

AUROVILLE

TODAY

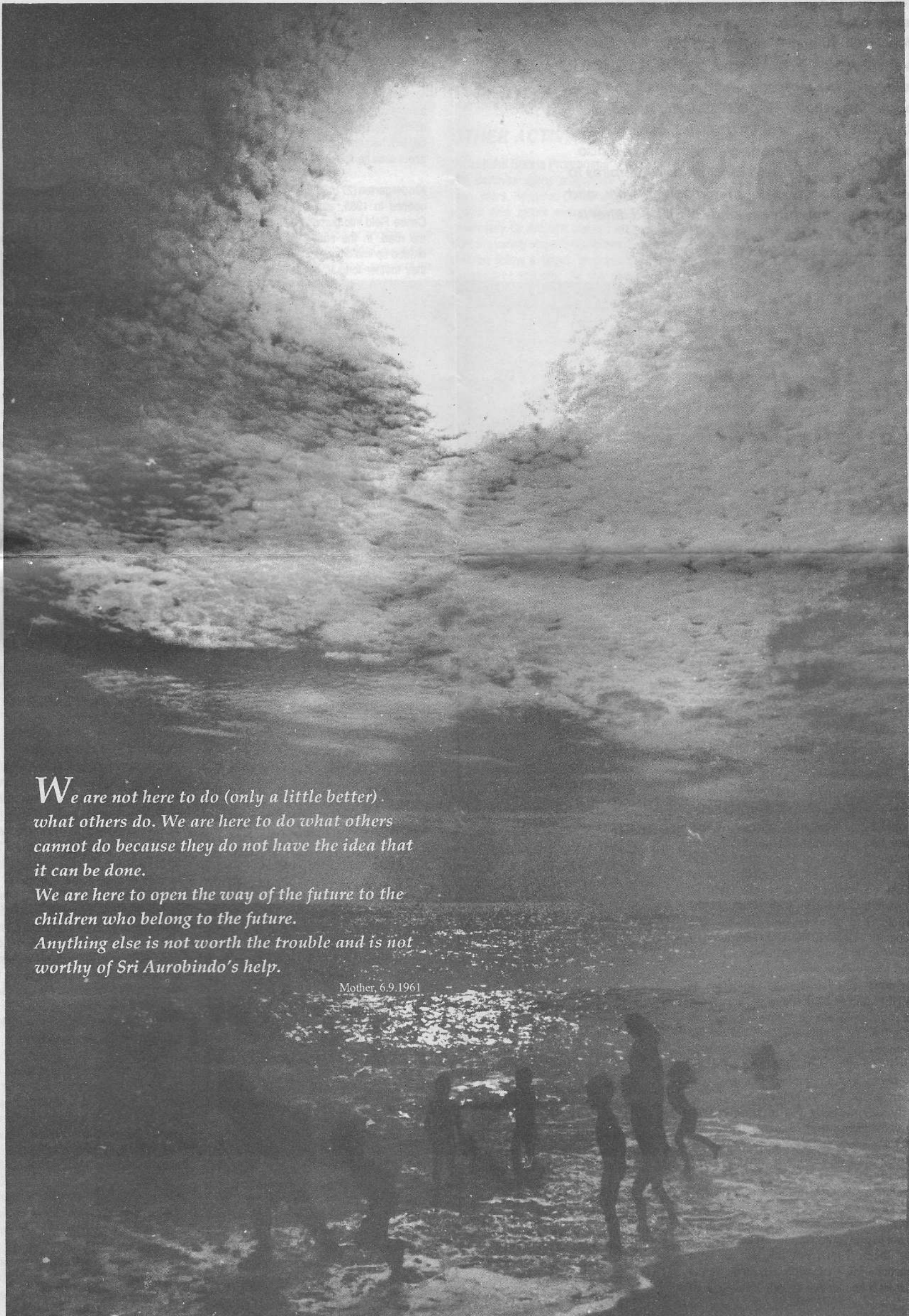
October 1994 Number Sixty-Nine

We are not here to do (only a little better) what others do. We are here to do what others cannot do because they do not have the idea that it can be done.

We are here to open the way of the future to the children who belong to the future.

Anything else is not worth the trouble and is not worthy of Sri Aurobindo's help.

Mother, 6.9.1961



IN THIS ISSUE...

This year, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, otherwise known as SAIER, is ten years old. To mark the occasion, a short meditation was held on Sri Aurobindo's birthday, and cards were distributed—both within and outside Auroville—with the message which is printed on our front page. This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY focusses on SAIER: its history, present activities, achievements and the challenges facing it today. And we also profile Vahula, a young Tamil artist who aspires to reveal the beauty of nature through his work, and whose drawings have already illustrated other issues of this magazine.

A new method of teaching children

It would be interesting to formulate or work out a new method of teaching for the children, taking them very young. Very young, it's easy. There must be people (oh, we would need remarkable teachers) who have, first, sufficient documentation on what is known, so as to be able to answer all questions; and at the same time, at least the knowledge, if not the experience (the experience would be better) of the true intuitive intellectual attitude, and... naturally, the capacity would be still preferable, but at any rate the knowledge that the true way to know is mental silence: an attentive silence turned towards the truer Consciousness, and the capacity to receive what comes from there. The best would be to have that capacity; in any case, they should explain that it is the true thing—give a sort of demonstration—and that it works not only with regard to what must be learned, the whole field of knowledge, but also with regard to the whole field of what must be done: the capacity to receive the exact indication of HOW to do it. As one progresses, it turns into a very clear perception of what must be done, and the precise indication of WHEN it must be done. At the very least, as soon as the children have the capacity to reflect (it begins at seven, but around fourteen or fifteen it's very clear), they should be given some first hints at the age of seven, and a complete explanation at fourteen, of how to do it and that it's the only way enabling you to be in contact with the deeper truth of things; that all the rest is a more or less clumsy mental approximation of something you can know directly.

The conclusion is that the teachers themselves should have at least a sincere beginning of discipline and experience: the point is not to pile up books and just keep repeating them. That's not the way to be a teacher—the whole earth is like that, we can just let it be like that outside if it enjoys it!



PHOTO IRENO

As for us, we aren't propagandists, we just want to show what can be done and try to prove that it MUST be done.

When you begin with very small children, it's wonderful! With them, there's so little you have to do: you just have to BE.

Never make a mistake.

Never get angry.

Always understand.

Understand and see clearly why this movement took place, why that impulse, what the child's inner constitution is, which point needs to be strengthened and brought to the fore. That's all you have to do, and then leave them: leave them free to blossom, just give them the opportunity to see many things, touch many things, do as many things as possible. It's great fun. And above all, do not try to impose on them something you think you know.

Never scold, always understand, and, if a child is capable, explain. If he isn't capable to receive an explanation, replace the false vibration with a true one (if you are yourself capable of it). But that...that's asking of the teachers a perfection they rarely have.

But it would be very interesting to draw up a program for the teachers, and the real program for study, starting with the very small ones—they are so plastic and anything leaves such a deep imprint on them! If they were given a few drops of truth when they are very small, they would blossom out quite naturally as their being grows.

That would be a lovely work to do.

From: *Mother's Agenda*
(vol. VIII, April 5, 1967)
(translated from the French)

Under SAIER's Umbrella

SCHOOLS

Transition Creche (8 children, ages 2 to 4 years) is located in the greenbelt, opposite Transition School. The languages used are English, Tamil, French and German. A wide range of activities take place, but the overall challenge, as the teachers conceive it, is to let each child be him/herself, without preconceived ideas about what he/she should become.

Kindergarten (27 children, ages 4 - 7 years) first opened in 1985, and last year moved from Centre Field into purpose-built premises down the road. In the early years, children were divided up into different classes on the basis of their mother tongue, but this was abandoned

above all, the need to deepen our sincerity are the essential bases of our daily work."

Last School (32 students, ages 12-17 years) is the Auroville High School, located on a ten acre campus next to Aspiration. The campus includes a computer centre, a science laboratory, a library and an art centre. At present there are about 30 students with a staff of ten full-time teachers and several other part-time teachers.

New Creation (186 students ages 3 - 14 years, 20 students in boarding facility) is the name not only of a school but also of an experiment in community living for children from local villages who can experience Auroville without losing contact with their roots. Apart from the usual range

of academic subjects—science, social studies, mathematics, art and languages—singing and Tamil drama are taught, and the oldest classes can develop skills in carpentry or tailoring. The eventual aim is to set up workshops in all the essential trades. Students who wish to continue their academic studies are prepared for entrance examinations to enter a local school.

New Creation also has a boarding facility for 20 children between the ages of 7 and 17 years. These children attend other Auroville schools, but are also made partly responsible for the running of the New Creation community which remains their base. Since the boarding facility

began, more than 25 students have taken up work Auroville.

Arul Vazhi (112 students, ages 4 - 14 years) which is Tamil for 'way of grace', is a programme of supplementary education for the children of a neighbouring village, Morattandi. The programme is conducted by residents of the Auroville community of 'Promesse', all of whom had personal darshan of the Mother. The aim is to develop the potential of the young village children by applying the educational principles set out by Mother. Specifically, this means supplementing the education available at the Government school in Morattandi (2 teachers for 130 students!) by offering evening classes in body awareness and cultural expression. Arul Vazhi also has a small kindergarten, mainly for the children of Auroville workers, and it also gives continued support to about 20 ex-Morattandi school children who are now attending the high school in a neighbouring village.

Transition School (62 children, ages 7-12 years) is one of the larger schools, with extensive grounds and many buildings. Designed for 100 children, there are 7 classrooms, a common hall, a crafts room and video room. Although one-third of the students are Tamil, over 14 different nationalities are represented at present. A lot of emphasis, therefore, is put on the development of language skills. The base language is English, but Tamil and French are also taught as first languages.

Mirramukhi (30 students, ages 2-15 years) Mirramukhi, which began 5 years ago, is an expanding educational experiment, comprising a creche, a kindergarten and a school for older children. The teaching medium is French. As one of the teachers puts it, "That which has been discovered and put into practice cannot be described in a few lines. And, moreover, that which has been done is of little importance compared to what still remains to be done. To advance, to open secret ways, to discover new elements and to always question where we are going are the living movements of Mirramukhi. It seems to us that whatever the experiment is that is being undertaken, the spirit of adventure and,

Ilaignarkal (45 students) is located in Matrimandir Nursery and has been running for 18 years. It has two main educational programmes; an after-work school for young Auroville workers—which offers functional literacy classes and a new training programme for young girls—and a youth hostel for young Tamil people who want to join Auroville. In addition to the above, two groups of local youth meet regularly on the school premises: a women's group and a group who want to learn new skills to become active workers in their villages.

Like all Auroville schools, both teachers and students are actively learning together. In the

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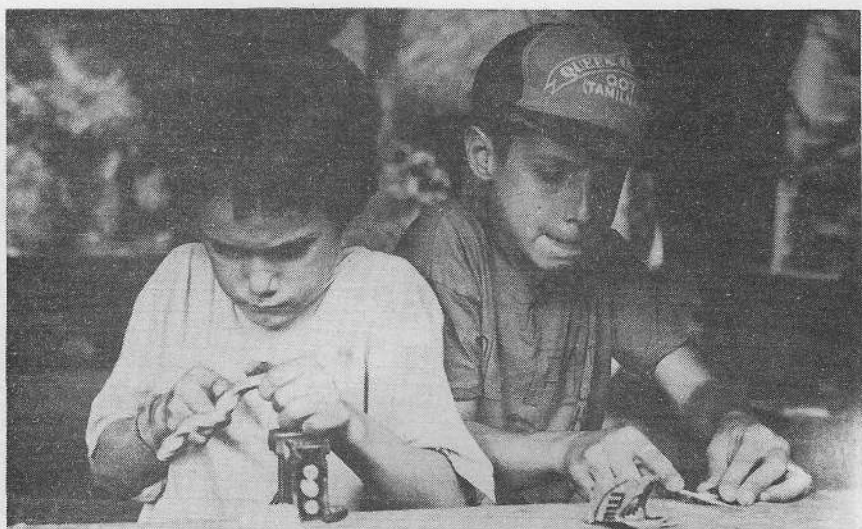


PHOTO IRENO

SCHOOLS, continued

case of Ilaigarkal, a special area of research is the resources and culture of the local area.

Isai Ambalam (56 students, ages 7 - 14 years) is another school for village children which has been running for many years, but recently it has been reorganised. The school is basically intended for 'drop-outs' from the Government schools, but there is also a creche and kindergarten, mainly for the children of Auroville workers. The children get a basic education in Mathematics, Tamil and English, and training in skills like tailoring and other textile handicrafts will be available soon. Isai Ambalam has also begun a teacher-training programme.

Life Education Centre opened in 1990 at the site of the old Kottakarai pottery. It is for local

children who, for one reason or another, have not been able to continue attending Government schools. The aim is not only to supplement the education they have missed, but also to prepare them for taking up an active and responsible role in their villages. As the present coordinator of the project puts it, "We want to bring the life of the students as much as possible into the classroom. We try to look for all the possible relations between what they learn and their present conditions..." Activities include environmental education, body awareness, dance and basic economics.

Night Schools

In addition to the above, there are also evening education programmes for children in a number of local villages. Over the last 4 years, le Secours

Populaire Francais has funded the construction of 7 buildings in different villages to house these activities.

In the past the system did not always work so well as the teachers were all volunteers and were sometimes exhausted after a full day's work. Now, however, Oxfam India is funding the training of two night school teachers as 'Development Work Trainees'.

As night school students have only a very short time to devote to their studies, the night school team has developed innovative approaches to teaching mathematics, literacy and social and environmental education.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Dehashakti Sports Programme

The Certitude sports programme has run for many years. Renamed Dehashakti a few years ago, it now caters every afternoon for approximately 60 Auroville children who develop skills in a variety of sports disciplines. Sixty more children follow a sports programme in New Creation community. All the participating children come together twice a year for the 'Aurolympics'.

The Laboratory of Evolution, a twin unit of the Centre of Human Unity, is concerned with research into the collective aspects of human evolution. In addition to the works of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, it has compiled a library of the latest research and theories concerning evolution.

Centre of Research in Indian Culture, which also incorporates the Hall of Culture and Centre for Indian Studies, is intended to act as an

interface between the culture of India and other cultures of the world. The Centre has a library of works on Indian art, spiritual thought and history and a collection of recorded Indian music. The Centre is also the venue for talks, exhibitions, musical events and workshops.

Auroville Video

Auroville Video makes experimental and documentary video films, including films about Auroville. Recent projects include a film on the visit of the Dalai Lama last December and an educational documentary about salt-water intrusion along the coast.

Research and publication of educational support materials

Under the auspices of SAIIER, two substantial anthologies — *The Aim of Life* and *The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil* — have been published to provide basic texts for teachers involved in value-oriented education. Further anthologies on the themes of physical, vital, mental and spiritual education are in process or planned.

SAIIER also publishes a monthly research letter that keeps Auroville teachers up-to-date with educational practice in Auroville and elsewhere in the world.

Miscellaneous

In addition to the above, SAIIER acts as a funding channel for the Auroville library, the school transport service and Bharat Nivas kitchen (which provides meals for many of the schools). It has also promoted seminars and exhibitions, both inside and outside Auroville, on educational and cultural themes, and supported Auroville artists and literary projects. □

Transition School

As the name implies, the Transition School fosters the growth of a child from childhood to adolescence. Transition came into being in July 1985 when some teachers and the children in the age-group of 6-12 years moved out from the overcrowded Centre School to a new purpose-designed building complex. Today, Transition consists of a team of 22 teachers (including part-time teachers and specialists) and 65 children who belong to a diverse mix of nationalities, cultures, languages and lifestyles.

The children, on the basis of their development, are divided into six groups and the teachers adapt the level of instruction to suit the needs of each group. English serves as the common language and is the medium of instruction, though at present, only three of the children are native speakers of English! Each group has a "base" teacher; some groups have an assistant or a part-time teacher; and sometimes,

teachers with special skills are associated with individual children who have behavioural, learning or language problems. Teachers of second languages (Tamil and French), art, theatre and gymnastics work separately with each group.

Many of the base teachers follow an integrated method of teaching where a particular topic is explored from different aspects. For instance, if a group is exploring the theme of water, they may begin by considering the properties of water from a scientific point of view; then they may go into the geographic distribution of water-bodies in the world, or study history by considering the influence of water on the growth of a civilization. Music and language skills can also be incorporated in the scheme as the class is led into writing or singing songs about water. Further, this method encourages team-work and allows each child to exercise his particular talent.

One afternoon, every week, there is a free choice programme where students are allowed to choose the subject that they want

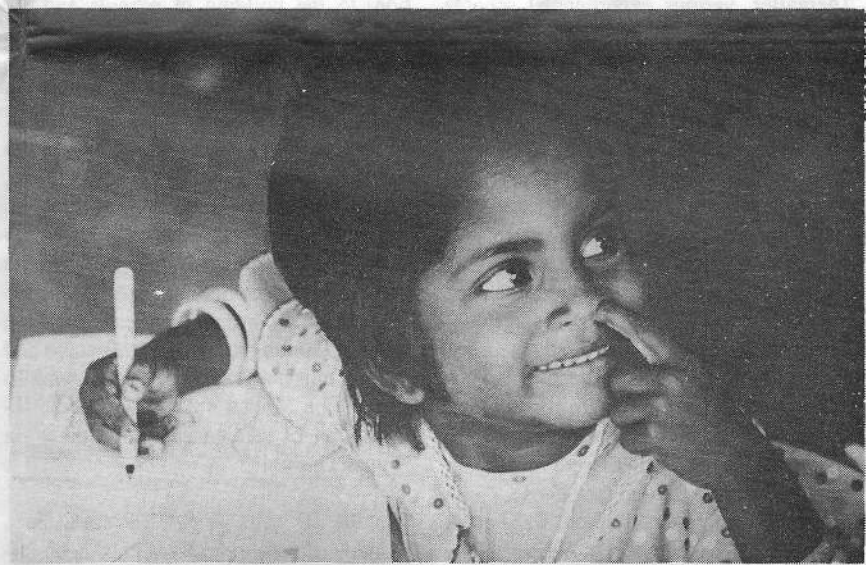


PHOTO IRENO

to study. According to the subjects chosen, which include art, handicraft, mythology, story-telling, Dutch, chess and tabla lessons, students of different age groups interact with one another.

Transition School teachers work closely with parents. Teachers and parents meet at the beginning of every school year to formulate disciplinary policies relating to school timings, holidays, homework assignments etc. To keep parents informed of the progress of their child, a file is maintained for each child which contains samples of his/her work. Some teachers give out progress reports periodically.

If the success of Transition can be attributed to any one particular reason, then credit would have to be given to the initiative and the determination of the teachers to work as a team. Over the years, the teachers have learned to work together, to share their particular methods of teaching and their problems with one another. "The key," one of the teachers says, "is not to judge or to criticize for everyone offers their best, but to listen and to learn." Besides their daily discussions over meals and their bi-weekly administrative meetings, the teachers have recently decided to meet once a month to

review their own educational methods and to discuss the broader underlying principles of education in Auroville. Also, being the transition or the link between the kindergartens and Last School, the teachers at Transition recognise the need of working with the teachers of other schools and look forward to greater interaction.

At Transition, there is a concrete awareness of the need to evolve ever better methods of teaching. "Educational research", a teacher comments, "is something that we do daily, when we handle children in the classroom". It is difficult for the teachers to note down all the teaching practices that they follow, but they try to give an overview of their most important methods in an annual report, or sometimes, in the monthly research newsletters of SAIIER. The teachers at Transition are appreciative of the efforts of SAIIER to provide a forum at the community level for discussions on education, to sponsor the visits of noted educationists and to offer training workshops. One of the teachers who regularly attends SAIIER meetings concludes, "By our very work, we all form a part of the body called SAIIER".

Bindu

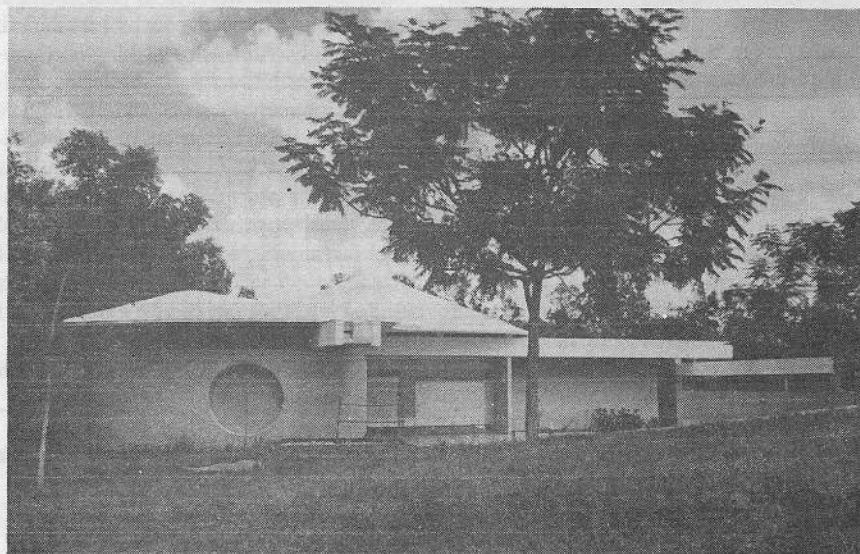


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Beginnings

The Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER) was founded on the 28th February 1984, Auroville's birthday. The Trust Deed of the Institute had been previously registered on the 21st February 1984, Mother's birthday. "On the occasion of its foundation, a large number of Aurovilians gathered at the anticipated site of the Institute's main compound while the children of Auroville laid the foundation stone in what is likely to become its Garden of Evolution", mentioned SAIER's first project proposal which was submitted to the Government of India. The foundation stone was ultimately moved a couple of acres further away to the Transition primary school campus. The Garden of Evolution has since become extinct. But initial adjustments notwithstanding, SAIER has become a major tool to help shape education and educational research in Auroville.

In February 1984, when SAIER was founded, Auroville began its 17th year, in the aftermath of a volatile period during which 'formal' education had virtually stopped—a consequence of some people's perception the first experiment, at Aspiration School, had become too traditional. Thereafter, various experimental schools were started: there was a Crèche at Transformation, which fourteen children attended; there was Centre School in Centre Field which had a mix of seventy students aged four to fourteen and 12 full or part-time teachers. The school consisted of seven classrooms, small huts thatched with thatch. There were no fixed syllabi and standards, and the classes would consist of children with various levels of competence ranging from pre-primary to the secondary level. Discipline was essentially self-imposed, though "students and teachers sometimes find it necessary to correct one another". The essential trait was freedom: both students and teachers were free to join whatever working group they chose.

Another experimental school was Fertile School, also called "Kid's Access". This was a highly unusual experiment. Essentially it focussed on a child's innate interest in something and tried to give it a practical shape. Regular classes were interchanged with field activities, such as building a roof, training a horse, developing a zinc smelter or building model wind generators.

For the older children an attempt to organise a more consistent and academic sort of study programme started in January 1985. Earlier, they had only sporadic classes with various individuals in different communities. 'High School' found a place in Swagatam, the Sanskrit School building, next to the Aspiration community. There were three small classrooms, a teachers' room and a small library. About 35 students aged between 13 and 24 were taught a variety of topics by 15 adults working with them as teachers. 'High School' was ultimately renamed 'Last School', after the adjacent unfinished structure of that name. Finally, the unfinished "Pyramid" and the improvised "Locomotive" buildings became part of the Last School campus.

For the children of the nearby villages, a number of schools had come into existence.

The community of New Creation, near Kulapalayam village, offered classes for 120 children, as well as a small boarding facility. In the Kottakarai area 3 night schools, a day school, a crèche and a boarding facility had been started. Another facility at Ilaigarkal offered a boarding school to 24 students.

For all children, Aurovillian and village alike, physical education was given a high priority, and many communities offered (basic) facilities for athletics and team sports, amongst which are the now nearly forgotten Kho-Kho and Cross.

SAIER was primarily set up to act as an umbrella under which all the educational research activities of Auroville could be coordinated and supported. The unique character of Auroville as a "place of education for international understanding where learning takes place through all the circumstances of life inherent in an international community set amidst a background of rural Tamil villages" was accepted by the Ministry of Education (later: Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development) of the Government of India, which has provided a substantial part of Auroville's educational budget ever since. But SAIER did not intend to restrict itself only to formal education, to the building of schools and the creation of learning-teaching materials in various disciplines. The initial plans also included the creation of a vast international library; the organisation of a Laboratory of Evolution, including an exhibition on Human Evolution, a Garden of Evolution, and a Museum and Documentary center on Evolution and a game called 'Gayatri'; a centre of research in Indian Culture; the support of works of literary creation; the stimulation of artistic expression in the areas of painting and sculpture, video and theatre, music and dance; research work to be done on Mother's Agenda, and the organisation of seminars such as those on Human Unity.

In the 10 years of SAIER's existence many of these objectives have been fulfilled, and many new ones have been added. The new school campus for Transition primary school was inaugurated by P.V. Narasimha Rao, now Prime Minister of India, when he was Minister of Education and Chairman of the Auroville International Advisory Council, in the presence of the late J.R.D. Tata and A. M'Bow, then Secretary General of UNESCO. New classrooms and craft-rooms were built in New Creation. In Fraternity a building was created for the Center of Research in Communication and Publication (CRCP), which was soon to house Auroville's first laser printer donated from abroad. The existing school buildings in the Last School campus were gradually updated and improved. The Kindergarten was housed in a new building. Old buildings were renovated to provide accommodation for new schools until they too can move into more appropriate and permanent accommodation.

One of SAIER's most remarkable undertakings is research in value oriented education, carried out in collaboration with the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR). Particularly in the early years, many seminars were held on

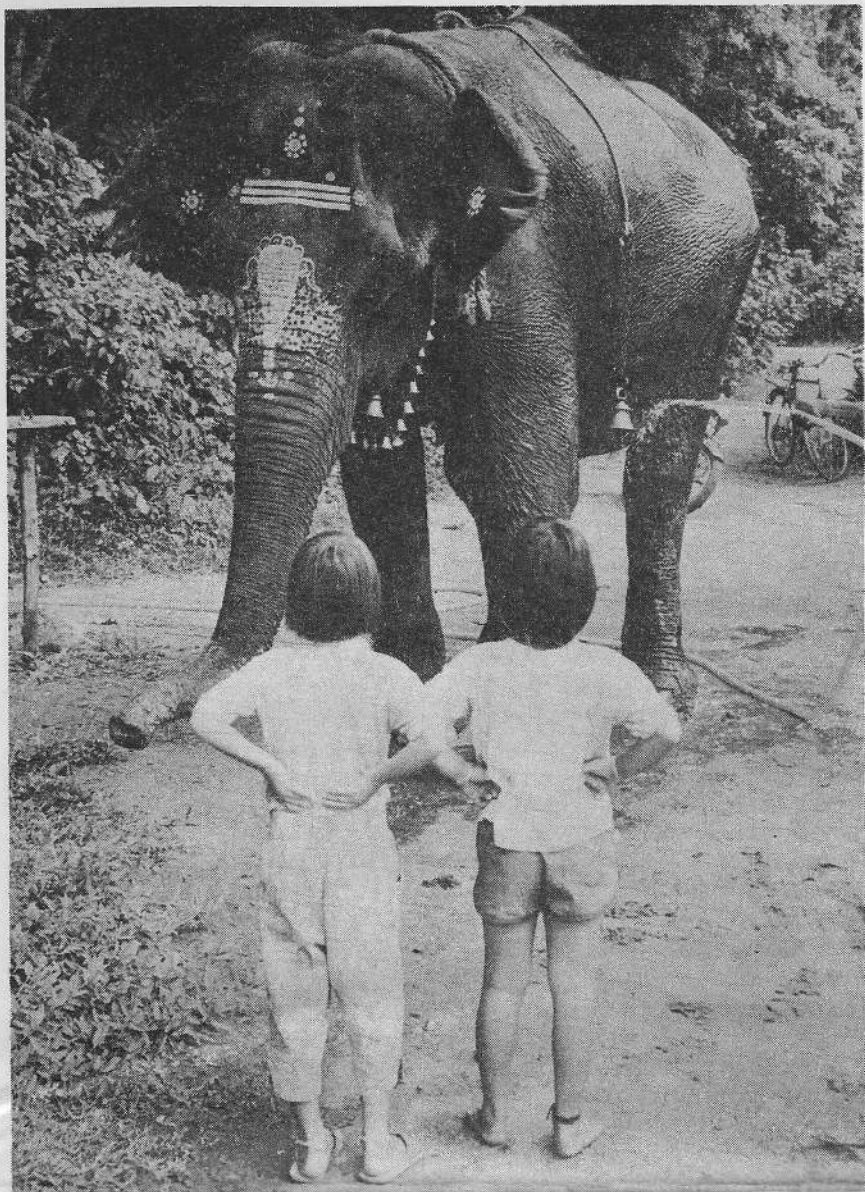


PHOTO IRENO

this topic in various parts of India. This led to the publication of two books, intended to be learning-teaching aids, "The Aim of Life" and "The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil". A series of five books dealing with physical, vital, mental and spiritual education is in preparation. The then member-secretary of the ICPR, Kireet Joshi, (also member of the present Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation) played a prominent role in this work. In the later years contacts with other educational institutions were made, and seminars on topics like Education for Human Unity (with Pondicherry University), workshops on dance (such as with members of the Madras-based dance school Kalakshetra), or workshops given by educational specialists (such as a dyslexia workshop by a specialist from England and a workshop on progressive education systems by an educational specialist from the USA) became more common. Progress was also achieved in the area of village-related activities, both in the field as well as by the publication of a series of small books providing elementary education on environmental issues. One of these books, called "A Boy and a Tree" was so popular that it soon was translated into Tamil, Hindi, Bengali and Kannada.

The field of education itself has proved to be an ongoing struggle. No school has escaped the need for (often painful) introspection, dealing with internal issues such as discipline (regarding both pupils and teachers!); the desirability of asking individual children to absent themselves from school if their behaviour adversely affected the concentration of the other children; and the support—or the lack of it—from parents and the community at large. Other major discussions centred around the school curriculum: should it

enable the children to take exams so that they can join other schools elsewhere in India or abroad, or is studying for exams contrary to the spirit of Auroville? The high ideals expressed by The Mother were often beyond the capacities of both teachers and students. But the desire to adhere to them often prevented the application of more pragmatic solutions. It also led to the setting up of alternative schools, such as Mirramukhi primary school and the Mirramukhi crèche.

Financial support and support in kind was, and still is, received from many institutions and private individuals from within India and abroad. SAIER's educational, research and building activities have been made possible with the help of many: the Government of India, the ICPR, the U.S.-based Foundation for World Education, the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier, Auroville International Centers, Swiss Aid and many private individuals. One of them donated a bus and drove it all the way from Germany to Auroville; others donated musical instruments such as pianos. But in the course of time the focus has shifted: increasingly, Auroville is taking up financial responsibility for its educational efforts. Commercial units and individuals alike have started contributing substantially, both towards fixed assets as well as towards our educational running expenditure, thus recognising SAIER as a central tool for moving us towards "the place of unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages" that Auroville aspires to become.

Carel

(*) from SAIER: "A review of the work done in 1984-85."

(**) Auroville Charter

The Laboratory of Evolution

The modest white door at Bharat Nivas proclaims, in elegant gold letters, "Laboratory of Evolution". Inside on the notice-board a quote from Savitri reads:

*"Our body's cells must hold the Immortal's flame.
Else would the Spirit reach alone its source
Leaving a half-saved world to its dubious fate."*

This quote perhaps explains the need for the "laboratory" which came into being in 1984 as a sub-unit of Sri Aurobindo's International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER). The stated aim of the Laboratory of Evolution was "to research, experiment and disseminate information on all aspects of human evolution". And the foremost task that was needed to be done in this field was to make a topical index of *Mother's Agenda* to facilitate further research. As Bhaga was already indexing *Mother's Agenda* on her own, she decided to take charge of the Laboratory.

Today, thanks to grants from SAIER and donations in the form of books and cash

from individuals, the Laboratory of Evolution has a distinguished library of unusual books and periodicals in different languages on various scientific and theological topics such as New Physics, Astrology, Mysticism, and Natural Therapies. Bhaga says that the Laboratory tries to acquire those books which relate to the evolutionary work done by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and corroborate their findings. The Laboratory also possesses a notable collection of tape recordings. Again, the emphasis is placed on collecting music or recordings which help the inner spiritual growth, such as Mother's organ music, her "Entretiens" and "Agenda" recordings, Sunil's musical compositions for *Savitri* and Satprem's interviews. "We also keep recordings of Aurovilian musicians," says Bhaga, "as long as they are not too much of the rock variety!"

Another important task undertaken by the Laboratory of Evolution is to inspire Aurovilians to develop the consciousness of the body through the practice of physical culture and the adoption of alternative healing methods. Bhaga points out that most people tend to neglect the body, often in their ignorance depriving it of adequate

food and rest. Bhaga and her colleague, Kalyani, feel that this is a shame because, as Mother says, "the more the body is conscious, the more is it capable of receiving the divine forces that are at work to transform it and give birth to the new race."

Kalyani offers classes in Hatha Yoga, Tai-Chi Chuan and Kalaripayatt. She explains that these ancient physical disciplines, grounded as they are in a deep spiritual knowledge, "actively prevent the stagnation of the energies of the body, harmonize the physical will to the mental will and thereby create an active dynamic unity in the being". Kalyani mentions that for ten years she had offered massage and acupuncture treatments but gave them up upon realizing that such "passive" methods of harmonizing the energies of the body do little to change a person's thinking or his way of life.

Sharanam offers Bach flower remedies and polarity massage while Bhaga dispenses biochemic salts. In the practice of these alternative healing therapies, emphasis is placed on making the patient aware of the needs of his own body. For example, Bhaga, when dispensing biochemic salts, rarely prescribes them for a patient. Rather, she

advises the patient about the effects of the different salts and recommends dosages but lets him make the final decision. The possibility of self-healing, through consciousness and through deep relaxation, as expounded by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, keenly interests Bhaga.

Hence, Bhaga looks forward to making available to Aurovilians two bio-feedback instruments: a Kirlian photographic machine and a simple device that is based on galvanic skin response. These bio-feedback instruments offer a simple method of determining the state of the body as affected by the inner consciousness. Bhaga, who has extensively researched bio-feedback techniques in India and the USA, points out that this valuable tool has not been utilised to its full potential in Auroville. Thus, keeping in mind the evolutionary perspective of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Bhaga plans to undertake a whole project using bio-feedback instruments. "That, perhaps", she laughs, "would mark the beginning of the real, full-fledged laboratory that this unit must one day become".

Bindu

Physical Education

"Of all the domains of human consciousness, the physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline, process. The lack of plasticity and receptivity in matter has to be replaced by a detailed organisation that is both precise and comprehensive." (From: *The Mother on Education*)

These words of the Mother are the inspiration behind the Dehashakti Sports Programme, funded jointly by SAIER and the Development Scheme. Starting a few years ago, a team of sports teachers began working both upon themselves and with the children to practice the principles of discipline, regularity, effort and the right attitude during competition and training.

Yves, one of the teachers who is himself a tennis coach and comes from a family background of high-level sports competition, comments: "The children themselves don't seem to mind a kind of drill that may appear somewhat militaristic from the outside. They simply concentrate on what is asked from them. It is more the adults, especially the ones from the West, who have negative associations with words like discipline and competition. One 7-year old girl who had never participated in team games before, said when asked to throw the ball, 'I don't like competition.' It was clear that this preconception came via the parents. Another negative association which makes parents hesitate to send their children to sports is that sports in the West is seen as 'elitist' and that if you do not excel, the effort of serious training isn't worth it. Tamil parents are different in this regard. They send their children regularly. Unfortunately, quite a few Tamil children were sent by their parents to Pondy schools, and so we lost some very good athletes. And they will miss out on further physical

education which is minimal at schools outside."

Yves had always had his own vision of the purpose of sports. Rather than laying emphasis on competition and the need to be the best while putting down others, he aims to infuse into the children the principles of Mother's Dream by gradually making them understand the value of cooperation, of helping each other to progress, of giving everybody an equal chance—"no matter whether you're a boy or a girl, strong or weak, big or small"—to develop their ability. To encourage these principles, the Five Star Award Scheme is now used during the Summer Aurolympics (see below). Team games are another field of practice. Both weak and strong players (determined by individual skill tests) are put together in

stamina, challenge and skill. As in Auroville an integral education (i.e. the education of all the various parts of the human being—spiritual, mental, vital and physical) is envisaged, physical education should not just be seen as a means for relaxation or entertainment, nor as a means to glorification, but as an essential element in the growth and development of the whole being.

Summer Aurolympics '94

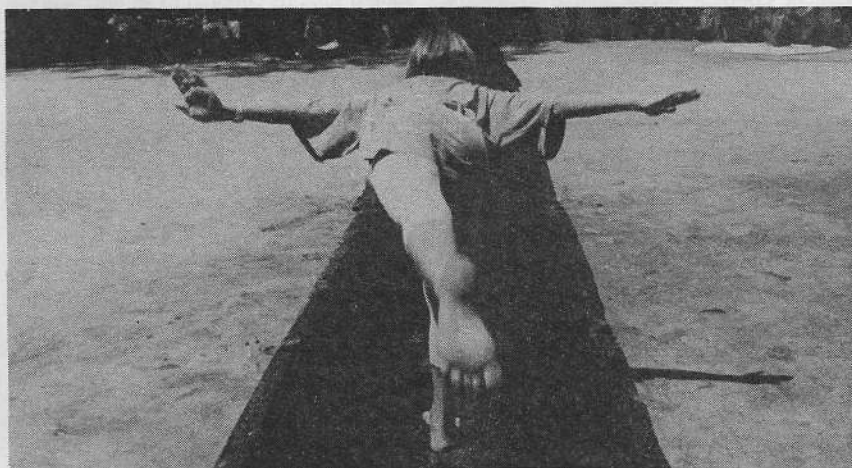
This year's Summer Aurolympics were the highlight of a two-month physical education programme for school children which started at the beginning of the academic year. About 105 children, aged 6 to 16, had committed themselves to be present at the Certitude sports ground or the

during the regular sports hours, to avoid a tight schedule and an exhausting final day for the children. Whereas earlier Aurolympics had awarded prizes for the best performances, now the "Five Star Award Scheme" was used. This is an athletics evaluation system (used in many British schools for many years), which gives feedback about the effort and progress made by each individual child. What is important is that, in order to get more stars (scale: one to five), excellence is required in at least three disciplines (throwing, track and jumping). With this system, competition is not altogether abolished, but rather than awarding only the talented ones, the average and below-average too are rewarded a number of Stars reflecting their input and progress, taking into account their age and sex. This encourages the children to compete against themselves, and improving one's own time or distance becomes more important than beating a classmate.

According to some of the teachers, the children, especially the younger age groups, responded positively to the new system which was first introduced last year but has now been perfected with the help of a specially designed computer programme, acquired thanks to the efforts of the Auroville International centre in the U.K. Some of the older students however, protested at not getting prizes—obviously not yet able to let go of something they were used to. On the whole, the overall results this year showed a considerable progress in the performance of most children, compared to last year. "The children like to be able to set goals and to evaluate their achievements. The atmosphere was concentrated, and helped the children to improve their performance. They even began to encourage each other," one of the teachers remarked.

Now Summer Aurolympics are over, and the next training season has started: the preparation for leagues and the development of technical skills in volleyball, basketball, football, tennis and table tennis. After this phase it's time to prepare for the Winter Aurolympics team sports.

Annemarie



Gymnastics at Certitude, during the Aurolympics

PHOTO IRENO

one team, to teach the strong players to respect and bring out the best in the weak players in their team.

The aim of the Dehashakti Sports is to offer a comprehensive programme for physical development—working on various aspects such as movement, mobility, control, health/fitness, strength,

New Creation sports ground every afternoon after school, to be trained in track events, throws, jumps and (so far only for the younger groups) gymnastics.

The organizers of the Aurolympics events have been experimenting with different methods. This year, the activities were spread out over five days and were held

The situation at Auroville's high school is extremely intricate. In the following article Caryl has made an attempt to sift through the complexities, and to initiate a debate upon the present situation of high-school education in Auroville. For example, why do many high school students not stay in Auroville? What is the aim of education in Auroville, and what about examinations? Is...

LAST SCHOOL lost school?

“When we first got to Last School, our class was a whole lot bigger. It consisted of thirteen kids...” wrote Akash in October 1993 in the youth magazine, *Auro Mannan*. He then explained how one teenager after the other dropped out, and left Last School for the Lycée Français in nearby Pondicherry or for the International School in far away Kodaikanal. “It looks like the ‘seniors’ group faces extinction and is waging a fierce battle with desertion”, concluded Akash, who now, at the age of seventeen, is the oldest ‘survivor’ at Last School. Has the battle with desertion been lost?

About two years ago, Last School went through a period of intense upheaval. Teachers, parents and children went through many meetings together, in which topics such as the lack of discipline on the part of both children and teachers, the lack of a curriculum and the lack of parental support, were all mercilessly commented upon. No one left those meetings in a happy mood, and it may be argued that all of Auroville lost “the battle of Last School” at that moment.

“Last School” is the name given by The Mother to Auroville High School, situated in a campus of architecturally daring but educationally inappropriate buildings next to the community of Aspiration. Here perhaps lies one cause of the problem: Auroville's High School still lacks a proper building. The Last School campus consists of buildings that were conceived in the early years of Auroville, when architectural beauty took precedence over practical considerations. Swagatam, the Sanskrit School building, has only very small study cells which are not really fit for teaching; the Last School building has big interconnected rooms making more than one class at a time impossible; the medium-sized but drab

classrooms of the building known as “the Locomotive” are the only ones that can be used really well, though they have horrible acoustics. Extensive reconstruction has not been able to prevent the Last School campus from remaining the educational misfit it was from the beginning.

In the early years, Last School provided education for older children who had not come from other Auroville schools. But the student's average age and educational background have changed nowadays. Last School candidates mainly come from other Auroville schools, in particular from Transition which sent this year about 10 children, all of them in the ages of 12 to 13 years. Fresh from the highly structured and supportive atmosphere of Transition, the new school provides many challenges for them. “At Last School there are forces that continually undermine everything”, comments Suzie, herself an ex-Transition teacher who came to Last School specifically to provide a bridge for the children from Transition. “There is no fixed method of teaching. The teachers of Transition have managed to form a strong team, but the same cannot be said yet about the Last School teachers”. Consequently, overall curricula are vague or non-existent, teachers design their own programmes and those subjects for which no teachers are available are simply not taught!

This situation is viewed with concern by the parents. Those who have no financial means have no option but to accept the high school education Auroville offers. But many of those who have financial means start saving for the expensive boarding school fees of the International School at Kodaikanal, some 400 kilometers to the South-West in the Palani Hills, or, in the case of children whose native tongue is French, for the Lycée Français in nearby Pondicherry. This attitude in turn feeds “the

forces that continually undermine everything”. Some children who know that they will leave school soon anyhow are not really motivated to study. This creates a bad “vibe” which affects in turn the younger ones, so that teachers sometimes complain that the attitude of some parents is not only non-supportive, but even destructive. “There is a strictly applied rule in Transition that children from Transition who drive mopeds or motorbikes or who go to parties, are banned from the school for a week”, says Ila, a mother of two girls, one of whom joined Last School last year, “but it seems that such a rule cannot be applied at High School, not even for those attending the lower grades. Some parents say openly that they cannot control their 14-year old child, while others do not agree with the undesirability of their children attending parties, a few of which even serve alcohol. With this lack of co-operation it is not amazing that the teachers are unwilling or do not see a possibility to enforce discipline and to apply an identical ban to the younger Last School students. The role of the parents is extremely important because although Auroville looks like a paradise for children, it still houses all the dangers to which children, in particular adolescents, are exposed anywhere else in the world.”

It is not only the Last School teachers who struggle with the lack of discipline among many of Auroville's children. Ms. Billie Kolhatkar, a teacher at the International School of Kodaikanal, says: “The main problem of the Auroville children is lack of discipline. We consider it rather unusual for Auroville children not to get into trouble here. I do not want to blame the children for this, I blame the parents. Discipline is essential on all levels of life, including the spiritual one, and many of Auroville's children would have no or less problems here if a certain amount of discipline would have been instilled in them”. She immediately adds that “the batch of children we received this year from Auroville seems to be the exception to the rule, and have caused few problems so far. They are far more motivated to achieve academic excellence; they are interested in the studies themselves. The previous batches gave rather the impression of just wanting to work for the high school certificate. One of the reasons might be that these children are younger than the previous batches, they have entered the 9th grade while the others entered the 11th.”

Do these words imply that Auroville should send its children to an international boarding school like Kodaikanal at a younger age? “No”, says Ms. Kolhatkar. “I

view with dismay the development that increasingly children from Auroville come here for their high school education. Auroville should be able to do a better job. Auroville should change its high school curriculum, so that the Auroville children will be motivated to follow high school in Auroville and thereafter, if they so desire, to pursue higher studies in India or elsewhere. And it should be possible to instill discipline without breaking that wonderful free spirit which characterises the Auroville children: that spirit which makes them associate with people on a very different level than what we normally experience. Auroville children can give themselves with heart and soul if they like a person—or become completely inaccessible if they don't.”

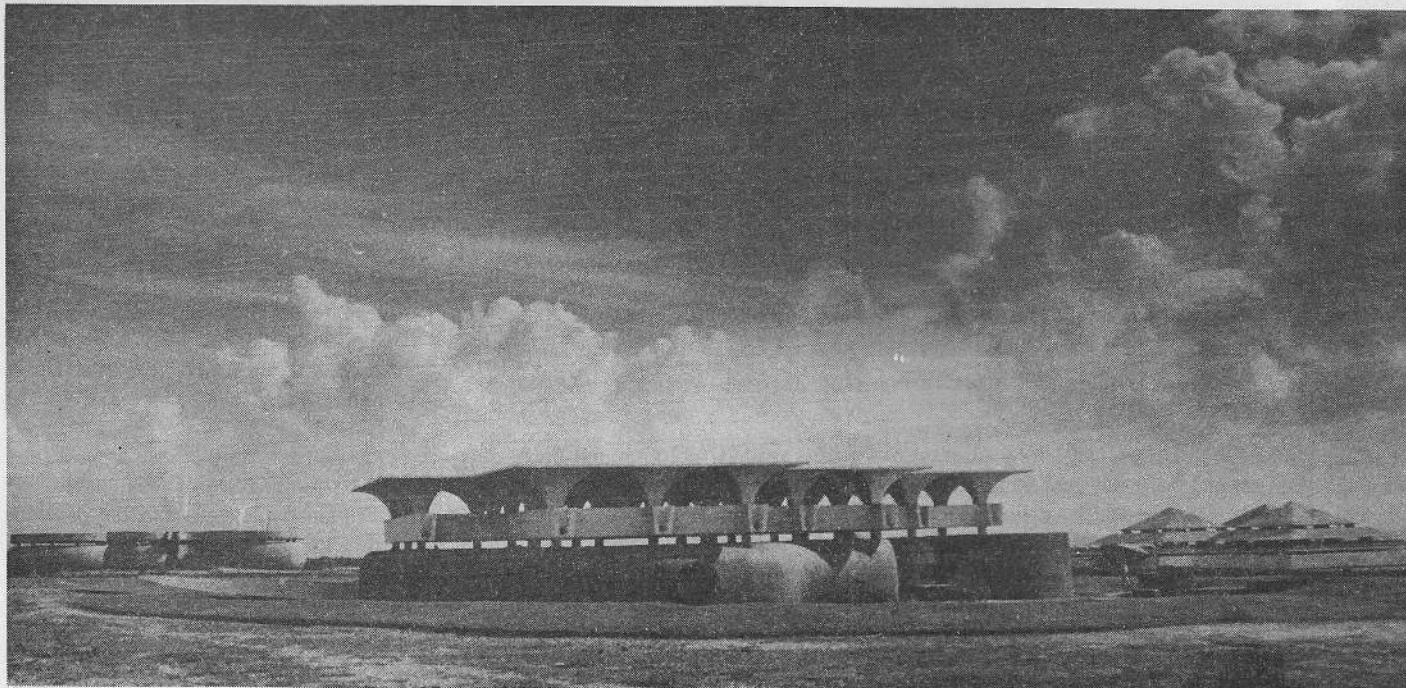
It should be noted that Ms. Kolhatkar's observations apply to the overall school curriculum, not to the quality of the individual courses taught. Most if not all of the individuals who have accepted the challenge to teach at Last School do their utmost to provide a good learning environment. The problem is rather one of co-ordination and of teaching within the frame of a properly designed school curriculum. “This year nine senior students have consciously decided to stay and have designed their own programmes”, says Suzie. Her words point to another problem: can we expect senior students, the oldest of who only recently turned seventeen, to design their own curriculum? And is their “conscious decision to stay” not one which they will ultimately regret, as the school curriculum does not provide for the teaching of subjects for which no teachers are available?

It is understandable that Last School is happy with the decision of nine senior students to stay. Many more have left. “We lost about twenty of our fifty students last year”, says Anton, another Last School teacher, “not out of anger or frustration but perhaps because of the subconscious fear of the unknown, the future without the conventional certificate or diploma, a fear instilled by the parents as well as the society around.” It is here that another basic problem of Auroville's High School surfaces: conventional diplomas or certificates are not given. Why?

The guidance given by The Mother provides an answer to this question. “The majority of children study because they are forced to by family, habit, current ideas, not because they want to learn and know. Until the motive for their studies is rectified, until they learn because they *want to know*, they will use all kinds of tricks to make their

(continued on next page)

COURTESY AUROVILLE ARCHIVES



“...architecturally daring, but educationally inappropriate” school buildings in the Last school compound. From left to right: The ‘Yoghurt Pots’, ‘Last School’ and the ‘Pyramids’.



The 'Locomotive'—where most of Last School classes are held

PHOTO COURTESY AUROVILLE ARCHIVES

(LAST SCHOOL continued)

work easier and get results with the least effort", she replied to an Ashram School teacher who asked why children cheat in exams. She advised him: "At the end of the year you will give notes to the students, not based on written test-papers, but on their behaviour, their concentration, their regularity, their promptness to understand and their openness of intelligence. For yourself you will take it as a discipline to rely more on inner contact, keen observation and impartial outlook. For the students it will be the necessity of understanding truly what they learn and not to repeat as a

parrot what they have not fully understood. And thus a true progress will have been made in the teaching." (*)

But does this mean that Mother felt that tests have to be abolished in their entirety? In a note sent to the Ashram School in 1967 she announced the modified rules for its Higher Course. These rules say that all students will be treated equally in so far as the pursuit of knowledge is concerned. Students who wish to obtain a certificate can do so, and they will then naturally have to take all the prescribed tests. But there will be no compulsion and students will have the

option either to take the tests or not to take them. (**) She added later: "It is by tolerance for the old habits that I consented that those who want tests can have them. But I hope that in future this concession will not be necessary". (***)

Similar guidance for Auroville is not available, but we might assume that Mother's views on education apply to Auroville as well. It would answer the question of studying with the aim of acquiring knowledge or for the sake of passing of exams: knowledge should be provided. Those who want to can take exams, and those who do not, can abstain. And that answers also the question of the school's curriculum: an overall one should be made and adhered to. This would ensure that, if teachers were not available for a certain topic within Auroville, they would be called in from outside. A good curriculum would ensure that a good education is provided. And a good education is essential for young people to decide whether or not they want to remain in Auroville. "Without a good education this decision is difficult to make because living outside Auroville appears all the more difficult and the decision to stay could be made for the wrong reasons", says Nelly, an Aurovilian who came to Auroville at the age of 8 and left at 16 to pursue higher

education elsewhere. "Young people who want to live and work outside Auroville should not be disadvantaged relative to their peers elsewhere simply because they grew up in Auroville."

Carel

(*) Note of July 21, 1967, published in Mother's Agenda Vol VIII, 1967, p. 232

(**) Note to the School of April 14, 1967, published in Mother's Agenda Vol VIII, 1967, p. 166, the full text of which runs as follows:

"Henceforth the existing rules concerning the Higher Course will stand modified as follows: (1) Students who wish to obtain a certificate of having successfully completed the Higher Course as 'full students' will naturally have to take all the prescribed tests and satisfy the regulations governing the full-studentship. (2) Other students will have the option either to take the tests or not to take them. There will be no compulsion with regard to tests for these students in order to pass from one year to the next. (3) All the students will, however, be treated equally in so far as the pursuit of knowledge is concerned."

(***) Note of July 22, 1967, published in Mother's Agenda Vol VIII, 1967, p. 232

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BRIEF NEWS . . . BRIEF NEWS . . . BRIEF NEWS . . . BRIEF NEWS . . . BRIEF NEWS

The Indian Army turns greener

What would bring a group of ten unarmed officers of the Indian Army to Auroville for a whole week?

An official visit by General Joshi, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, in October last year, triggered off the idea of using Auroville's experience in reforestation and soil conservation for a training course for officers already working in this field. The Army has two so-called "Green Battalions" involved in afforestation work in remote areas of the country. Also large areas of wasteland are under the control of the army and could be restored with their help. During the first week of September a group of four Colonels, five Majors, and one Captain exchanged their uniforms for T-shirts, shorts and sneakers while attending an afforestation workshop in Auroville, organized by the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre. Besides theoretical sessions, the participants visited many of the demonstration sites, and were introduced to other facets of life in Auroville, like a visit to the Matrimandir Chamber, appropriate building technology, and a swim at an Auroville beach.

What's in a name?

It's never been exactly easy finding one's way around Auroville. But now there's a further twist to confuse you: names. Why? Because in a moment of rare inspiration, two new communities in the Residential Zone, which happen to be adjacent to each other, have come up with very similar names for themselves—namely, 'Prarthna' and 'Prayatna'. To compound the confusion, just down

the road the community of 'Sharnga' is separated by a small cashew field from the community of 'Sangha'.

Not to be outdone in this orgy of confusion, one new commercial unit has named itself 'Mantra' and another one, yes, you guessed it, 'Mantram'. And all the while the vehicles of the identically named, but legally and geographically separate, Auroville Transport Service, are revving up in either Abri or New Creation. Pity the poor postman...

Blissful water

Water was the central theme of the September issue of AUROVILLE TODAY. We concentrated on the lack of it. But we forgot to mention how good it is. The firm of Auoreal, Health Care Water products, which has nothing to do with Auroville and which is situated next to Auobrandavan on the Tindivanam-Pondicherry road (outside of Auroville), realised that water is not only good for body and soul, but also for their bank account. And that sales might increase if the name of Auroville is added. It started a water bottling factory, drawing natural water from the underground aquifer, purifying it as far as necessary and selling it, using the name of Auroville on the label.

"This blissful subterranean water of Auroville is filled with all natural goodness. This highly purified natural water is absolutely free from harmful microbes and is ideal for any age from the newborn to the adult. Eau d'Auroville. L'eau naturelle délicieusement pure."

Having unsuccessfully tried to convince Auoreal that the use of Auroville's name was incorrect, Auroville was forced to bring the matter to the High Court in Madras. The Court supported Auroville's views and has ordered Auoreal to discontinue using the name of Auroville in its commercial operations. □

New Publication

The latest publication from Shanta Books is a paperback collection of poems by Lloyd, titled *But for the breeze*. The poems capture in lyrical verse Lloyd's experiences in India in the past five years (1988-1993). As one critic puts it, "Lloyd's deeply personal poems describe a life of solitude and sharing, sadness and joy, with touches of the ordinary and of realms beyond". This new publication was marked with a book signing event by Lloyd and Vitthal at Vérité.

(*But for the breeze*, Shanta Books, Auroville, 1994. Rs. 40/-)

The other population debate

Further evidence to support Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance: during the Cairo population and development conference, Auroville carried on its very own population debate in the pages of the 'Auroville News'.

It all began with someone pointing to the 'very high number of births in Auroville' and observing that reproduction was not the task of the present members of the community - "The Mother will call fit people from everywhere, at the fit time, for the purpose." In a footnote, the editor of the 'News', in a (mathematically) unguarded moment, calculated that at the present growth rate of 9.07 children born in Auroville annually, it would take until A.D. 3241 before our population reached 50,000.

Little did they know what they had unleashed! Next week, one respondent stated that the writer of the original article "sees only one side of this so complex problem. The Divine Grace never acts according to the 'childish' simplifications of the mind. For, if She asks some of us to overcome the natural fulfilment of their sexual impulses and of their need for progeny - in order to be totally free from every bondage which could prevent them from answering the call of the higher consciousness - She gives to others, by the coming of a child, a marvelous opportunity to widen the egoistic limitations of their selves..."

Meanwhile the poor editor was being told to "educate himself about population dynamics before coming out with cretinous statements in print. A simple addition as he

has done is not justified. The simplest model is the Malthusian one of unchecked logarithmic growth. We will reach a population of 50,000 in 60 years from now."

All this, of course, spawned further responses in the next issue. "Having children is beautiful. Not having children is beautiful" saw the skilful opening of another line of argument. "But beyond the Auroville sophic debate is the larger issue. The resources of our planet are finite. They represent clear limits of growth. Planet Earth simply cannot sustain exponential population increases for very long." All this was positively restrained beside another correspondent who noted, "To regret the birth of a human being into Auroville is an unforgivable sin. Much greater a sin than

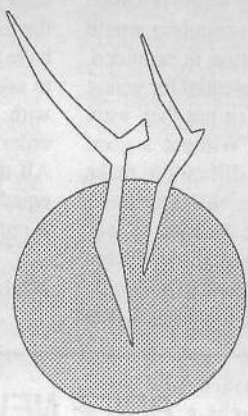
the act of procreation that was necessary, and by God necessary, for the future life of the species." Later, he (or she: the article was unsigned) waxes poetic. "A vision is growing overwhelmingly powerful...life, then, in its most basic and wordly form...is that then the Royal Trunk Road to Perfection! Is it not a fact that the ordinary life has always been the one in which all pure metals and precious stones have been found...It is indeed the humble soil that nourishes the lotus bud. And therefore, the thought is unbearable, is the worldly life the supreme Path!!" "I'm only wondering," the writer modestly concludes, "But the Mother said: Superman will be born from woman".

And so, in unchecked logarithmic manner, the debate goes on and on and on... □

AUROVILLE TODAY

By Airmail
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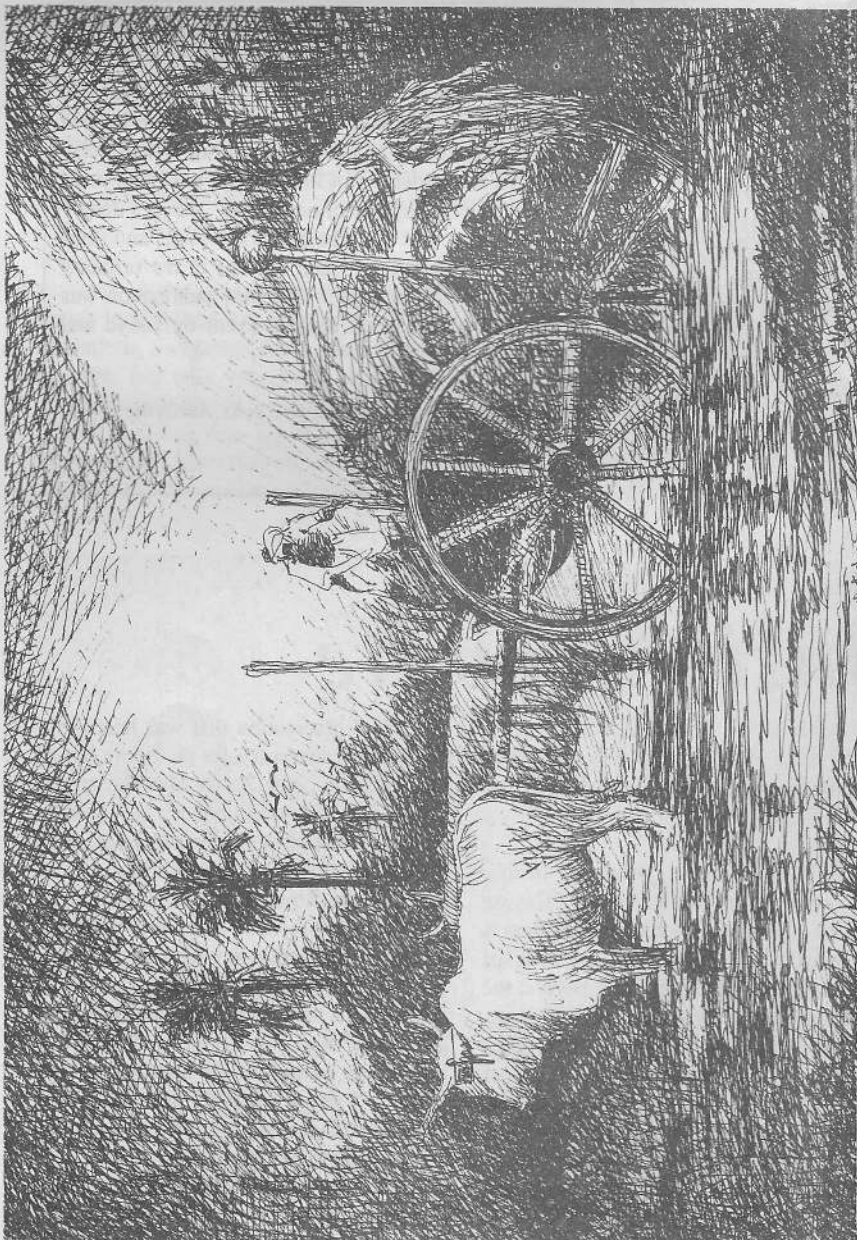
In this issue (8 pages):
Aspects of SAJJER; portrait of an artist

Exp. # 74

ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE

October 1994

Number Sixty-Nine



A PORTRAIT

Drawings on this page by Vahula



Vahula

In previous issues of AUROVILLE TODAY you may have noticed Vahula's drawings. Jill asked him about his life and work.

They came in a small boat. Fifty-two people crammed inside, tossing and turning in their fragile vessel across the Palk Straits. The journey took eighteen hours. Eighteen endless hours until they reached Rameswaram. He was seventeen.

Vahula sits opposite me in the quiet refuge of evening. We have eaten dinner at my house, and over coffee (I'm drinking, he's not) he remembers this incident, a turning point in his life, a voyage from one world to another. He recalls the terror of the crossing and the political upheaval that made his family flee Jaffna, a Tamil area in Northern Sri Lanka. Bombings were frequent. He remembers the planes overhead, the stench of the fire-bombs and buildings crumbling everywhere. "It was difficult," he says, smiling faintly. He doesn't want to frighten me. "Like Goya," he adds, referring to the scenes of war and destruction portrayed by the famous Spanish artist.

Then the refugee camps. One day here, two months there. In Madurai, his family spent nine months together in a small shack with no running water or indoor plumbing. Luckily, his father had studied in Chidambaram when he was a young man and still had some friends there. The family found a home and Vahula stayed four years, studying traditional South Indian singing techniques at Annamalai University. Then he heard from a friend about Auroville.

"I wanted to be on my own, live my own life," he says. So he came to this international place. "I knew it was different—without caste or religion," Vahula explains,

trying to describe what attracted him to Auroville. He lived from place to place, then, finally, he met Andre at New Creation. Immediately he was welcomed as an art teacher and given a room, but the noise and constant activity at New Creation made it difficult to work. Now he lives in Fraternity, in a small garret above the After School building.

In 1992 he became an Aurovilian. He still teaches art at New Creation. "I teach drawing, painting, calligraphy. There are fifteen children in each class. I have seventeen class hours weekly."

Referring to his still-lives and portraits of children that he shows me, he says, "I'm drawing from life." There are hundreds of rough sketches of children—studying, sleeping, playing, dreaming. "I also like Nature," he adds, and lays out on the table several photos of oil paintings he has done which capture the quiet beauty of a seaside landscape: the boats on shore, sunsets over the sea. Calm places, serene and undisturbed by man.

I ask him about the future. "I think my life will continue in this place," he replies. His English is still tentative. Teaching, painting, living. He is fascinated by Western art, and spends time doing "copy work" from reproductions of Michelangelo and Da Vinci's drawings. "In India, art is 'very flat—a flat surface. In Western art it's more three dimensional.'" Vahula is also starting to venture into abstract art, what he calls "fantasy", but his first love is "to make visible the beauty of Nature. To show the beauty in a leaf."

AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Bill, Bindu, Carel, Jill, Martin, Roger, Tineke. Proofreading: Barbara. Layout & DTP: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.

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