

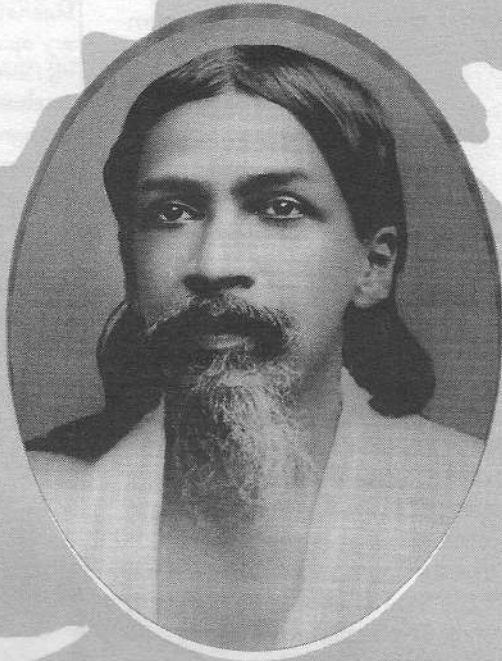
15 AUGUST 1997

50th Anniversary
of India's Independence

125th Birth Anniversary
of Sri Aurobindo

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AUROVILLE TODAY



15 August 1997 marks the 50th anniversary of India's Independence and the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY celebrates these two historic events.

Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a Power, a God-head, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being...⁽¹⁾ When, therefore, you ask who is Bhawani the Mother, She herself answers you, "I am the Infinite Energy which streams forth from the Eternal in the world and the Eternal in yourselves, I am the Mother of the Universe, the Mother of the Worlds, and for you who are children of the Sacred Land, Aryabhumi, made of her clay and reared by her sun and winds, I am Bhawani Bharati, Mother of India".⁽²⁾

"The Mother's map of India," shown above, which includes Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, "is the map of the true India in spite of all passing appearances, and it will always remain the map of the true India, whatever people may think about it. (The Mother, 29-7-1964)

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world,—not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity. This ideal can be as yet only a little seed and the life that embodies it a small nucleus, but it is our fixed hope that the seed will grow into a great tree and the nucleus be the heart of an ever-extending formation. It is with confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of a world in dissolution, and of the future India, the greater India of the rebirth that is to rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother.⁽³⁾

(See page 7 for references to the quotes)

AUROVILLE TODAY spoke to elder members of the Indian community in Auroville who had witnessed that momentous day on 15 August 1947 when India became free of colonial rule. Here are their reminiscences as well as reflections on India and Auroville:

Jayant Thakar:

I sacrificed my studies at the medical college to join the freedom fight movement in 1942. I was very close to Shri Morarji Desai, who was from the same district as I. Under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, we were organizing the masses to oppose, without violence, the British rule. We believed that one day the British would understand that they cannot rule a country without the consent of the people.

Because of the role I played, I was sentenced to prison by the British for 15 months in the Sabaramati jail of Ahmedabad. In retrospect, the time I spent in jail was fruitful for it was there that I started reading, in depth, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and also Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Since I had some knowledge of medicine, I used to help in treating other prisoners who were suffering from disease. I used to clean their boils and sores, and to me, that too was work for the Divine. After my release in 1945, I quietly continued my work of awakening the people. What sustained me in my work was Sri Aurobindo's prophecy in 1910 that India will be free. And by God's grace, in 1947 we achieved freedom. Of course, our joy at freedom was dampened by the division of the country.

However I strongly believe in the Mother's dream of an united, unpartitioned India. And I feel that the organization SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) is a step towards the unification of the Indian sub-continent. SAARC has succeeded in bringing together the countries of India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Europe with its European Union is taking great strides towards unity. And the ultimate goal will be the human unity that Sri Aurobindo talks about. I have full faith that whatever Sri Aurobindo dreamt for humanity will come true.

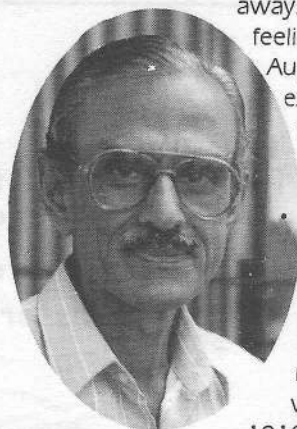
I know today we are passing through darkness. Indian politics has come to a very, very low level. When we fought for independence for our country and Gandhiji had defined what is "Swaraj" [self-rule], we had such dreams for our country, but today those dreams seem to be shattered. Everywhere there is corruption. We were

so poor as a nation, and when we got independence and with that prosperity, people could not control themselves—we went mad after money. But I do feel that this is a passing phase and that light will dawn

not only for India but for the whole of humanity. You see, the Divine Nature has its own way. It's a magical thing. You can't just reason out things and come to a logical conclusion. Auroville is the creation of the Mother and the Mother was Divine. So whatever she has dreamed, whatever she has said, must come true—that is what I believe. Whatever we are passing through these days, is our "Agni-Pariksha"—our

Varadharajan:

I was a mere lad of eleven when India became free. So I did not really take part in the freedom movement, but let me illustrate how I felt on the day we achieved Independence with another incident. I had my first "darshan" of the Mother on 15th August 1964. On seeing her, I felt an immense sense of freedom and joy. The experience passed



away. But after a few days, it occurred to me that I had a similar feeling, a similar sense of lightness and joy and freedom on 15th August 1947. On that day of India's Independence, I had felt extremely light and free, as though my body were floating in the air. Now these two events, one spiritual and one seemingly secular, both having an almost similar effect, have a deep significance for me. India's independence is a spiritual event. I am deeply in love with India. Sri Aurobindo's statement, "Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a Power, a Godhead... (1)." really means something to me—it resonates deep in my being.

Regarding Auroville, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have marked out very clearly how we should proceed in this adventure. Just as people did not really believe Sri Aurobindo in 1910 when he predicted that India would be free, similarly, people today do not really believe that "Auroville is a spiritual city." But it is. For Mother has said so. Just as India, at one point of time, boldly declared her freedom, similarly we should boldly declare that "Auroville is a spiritual city." We are beginning to do that in all our Tamil publications and brochures. Till now, Auroville has been projected more as an international township and so on, but now we are making a determined thrust to proclaim its spirituality. And there has been a very fine echo of our efforts: magazines in Tamil Nadu, reporting about Auroville, have also started calling it as a "spiritual city." The Mother has given her blessings for the certitude that the Tamil people will do what they can to realize human unity. And this message of the Mother should be spread in Tamil Nadu so that people become aware of their destiny. The Tamils express their psychic sensitivity in their fondness for flowers. Even the poor among them love flowers and despite everything, they smile. Many Aurovilians testify as to how they are touched by the beautiful smiles of their workers. Daily there is this psychic interchange between Tamil workers and their Western employers which, to me, is a concrete manifestation of being on the way to human unity. I must add that the Western influence, the dynamic energy of Westerners coupled with their spiritual seeking, has been very important and beneficial for Auroville.

(1) Letters on Yoga vol. I p. 424

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom....The old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

(A passage from Sri Aurobindo's message on the occasion of India's Independence, August 15, 1947. On Himself, p. 401-402)

test through fire. We are passing through this stage where, inside our dark tunnel, we cannot see the light. But even today, the experiment of Auroville, the experiment of human unity has significance, not only for India but for the whole world. Auroville is a unique experiment of human beings from all races, all nations, living together.

Auroville could not have developed the way it has without the Westerners. You see, Indians are essentially dreamers. They are thinkers and idealists. But the Western people have the capacity to work. Once they set their mind on something, they work and get it accomplished. I have always admired this trait of the Westerners. But we should not get bogged down in petty quarrels amongst ourselves. We should always focus on the future, on our ideals. I constantly pray to the Mother to guide Auroville to its destiny.

Recollecting

Kusum Ben:

In 1947 I was living with my husband Chinubhai, in Ahmedabad. My husband was an active freedom fighter and was put in jail several times. He was the right hand of Shri. Sardar Vallabhabai Patel. I was only sixteen when I met him in 1942. He gave me a book to read, "Jeevan Shodan" by Kishorlal Mashabuvalla, which awakened a revolutionary spirit in me. My parents were against my relationship with Chinubhai. They wanted to arrange my marriage elsewhere but I did not agree with their choices. I wanted to live my own life, so in 1943 Chinubhai and I ran away and got married. He taught me spinning and we spun our own cloth. I supported him fully and our home became a camp for the freedom fighters. My role was to attend women's meetings and processions and encourage women to come out of our homes and fight for our freedom. I learned so much

from my husband: Not words but acts are

important; My main job was to help people; This life is for my nation!

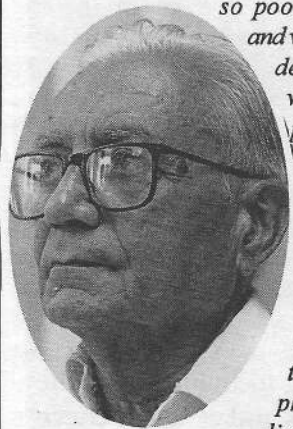
My husband died in an unfortunate accident in 1950. I was 26 years old, with two small children.

My mother-in-law asked me to move in

with her, but I wanted to live according to my own ideals. Although my husband had some savings from which we could live a simple life without having to work, I joined the women's section of the Congress Bhavan of Ahmedabad. In 1963 I left the Congress Bhavan, because I was appointed as assistant manager of the Khadi Gram (the hand spinning institution inspired by Mahatma Gandhi). Although I loved my work, I did not do it for the money and I always managed my timings according to the school hours of my sons.

Our summer holidays we spent traveling to get to know different parts of the country. In 1957 it brought us to South India and Pondicherry. That is when I met Mother for the first time. I saw her playing tennis. My sons and I brought her flowers. I still remember Her eyes! I wanted to join the Ashram right there and then, but I first had to bring up my sons. In 1970 I came back to Pondicherry to stay. I became the assistant of the doctor of Auroville's Maternity Department in Promesse. That's where I've lived since. In 1972 Mother asked me to look after the Ganesh temple nearby. And among other things, from 1994 onwards I have started working at the Matrimandir.

Why did the Supreme choose India? In this soil there is something spiritual inspite of all the problems, ignorance, difficulties and obstacles. That means there is hope. Although the nights are dark, there are many stars, there is hope! After the darkness, the morning will come, will be. The Mother has asked us "Will you collaborate?" To me, working in Auroville is collaborating with the Divine work.



Freedom's Day

Where the mind is without fear, and
the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken
up into fragments by narrow domestic
walls;
Where words come out from the depth
of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its
arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has
not lost its way into the dreary desert
sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee
into ever-widening thought and ac-
tion—Into that heaven of freedom,
my Father, let my country awake.

(from *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore.
Trans. from Bengali.)

Prem Malik:

That was Tagore's aspiration for the awakening of India. It poetically expresses his and our aspiration for India's Independence. When it finally happened, in 1947, I was 28 years old and lived in what is now Pakistan. There was a jubilant mood, but it was fringed with apprehension for what the immediate future might bring. None could have imagined the holocaust which happened shortly afterwards, in which hundreds of thousands of people were forced to move away from their birthplaces and in which over a million people died. I got away from Sind by posing as a Muslim. But when I arrived in New Delhi, I found that the Hindus in India were behaving as badly towards the Muslims as the Muslims had been behaving against the Hindus in Pakistan.

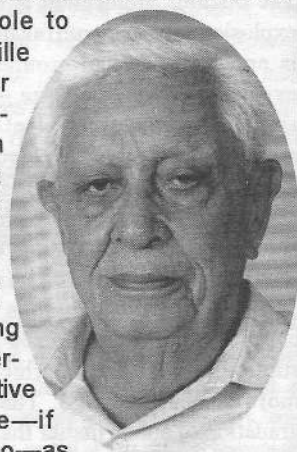
India has not been able to live up to Tagore's prayer. Not yet, in any case. I think that the main problem is that India is still divided. "The division must go", said Sri Aurobindo, and he said that the division of India into India, Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) is artificial and would weaken the country. We have seen how right he was. Now, after 50 years, a kind of approach towards Pakistan is taking place. I can only hope that it will result in uniting the Indian subcontinent, perhaps in some kind of large federation.

The present situation of India is lamentable. Things have become very bad, in particular the corruption everywhere in India, up to the highest political levels. This is slowly killing the country. The people are completely fed up by this. But I think that things will change, actually, things are already in the process of change. There is some kind of "pruning" going on, which I see as a result of the Divine will, a spiritual force which is strongly acting in India today. For example, for the first time in India's history, bureaucrats and politicians up to the level of Prime and Chief Ministers, are facing corruption trials in court. It may be the beginning of the end of corruption.

Only its spiritual force will be able to change the present sorry state of India

into the true role of India as described by Sri Aurobindo.

It is on this level that Auroville has an important role to play. Auroville stands for spiritual development in matter, for a different way of life. The spiritual force I was speaking about is certainly as active in Auroville—if not more so—as elsewhere in India. Many positive developments are taking place at present in Auroville. The obstacles from the past are gradually disappearing, though some pruning may still have to be done. But I am deeply convinced that Auroville is developing in the intended way, so that it may play its true role and spread its message in the world.



Nergez:

Yes, when India's Independence dawned, most of us were drunk with the idea of freedom. Even though the Parsis, the community to which I belong, were the most favoured community under the British, to me it felt like being in a golden cage. I well knew that with Independence, the Parsis, a minority community would be swamped under by other dominant communities of India, but still it would be freedom. I could raise my head proudly and call myself "Indian," and I was free, free, FREE!



Excepting my uncle who was a staunch British supporter, my family were strong nationalists. We had a "charka" [spinning wheel advocated by Mahatma Gandhi as a symbol of independence] in the house, and I would spin it for hours... That was my contribution to the freedom movement.

Now, in hindsight, I realize that intoxicated with its first flush of freedom, India went head on for materialism, dropping its inherent spiritualism—its gift from the gods—in the dust.

Regarding the third question of Auroville's relevance for India, I would like to turn it the other way around: what relevance does India have for Auroville? I believe India is still a leader, a giant in the field of spirituality. And the *raison d'être* for Auroville is "life divine."

Perhaps after the East and the West have converged—East with its relaxed spiritualism and the West with its dynamic energy—it will be then that Auroville will have any relevance for India proving that East is East and West is West and when the twain shall meet, it will be the best.

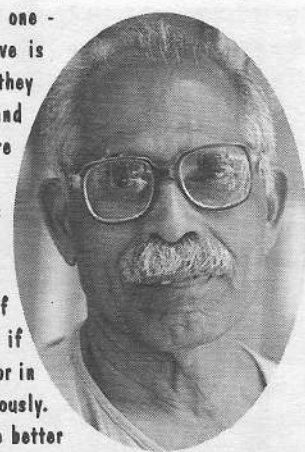
Mahalingam:

In the thirties, I was a college student. The Congress used to hold sessions in my village and other surrounding villages. We students used to attend these sessions and wear "khadi" [handspun cloth] to support the "swadeshi" [nationalist] movement. But in 1942, when the Quit India movement intensified, my friends and I gave up our studies and started organizing rallies and protest marches in the district. We often had confrontations with the police force, but I always felt that they, themselves being Indians, were considerate to us. Independence was an occasion of great joy and celebration.

Unfortunately, in many ways, things have deteriorated after Independence. Relationships between families in the villages, between teachers and students have all deteriorated. Formerly, in the villages, there was no need to guard your fields—people used to keep a look-out for one another. Today, more than half of our harvest from our tamarind grove is stolen. And people even when they know the thief do not report him as they do not wish to get involved....this is totally contrary to Indian thought and tradition. The trouble is money has to come to rule now. Relationships are now measured by money.

Yet, I am not disheartened. This is the work of Rudra [Shiva in his destroyer aspect]. This too, India's present phase, is the work of the Lord. In *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo says that there is "no construction here without destruction, no harmony except by a poise of contending forces won out of many actual and potential discords"...and if one can look beyond the so-called "evil," there is still a lot to rejoice for in today's world. People's awareness of the world has increased tremendously. Not only by the spread of the television, but also, the young people are better educated now. At least, one child in every family of my village works in a big city like Hyderabad, Madras, or Bombay. In the olden days, people's lives were restricted to a circle of 10 m.

Regarding Auroville, I fear not much is known about it in the villages and smaller towns of Tamil Nadu. And in Auroville, I am afraid, there are many Tamil Aurovilians who have joined Auroville for the wrong reason. They do not accept Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's ideals as their aim. They are content to stick to their old rituals, to worship the lesser gods...they have joined Auroville for material and not spiritual reasons. One has to somehow counteract all this ignorance. Many Tamil people in the Ashram and in Auroville are doing a lot to spread Sri Aurobindo's thought in Tamil Nadu. I contribute articles and translations of Sri Aurobindo's works to *Vaikalai*, a Tamil magazine that Sitaramaji in the Ashram and I started in 1969 with the Mother's blessings, and would like to devote more time to translating the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



Invocation.

15 August 1947

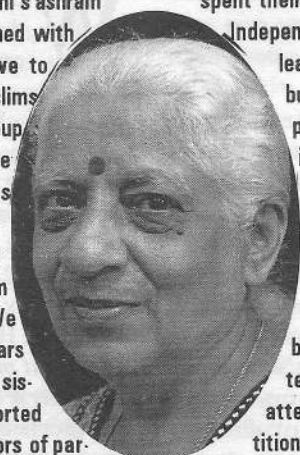
O our Mother, O Soul of India, Mother who hast never forsaken thy children even in the days of darkest depression, even when they turned away from thy voice, served other masters and denied thee, now when they have arisen and the light is on thy face in this dawn of thy liberation, in this great hour we salute thee. Guide us so that the horizon of freedom opening before us may be also a horizon of true greatness and of thy true life in the community of the nations. Guide us so that we may be always on the side of great ideals and show to man thy true visage, as a leader in the ways of the spirit and a friend and helper of all the peoples.

The Mother. (Collected Works, vol 13, p. 360)

Lachman Melvani:

My family comes from Sind, which lies mainly in Pakistan now. I was born in Karachi. But I went to school in Hyderabad [in Sind] where the family house was located. It was a big house built around a courtyard and it was shared by our whole joint family. My uncle was an active member of the Congress and he inspired the ideals of freedom in us. I remember, as early as the age of eight, I became a member of a patriotic children's organization and we used to take part in demonstrations and processions, singing songs of freedom, shouting slogans, waving our handmade flags. My two elder sisters and a cousin who later joined Gandhi's ashram spent their time spinning the "charkha" [spinning wheel]. We never had imagined with Independence that the country would be split into two, that I would have to leave my birthplace... In Hyderabad, but they were our friends. We would go out to the street to see the puppets, and they used to come to our house to participate in our festivals. The rift between Hindus and Muslims has always been a politically instigated one...I remember that on the day of Independence, I seized the Congress flag that we had and put it up. But down for fear of retaliation from our life was totally disrupted. We had to flee Sind. My father had already passed away a couple of years before. My brother-in-law booked a passage to Bombay for me and my sisters. And we all managed to leave Hyderabad after a number of aborted attempts. The journey was fraught with tension for the tales of the horrors of partition—the looting and the killing—had already reached us. And when we came to Bombay, we, who were born on Indian soil, had to register ourselves again as Indians!

Regarding the relevance of Auroville being in India, India is the only country where such an experiment could have been hosted. India has been the fount of four major religions and countless other spiritual sects. She has equally embraced all the religions, all the various paths to God that people follow. Despite the partition, India has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. I think we are still far from understanding all that Mother with her foresight said about Auroville's role and India's role in the world. We have not reached that level of consciousness. It is no use making mental formations in trying to interpret her words. We must grow beyond mental formations. We must constantly aspire to grow in consciousness. How can I or any one else judge if Auroville is developing in the right way? Things are not necessarily what they seem. To move forward, the wheel first goes down and then up... Personally, I feel I have grown and developed tremendously after I came to Pondicherry and to Auroville. But I can only speak for myself.



SRI AUROBINDO: A VISION OF SCIENCE



PHOTO COURTESY: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM ARC

*The surface finds, the screen-phenomenon,
Are Nature's offered ransom, while behind,
Hers occult mysteries lie face, unknown,
From the crude handling of the empiric
Mind.*

Sri Aurobindo: "Discoveries of Science"

Sri Aurobindo is well-known as a yogi, philosopher and a poet. But few know him as a scientist, even though his writings are replete with discussions on issues relating to the different fields of modern science. When reading him one feels as if it is the Creator himself explaining the intricate processes of the cosmos. He exceeds easily the limitations of modern science as physics, psychology, occultism and philosophy blend into each other to become Science in the highest sense of the word — a search for the ultimate and the highest Truth.

From the eyes of scientist, Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, **The Life Divine**, is not simply a philosophical exposition, it is seen to be a book of physics — physics of the cosmos — in which he describes the laws and processes of the whole of creation ranging from the highest planes of consciousness, through the subtle realms of existence down to the physics of pure matter.

Particle Physics

In the first volume alone of **The Life Divine** we find fifty occurrences of the word "atom" (or its derivatives) as part of discussions that often involve the cutting edge of physics and, more often than not, exceed the scope even of modern physics. He describes, for example, the properties of subatomic particles several decades before physics knew of their existence. "Subdivide the formal atom into essential atoms, break it up into the most infinitesimal dust of being, we shall still arrive at some utmost atomic existence, unstable perhaps but always reconstituting itself in the eternal flux of force" (p.238)

In one pregnant sentence written in 1916 he summarises the world of subatomic particles with the stunning accuracy of a physicist. It was many decades later that quantum physics confirmed the fact that subatomic particles exist, that they are unstable and always reconstituting themselves in an eternal play of force and energy!

But Sri Aurobindo's writings contain much more than the obvious meaning, one can

always go deeper still into the subtlety of words by asking why he wrote these words and not others. We discover that the sequence of words conveys a deeper knowledge: a) unstable, b) reconstituting, c) eternal flux, d) flux of force.

The fundamental characteristic of subatomic particles is their instability. Hence this point comes first. But this instability has the tendency of reconstituting itself so that something always exists: the instability does not lead to annihilation but to reconstitution. Hence this point comes second. This flux of constitution and reconstitution goes on eternally: it has no beginning and no end. It has a stability in the very fact that it is eternal! This point flows naturally from the first two, hence it is the third. And finally, it is this flux of force that binds the unstable particles into stable clusters that we call the atom which is the first stable entity arising out of the chaotic instability of the subatomic world.

Today one of the most important goals of particle physics is to find the most fundamental particle of matter — if such a thing exists — which will explain this whole creation. The last of the quarks has recently been confirmed and the question today centres around what is it that makes up the quarks. Sri Aurobindo's yogic insight answers this question unambiguously even while relating it to the larger framework of the subtler realms and processes of the cosmos: "Not any original Matter is the cause of atomic existence. Subdivide the formal atom, break it up into the most infinitesimal dust of being, we shall still arrive at some utmost atomic existence". In other words, there is no such thing as an ultimate particle that can explain the whole of material creation for matter is infinitely divisible though increasingly unstable.

This is only the first glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's comments on particle physics, but he has much more to say, most of which has been confirmed by recent discoveries, and quite a bit of it which is yet to be discovered by science. But for now let's peek at the atom itself.

The Atom

While describing the important role that the atom plays in material creation, Sri Aurobindo identifies key features of the atom in scientific though non-technical words. He then draws attention to the tremendous energy locked up within the atom that resists all external pressure for change or dissolution. He even anticipated the development of atomic power and the atom bomb several years before their development. In 1939, six years before the Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, he wrote:

*A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.*

(Sonnets: A Dream of Surreal Science)

A layperson tends to see the phrase "blew out the universe" as a case of poetic hyperbole. But a physicist who knows the working of the hydrogen bomb would see it quite differently. The hydrogen bomb works on the principle of fusing hydrogen atoms to release atomic energy in the form of an explosion of intense heat and pressure which continues as a chain reaction throughout the hydrogen gas. The horrifying aspect of this reaction is that in principle there is no limit to the size of the hydrogen bomb: one could put as much hydrogen gas as is needed and the explosion would continue to be that much longer and

more powerful. This in itself does not seem to be too serious until we realise that hydrogen is the most plentiful element in the universe. The obvious implication is that any atomic explosion can easily run out of control if there is enough hydrogen around it causing an explosion of unlimited size — potentially the size of the whole universe! In the light of modern science what seemed at first to be a case of poetic exaggeration is now seen to be a statement of fact of pure physics.

But there is more to the story: esoteric science tells us that the atomic chain reaction is only one side of reality. There is a more crucial chain reaction taking place at the level of subtle-physical matter which causes even more serious damage. There is a whole gradation of subtle matter that exists beyond the gross matter visible to our eyes. Sri Aurobindo makes a passing mention of this subtle matter in his evening talks: "There are various forms of Matter. What we know is the grossest form but there are other subtler ranges of Matter, and each form has its own properties." (Evening Talks as recorded by A. B. Purani, p.190)

This subtle-physical matter plays a crucial role in the health and maintenance of our bodies. If this supporting structure is damaged, it leads to cancer and immunological diseases that have no apparent physical basis.

The Mother was so sensitive to the subtle-physical vibrations that when the atom bomb was exploded by China near the Indian border on October 16, 1964, she experienced an extremely unpleasant smell in the subtle-physical air. In a conversation on November 14 that year she describes her unusual sensitivity from childhood to the quality of fresh air. On the day of the explosion she sensed something new in the air, something pernicious which had an extremely subtle and non-physical odour and had the power to separate vital vibrations from physical ones. She describes how she immediately set to work spending several hours of the night counteracting it by neutralising it with a higher vibration. From a higher point of view, splitting the atom is a process of death which reverses the effort of life to build the atom. That is the esoteric explanation for the atom bomb's many life-abolishing results.

Sri Aurobindo hints at this, both by reference to life in building the atom as well as to death in splitting the atom: "Form is the most visible sign of life in the atom. So there is a tendency in the physical atom to throw away anything that would destroy form: there is an effort to preserve form." (Evening Talks as recorded by A. B. Purani, p.191)

The reference to death is in his epic poem **Savitri** where Sri Aurobindo describes the division of the atom as a process of death which releases an "omnipotent" force that can be used to destroy or create:

*Alone a process of events was there
And Nature's plastic and protean change*

*And, strong by death to slay or to create,
The riven invisible atom's omnipotent force.*
(p.255)

Further in the same epic he gives another description of the power of atomic energy both in its military use of destruction as well as its peaceful uses. The defiant warped echo, the voice of the vital man, declares his challenge:

*I have found the atoms from which he built
the worlds:*

*The first tremendous cosmic energy
Missioned shall leap to slay my enemy kin
Expunge a nation or abolish a race,
Death's silence leave where there was
laughter and joy.*

(p 512-513)

The passage is straightforward and its meaning quite obvious. But a deeper study reveals much more than what is seen at first. There is an implication that this energy has in fact an independent existence throughout the cosmos and can be commanded without going through the physical process of splitting the atom.

The Technique of the Void

There is a little known and even less appreciated note of Pavitra-da, the French scientist in the Ashram, which summarises a discussion with Sri Aurobindo. It consists of four more or less independent sections containing many interesting concepts and hints which Sri Aurobindo expressed. Unfortunately it is not a very detailed note and although several of the ideas have been discussed in Sri Aurobindo's major works, this paper carries them together and contains some hints that do not seem to appear anywhere else. The most interesting is the secret of "whirling systems". The first section of these notes reads as follows:

"8th May, 1926

In the West the highest minds are turned not towards spiritual truth but towards material science. The scope of science is very narrow, it touches only the most exterior part of the physical plane. And even there, what does science know really? It studies the functioning of the laws, builds theories ever renewed and each time held up as the last word of truth!"

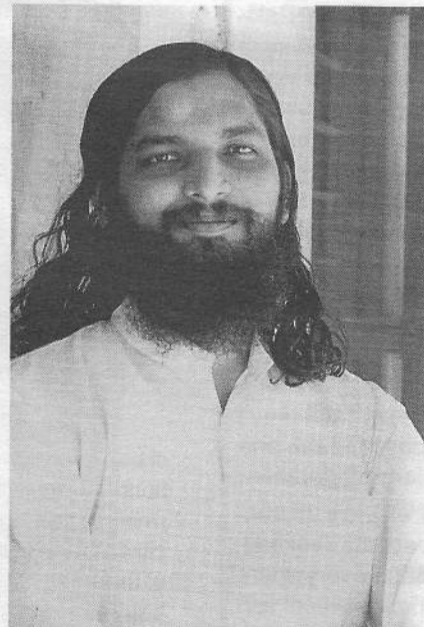
We had recently the atomic theory, now comes the electronic [Following these there have been the Quantum and the

Superstring theories! Ed.]

"There are, for instance, two statements of modern science that would stir up deeper ranges for an occultist: 1. Atoms are whirling systems like a solar system; 2. The atoms of all the elements are made out of the same constituents. Different arrangements is the only cause of different properties.

If these statements are considered under their true aspect, they could lead science to new discoveries of which there is no idea at present and in comparison with which the present knowledge is poor...."

The implications of the first statement take



Shradhdhalu Ranade

Translating Sri Aurobindo the Poet

us to the very borderline of conventional scientific theories. Correlating it with other comments both in *Savitri* and in *The Life Divine* it appears that the secret connection between the atomic and the solar system lies in the similarity of a) their physical structure and b) the internal relationship between their components.

Looking at the solar system, we find that there are innumerable "whirlings" within whirlings. Every object of the solar system has an orbit, its eccentricity, rotation around itself, and the precession of its tilt. And this arrangement is repeated at different levels of organisation: the suns, the planets, the moons, the asteroids, small rocks, dust particles, stray molecules, individual atoms, and subatomic particles.

The atom too has a similar whirling arrangement: the electrons whirling around the core in an extremely complex orbit, the rotation of the core around itself, the particles that make up the core whirling around themselves, the rotation of the electrons around themselves, the quarks that make up the electrons (and protons and neutrons) whirling around themselves, and the particles that make up the quarks whirling around themselves, and so on infinitely, each deeper level bringing us closer to a freer play of sheer energy. Each whirl encloses a clearly defined region of space and effectively seals it off from intrusion by other particles of similar size or energy.

The essence of the atomic whirlings is the vision of sheer energy whirling in small knots which in turn whirl into larger knots which whirl in still larger knots, each whirl enclosing a larger region of space. Thus the atom is seen to be nothing but a vast system of whirling energies that lock up a region of empty space. If we were to enlarge the electron to the size of a table-tennis ball, the core nucleus would be seen to be the size of a softball with the electron whirling around it at a distance of a hundred metres. The atom is thus more than 99.999999% empty space, or to put it more simply all of this material creation around us is predominantly an empty void!

This vision carries within itself the secret of how gross matter is created from subtle-physical existence, which Sri Aurobindo refers to as "the technique of the atomic Void" (*Savitri*, p.106). And the technique of the atomic void is closely related to the whirlings within the atom creating an illusion of solidity and form:

A quantum dance remained, a sprawl of chance

In Energy's stupendous tripping whirl:

*A ceaseless motion in the unbounded Void
Invented forms without a thought or aim:
Necessity and Cause were shapeless ghosts;
Matter was an incident in being's flow,
Law but a clock-work habit of blind force.*

(*Savitri*, p.254)

The ceaseless whirl of sheer Energy enclosing innumerable minute portions of the Void creates the facade of form. The appearance of matter is seen to be almost incidental to the stupendous flow. The laws of nature governing the play of subatomic particles are nothing but a mechanical habit of the force that blindly drives the Energy in its whirl.

(Excerpted from "Science in Sri Aurobindo: A Survey by Shradddhalu Ranade, Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

There are four very great events in history, the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan, and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurushetra. The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion (for there was only meditation and worship), Christ from his cross humanised Europe, the colloquy at Kurushetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.

Thoughts and Aphorisms by Sri Aurobindo.

History is strewn with examples of great civilisations that were either temporarily invigorated or brought down by barbarians. With an implacable and seemingly pitiless evolutionary logic, History scuttles its partial or one-sided achievements — no matter how great — for the sake of a long-term, more ample and more comprehensive perfection. Beyond the ken of mortals, the knowledge of the goal of time's blind trudge is guarded by the gods. The drama of The War of Troy can still exert its thrall and fascination today. *Ilion*—Sri Aurobindo's little known and unfinished epic-masterpiece which he worked on and reworked for many years, rewriting some 12 times the first two Books, simultaneously with *Savitri*—gives us a magnificent God's eye view of the play of the forces at work behind the heroes and events of the War of Troy.

Raymond Thepot's masterly French translation of *Ilion* along with a commentary and his second and final volume of *Savitri* (a translation comprising Books 4-12)—the culmination of fifteen years of assiduous and solitary work, have both been recently published under the auspices of Latin Pen in Auroville. Raymond has also published a French translation of Sri Aurobindo's drama *Eric*, a collection of short stories and poems, *Houle De Terre*, as well as a volume of diary observations, *Carnets de route sur place*, many of them dating from his first years in Auroville in the late seventies and early eighties. He was sitting half-hidden behind a battlement of freshly published books, when we spoke at his house in Fraternity over coffee, about his work, his resultant forays into historical research and the many dilemmas he encountered translating *Ilion* and *Savitri* into French.

Translating *Ilion*:

"I'm not really a scholar," says Raymond, "but there are so many historical references in *Ilion* that you're obliged to track them down. It was both strange and unexpected. I read Aeschylus and the other great playwrights, researched the War Of Troy and finally provided a genealogy, as that of Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion* is different from the traditional ones. If I had known the exhausting amount of work the commentary demanded I would probably never have embarked on it. "Then there's the historical question for which different theories abound of whether or not the War of Troy occurred. Following Sri Aurobindo's texts one can draw the conclusion that not only did the War of Troy happen, but that for instance both Achilles and Aeneas actually existed. I provide a map illustrating the locales of the poem as well. The figure of Achilles in *Ilion* is different from the Achilles of Homer, and has many common traits with Alexander the Great. For instance he dreams of creating an alliance with Troy and conquering the East up to India and when Achilles dies, Apollo's voice announces to him that he will return a thousand years later. It is clear that for Sri Aurobindo, Alexander The Great was the reincarnation of Achilles. This is also something that Alexander The Great himself believed."

In Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion*, "The historical reason for Troy's downfall, (whose civilisation was much more advanced than the Greeks), was that they had lost touch with their earthly roots. They were one of the last of the old civilisations to have such a highly de-

veloped and precise relationship with the Gods, and were much more celestial than earthly at the end. They had become forgetful of their roots and each time a civilisation loses touch with its roots, it is invaded, or a conflict occurs with a coarser, less civilised culture or nation, that either destroys it or obliges it to come to terms with the earth. The historical vision that permeates the poem and which finds particular expression through the God Zeus, represents an evolutionary view of the reasons for the rise and fall of societies and civilisations."

Let not one nation resist by its glory the good of the ages.

Twilight thickens over man and he moves to his winter of darkness.

*Troy that displaced with her force and her arms the luminous ancients,
Sinks in her turn by the ruder strength of the half-savage Achaeans.*

... So shall it last till the fallen ages return to their greatness.

For if the twilight be helped not, night o'er the world cannot darken;

Night forbidden how shall a greater dawn be effected? (Sri Aurobindo)

Que la gloire d'une seule nation ne fasse pas obstacle au bien des millénaires.

Le crépuscule s'épaissit sur l'homme: il marche vers son hiver ténébreux.

Troie, qui par sa force et ses armes supplanta les luminous Ancients,

S'effondre à son tour devant la vaillance plus primitive des Achéens à demi sauvages.

.... Il en sera ainsi jusqu'à ce que les âges déchus retournent à leur grandeur.

Car si le crépuscule n'était pas secondé, la nuit ne pourrait tomber sur le monde;

Et comment, la nuit proscrite, une plus grande aurore pourrait-elle être concrétisée?

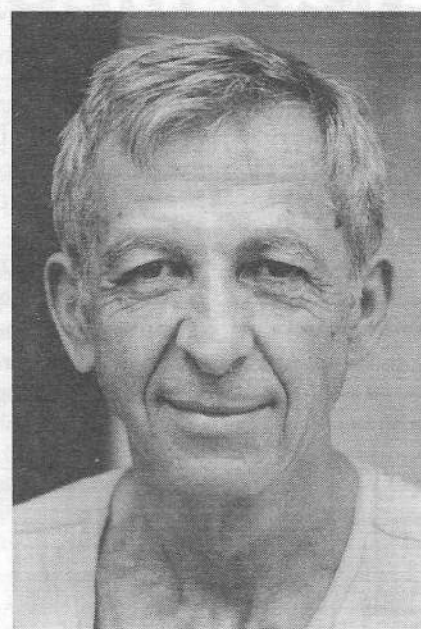
(Trans. by Raymond Thepot)

"Rendering the original poem in exact quantitative hexameters is almost impossible in French as quantitative accentuation has all but disappeared from modern French. It might still be possible in Italian though, whose accentuation is naturally more musical. I feel the most important thing to capture in *Ilion* is the wideness and amplitude of the original rhythm. It has to have and carry something of the wideness of the waves of the Aegean Sea. It was at times even more difficult to translate than *Savitri*."

Translating *Savitri*:

"In *Savitri* there are two types of flow or style. There are pages where the Germanic strain of English is dominant and others where the Latin and Romantic elements prevail, both of course coexisting. Some sections can be practically translated word for word into French without losing the rhythm or flow."

It took Raymond 15 years to complete the first volume that was published six years ago and comprised Books 1,2, and 3 of *Savitri*: "I was working irregularly on it. At the beginning many French people in Aspiration where I was living were against it—though the times were politically volatile, it was nonetheless a beautiful epoch—but translating Sri Aurobindo was considered a bit flighty. I was tolerated but I didn't work on it as assiduously back then. The second part, Volume 2 took me four years, and now I type directly



Raymond Thepot

on the computer instead of a typewriter.

"When you are translating *Savitri* you enter into atmospheres that are very luminous. *Savitri* is not just a poem, it is an initiation. For instance, you can get a fleeting foretaste of the experiences of Aswapathi. If you're a translator it helps to have some poetic faculties as you want to be able to graft something of that experience into your own language to the best of your capacities; it helps, because otherwise you run the risk of producing a very flat translation. The translation however has to be as poetic as possible and absolutely clear: there can be no

shadow-zones as regards what Sri Aurobindo wanted to say. There's a didactic side to Sri Aurobindo, and by didactic I mean that he has poured all his knowledge into the poem, and it is never a dry knowledge—knowledge for the sake of knowledge, without love. Love is always there.

"The most difficult thing to do is to capture what Sri Aurobindo evokes or suggests, as English is naturally a richer and more fluid language than French, but sometimes I feel I have succeeded. In some lines which he has packed with meaning one can only give an equivalent, the main thing being clarity. At times Sri Aurobindo's style is very laconic, he can compress multiple ideas and suggestions into one line, and as French needs more words than English, it is quite a challenge to keep the translation within a line. Also the natural five beats of Iambic Pentameter tend to become six, seven or even more in French."

"The most difficult section to translate was "The Book Of The Everlasting Day" which is mostly devoted to the Supreme Lord speaking. 1490 lines in such a rush of and unbroken flow of inspiration that it took me months to translate! There is a recording of Mother reading a part of this section—the speech of the Supreme to *Savitri*. She reads 225 lines without accompanying music. It lasts about forty minutes and is so powerful that it is almost unbearable! Some of the lines of the Book are very cryptic but many more are crystal clear and you can see how transformation will take place on earth, or how it is already taking place in the body of the Supreme. I think even for the reader this book is quite a test!" One of Raymond's dilemmas was producing a different translation based on a free adaptation of the first three cantos and part of canto 4 of Book 10 including "The Debate of Love and Death" that The Mother had herself translated. But at a certain point he was reassured when he had a very clear sign that it was all right. The Mother had stopped her translation at a very significant point, a passage about the Strength and Patience and Passion that the Universal Mother has for the transformation of the earth. And Satprem writes it was the last passage found in Mother's notebooks. There were so many convergences between what Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Savitri* and Mother's subsequent experiences that it is an incredible story of life, art and yoga being completely interwoven. Raymond's 2nd volume of *Savitri* is accompanied by a booklet by his colleague, Paola De Paolis which is a translation of a commentary made up of quotations from Sri Aurobindo's writings that corroborate the text. Raymond hopes that Latin Pen whose aim is to publish original works, commentaries and translations in Latin tongues will soon be able to publish more titles.

Roger



NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD SCRIPT:

A new theory of Harappan Culture

Recent studies of the script of the Indus Valley civilization also known as the Harappan or Indus-Saraswati culture by two scholars, Dr. N. Jha and Dr. N. Rajaram raise the possibility that this ancient urban civilization was actually a Vedic civilization. This contradicts theories of an Aryan invasion of the sub-continent 3,000 years ago. Dr. Rajaram who gave a talk on the subject in Auroville recently held that the "Harappan civilization should not be seen in isolation but as part of an ongoing revision of ancient history." Roger reports.

The first cities of the Indus Valley civilization were unearthed under the supervision of the British archaeologist Sir John Marshall, in 1921. These, and hundreds of further sites excavated over the last fifty years, both in India and Pakistan, some dating back as far as 3,500 years, show a remarkably sophisticated level of town planning complete with public baths and intricate drainage systems. It is believed that the Indus Saraswati Civilization, which originally had as its lifeline the now dried-up Saraswati River, was a mercantile civilization having trade links with Sumer and the Middle East and at its height covered an area of over one million square kilometers.

Thousands of small inscribed seals or tablets belonging to this culture—many containing portraits of animals such as bulls, elephants, tigers and what could be a unicorn—have been discovered, mainly in India and Pakistan but also in the Middle East. Despite years of painstaking work the script on these seals has to date baffled scholars and eluded decipherment.

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE VEDAS

"The hypothesis I propose is that the Rig-Veda is itself the one considerable document that remains to us from the early period of human thought of which the historic Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries were the failing remnants, when the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed, for reasons now difficult to determine, in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated."

(The Secret Of The Veda, p.6)

Recently however, Dr. Navaratna Rajaram, a mathematician and scientist based in the U.S. and author of a number of books on pre-history, has been heralding a possible breakthrough in the deciphering of the Harappan script. This breakthrough is based on a recently published volume of 60 pages, titled **Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals**, and is the outcome of twenty years of research by Dr. Natwar Jha, a Vedic scholar and palaeographer. Jha's decipherment

the god of the sea, figures prominently). Furthermore the Vedas, the Rig Veda in particular, represent not the early utterances of a young nomadic culture, but the culmination of a long extant tradition and civilization. This civilisation can be roughly divided into three periods: The Vedic proper; The Brahmana; and The Sutra period which is of approximately 3000 BC. "The Harappan Culture came at the end or the twilight of the Vedic age", says

Rajaram, "and represents the transition from the largely spiritual age of the Vedas and Brahmanas to the more material one of the Sutras." Harappan architecture and town planning demanded a substantial knowledge of mathematics—geometry in particular—and this mathematical knowledge has been preserved in "sutra" form. According to Rajaram not all the seals are of a religious nature and a number of them contain references to mathematical formulas and number systems including an approximation of Pi, a notation representing the circumference of a circle in terms of its radius, and a dozen trigonometric expressions of an astronomical nature.

Dr. Jha got a clue into the nature and interpretation of the seals by the

reference in the Mahabharata to a lost library of the Vedas. The library might have been destroyed through floods or natural calamities. Yaska, who wrote one of the world's earliest works on grammar and etymology, is said in "The Nighantu" of the Shantiparva of the **Mahabharata** to have searched for a lost Vedic library. He found it buried in different places and proceeded to compile a twenty-page glossary of key words from the Veda. Based on this legend Dr. Jha decided that many of the words on the seals could have been from such a Vedic seal library and worked from this hypothesis. Rajaram holds that oral tradition was very strong in the culture of the time and writing was used as a supplement, or an aid, to help chant the Vedas properly in the same way as a musicians today might use a musical score.

According to him Harappan writing was not a pure alphabet but a primordial link between several forms of primitive writing such as pictorial, logographic, syllabic and alphabetical. It is related to Middle

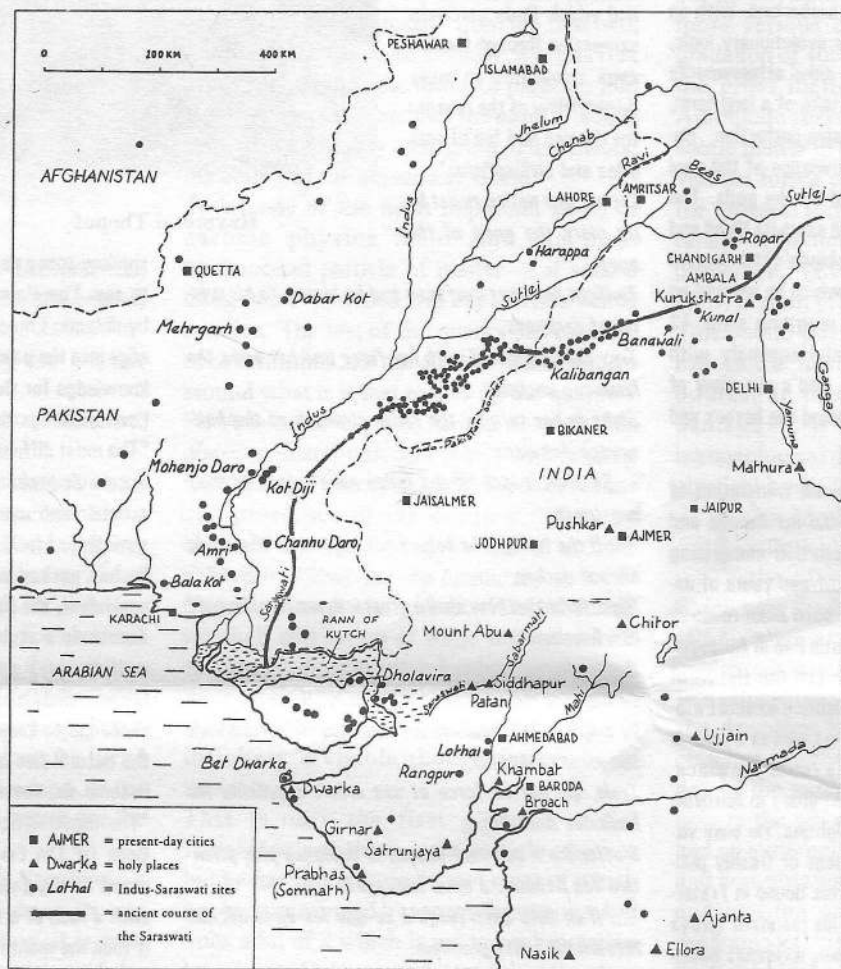
Eastern languages of the time such as Sumerian, Aramaic, Phoenician and Hemiaretic. It combines pictorial signs with a largely syllabic system of writing. It is also logographic in that some of the pictures have sound equivalencies. For instance, a parallel wavy line represents a river (Nandi in Sanskrit) and this pictogram later came to represent the sound "NA". A bird (Shakuni) represents the sound "Shak"; a scorpion (Vrishchika) represents "Vrish" and a dotted square (Aksha) represents "Ksha". Vowel beginnings are represented by a generic U type symbol and this vowel symbol only appears at the beginning of a word. Elsewhere in a word, a vowel sound is not represented but would have to be filled in by the reader. The word Agni—the most common word found on the seals—would be written Ugn; Ishavara would be written Ushvr; and Indra (who is represented by a bull on the tablets) as Undr. When asked why the horse—an important animal in the Vedas—is not represented on the seals, Rajaram replies that the word Asva (Sanskrit for horse) but not the picture of the horse, appears frequently. It is a very symbolic word, with multiple meanings in Vedic Sanskrit, such as force and physical energy. Instead of a picture of a horse its phonetic value (Shwa) is represented by the picture of a peepal leaf (Ashwatta in Sanskrit). The majority of the seals are read left to right, but if the line is run-on then the next line is read as a boustropheron i.e. right to left, but he adds, rather inconclusively: "There is no hard and fast rule as some of the seals are imprints for clay tablets."

So whether they are seals, or index-tablets, or both, remains unclear. Also if a library of Vedic works, for which the seals could be an index, did once exist, in which script were these lost works written? But these are secondary questions. If the decipherment of over 2000 of the Saraswati-Indus seals by Dr. Jha and Dr. Rajaram, were to be confirmed and corroborated by other scholars, this would prove an amazing breakthrough that could both revolutionise and deepen our understanding of the nature of the cultures and civilisation of ancient India.

Vedic Glossary On Indus Seals by Dr. N. Jha. Ganga-Kaveri Publishing House (D. 35/77, Jangamawadimath), Varanasi: 1996.

Map shows the chief sites of the Indus-Saraswati civilization

SOURCE: *The Invasion That Never Was* by Michel Danino / Sujata Nahar, Auroville Press, Auroville, India: 1996

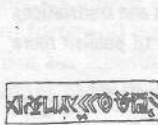


ment of hundreds of the script as being Sanskrit of the late Vedic period, has created its share of scholarly and political controversy as it upsets a number of long-standing theories of Indian pre-history. These include that of an Aryan invasion of the Indian subcontinent from the North 3500 years ago, as well as the linguistic theory proposed by Asko Parpola, the eminent Finnish scholar of the Indus Valley Civilization, that the Harappan language was a form of Proto-Dravidian. Dr. Rajaram was in Auroville for a few days to give a talk on the decipherment of the seals. He spoke about the nature and possible implications of this purported breakthrough that could give historical weight to the traditions of an unbroken continuity of a highly defined civilization on the Indian subcontinent from the earliest times.

According to Dr. Rajaram, the Vedic civilization to which the Harappan culture belonged was largely a maritime one (there are hundreds of references to the ocean in the Rig-Veda, dozens to ships and Varuna,

KEYBOARD OF LOGOGRAPHS PICTORIAL-SYLLABLE

Phon. Value	Sign	Relation
vriṣ		vriṣchik
vis		viṣhāp
aśwa/śwa		aśwath
śak		śakuni
śwā		śwān



Dancing with Savitri

To dance with Savitri is to whirl with the wind, to look for the light, to descend into darkness, to search for the soul, to know nothing, to imagine everything, to recreate the world... In other words, it's not easy.

Every time you dip into the blank verse of this epic poem you find another aspect of...yourself. It is a mirror and a journey. A cosmic pilgrimage, or, as Sri Aurobindo called it, "A Legend and a Symbol". Paulo became involved with Savitri in the early '70s, both through Mother's recorded readings of selections from the text and through Sunil's music. Sunil Bhattacharya, now in his seventies, is an Ashramite, whom Mother asked, in his youth, to compose music. Paulo was in Brazil when he first came in contact with this music. His dance teacher and mentor, Rolf Gelewski, was choreographing a Suite to Sri Aurobindo. "When I met him (Rolf)," Paulo says, "I took his class and the work was very attractive to me. I found then some answers to my inner questions. Now it's the same struggle."

So Paulo, Joy and others are working with the poem and music to create "Dance Savitri" for presentation this August. There are twelve pictures (as he calls them) or sections to the piece, plus an introduction and a conclusion. "The logic of the choices from the twelve Books of Savitri is purely personal," says Paulo. "These are the sections which I identify with. And then there is Sunil's music—the only music I ever heard that's purely from another dimension—a psychic dimension. You can hear it in Bruckner or Bach, but they are still tied to a classical structure. Mother recognized it. She was behind it, pushing it. So I also wanted to expose us to that, and to expose the audience. Both to the music and to the text. "The choreography, of course it's not easy. But I had a need to go into my creative side. I had been hiding from this, from the creative process. As a dancer, of course,

dimension, that is, the breath and the body with the music. That is what the dance piece is about.

"Let this work be for us a chance to get used to being exposed to light," declares Paulo. "It's a prayer, because it takes time. Like a diver, to go deeply, you need to develop your lungs. Sometimes the choice of music and text came from my personal relation to them. At other times, there was a more objective aspect, i.e., what moments are suitable for a dance performance? But I always considered what is relevant or representative of our inner journey. For example, the aspect of joy in Book IV, Canto 1:

*Each minute was a throb of Beauty's heart,
The hours were tuned to a sweet-toned content*

*Which asked for nothing but took all life gave
Sovereignly as her nature's inborn right.*

*Near was her spirit to its parent Sun,
The Breath within to the eternal joy.*

"It's a challenge to express this deep emotion through movement. But we must try. My life is hooked in Sri Aurobindo, and Savitri for me expresses in the most subtle and beautiful way what Sri Aurobindo's path is. Then, working with Sunil's music gives me the deepest connection to my life and the work on the body, connecting the body with the highest vision I can see. Working on that with the dancers, trying to let something of that pass to the public—that is what we are attempting with Dance Savitri."

Joy, who will dance the part of Savitri says, "This poem carries something very special. Personally, I had a need to re-connect to something which is nearer to me, more essential, less abstract than what I was doing—to connect to something more essential—to the reason why we're here in Auroville. There's also a strong connection for me to the music, but I was concerned because at the beginning it was not a connection to the vital, the vital which makes you move. It leads us to a more



Paulo (bottom row, far right) and dance company

you create, but you are not the primary creator. So I come back to Savitri, which has such a deep meaning now to me and to our life here. Savitri has an emotion in it that's not superficial. So a lot of the movement I am using is a vehicle for the expression and the deepening of the emotions. That was the challenge for me. To express the inner dimension—the psychic, with softness and intensity. This is the base of my work on Savitri. I want to explore the depth through the piece. To go beyond the surface of life. The great question was, 'How can we connect the physical movement of the body with the inner

introspective dimension. So it was a challenge to choose the right pieces of music. The selection was important. Now, I can connect in a very full way. In fact, nothing has touched me as much as Savitri in performance. And the most powerful force that emerges is the force of Love. Even when Savitri is challenged with Death. I felt this "Yes", this huge, immense message of Love.

Interview by Jill

References page 1: (1) Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram, Early Political Writings*, p. 70. (2) Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. I, p. 424 (3) Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, p. 331

Photo Courtesy on page 1: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives

Voices from the Youth Camp

For a couple of weeks in May and June, Auroville took on a truly international flavour as students from, Kenya, Congo, Mongolia, Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Nepal and India descended here at the Youth Camp in Fraternity. These students were part of a programme held as part of the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. Bindu reports.

The Youth Camp was started five years ago to allow students from India and other parts of the world to experience Auroville (see AVT #57). At Rs. 50 per day (which includes two meals), the Youth Camp offers an affordable option for students with limited budgets to stay in Auroville. Over the years, the Youth Camp has housed participants of the Peace Trees programmes, indigent newcomers, and the odd student or trainee passing through Auroville. And though Rajeev, who is in charge of the Youth Camp has hosted a few one day "introduction" camps for groups of Indian students, his dream of hosting regular groups of students at the Youth Camp to experience Auroville had largely remained unfulfilled. This year, however, as part of the celebrations for the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, the Friends of Auroville in India sponsored 3 groups of 10-15 students each to visit Auroville for a week. Two of the groups consisted of foreign students in India (The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, a national body that keeps track of foreign students, acted as a liaison in bringing these students to Auroville.) The third group consisted of architecture students from Gujarat, Rajeev's home state. All the groups stayed at the Youth Camp and in a programme arranged by Rajeev, visited different communities and units of Auroville, the Matrimandir, the Ashram; the beach and of course, the youth community Ami. For Rajeev, who enjoyed witnessing the interchange of ideas between the students and the Aurovilians, it is a dream come true. He hopes that the programme continues by "word of mouth", that the participants of this programme tell others about Auroville so that "those who truly wish to come here will do so." For the participants, one week was too short to get a proper feel of Auroville. Many went back scratching their heads, wondering what this crazy experiment was all about, but some were touched somewhere deep within and promised to return. Here are the views of the students:

I am fascinated with the philosophy behind this great experiment, Auroville....For an outsider, Auroville is a perfect spiritual place, somewhat too idyllic even to believe in, but as one interacts more with Aurovilians, there's a good chance for one to get a rude shock of the down-to-earth, too trivial reality of Auroville with all its internal problems and troubles. But again as I understand, Auroville is a place where human beings live, not the supramental creatures and we have to remember that this is only a very beginning stage of the Earth to come....I really want this experiment to succeed and spread more and more throughout the world. I would like to live in this place and contribute my share to the future of humanity.

Anara, Mongolia.

I would like to suggest that information about Auroville is spread to other parts of the world, especially to those parts, such as Africa, from where as yet there are no representatives in Auroville.

Benson, Kenya.

I never expected such an experiment here in which the whole world is involved. Some students in my group thought that people are unequal here, but I don't think it's a great problem for Auroville is not a place for people who are searching for material opportunities in this life. This place is for dreamers, for people who have the desire to work and truly create something in this life.

Christina, Khabarovsk, Russia.

I couldn't help noticing that more than half of the people in Auroville use motorcycles, with their environmentally harmful exhaust gases, for transportation. I would like to suggest that cycling which is important from both the physical and environmental point of view is encouraged as the means of transportation in Auroville.

Ram, India.

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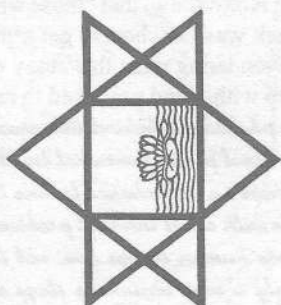
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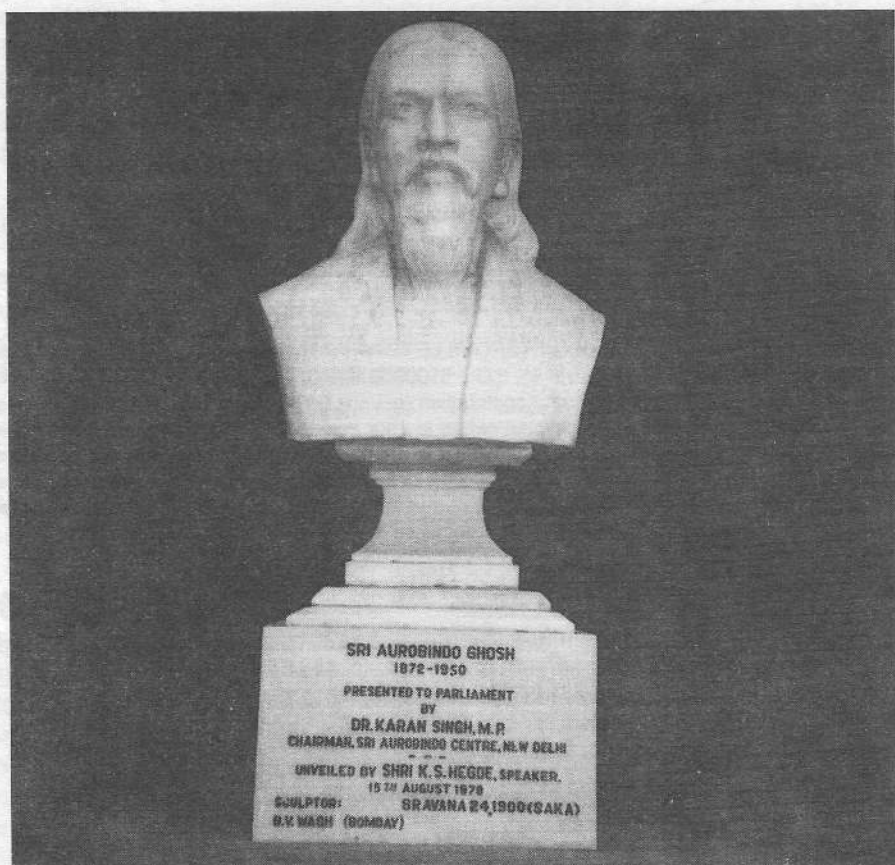
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C/O KRISHNA T.
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*What Sri Aurobindo
represents in the world's
history is not a teaching;
not even a revelation;
it is a decisive action
direct from the Supreme*

Sri Aurobindo's influence in India today

Every evening, when the Indian Parliament is in session and Doordarshan, the state television presents the Parliament news, the camera focuses for a few seconds upon a bust of Sri Aurobindo. At AUROVILLE TODAY'S request, Dr. Karan Singh, member of the Rajya Sabha (the Upper House of the Indian Parliament) and member of the Governing Board of Auroville, explains how the bust came to be installed in the Parliament Building and speaks on the influence of Sri Aurobindo's thought in India today.

The installation of Sri Aurobindo's bust in the House of Parliament Building is a very interesting story. From 1967 to 1977 I was a Cabinet Minister. As such I always used a separate entrance to get into the Lok Sabha. In 1977 when Indira Gandhi was defeated, I won my seat and I became a plain Member of Parliament, and started to use the main gate as the entrance. When I walked into the Centre Hall I noticed that on the right side there was a bust of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the great Nationalist and leader of the moderate faction of the Congress Party, but that on the left there was only a large flower vase. It struck me that it would be most appropriate if instead of that flower arrangement there should be a bust of Sri Aurobindo, because of his tremendous role in India's Freedom movement. He was a contemporary of Gokhale and represented the more radical and so called extremist faction of the national movement.

So I initiated (I was then chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Center in New Delhi) steps to have the bust made by sculptor B.V. Wagh, from Bombay. He made a very nice marble bust—the same size as Gokhale's bust on the other side so that it would match. It took a few months to have it prepared and it was unveiled by the speaker of the Lok Sabha at that time, Ramakrishna Hegde, on the 15th of August 1978. It was a very nice function as I remember. The central hall of Parliament was packed and both Mr. Hegde and I made a speech on Sri Aurobindo. Everybody knows him as a great Mahayogi, the philosopher, but not many people were aware of his intense, brief but extremely effective role in the freedom movement at the turn of the century.

That was how the bust was installed and I think it is a happy synchronicity that every evening when the Parliament is in session, before the Parliament news is presented by Doordarshan, the camera focuses upon this bust for a few seconds. In some ways I feel very gratified because it means that at least Sri Aurobindo's presence is not only recognized, but is tangibly present there every day.

You asked how strong the influence of Sri Aurobindo's thought is in India today. There is no way one can really quantify that. Prima facie one would say it is not strong. If it would have been strong, India would not have been in the situation in which it finds itself today. But the influence of people like Sri Aurobindo is not necessarily on the surface. His action on the higher planes is certain, but also on the deeper psychological planes there are many subterranean streams of thought which profit from his views. And there, I think Sri Aurobindo's influence is strong.

But it is remarkable that the Government of India has set up a National Committee for the celebration of Sri Aurobindo's 125th birth anniversary. This is unusual. A lot of committees are set up for centenary celebrations. But as far as I am aware this is the first time that a national committee has been set up to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of someone. Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary of course coincides with the 50th anniversary of Indian independence. The National Committee consists of twenty-nine people, amongst which are several Chief Ministers, and is headed by the minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Bommai. There are also members representing the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Society and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. The committee has decided that on the 24th of November there will be a major event in New Delhi to commemorate the birth anniversary, the details of which still have to be worked out. We also decided to further support the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Calcutta, the Sri Aurobindo Nivas in Baroda, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and Auroville as these are all important areas which are so closely connected with Sri Aurobindo's life and work. I believe that the anniversary celebrations involve what I've called the Sri Aurobindo movement which means all those institutions, societies, organizations and individuals who have been influenced and inspired by Sri Aurobindo, in India and around the world. So I look upon this as a very significant event. India itself is going through a very major crisis and it seems to me that this is a good opportunity to restate, to rearticulate the tremendous vision and power of Sri Aurobindo's thought. His 15th of August 1947 message for example is a document which should be in every school room and every classroom around the country. The five dreams that he speaks of there represent the quintessence of his work and his vision for the future.