

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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Two years ago we devoted an issue of *Auroville Today* (no.18, June 1990) to Education and Youth. In this issue we take a look at education primarily from the point of view of the teachers, a number of whom reflect upon their experiences over the years in a variety of Auroville schools.

A commitment to unending education is one of the guiding principles of the Auroville Charter, which affirms that Auroville will "take advantage of all discoveries from without and from within" and will "boldly spring towards future realisations". This aspiration remains a lodestar for most of us—even if our sextants have over the years occasionally left something to be desired.

The challenges are many. How in our schools, whether formal or informal, can one encourage and foster an atmosphere of learning for learning's sake, and turn the pursuit of knowledge and the growth of one's being into an adventure of discovery that encompasses both the spiritual and the practical? How to provide students with a sense of confidence in themselves and the skills necessary to live and deal with the world as it is? How to more fully take advantage of the larger learning environment of Auroville and of the knowledge and skills of those many individuals outside of the more formal context of classrooms and schools? How to make schools into focal points and resource centres—and potential springboards into the greater and ongoing educational environment that is Auroville? "It is not brilliant students that we want, but living souls," Mother remarked.

In an environment where freedom is sacrosanct, the importance of helping a child to evolve a sense of inner discipline for it to be able to organize its talents and put its freedom to creative use cannot be underestimated. And the close interaction between students and teachers outside the school creates a situation in the classroom where the traditional role of the teacher is transformed. He or she becomes a helper or a guide whose authority can only be a natural one.

The challenge of the education of our youth as confronted in Auroville's schools has been a topic of particular concern to a large cross-section of the community this year. For a crisis earlier this year at Last School born of a number of different factors and accentuated by a breakdown in communication amongst teachers and between students, teachers and parents, brought many problems to the fore.

Perhaps, finally, the main challenge being confronted in our schools today is to be responsive to the real needs of individuals in a small, but culturally very diverse, student body.

In this issue of *Auroville Today* we also look at a serious ecological set-back in the making at our doorstep, and we bid farewell to Mr. P.N. Ojha who, for many years, had the herculean task of trying to administer this eccentric community.



PHOTO SVEN

## *The true basis of education*

"The true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult. Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind. For the educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work in the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body.

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

"The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a pre-arranged career. To force the nature

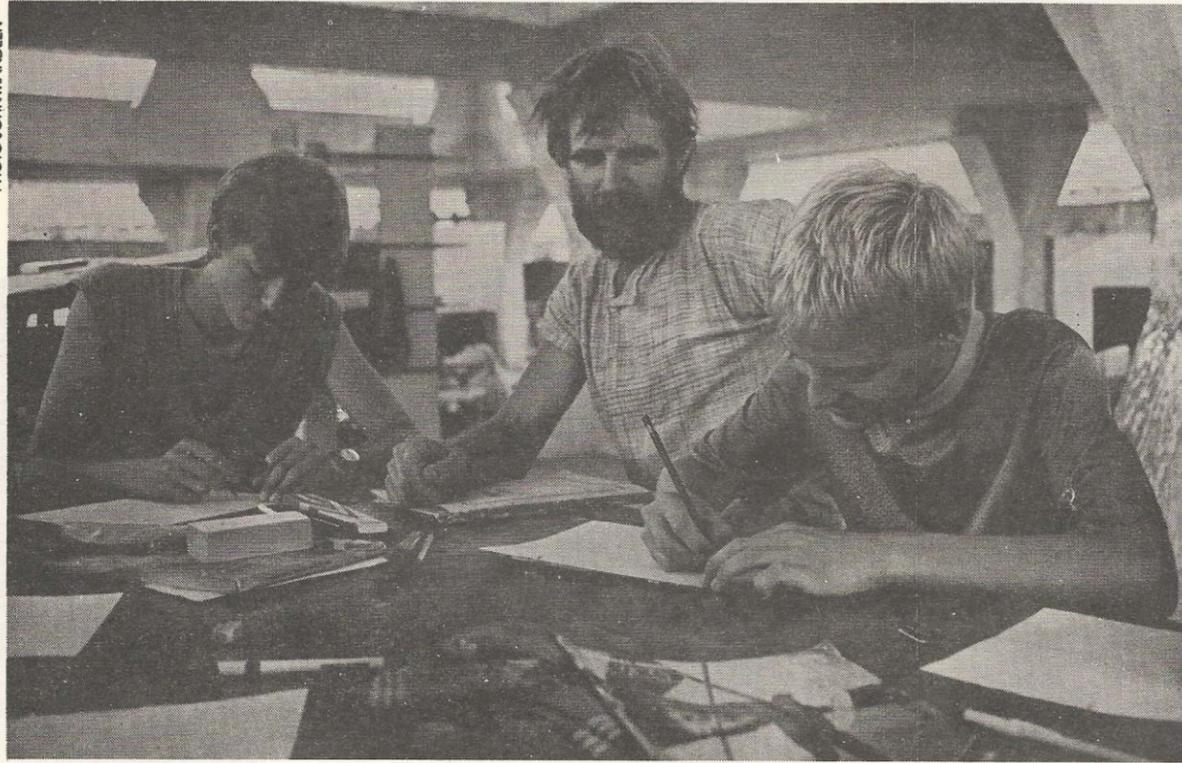
to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

"The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully but insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God's arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education."

Sri Aurobindo

# Learning and Unlearning: The Paradox of Teaching

An interview with Auroville teachers



Johnny at the 'Pyramid', with students.

Johnny was one of the pioneering greenworkers of Auroville. He ran an informal school in Fertile for many years, and has been involved with 'Last School' since its inception in 1985. Miriam came to Auroville with her father at the age of 9. She attended a number of schools in the community, and has been teaching in the kindergarten for 10 years. Jossy came to Auroville in 1974 and has been teaching at 'Transition' school for the past 6 years. Lisbeth came to Auroville in 1972. She was involved with greenwork and village relations for many years, and has been teaching at 'Transition' and 'Last School' since 1985.

## **Auroville Today: What is it like to be involved with education in Auroville?**

Johnny: What I sense with the kids here, is that it's possible to have real contact with them, to go on adventures with them, to share their problems with them, to know their family life and the whole thing. Especially when you work in theatre with kids, for instance, you really get to work with the whole kid.

## **Okay, we let their personalities develop, we give them the scope to discover themselves in an atmosphere where they don't feel threatened. But what don't we provide them with that we should?**

Johnny: What I think is clearly missing is taking full advantage of Auroville as a living educational situation. I don't think we take full advantage of that in the sense that we don't involve the kids enough in the learning process that we're going through here. I think people don't stay in Auroville unless they're involved in some fairly radical informing process. You can come here uninformed, but what keeps you here in a lot of situations is the fact that you are constantly being informed about village culture, about how to survive in the tropics, how to look after your body, how to build a ferrocement house or how not to build a fish tank or a swimming pool, everything. Much more than goes on in the West. There you've got a sort of status quo as far as information is concerned—what goes on is all this trivia in fact. It's not very relevant to real life. This thing of making learning natural, effective and easy appeals to me because I've seen how our kids grew

up, without school except for critical moments where they really wanted to go to university or something; and the sort of education that they had was just learning how to do the PVC pipe plumbing and to build a keet house and to mate the bull and get the chickens some meal; in every little back yard there's something going on that the kids can get more involved in. Learning in the West has become detached from physical life; what you learn here is a form of survival.

I think we could begin finding a way in Auroville, particularly with Tamil children, to create the adult/child relationship; that a godparent would be responsible to see that the particular type of intelligence that child has was being developed, tracking down the resources in the community for that kid.

Lisbeth: I think this godparent thing is very important. Especially if you become a single parent, it is hard; it is important to have a person that one of your kids can trust, to take them out sometimes for a few days, especially when the kids are small—a mother needs a break. In that way I'm very disappointed in Auroville as a society; it's too much still either the family or each person on their own. There is very little cooperation and support.

## **Take the kids, Tamil or Western, who have no context to situate Auroville in, very little sense of the past, of its history; how should one put Auroville into a context that can make a bit more sense to them? What is it we have to do to help them appreciate, in terms of the Auroville culture, identity, the values of Auroville, what the attempt is all about?**

Johnny: If the kids don't sense they're living in an atmosphere where that's a living reality then there's no point in telling them. All this thing about making sure that Tamils speak English and have read some Mother and Sri Aurobindo is all a bit artificial in the context that very few of us speak Tamil and know much about their culture. The extent to which they begin to understand or not understand Auroville depends upon me or what happens in the community—how we live and share our experiences.

Lisbeth: When the kids come to Last School they come there as pre-adults aged 13 or 14 and it's harder, you have to find a new mode of teaching. In recent years in Last

School our direction has been very academic, so for most of the kids this is too big a jump from Transition where there's a lot of care, the teachers care a lot. In Last School where this type of attention falls away the focus is narrowed to an academic direction and it's not so easy.

Johnny: Of course, there is a whole wealth of experience in education in the outside world that we don't have access to. One of the benefits of a situation like ours is that incredible information is always passing through in people that come by.

Miriam: I have the experience also that as a student you learn a lot from the person, not only about the topic but the person. And if you're with a person who loves trees, somehow you imbibe that love for trees. So that's why it is actually much better to go to his place because he is much more able to be himself there than if he comes to your environment.

Johnny: I had an old teacher, when I was 13 or something, who read me Marco Polo's adventures one afternoon in a dusty old classroom and it excited me incredibly about the East, and the whole of the rest of my life was changed by this one old guy reading me this story. It's true—the spark of affection is incredibly important in an educational relationship.

## **Have any of you had the experience of having a class that was blocked, and something made it suddenly unblocked?**

Johnny: I had the experience of being with a group of kids where I had worked something out beforehand and gone in there and presented it to them and they rejected it totally. They said: "That's hopeless, that's a really bad idea", and I suddenly realized I'd got kids on my hands for an hour-and-a-half and all the things that I'd planned to do with them have completely gone out the window. The problem was that what I'd prepared was too abstract; it was something which excited me but I couldn't communicate it to them. I'd put enough pressure on them to get them started, to get them into this thing, and it got to a point where it really got dangerously out of hand. It really got to a point where incredible chaos was evident. I felt at that point that it was important how we handled this chaos, and actually what I was able to do was slowly to shift the theme into something where I could

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break the kids up into different groups, and attack the problem from different angles. I suddenly found that these two kids could do this, and these two that, and suddenly I felt that we had taken a situation that had gone completely out of hand and become chaotic and given it order and I felt that what it actually taught the kids was how to deal with chaos, which excited me. I felt the Last School crisis was good because it made the problems of education evident to the kids. The kids need to realise that education is a problem and then see how to solve the problem; how to deal with the problem. I really felt that Last School falling apart was more educational than what we actually do in the school half the time.

## **Could you provide us an example of how you've approached a subject?**

Lisbeth: This year as an experiment we did a project on space, without the students relying on a textbook. In the end we gave them the test that they would have had if they had gone through the text book and they all got almost everything correct in the test. Most of the research they did themselves, they made books themselves about a planet, and at the end they were able to figure out how it worked.

## **So how did they pick up all this knowledge?**

Lisbeth: By doing things. We went outside, we looked at constellations, we made drawings. But always they were put in a situation; they never had a book, except when they wanted to find something for themselves. They had to research—each one chose a planet and had to research that planet so we could make a book on all the solar systems, so they made their own books on their planet, and presented it to the class. At the end, they picked up a lot about the solar system. They were not bored. But of course it takes a lot of energy.

In Last School a few years ago we did a project on the Universe with the science teacher. It was a project which we really enjoyed. We worked for two months within our class hours. We approached it from the side of astronomy and the side of science in both our classes. For two months, say 10 or 12 hours, these kids were immersed in their subject. Then we culminated it with a two-day project that was presented to the whole

## And what do the students think?

Most of the children born in Auroville have begun their schooling here, but at some point have chosen to finish their education in schools outside. Their reasons for doing so vary; some wanted a stricter or more academic system, some different social contacts. But other Auroville children have chosen to remain in the Auroville educational system. Why? *Auroville Today* spoke to two such students—Akash, 15, and Sukrit, 17, both of whom were born and brought up in Auroville—about their experiences in Auroville schools.

"For a few years, I didn't go to school at all, because the kids bugged me a lot. But now that my class has moved from 'Transition' to 'Last School' I've joined them again," says Akash. "And I really like 'Last School' because I get here what I want to learn."

Sukrit believes that "our educational system in Auroville does not much differ from those outside, except that here you are a bit more free. It is more Auroville itself that is different. In fact, all the things I wanted to learn I had to arrange for myself, because they were not taught at school." For example, he goes daily to 'Sri Ma' where he learns about mechanics from Gilles. In the same way, Akash goes outside the school to take Dutch lessons from Carel, computer lessons

from Pierre, and he is learning about electronics at 'Altecs' workshop.

Akash is quite satisfied with what 'Last School' offers, except that there is no teacher for science at the moment. Sukrit feels that "at an earlier age they should teach us more skills, more things to do with our hands. There should be a balance between academic subjects and crafts." He feels that for the first year, students at 'Last School' should take all the subjects, and then choose what they want to concentrate upon because at the moment "some say they don't like certain subjects, without even having tried them".

One of the reasons they don't want to go outside Auroville to complete their education is the special personal contact they have with their teachers here. "We are friends with them, we meet them outside. It's very free." But for Akash, the teachers are sometimes not strict enough. "When the students want to just goof off, the teachers can't really do anything. They can't really control them, and this I don't like."

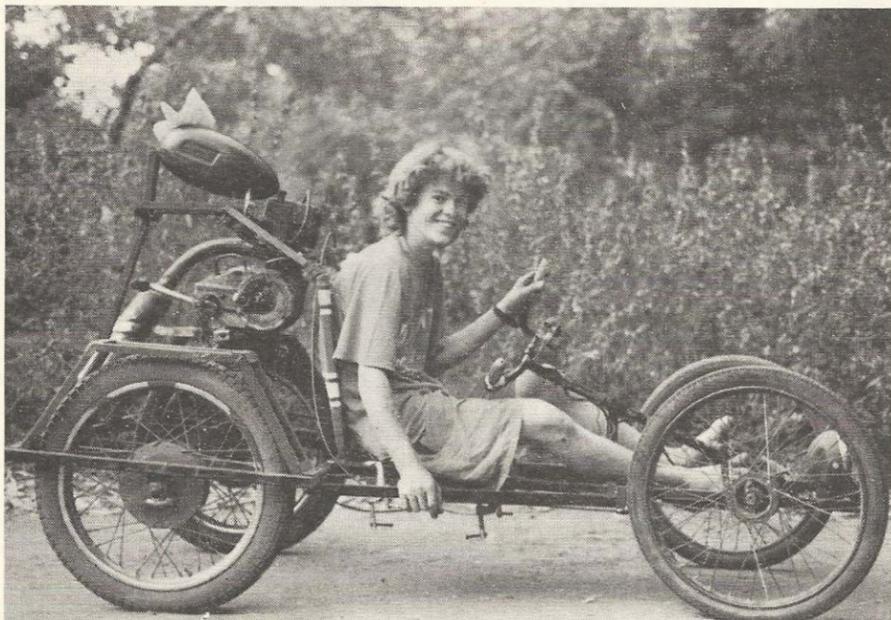
So what does 'education' mean for them? For Akash it means "to know a lot about different things." For Sukrit, the essence is to do with learning. "A good education should make you want to learn. I don't think education has to do with different subjects. A good teacher can make a boring subject interesting by just making you want to ask questions about it".

Tineke

Akash (right) and Sukrit (below): Last School students



**Sukrit: "At an earlier age they should teach us more skills, more things to do with our hands."**



## "Where's the Locomotive?"

A new teacher on her first day at school

"The girls are all waiting for you. They're in the room behind the Locomotive."

Like any new teacher on her first school day, I had to ask the obvious question. "Ah, excuse me, where's the Locomotive?"

This building, named for its resemblance to a cartoon of a choo-choo train, is one of the main classroom buildings at Last School, the Auroville equivalent to an American high school. Sort of.

After finding the Locomotive, I then had to figure out what "behind" meant. Finally, circling the main classrooms, passing a door labeled "Duck Room" (Duck Room? I found a small courtyard shaded by mango trees, and beyond the mango trees, a classroom, maybe 8 x 12 feet, and yes, finally, the girls.

The girls turned out to be six girls and two boys, ages 12-15, who were occupied by lessons in their English eighth standard books when I arrived. They looked up, stared, and like most children you first meet them, remained silent. Waiting. I was a "substitute" teacher, assigned to take over their class because their regular teacher was sick, a victim of one of the tropics many exotic diseases.

Okay, what's first. Names. I put my name on the blackboard, then went around the classroom. Vijaya. Sarasu. Renake. Usha. Kaliamurthi: Murugan. Meera. These names went up next to mine. To help me remember. Laughter in their English stories about Rama and his bullock cart, or Dr. Das and a trip to the village bicycle store, seemed to me dry, anaemic. Yes, they would be kept busy and quiet, their heads in their books, but I wanted something more. A more human exchange. I wanted to forge connections between myself, a newcomer to Auroville from the States, and these children, born and raised in the neighbouring villages adjacent to Auroville.

"Let's close the books. I've brought something we can read together." What I had grabbed on my way out the door was a copy of Time magazine, the International edition. An article in the magazine about the cruel treatment of Indian women working in Kuwait had caught my eye. Perhaps we could read it aloud. I had thought that a classroom of young Indian girls might be interested in how Indian women were treated abroad.

"Let's put these chairs around in a circle." Rearranging the room, making it possible for everybody to see everybody else, made the room less teacher-oriented.

They began to read aloud. The story of these women, who were hired by agencies in India for employment in the Gulf, and then badly mistreated, touched them. First, dis-

belief. Then anger. Then helplessness. What to do? We explored the topic a little. How about the treatment of women in India? Sarasu, a bright young girl in a pale blue and white sari, told about women she knew in her village who were regularly beaten by their husbands.

"What can they do?" I asked.

An uneasy silence.

"Nothing. Their husbands drink, and sometimes the women get beat up."

Evidently, this was a subject that needed further exploration. More stories came out. The wonder for me was the casual laughter which followed the descriptions of domestic violence. Then I remembered that, like children everywhere, they had adapted to the situation. It was just the way it was. But underneath, I felt a longing to be told there was another way.

"Who are the women leaders in your village?" Renake had a sister, Lakshmi, whom she admired. Lakshmi was married and still going to school. And she didn't want any children right now, an unusual situation for the average Tamil girl, who gets married before she's twenty and has children almost immediately.

Murugan, a small boy who had been quiet until now, spoke up. The woman he admired most was Greta, an English lady who lives and teaches at New Creation. She had saved him one day from a beating by some bigger boys. He was amazed.

"She came right in between us, and she wasn't afraid at all. She pulled these bigger boys off me, and then she told them they shouldn't pick on me."

Someone else had a sister, an aunt, a mother who they admired for their patience, their kindness, their cleanliness, and their obedience to their husband. I bit my lip, remembering not to let my women's lib consciousness interfere with the free flow of ideas and the exchange, the sharing of different experiences. No judgements. Just listen.

"What are some other qualities in women you admire?" I asked. "Let's do a story for homework."

Could it really be time for the class to end? As they swept out the door, I stood and watched them. I was a little dazed, a little tired... tired, exhausted... and very happy.

Jill



PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

# Freedom and discipline

*Croquette came to Auroville in the mid 1970's after being involved with theatre and teaching in Europe over many years. Besides his ongoing commitment to teaching in Auroville, for a long time he was a moving force behind Theatre d'Expression d'Auroville. For the past few years—along with Yanne—he has edited our sister-in-law publication, 'Auroville Aujourd'hui'.*

**Auroville Today: You have taught for many years in different Auroville schools, including one that you started yourself. Could you reflect on your experience in the field of Auroville education?**

Croquette: After 15 years of teaching in Auroville, I have a sense of failure. Not in terms of what I've been able to do, nor vis-a-vis the children—they did well, the results speak for themselves. But I feel I had things to communicate to other adults drawn to teaching, and there I don't feel that I've succeeded. Somehow, I wasn't able to pass on what I'd learned about teaching over the years, firstly in Europe where I studied teaching and child psychology at university, and where I later taught and kept up with all the latest developments, and later what I learned in Auroville.

**Could you specify some of the things you would have liked to pass on?**

Croquette: One thing which is very important is our attitude towards a child. There are two methods to know a child. The simplest one consists of living with children, and in doing so observing them and making your own deductions. Another method involves respecting what people throughout the world have to say who have studied and written in the field of child psychology and education. For example, one can study the works of educational psychologists like Piaget and Frenet. If you don't have the direct experience of living with children, you should at least familiarise yourself with the knowledge that is available, and be open to what others have to say.

One thing is certain for me: you can never judge a child. You can't hold a child responsible for falling down or knocking himself, but you can do everything to help him learn.

**In the past, education in Auroville has been plagued by an indiscriminate refusal to learn from what was labelled the 'old world'.**

Croquette: Yes, a permanent refusal of all that has been done elsewhere. And it is because of this that education in Auroville has always had to start from zero. The Charter of Auroville affirms that we are to take advantage of all discoveries from without and from within. This includes taking advantage of knowledge from the past, but at a certain point in the history of education in Auroville, this wealth of knowledge was rejected, and this refusal then became a habit.

**Isn't it possible to access much of this knowledge through one's intuition, without having to read every book on the subject?**

Croquette: Of course it is. But I feel we've based our approach here far too much on inherent instinct, which is not necessarily intuition. We too frequently take our feelings for intuitions, without questioning them. In the field of education in Auroville, we frequently impose our rejections—based on our childhood experience of schools and education—on the children. And everything we refused and rejected without analysis, we



PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

continue to carry with us in one way or another.

**Was there something positive to be culled from that refusal of the 'old'?**

Croquette: If there was, it certainly wasn't for the children, but for the adults. Maybe some people learnt the worth of books after having burnt them. Perhaps some people had to go through a total refusal of everything in order to begin anew. But in terms of education, this habit of starting from scratch each year with each new child means that progress is very slow. The substance of a child is a fragile one, to be handled with care, and every minute that goes by in a child's life can never be caught again. It is gone. A child registers everything—whether it is a gesture of warmth and concern or whatever. It will carry these marks in one way or another for the rest of its life.

**So what happened to the children of Auroville who grew up during that period? Some speak of a lost generation...**

Croquette: I'm not as negative about it as that. A child has 24 hours to his day—The Mother also considers sleep to be a potentially conscious activity—of which he spends from 4-7 hours at school. This means that three-quarters of his time belongs to himself. In terms of the forming of his being, school takes up only a quarter of his time. Even

though I don't think formal education has been all that successful here, I'm extremely positive about what goes on in terms of a child's development outside school. The environment of Auroville and of those who have chosen Auroville is an extremely positive one. So while the global result in terms of the child's development is not so bad, this is due not so much to our structured education as to the context of the larger Auroville. I continue to have complete confidence in the children of Auroville.

People talk about problems in the schools, but for me the problems begin a year or two after a child is born. A child starts his life off well in Auroville. We take a lot of care and are very involved in the child's birth. After a year or two, the child will go to the creche or kindergarten, which are well run by very dedicated people. But then things start going off. And this is because we think—with our May 1968 attitudes to freedom—that a child should never encounter any barriers, obstacles or bars to its growth. But a child needs to encounter these just to be able to surmount them, because that's how a child grows, develops and forms itself. However, all the child psychologists will tell you that if a sense of discipline and respect has not been instilled in a child early on, by the age

**Many of the young Tamil students in Auroville seem to have little connection with their own roots and values...**

Croquette: Yes, absolutely. Traditional education doesn't exist in the village any more. A kid will have a narrow outlook if he is not taken out of the narrow context of the village, where no one is concerned with him, or shows him things or tells him stories. To place a child within the context of Auroville can be very powerful, but if he is only here for 2-3 hours a day and then has to return to the village, to the blaring loudspeakers and people fighting, then something will be destroyed in that child.

As for respect...in the schools you cannot demand or insist upon respect from a child. You have to behave, to be, in such a way that a child will naturally respect you. To approach discipline in our schools by demanding respect is a terrible psychological error. It is a form of threat that a child must refuse.

Given the educational situation in Auroville right now, there is a need for a progressive, gentle and solid work to be done with the older children, and a very in-depth conscious work to be done with those who are still very young. As for those who are fifteen years old now, you can see that the good students usually come from a stable

**“One has to give the child a sense of discipline so that it knows the value of freedom.”**

of seven it is already too late. One has to give the child a sense of discipline so that it knows the value of freedom. Liberty that is not valued is not freedom.

When Yanne and I were in Russia, we met a famous Russian educationalist who lets the children grow up free and naked in nature. But this is fine because he also involves them in all kinds of work—manual and intellectual work—and the results are quite phenomenal. A child needs to fight, to be challenged. A child needs someone to measure up to. The greater the obstacle or challenge, the greater is the child's sense of accomplishment in dealing with it. A rebellious child is a living one.

family background, and have parents who take care of them.

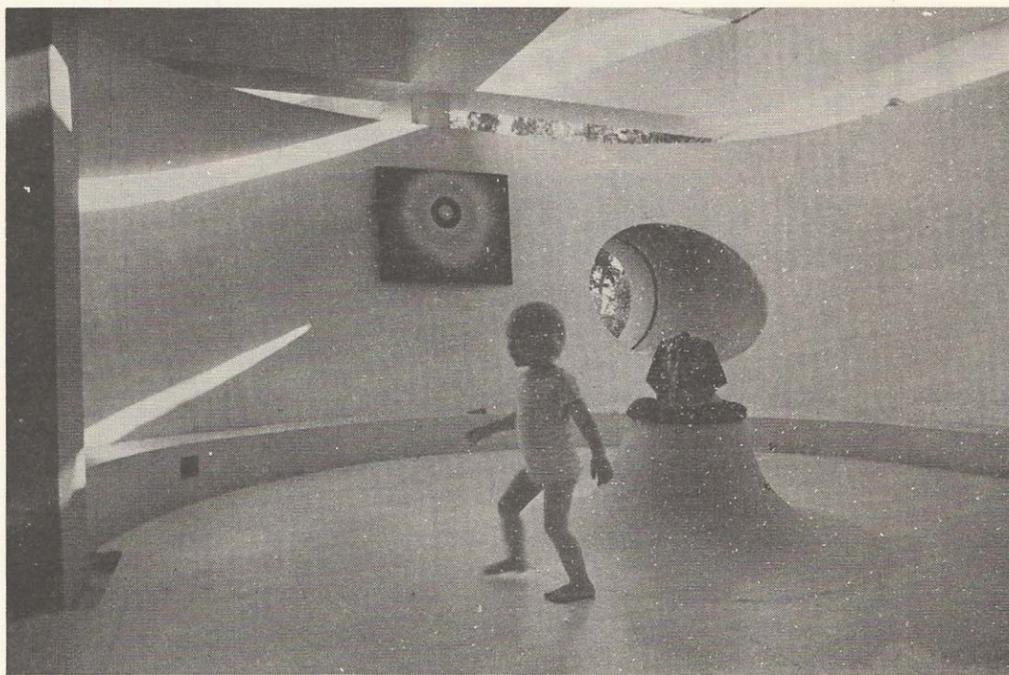
As for the problem kids, one hears it so often, “It's impossible to work with this kid.” This is an attitude born of the image we have created of the child. And to want to see a child in terms of an image is the fundamental mistake in Auroville education. There is no such thing as an ideal child. The child is what it is, for better or worse, and you must accept him as he is. If a child takes to you, you must take to him, and accept him for what he is, with all his difficulties. And you love him, and help him, or try to help him realize the best that he is capable of.

*From an interview with Roger*



PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

PHOTO JOHN MANDEN



**Learning and Unlearning...**

(continued from page 2)

school. It took a lot of preparation and we really looked around Auroville—we invited five astrologers and we had the kids break up in small groups and talk about their charts and we had a little skit; we had a quiz; we had videos. This kind of teaching is very nice because it can bring in mathematics, it can bring in language use—they had to recite a poem, a piece, on space. I felt we could really pool a lot of subjects together around the topic of space, or the universe. It asks a lot of preparation—but you bring out the creativity of the kids. I've sometimes referred back to that class and it's amazing how much of that time is retained by the kids. For me, that's the only proof of successful teaching.

Jossy: What we do with the kids in Transition is we choose a theme together. We choose a theme that interests them, whatever it is and then our work is to find and bring as much together around that as possible. For example, we started the year with water as a theme and we then explored water from a variety of angles and approaches. By that I mean we approached water from the point of view of science, and from the point of view of geography. We went to see a river, we learned about the ocean, we went to the beach and studied there and through this we could get them interested in other types of ocean environments. We went to a mangrove, and all this was centred around water. At one point we even studied Egyptian civilisation because it was a civilisation which grew up along the river, and it showed what a river can be for the life of the people. We then did something on Greece because Greece is a civilisation that also developed around the sea. We could have worked a year on the theme 'water' and follow it in every direction. The interest was unifying.

**What are the skills that are required in order to survive in the future, as you see it?**

Johnny: Imagination is a very essential skill—personally I think that being able to do many different things is increasingly becoming a skill, to be able to deal with problems, to be able to solve problems; every person in Auroville is, in their own way, gearing themselves for what they see the future to be.

I've often felt like a mother bird, coming into a room of open beaks and not feeling that I have the right worm! I think education simply should enable kids to go looking for information when they want it, in the sense that if you'd wanted to know about geography you would now have the skills to actually find out about geography and science and these things. We've let you down if we

haven't made you able to go and access that information if you wanted it.

Miriam: We as children felt that very strongly. We were about 14 and we'd say: "Hey you! We want to learn something". The one thing I remember always saying was: "I don't even know how to buy a ticket if I want to leave this place!"

Johnny: We aren't in the race of competing with Kodaikanal International School. There's nothing wrong with that system. I can see that we should be open enough to say that some kids can benefit from something like Kodai school and we should have a scholarship system and we should include the Tamil children and all the children have equal opportunity to go to Kodai school. Because I've seen it—there's definitely a percentage of kids in Auroville that definitely benefit from that particular type of high-powered education. But it's nonsense to try to provide that here. So what we've got to do is try to take advantage of what we do have and that's an incredible amount.

Miriam: For the small ones, affection is one thing, but they need a good picture of themselves; to have a good sense of themselves in a group and to be able to function in a group. We teach them a lot of that in the kindergarten. Their place in a group, and to be accepted in a group and to feel secure in a group and to feel that they can have all the contact they need with the person guiding the group and not to feel left out—to feel that they are important, that each of them is just as important. That they have their say and their needs are going to be met.

Lisbeth: I think this care is often lacking with what we call the problem children. I feel they have incredible interest for some things, and most of them are very intelligent, but they get completely blocked because they don't feel good about themselves.

I have a class of 12 kids—and you can walk past a desk and a kid will grab your hands and want you to be there. I'll say, "you can make that line on the map, you do it" and they constantly want attention because they didn't get it when they were small, or they don't get it now or whatever, and this reflects in their work.

Jossy: Because here in Auroville we are very close to the kids we don't have this teacher figure that they have in a normal school situation—here you bring all the problems that

you have as a kid to the school. When my kids were in kindergarten I could never work there because I had the two of them and then the whole psychodrama which was happening at home would be put in the school and I would have had no possibility of working with the other kids. But what I found quite interesting is that they identified so much with me as a teacher that in both of them there is a wish that they could become a teacher.

**What about the fears of parents who think that their kids are not getting an education or sending their kids off to Kodai; who fear that Auroville education is a sinking ship, and want to get their children out of here as soon as possible. Can you relate to that?**

Jossy: For a very long time I was one of the ones that was saying I would never send my kids out of Auroville to any other school and right now Jyotis has passed a test and is going to the Lycée (*Lycée Français in Pondicherry*) next year. But I don't feel I have any part in it, it's her choice. We had a long talk about it and I tried, not really to discourage her, but to probe into it and try to know why and what she is expecting and I just feel right that this girl wants to prove something to herself. What was so interesting was not so much what she had to do but the way she handled it. For this I felt great, at least Auroville gave her that. She is now grown up enough that she can find herself in a situation of stress and be a witness of her own actions and be able to analyze this situation. She also wants to expand socially. She wants more friends.

Johnny: I think that the fear that the kids aren't being prepared for the world outside is being expressed by parents who don't have much connection with the school. I think that living in Auroville as it is provides an incredible skill for dealing with whatever they have to deal with out there.

I think we've reached a point where we definitely can begin to open it up, to decentralize it in a sense, where we really can consider the whole of Auroville as a school and really begin to make every individual Aurovilian expand a bit more to this thing. I remember in the old days of Auroville kids walking around with a great big story book and stopping people on the road and asking them to read a story. Kids in loin cloths and that sort of thing. It was an interesting educational environment. I personally wouldn't be as attracted to Auroville now, if I had young

children, as I was then. I felt Auroville was an exciting educational experiment because it allowed human nature to develop naturally, and education arose when it became a need. What sustains me now is the calibre of the kids. I wouldn't be into it at all if I didn't feel we have an amazingly unique group of kids.

I think there is definitely a good side to the problem we are having now if we can build up this contact—particularly with the Tamil children. I am part of the Council and the Co-Entry Group this year, and I see now what the problems are with Tamil people coming into Auroville; they have basically in many instances no clue why are they here, what's going on, and many do not really know how to connect. Suddenly they find they have to do something in Auroville—it's as if it's suddenly occurred to them: "Oh, I have to do something; well, okay, I don't know" and they look around for somebody they can relate to and if they haven't built up relationships with anybody other than a few other Tamil kids, they're completely at a loss.

**Finally, what is it that's lacking most?**

Lisbeth: I think in general we could practise being a bit more open and loving and sharing.

Jossy: But has it ever been like this? I remember arriving in Auroville, and going from place to place and finding people so busy that they didn't even look at you. Auroville has never been what I would call a loving society. Never.

Miriam: Mine were children's eyes, but there definitely was much more togetherness then than there is now. The possibility to find somebody to share—like a godparent or something, that possibility was so open, people were just willing to talk with each other. That has to do with the newness of it; people when they do something new, they open up, they share.

And there was faith. Mother was around and it was like: "We don't understand what's going on here, but she knows." So you just did your thing.

Johnny: But you don't think that it would be possible now to encourage this sort of ideal? One way to do it would be to try to encourage—like one idea I had was to put a capsule in every different community—a kid's capsule—and encourage all those places, like the greenbelt, to take on, or be available, to kids to come and stay for a week or two, and get to know the people and the rhythm of living there.

Miriam: A strong centre is needed before we can decentralize. We must encourage a network. Auroville can only function as a network. Without strong points of unity all we have are scattered disconnected experiments.

Interview by Roger and Tineke



PHOTO SVEN

# "Unity is the key..."

On May 31st, Mr. P.N. Ojha retired as Director/Joint Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. He has been with us since November 1980, when the Government of India appointed him Deputy Administrator. Mr. Ojha had a distinguished career in the Indian Police—receiving all the highest awards—and in the Indian Foreign Service, serving in senior positions in countries like Nepal, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Laos and Kenya. After retiring from Government Service, he was appointed Chief Executive of a Joint Sector Company, Bihar Alloy Steels Ltd., and later was Officer on Special Duty to the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. He is 'retiring' from Auroville at the age of 78.

It is unlikely that we will ever know how much we owe to his—and to Mr. Justice L.P. Nigam's—efforts to provide Auroville with a secure foundation during a critical stage of its evolution, for much of it cannot be published. In the interview below, however, (recorded on almost his last day in Auroville) he indicates some of the problems he encountered, and how he conceived his role in relationship to the Government and the Aurovilians.

## **How prepared were you for Auroville when you arrived in 1980?**

I did not have much idea about Auroville, beyond what I had read in the papers, before I came. And it happened so fast. I was on holiday in Varanasi and suddenly I received a telephone call asking me to return to Lucknow. There I was informed that I had been appointed Deputy Administrator in Auroville—and that I should proceed there immediately!

When I arrived, Mr. Nigam—who I had never met—was staying in Pondicherry. I went to see him, and he explained some of the difficulties of the situation. For example, there was a confusion in the set-up of Auroville as some people were against the Sri Aurobindo Society, some were for it, and some were neutral—and it was sometimes difficult to know who was who. At that moment, an Advocate came from the Supreme Court, Delhi, telling us that the operation of the Auroville Ordinance (Emergency Provisions Act) had been stayed. The Administrator had just taken over charge of Bharat Nivas from the Society, and many Aurovilians were there. So I had to go and tell them that under the Supreme Court's Order, the charge of Bharat Nivas had to be returned to the Society. And this was my first day in Auroville!

## **The situation in Auroville was tense in those days...**

Aurovilians were being attacked at some places by certain 'watchmen'. So our first priority was to create a sense of security in the minds of the Aurovilians. If there was an attack for example, we immediately contacted the Collector or the police at the highest levels to bring their influence to bear.

## **Did this make you a target for those ill-disposed to Auroville?**

No pressure was put on us. But at the beginning, some of these people offered to help us in administering Auroville. We said, "Thank you very much, but we don't need any help and we shall request it if necessary." That was the end of that.

Of course there were difficulties. For example, after the final judgement was handed

down from the Supreme Court, the Society wanted us to take over a unit called Takshanalaya, which had no assets. They sent letter after letter, but we refused, pointing out we couldn't take over something which had no assets. They insisted. Finally we wrote to them, "You will appreciate that we can take charge of a white object. But not of whiteness." That was the end of that correspondence.

**"Dissidence is a must  
in any organization.  
But if dissidence  
crosses the border of  
reasonableness,  
it may lead to  
mobocracy."**

## **Did you find you had to educate the Aurovilians in those days in matters like keeping accounts?**

The Aurovilians were keeping accounts, but some of them not properly. I explained to them how essential this was; that when you handle public money, you have to render proper accounts. Even the Mother, when she was President of the Sri Aurobindo Society, checked the accounts to the last *paisa*. If there was one *paisa* missing, she made them find it. There is no contradiction between having a spiritual goal and exercising financial discipline.

## **The concern among Aurovilians was, and is, more about the dangers of decisions being taken outside of Auroville and imposed upon us.**

I don't think we imposed anything on the Aurovilians. Of course, we had to ensure that the laws and guidelines of the Government

of India were followed. But if you are a foreigner in any country, you have to respect the laws of that country.

Whenever possible, however, we helped the Aurovilians with these regulations, and facilitated the procedure so that it would not create difficulties for them. For example, for the first three years we were here, no Entry visas were being issued. This made it very difficult for the Aurovilians and those who wanted to come and join Auroville. So we took up the matter with the Government of India, and we drew up lists of those who were eligible for visas. We helped many individual Aurovilians because we knew they had nobody else they could turn to. It was a challenge to try to solve these problems.

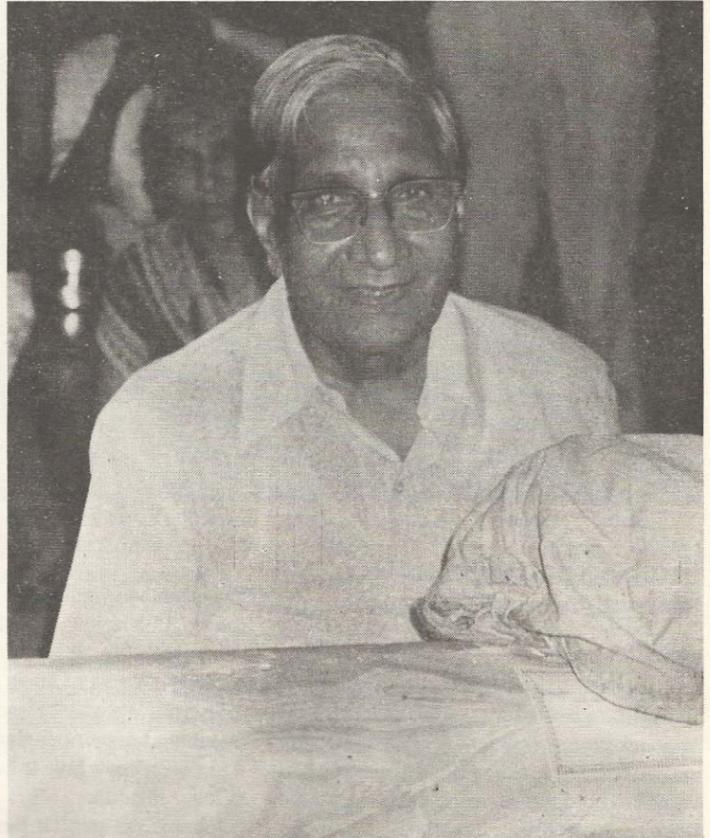
## **In a sense, you were like a bridge between the Government and the Aurovilians. Was this difficult?**

Naturally it is difficult to function in this way. But during my time as a Police Officer I faced many similar situations, and it is my firm belief that all situations can be tackled peacefully, without creating difficulties for all the parties concerned. Even when in Bihar in 1946 I was confronted by a crowd of 50,000 which was ready to create a law and order problem, I managed to solve the problem by persuasion. The important thing is not to lose your temper, because then you lose your proper perspective.

## **Did you ever lose your temper in Auroville?**

No. Because I never had a complaint against anyone here. Of course there were misunderstandings, when I had to tell someone something was not possible. Because finally I was accountable to the Government of India.

## **Did you feel it was simply your duty as a Government Officer to help Auroville? Or was there some other reason as well?**



*Mr. P.N. Ojha with parting gifts at a farewell tea-party organized by Aurovilians. He told them, "I carry you all in my heart."*

My feeling was, these people who are living here have left their homes and jobs, have come here as voluntary workers and are confronting hardship and difficulties. We admired their patience and perseverance and wanted to help them, to stop them being harassed. Of course, we looked into the matter first, and satisfied ourselves that the Aurovilians were not to blame. When they were, I pointed it out to them, and sometimes I had to be a little tough. But it was the toughness of a surgeon who operates on a patient so that they can get well again.

## **Are there lessons that Auroville still has to learn from its past?**

The main thing is that you don't forget, that you learn from the experiences of the past and don't become complacent. It is always better to be careful and ready for any eventuality.

## **How do you feel about Auroville's future?**

I'm quite optimistic. The important thing is that you remain united, like in the past when many of you came together in the event of an incident. Of course there will be differences between you—these should be ironed out in meetings. And dissidence is a must in any organization. But if dissidence crosses the border of reasonableness, it may lead to mobocracy.

Otherwise, you should be careful that you admit people into Auroville who are really interested in the Charter and the ideals of Auroville. It is very difficult for people to sacrifice their possessions and what they have achieved to the community, and only those who are really capable of making such a sacrifice should be accepted here.

But unity is a must. Unity is the key to the growth of Auroville.

*Interview by Alan and Annemarie,  
4.6.92*

Recently, two teachers from Last School—Ulla and Ela—attended an international conference on experiential learning, held in Pondicherry. The following article is Ulla's response to the changes and perceptions triggered in her by the conference.

## "I'm Still Learning"

What did I get from attending the conference on experiential learning? The question itself suggests to me a state of reality within myself that carries the aspect of "I need to get something", thus indicating a thirst, a longing to be nourished, to be fed, to be given.

In my personal history that seems to make sense to me. A two months sickness (some kind of parasite clogging up the lymphatic system in my right arm) and a major school-crisis in one of our schools where I teach and learn (I've been a teacher for 15 years, half of that time in Germany, half here), have all been challenging factors for the process I am in, within myself at a micro-level and as a person who has been participating in the Auroville process since 1979, and as a mother of three kids (9, 10 and 19 years) and as a woman sharing my life happily with a (Dutch) man. Who am I? What am I doing to achieve union with my true self? The question kept coming up. Pause; reflection; observation; stillness filled with movement. Many evenings followed where I would sit quietly on our roof-terrace in Ravena at night, admiring the beautiful night sky, listening to all the sounds from nature, widening, observing the play of thoughts in my head and the corresponding physical energies. Once I had stepped back from my conditioned belief-systems, my habits of relating thoughts to each other and making conclusions, the very option of a multitude of patterns, connections and possibilities surfaced. I tried not to reject any for the sake of others but simply allowed everything to exist, to co-exist; a weaving of patterns with their own inherent intelligence. In those sacred moments under the sky I understood with my heart that everything is interconnected, that nothing is separate. This state of being receptive and open to assimilate must have created a positive reality with me and it was no surprise that suddenly I ran into an

unknown lady who told me about an international conference on experiential education that was to be held in Pondy soon. I accepted this 'coincidence' as a sign.

As my friend Ela and I drove out of the school-compound on a Monday morning, having managed to organize our school-lessons, the colours changed from grey to pink.

From day one up to the last day the week in Pondy was enriching. People, educators and learners had come from all over the world to exchange and experience experiential learning (E.L.) Initially I felt like just listening, like inhaling, and I took a lot of notes during the lectures. But then the week turned out to involve more workshops than lectures. So there was no escape for me, I had to participate actively!

What did I have to offer, me? I had not prepared any session-paper, nor did I come prepared. The workshops reactivated accumulated experiences within me, experiences which I hadn't had time to come to terms with and analyse, being too busy with my day-to-day life in Auroville. But all of my accumulated material was suddenly available, it had become alive by coming in contact with other people's experiences, positively reinforced. Overwhelmed with joy it flashed on me how rich my life had become after being in Auroville for 13 years. There was mutual respect. At the conference, we listened to each other, embracing each other in moments of synchronicity, glancing at each other, getting the point that we, all of us, are parts of a complex network, that we can exist and let each other exist without needing to hurt, harm, and overpower each other. The atmosphere was very peaceful and beautiful, ancient wisdom in the air whispering gently into our open ears, that we are all one body. Exchanging mind-matters in such a warm and protected atmosphere was something that I had been missing at times here in Auroville.

What were the factors involved that made this possible, I asked myself. What was it that made the conference week a learning week, a work week, a week of fun, a week of insight? Then the answer became obvious, revealed itself. We had all been in one place, caring for each other, listening to each other, respecting each other, appreciating each other for what we were and could offer. We talked with each other, we laughed with each other, we intellectualised with each other, we played with each other and we were silent together. The human level of interaction was truly human. Yes.

Upon reflection under the sky, I thought that in Auroville, my beloved Auroville, we want to achieve a higher level of consciousness than exists elsewhere. This spiritual ambition invites all kinds of negative energies that produce negative attitudes towards oneself and others and thus leads us into a collective inflation of the ego, creating an unwanted and unfavourable state of mind, and an obstacle for progress. How can we ever become something else than we are if we don't initiate the future right now, if we don't make our far away goal a constant element of our present reality! Only when we refine our human interactions to the highest possible degree can we transform them and become divine. Instead we're freezing our perceptions, images and opinions of ourselves and each other and getting caught in a dangerous standstill. Instead of supermanhood, we have become dead humans, vessels filled up with all kinds of values that we adopted, with belief-systems that others created out of their needs. Suffocation! And then a bell was rung close to my heart. 'Remember thyself'.

I got up from my sitting position, stretched my body, opened my arms wide and greeted the sun. Prickly sensations, waking up, remembering myself. How could I have forgotten? Do I not have any potential of my own? Where is my rich self, my source, my well, my life energy, my true self? Buried, hidden, powerless, thoughts, flashes, flashbacks, images, feelings, sensations invaded, an influx of new and revealing mind energies. I was filling up, gaining substance. The very situation that we had with each other in Pondy was so positive, so free of judgement, that it allowed myself to fill up myself through myself. Everything got activated within me, I was incredibly alive, joyful and then I noticed that I was actually contributing, giving, sharing, while I was drinking from my own well. I started to exhale, to breathe out. Out of my growing

self-respect and self-allowance the rivers were flowing. People came and showed an interest in my life and work, in my process within the Auroville process. I became conscious of Auroville, a place, where I am living an experiential learning situation day in day out. I understood with my whole being that experiences have to be communicated.

We, I, you, Auroville, our experiences have to reach out, we need to breathe out into the world, because we are world-citizens, with responsibility for ourselves, our children, our community, our world. No exclusivity, no sense of superiority just because we live here, in Auroville. Of course it's a grace to live here. I experience it every day. This place, meaning more than just a location on a map, is very special, it's unique and if I can remember this always then only can I become humble and truly serve. I pray for connections and relationships within myself, within Auroville and within the world so that Mother Earth gets honoured and becomes our daily nourishment again according to original ancient teachings, based on experiential learning within one's own body matter.

During the week I became aware more than before that our planet is in danger, that the future is uncertain. I, you, we have to become fit for unpredictable scenarios, flexibility, spontaneity. As to our schools, they have by all means to encourage questions instead of going for 'right' answers. The right hemisphere of our brains needs to be developed, intuition has to be positively rewarded (intuition comes from the Latin word 'intuere', meaning to observe something). Survival techniques for the 21st century are the capacity for synthesis and the perception (recognition) of patterns. Our culture is getting more and more complex, the number of choices between systems increase so that intuition is needed to assist a choice. The right hemisphere is good for innovation, for feeling out, for stirring up and the looking into the future. The left hemisphere is good for testing, for analysing, for examining, for constructing a new order. Together they make the future.

Back in school the pupils and I applied a lot of what I'd learnt. I used Gestalt-therapeutic methods to activate a child to act out a conflict with a friend, thus reaching a better understanding of a situation. I sat aside more often and let the pupils be more active, getting into their own dynamism. I assisted them in looking at each other instead of towards me, when they discussed a subject. I stimulated more than before different approaches to a math problem. I encouraged feedback amongst and from the students, instead of just providing them with the answers myself.

My main contribution has been, and will always be, to try and make each single child feel good, potent, beautiful, to preserve its wholeness, and that's why I work mainly with positive reinforcement. I believe and meanwhile know, that it's my duty as a teacher to integrate the lost child within me to be a true joyful learner again, an equal among equals.

Ulla



DRAWING BY CHANTAL

## Bridging The Gap

*A journey of a thousand miles, or a hundred metres?*

Many of us who come to stay in Auroville think of the move as a long distance transfer of bag and baggage, a gentle (or not so gentle) tearing away from family, friends, our native culture, our familiar surroundings. But for some 200 Aurovilians, the physical distance is not that great. The blacktop road between the village and Auroville is easily traversed, and then you've arrived. In fact, the physical distance from village to Auroville can often be measured in metres. However, that is not the end of the story.

*Auroville Today* spoke to several young Tamil Aurovilians, and what we found is that the real gap is the emotional and cultural distance that they must bridge. For some young people, their decision to become Aurovilians is the culmination of a perilous journey that rivals the immigration stories of Western travellers in search of a better life. Indeed, the blacktop road can be as wide and as deep as an ocean and the journey from the village to Auroville an adventurous tale.

At the beginning... they come with that wonderful mixture of timidity and bravura which only the young can sustain. Some have brothers and sisters who have already "emigrated", paving the way for their arrival. Their mothers and fathers, too, have been here "from the beginning", living and working in Auroville shortly after the first busload of wandering Westerners set down their backpacks on an arid plateau in the middle of nowhere.

Mother said the local people were "the first Aurovilians", and their children are quick to remind us of their strong connection to the spirit of Auroville. At the same time, the decision to live in Auroville has meant a wrenching from the past, a rejection of those familial duties and responsibilities, those patterns of behaviour that Tamil culture instills in every child.

"My father wanted me to stay at home, because of the British rulers. He knew the way he was treated."

S. Manickam, age 19, was born in Kuilapalayam, one of the closest villages to Auroville, and the village from which most of the Tamil Aurovilians come. Against his father's



from l. to r. : Partha, Auroprem and Selvi

wishes, he left home to live with his brother in Auroville. "In the village, the atmosphere is not good, with bad habits, like drinking and gambling. That's why I came." In fact roughly 75% of the men from Kuilapalayam drink regularly because alcohol is so easy to buy. Alcoholism leads to physical and emotional abuse. Auroville offers an escape from the pain of parental neglect and domestic violence.

Manickam first lived with his brother Verimuthi in Pichandikulam, a Greenbelt community in which Tamils and Westerners live side by side.

"First, I went to school in the village. Then Joss sent me to Auroshikha for 8 years, and then I went to Abri." He liked the atmosphere of learning and freedom of opportunity which is a way of life here. "Some of the people in the village don't know about the rest of the world. I couldn't have a conversation, like talking about King Lear." (Manickam and I had been talking about Shakespeare and our favourite Shakespeare play.) "If you come out, you can see the world. There's a lot to learn."

Lawrence Selvi, 18, was born in Cuddalore. Her parents are Christians, and she went to a Catholic School in Pon-

dicherry until age 13. When she was 8 or 9 she heard about Matrimandir from an uncle, and she knew about the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

"I saw Mother's photo in a shop and then another and another. I asked my mother, 'Who is this old lady in the picture that everyone is hanging in their shop?'" Now she understands the positive influence Sri Aurobindo and Mother have on Auroville, but sometimes feels that "in Auroville, too many people use Mother, quoting her for everything! But we have to think about our own life also."

Certainly, Selvi is atypical of most Tamil girls, whose lives are prescribed from birth. Strong-willed and independent, Selvi has carved out a life for herself in Auroville as a health care worker, and now works in the Isaibalam sub-center. Her mother and younger brother live in Kottakarai. Selvi, who applied to become an Aurovillian in 1990, now lives in Pichandikulam, which is an afforestation community.

How was the break from the family to life on her own? At first, she didn't want to come to the forest, feeling a bit afraid of such a close environment. After staying for several days and nights, she felt better.

"The first time alone was difficult, but I liked the peace and calmness of Auroville life. I feel happy now because I am doing what I want to do and my mother has been supportive. I feel some Tamils have cut all ties with their families (when they come to AV), and this is regrettable, on both sides. The children don't think about their families." Selvi maintains her connection, having lunch with her mother almost every day. How does she feel about Auroville? "This place is unique as an international township and we learn about other people and other cultures. It is unique in the world. I like the life here: calm, peaceful, natural, simple."

As a generalization, one can say Auroville attracts young people from the villages who have a curiosity about life outside their immediate surroundings, who have an independent streak, who

have a yearning to improve themselves in all areas of their life—educationally, economically, spiritually—and who are willing to accept the domestic strain that 'crossing the road' brings with it. Naturally, it's a bit easier if your whole family, or at least most of it, is already in Auroville.

Auroprem, 19, has parents who have lived and worked in Auroville. Of his nine brothers and sisters, half live, work and/or study in Auroville. Prem now lives in Aspiration. How is his life different from that of a boy living in the village?

"There is a big, big difference between living in Aspiration and living in the village. You get to know less about people and things when you live in the village. In Kuilapalayam, I would have gone to school in Pondy. At the beginning, my parents didn't feel it was good to send me here, because another brother was here already. Finally, they sent me here." Most villagers need young men at home to take care of the land. Does he feel there's much of a separation now from his parents? "I go home, almost every day. I don't feel like being separated. It was easier for me because my friends were here already."



PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Are there any suggestions for improvements? "Auroville adults should listen more to young people. I feel they should be more open. Auroville is not an easy life. There is a lot to do, like working for the community, for yourself, for your family. But at the same time, you have a lot of entertainment: sports, movies, theatre, parties."

How does he see himself, in the future? "For the future, I want to finish my studies, work in Pour Tous or some other unit as a full member, try and get involved in Auroville's growth. I think staying here is a good decision. I've learned more things, my knowledge is wider. Pour Tous wants me to learn to operate the computer and I can use the time there while continuing my studies."

When I asked Prem if he had any complaints about his life here, he smiled broadly and replied, "No complaints."

Education. One of the biggest changes for young Tamils coming to Auroville is the increased educational opportunity that Auroville offers. Parthasarathy, age 18, lives in Fraternity with two other Aurovilians. When Partha was a baby, his parents moved to Auroville, and all the children in his family have attended school here.

"At ten, I would have gone to work as a helper in the village. Something like that." Now his future seems much brighter. "I'll try to study more till I get myself educated at a good level. I don't see myself with five or six babies and drinking alcohol. I hope my parents will be understanding."

Actually, Partha's parents, who used to live in Aspiration, are building a house in Auroville, and have been Aurovilians for some time. He has two brothers and two sisters, three of whom are living in New Creation, an Auroville community dedicated to education. Does he maintain any connection with the village?

"I have some friends who have a drama group. If they make a drama, I will get into it. Also, I helped as assistant director for a play my friend wrote for New Creation. It was performed in March."

What about relations between young Tamils and foreigners in Auroville? Recently, there was a crisis in Last School which brought to the surface a lot of pain and frustration. Out of this pain, teachers, parents and students have been working to create a better atmosphere, and to come up with a concrete response to the needs of the older (mostly Tamil) students who felt neglected because enough attention was not paid to their educational needs after the age of 16. Many Western kids escape to study abroad, but for the majority of the Tamils, that is not an option.

A project called "After School" has been started, and although its beginnings were a bit rough, it is now seen as a viable alternative for those students who want to continue their studies, academic or vocational, in Auroville after the age of 16.

We asked Partha if he believes that Tamils and foreigners can work and live together, to build a truly international community. He hesitated, framing his thoughts carefully.

"To live in Auroville, everybody should be like a friend. There should be unity. If you have a big stone, you can't carry it by yourself. But if you have three or four people, then you can carry it easily. I can see Tamils and foreigners getting together. We can achieve this kind of unity. I hope."

Jill

## Grazia

In December, 1969, when Grazia was born at Promesse, Auroville was still only a desert-like plateau, populated by goats and bony cows.

Grazia's first memories are pervaded with the sense of space and long journeys, by cycle or on horseback, through the canyons and over the red-earth roads. She watched trees being planted and growing up, new roads being cleared, houses and collective buildings being constructed. Of her first years at school, she still remembers moving from one school to the next, from the playground at Aspiration to the Tamil school at Udavi and then to Johnny's school in Fertile in 1975.

"It was a very free school. We were no more than 8 or 11 students... so of course we always had fun, doing maths, history, English or crafts. Going to school on horseback was enjoyable. We rode without saddle, we fed the horses ourselves, we brushed them and in the summer when everything was dry, we had to search for every small blade of grass. Sometimes we let them loose in freshly watered gardens, which made people freak out. At every full moon, Johnny organized a bonfire at the beach: we played, told stories, looked at the stars, swam and grilled fish."

When she was almost ten years old, she decided to go and live alone in a youth community called 'Ami'. "I lived in a hut together with an English and a German girl, and my sister. We laughed a lot." But when she felt freedom weighing too heavily upon



her, and when she felt she had enough, she moved back to her parents' home. As an adolescent, she spent a year at Last School concentrating on more specific interests, and then another year at the Kodaikanal International School. "I was not able to stay on, for after the freedom I knew here, I found I was completely blocked. I couldn't manage to communicate with the others and to make friends. At that point I made the mistake of leaving Kodaikanal School. Now, looking back, I regret having had the freedom to choose; my parents should have forced me to stay! It would have taken only one and a half years to finish my studies." →

### "Why are you here?"

Wyn from Australia arrived in Auroville a few months ago with her daughter. Wyn's stamina and apparent enthusiasm for typing soon ensured her a mountain of work from various quarters—including, of course, from the illiterates of Auroville Today. The following was written by her and published in a recent issue of Auroville News.

Around the middle of April I met with the Entry Group. It was not as intimidating an experience as I had anticipated it would be, although I still found the process discomfiting. One of the questions asked me was, "Why are you here, what made you come?" I replied, "I don't know. It just feels right, I feel at home here." This answer was not acceptable to at least one member of the Entry Group. Cycling around Auroville since the meeting, I've thought and thought about an alternative answer. I've thought about:

- the frequent electricity cuts which are not easiest to endure in this humid weather (no fan);
- the equally frequent lack of water to wash away the results of the lack of electricity in this humid weather.
- The hard mattress on my bed—I sometimes think a rock would be more comfortable!
- The enforced vegetarian diet—I love a juicy, grilled chicken leg.
- The spiders, geckos, frogs and other 'creepies' that inhabit the keel roof of my hut.
- The mess on the desk, bed, floor of my hut caused by the said 'creepies' toilet habits!
- The lack of hot water to wash my hair—if not the rest of me.
- The attempting to sleep through the whine of assorted motorbikes/mopeds/scooters, as their owners return home after a night out.
- The attempting to sleep through the barking of one-thousand-and-one dogs.
- The attempting to sleep through unmelodious music amplified through antiquated loudspeakers at 3 in the morning (fortunately not too frequent an occurrence).
- The attempting to sleep while geckos speak lovingly to one another; frogs croak; 'things' outside chirrup, kerump, twitch, tweet or twiddle. (You'll gather that I'm an awfully light sleeper!)
- The speed—or, rather, lack of—at which things are done in India. I hope I never, ever, need something 'now'. It won't happen.
- The length of time for communications from my daughter in Australia to reach me.
- The discomfort of riding a bicycle in the heat, over badly-made roads—I sometimes think longingly of my zippy little red, Japanese car.
- The number of people here who won't/can't smile.
- The quite frequently encountered lack of friendliness in Auroville.
- The yellow dust that gets into everything—hut, clothes, particularly feet.
- The lack of a close friend or companion to share thoughts, actions, hopes, aspirations, frustrations...to share.

"Why are you here, what made you come?"

"I don't know. It just feels right, I feel at home here."

To which I should add, "These past three months I've been happier and more content within myself than in the previous three years."

Wyn

Back in Auroville, she settled in Aspiration. At the same time she got her first job at the Auromodele Atelier where she did silk-painting, and then, at Filaure Atelier, she designed children's clothes. A year ago, an American woman asked her to take over a small unit, making patchwork in cotton and silk using American folkloric designs. She accepted. "I love playing with colours; and with the silk-painting and the patchwork I could put into practice all that I liked to do. The only thing is, my monthly maintenance is just the minimum to survive. This is very frustrating because you have to ask for money all the time and I hate that. It is a very big problem for the young people here, because we can't do anything. There is nothing organized for us. My parents, when they came, received money from their parents, but I can't ask them for it, because they haven't any money either. For the moment the only solution seems to leave every year for four months, to work in Europe or America, but I don't like this. Almost all the young people are leaving, either to study or to earn money. Recently I made a trip to Italy, and I got a real culture shock. Everything seemed so beautiful, so modern. And I was surprised at the number of young people!! Here there's a lack of young people, of places to meet, and places to receive other people of your age who live outside Auroville. That has to change, because otherwise the young people will not stay. And I want to stay because Auroville is my home!"

Last year she was invited to take part in the Auroville Council. She stayed there for three months. "It was a horrible experience! I discovered there were a lot of problems in Auroville which I didn't know about, and which I don't like. There are people here with

enormous egos! So I don't see how that leads anywhere. Working in the Council has taught me to stay away from the political problems of Auroville. Being Piero's daughter, (*Piero is the chief engineer of Matrimandir*), I listened to discussions about these problems at home and I remember being, as a child, often very much disturbed about them. This experience has made me ask myself a lot of questions about Auroville, its future, its *raison d'être*... For Auroville I envisage a slow-paced evolution. I hope it will never be a town with asphalt roads, concrete buildings and all that you see in the West or in the big Indian towns. I find that horrible, inhuman! I have always lived in Auroville and for me it is a village where I know everybody. Certainly it needs more people, but it does not have to be a town at all costs. Before, life was simple. I was there, Auroville was there, and it was good!"

Next year, Grazia will go to Italy for a few months, and then to Germany. "I would like to spend one year in Europe, to work, to discover the culture of my parents, understand why they chose to live in Auroville, and maybe also to understand why I am in Auroville. About the ideal of Auroville, about the Charter, about Mother and Sri Aurobindo I know very little, in any case not really in detail. I haven't read anything of Sri Aurobindo, of Mother just a little, but I don't like it when people quote them at every occasion. That looks too much like a religion.

"I definitely see myself spending my life here, having children here—now the schools are better organized. My dream... to build a house with a real roof that doesn't leak, in a quiet place. Before I do this, I must go away, but I will come back. Auroville is my home!"

Yanne

### A Playground for Handicapped Children

More than a year ago, two Aurovilians—Franca and Appie—talked about doing something for the handicapped village children living in the Auroville area. At that time, workers from CERTH (Centre for the Education, Rehabilitation and Treatment of the Handicapped) were coming twice a month to the villages, mainly to visit polio patients. (The polio virus is still prevalent here. While an average of 10% of Indian children contract the virus, about 1% become paralysed.) CERTH workers—who receive an intensive one year's training from 'Handicap International' in Pondicherry—provide patients with caliper splints and give them physiotherapeutic exercises to practise. It is particularly important that the affected children practise these exercises regularly if they are not to grow up with deformities. However, some of the parents are not aware of the necessity of these exercises, or do not have the will or the energy to ensure that the children do them.

Consequently, Franca and Appie, on the basis of an idea provided by 'Handicap

International', decided to make a playground in a local village for the handicapped children to encourage them to exercise. With the help of Village Action, they organized meetings with parents and village leaders and a place was selected, beside the Auroville Bakery in Kuilapalayam. After an initial clear-up—the site used to be the village toilet and compost storage place—Kuilapalayam night school students, Last Schoolers and Village Action workers transformed the site into a playground, making swings out of old lorry tyres, frames out of steel pipes, and building a small hut to house toys and educational materials.

The playground, which was inaugurated on 19th January, is open five afternoons a week. Franca and Appie have been joined by Marika, who worked with handicapped children in Italy, and the indispensable coordinator and liaison with the parents is Veeramani, who was trained by CERTH and is sponsored by Village Action.

It's a small beginning, but a long overdue opportunity for these disadvantaged children to find their place in the sun... □

### Champaklal

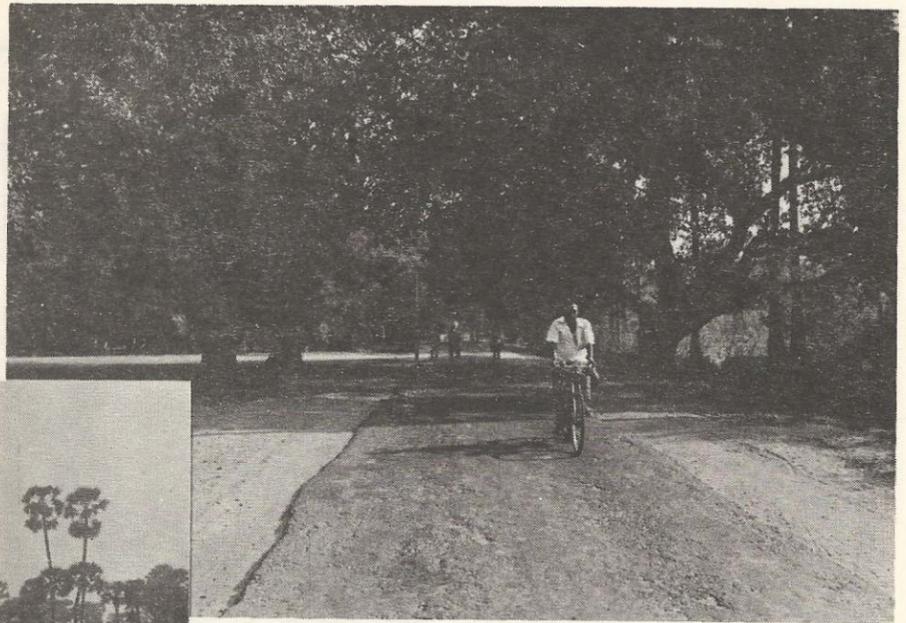
Champaklal, for many years the attendant of first Sri Aurobindo and later Mother, left his body on the evening of 9th May at Jantral, near Baroda in Gujrat, where he had gone for health reasons. Champaklal visited Matrimandir several times and some of the powerful visions he had there were recorded in issues of *Matrimandir Newsletter*.

# THE EAST-COAST ROAD

## An Ecological Disaster in the Making?



Before and after  
the clearing  
(photos by  
Francois)



It has been rumoured for years that a major East Coast highway, stretching from Calcutta to the southern tip of India, was planned to pass between the main part of Auroville and the sea, with all its implications for industrial development and increased tourism. In fact, it had been planned since 1986. But nobody took any action. Apathy? Or was it a belief that such a huge project would never get off the ground? Recently, however, came the first unmistakable evidence that the planners are serious, for a major tree-cutting programme has begun on the existing coast road, close to Auroville. The following article—originally published, in an expanded version, in "Sunday" magazine—was written by an Aurovillian journalist, Francois Gautier, who is concerned that everybody wakes up to their responsibilities in the matter.

IN KOONIMEDU, A VILLAGE HALF-WAY between Marakkanam and Pondichery, the entire population is Muslim and many of the men are working in the Gulf and it shows; the houses look prosperous and are gaily painted. But today Koonimedu wears a forlorn look: all the trees have been felled, sand from the nearby beach has completely recovered the tar road; and the authorities have warned that the mosque has to be removed. "They say they are going to replant trees, but I know I won't be alive to see them" says Abdul Karim, a tea shop owner.

It used to be one of the prettiest drives in Tamil Nadu: miles and miles of a charming little road, bordered by century-old tamarind trees, wandering through lush green fields, salt marshes, rivers, sand dunes, mango groves, two huge water reservoirs which are home in winter for thousands of migratory birds, and peaceful little villages. It was an ecologically balanced area...

But today, parts of the Mahabalipuram-Marakkanam-Pondichery road in South Tamil Nadu look like a huge battle field. Hundreds of beautiful trees have been felled; the tamarinds which gave shade to generations of villagers are lying on their side, like some great wounded animals. The sand from the ever near sea is fast encroaching on the road, as there are no more roots to stop its relentless march inland. The vulnerable water table is exposed to the continuous drilling that is bound to take place to feed the ever advancing monster: the road, which will cut a 45 metre wide swathe of land through the countryside, has been marked to pass plumb through mango groves, through houses, villages sometimes, uprooting not only nature, but also thousands of people.

In Cheyur, Subramaniam looks on sadly at the fateful white line, which points toward

his three acre coconut grove. Officials have warned him that if he refuses the Rs 250 per cent proposed to him as compensation, (market rate is Rs 1000 per cent), they will go to the Registrar with his plot number and requisition his land. "What can I do?" he asks sadly, "I need the money to start all over again".

Who is subsidizing this road? It's a Rs 200 crore project, of which 60% will be provided by ADB, the prestigious Asian Development Bank, and the rest by the Central and local governments. The first section to be worked upon—between Madras and Cuddalore—will cost 63 crores (630 million rupees, or around 20 million dollars), of which the ADB will provide 50 crores.

The first phase of the project has been initiated. The contractor responsible for the first phase is Afcons and Pauling. Afcons is a Bombay-based company which specializes in building roads and bridges; Pauling is a British firm which has a technical tie-up with Afcons. According to Afcons and Pauling officials, it seems two Westerners had the final say on the road layout. One is an Australian, Mr. K. Coony. Based in Singapore, he comes and goes and sees that the road is being made. The ADB advised the Tamil Nadu Government to hire the services of a Delhi-based engineering company called Ercon to design the road. Ercon has also a foreign collaboration with a firm in the UK. One of the consultants of this UK firm, Mr Roland, seem to be the ultimate authority on the final design of the road and he stays in a hotel near Mahabalipuram, 20 days each month. When one knows the hyper-sensitivity of the West to ecological problems, when one knows that most industrialized nations prefer nowadays to make a narrower

road, rather than to have to cut trees, one wonders why the same standards are not applied to India? No such road which destroys thousands of trees and upsets a delicate ecological balance would ever have been allowed in the West—and both Mr Roland and Mr Coony must know that. (In fact, even some of the executives of Afcons and Pauling admit that it would have been better to have built the road 12 kilometres inland, as it would reduce the cost of bridges and culverts.) How can the ADB, a respected worldwide banking institution, knowingly fund crores of rupees for a project that is detrimental to India's ecology?

In Anu Manday, near Marakkanam, Govindswamy points to an arrow on his house and a stone in his courtyard: "Government officials told me they need 150 feet for their road and that I have to rebuild elsewhere. Please take a photo Sir, tell the press, tell the world what they are doing to us. One hundred and fifty feet, this is crazy Sir! Please take a photo Sir, and tell the press..."

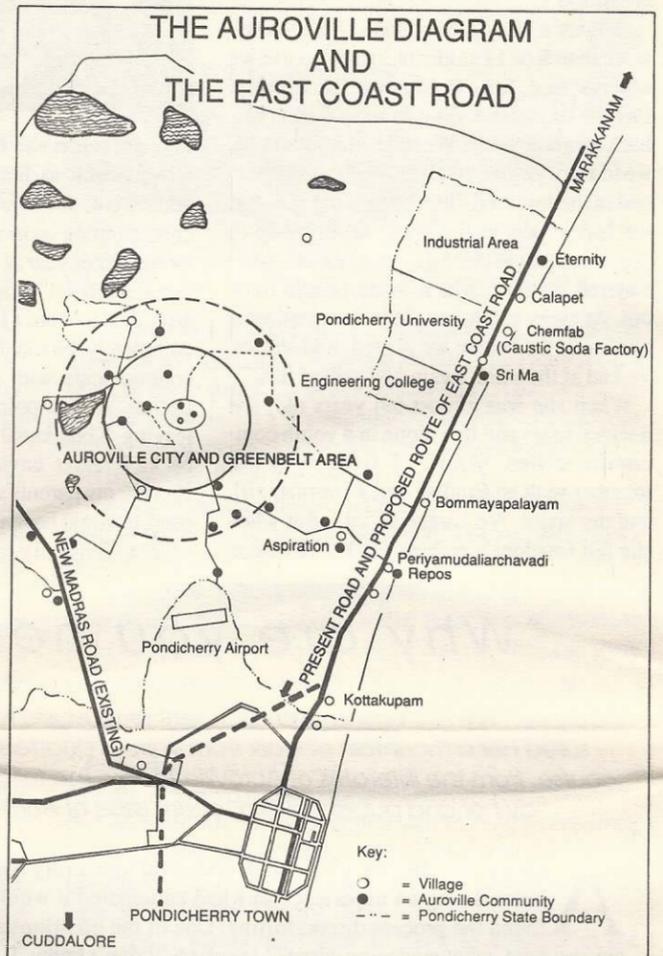
Indeed, fortunately for the East Coast's ecology and road-side inhabitants, it is transpiring that the proposed highway is running into major problems. Even though most of the environmental movements, state and national, seem to have been flat-footed by this project, so far only 25% of the land has been handed over to the contractors by the Tamil Nadu government, and there are more than 65 cases against the government by

farmers and house-owners whose land is going to be acquired.

So what now? There is no doubt that the existing Madras Kanyakumari road (National Highway 45), has reached its maximum capacity: as soon as a small accident occurs, there is, in less than a quarter of an hour, a pile up of hundreds of buses, lorries and cars on each side. There is no question either that the small coastal road from Madras to Kanyakumari has to be improved to open the area to tourism and development. But why go for a four lane, 45 metres wide road, cutting all the trees, destroying the scenery, bringing dirt, noise, pollution and all the evils of a heavy traffic road? The coastal road need only be enlarged so that two vehicles can cross each other safely; and the already existing road between Villipuram and Tanjore which goes on to Nagercoil should be the most obvious one to be made into a super highway, as it is already wide and taking heavy traffic.

At any rate now there needs to be a very selective tree cutting programme, under the supervision of a national environment agency, and a serious environmental study should be made as well as a solid scheme for replanting the trees already cut. The expertise of Auroville, which has shown how nothing is doomed in nature and how one can reclaim what seems irremediably lost, could be very useful. This ecological massacre has got to be stopped...

Francois Gautier



## ◆ Brief News ◆

### WAITING FOR GODOT—A PLAY

Of course we've had superb theatre performances, staged over the years by our well-known French group of Auroville actors. But when did we last have an English-language play staged in Auroville? Only the veteran Aurovillians seem to remember one that happened in the Forecomers' canyon in 1970... So for this alone, it was already enjoyable to watch 'Waiting for Godot', Samuel Becketts' well-known play, adapted for presentation in Auroville by Jill Navarre. Jill, who joined Auroville six months ago, worked for many years as a theatre director in Washington D.C., where she produced a dozen plays. She and the four actors Otto, Jeff, Francis and Tai prepared themselves for the stage in two months, fitting in rehearsals after work. The result was an entertaining and convincing performance, staged on two consecutive evenings in the Bharat Nivās Auditorium. We're all waiting for more!



Francis as Lucky, "Waiting for Godot"...

### THE AUROVILLE TODAY TEAM

Jill Navarre also joined the *Auroville Today* team. Her joining coincided with Yanne's departure for France. Yanne expects to be spending up to a year away. *Bonne chance* Yanne, and we're looking forward to your communiqués!

### AUROVILLE AUJOURD'HUI

*Auroville Today's* French counterpart, *Auroville Aujourd'hui*, has from now on a new editorial team, consisting of Pierre-Charles, Pascale, Jean-Michel, Hélène Verré, and Yves. *Auroville Aujourd'hui* has just brought out its twelfth issue, compiled and edited, like the previous issues, by Yanne and Croquette. We look forward to a continued co-operation between the two 'sisters-in-law'!

### RUUD LOHMAN MEMORIAL PARK

Pettai is the name of a small village to the north of Auroville. In 1976, Meenakshi and the late Ruud Lohman (a long-time Matrimandir worker who had a special affinity for this village) inspired the youth group there to initiate a forum to manage their own affairs. This forum, the Pettai Village Development Association, celebrated its 16th anniversary last month. On this occasion, the village temple authorities offered a piece of land to create a park for children. This park will be maintained by the youth club and will be named the 'Auroville Ruud Lohman Memorial Park.' Matrimandir offered a white marble slab with Ruud's name inscribed, which was unveiled by Ruud's son, Akash, on his birthday, 29th May.

### PASSED AWAY

Twice in one month, the community was left with a sense of shock and loss due to the deaths of two long-time Aurovillians. Anna Rivera passed away in her house in Fraternity on 29th April; Roger Bogaerts from Fertile East met with a fatal road accident on 16th May. □

## Awareness workshop for a sustainable future

Between the 3rd and the 9th May, the Centre for Scientific Research (CSR), with the financial support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, New Delhi, ran its first workshop aimed at raising awareness about sustainable alternatives to non-sustainable development strategies prevalent in the world today. The participants/'guinea-pigs' were architects and architectural students from major schools in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Vidyanagar and Bombay; the organizers were four Aurovillians who didn't quite know what they'd let themselves in for, particularly as the workshop had been organized at very short notice. It soon became clear, for example, that the greatest test of sustainability would be that of the organizers' health, confronted as they were by sharp young minds with a voracious appetite for information—and, seemingly, little need of sleep. To this day, the students' habitual cry of "What next?" brings at least one of the organizers out in a cold sweat...

But what do we mean by 'sustainability'? The 1983 Brundtland report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It's a cautious definition—born, one suspects, of political pragmatism—because it doesn't question the concept of development itself. However, it does provide a rough yardstick by which to examine the impact of global policies, and of how far Auroville exhibits genuine alternatives.

The CSR workshop focussed upon specific areas—soil and water management, habitat and energy generation. Each topic was first introduced in its global aspect, and the major problems caused by short-term solutions and neglect were identified. Aurovillians then explained how Auroville is attempting to respond in a sustainable way to the global challenges of deforestation, inappropriate building techniques and costly and polluting energy production. There were presentations on soil conservation, afforestation and organic farming; on stabilised earth construction and ferro-cement; and on renewable sources of energy like biogas, wind power and photovoltaics. These were complemented by field trips, with particular emphasis upon architecture in the community. On the final morning, participants visited various constructions in Auroville and evaluated them on the basis of how far they demonstrated sustainable siting and construction techniques.

How successful was the workshop? During the final evaluation session, the participants confirmed that their former perspectives had been radically changed, not only by hearing about sustainable techniques, but, above all, by seeing them put into practice with such determination and dedication. They were particularly impressed by the work on land conservation and renewable energy systems. As architects, however, they were disappointed by how little they felt Auroville had to offer. They lamented the chaos of different styles, the lack of genuine planning, and the failure—as they saw it—of our buildings to reflect our ideals of sustainability, human unity and perfection in matter. "Your architects have problems in listening to one another," a student observed, "as they are all bound up in their different visions of what architecture in Auroville should be."

The workshop, however, also raised larger questions about what we mean by 'sustainable' practices. For example, mud-fired housing, as practised by Ray Meeker of 'Golden Bridge' pottery in the construction of four houses in Auroville, does use local

## Auroville International Meeting

May, 1992—Gaunts House, Wimborne, Dorset, England

In the welcome letter to those attending the meeting this year, the following message was included:

*"We welcome to this meeting all like-minded aspirants to The Mother's Dream. We hope the meeting will evoke a spiritual sense of oneness and collectivity in which we can consecrate ourselves to Her Dream. Every year over the last ten years, we have met to share our joys and pains and experiences on the way, and the fact that we continue to meet shows that the collective flame continues to burn bright. We look forward to your active and open-hearted participation in the meetings."*

The meeting this year was held in Gaunts House, a large and imposing house set in extensive grounds amongst the beautiful countryside of Dorset. Inside, the rooms had beautiful painted ceilings and some lovely Tibetan carpets. The food was vegetarian—and excellent. The most notable quality of the place, however, was the warmth and openness of the staff, who are members of their own small community at the house. They have aims similar to ours, and joined with us for several activities.

This year there was a total of 43 participants, from Holland, Germany, France, Sweden, Spain, USA, UK and Auroville. We were particularly glad to have nine Aurovillians present, including three Tamil Aurovillians.

The general theme of the weekend was human unity, and this theme was reinforced by a collective meditation each morning before breakfast, and a reading from Sri Aurobindo's works and a silence before each session. We set out on the first day to explore this theme among ourselves in small groups, this being an opportunity to get to know one another more closely, and to create an atmosphere of openness and sharing. A conscious attempt was made from the beginning to concentrate on the realisation of this human unity, and to use this as a basis for our discussions on themes such as fund-raising, collective housing and village action. These sessions were very positive and gave much inspiration to the AVI centres in their work.

There were no formal meetings in the evenings, and we shared a slide show and two videos—one sent to us by Joss, and one about "Boytons". There was also sacred dance, music, guided meditation and a very beautiful Indian dance performance by Devasmita, an Indian lady who lives in France. The meeting ended with each participant sharing his/her experience of the three days. It was a touching time, with tears of joy and laughter as a special time together was recalled. We all felt a close bond among ourselves, with a common aspiration to help manifest The Mother's Dream of Auroville.

It was decided that the next AVI International meeting will be held in Germany next year, from May 20 to 23.

Martin and Thakor of AVI UK

materials but the technique is energy-intensive and relatively polluting. And ferro-cement technology, while it makes very economical use of the materials and, in certain situations, can serve as a substitute for the use of prime timber, nevertheless employs energy-intensive steel and cement. Even the solar panels produced until recently—according to Dr. Chamanlal Gupta—never 'repaid' during their lifetime the energy that went into their manufacture. It all goes to show that accurate energy audits are essential for assessing the 'sustainability' of a product or technique.

A long-term Aurovillian, Dee, also attended the meeting. Here are some of her impressions:

Shall we see it as an auspicious sign of evolution that the AVI meeting was held on a lordly estate in southern England, converted by the lord himself into an experimental community?

Exhilarated and touched by being together with such a large group of people, sharing what is dearest to our hearts and minds, we talked of human unity in small groups, danced in large circles, shared reports on the structure and activities of the individual centres, and agreed to improve the link-up between the centres and Auroville.

Letters from Auroville requesting financial support for land purchase and the Matrimandir disks highlighted the fact, expressed by several centres, that they found active fund-raising was well beyond their abilities, but that simply providing a channel for tax-deductible donations and information was in itself bringing in quite a lot of support. In this context, the success of the Dutch and American centres with small programmes relating to school children and student exchange in and with Auroville drew much attention.

In terms of new proposals, the French group came forward with two ideas; to provide a service to receive Aurovillians returning from Auroville, and to raise funds among their membership for a collective housing project in Auroville. The meeting also decided to strengthen links between the centres by circulating something like the Auroville messenger's book between members of different centres, allowing each centre to describe their work and update information. Each time it reached Auroville, it would be sent to the Auroville Communication Centre and copied.

There was also discussion of the proposed 25th Anniversary Celebration, which struck some people as being artificial. The name 'Silver Jubilee' was strongly objected to as having archaic, imperial echoes, and it was decided not to use this term for publicity in Europe.

There was also a very strong feeling expressed that the 25th anniversary celebrations of the opening of Matrimandir and Auroville's development should acknowledge and honour the participation of the Tamil villagers which has made so much possible. The crucial importance of developing harmonious relations with the villagers was stressed in the context of a world situation where there is so much unrest based on ethnic and racial strife. The idea that of the projected 50,000 population of Auroville, 30,800 are already in place in the villages and Auroville itself caught the imagination of many participants. Many centres, in fact, already put much emphasis upon village-related projects.

One final plea from AVI France: they urgently need a French-speaking Aurovillian to be a contact person in Auroville now that Yanne is in France. Dee

Overall, however, the inaugural awareness workshop was definitely a success, even if judged only upon how quickly participants took up key terms like 'appropriateness', 'interdependence', 'diversity' and 'holistic'.

Quotes of the week? Bernard's interesting reference to 'nitrogen-fixing noodles' on the roots of plants, and his description of orthodox science as 'institutionalised idiocy'. And Chamanlal's wry comment that 'once in Auroville we had an eco-house. Now we only have ego-houses'

Alan

# AUROVILLE TODAY

C.S.R. Office,  
Auroville 605101  
Tamil Nadu, India



In this issue: Education, Mr. Ojha's departure, AVI annual meeting, etc

By Airmail  
Bookpost



June/July 1992

Numbers Forty-one/Forty-two



PHOTO SVEN  
Otto and Jeff: "Waiting for Godot"

## REFLECTION

### Losing the Way

6 a.m. Unreal hour, magical moment between thresholds, a pause before the guillotine of day. The wind still cool, but with occasional cat-licks of heat carrying the heavy perfume of cashews. I sprawl, luxuriantly, feet on the table, and open *Notes on the Way*. It's 16th August, 1969, and Mother is talking about the world situation:

"Finally, I am fully convinced that the confusion is there to teach us how to live from day to day, that is to say, not to be preoccupied with what may happen, what will happen, just to occupy oneself day to day with doing what one has to do. All thinkings, pre-plannings, arrangements and all that, are very favourable to much disorder.

"To live almost minute by minute, to be like that (*gesture upward*), attentive only to the thing that is to be done at the moment, and then to let the All-Consciousness decide... We can never know things even with the widest vision: we can know things only very partially—very partially. So our attention is drawn this way and that, and still other things are there."(\*)...

Pause. Silence, as the world silently reforms...

Later, amid the coffee chaos of breakfast, a moped blurts impatiently at the gate; the first caller. "John wants another arch in the living room." "Does he know what that will cost?" "No, but he says it has to be like that. He thinks it will unify the room. He wants you to talk to the architect." "But the architect just left for France..."

Somehow, I'm already on the edge of my chair, straining into a morning which is thinning, leaking amplitude. Jabbing toothpaste on my brush, punishing my gums, I try to remember who I'm meant to be meeting this morning. And where. And why.

Next, the garage, and the ceremony of the keys. Why, oh why, do we need three locks? The cycle... needs pumping. Five minutes later, oil on my fingers, sweat staining my tee-shirt, I plunge off, ploughing into the heat, accompanied by the 'tchik' 'tchik' of something rubbing on the tyre. DON'T STOP!

\* Note: See *l'Agenda de Mère*, Vol. 10, pages 310-311

Alan

CSR office; an oasis of sanity, the computers arrayed in transient obedience, winking out obsequious 'Good Morning's. I sit and jab oil-stained fingers at the pristine keys. "Logib Alan". Slowly. "Login Alvan". Breathe deeply. "Login Alan". Aaah! The morning lightens. "Exec. failure". What? "Exec. failure". But... "Are you going to the meeting?" "What?" "Are you going to the meeting about the Silver Jamboree?" "Look, I'm trying to get this computer to work." "Alan, telephone for you. Somebody complaining they haven't received *Auroville Today*." "Alan, can you finish that report today?" "Alan..."

Later, much later, the evening unfolds, a copper sun burnishing the earth and pricking out the stark silhouettes of heavy-headed palmyras—the old gods standing sentinel at the edge of darkness. The first mosquito whines past as brain-stunned, listless, I shift uncomfortably in my chair and grope for a book. A page flips open:

"Finally, I am fully convinced that the confusion is there to teach us to live from day to day..."

The words fall like a knife. Oh, Mother. Why can't I hold them, those precious fragments of dawn that rippled through the pool of my heart? Why do I spill them, betray them, at the first clumsy encounter? Why am I so easily invaded by the demands and self-importance of this busy, busy world, why seduced by the illusion of 'getting things done'? Why inveigled by those oh-so-reasonable voices that slip me from the anchor of myself and whirl me along passages marked 'responsibility' to dusty rooms of impotence, incoherence and the long, slow leak of creativity? Why?

Night. I lie on the roof and watch the stars wheel quietly overhead. Slowly, among the soft rasp of cicadas, something fills the chasm of my heart, something like a whisper, a promise of other nights and other days to come, of an impossible dream that is but a hair's breadth away, awaiting that inner shift, that glance of recognition. Our call.

The world ebbs quietly away. At last, I can sleep.

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