

Auroville Today

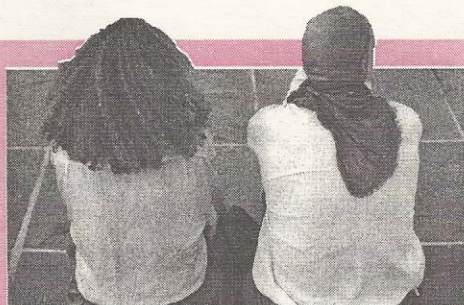
SINCE 1988

DISCOVERING THE DREAM

SEPTEMBER 2000, No.140

COVER STORY: Relationships

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■ Growing together

■ Living with love and laughter

■ Growing into relationships

■ Engaged in a new awakening

■ Spirits free

■ Breaking free from traditions

Relationships in the light of the yoga

Barbara worked as a healer and therapist in Europe. In Auroville, she lives at Ritam and works primarily as a counselor. About her work, she says, "the Mother's Force is at work on each individual here and that is the only force that can truly heal or effect a change." Here Barbara shares her understanding of relationships in the light of the Integral Yoga

"The aim of Auroville is to manifest an actual human unity. And this governs all our relationships: relationships between people as lovers, friends, partners as well as relationships with the land, nature, money and objects. This aim of Auroville is being worked out through the people here and the Mother's Force is at work on each individual at every moment, whether they are aware of it or not.

"In terms of human evolution, we are in a transition period. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother worked to bring down the Supramental Force into the Earth's atmosphere to hasten the human evolution. Sri Aurobindo says, 'The real movement is from Above — the Truth is trying to come down.' Due to the pressure of the Truth descending from above into the ignorant levels of the surface being, all sorts of falsehoods based on the ego arise and are exposed. They can no longer remain

to consciously work out his or her way towards transformation and to find his or her place in the Divine order.

"Given these conditions, it is very difficult to speak of partnerships in general terms for each couple is at a different level of evolution in the general movement towards Truth. Each couple is experiencing a different moment in their growth. Couples represent the closest relationship between two individuals. This offers a tremendous potential for growth. Friction between the two individuals can also be enormous for two separate egos are brought together. Earlier, there was a certain compromise between men and women. Men and women had been conditioned over the centuries to accept certain roles. These roles are now being broken down. The discovery of the psychic is essential so that the inner truth of the individual can be expressed and his or her true role can be found. For that sincere aspiration and surrender and rejection of what is false is necessary.

"Individuals come together in a relationship to help each other's growth. Sometimes, even after the potential for growth is exhausted, they remain together for they fear changes. But essentially, this resists the working of the Mother's Force and leads to impotence and falsehood.

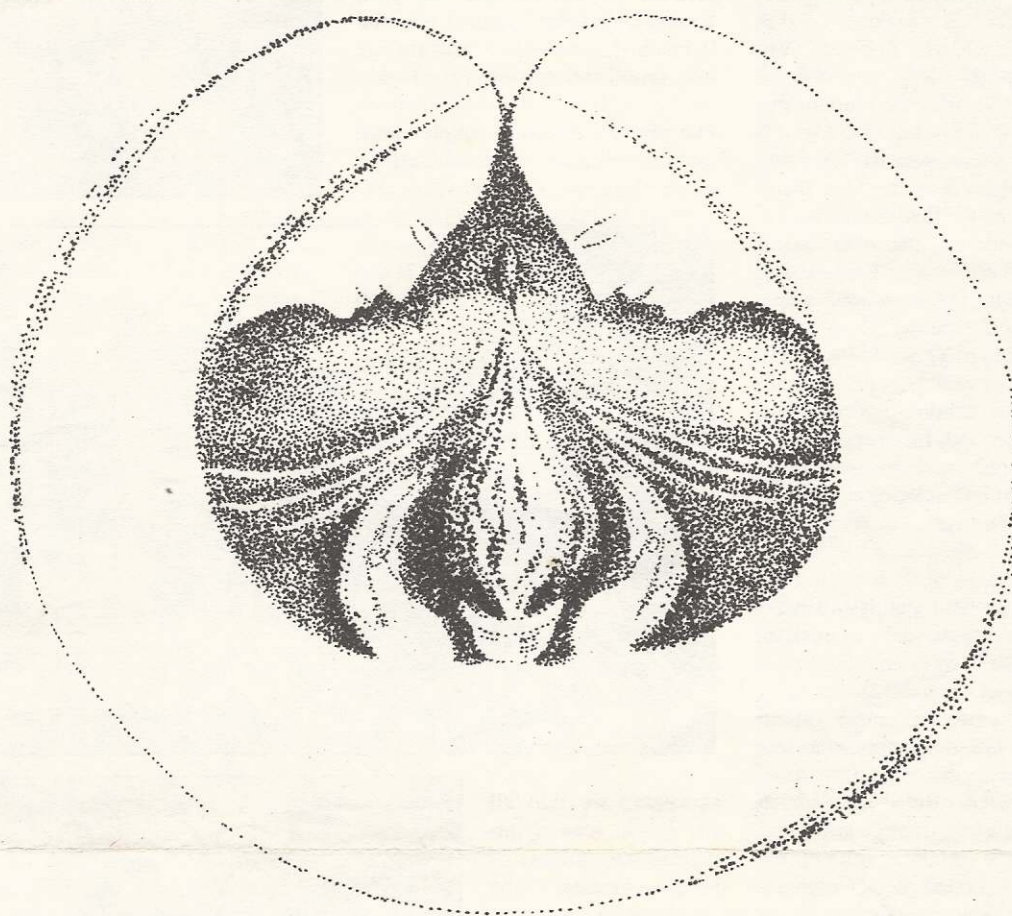
"Because of the accelerated evolution taking place now, one has the potential to work out things in one lifetime instead of several lifetimes. This poses its own challenge to lasting relationships. Many people feel an intense connection with not just one person, but to two or three persons with whom they probably had a connection from a previous life. All these connections or relationships need to be given expression to the extent that they are based on the Truth.

"The solution for all our relationships — not only partnerships between couples — is to learn to become true individuals, or as Aurovilians to become true Aurovilians and by that to become the expression of progressive harmony."

Based on talks with Bindu

The concept of Integral Yoga requires us to follow a spiritual path living in the world and not withdrawing from it. As such relationships are part and parcel of life in Auroville. In this light we profile some couples who have chosen to be in relationships; we give the views of a few young adults who grew up here; and we publish the observations of some therapists and counselors to get an overall picture of the nature of relationships in Auroville.

hidden. They come up to be transformed in the light of the Truth. What we are experiencing now is a transition from an individualistic age governed by the mind and ego to a true subjective age that is based on the conscious choice by individuals to collaborate with the Divine work. But while Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have opened the path into the new world that is being born, each individual has



DRAWING FROM 'A CAPTIVE OF HER LOVE' BY JANINA STROKE. COURTESY SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

"Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force." The Mother, CWM 3:69

Working with the vital

The ideals placed before us in Auroville are high and there is an aspiration to reach them.

Nevertheless, Aurovilians are mere human beings, perhaps no better or worse than the average homo sapiens, and equally have problems dealing with their emotions in the light of a higher Truth. This fact is perhaps most strongly brought out in the attitudes to sexuality and relationships. Bindu recounts the views of two therapists on this issue who preferred to remain anonymous

Says a therapist, "In the matter of sexual relationships, people in Auroville are quite immature. It is comparatively easier to try and meditate or to do one's work consciously, but it is not easy to bring down consciousness into the vital and deal with the energies of the lower vital."

Another therapist analyzes the situation thus: "The basic mistake that we make here, as elsewhere in the world, is that we have the wrong idea about finding the ideal relationship. We think we can realize something or find wholeness in another person (mostly of the opposite sex because the attraction is there) that actually should be found in our relationship with the Divine. If we are not able to contact the Divine in ourselves, we try to find it in others insofar as that is possible. But the Mother has said that it will never be realized. Relationships between men and women that fulfill everything, that

encompass the entire being, can only happen when each knows and lives the realization in the other. As long as we have any expectations or possessiveness, or use the other, it will always end up in an emotional drama. The physical and the vital always want to possess. And that is the origin of many problems in partnerships: one partner is in the process of freeing himself or herself from possessiveness while the other partner is still in the phase of needing to possess.

"In their attitude to sexuality, many have feelings of guilt on this matter, because of the high ideals expressed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the level on which one finds oneself. Such guilt feelings and attempts to repress one's sexual needs are often the cause of many distortions. The sexual centre is actually a centre of creative power, of energy. We have to learn, of course, to make this energy available to our entire being, but for that one has to acknowl-

edge it before one can try to channel it, pull it up towards the heart and then transform it. But before trying to deal with the manifestations of the sexual force, one should deal with the expressions of the lower vital, such as fear, anger, possession, and jealousy. Many jump this stage. These blockages and complexes are then partly compensated by the sexual energies. For example, emotional insecurity gets expressed in a sexual relationship, and everything gets mixed. Sri Aurobindo points out that it is dangerous to deal with the vital before one has established peace in the mind and love in the heart.

"To conclude on a positive note, many relationships, and not just partnerships, exist where some higher vital or even psychic element is present. Then there is a sweetness where one is able to really open one's heart without any expectations, and a love and joy can flow straight through, touching both people."

Building the city

Transiton school inaugurated two new halls

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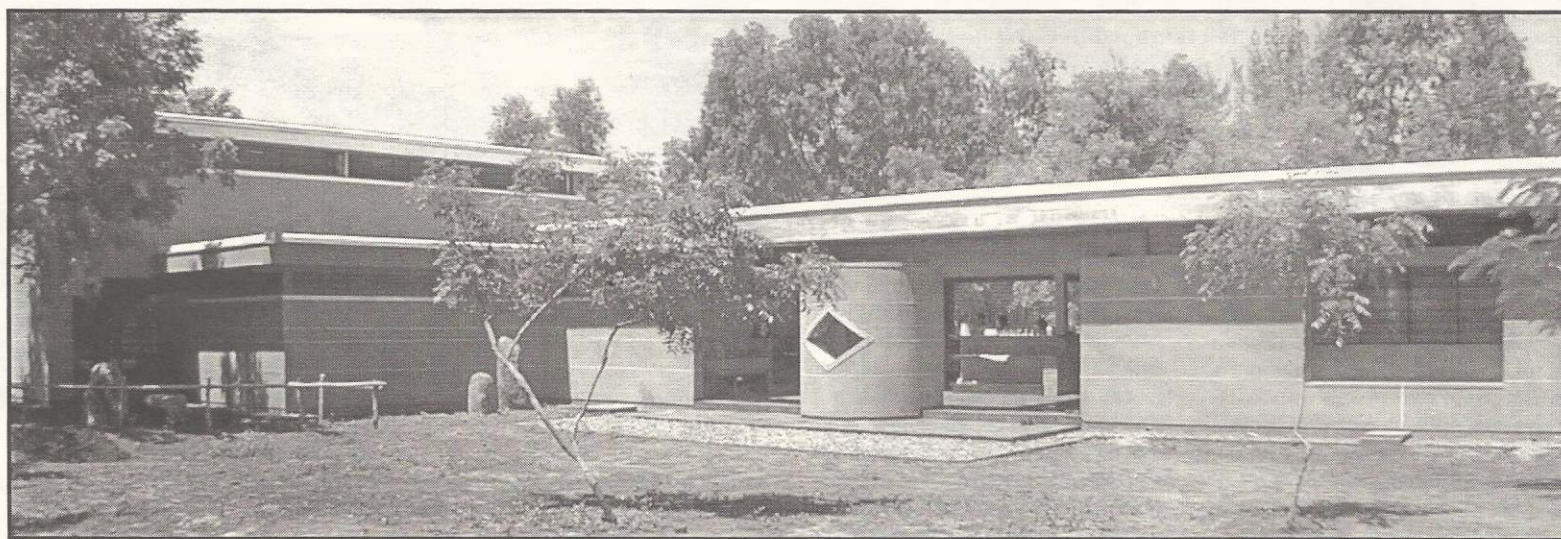
New halls for Transition

Transition primary school has inaugurated a new dining hall and a hall for "Awareness through the Body"

When I arrive, a week before the new school year starts, a huge monolith is just being manhandled into place. About 12 people are pulling or pushing the inexorable piece of stone, on the "oone, rende, moone" rhythm shouted by the Tamil supervisor. As I grab the rope to help I notice that Joan and Aloka, who are responsible for building the two new halls, happily participate. "The building has proceeded as per our estimate, which allowed us to do the rainwater management and the landscaping with the monoliths, items that were low on our list of priorities," explains Joan while wiping the sweat from his face. "But thank God, it's now finished," adds Aloka. "And we hope that for some time to come Transition won't need any other building! The school offers now a place for 160 children, which is the maximum Transition wants to have as we are really not interested in a mammoth school." When Joan shows me around, I notice one thing in particular: the meticulous attention to detail that has manifested in these buildings. The architecture of Piero and Gloria is simple and beautiful, the construction work done by Rolf shows an excellent quality of finishing and the artistic details, such as the mural made by artist Himesh out of hundred of ceramic tiles and the granite cube in the spiral garden donated by him only serve to underline that Auroville can be proud of these buildings. "But it hasn't been easy having a construction site going on next to a school, with all the noise. And of course, being responsible for the building apart from our normal teaching work and, in my case, of giving massages, adds a lot of strain," says Joan. Aloka's weary look underlines what Joan has just said, but it seems to be softened by a great joy. "I am incredible happy that after years of working in small spaces our 'Awareness through the Body' has now its own hall of 8x13m and 5m high. We started body awareness classes, as they were then called, in 1992. The aim is to make

the child aware not only of its body, but of its entire being, its place in space and its relation to others and to its environment. These classes help the child to develop a fantastic quality of concentration and group awareness. We have progressed quite a lot with our method of teaching. To have this hall now to do this work is a great gift, and we are immensely grateful to the donors, Ila, Ulli, Nancy, Guy, Dilip, Michèle, Mia and Dara who have made this hall and the new dining hall possible," she says.

The dining hall offers ample space for 130 children. "With a bit of



squeezing we will all fit," laughs Joan, pointing at the tables of black granite, the kitchen and the washing place. "The days of getting dust and other things from the keet roof in your food are definitely over," he says. Transition's Open Day on July 23rd showed its new buildings to Auroville.

Carel



Photos : Aloka

AUROVILLE AND THE WORLD

Pestalozzi students visit Auroville

In 1999, four Auroville students stayed some time at Pestalozzi in England. This year, 11 students from Zambia and Britain came to Auroville

"At first I thought this place and the people here were strange, but now I can't believe that I thought that!" exclaimed Sebastian at a discussion one evening in the New Creation kitchen. Sebastian was one of eleven young people from Britain and Zambia who visited Auroville during July as part of an exchange program with the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation. With a quick smile he added, "And now that we're leaving, I know that home is never going to be the same place again."

This summer's visit was part of an ongoing relationship between After School and Pestalozzi, a British charity which provides students from five developing countries with the opportunity to earn an international baccalaureate. Last year four students from Auroville had the opportunity to study at the Pestalozzi's headquarters. Then the idea came to make the exchange a reciprocal one, and to involve students from the neighbouring Hastings and Bex Hill colleges as well. After raising

the funds to cover most of their costs, the students set out on their summer adventure along with Christine, their mentor who had coordinated the project from the British side. "I really didn't know what to expect," admitted 19-year-old Jenny Edbrooke. "But it was great, because most people only come to visit India, but we also got to know a really unique place like this."

as many of the ongoing projects in Auroville as possible. Students attended workshops on topics as diverse as Tamil culture, alternative technology, environmental studies and yoga. They also got a feel for different kinds of work, participating in the compilation of a village water questionnaire and helping out with composting at Harvest. At the end of their stay, the

Aurovilian students from Last School and After School. For them it was a time to meet other youth and share experiences. Shakti, who took some time off from her usual academic routine at Last School to participate in the program, affirmed the importance of coming into contact with young people from outside Auroville. "Sometimes you can be more open when you meet new people. And when we hear about their lives, we understand our own more."

Among the many benefits of the exchange was the opportunity it gave for young students in Auroville to learn more about the place they call home. As Padmanabha explained, "I was born in Auroville, but never knew much about my own community! This month I've learned about England, but I have also been able to find out what is going on right here."

As for the visitors, their parting comments spoke for themselves. Although many expressed concern about whether the philosophy of Auroville could potentially become like a reli-

gion, most seemed truly impressed with the community's accomplishments. Jeffrey of Zambia told the group, "Auroville is a model of how the people of the world can live together in peace. It may not happen now, but I see that Aurovilians are working day and night to build their city. I am certain that one day Auroville will be a reality."

Equally important for the Aurovilian and visiting students alike was the fact that they managed to bridge the cultural distances between them. There was no shortage of laughter. And in spite of the hot sun, the full schedule, and a few upset stomachs, everyone seemed to get along.

Given the success of this year's visit, another exchange is already in the works. If all goes well, next May or June a group of Aurovilian students will visit England. The focus, according to trip assistant Linda Banks who accompanied the British students this time around, will be on environmental work and cross-cultural understanding.

Shanti

*"...when we hear
about their lives,
we understand our own
more..."*

Dull moments were few and far between during the month long visit. Selvaraj planned the group's itinerary with an eye to exposing the students to

students travelled together through Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Accompanying the visiting students in all of their activities were thirteen

Marvelling at marble

All the marble necessary for finishing the Matrimandir, 45 tons of it, has finally arrived

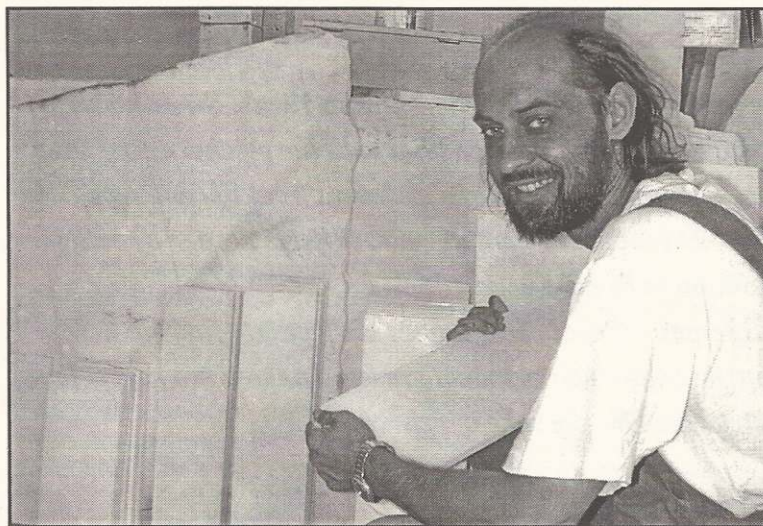
Andrej, Matrimandir's marble specialist who hails from Siberia, handles a white slab lovingly. "This is the most beautiful marble in the world," he says. "It is even more beautiful than the marble from Carrara in Italy that clads the walls of the Inner Chamber. The common opinion in India is that this marble is the purest of the world. You may be able to get a whiter stone in Italy, but the quality, e.g. the grain size, the hardness and chemical composition of this marble is superior. The Taj Mahal was built with the same marble that we are now using for Matrimandir." When I inquire about the price a painful look crosses his face. "This material is beyond any price, there is no question of money, there was never any question of money, this marble is a treasure all by itself and to think of money looking at this beautiful stone is something like an insult to it!" he answers passionately, before disclosing that it costs Rs. 100,000 a ton. The marble will be used

to finish the interior of the Matrimandir, the twelve meditation rooms in the surrounding large petals and the pond underneath the Matrimandir. "Will there be carpets in those meditation rooms? " I ask. "I hope not!" is the indignant reply.



Boris, cutting "the same quality of marble as was used for the Taj Mahal"

"We were blocked," continues Andrej. "One and a half year ago we used beautiful white marble for one of the two staircases leading from the first to the second level inside Matrimandir, but we couldn't get the same white quality for the other staircase. I went to Makrana in Rajasthan twice, without any success. It wasn't a question of



Andrej: "This is the most beautiful marble in the world"

money, but of availability. Makrana is a plateau, a flat area slightly above sea level. There are 24 quarries owned by 1,000 people, but only six of them excavate white marble. These quarries go to depths of 100-120 feet, and as they are below sea level, water seeps in. The quarry of our main supplier was under water for the past two years, and only recently did the quarrying operation start again. This white marble is manually excavated, without the help of pneumatic drills or other machines. This limits the size of the blocks to 6.5 x 3 x 2.5 feet, as they are pulled up using hand pulleys. Usually, whenever a quarry strikes upon a layer of white stone, it is excavated in the form of two big and two or three small blocks. These blocks together are

called a "lot," and one can only buy the entire lot. The problem is that you cannot judge the quality. Even when the blocks are cut in slabs, it is not possible to judge every slab. So you pray and hope that everything will be OK. With this particular lot I had an interesting experience: on the first day of our visit we went to see different lots of white marble. When we entered the godown of the first quarry, I saw a lot of marble covered with plastic. Something told me that this lot would fit our complete requirement and that we would purchase it. And it happened like that. This was a very significant experience for me. I felt Mother's help at each and every step of our stay there in Makrana."

Carel

AUROVILLE AND INDIA

Fostering Creativity for CAPART

Recently, Auroville hosted a high-level workshop on "Innovation." A report from Bhavana, one of the organizers

The participants of a three-day workshop on "Innovation" were delighted with Auroville as the venue for their deliberations. CAPART is an autonomous government organisation. The acronym stands for Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology. It was facing difficulties in defining and selecting "innovative" rural development projects, so their Standing Committee thought of running a seminar on innovation. Based on their experience with Aurovilians, they asked Claude to arrange a seminar. Like the workshop on "Creativity" which Auroville hosted last year, the invitees were drawn from an unusually broad spectrum of organizations: government, large non-governmental organizations, small grassroots voluntary agencies, activist groups, and, as one participant pointed out, both young and older people in the field of rural development.

ing them on a board. From Lighting the New, through Restructuring the Mind, to "Strategy", the thoughts on Innovation sparked new ideas and freedom of approach.

Distinguished participants

There were several persons of renown who spoke to the group: notably, Dr. Darshan Shankar who has organized a nation-wide movement to Revitalize Local Health Traditions (FRLHT, of which Pitchandikulam is a part); Dr. T.H. Chowdary, Advisor (IT), Government of Andhra Pradesh who has been instrumental in bringing the information age (telephones and internet) to thousands of villages all over India; Prof. Anil Gupta from the

Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, whose "Honey Bee" network is highlighting invention and innovation at the grassroots level; Dr. V. Venkataswami of Arvind Eye Hospital which serves the poor on the profits of giving excellent service to the well-to-do; Mr. Shankar Ghose of the National Foundation of India and Prof. N. K. Ambast, Chairman of National Open School which provides opportunities for persons to complete their secondary education in non-conventional ways. Mr. Ashok Takur, the Deputy Director General of CAPART moderated the sessions, which were attended on the second day by Mr. Rangan Dutta, Director General of CAPART. Mr. N. Bala Baskar, Secretary, Auroville Foundation, also

actively participated in this workshop. In the end CAPART was happy to have got a basic idea of how to identify innovation in projects — and moved on to their Board meeting with fresh ideas and inspiration. The participants in their evaluation session repeatedly appreciated the excellent setting of the seminar, Auroville, where innovation is a way of life. "Auroville is a hotbed of innovation", "It is a cradle of creativity" were some of the comments that the participants made. The Aurovillian organizers were pleased to have once again the opportunity to share the spirit of Auroville with a receptive and enthusiastic group, and at the same time to be of service to its host country.

BABIES GATHERING AT REVELATION



Issues of relationships

A record number of 25 babies were born in Auroville in the past twelve months.

PHOTO: IRENO



In brief

● Overviews published by Auroville's Project Coordination group revealed the substantial donations made by the American Foundation for World Education (FWE) and the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier. FWE donated in the financial year 2000-2001 a total of US \$65,000 for 8 educational projects, a farm and a forest project, the Development Fund and a matching grant for the purchase of a 15-seater electrovan. One of the education projects will cover the costs of training and research conducted by Aurovilians. Stichting de Zaaier donated approximately US \$60,000 for 6 projects dealing with agriculture and food processing, social research and education.

● The Economy Group has warned that an increase in community expenditure is not matched by a corresponding increase in community income. Special areas of concern are the housing situation, where the Economy Group proposes to create more collective housing possibilities and calls on individuals to propose ways to increase the flow of contributions; and education, where approximately Rs. 125,000 (US \$3,000) a month more is required.

● The Entry Group reports that while "awaiting clear, comprehensive and enlightened directives from the community allowing it to resume its work with a new elan" to re-open Auroville to newcomers, those who want to come can avail themselves of the Long Term Guest status instead. This would enable people who already have a clear and strong connection to Auroville's ideals and purpose through past association and who intend to eventually join, to come and be in Auroville anyway or to wait it out in their respective countries.

● In its yearly report the Housing Group observed that the Rs. 100,000 a month it receives for house repairs from Auroville's Central Fund benefits on average 10 Aurovilians each month.

Since the beginning of 1999, it has also received Rs 13 lakhs by way of the 10% contribution from 22 Aurovilians constructing houses as well as from contributions related to house transfers administered by the Housing Group. This amount has benefited 26 Aurovilians who needed additional rooms or significant development work to be done, as well as a few Aurovilians in Vikas who ran out of funds when the costs of their apartments heavily exceeded the building estimates due to no fault of their own. An amount of Rs. 5 lakhs is used to issue loans.

● The Ecoservice has reported that it has become economically sustainable and has repaid its loans. The Ecoservicemen (formerly ragpickers) are now able to make a better living and also work with greater motivation and efficiency. All the non-recyclable waste collected by Ecoservice is either stored in the new Ecoservice storage facility near Verité for eventual disposal, or incinerated in the Health Centre incinerator.

The workshop

This was only one of the innovations which Auroville introduced as a background for the seminar. In the opening ceremony, for instance, instead of just one or two VIPs lighting the lamp, everyone had a clay-pot candle and brought it silently to the centre table, where the flames added their brilliance, and their symbol of togetherness, to the setting for the rest of the morning. Talks were interspersed with exercises and attuning, and the mornings began with yoga and tai-chi. Everyone could express themselves in the T-shirt painting session out of which emerged a bevy of brightly coloured designs. "The Genius of India" slide show put the focus on the deeper sources of innovation, and India's leading role in the world. Defining innovation brought the participants essentially into an inquiry into consciousness, and their insights were recorded by everyone putting one or two words on cards and arrange-

In Letters on Yoga, under the section "Human Relationships in Yoga", Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the Divine as the focus of all true relationships with the psychic as the lever for transformation. But he cautions against all notions of withdrawal from life and says, "each case differs, one rule for all is not practical or practicable. What is needed by each for his spiritual progress is the desideratum to be held in view."

Bindu interviews four couples of different cultural backgrounds and ages, to find out how each of their relationships has contributed to their personal growth. In these two pages, the names of all individuals have been changed for the sake of privacy.

Spirits free

Selvi and Paul believe in a concept of marriage where two people are united and yet give each other space for growth. In a simple wedding ritual on a morning beach in Auroville about two years ago they took their marriage vows where each committed to support the other in the quest for the soul's freedom: like "two tiny drops of water" that "melt into each other...connecting with other drops with the same aspiration" till "they reach and be the Ocean again."

Says Selvi, "I always believed that each person has to work out his or her own way alone. The soul has to basically journey alone. I could not accept that being a wife and a mother was the be-all and end-all of life." Coming as she did from a conservative South Indian family, her views were considered unorthodox by her parents and relatives who wanted to see her settled down in an arranged marriage. "Even today, when I go back to visit my family," says she, "I feel the burden of traditions, the pressure from the whole extended family to conform to their social norms. And I strongly feel that I have to do something about it, change something for good so that the younger generation at least will be free. The concept of freedom was always important to me. And I cherished the freedom that Auroville had to offer. I responded to the Mother's call of the "great adventure" where one could let go off the baggage of the old life and jump into a new life.

"For a while, I enjoyed the freedom of being single. A freedom that is

denied to most Indian women. But, in some ways, it is an illusion to think that is one free if one is single. I feel that committing myself to one person has freed me in important ways. The energy freed in this manner helps to concentrate on higher aspects of life.

Adds Paul, "For me, it somehow became important to express the deep connection we felt for each other in a conscious act of marriage, a ritual that included but clearly surpassed past traditions. So instead of fighting against an established rigid system and to provoke its defence, we decided to use it to our advantage and seek its blessings, like the string of a bow for the arrow of our aspiration."

"For the rest," continues Selvi, "Paul and I lead quite independent lives. We prefer to deal with our problems individually, as far as is possible. But, at the same time it is nice to have a partner, someone who is close to you, who can offer you feedback on your own behaviour patterns, who acts as a mirror to your self. We are actually completely different beings with

different views on things. It would not be easy to live together and do everything together. So we give each other space in our relationship." Selvi was already part of a community before she met Paul and now they both have their own separate huts within that community.

For Selvi, the connection to a larger group or community was important. "We connect like this," she says, spreading the fingers of her hand, "and not as a couple locked into each other." "We are a couple because we are both looking at the same direction, and not because we are looking at each other," explains Paul. For both of them, the marriage is primarily a means to give each other support in their sadhana. "We meditate together, share our experiences, and as we read more and more of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, we discuss what we read to get more clarity and understanding," says Selvi, "and I would be happy if there were more people, say a small group, with whom I could share this aspect of my life.

Growing together

Devi and Prem, both Indians, have been together for four years. They both feel that their relationship has helped them to grow inwardly

Could you explain why you both have chosen to be in this relationship?

Prem: Actually, we were not conscious that we were choosing to be in a relationship. It all just naturally happened. From the first day onwards this relationship has just naturally flowered. We did not make a conscious verbal decision. Nor was there that sense of recognition some couples have. Other people seemed to recognize us as a couple before we did so.

Devi: In retrospect, I feel that my whole life has been a preparation in coming to Auroville and being with Prem. When I was a child, I used to write poems and paint pictures, dedicating them to a yogi I had in mind. Now I recognize that Prem is the person to whom my poems and paintings were addressed, and now that I am with him, I no longer feel the need to write or paint.

How has this relationship helped in your inner growth?

Prem: In a relationship, when you are sharing a life with someone, when you are living with someone day after day, there is a constant awareness of the other person and the need to be in harmony with the other person. The other person reflects the way you are. And this does not happen to the same extent in one's relationships to one's friends or colleagues, when one is single. There is not that intensity of commitment when one is single. One learns to surrender oneself to the other. And one learns to surrender one's ego. An intimate contact with a woman helps a

man to be sensitive towards finer emotions and brings out growth and maturity of the emotional being in him.

Devi: I was more aggressive before, may be due to the urban life-style I lived. With Prem I feel complete. I concretely feel the difference when he is present and when he is not. If he is not there, it is as though there is something missing from the atmosphere. Something that only he can fulfill. When I decided to build my workshop, I strongly felt that Prem should take part in manifesting it. His touch should be there. I do not think that I could have manifested all that I have done so far in Auroville without him.

Prem: We have come to realize that we somehow constitute a whole together. It acts as a synergy. Devi adds to my energy, helps me to achieve more than I could achieve on my own. Devi: It also acts in the opposite way. We can negate each other's energy. We are very conscious of this effect that we have on each other, and then it is a conscious decision about which path you want to take.

Prem: Over the years we have consciously chosen (Vipassana meditation retreats helped us a lot in this context) to develop our relationship, to strive towards greater harmony and synergy instead of pulling each other down. In the first year or so, we were not always in harmony, and we were not even very aware of the forces that were pulling us apart. You see there are so many forces that come from outside or from within you that are detrimental to the relationship. When you see a defect

in someone and it bothers you, then you actually have to look into your own being as to why you are affected thus, and then to correct that defect in yourself which is being projected outside, onto the other person. In this process, your partner becomes a mirror that shows you the flaws within yourself.

Devi: We both accept this process and there is not much need to always verbalize it. One has to give the other person time to correct one's defects. One has to trust that the other person is making his or her best effort towards greater perfection and harmony.

Prem: Then there are other things which have come about without us consciously working towards it. Sex, for instance. Somehow the more we are attuned to each other, at a deeper level, the need for physical contact is falling off naturally.

I know, being in a relationship is somehow in contradiction with the concept of Integral Yoga. So many times, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in their writings have warned their disciples not to indulge in sex and not to form relationships based on physical and vital needs. And yet, somehow, I feel complete and integral in my relationship to Devi and it is very much a part of our yoga. I also believe that the advice Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gave on this issue was specific to the person seeking the advice. There are a few instances where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother describe the positive side, in terms of the yoga, of the relationship between a man and a woman.

A new awakening

Bill and Susan married each other eighteen years ago in a commitment to "learn to love each other." They lived together for sixteen years but it was not always easy. They moved to Auroville five years ago, where Susan realized that, despite their best efforts, they were not helping each other to grow. At her instigation, they got divorced. But recently, they renewed their commitment to each other

Looking back on his experience Bill says, "I was aware that I didn't know how to love when I was a young man. When I met Susan, I felt an intense attraction for her. I believed that with her I could grow inwardly, that we could love and accept each other. I knew that it would not be easy. I knew that I would have to discard conditioned habits that prevented me from loving. But I was ready to work out these things in our relationship. I felt tremendous confidence that we would succeed in our goal. That love was within our grasp.

"What shocked me was that it was far more difficult than I ever imagined. There were patterns of behaviour between us that we could not break even though we could see them. There were ways we constantly hurt each other. Finally Susan had the courage to face the reality and to say that we were not growing together anymore, that we were actually detrimental to each other's growth. It was hard to accept that I had failed in what I had set out to do. But Susan was determined to break the relationship."

Says Susan, "For most of my life, I had always been in a relationship and I looked to my partner to take care of my emotional needs. When I was hurting, I wanted Bill to be there for me in a particular way. And I was angry and hurt when he couldn't fulfill the role I wanted him to."

"The breakthrough came," continues Susan "when I turned my attention inward and learnt that it was me and not someone else who was responsible for my happiness and that to a great extent I was creating my own suffering. I also began to experience a stronger connection to the Divine. When it comes right down to it, there is nothing else to do but surrender and trust and the Divine will do the rest."

"For me," says Bill, "the biggest change was to come to terms with my sexual energy. I was always erotically attracted to other women and my energy would go out to them. And even though it didn't manifest in a physical affair, vitally my energy would go and that would distress Susan. What made me change was the experience of having an affair with another woman. The affair was loving and sweet. But paradoxically, as I realized, it was also a mistake — a wrong use of energy. I felt a lack of vitality as though there were a weakness in my whole lower belly. It kept me from growing in the ways I wanted to. I realised then that at a certain point in one's development it is a mistake to let one's vital, erotic energy be played out. I know now that I have to reject this expression of sexual energy that was debilitating me. It is not repression that is required; it is a conscious decision not to be used by that vital force. When one's sexual energy is contained within a relationship one has a chance to learn to transform it. To channel it into the heart and turn it to love. Of course, I am just beginning to take my first steps in this process. But it really feels that we are now truly engaged in a process of awakening."

Concludes Susan, "We still have a long way to go. The same flaws, the same patterns still come up, but we are learning how to deal with them differently. Sometimes, when we get into an argument it feels as though vital, asuric forces are just using us to create disharmony, and when we realize that, we disengage from the argument and give each other space. I believe what Bill and I work out in our own relationship has a general effect on all relationships between men and women. I feel

blessed that we are able to explore this path in the context of Auroville."



Living with love and laughter

Marc and Valentina have lived together for more than two decades in Auroville. It was Marc who had first discovered Auroville during his travels

"I remember," says Valentina, "he talked about Auroville on our very first date, and it was clear that he wanted to return there as soon as possible. I had never been to an eastern country before and definitely had never thought of going to India. But I decided to come here with Marc for two years to see if I liked this place. Looking back now, I feel that in terms of growth, this is the biggest gift that this relationship has given me. Without Marc, I definitely would not be in Auroville. We complement each other. There are some things that he can do better, situations that he can handle better, and there are other circumstances that I can handle much better than him."

"I feel that we actually stayed together because we were in Auroville. I am sure we would have separated if we had continued to live in Europe. The materialistic lifestyle in Europe offers more distractions, and if one is not happy, one tends to blame it on the relationship. Here somehow, we were

constantly forced to work out our problems together. And best of all, our families could not interfere, give advice or take sides. We had to rely only on ourselves to give shape and meaning to our being together."

Adds Marc, "Our relationship — and I suppose it happens in other relations also — went through different phases. While young the physical aspect of a relationship holds a lot of attraction, but slowly that is replaced with something else, with a deeper joy and a feeling of being part of each other. Our relationship is actually more fulfilling, richer now than it was in the early years." Interjects Valentina, "the early years were nice too, otherwise I would have left you!"

Continues Marc, "About thirteen years ago, our relationship went through rock bottom. We just did not seem to get along anymore. That was the closest that we ever came to breaking up. With grace we made it through, and we emerged stronger and more committed in our relationship."

Says Valentina, "All relationships go through such crises. And it is a pity that people choose to break up when the going gets tough...you see, it does not always help to break up and start another relationship for one simply repeats the same patterns elsewhere. It has not always been easy for us. We had to constantly learn to respect each other's rights, to find a way out through problems where neither was willing to compromise, and so on and so forth. But there is a lot of humour and laughter in our relationship that sustains us. Now if we argue, after an hour, we are laughing about it. Earlier it took us weeks to forgive each other."

"Actually not so long ago," continues Marc, "I had this insight that we had chosen each other in some other dimension. I can't say exactly where and when, but there was this feeling of certitude that we were meant to be together, here and now." "Oh! I felt like this a long time ago, which is why I stuck it out with you!" laughs Valentina.

Breaking free from traditions

Shanti, a guest editor, speaks to young Tamil men who grew up in Auroville about their relationships

Learning about relationships is not an easy process for any young person, yet the problems seem all the more complicated when one comes from a culture in which exploration and experimentation in this aspect of life are frowned upon. Such is the case for many Tamil youth, who must inevitably deal with family pressure to have an arranged marriage to a person of the appropriate caste and family. Not surprisingly, the situation is generally more difficult for girls, as their families are all the more protective of them and concerned for their "reputations". Even for boys, confronting societal expectations over an extended period of time can be exhausting and many eventually capitulate. There are, however, exceptions. And within the pool of exceptions, there are some noteworthy cases of individuals who break with tradition

in ways which are nothing short of radical.

Ranganathan, who grew up in Auroville, is one such young man. He has been living for the past year with his girlfriend, an Aurovilian of French parentage. He sweetly tells the story of how he once saw her riding on her moped and how he knew from that moment on that he had to meet her. He wrote her a letter, which began a correspondence courtship until the day when they finally came together with some friends for dinner. For a 23-year-old, he is quite self-aware. The consciousness and reflection he has brought to his life choices would disarm any adult, convinced as many always seem to be that young people are incapable of making their own responsible decisions. "I never liked the idea of a traditional marriage," he says frankly. "For one thing, dowry is such a stupid practice. But the other problem is that marriage as we know it now no longer has the meaning that it once had in days long past. So why marry at all? I think that once you live with a person, and really have a good understanding of one another, that in itself is a lot. One should not commit just because it is the thing to do. Its something you should both want to do. And people always change."

When asked about his family's views on the subject, Ranganathan is unequivocal. He recounts the time when he brought his girlfriend to his family home in the village and announced to his parents that he had already been living with her for one month. While his parents were not keen on the arrangement, the fact that he had always been independent made the situation less of a surprise to them.

Another example of someone braving to break free from traditions is 21-year-old Prakash. Like Ranganathan, he has always had mixed feelings about traditional marriages. For one thing, he likes the idea of an inter-cultural relationship. "I always thought that I would like to be with someone who is different from me," he states. "There is so much to learn in this way." Prakash admits that his experience in travelling abroad served to increase his interest in learning about the world through friendships with others.

Upon returning to India after his studies, Prakash met a young woman from North India living in Auroville. He shyly reveals that he felt instantly that she could be the one for him. The situation is not easy, however, as both of them must keep their relationship a secret from their families. Prakash is particularly uncomfortable with this as his parents have already begun to pressure him into a match with a cousin.

Interestingly, both Prakash and Ranganathan feel that they have learned some do's and don'ts about relationships by observing the adults, both Indian and European, around them in Auroville. "I think many people are just not responsible," says Prakash, referring to the seemingly quick way in which partnerships are begun and dissolved in Auroville. They also feel that many adults have children without consciously making the choice to do so. "I will not even think about having a child until I am well settled and stable in a relationship," states Ranganathan emphatically. "Then if we want to have a child, we will decide and work towards that."

Growing into relationships

The step from adolescence to adulthood has always been a complex initiation process. Yanne, one of the founding members of Auroville Today and now a guest editor, interviews young Western women on the challenges they faced as adolescents in Auroville

In Auroville, says an educationist, the first awakening into adolescence usually happens at the age of 12. Although girls and boys prefer to keep within separate groups, there are frequent written exchanges, and sometimes jealousies. In Transition School and at Last School, sex education is included as part of the teaching of science and biology. Television and films serve as instruction medium. The children discuss the topic amongst themselves during recess.

Western parents often broach the topic of love and relationships, but this is rare for Tamil parents.

Then comes the first encounter, often experienced as an initiating necessity. Generally they meet at parties far from the eyes of parents or other adults. The girls are usually more ahead in their development than the boys, though some of them prefer to "wait till they are really in love before exploring their sexuality" or dedicate their vital energies to sports and the arts. Most of the girls hope "to meet Prince Charming" while the boys without exception "wish to remain free to explore the world."

But there is a problem. "In the age group of 15-20 years there are only 94 adolescents: 45 young men and 49 young women who all have grown up together," explains a young woman.

"We consider each other as brothers and sisters. While a flirtation may happen during a party, most girls are not really interested in the boys of their age, and I think it is the same for the boys." And she laughs "we prefer to wait and see what interesting people come when the tourist season is on."

Cultural patterns

Auroville still has a predominantly Western outlook. Young Aurovilians brought up in the Western culture are freer and more spontaneous in their behaviour. Sometimes, however, their behaviour in seen as being provocative in a country where cultural values are different. Says one young Aurovilian woman, "In India, a man and a woman will never walk hand in hand, let alone embrace in public. In the West, this is normal behaviour. In India, two men have no problem putting their arms around each other. In the West, this would be considered an expression of homosexuality. In Auroville, I can dress as I please; if I go to Pondicherry I have to take care that my dress doesn't attract unwanted attention. But these lessons one learns only gradually. At 15, I started realizing that I was a fully-grown woman. I was very romantic and believed in a Prince Charming. What to do to meet him? It took quite some unhappy and painful experiences, before I realized that it was my own behaviour which had caused them in the first place."

Inter-cultural relationships

It is rare that relationships are formed between Aurovilians who have grown up together in Auroville; there are perhaps half-a-dozen in the first generation of kids who grew up here. The majority of those who have a foreign passport leave Auroville to work or pursue higher studies in the West and often find a partner there. But sometimes young Aurovilians meet again outside of Auroville, rediscover each other in different surroundings, decide to live together and return to Auroville as a couple.

Here where people from more than 33 nationalities live together,

inter-cultural relationships are the norm rather than the exception. During the eighties and nineties, the majority of the inter-cultural relationships were between young Indian women who chose Western men for partners. Nowadays this trend is being reversed: young Western women are choosing Indian partners. Explains one of them: "I wanted to have a stable relationship and to start a family. But the young Western Aurovilians all leave Auroville at some point in time, for shorter or longer periods. Young Indian men, on the contrary, are stable. I have been now living together with an Indian man for several years. We got married and have a child. If there are problems, as there are in all relationships, they are often because of the differences in our cultural heritage. Most Westerners, for example, are very explicit in the expression of their sentiments, but this is not so for Indians. Whenever I see a young European couple with the man putting his arm around the woman's shoulders, I know that my husband will never do that and that sometimes bothers me. Also, notwithstanding the fact that I have been brought up in the midst of the Tamil culture and that I have been strongly influenced by India to the extent that I often feel myself to be Indian, for Indians I will always remain as 'the foreigner.'"

"Has the fact of growing up and living in Auroville changed your concept of relationships?" I ask.

"Often, when we were young, we were told what The Mother considered to be an ideal relationship between a man and a woman. We cannot exactly say that in Auroville the adults have given us a good example. As an ideal it is great, but I do not believe that most of us are ready to live up to it. We are still jealous and possessive. We are still 'very ordinary' — perhaps with the sole exception that there is a true aspiration to live an increasingly harmonious relationship. Auroville is certainly a place where the truth of an ideal relationship is being tested, perhaps more than elsewhere. But it is up to us to face the challenge."

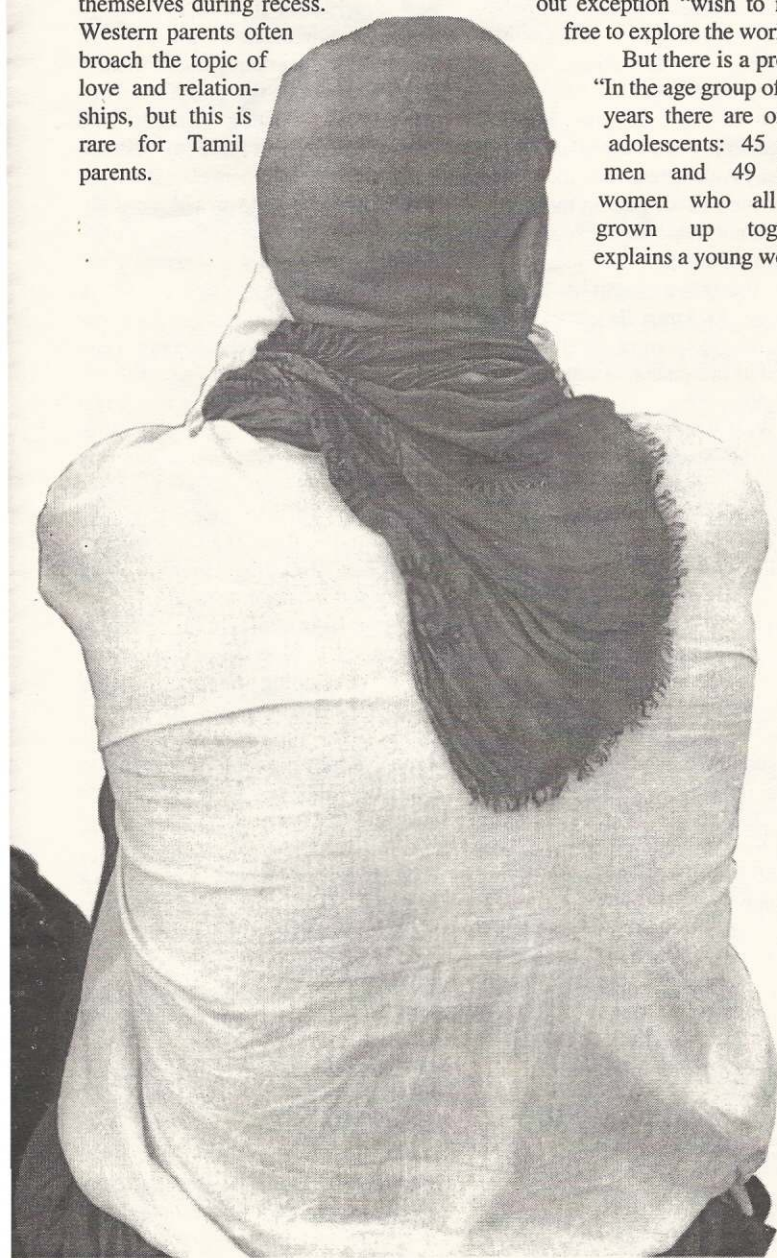


PHOTO: IRENO

Auroville and Money

"I would like there to be no money in Auroville (...) I would like money to be retained only for relations with outside." (The Mother)

Guest editor David discusses the nature of money, and asks some individual Aurovilians how they feel about its role in the community

What is money?

Money is a measurement of value. Its purpose is to allow us to exchange things easily.

On this point we should note that — purely as a device — money is totally successful: it does indeed allow us to exchange goods and services with an ease undreamed of by our bartering ancestors.

Like all units of measurement, money is entirely conceptual. It does not relate to anything "real" unless we ourselves create that relationship. A bottle of Coca-Cola doesn't equal Rs. 10 any more than the journey from here to Pondicherry equals 10 kilometres. Both the price and the distance are convenient ways of describing something real. But they are not the thing itself.

However, measuring value is more difficult than measuring distance. Why? The first difficulty is that the things measured by kilometres and grammes and hours are — on this level of reality — pretty fixed. That is to say, our opinion about them does not alter them very much. But our opinion about the value of something can and does alter. Another problem is that we use money to measure different sorts of things, particularly hours of work against goods and services. Why should so much of this be worth so much of that? Thirdly, a kilogram is itself a fixed quantity, independent of the thing to be measured. This is quite arbitrary, of course, but the important thing is that it never changes. Whereas the value of money changes all the time as peoples' opinions about it change. Money itself is not exempt from the process of valuation. This is why it can be bought and sold like anything else.

Finally, money can be saved and accumulated. While all the real things it represents — wheat, cows, bicycles — will perish or die or fall apart, money does not. We cannot preserve this year's apple harvest for very long: the fruit will rot. But if we convert it into money (i.e. sell it), it will last pretty much for ever. We have turned a physical object into an idea, which cannot die.

From this one property of money derive speculation, interest, stocks, shares, bonds and banks. Money can

be invested, saved, gambled, traded, stolen, even incorporated. And finally, perhaps, converted back into an actual physical object... in other words, spent. While money is a most efficient tool of exchange, it is at best an imperfect method for measuring value. And society's energy is always liable to be diverted into accumulating it for its own sake. So is it worth it? Or is the usefulness of money outweighed by its disadvantages?

Question of money in Auroville

I recently discussed these questions in a series of conversations with Aurovilians. Clearly, goods and services will continue to be exchanged within Auroville. Is money necessary here? And what might it be like to do without it?

One veteran of thirty years told me, "Although money is held in a different spirit in Auroville, it is so close to the Western way that we often get confused." This view seems widely held. "There is not much difference between Auroville and the world," says one. "We are virtually a free market economy," offers another.

According to some of those who take this view, as long as Auroville continues to use the financial tools of the outside world it will be impossible to break through to a higher plane. Sheer habit of terminology will keep the community operating in the old way. So perhaps money must be left behind.

A moneyless economy

The most extreme — and in some ways the most straightforward — means of doing without money is to stop using it for internal purposes. There would be no measure or record whatever of who does what. This may sound drastic, but at least in theory the effects could be quite small. Since nearly all transactions between Aurovilians are made through Financial Service accounts, not recording them won't make any difference. The same amount of rice will be bought from Pour Tous. The number and type of internal transactions will continue exactly as now. Only the measurement will have stopped. Some Aurovilians broadly in favour of a moneyless economy believe that

such a system would lead to increased consumption. Abandoning all functions of money at once seems to them to be too ambitious. A more cautious proposal is to keep recording what is "spent", but not transfer funds between accounts. Consumption could thus be monitored, enabling everyone to keep track of their personal "spending". This is using money as training-wheels: when we have the balance and strength to stay on the path without it, we can let it go.

Another idea under consideration by some people is a separate internal currency. All transactions within the community would be conducted in Auroville Economic Units (AEU). This is not just "alternative money", since part of the point is to eliminate the savings-and-loan properties of real money. According to one sponsor of the idea, it's intentions are to "keep the community's wealth within the Auroville economy as much as possible, in order to boost the creation of new services, save cash that would otherwise have to be earned, and become more aware of the financial activity of the community." The AEU, as currently conceived, could not be invested for interest: it would also lose a portion of its value while unused, giving an incentive to circulate wealth rather than hoard. "Money is spoiling the game. It is energy which should be available for creation not accumulation," observes another Aurovillian.

The circles

One aspect of all these proposals, freely acknowledged by all concerned, is that to some extent they are intended to operate on the whole community. Even the AEU idea, while not strictly speaking needing to be compulsory, would still require certain conditions (chiefly on convertibility of Rupees) to be imposed on non-participants. From this point of view, an advantage of the current Circles experiment is its voluntary nature. At present approximately three hundred people pool their maintenances together in nine groups or circles. Within each one, a circle co-ordinator oversees the income and expenditure patterns of the members. Overspending by a member is first compensated by other members contributing more than they take out for their own needs. All nine circle accounts are consolidated at the end of the month, where negative and positive balances are netted off. On average, the experiment shows a monthly negative balance of Rs 20,000 which is made up by the Central Fund.

This experiment is helping the participating Aurovilians get accustomed to communal money; it is also yielding a lot of extremely useful information about the consumption patterns and differing needs of a fifth of the community.

Advantages of money in Auroville

Some other Aurovilians are concerned about the consequences of a moneyless economy. There is no doubt that a free-enterprise system has one great advantage over any other system yet discovered. It is simple. At Pour Tous, how much cheese I can buy is limited by the amount of money I have. This in turn tends to be limited by how much work I do, and what kind. With no money, what is going to restrain my consumption? Ideally, I would weigh-up the needs of the whole community before deciding how much cheese — if any — to buy. But this is very much easier said than done. The Aurovillian who supplied me with this example suspects that, at the present level of consciousness, it is impossible. Another advantage of the present

money system is that Auroville fits easily into the outside world, from which it derives necessary income. Since Auroville is not nearly self-supporting, it must trade. Every rupee spent by the community on things from outside must be balanced by a rupee of outside income. Otherwise, we will have to borrow from ourselves (a sort of National Debt) or from others.

This raises the question for some Aurovilians of whether the community is generating enough wealth to meet its needs. For at least one person I spoke to, the question of doing without money is secondary to that of raising the community's income. "I look around and I see people who are potentially incredibly productive. Is there some way this could be harnessed to create money for Auroville?"

A quick look at the monthly accounts published in AVNews reveals that one business unit is contributing over 20% of Auroville's income. None of the others comes close at this. If there were one or two more such success stories, would that enable the community to address its internal needs better? And what are those needs?

Supplying people's needs

Everyone I spoke to referred to this in one way or another. What is enough? What should Auroville provide to all Aurovilians? And under what conditions? What constitutes "necessities" varied from person to person. But some combination of food, clothing, shelter and education was present on most lists of things that should be considered as entitlements for every Aurovillian.

Guaranteeing to provide necessities implies a formal bargain between the individual and the community which does not currently exist in Auroville. There are many excellent informal arrangements, varying from friends gathering to help when sickness or misfortune strike, to hardship loans extended in times of financial trouble. But if simply being Aurovillian entitles everyone to certain things, a very important question arises. "If 'we' are going to take care of 'you', how are 'you' going to contribute to 'us'?" "So many Aurovilians have the experience of their needs getting met," says one. "It's not 'reasonable'. And it's not a system, of course." The question for some is whether a system has become necessary. As Auroville grows, will it be able to take care of its elderly, its sick and its incapacitated without some formal process?

In the West, enormously complex systems exist to guarantee certain necessities to each citizen. The other side of the bargain is that each citizen should work and pay taxes. But who in Auroville would have the power to decide what is or isn't "work" for these purposes? "There's no point in creating just another social security system here," was a comment often made.

Perhaps the most frequently expressed opinion is that Aurovilians' basic needs should be catered for, allowing them to do whatever work it is they feel called to do. The community should trust that the "right" work will get done that allows everyone to live abundantly.

This calls for a level of trust not experienced by all. Without being cynical, some Aurovilians do not believe that it will work. "As a dream, a vision, it is perfect," said one. "But as a reality, I find it very difficult to believe." Of course, one way to discover whether the community is ready for that level of freedom is to try it.

Experiment

There must be very few places in the world where social ideas can be so eas-

ily tested as in Auroville. With only fifteen hundred Aurovilians, all of whom are dedicated to finding a better way of living, it should be possible to experiment with a broad range of new systems. In other words, to answer the question "What if...?"

What if we adopted an alternative currency? What if eight sages with intuitive intelligence make some of the decisions? What if we provided basic needs unconditionally? The only way to find out is to do it.

One problem with conducting such experiments is that they arouse the legitimate — and I suspect almost universally shared — fears of the community. The basic fear could probably be expressed as "What if it all goes wrong?" Limiting the time-frame of the experiment may be an effective way to allay such concerns. It may be possible to gather community support for a three-month trial of almost any system. As was pointed out to me several times, all systems fail in the end anyway. They are all, by definition, limited. "We are here to transform consciousness, not to devise yet more systems," said one Aurovillian. "Of course, we need systems in the meantime. But we should always remember that the only purpose of a system is to help in that process of transformation."

Paradox

Do we do the inner work first, which will manifest the outer reality? Or do we change the outer reality as a means of transforming consciousness? This question will not go away simply because it is too difficult or boring to contemplate. As one person succinctly said, "It is not the presence or absence of money that determine the quality of exchange. It is the state of consciousness of the individuals involved in the process. Abolishing money or exchange between individuals will not abolish the trader mentality, because that mentality is a state of consciousness independent of money."

There is a paradox at the heart of Auroville's uncertainty about money. We are here to do things differently. If we use the existing capitalist and socialist tools, Auroville will simply become like everywhere else. But if we do not, how are we to provide an abundant life for ourselves? If we isolate ourselves from this or that aspect of the world, how can we simultaneously interact with it?

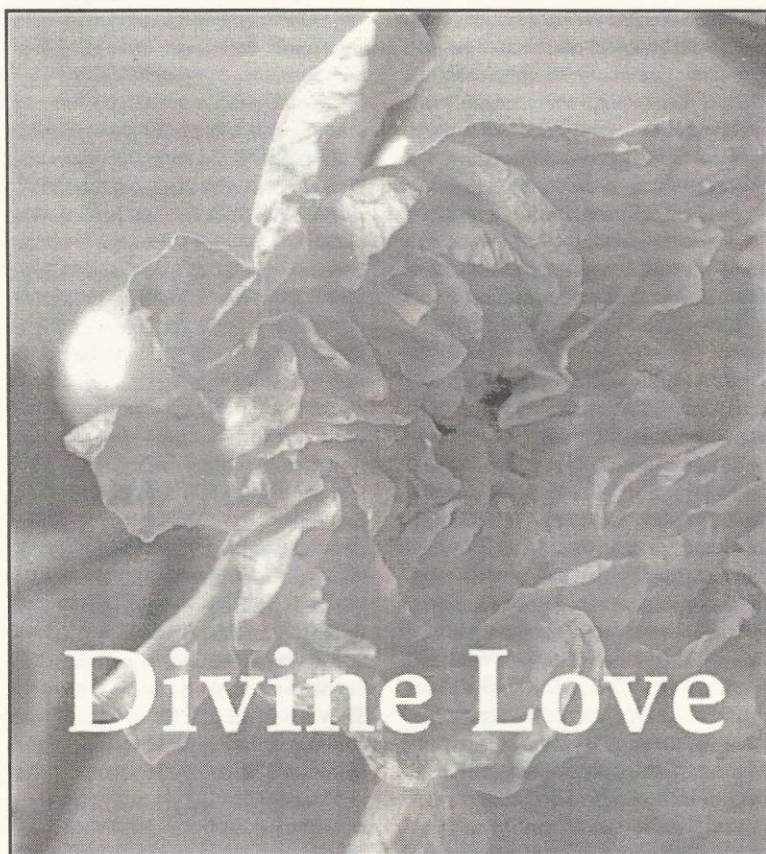
The enormously heartening and encouraging thing about these difficult riddles is that they are being worked on here. They are under active consideration by an entire community which is dedicated to their resolution on a higher level of consciousness. It is this which binds and unites all Aurovilians, no matter what their opinions about money and financial systems.

However little common ground there may appear to be in this or that conversation or meeting, there is actually complete consensus: we are here to solve these problems. C.S. Lewis wrote, "Really close friends are able to disagree wholeheartedly about the answer. What is vital is that they recognize the importance of the question."

From a certain perspective — for example, 6.30 pm at a fractious Platform Meeting after a bad day — it may seem that Aurovilians are hopelessly divided. They are not. They are addressing the questions together. One by one.

David
(Thanks to Serge, Paul Vincent, Paulien, Peter T, Alain Bernard, Olivier (La Ferme), Kathy, Don, Judith, Bindu, Steve, Manoj and many other Aurovilians who have patiently answered my stupid questions. Any errors of fact or interpretation are solely my responsibility.)

PUBLICATION



On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birthday on August 15th, Auroville's House of Mother's Agenda presented a small booklet *Divine Love* with quotations mainly taken from *Mother's Agenda* to all Aurovilians.

A butterfly garden

Jana and Perumal speak about their efforts to create a garden for the 'conscious flowers of air', as Sri Aurobindo described butterflies poetically in *Savitri*

It is well known that Auroville was started on degraded land stripped of its original tree and bush cover, interspersed with dry land crop fields. The last three decades have witnessed a massive re-afforestation in a bid to restore soil quality and the general health of the land. This has met with spectacular success, but certain problems have arisen. As much as 72% of the regeneration in many areas consist of imported exotic plant species, like Acacia trees — 'Work', as Mother named them. To what extent this has adversely affected the local fauna still remains to be seen, but nowadays a shift to afforestation with indigenous species is being promoted.

One of the areas where this is being done is Fertile Field. Jana and

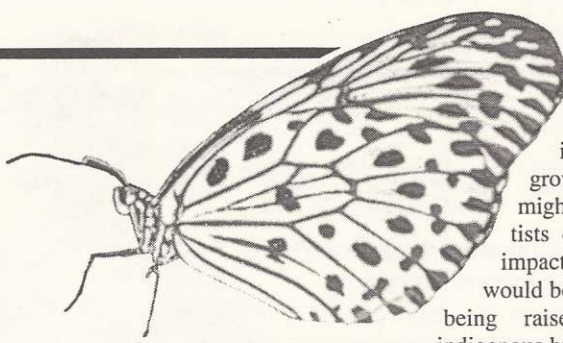
"Since I was a child I loved insects, particularly beetles. I collected and bred them. But I choose to get a bachelor's degree in English Literature, and insects remained a hobby. When I came to live in India, with its enormous amount of insects, my interest reawakened. I am thinking about taking up a correspondence course to get a Masters in Biology. This time, the emphasis will be on butterflies. I had been breeding them on a small scale when I was living at the beach community Sri Ma. Now, here in Fertile Field, we plan to plant 10 acres for the butterfly garden with food plants for the larvae and with plants that attract butterflies."

Butterfly population in Auroville

"There is quite a good butterfly population in Auroville," she continues. "Research done in 1995 by Ms.

Aditi Pai showed that there were 55 species of butterflies living in Auroville, against 49 in Puthupet, a forest nearby Auroville which still has the original shrub jungle of this area. Now it is well known that certain insects, especially butterflies and moths, are particularly suited as biological indicators.

Biological indicators are organisms, which are very sensitive to their environment. This is manifested by their 'performance' in the habitat. Their very presence or absence, or their number, is a good indication of the state of the environment. Using butterflies as biological indicators, Pai found that the quality of the Auroville habitats is not exceptionally good, but that the diversity of Auroville's habitats, ranging from grasslands (Aranya) to plantation areas (young areas in Aurobrindavan and older



Malabar Tree Nymph
Idea malabarica (Moore)

ones in Forecomers) to natural degraded scrub lands (e.g. Fertile) and ravines (Forecomers) was responsible for the species richness."

"Large parts of Auroville", says Jana, "are disturbed habitats, that is areas where due to all kinds of reasons there has been a loss of biomass. Other areas are unsuitable for the indigenous butterfly population because the flora is partly exotic. The afforestation efforts attempt to change all that, and I hope that the species variety will drastically grow once the indigenous food shrubs and trees mature. After all, there are about 1,500 species of butterflies in India, 315 of which live in South India. The butterflies seen in Auroville are among the most common species of India. But they are hardy. My neighbor, a Tamil farmer, sprayed his field this year with DDT, which may have killed some of them, but I have also found many larvae that lived through the spraying season."

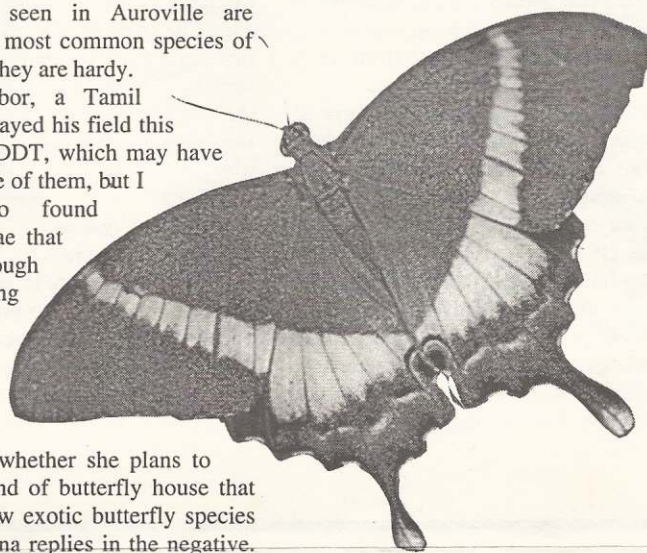
The project

As to whether she plans to make a kind of butterfly house that would show exotic butterfly species as well, Jana replies in the negative. "That is not the objective, although it would be a great project. I recently visited one such house in Malaysia, which is filled with different butterflies from all over the world. It is stunningly beautiful, but it is not what I want to do. I want to focus on local species and release them. To import

non-indigenous species is useless if you do not grow their food plants and it might be dangerous, as scientists do not know what the impact on the environment would be. Already questions are being raised whether breeding indigenous butterflies would not create a pest, as the larvae eat plants. The emphasis will be on growing the food plants and planting them all over Auroville, which implies a lot of nursery work. It is not a question of just breeding and releasing them!

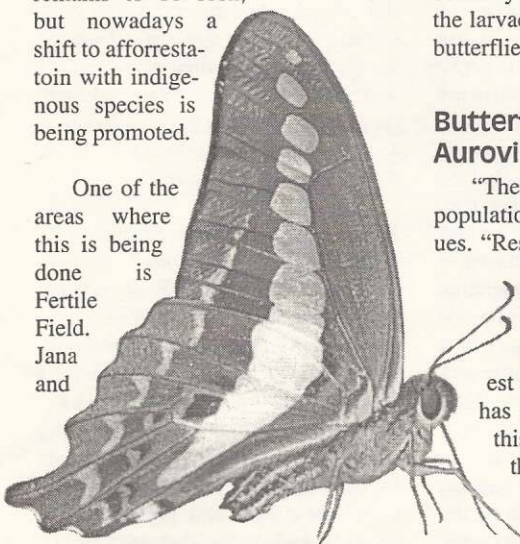
The general consensus is that this project would be beneficial to the environment. One of the advantages is that butterflies are the second strongest pollinating insects next to bees. We expect that the butterflies will disperse and migrate and that, as we will not introduce any new species, nature will balance it out. We have already seen many new birds coming to Auroville, which are the natural predators of butterflies."

Carel



Common Banded Peacock -
Papilio crino (Fabricius)

Photos from
Some South Indian Butterflies
by K. Gunathilagaraj



Common Blue Bottle
Graphium sarpedon teredon
(Felder & Felder)

her husband Perumal have taken charge of 17 acres recently purchased land — 10 acres of cashew tope and 7 of open field — with an aim to plant native trees and shrubs so as to create a butterfly garden for indigenous butterflies.

"I was more or less born with a passion for insects," laughs Jana.

LIVING TOGETHER

Issues of abuse

Physical and sexual abuse occurs in all societies, particularly in repressive and male-dominated societies. Though it is rarely openly acknowledged, Auroville also has seen cases of sexual abuse. Bob and Jean are qualified counselors who form part of an informal group that seeks to help both victims and abusers. Auroville Today interviews them about the issue

One hears rumours of sexual abuse, but it is often hard to establish facts. Why is that?

JEAN: I believe it is so because Auroville wants to be a spiritual community and Aurovilians aspiring to lead a yogic life find it difficult to accept that things are not perfect here. It is a hard truth to bear and it is easier to deny it than to acknowledge the fact that certain things which happen in the rest of the world also happen in Auroville. Besides, this is a small community where most people know one another. It is hard for people to accept or admit that fellow Aurovilians are perpetrators of abuse.

Then there has been a long history in Auroville of letting people live the way they want to live. It has been considered as part of the yoga to let people have their independence to work out their own problems. That is a wonderful condition for growth provided that people do monitor themselves. But perhaps not everybody in Auroville is capable of such self discipline.

BOB: There is also a lack of awareness here in Auroville. Many Aurovilians do not know what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. In the

West, particularly in the last decades, society is attempting to shed some light on the darker side of life and people are aware of what constitutes abuse. The people who have been here for many years have perhaps not followed this movement in the West. It was necessary to publish a statement in the Auroville News explaining the categories of unacceptable behaviour.

How has Auroville responded to the formation of this group?

BOB: Less positively than we had expected. At present, we have difficulty in even talking openly about this issue with relevant working groups of the community. We have problems in getting this group officially ratified as there is a resistance to recognize the problem. So our first step is to create awareness. The community should learn to accept the fact that there are cases of abuse happening here. There should be information about the issue so that people know what's wrong and what's not. People should be encouraged not to accept abusive forms of behaviour and to report it to our group if they are subject to it or hear about it. Women in particular should be clear about their rights and bold enough to

stand up for them. Eventually we hope to have a large diverse group with a mix of cultures and nationalities encompassing both men and women so that we can offer help to the victims and the abusers in the most effective and sensitive way.

On this issue, what changes would like to introduce?

JEAN: The biggest change we would like to see is a change in people's attitude. People should understand that in addition to the physical trauma, the victim suffers psychologically. It is the only crime where the victim feels guilty!

BOB: People should also realize that we do not want to mete out punishment to the abusers. Our group does not wish to be judgmental or create a big public fuss. There is no need to humiliate one member of the community in front of the rest of the community. Our groups wants to help people to understand their urges, to understand the fact that their behavior causes hurt to others, and to learn to change their behavioural patterns. We once thought of calling our group "Friends" in order to let people know that we wish to help both the victims and the perpetrators of

abuse.

JEAN: There is no excuse to accept abuse in Auroville. One sometimes hears as a justification that, as unacceptable and damaging behaviour is taking place all over the world, it is logical that it occurs in Auroville as well. But Auroville should be the leader in changing things in the world that need to be changed. If we collude with abusive behaviour, we are helping the negative forces that are at work here instead of stamping them out. We should be honest enough to know where we stand and honest enough to take a stand when necessary.

BOB: The mark of a mature society is one that can look at its own reality, no matter how flawed or painful it is, and deal with its weaknesses. The worth of a society is also measured by the protection it offers to its weakest and most vulnerable members, which are very often the children and the women. Collectively, we should care about what's happening Auroville. We are one family and caring for one another is part of the yoga here.

Interview by Carel and Bindu



In brief

● Two collective meditations were held on August 15th, India's Independence Day and Sri Aurobindo's birthday, one in the morning in the World Centre (SAWCHU) to pray for peace between India and Pakistan, the other in the evening at the Amphitheatre next to the Matrimandir.

● Following the summer camps of Village Action in which over 700 village children participated, "AVAA" — Auroville Village Action Arts — will give three-month courses in dance, drama, singing, painting and physical education to village children.

● The Ashram Archives has released a CD-ROM containing the full text of 11 major books (16 volumes) and a life sketch of Sri Aurobindo. Price in India Rs. 600, e-mail to: sabda@sriarobindoashram.org. In the USA Lotus Light will come out with its own CD, which is, except for the cover and the ordering information identical to the Sabda CD. Expected price, around US \$40.

● A proposal to establish a 100-acre botanical garden at 'Peaceful City', the site near 'Adventure' which Auroville recently purchased from a speculator, is under study. The project would involve specialists in cacti, ferns, palms, orchids, native trees and shrubs.

● The exhibition "Architecture at the Crossroads: Extremes of an Opulent Society", the second in a series of three entitled "Squaring the Circle", was held in Pitanga. It featured in photographs the designs of the world's most influential personalities who have shaped the last 25 years of architecture.

● The Auroville Press presented its exhibition "The Genius of India" at Mumbai's National Centre for Performing Arts during the last half of August.

● Savitri Bhavan hosted an exhibition of line drawings by Franz on themes of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

● The Verité Learning Centre hosted a series of talks on Integral Psychology in the Light of Sri Aurobindo by Matthijs Cornelissen of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

● Quiet hosted an "Integrated course of functional and informational medicine (biological holistic and bio-resonance paradigms for non-invasive diagnosis and therapy)" by Dr. E. Dobrea.

● Indian classical Dhrupad vocalist Sri Uday Bhalwakar from Pune has given a one-week vocal workshop in this oldest form of Indian classical spiritual music.

● Former Aurovillian Lisa Borstlap creator of Aurosarjan who now lives in the Netherlands, gave a one-day workshop on "Discover your creativity and how to improve it".

APOLOGY

The previous issue of *Auroville Today* (cover story "India: Defying Definitions") was inadvertently printed with the wrong date and number. It should have been August 2000, no. 139 instead of July 2000, no. 138. We apologize for the mistake.

Kanchana dances Odissi

Kanchana is a young Tamil woman from the village of Kottakarai who grew up in Auroville. A student at a well-known dance school, Nrityagram in Bangalore, Kanchana has blossomed into an accomplished Odissi dancer. She has performed extensively in the USA as part of an ensemble, and this summer she gave her first solo performance at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivass — the very same stage from which she set out. An interview

How did you get into dance?

I started dancing when I was 7 with a Bharat Natyam teacher who taught in Kottakarai. I also had another teacher whose background was in folk dance. I often used to perform this kind of dance with some of the other students at local functions like marriages. A few years later they closed the school and I didn't know what to do. My family enrolled me in the local government school, but in these schools children aren't taught anything about performing arts. I was not happy. Then I started attending Meenakshi's school in the evenings and there they taught us music and dance. Still later, I studied at New Creation, but in those days only a few of the kids were taken to Pondicherry to learn dance. I used to stand outside the room where they practiced, watching and copying them. Then I met Ursula, and she became like a grandmother to me. I had been working in her house for about one year when she came to know of my love for dance. She insisted that I continue. She spoke to Paolo and Anu and they were both supportive. I thought, "Wow! I can't believe I am going to start dancing!" So I worked in the mornings and took class in the afternoon. I also participat-

ed in the production of the choreography, "Crossroads." We performed this piece around India, including at Bangalore, in 1992. While we were there we all went to see an Odissi performance. I had never seen Odissi before, but I knew right then and there that this was what I wanted to study. I was determined to go to Bangalore and enroll at the Nrityagram dance school. It so happened that Veenapani in Pondicherry was very good friends with a teacher at that school. When that woman visited Pondy, I went to see her and she invited me to come and see whether I liked the place. At first it was tough — Auroville is such a special place it was hard for me to leave. It took me a few months to feel settled, but then I felt very happy to be there.

Many young Indian women have to fight against the social conventions that might prevent them from performing. Have you had any support from your family?

No, not at all, except for my brother who also lives in Auroville. He has some understanding about the importance of culture. He also supports me in telling my family not to insist that I get married. It's so hard for Indian girls to become dancers, they have so little

support. If you aren't very strong, you just can't do it. You have to really struggle and often no one helps you. For myself, I decided that whatever happens, I have to remain firm. My family worries about what other people might be saying about me. But maybe this is changing. They all came to my recent performance here in Auroville. And for the first time my mother seemed so happy after she saw me dancing! Her eyes were filled with joy.

What is your typical day like at Nrityagram?

We wake up at 5:45 and either go jogging or do pranayam. Then we clean the facilities, since our school has no cleaning staff. At 7:30 there is a tea break. From 8:00-9:30 we do different exercises we have put

together, mostly based on exercises that various visiting dancers have given to us in workshops. Then we eat breakfast. From 10:30-12:30 we take our dance technique class. After lunch we each do our different chores. Some of us work in the office, others in the garden. Then from 3:30-5:30 we practice our dance repertoire. From 6:00-7:00 we work in the garden. Each student has her own plot and must do gardening. Then at 7:30 those like myself who are in the Nrityagram travelling dance company rehearse.

What are your aspirations as a dancer?

I dance because it makes me happy. But I also hope to use dance creatively through my own choreography. I have had many teachers of many kinds of dance and I don't want to just leave aside their training. I hope to find an innovative way to use what they have taught me. Teaching is also important to me. In the future, I would like to help the next generation of dancers. Everyone these days wants to become a computer engineer or a doctor, as if only in holding those professions one can be educated. But I want people to understand the importance of dance and music. Hopefully one day I can support someone out there who is in the same position that I was in. And my aim is definitely to return to Auroville some day after I have finished at

Nrityagram. I have received so much from the people here, and I want to contribute in return. In Auroville, there are so few teenage students in the dance classes and this is something that I would like to change. I would like to see more young people involved in studying and performing.

Indian dance is traditionally about bhakti. How do you relate your own practice and performance to that concept?

Every day is different. Some days I get up early in the morning and something bad happens and I am in a bad mood all day. But when I am feeling good, I really feel as if I am dancing for someone other than myself. I have a connection with something higher than my immediate surroundings. There are times when I even cry if something in a dance really touches me. Many people think dance is just about showing yourself to others. But while you do dance for the public, your first connection is with the Divine. It's like a triangle with three points between you, the audience and something higher. You can't break the connection anywhere.

How do you relate that feeling to Mother and Sri Aurobindo?

As a child I was not so interested in going to the temple, but I felt very connected to Mother and Sri Aurobindo when I started hearing about them. I have had lots of ups and downs in my life, so many times when I thought I should stop dancing. At these moments I visualize Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I feel their help and presence very strongly and know that because of them, I have received so many gifts.

Shanti

PEOPLE

"My perception of Auroville has changed"

An interview with Ashaman

Ashaman was born in Canada. He was a baby when his parents, Marlenka and Alan, visited Auroville in the mid-1970s. He came back with his mother in 1983, and lived in many different communities and experienced most of the Auroville schools. Later he went to Kodaikanal School before returning to the U.S. to pursue higher studies. He returned, accompanied by his dog Sacha, for the AV Youth 2000 celebrations and since then has been involved, among other things, in teaching Auroville babies to swim

"I don't remember much about my first visit to Auroville — only the red of the earth and the heat. I came back in 1983 at the age of eight. All the children had ponies then — it was our means of transport — and I remember racing through the canyons behind Anusuya and Samridhi with other kids like Bas and Stefan. It was wonderful to experience Auroville as a child in those days because of the equality with which the adults treated you. Some friends and I spent a lot of time in the Matrimandir workshop, and all there were very nice to us — they treated us like adults, not kids.

"On the other hand, with some of the other kids I had a pretty hard time: Auroville kids can be brutal. In fact, one of the main reasons I left to go to Kodaikanal School was that I felt I had to get out of Auroville to somewhere larger, somewhere I could grow and not feel oppressed. Actually all the Auroville kids at Kodai got along well together: we had a past nobody else could really understand.

"At Kodai I learned discipline, which was exactly what I needed then. As far as putting knowledge into a structure, like writing an essay, I had to start from scratch. Yet my Auroville experi-



ence, while it didn't fill me up with facts, gave me a good basis of common sense. More than that, it gave me a way to approach things — an exposure to a deeper pursuit, a way of looking at things from the inside out rather than

from a more materialistic level. At Kodai I started playing the "veena" (an Indian stringed instrument) and the classical guitar. So when I went back to the States, I decided to study music as part of a general liberal arts degree at a

college in Washington state. It was very intense — I was practising classical guitar for 4-6 hours daily. The classical guitar is a wonderful mirror of your inner progress. It's almost a Zen-type thing where you have first to develop an inner stability and then the external practise comes.

During those years I kept in touch with Auroville through the "Compats Forum" [an online Auroville discussion forum]. It was great to read about what was happening, although sometimes, when I listened to what went back and forth, it seemed like a lot of personality was getting in the way...

"When I finished my degree course, I put down my guitar for a few weeks. When I picked it up again I found I'd forgotten all the pieces that I used to play! I'd had too much of it, I just blocked them out. So for two years I took a break, doing all kinds of jobs — construction, gardening, laying floors. It was while laying floors that one of my colleagues found an abandoned husky puppy. I took her home, trained her, and Sacha's turned out to be a really good companion. Six months before I returned to Auroville she was hit by a car and her leg was paralysed. I kept hoping it would heal, but it didn't, so to prevent infection and attacks by other

dogs, I eventually had to have the leg amputated. I brought her with me, and now she travels everywhere with me on a trailer behind my bicycle — already she seems well known across the Indian subcontinent!

"When I returned to Auroville for the youth 2000 gathering I was a little tentative — I still had memories of some of the difficulties I had here when I was younger. But everything was different. In reality, my perception of Auroville has changed, and now I'm ready to take much more advantage of all the possibilities that are here. Of course, everywhere in the world there are possibilities for work and yoga, but here there's a strong, almost tangible atmosphere that is quite unique in my experience. I definitely want to come back and spend a longer time here when I've returned to a place of peace and focus in myself.

"On this visit I've been teaching young babies to swim — it's something I learned in the States. I think water is a very special medium. It facilitates communication on a much deeper level — on more telepathic and emotional levels — and working with small kids in the water creates such beautiful bonding. It's wonderful work."

Alan

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