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. While there, he founded, edited and published *The Russian Review*, an anti-communist and literary quarterly. The magazine continued for many years under another editorship after Dimitri left for India in 1976.

His close friend, the late Rene Fueleoep-Miller, educator, author and Professor of Sociology at Hunter College, New York and later Dartmouth College, introduced him to the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the late 1950's. Dimitri then travelled to the Ashram in 1958 with Eleanor Montgomery, where he met the Mother and had Her darshan. He made other visits. After his visit in 1962 he returned to the States, retired from

Dartmouth in 1968 and moved to California where he served as a consultant on Russian affairs for the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. In 1976, at age 74, he left that post and his life in America and moved to the Ashram in India where he spent the last 26 years of his life as a resident of Golconde.

He began translating Sri Aurobindo's writings into the Russian language and somehow managed to get these typed manuscripts into Russia where they were circulated underground. For years there were many souls there who were spiritually inspired by the words of Sri Aurobindo due to this daring act. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Dimitri was visited at Golconde on a regular basis by visitors from Russia and those Russian citizens who had moved to Auroville and the Ashram. He had become something of a 'living icon' for them as a representative of pre-revolutionary life in Russia.

Dimitri was the personification of the aristocratic, intellectual and cultured European nobleman. He enjoyed fine cuisine, the best Belgian chocolates and Lindt Swiss Chocolates (my standing

gift to him), the arts, music, poetry, dance; simple but elegant dress. He detested everything base, unrefined, insensitive, coarse and uncouth. His inner life was private but his devotion to Mother and Sri Aurobindo was most apparent. His generosity and affection towards his friends was touching and heartwarming, as was his generosity towards Auroville and other aspects of the Mother's work. For many years he made donations to the Matrimandir Gardens and more recently to the Russian Pavilion, the Unity Pavilion and the Auroville Land Fund. On February 26, 2002 he laid the foundation stone for the Russian Pavilion in Auroville.

He had an enormous will and powerful stamina. He loved the sea and, after coming to India, he swam daily in the Bay of Bengal. This continued up to his 89th year. When he could no longer swim, Sue would wheel him down in his wheel chair so that he could imbibe the fresh salt air and watch the waves roll in and recede.

He passed on in the manner in which he had lived his life....with quiet dignity. He will be greatly missed.

Dimitri had miraculously come through the acute stages of a severe lung infection before quietly withdrawing from this earthly life at the age of 100 years. Dimitri was cremated in the ashram on Monday June 10th and his ashes cast into the Bay of Bengal at sunrise on June 11th. Dimitri was born April 11, 1902 into an aristocratic family of German heritage, in the beautiful city of St. Petersburg, Russia, formerly known, during the communist regime, as Leningrad. In 1917 Dimitri's life and that of his family, which was one of privilege, wealth and social standing, was abruptly interrupted when he was just a boy of 15 years, by the Russian revolution and the overthrow of the Czarist rule and the murders of Czar Nicholas II and his entire family. The Bolsheviks quickly took control and moved into power. Stories of this terrible tragedy are now a painful part of Russian history. So

many families were slaughtered and others barely escaped with their lives across borders dressed as peasants, even carrying with them infants buried under clothing in laundry hampers. Dimitri's immediate family was spared but some relatives were murdered. He was separated from his brother and parents for quite sometime. During this period he was captured, imprisoned and was named on a list of those to be murdered. However, he was spared when a senior communist official told him that the Soviet Government did not execute children (Dimitri was 17 years old at the time). Subsequently, his father was able to get him included in a group of Polish hostages to be exchanged with the Polish government and he travelled by special train across the border to Minsk where he was reunited with his parents. At each of these frightening junctures, he came to see that in all cases it was an intervention of the

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