

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

The beaches in crisis!

"The disappearing beach dilemma" was the title of an article in the November, 2002 issue of Auroville Today. In it Aurofilio Schiavina, who has studied coastal management, warned of the imminent loss of Auroville's beaches due to "unsustainable development practices in Puducherry".

He was referring to the construction of two long breakwaters to the south of Puducherry town in the late 1980s as part of a new port development. These breakwaters had blocked the sea's natural transport of sand up and down the coast (known as 'littoral drift'), causing a massive build-up of sand to the south of these structures and fierce erosion of the beaches to the north. In 2002, the writing was already on the wall. In little more than a decade Puducherry had lost its beach and villages to the immediate north were losing theirs. The Auroville beaches, Filio warned, "face the prospect either of being washed away or needing protection by massive seawalls to prevent an erosion disaster".

In addition to their recreational benefits, beaches are an essential part of the coastal ecosystem. A substantial beach is a valuable protection against storms and tsunamis and it prevents seawater intrusion into coastal aquifers. To counteract the erosion, Filio and other concerned individuals persuaded the Puducherry Government in 2002 to resume dredging of the harbour mouth at Puducherry and to undertake sand replenishment activities at the affected sites. "As a result, some beaches started to reappear in Puducherry, but because sand nourishment was undertaken only sporadically and not to its full requirement, the erosion could not be fully controlled. At the same time they also convinced the Puducherry Government to shelve the project of constructing a 'groyne field' (a series of seawalls built perpendicular to the shore, projecting seawards for about 100-150 m in length (see box) in front of the Puducherry seafront. Such a groyne field would have meant transferring the problem of erosion to the Tamil Nadu coastline to the north and the onset of massive and accelerated erosion along the Auroville beaches.

"Then in 2004 the tsunami hit this coastline and the whole situation went out of control. Subsequently the Government started talking of shoreline protection and large sums of money were made available for constructing and strengthening seawalls. The whole situation was so 'emotional' during that period that it was not possible to have a reasonable dialogue with the Government agencies to take up environmentally-sound coastal protection measures.

Getting worse

"So the Puducherry seawall was extended, causing the erosion to move north to villages in Tamil Nadu. As these villagers' homes were washed away by the intruding sea, they sought the interven-



PHOTO COURTESY AUROFILIO

The sea has gouged out a vertical section of the beach in the village of Soudanaikuppam south of Auroville. The village is now protected by groynes on either side.

tion of the Tamil Nadu Government. Instead of addressing the root cause of the problem – the blocking of littoral drift by the breakwaters at the Puducherry port – the Tamil Nadu government also built seawalls. However, because seawalls do not help retain sand but only protect the land from further erosion, the fishermen lost their beaches – where they park their boats, repair their nets, and dry the fish – as well as their access to the sea.

"Thus the livelihood of these communities was severely affected and they wanted their beaches back. The authorities, once again, failed to tackle the root cause of the problem. Instead, they now started to build groynes in an effort to retain some sand. But the construction of seawalls and groynes accelerated the rate of erosion further north and more villages were severely affected. Several homes even disappeared into the sea.

"The first groynes were small, but this April much longer groynes were built on either side of Thandirayankuppam village. For the beaches and communities north of Thandirayankuppam the construction of such long groynes are a disaster because they have started a whole new cycle of accelerated erosion in places like the Auroville beach community of Quiet (see accompanying article). Meanwhile, the three shorter groynes built in Kottakuppam closer to Puducherry are being lengthened, which will accelerate and extend even further the erosion to the north.

"Today, sand erosion affects about 25 kilometres of the coast to the north of Puducherry and has severely damaged a 7 kilometre stretch. The erosion is moving northwards at about 350 metres a year."

The new port project

Can things possibly get worse? Filio says they can. "For now the Government of Puducherry is planning a big expansion of the port – ten times the size of the existing harbour – which will include constructing a new breakwater 2.5 kilometres long to create a large harbour." While the Environmental Impact Assessment report concerning the proposed new port development states that "the proposed development of the new port will not cause the current situation to worsen", Filio is skeptical. "Chennai, which has similar coastal geomorphological features to the Puducherry coastline, has a harbour similar to that proposed in Puducherry. By comparing the huge erosion the Madras harbour has caused to its nearby northern coastline, one can anticipate what is in store for the beaches to the north of Puducherry if such a harbour is built."

Recently, the environmental magazine *Down to Earth* featured the proposed new Puducherry port development plan. The lead article, which was highly critical of the project, concluded that "The construction about two decades ago of the commercial harbour and breakwaters south of Puducherry was the beginning of the end for the beaches that dotted the coast of Puducherry and Tamil Nadu. The new port promises to finish the job comprehensively."

What can be done?

Filio is very clear. "The proposed port development should be dropped. Full-time dredging at the existing Puducherry harbour and sand replenishment activities at the affected beaches to the north should be resumed immediately. The construction of groynes should be stopped."

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The breakwaters south of Puducherry that protect the Puducherry harbour. They have created a wide beautiful beach to the south, but have led to loss of entire beaches and even parts of coastal villages to the north.

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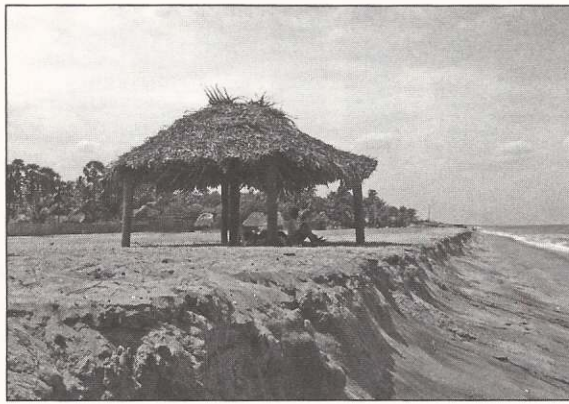
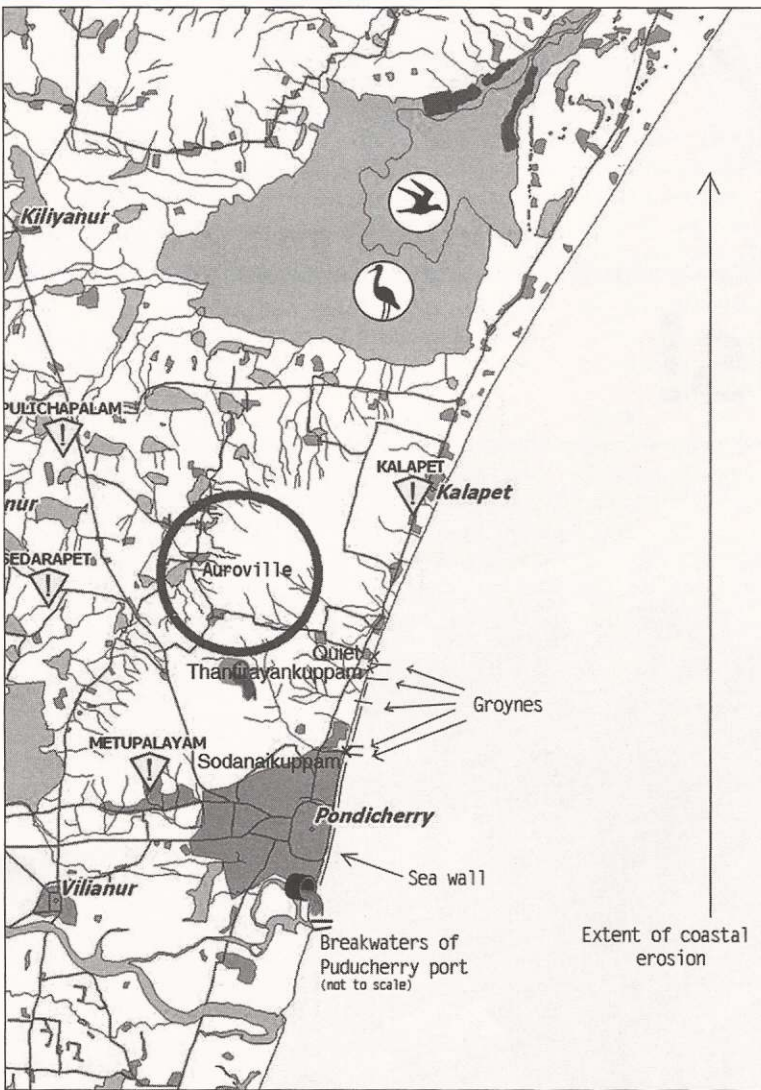
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Photos of the beach hut outside Quiet taken within a span of 7 days.

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Only essential and temporary coastal protection measures to prevent people's homes from getting washed away should be adopted. At the same time, a study of this coastline should be undertaken and short-term and long-term coastal management measures should be established."

The best coastal protection measure is a healthy coastal ecosystem, notes Filio. "Our coastline here is characterized by dunes and estuaries. Dunes are a very effective barrier and they also serve as temporary reserves of sand. But for dunes to exist you also need certain types of vegetation on them. So a healthy dune ecosystem will have dunes as well as vegetation. Where you have estuaries you have mangroves and mangroves also offer protection and stabilization of the coastline. The problems start when we interfere with these ecosystems and we upset the equilibrium that nature has established over millennia."

This is precisely what is happening at present, and it is typical of what is happening elsewhere in India and in many other parts of the world. "While it is true that one cannot stop development and development is bound to have some impact on the environment," observes Filio, "in

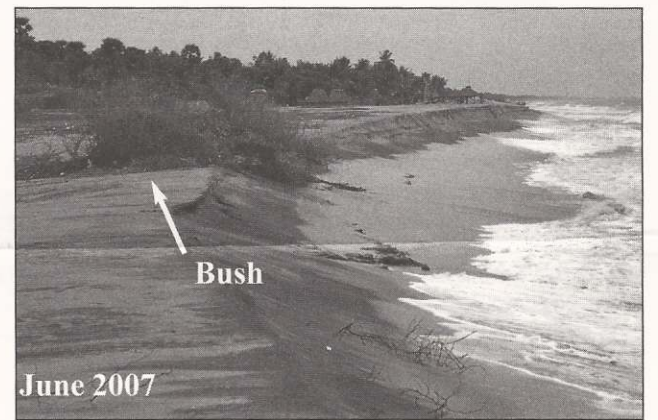
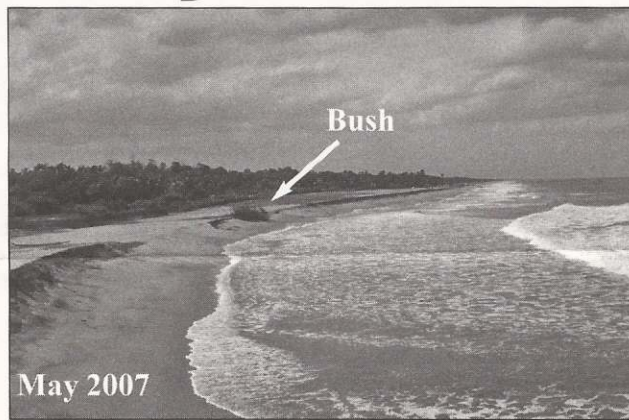
cases like this, it is the non-implementation of mitigation measures that aggravate the problem."

Will there be action?

How optimistic is Filio that the political will exists to resolve the problem of coastal erosion in this area? "Local communities in Tamil Nadu that are already facing the problems of coastal erosion have passed resolutions demanding that the proposed port project be dropped and that sand nourishment activities be started immediately. However, the political will to solve this problem is totally absent, mostly due to lack of awareness. Moreover, as the *Down To Earth* article made clear, the interest in the real estate development attached to the port project is overriding all environmental considerations. So perhaps the only hope is that the judiciary might force the politicians to change their course of action. In fact, a few civic groups are already preparing to take the Puducherry government to court, alleging negligence over their failure to resume sand dredging operations."

Alan

Quiet threatened by the sea



Erosion caused to the north of the groyne nearby Quiet. The bush has meanwhile disappeared into the sea.

The Quiet community, with its Quiet Healing Centre, is the closest Auroville beach community to Puducherry. The residents had noticed that the beach had been disappearing over the past years, but erosion has dramatically accelerated since April when a groyne was built extending 120 metres into the sea just south of the community.

This, the fifth groyne to be constructed to the north of Puducherry, was built by the Public Works Department of the Tamil

Nadu Government to protect Thandirayankuppam village which was disappearing into the sea. "Each year until October, the sand is eroded but then the current changes for three months and sand is deposited again", explains Quiet resident, Appie. "But we've never had this scale of erosion before. We've lost almost twenty metres of beach since April, 2006, one and a half metres in the past week alone. At the last full moon the high tide the sea came up to the corner of our fence for the first time."

It's not difficult to see what she's referring to. Looking south, one can see that the sea has already taken a substantial bite out of the beach: the most aggressive erosion appears to be taking place right next to the wall of the new groyne. The beach used to slope gently down into the sea. Now there is a steep shelf at the water's edge. The water near the shore is fringed with red, indicating that the red mud that had been washed down over the years from inland canyons is now being exposed as the covering sand is scoured away.

In June, three members of the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) came to study the situation at Quiet. Subsequently they made an Initial Assessment Report in which they stated that "the shoreline erosion is a result of construction of groynes along the Pondicherry coast for shore stabilization". Concerning the construction of these groynes, they observed that "there is no tapering of the groynes as is normally required to avoid abrupt change to the shoreline".

Confirming that there was "significant erosion" of Quiet beach, they suggested that two steps should be taken to remedy the situation. "The first step would be to [...] use sandbag revetments to protect the coastline up to November when littoral drift reversal is expected to occur. At the same time, the Auroville Foundation is encouraged to seek assistance from the local authorities to minimize the beach [erosion] immediately north of the groyne [by replenishing it] with at least half a million cubic metres of sand."

"For the longer term solution, NIOT shall work out a conceptual coastal protection solution with the objective of:

1. absorbing the energy of the waves approaching the shoreline using environmental-friendly coastal protection measures
2. Protecting the present shoreline in the long term by beach nourishment and gabions." [Gabions are cylindrical baskets filled with earth or stones and used for fortification.]

NIOT is willing to provide funding for trials using environmental-friendly low-cost materials to stabilize the shoreline. One idea is to construct a barrage in the sea using waste tyres. (The Indian tyre manufacturer MRF has already donated 300 waste tyres and is willing to donate more to protect 250 metres of coastline.) Dr. Rauf Ali, an Aurovilian who is an ecologist and trustee of the Foundation for

Ecological Research Advocacy and Learning, points out that such a barrage would break the force of the waves while allowing sand to wash over. "It's already been tried with success in the Andamans."

NIOT says the Auroville Foundation should contact the local authorities to get permission for building the barrage and for ensuring that the sand is replenished. There are two ways of doing this. The first is to bring sand equivalent to several years loss at one time. "This is known as 'capital dredging'," Rauf explains. "It will involve dredging sand at some other location (perhaps south of Puducherry) and dumping it offshore off Quiet and other affected areas. One estimate is that 6 million tonnes of sand (equivalent to about one million lorries of sand) might be required. The second method, known as 'replenishment dredging', is what NIOT suggests for the moment. In this, beach nourishment is done every year to replace the sand lost in that year - in this case, it is estimated to be half a million cubic metres."

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has meanwhile taken the matter up, for if "nothing is done, Quiet may have lost its beach by the end of the year." And next year the boundary wall and the first row of houses might also get washed away.

As to other Auroville beach communities to the north, Pavitra, a resident of Repos, notes that his community has not yet experienced catastrophic erosion on the scale of Quiet, but that the beach has definitely shrunk over recent years. Filio points out that Repos, which is about 1.5 kilometres north of Quiet, has lost its offshore sandbars and underwater sand shelves which used to protect the beach from erosion. He also notes that the beach drops more steeply into the sea now, that the grains of sand are coarser, that the underlying clay is getting revealed, and that the salinity of the groundwater is increasing - "all of which indicates that erosion is well underway here, too."

Alan

GROYNES

The long groyne south of Quiet.

A groyne is a rigid structure built out from the shore which interrupts the flow of water and sediment. The purpose of a groyne is to create and maintain a healthy beach on its updrift side, which in turn provides protection to the land behind. These effects are achieved through two main processes. First, groynes act as a barrier to physically stop sediment transport in the direction of longshore transport through the system. This causes a build-up of the beach on the groyne's updrift side. Secondly, groynes interrupt the tidal flow forcing the tidal current further offshore beyond the groyne end. This slows the tidal current inshore causing the deposition of heavier sediments and encouraging the beach to grow in size.

However, this is often accompanied by accelerated erosion of the downdrift beach, known as terminal groyne syndrome, as it occurs after the terminal groyne which receives little or no sand via longshore transport. If a groyne is correctly designed, then the amount of material it can hold will be limited, and excess sediment will be free to move on through the system. However, if a groyne is too large it may trap all sediment reaching it and this can cause severe beach erosion problems on the down-drift side, which in turn can result in coastal erosion problems.

(Courtesy Wikipedia)

It's an ill wind...

Puducherry's loss is Cuddalore's gain. While the breakwaters of Puducherry port are starving the northern coast of sand, they are causing sand to accumulate to the south. Cuddalore, about 10 kilometres to the south of Puducherry, now has a much bigger beach. In fact, recently they held their first beach festival.

It's not well-known that even the famous Marina Beach in Chennai is the result of the British building a harbour and breakwater to the north in the late 19th century.

Auroville Health Centre goes IT

The Auroville Health Centre's new telemedicine service for patients with mental disorders is the first in Puducherry.

Telemedicine – 'medicine from a distance' – is a way by which patients living in remote rural areas have access to a 'virtual' doctor or a specialist. Consultation happens through phones and a two-way video screen. All that is required is an ISDN line and a video monitor.

On 22nd May, the Telemedicine videoconferencing service was inaugurated at the Auroville Health Centre (AVHC). Eleven patients from nearby villages showed up on opening day. They consulted with their doctors at the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) in Chennai over a video-phone, describing their complaints and receiving appropriate advice.

For the first time in South India, telemedicine has come to the aid of people with mental illness. The telemedicine project, a brainchild of the SCARF Foundation and funded by Deutsche Bank, came into effect after the tsunami of 2004, when it was realized that large numbers of people were traumatized by

the disaster. Telemedicine seemed the best way to assist and follow-up on these individuals without involving huge infrastructure costs.

The AVHC established contact with SCARF to evaluate and monitor patients with mental disorders from the surrounding villages. For two years, the doctors from SCARF visited the Health Centre and provided free consultation to up to 24 patients once a month. Many of these patients had been on erratic treatment from the local government hospitals, and some had no medical care since their families were unable or unwilling to pursue life-long treatment. Transport and medication was free – AVHC provided transportation for the patients, while the cost of medicines, some fairly expensive, was shared between SCARF and AVHC.

Early this year, this arrangement came to an end due to issues of time from SCARF's busy doctors, and from a financial crunch faced by the AVHC. This was when the idea of telemedicine was suggested.



A telemedical consultation in progress at the Auroville Health Centre.

The staff at the Auroville Health Centre is quite proud of this achievement. As for the patients themselves, they have become quickly used to the idea of speaking over a phone and see-

ing the 'doctor-on-screen'. While a few were intimidated by the video monitor in their first encounter, the subsequent session in June has been quite positive.

Dr. Uma

AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

Visa policy clarified

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. M. Ramaswamy, clarified in Auroville's internal newsletter that he will normally follow the recommendations of the Entry Service to recommend the issuance of visas to foreigners to live in Auroville. In case the Secretary disagrees with the recommendation of the Entry Service, he will dialogue with the Entry Service and the Working Committee. Adequate opportunity will also be given to the person concerned to put forth his viewpoint. If after these procedures, there is still disagreement between the Working Committee and the Foundation, the particular case will be submitted to the Chairman for his final decision.

The Secretary stated that cases of rejection are very rare and these cases only occur when an Aurovillian commits a serious offence which is punishable under the Indian Penal Code. If such a person is convicted by an Indian Court, they have to leave Auroville regardless of whether they are an Indian or Foreigner. In the case of an Indian they would be sent out of Auroville, and in case of a Foreigner their visa would be cancelled and they would be deported to their place of origin. In these cases also adequate opportunity will be given to the concerned individuals to explain their view before a decision is taken. These matters will be decided by the Chairman and not by the Secretary.

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Employees' survey

The design and planning for the second Auroville Employees Survey in 2008 has taken off.

In 2000, the first socio-economic survey of Auroville employees was conducted with the aim of finding out what the impact of Auroville is upon the lives and livelihoods of its employees, their families and their communities. The survey was done in coordination with Auroville's Small Employees Welfare Association (SEWA), Auroville Social Research Centre (SRC) and the University of Pondicherry (Head, Dept of Sociology). Funding was provided by the Dutch Foundation, Stichting de Zaaier.

The team had envisaged that such surveys would be carried out every seven years to re-evaluate the impact and compare the changes and trends.

Recently, SEWA and SRC have announced that the second survey will begin in early 2008. The work may be done in association with external agencies like social work departments of colleges or research institutions in Chennai. In this survey, there will be an effort to get maximum internal funding from within Auroville, to make this a more Auroville-endorsed exercise. Simultaneously, a small core team is being formed to represent different interests of Auroville.

While many of the socio-economic parameters will be compared over the seven year period, the next survey will have a greater emphasis on certain critical areas. These will include the status of women, youth, and the status of children with respect to health, education, and recreation.

The outcome of the first Auroville Employee survey in 2000 was an overview of the employee's life, including knowledge about the distribution of the workforce by village, gender, and caste. Employees also shared their personal impressions on Auroville. Information from the survey of 2008 will be used to create better awareness of economic and financial literacy, health, sanitation and hygiene issued by strengthening educational efforts and outreach.

The results of the survey could also throw light upon the concepts of co-evolution and the realisation of human unity as envisaged by the Mother in the context of a day-to-day reality.

For further information, please contact SEWA or SRC at sewa@auroville.org.in or src@auroville.org.in respectively.

Unity Fund troubles

The co-signing of cheques by the Secretary continues to be blocked.

Is it legally necessary for the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to be a co-signatory to all bank transactions of the Auroville Unity Fund? The matter has been hotly disputed ever since the Secretary issued an Office Order to that extent. [see the article *More 'government' control?* in the June-July 2007 issue of AVToday]. The Office Order, which is based on a decision of the Finance Committee, a subcommittee of the Governing Board, was rejected by a General Meeting of May 6th, 2007. Since then, the Unity Fund has effectively been blocked.

A recent legal opinion obtained by the Working Committee states that only the Governing Board of the Foundation, not one of its sub-committees, has the power to instruct the Secretary to issue office orders. Therefore the contested Office Order lacks sufficient basis. The legal position of the Unity Fund is therefore based on an earlier Office Order issued in March 31, 2006, which explicitly states that the executives shall manage the unit, which includes the issuing of cheques.

It is another question if the Board has the power to unilaterally change an agreement between itself and the Residents' Assembly. The Unity Fund

came into existence after the relevant proposal of the Residents' Assembly was approved and accepted by the Board in March 2006. If the Board had made its acceptance conditional on a compulsory co-signing by the Secretary, the Unity Fund would most probably never have come into existence.

It has been argued that the Board, on the basis of the stipulations of the Auroville Foundation Act, has the powers to impose its views. This, certainly, is correct. But this was never the intention behind the Auroville Foundation Act. Human Resource Development Minister P. Shiv Shankar, put it as follows when he introduced the Auroville Foundation Bill in Parliament in 1988: "As far as the day-to-day activities are concerned, they will be looked after by the residents through appropriate autonomous arrangements, which will include Residents' Assembly and its Working Committee. The idea underlying this arrangement is that the residents of Auroville should have autonomy so that activities of Auroville can grow under an atmosphere conducive to harmonious growth."

The issue will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Governing Board, scheduled for the end of August.

Carel

Lighting the roads

At the initiative of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. M. Ramaswamy I.A.S., and with funding of the Government of India, Auroville's roads are slowly being illuminated at night-time.

Auroville's unit AuroRe has taken up the task of installing the 40 solar-charged street lamps at various locations in Auroville at the costs of about Rs 12 lakhs. "We're doing the work at cost-price," says Hemant, executive of AuroRe. In addition, two regular street lights powered off the grid have been installed at the Certitude junction and at the entrance to Auroville on the East-Coast Road.

For the Secretary, this is one more step towards building the city and providing safety on the roads of Auroville.



Auroville's new solar street lamp

In brief

Visit of President of Mauritius

On July 1st, the President of the Republic of Mauritius, Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, and Lady Sarojini Jugnauth visited the Matrimandir. This is the second time in Auroville's history that a Head of State has made a visit.

Change of Auroville Foundation Act

In its interaction in April on the topic of the Unity Fund with Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, the members of the Working Committee observed that the Auroville Foundation Act needs to be amended to ensure that the autonomy that was promised to the Aurovillians can be duly exercised. Dr. Karan Singh has meanwhile requested detailed proposals and asked the Working Committee to initiate discussions.

Land situation

Issues of land exchange and purchase the lands within the city area and elsewhere were the topic of a two-day workshop at the Town Hall. It addressed the assumptions held regarding land consolidation and the various strategies to achieve them.

Cancellation of Puducherry land acquisition

The Chairman and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation have successfully requested the Puducherry government to cancel their proposed land acquisition of parts of Sri Ma and Eternity communities on the beach for tsunami-affected people.

Formia for New Creation

On June 9th, 2007, Auroville International Italy, in collaboration with the Council of the city of Formia, organized an event to collect funds for the New Creation Bi-lingual School (NCBS). Hosted at the Archivio Storico of the Town Hall, the event was preceded by an hour-long live broadcast on local Radio Formia and drew over 150 donors. A total of Euro 2,200 (Rs 1.2 lakhs) was raised. Now the town council is preparing to make a large donation to NCBS.

Part of Auroville?

In order to prevent creating the impression that units are independent of the Auroville Foundation, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has requested all units and trusts of Auroville to explicitly state that they are a unit or trust of Auroville by putting the name of Auroville on all their stationary.

Work discipline

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has requested essential 'municipal' services to be staffed 8 hours a day instead of 5 hours as has been customary. This will ensure that services such as the Residents' Service, Working Committee, Auroville Council, L'Avenir d'Auroville, Electrical Service, Water Service, and Telephone Service can be reached throughout the day.

Run the spiral

To celebrate Auroville's 40th birthday, AV Runners is organizing a marathon open to all on February 16th, 2008. E-mail jothi@auroville.org.in to register for participation.

Sri Aurobindo statue for Auroville

On the occasion of the 40th birth anniversary of Auroville, the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation will unveil a statue of Sri Aurobindo in Auroville.

Sri Aurobindo's statue will be another bronze cast of the one already installed in the Parliament House, New Delhi, and in the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Kolkata (Calcutta). The one in Delhi was unveiled in August 2006 by Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Vice President of India, and Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, India's lower House of Parliament. The occasion was graced by the presence of many ministers and parliamentarians, both from the ruling coalition as well as from the opposition.

As might have been expected, the decision of the Board to have an identical statue in Auroville didn't go unchallenged. Soon after the announcement, Auroville's internal website bristled with comments. Remarkably absent, however, were any objections to the principle of having a statue of Sri Aurobindo. There was criticism that this particular statue "doesn't capture the spirit or personality of Sri Aurobindo"; "that it is not good enough for Auroville, due to its colour and overly Greek appearance," and that "the general impression is weighty, like Socrates, and not very delicate, with a dhoti which is much too heavy." And there was frustration that opportunity hadn't been given to an Auroville artist to make a bust or statue, preferable in spotless white marble.

One criticism, borne of equal veneration, was of having Sri Aurobindo's statue standing in the open. What about the bird droppings? And do we really want a rickety fire-escape kind of steel stairs built next to him for garlanding politicians to climb – as is the case with statues of politicians all over India?

Auroville Today researched files of the Ashram Archives to find what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother had to say about statues – and about relics. The pickings were thin, but the few we found were amazingly rich. We also discovered that there is quite an abundance of busts and statues of Sri Aurobindo, and that small statuettes are now even on sale on the street corners of Pondicherry. All these are based on the few photographs of Sri Aurobindo that exist: some of the young Sri Aurobindo gazing into the future – the photo which The Mother felt would be the beginning of the legend – but most on Henri Cartier Bresson's photos, taken in April 1950.

Here we present two conversations of The Mother with Satprem. One is on the inner force and presence of statues. The other one is on placing statues in the open air.

The inner force and presence of statues

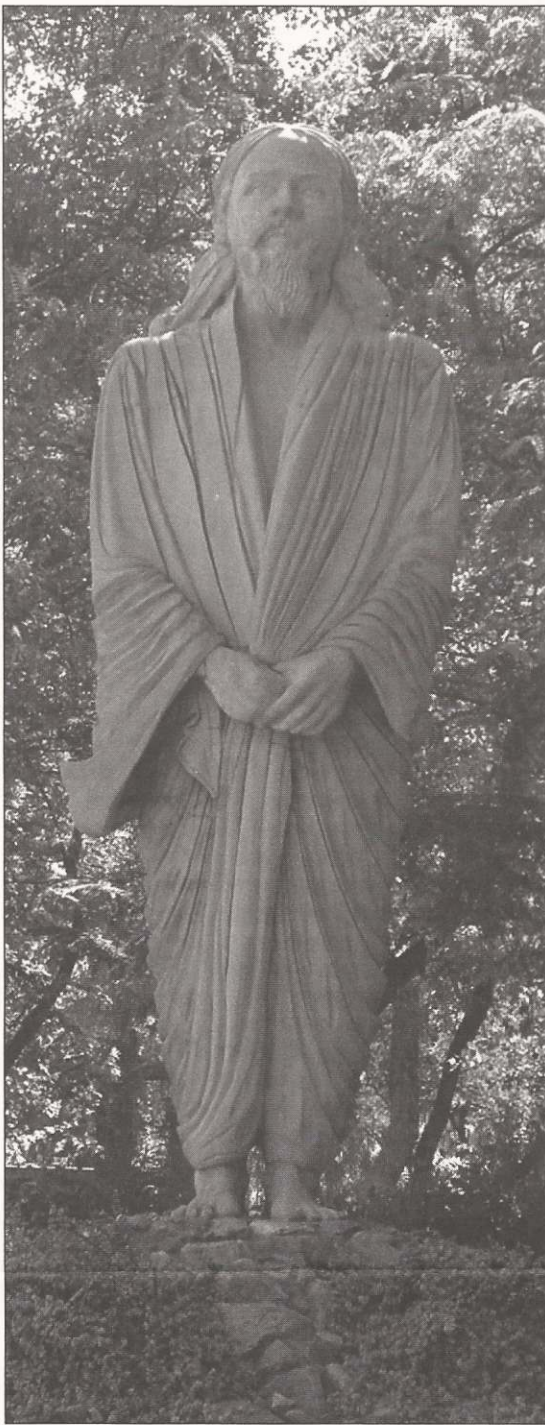
"Oh, I've had some very interesting revelations on this point, on the way people think and feel about it. I remember someone once made a little statue of Sri Aurobindo; he gave it a potbelly and ... anyway, to me it was ridiculous. So I said, 'How could you make such a thing?!' He explained that even if it's a caricature for the ordinary eye, since it's an image of the one you consider God, or a god, or an Avatar, since it's the image of the one you worship, even if only a guru, it contains the spirit and the force of his presence, and this is what you worship, even in a crude form, even if the form is a caricature to the physical eye.

Sri Aurobindo's statue in Parliament House

The man behind the statue is Lalit Verma, the owner of the Aurodhan art gallery in Puducherry. Lalit, as team leader, did the drawings and the sketches. "There were moments when I was ready to give up," he says. "Our ideal was to create a statue of Sri Aurobindo that would not only resemble him but also convey something of his presence. I often felt it was impossible."

The main difficulty was to imagine how Sri Aurobindo would appear standing up. Henri Cartier Bresson's April 1950 photographs are all of Sri Aurobindo in a sitting position. The only photos of him standing are from before 1915. Using measurements of Sri Aurobindo's body taken by one of the old sadhaks in the 1940s, Lalit made many sketches. "One of them was particularly good. I sent it to the Parliamentary Committee. I heard afterwards that one of its members almost went into a trance gazing at it. They gave the order. I replied that I would do my best, but that the statue would not be released until I had the sanction of someone who had seen Sri Aurobindo." That someone was Nirodbaran, who occasionally would come to check the progress of the work and give advice. "We first worked with small scale models. Then, when we had finished the mould for the final statue, he came again. He looked intently at the mould, and then said 'Yes, there is no doubt that this is Sri Aurobindo.' Then we cast it in bronze," says Lalit.

As reported in Auroville Today, October 2006, no.212



The statue of Sri Aurobindo near the running track of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Delhi Branch, New Delhi. Sculptor: unknown

Someone made a large painting of Sri Aurobindo and myself, and they brought it here to show me. I said, 'Oh, it's dreadful!' It was ... to the physical eye it was really dreadful. 'It's dreadful,' I said, 'we can't keep it.' Then immediately someone asked me for it, saying, 'I'm going to put it up in my house and do my puja before it.' Ah! ... I couldn't help saying, 'But how could you put up a thing like that!' (It wasn't so much ugly as frightfully banal.) 'How can you do puja before something so commonplace and empty!' This person replied, 'Oh, to me it's not empty! It contains all the presence and all the force, and I shall worship it as that: the Presence and the Force.'

All this is based on the old idea that whatever the image – which we disdainfully call an 'idol' – whatever the external form of the deity may be, the presence of the thing represented is always there. And there is always someone – whether priest or initiate, sadhu or sannyasi – someone who has the power and (usually this is the

priest's work) who draws the Force and the Presence down into it. And it's true, it's quite real – the Force and the Presence are THERE; and this (not the form in wood or stone or metal) is what is worshipped: this Presence.

Europeans don't have the inner sense at all. To them, everything is like this (gesture), a surface – not even that, a film on the surface. And they can't feel anything behind. But it's an absolutely real fact that the Presence is there – I guarantee it. People have given me statuettes of various gods, little things in metal, wood or ivory; and as soon as I take one in my hand, the god is there. I have a Ganesh (I have been given several) and if I take it in my hand and look at it for a moment, he's there. I have a little one by my bedside where I work, eat, and meditate. And then there is a Narayana which comes from the Himalayas, from Badrinath. I use them both as paperweights for my handkerchiefs! (My handkerchiefs are kept on a little table next to my bed, and I keep Ganapati I and Narayana on top of them.) And no one touches them but me – I pick them up, take a fresh handkerchief, and put them back again. Once I blended some nail polish myself, and before applying it, I put some on Ganapati's forehead and stomach and fingertips! We are on the best of terms, very friendly. So to me, you see, all this is very true.

Only....

Narayana came first. I put him there and told him to stay and be happy. A while later, I was given a very nice Ganapati; so I asked Narayana – I didn't ask his permission, I told him, 'Don't be angry, you know, but I'm going to give you a companion; I like you both very much, there's no preference; the other is much better looking, but you, you are Narayana!' I flattered him, I told him pleasant things, and he was perfectly happy.

It has always been like that for me – always. And I have never, never had the religious sense at all – you know, what people call this kind of ... what they have in religions, especially in Europe. I see only the English word for it: awe, like a kind of terror. This always made me laugh! But I have always felt what's behind, the presences behind."

(The Mother to Satprem as recorded in Mother's Agenda, April 29, 1961)

The statue of Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta

Satprem: There's a practical problem, Mother concerning the statue of Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta. You know that the Government of Bengal decided to erect a statue of Sri Aurobindo in place of Lord Curzon's – the very man who had sought the division of Bengal, and Sri Aurobindo had tried to stop him. Sri Aurobindo would take the place of Lord Curzon, across from the "Victoria Memorial." It's at the entrance to Calcutta. That's what they decided in principle. Then the government of Bengal was overturned and their decision wasn't put into legal terms, so now everything is pending. Now to restore the momentum, the people of "Pathmandir" have to do something. But the people of Pathmandir have another idea. They purchased some time ago the house where Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta....

Mother: Ah!

And they propose, instead of putting the statue of Sri Aurobindo on a public street, to put it in the house where Sri Aurobindo was born.

But would it be in the open?

No, it will be in the house.

But no one will see it, then!

That's what I think too. But they say, their argument is: if we put it in the house, it will be protected – the crows will not make a mess on it, and the students won't decapitate it!

Are the students of Bengal against Sri Aurobindo?

No, no, Mother! But it so happens they decapitated the statue of Gandhi, for instance!

(With a smile) Ooh!

For Sri Aurobindo himself, it's better in the house – it's more in keeping with his temperament and character. For the people, it's better outside.

Yes, certainly. A statue is made to be in pub-

The importance of Sri Aurobindo's statues

What would be the significance of a statue of Sri Aurobindo in Auroville? When his statue was unveiled in Parliament House, the headline of one national newspaper reporting on the occasion was "Spiritual Power." It indicated that India has not only a spiritual heritage but also a spiritual destiny. For India's destiny, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not just to become a nation like many others, but to be the leader in a new world and spiritualise the human race. The Mother, in a conversation in 1954, had said it more specifically: "The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world. The Government of India ought to recognize this significance of India in this sphere and plan their action accordingly."

As India is to the world, so Auroville is to India, according to The Mother. On February 3, 1968, she explained to Satprem why she had created Auroville. "The same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is occurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the ... cure. And it is for that – it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville."

lic, so the image is there for everyone to see.

Yes, but if they are likely to damage it or That should be absolutely avoided I don't know, they're mad there – they're mad everywhere. They're mad here too.

Here too, it came here, the same idea of killing, destroying It's everywhere. It's as if the whole vital world had descended on earth (gesture of a crushing mass).

I wouldn't want anything to happen to the statue.

Yes, Mother, but in my opinion, the statue loses its meaning if it isn't in public. If it's put in a house, it loses its meaning.

Obviously! Obviously!

What had a meaning is putting Sri Aurobindo across from the Victoria Memorial, in place of the Englishman who wanted to divide Bengal – that has a meaning.

Yes, obviously. But then the Indians would have to behave decently.

Anyway, the people of Pathmandir will do what you say.

(Mother remains concentrated)

The best thing is to have two statues: one in public and one in the house.

All right, Mother.

That would be the best.

I'll tell them.

And they don't have to be the same. One can be sitting and the other standing. The one in the street, standing; and the one in the house, sitting. That will be very nice. Because in the house there's no need to ask anyone's permission. I hope the one in the street is standing?

I believe you had chosen a photo of Sri Aurobindo in which he was looking toward the future. I think it's the photo by the Dutch painter.

Yes, that's it. I would like the one in the street to be standing. And then, in the house, sitting at a table.

At a table?

Or simply sitting. That way, it's fine.

(silence)

If something happens to the statue in the street, well, it will be the sign that Bengal will go under. That's all. It will be too bad for them.

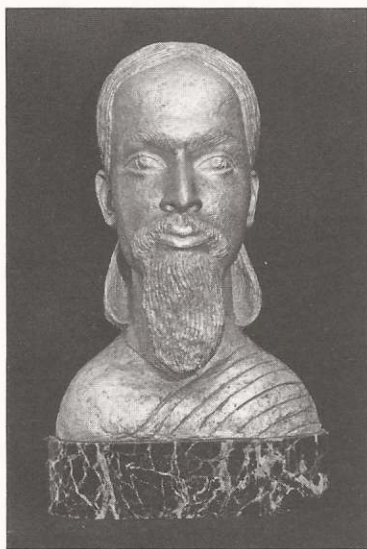
That's the point, I don't want his action to be dependent on that. So, if he is seated in the house, his action continues – even if they destroy his statue [in the street] ...

But they won't touch it, Mother!

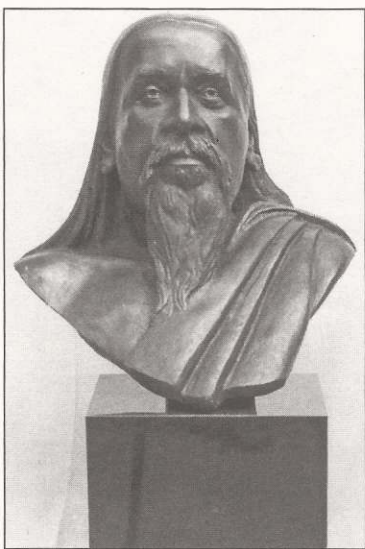
I don't think so.

He is too beautiful!

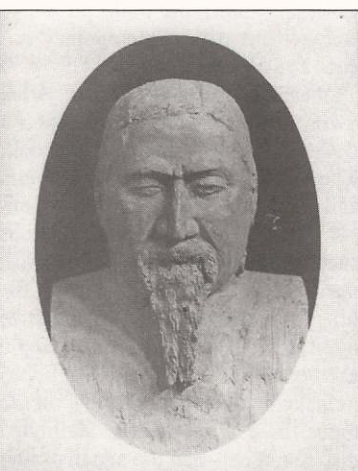
(From a conversation of The Mother with Satprem as recorded in Mother's Agenda, October 27, 1971.)



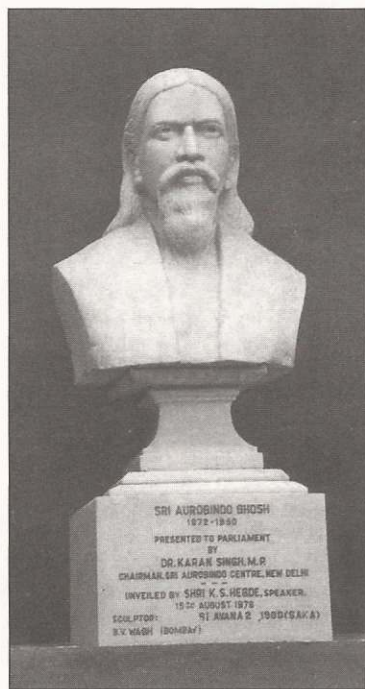
Bronze bust by Elsa Fraenkel. This was the first sculpture of Sri Aurobindo which was displayed in his room. Present location: Sri Aurobindo Library, Puducherry.



Bust by Erna Rose King, made in 1964. Erna Rose King in a letter to The Mother: "By asking help and guidance, I felt surrounded by His light, force and spiritual presence." Mother's comment on this bust: "The vast calm simplicity of his forehead, reflecting the perfect peace of total knowledge." Many casts have been made of this statue. Two are in Puducherry (Reception Room, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and Hall of Harmony, Ashram School), others are in England.



Bust by Purani. Present location: unknown.



Bust of Sri Aurobindo in Parliament House, New Delhi, by B.V. Wagh, Mumbai.

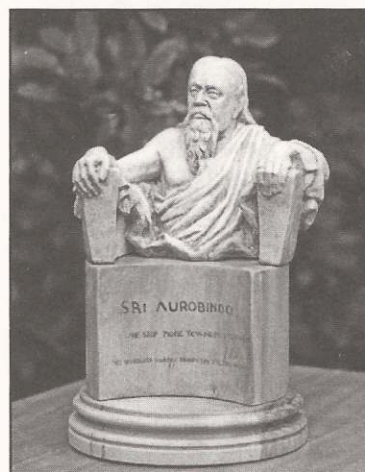
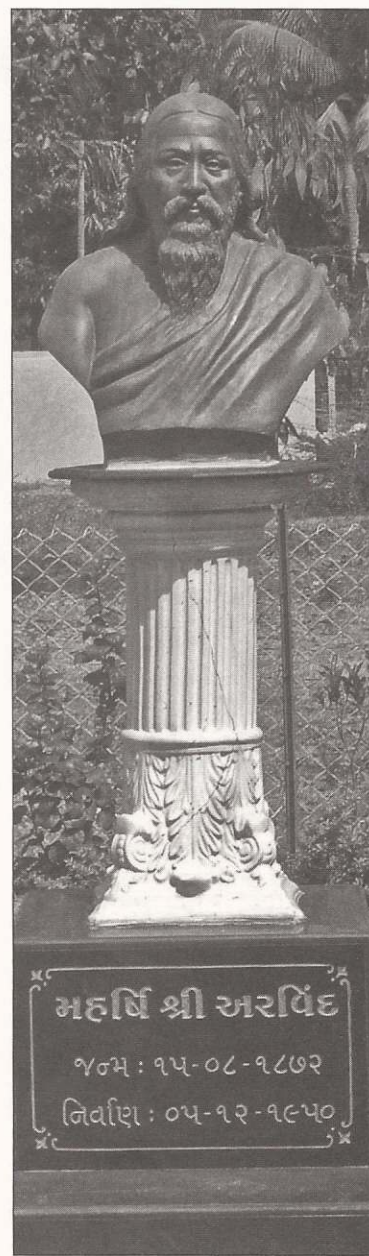
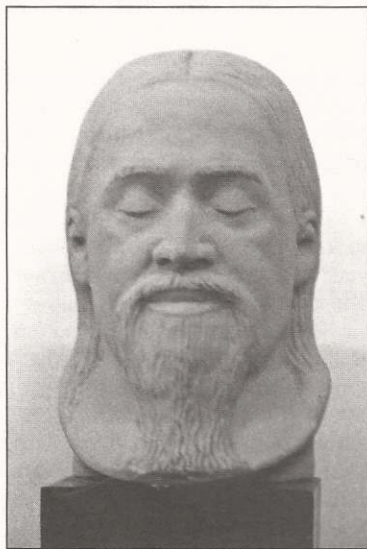


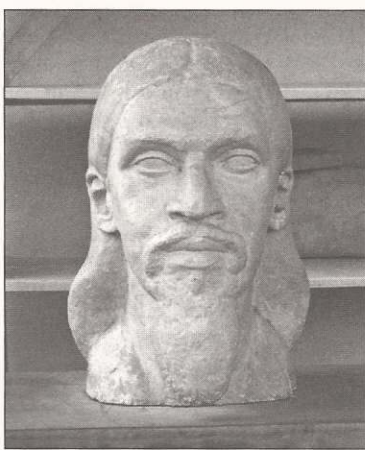
Table-top statuette by Luciano Gabrielli, Galliate, Italy. Present location: unknown.



Bust by unknown sculptor. Present location: a street in Karadi village near Navasari in Gujarat.



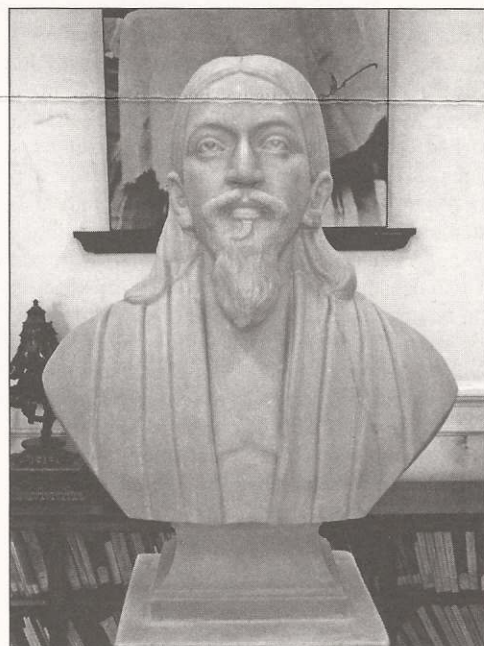
Sri Aurobindo in death. Sculptor: unknown. Present location: Sri Aurobindo Library, Puducherry.



Bust of Sri Aurobindo. Sculptor: unknown. Present location: Sri Aurobindo Library, Puducherry.



Bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo by unknown sculptor. Location: Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata.



Marble statue by Hirishikesh Das Gupta, offered to The Mother on August 15, 1973. Present location: Sri Aurobindo Library, Puducherry.

The Mother on Sri Aurobindo's 'gazing into the future' photograph

That's how I first saw him, at the head of the staircase.
(silence)

I had an experience while listening to you read; it was as if I heard, "The beginning of the legend ... the beginning of the legend" It's rather strange.

He is there and the atmosphere is full of a sort of concentration of force, and there are these two things: "This is how legends come into being ... how legends begin The beginning of the legend" I hear this. And there is also a kind of analogy to the old stories of Buddha, of Christ It's strange.

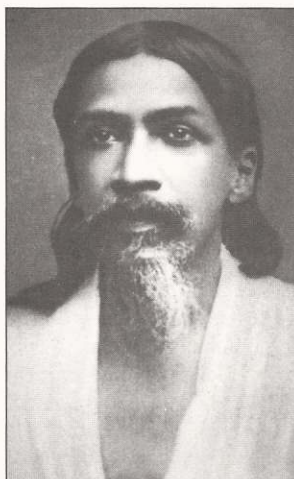
I seemed to be looking back into the present from some thousands of years ahead (it's no longer now, but as if I were propelled somewhere several thousand years ahead, looking backwards) and it's the beginning of the legend.

And the photo adopted by the legend is this full-face one of him as a young man.

A strange impression....

... I got the impression of there being the same difference between the physical fact of Christ or the physical fact of Buddha – and everything we know and say and think and feel about them today – as there is between what we now know of Sri Aurobindo and what will be known of him in the time I was propelled into.

(The Mother to Satprem, as recorded in Mother's Agenda, October 30, 1961)



On relics

Many Westerners have a revulsion for the veneration of relics, the body parts of a dead person. Yet cases of relic veneration abound in Catholicism as well as in Buddhism and Hinduism. This veneration may, of course, be ascribed to religious sentiments. But is there more to it? Do Westerners, perhaps lack the inner sense to discern what relics emit? For why did The Mother allow relics of Sri Aurobindo to be distributed and enshrined?

"She said that each and every molecule of Sri Aurobindo's body was filled with Supramental Consciousness," writes Nirodbaran. "We know that his body was glowing with Supramental Light as soon as he left it. That Consciousness is not a mortal thing which ceases with the death of the physical body. If that is to be, then we wouldn't feel such an extraordinary power and strength when we touch the Samadhi," he continues. And he explains, "We have learnt that wherever the Relics are enshrined, there dwell such peace and tranquillity. Therefore the relics are not a mere memento. Relics are the living Presence of Sri Aurobindo imbued with the light and force of his lifelong sadhana, just as an atom contains an infinite power in itself."¹

In Champakalal Speaks (1976), Champakalal, the servant of Sri Aurobindo, explains how he gathered the hair and nails of Sri Aurobindo that were later given out as relics.²

Relics were first installed at the Delhi Branch of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on December 5, 1957. They were housed in a gold casket which was then encased in three surrounding caskets of silver, sandalwood and rosewood. The same process was followed when relics were installed at the Bangavani centre in Nabadwip, West Bengal, on 21 February 1959. There is an account of it by one of the devotees present: "Mother explained the relics, what they were and when they had been taken. They were nails and hair taken from Sri Aurobindo on August 25th, 1950. The Mother first herself sewed up the Relics into a brocade bag with a brocade

thread, then put it into a small gold box, the symbol of Supermind; then put the gold box into a silver box, the symbol of Overmind; the silver box into a sandal wood box, the symbol of Higher Mind; the sandal wood box into a rose wood box, the symbol of Material Mind; then Mother tied it up with a silk handkerchief used by Sri Aurobindo during his last Darshan. Then Mother covered it up with a piece of red silk cloth, put it into a plastic bag, made it airtight. Then she put the whole thing into a stone casket made for the purpose and Udar cemented it up. 'Sri Aurobindo sharanam mama' chanted Champakalal at varying pitch at every phase of the ceremony. Mother presented each of use with a card with Sri Aurobindo sharanam mama [Sri Aurobindo is my refuge] printed on it and with blessings written by her own hand. We were twelve of her Selection for the ceremony."³

And relics of The Mother? They are not given. As Nolini Kanta Gupta explained: "We have not till now issued 'relics' of the Mother, for relics mean remains of a dead person and we did not associate death with the Mother's body. She is ever living to us – even in her body. Sri Aurobindo's was a different matter – the matter was decided by the Mother herself. But in the present case instead of so-called relics we have been issuing things and objects which Mother had in her personal possession and were used by her and considered and treated and loved as part of herself – she herself had declared it so."⁴

Carel

(1) Translation by Gopa Basu of an article on Relics by Nirodbaran in his Bengali book Rancahana Bichitra, as published in Nirodbaran, Divinity's Comrade.

(2) Champakalal Speaks (pp. 104-105), 1976 edition.

(3) From The Mother: A souvenir commemorating the New Advent of Sri Aurobindo in His Motherland: Installation of the Great Relics on the 21st of February 1959 in Bangavani, Nidayaghat, Nabadwip, West Bengal (pp 149), by Gobinda Lal Goswami.

(4) Handwritten note of Nolini Kanta Gupta of 18-12-1977.

AUM 2007

Meeting our evolutionary allies.

AUM, the All USA Meeting, has annually called together the students and admirers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in America since the mid 1980's. Unlike Aurovilians, whose choice of home assures them the company of hundreds of others captivated by the vision of humanity transcended in an evolutionary step forward, Americans so inspired are flung out over this vast land, living with their version of the Integral Yoga in isolation from their daily companions. This yearly gathering is therefore charged with all the emotions of a family reunion: love and recognition, sibling rivalry and frayed nerves, good food and hearty hellos, happy re-connections and a sense of revisited Oneness on the basis and depth of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's towering and all-embracing consciousness.

This year's AUM formally hosted for the first time by an accredited graduate school, the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS), was visioned and organized by former long-time Auroville resident, Savitra, who also designed and developed the programme, presentations and panels. In keeping with his work of bridge-building collaborative relations with America that the Mother entrusted to him in 1971, he chose to expand this AUM out of its previous 'in-house' pattern and open it up to exchange and dialogue with the wider world and what he calls our 'evolutionary allies'. In this light, seeking to encourage a genuine cross-pollination of ideas and experience, he

themed the AUM Integral Yoga in Dialogue with the World. The questions he posted were, "What is the 21st Century relationship between Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision and the evolving fields of human knowledge and experience, in particular, the enormous research opening up in the fields of Consciousness and Spirituality? And, in light of this quantum leap in emergent knowledge going on simultaneously in so many fields – from the hard and soft sciences of physics, biology and psychology to the applied researches in ecology, integral healing, whole systems behaviour and collective intelligence – what does the Integral Yoga Community have to share with and learn from its evolutionary allies in the world, particularly in view of the evolutionary crises which presently threaten the very sustainability of our terrestrial existence?"

To create the elements for this dialogue, Savitra brought in as chief speakers a number of his evolutionary allies, including Barbara Marx Hubbard and Elizabeth Sahtouris, whose insight into the evolutionary nature of our global future seems to fulfil in many ways the vision of Sri Aurobindo. Both women made stunning visual presentations, drawing on their personal search and academic studies, showing how contemporary scientific findings and their own profound inspirations confirm that the present era's accelerated change and apparent chaos are indicators of challenges to be overcome in conscious evolution. Sraddhalu Ranade from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram brought the depth and presence of the Integral



Melissa Michaels addressing the gathering.

Yoga, a connection to the ancient spirituality of India amid an active engagement with contemporary science and psychology.

Michael Murphy of Esalen, Brian Swimme author of *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, Robert McDermott, who wrote *The Essential Aurobindo* and many others were part of six panels discussing important questions such as: How does one distinguish the Soul or Psychic Being in the Integral Yoga from other classical traditions? These sessions, where each panellist was given 10 minutes to make an opening statement on the topic, then a moderator facilitated discussion between the panelists and then with the audience, brought up important issues in 'the Yoga' (as Americans refer to their relationship with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo).

A panel of psychotherapists, including two who have recently brought out excellent books, Brant Cortright and Arya Maloney, shared how the widened and deepened worldview which Sri Aurobindo's vision brings opens up new vistas of healing for both client and therapist.

Another panel, moderated by Savitra, dared to raise the issue of fundamentalism and its challenge to the ongoing evolution of the Integral Yoga. The panel began with Lynda Lester giving a very clear and definitive distinction between spirituality, religion and fundamentalism, then went on to list 'fundamentalist episodes' which have also occurred in our midst, making it clear that they are recognised as such by the majority. Wolfgang (formerly of AVI-Germany) warned that as Sri Aurobindo becomes better known, we can expect He will be subjected to

the same 'deconstructive' scepticism as all spiritual thought is in our secular and scientific culture, and it would be better if we are prepared for this. Craig Hamilton (former editor of *What is Enlightenment?* magazine, whose workshop at last year's AUM brought this question into the open) along with Michael Murphy found that their major criticisms (the unquestioning acceptance of Mother and failure of self-reflection that they'd seen in the Ashram and Auroville) were effectively answered by the very fact of the panel itself. Michael actually put aside his scripted notes and focused primarily on his intention to make available to a wider public the *Record of Yoga* in which Sri Aurobindo's notes on his own adventure of consciousness will be recognisable and appreciated by a new generation of seekers. And a young woman of Indian origin and western education, Mytrae, dared to bring up the question of sexuality, and how its suppression in the yoga constituted a sort of spiritual bypassing and a denigration of the dark feminine and the earth. This evoked some strong clarifications, followed by a call for a true discussion – for which there was actually no time. Savitra, who'd been facilitating the whole programme with a wonderfully inclusive referral of all process points to the assembly, managed to resolve this potentially explosive interchange with a call to go beyond our right-wrong mental reactions – to flow toward each other with acceptance, awareness and love, respecting that we are all living through the experience of subjective truths unique to each of us at a given moment in time, reminding us that we are here to

model a new personal and collective behaviour, avoiding the destructive tendency in the world which judges others by one's own truth and then seeks to impose that truth uniformly.

The pale columnar flowers of the buckeye tree were in bloom for the week of the conference, which was held on the rolling hills of the Institute of Noetic Science's campus in California. (Savitra actually co-opted their President onto the panel on 'Evolutionary Activism, Sustainable Transformation and the Divine Feminine'.) Walks through trails to get to the sumptuous vegan meals gave opportunities for participants to exchange experiences from the (too) numerous workshops by creative Integral Yogis and catch up on each other's life trajectories. Evening performances added another dimension, Melissa Michaels bringing in Jeremy and Jivatma for a musical boost from the youth, and internationally-acclaimed singer/troubadour Raffi inspired and entertained us with his "songs of compassionate revolution". On the closing night, Karunamayee's deeply-touching devotional songs set the tone for a memorial to honour Bina Chaudhuri, wife of Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri who founded the original graduate institute from which CIIS emerged. As Karunamayee's chanting ended, the gathering spontaneously fell into a long silent meditation.

The overall atmosphere of this AUM fulfilled us all, providing a space and time for Integral Yogis to meet with other voices of conscious evolution, and sense for themselves that the Supramental is no longer a vision but a global reality.

Bhavana



B, Savitra, Barbara, Jack, Kate, Dakshina.

Savitri studies in Holland

Thirty Dutch lovers of Savitri met for a weekend to study Sri Aurobindo's epic poem. Dianna recounts her experience.

It was a feast. Shradhdhavan from Savitri Bhavan had come to Holland to lead the weekend session in a lovely old monastery near the Belgian border set in the middle of a forest. For our study sessions, she had chosen the book 'The Secret Knowledge' as it is a book that can stand alone. It begins with these lines:

On a height he stood that looked towards greater heights.

*Our early approaches to the Infinite
Are sunrise splendours on a marvellous verge*

While lingers yet unseen the glorious sun.

And concludes with;

*That the eyes of the Timeless might look out from Time
And the world manifest the unveiled Divine.*

*For this he left his white infinity
And laid on the spirit the burden of the flesh,
That Godhead's seed might flower in mindless Space.*

I found *Savitri* much more accessible when read and studied in a group, which is the way the *Savitri* study group does it in Auroville. Shradhdhavan actually teaches English through the study of *Savitri*. This sounds absurd as even English speakers find the language very difficult, but she has found that the meaning of the words penetrate the spirit on a different level.

When we introduced ourselves on the Friday evening, it was inspiring to hear that several of the participants had been studying *Savitri* for twenty years or more. One of the groups told us that they meditated on a few paragraphs every day and this was their guiding light for that day. For another, *Savitri* is a personal sadhana, for yet another, "It's like coming home."

Indeed two members of the Dutch group, Martin and Hans had both independently translated the 27,000 line epic into Dutch, a remarkable undertaking. Martin shared the story of how his translation of *Savitri* into Dutch came about. "I have been reading *Savitri* for thirty years and found it difficult

to access it in its original. My English was poor, and I had to look up many words in the dictionary. I then decided to try and translate it into Dutch as this would be a way to study and understand it in greater depth. When I went on my travels to India, and I have done this seven times now, I used to work on the translation. Now after thirty years the work is finally completed!"

Martin has now embarked on another translation, of *The Ideal of Human Unity*. "Every Sunday afternoon, when I visit my old aunt, we sit together and try and translate it, and this we are finding very difficult, almost impossible..."

Mia, an energetic ninety-five year old who has been supporting Auroville since the sixties, remarks that "Unfortunately for the group here in Holland, almost all of the committed people eventually go to live in Auroville. It's as if we are a nursery for Auroville. Now we are asking ourselves how we can best support Auroville. At the beginning we helped financially, then later by providing people with information, but now the

internet can do that. What we can do in Europe now is to create small groups that meet and study *Savitri*. This will help to raise the consciousness, which I think is the best thing we can do. But we must also attempt to include the many nationalities that now live in Holland as Auroville is meant to be an example of human unity."

The Dutch group meets regularly. Their commitment is impressive. Most of the group members had visited Auroville, and three or four of them were planning to go and live there in the near future. The weekend study session was a happy occasion to recognize the depths of their feelings for Auroville, which in some cases, was an outcome of their love of *Savitri*.

The Dutch people have a lovely custom of lighting candles, even in the daytime. As I look back on my experience of the weekend, the memory of thirty people immersing their hearts and minds in the light of *Savitri* for two days amongst the flickering flames of the candles will always remain with me.

Dianna

The USA pavilion

Auroville International USA says "No!" once again to location change.

More than one and a half years ago, on January 24, 2006, chief architect Roger Anger presented a new lay-out of the International Zone to the International Zone Group. The new lay-out was received with mixed feelings. One problem was the relocation of the area reserved for the Americas. The plan ignored the fact that the first phase of the USA Pavilion, the US Students Dormitory, had already been built on the site originally allocated to it and approved by Roger.

Roger proposed to rename this dormitory the 'International Student Dormitory' and to build the USA Pavilion elsewhere. This was not accepted by Auroville International USA, which was responsible for the fundraising. "It would amount to a change of purpose of a building for which neither the donors nor Auroville International USA have given permission," they argued. Auroville International USA complained to the Working Committee with a copy to the Governing Board and International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation, but nothing happened. [see AVToday 209-210, June-July 2006]

On April 7, 2007, Auroville International USA raised the issue again. In an open letter to the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council, as well as to various Auroville working groups and the News and Notes (Auroville's internal newsletter), the Board of Auroville International USA reaffirmed its intention to preserve the existing USA Pavilion Project at its present location in the International Zone of Auroville. Recalling that the USA Pavilion Project had obtained approval of all appropriate Auroville bodies since 2001, AVI USA objected to the pavilion being re-designated as a guesthouse and the proposal that they build a new pavilion at another location. They said, "The project was conceived, energized and funded by the people of the USA with the intention of manifesting aspects of the national soul of the United States of America."

The AVI-USA Board expressed its willingness to work with l'Avenir d'Auroville, the new planning group, and requested to be included in all future discussions regarding the USA Pavilion and its relationship to the International Zone. It demanded that building permission be given to proceed with a detailed architectural plan designed by architect David Tollas, as the implementation of the second phase of the project is critical to the completion of the basic infrastructure of the Pavilion and was part of the

original plan. The Board also observed that there should not be only one architectural style in the International Zone, as suggested by certain people. This, it said, "would be a tremendous mistake, as the creativity and genius of each nation needs space and openness in which to unfold."

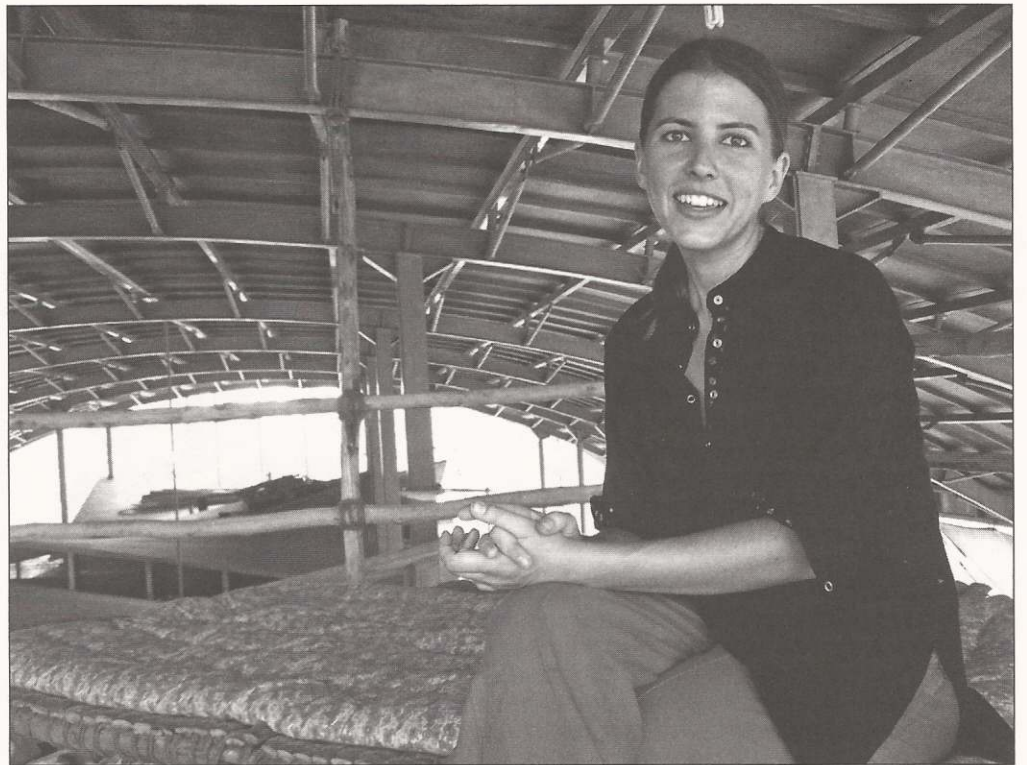
The AVI-USA Board underlined the views of the International Advisory Council as quoted in the AV Today, March 2007, No. 217, that "guidelines for national pavilions and for their planning process and responsibilities be formulated as soon as possible, and that the inclusiveness of the process is as important as the results".

Phase 1: The Dormitory

It was in 2001 that students from the architecture department of the University of Washington, Seattle, began the design and construction of the first phase of the USA Pavilion as part of their Global Community Service programme. This phase is a sustainable eco-building that serves as a dormitory for students from North and South America who are spending time in Auroville. Three professors guided the work: Sergio Palleroni (Architecture), Steve Badanes (Architecture), and Chuck Henry (Sustainable Infrastructure).

The work was completed in 2005. Since then, the dormitory has seen over 500 visitors from around the world, many of whom were students of architecture.

With a hyperbolic parabola-shaped super-roof, inspired by the 'outdoor room' ambience of a banyan tree, the dormitory aspires to be a model of eco-living. It has five main elements of sustainability: the use of compressed earth bricks and ferro-cement, solar power as energy source, rain water harvesting, grey water treatment, and composting toilets. It is also fully 'off the (electrical) grid'.



Ing-Marie, caretaker of the USA Pavilion in the loft beneath the Pavilion's super-roof.

However, it is only since the beginning of this year that the dormitory finally achieved its intended function; to host visiting students from the Americas. From January 1st until March 7th, six of the fifteen undergraduate students from the University of Washington, Seattle, made it their home (the rest stayed at the neighbouring Tibetan Pavilion). The group, led by Professor Karen Litfin, had come to Auroville to study the interaction between nature, spirit, and politics within the Auroville setting. As one student put it on her journal, "This place [the dormitory] is a source of constant inspiration to the emerging environmentalist in me".

Now the dormitory is a vibrant presence in the International Zone, next to the Tibetan and Indian Pavilions. For Ing-Marie, the dormitory's caretaker, this has been an exciting achievement. "But the dorm still needs to grow to be able to accommodate fifteen students plus two faculty

members," she says. "Right now, we can host only nine students. Ultimately we want to be able to book two student groups during the fall and winter semesters each year."

The running costs of the USA Pavilion are modest, yet the Pavilion struggles to meet its expenses. Says Ing-Marie, "It takes roughly Rs 10,000 (or US\$225) a month to run this place. We've tried doing it from donations, but this only covered the costs for about seven months. We are still trying to figure out how to keep the spirit of giving through work alive, while also meeting the financial needs of the Pavilion."

Priya Sundaravalli

For more information or to obtain a copy of the Pavilion's newsletter, contact Ing-Marie at ingmarie@auroville.org.in; or write to USA Pavilion, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu

Recent events at the American Pavilion

In January storyteller Paula Murphy spun tales around a campfire over mugs of hot chocolate. April saw a flurry of activities, from the construction of a 'keet capsule' for the caretaker to celebrating Earth Day 2007 by hosting the 'Eco-Living Expose'. The highlight of the event was an eighteen foot diameter tepee, a model of light living assembled by visiting American students. April also saw Seattle-based artist, Perri Lynch, designing and making the Pavilion's iron gates. With its water-like imagery, the gate invites the viewer to consider dynamic transitions and tranquil states in one's own life.

CELEBRATIONS

Live Earth

On 7th July, Auroville was one of many places around the world to participate in Live Earth events. The intention of this global project was to raise awareness of global warming. The organizers hoped that up to two billion people would tune in, but not drop out – they wanted people to do something concrete about the climate crisis by changing their living patterns and by pressuring their leaders to take urgent action.

The Auroville event began with a vegan dinner of locally-grown, organic food at the Visitors Centre. This was followed by short films and presentations. The highlights included Basile's film of Transition children describing what they understood by global warming and what should be done about it – "more trees and more fans" was one pithy suggestion – and an amusingly informative Indian television presentation on some of Auroville's organic food units.

Those who chose to make oral presentations (which, presumably, are more environment-friendly) were at a disadvantage: the microphones were not working, so the presenters had to bellow above the hubbub from the adjacent Visitors Centre cafeteria. However, there were good mega-

phonic presentations from Nandita on the need to go vegetarian (and, preferably, vegan), from Olivier on the latest in degradable plastic technology, and from Paul, who urged all flyers to immediately donate Rs 500 each for trees to offset their catastrophic carbon emissions.

The presentations concluded with an Al Gore video. In it, he remarked that Live Earth was a unique moment

because the undivided attention of the world was focused on the climate crisis, and he asked everybody to sign a seven-point pledge (see box).

The evening ended with Aurovilians of all shapes and ages warming themselves and the globe still further as they jittered to the music of Live Earth concerts worldwide.

Alan

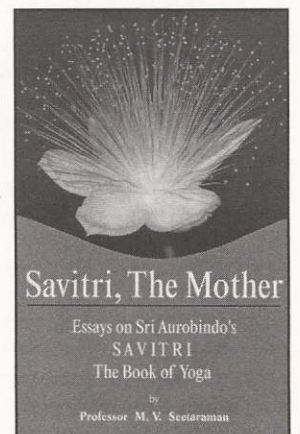
The Live Earth pledge

1. To demand that my country join an international treaty within the next two years that cuts global warming pollution by 90 percent in developed countries and by more than half worldwide in time for the next generation to inherit a healthy earth;
2. To take personal action to help solve the climate crises by reducing my own CO2 pollution as much as I can and offsetting the rest to become 'carbon neutral';
3. To fight for a moratorium on the construction of any new generating facility that burns coal without the capacity to safely trap and store the CO2;
4. To work for a dramatic increase in the energy efficiency of my home, workplace, school, place of worship, and means of transportation;
5. To fight for laws and policies that expand the use of renewable energy sources and reduce dependence on oil and coal;
6. To plant new trees and to join with others in preserving and protecting forests; and,
7. To buy from businesses and support leaders who share my commitment to solving the climate crises and building a sustainable, just and prosperous world for the 21st century.

NEW BOOKS

Savitri, The Mother

Savitri Bhavan has published a revised edition of a study on Savitri entitled: *Savitri, The Mother, Essays on Sri Aurobindo's SAVITRI, The Book of Yoga*, by Professor M. V. Seetaraman. The thirteen essays on Book Seven of *Savitri* focus on the correspondences between Sri Aurobindo's description of the Yoga of Savitri and the Mother's record of her own experiences in her *Prayers and Meditations*. The Essays appeared originally in the Ashram Journal *The Advent*, under the editorship of Nolini Kanta Gupta, from 1962 to 1965, and were approved by the Mother. The book is available from Savitri Bhavan. Email: savitribhavan@auroville.org.in



REFLECTIONS

A snake in the garden

I felt the snake before I saw it. I was in my living room, doing some mundane housework, when something made me look up and out into the garden. And there it was, cold and glistening, a yellowish-gray rat snake slithering through the grass. Rustling the dry leaves as it sinuously curved its long body and pushed its way forward. For a moment, the world stood still. I was aware only of the snake. I felt its presence quiver the back of my neck with an immediacy that preceded the chatter of thoughts.

I have noticed this before. Unlike human beings with whom one initially connects through the vibrations of their thoughts and emotions, I commune with wild animals through a preverbal sensation in my body. The mind goes still as the very nerves, tissues and cells of my body register the presence of something wild and free.

What is that allows me to sense the snake even before I see it? Is it because coded somehow in the neurons of my brain stem is a cellular memory dating back four hundred million years or more of my evolutionary connection to reptiles and other amniotes? What else is programmed into the cells of our bodies? Can we bring alive in our present consciousness our birth within the core of a star or, even before that, our genesis from Light and Love and a pregnant Emptiness? Does the unborn future too, fecund with creativity, quiver within us waiting to be brought to life?

Are we human beings evolutionarily gifted to be conscious of all this – to stand at the trajectories of the past and the future to celebrate our co-existence with all that was, is, and yet to be? Will one day we finally outgrow our need to dominate and destroy and instead, as cosmological beings, consciously affirm our deep and essential connection with all in this universe?

Bindu

LADS electrifies an old project

For years, the electric vehicle project in Auroville has languished. Now all this is about to change with the newly formed LADS – the Laboratory of Auroville Designers.

In early January this year, a series of documentaries on environmental issues was screened at Auroville's Cinema Paradiso. Of these two created quite a stir – Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth', and Chris Paine's 'Who Killed the Electric Car?' Amongst the audience were two young men, Akash and Sukrit, who decided to do something positive about it – bring electric two-wheelers to Auroville. Thus the EV Future project was born.

Auroville's fascination with electric two-wheelers is not new. In the late eighties, SAIER bought half a dozen 'Electros' – mopeds powered by a rechargeable battery pack – for a few of its workers. However the harsh local driving conditions, along with the not-so-optimally designed batteries and controllers, caused all but one to break down or malfunction. The single specimen that survives from this period and is actually still running well, is Bhaga's 'Vidyutine' (see box).

In contrast, electric bicycles or 'power-assisted' bikes, have had a more steady presence in Auroville, patronised by a few staunch ecologically-conscious individuals. B was the first with a do-it-yourself model. He imported an electric motor and attached it to his bicycle. Carsten of Auroville Energy Products (AEP) was the earliest entrepreneur in the Auroville's electric bicycle venture. AEP attempted to bring solar-charged electric bicycle into AV, but the project did not take off. More recently Chandresh and his team at SaraCon have started an electric bicycle rental service. The team maintains a fleet of nine bicycles all assembled in Pondy using motors imported from China. Aptly, these bicycles have been named QT for 'Quiet Transport'.

"But bicycles cannot meet the needs of most Aurovilians," says Akash. "Most people need a



Akash (left) and Sukrit, the young entrepreneurs of EV Future, modified their smoke-spewing, petrol-guzzling two-wheelers (a motorcycle and moped respectively) into 100% electric vehicles.

more powerful vehicle that has the range to do the weekly trip to Pondy and back, be able to haul a decent load, and preferably carry a rider in the pillion. For this one needs a moped or a motorcycle."

Over the last two years, a few Chinese models like Planet-7 have come onto the market and were picked up an enthusiast or two. But they have not proven successful. "Most of these are too flimsy for Auroville's outback conditions," says Akash. "There were more than a few incidents when these vehicles just came apart, and the person had a miraculous escape."

Now with the technology being more mature, what EV Future intends to do is to get the best components preferably made locally in India, and assemble 30 vehicles and offer them to Auroville at cost price. "One advantage for us

doing the work in Auroville is that we have the conditions to test it. If it works here, it will really work anywhere," says Akash.

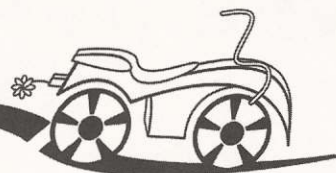
The team's biggest challenge has been to find manufacturers in India for the various components – batteries, controllers and the brushless hub-motors that are fitted on the wheelbase. Explains Sukrit, "To import them from China is expensive. And we want is to be able to offer a vehicle that costs about Rs.25,000."

For Akash and Sukrit, what started off as a hobby has now become a full-blown passion, albeit an expensive one. Any spare time they have is spent at the workshop in Reve, tinkering on refitted Electros, testing hub motors, updating the website, EVFuture.com, or researching the special regulations and certification required to drive an electric vehicle in India. "Of course, there are costs involved, and we're experimenting at our own expense," clarifies Akash. "But money is not our motivation. We're happy to do this work. But at a certain point if people are willing to help, it is also nice."

Their team has also grown in the past months. "In fact EV Future came about from an informal group called the LADS or the Laboratory of Auroville Designers," says Sukrit. "Besides Akash and I, there's Hemant (AuroRE), Carsten, Chandresh, Monica, Francois, Nathalie, and Auroson." The group meets once a month over dinner, brainstorming ideas and dreaming of the future. Dreams include LED headlights, charging stations along the Auroville's Crown road, solar-panels on the roofs of all parking lots, and silently-gliding vehicles. "And ultimately a pollution-free and fossil fuel-free Auroville," says Akash.

Priya Sundaravalli

EV Future
www.evfuture.com



Bhaga on her beloved Vidyutine.

"What strikes you is the silence and the way it glides; like you are on a magic carpet," says Bhaga of her Vidyut. "It was a prototype from a crazy company in Bangalore. As you can see, it has no design to speak of, but I love it." In 1985, when Bhaga received an electric moped from SAIER, little did she imagine that she would still be using it after two decades. Even with the regular battery changes, and annual paint job, Bhaga realized that she was not spending more than she would have with petrol. "And all this without the inconvenience of petrol!" But what has struck Bhaga more is the curiosity and interest that onlookers have shown on her bike. "If these were available in the market, I am sure most people will take to them!"

VILLAGE EDUCATION

Kuilapalayam High School

Thousands of village children are living in and around Auroville. Hundreds of them belong to Auroville's employees. At present, the village schools run by Auroville or others offer education to only a small portion of them.

Kuilapalayam School, till today not part of the Auroville Foundation, is active in this field since 1993. It offers the most common syllabus in Tamil Nadu in both Tamil and English medium of instruction. In India, a 16-year-old student will normally sit for an official 10th standard exam, resulting in a recognized diploma that will enable him or her to enter higher education or the profession they want to follow. The student will have to pass examinations in mathematics, English, science, social sciences, and the local language, Tamil, scoring a minimum 35% marks for each subject. Failure in even one subject is taken as a failure in the exam; that subject will have to be repeated. At Kuilapalayam School, 37 students appeared this year. The results were out in May: 19 students passed with over 75% marks averaged over the 5 subjects and 18 had managed 60 to 74 % average. None failed.

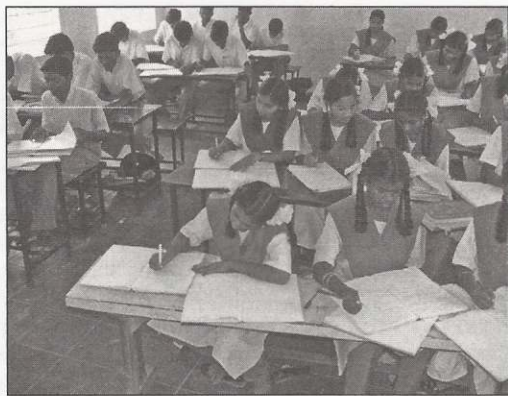
After passing, a student can go to a Higher Secondary School for 11th and 12th standard classes: in the Auroville Master Plan area this facility is only available at the Kuilapalayam Higher Secondary School.

The curriculum is tough and meant for those who aspire to become a nurse, a teacher, an engineer, a manager etc. If a student scores very high marks, a (much) cheaper seat in a college is available! In an (ex) agricultural area like ours, this is one of the few ways open to earn a better living for the student and the family.

Out of our 34 students who took the 12th standard exams (6 subjects), only one failed in one subject; 7 passed with marks between 50 and 60%, 20 managed 60 to 74% and 6 went above 74%. There are three surprises here: The first is visible to all villagers, namely

the good results achieved by the (mostly) poor rural students. In comparison, out of the 108 students of the Puducherry Government High School at Alankuppam that went for the 10th standard examination, only 58 passed. The second surprise is that Kuilapalayam School managed to obtain these results with only a quarter to a third of the finances of the other village education schools around Auroville. The last surprise is that the official Auroville total financial input in this endeavour today amounts to only Rs 5,000 a month (working out at Rs.4 per child per month).

Anton



Students in the 12th standard at the Kuilapalayam School

EXHIBITION

Maasi magam moods

Four youngsters from the Tamil Heritage Centre capture the spirit of Maasi magam, an annual Puducherry ritual, on camera.



The statue of a deity getting immersed in the Bay of Bengal.

'Maasi magam – People's Moods', was the theme of the recent photo exhibition at Gallery Square Circle in Kalakendra, Bharat Nivas. On display were photographs taken by four youngsters associated with the Tamil Heritage Centre who documented the annual Maasi Magam festival of Puducherry.

Maasi magam is celebrated on the day of the full-moon in the Tamil month of Maasi (mid February to mid March). Gods and goddesses come from all around Puducherry to the little fishing hamlet of

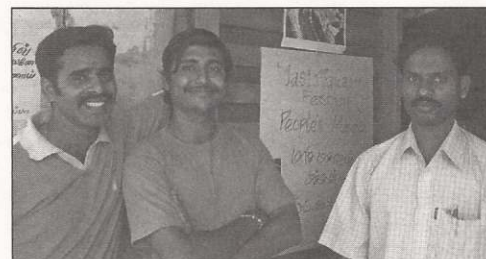
Vaithikuppam, located north of town to have a ritual dip in the ocean.

The event draws over a hundred thousand pilgrims and transforms the area into a vibrant and festive celebration. "It was quite overwhelming," says Anand, "but very joyful and full of life." Armed with digital cameras, the four independently shot over a thousand

images capturing the mood and the spirit of the event. Budgetary constraints permitted just eighty of the images to be put on display.

The photo exhibit was part of the Tamil Heritage Centre's 2-week long Second Annual Children's Book Fair.

Priya Sundaravalli



Three of the four photographers – Anand, Arunan, and Gunaseelan (left to right)

Animal welfare around Auroville

One of the ongoing problems that Auroville and its surrounding villages face is the presence of considerable numbers of abandoned or uncared-for semi-feral dogs and cats, many of them sick, and some carrying rabies. Adding to this problem is the fact that too many abandoned animals are left to wander about with the result that litter after litter of unwanted puppies and kittens, most of which die of under-nourishment and disease, roam the area. Those that do survive perpetuate the problem.

Some years ago a small team of concerned Aurovilians began trying to do something about the problem. Initially the aim was to give regular nourishment to uncared-for animals while trying to treat the sick ones. Alongside this work, a dog sanctuary was established where the unwanted puppies could be cared for while simultaneously, efforts were made to find homes for them. About 200 puppies have passed through the sanctuary in the past two years, with about 50% of those finding a home.

This helped, but it did not deal with the issue of rampant breeding, and so, in 2005, the 'Integrated Animal Care' team was formed in Auroville with the aim of tackling this aspect of

the problem. The team follows five principles in its animal care programme: sterilization, anti-rabies vaccination, medical care, adoption of strays, and outreach. The team has organized and paid for many sterilizations within Auroville and the surrounding villages where Aurovillian pet owners pay, while owners from the village have their animals sterilized for free. The team has also given anti-rabies vaccinations and provided treatment for a variety of skin conditions and other ailments when possible.

Their latest move has been the organizing of Animal Welfare Camps in the area, supported by funds from the Dutch Foundation Stichting De Zaaier, a donation of an ambulance by a generous long-time friend of Auroville in the same field of work, and the assistance of Dr. Kumar, the local vet who has been employed to do the surgical work. While the formal camps have concluded, the animal welfare work continues. Each week, about 7-8 sterilisations are performed. However, funding is urgently needed – the work costs Rs 50,000 a month.

For more information contact:
integrated_animal_care@yahoo.co.in

Tim

115 Sterilisations in 25 Days



Curious villagers watch a sterilization in progress at the Animal Welfare camp in Kazhumperumpakkam.

After much preparation, both organisational and practical, the sterilisation camp got started according to plan on Sunday, April 1. After a few hiccups we started out at 7.30 am, looking forward, but not without some anxiety, to our new experiences in the surrounding villages. Suresh from Edaiyanchavadi drove us in the new Integrated Animal Care van. The members of the team were Dr. Kumar, Lorraine, Merry, and Njal.

Rita and Ratna did excellent overall organizing work, including sending their long-time worker Shankar to help during the whole first week in Mattur, Kazhumperumpakkam, Nesal, and Apirampattu. He had arranged the places for us to work and made appointments for some of the dogs in these places. He and Suresh were of invaluable assistance in catching and bringing the dogs to the operation theatre, usually the porch of some small public building. In Sanjeevinagar the team was hosted by Mohanam Cultural Centre, in Kottakarai by Harvest and in Edaiyanchavadi by Thamarai Cultural Centre.

The owners, or in case of strays, a person responsible, were expected to help, which didn't always happen. Catching the dogs was often very difficult. Shankar, Suresh and Njal went to identify female dogs, spoke with the owners and caught the dogs by hand – they did not use the notorious 'dog catcher' since it is quite brutal and almost strangles the animal – and Dr. Kumar gave the first anaesthetic injection. But often the dogs escaped and had to be found again, captured, and injected a second time. Once Shankar got bitten which was a signal for the team members to go to the Health Centre and get rabies vaccinations, just in case. The temporarily 'sleeping' dogs were then transported in the van or, if they were nearby, were carried to the operation table.

The pre-arranged quota for sterilization was five dogs per day, which meant we were busy without a break for five to seven hours, not counting the often long travel time. While Dr. Kumar operated, Lorraine, who is a trained nurse, assisted,

and Njal and I kept the register and tried to keep onlookers quiet and not too close to the operating table. There were always a number of villagers watching with great interest, even young children. After the operation, the dog had to be laid down on a mat, since it was still unconscious, and Njal or I put a collar on it with an 'IAC-AV' sticker, which pleased the owner. If there was a skin condition, I gave necessary treatment with poongam oil, removed ticks, or applied antibiotic powder on small wounds. Dr. Kumar gave an antibiotic injection and, if necessary, other medicines.

On the first day of the camp mostly male dogs were brought to us – easy work, but not quite the main point. It turns out that people often take a male dog for a pet and chase the females away so as not to be bothered with puppies, even in Auroville.

Some touching incidents occurred during the first couple of weeks. On the first day, while one of the operations was going on, an old lady bent with age came up to us and wanted treatment for a broken hand that a cow had stepped on. We had neither the time, skill nor the medicines to treat a human patient, but Njal and I did the best we could. Njal made a small splint from sticks and we bound the hand to it with a clean rag. The lady was so grateful. Another pleasant incident was the headman of Alankuppam village coming up to thank us for the work. On the other hand, in another village an old man was angry with our work, and shouted that we should instead kill all the dogs.

When in the afternoon, tired and hungry and with aching joints, I flopped down on my bed, my overwhelming feeling was one of gratitude: to the dedicated medical team colleagues, to all the villagers who support us in action and in thought, and above all, to the divine, who gives us the physical and emotional strength to hopefully make at least a small impact on the concept of animal care in these rural areas and in Auroville.

Merry

Good 'wheel' for all

Manikandan cycles to promote environmental awareness.

On May 2nd, the region news paper, *The Hindu*, mentioned that Manikandan, a 28 year old Aurovillian, had set out on a cycle tour to help raise environmental awareness among the people of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

On his return, he spoke to Niranjani.

Manikandan realized that our Earth is being polluted in many ways, including pollution from the mind. "We think only in terms of science and technology," he says. "But what intelligent human minds create in terms of pollution is worse than anything else." He believes that solving the world's environmental problems begins inside each of us. It was this belief that made him decide to cycle through his home state of Tamil Nadu and disseminate the message of environmental awareness.

Leaving Auroville on May day, Manikandan made a 1,200 km journey through 15 districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry before returning back to Auroville on the 31st of May.

On the front of his plain green bicycle is a banner with a message in both Tamil and English. In Tamil it reads "Earth is full of love and patience for us, it has been so and still is, but are we conscious of it? Without the Earth we do not exist. So better take care of it." And in English, "Good will from all, good will for all, is the basis of peace and harmony on Earth!"

In his travels, Manikandan met and spoke with more than 2000 people, urging them that whatever we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves. Many were interested in the subject and knew a lot about it through the media. However, Manikandan noticed that while many agreed on the need to initiate a change, and to live a pollution-free life, when it came to action, they were not doing anything. Why? "Because they think it is an impossible task to change one's life if one wants to be part of the modern world. They feel that to catch up with the modern world, they must be more and more productive, and this means riding motorcycles rather than bicycles."

The only way to change this attitude he feels, is for each of us to experience true love for the Earth. "Only then will we change our way of life out of respect for it," he says. "Personally, I am learning to be a humble lover of our Mother Earth." Manikandan also emphasizes that a change of consciousness begins with us making changes in our own lives first. "In my own future, right here where I live in Auroville, I'll keep working on this by creating more awareness."

After his cycling expedition, is Manikandan hopeful that such a change will take place? "Yes! Through my journey I could see Earth's generosity and beauty, I could see the mystery of the creation and why Earth has been created. All this brought me an enormous sense of admiration for the Earth and for all its creatures."

"I could also see that there are people who are aware of how to make life better and are working towards this. In my travels, I met many social workers and NGOs who are spreading awareness through different programmes. The government, too, is making an effort. It has programmes to raise awareness about pollution, to plant trees, and to make people take care of their surroundings."

However, Manikandan also noticed that many people do not take the environmental threat seriously. He wonders if they have to face a disaster to be shocked out of their lethargy, before change can take place. "These shocks are already starting," he observes, "especially the water problems that people are experiencing all over Tamil Nadu."

Any unforgettable experiences to share? Manikandan recounts that while riding alone, he felt he was doing something that gave him a bigger sense of oneness. When he offered his good will and people responded, he felt great joy. "For me, this experience is just like one of the small drops of water that goes to make a difference in the quality of the entire sea."

Niranjani



Manikandan starting out on his cycle tour.

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