

# Auroville Today

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## Taking the pulse

Auroville Today has been relatively successful over the years in covering the big issues in the community as well as many of the most interesting projects and initiatives. But what about the texture of everyday life, that invisible sea in which we all swim, woven from the preoccupations, the frustrations and joys of individual Aurovilians?

In this issue we speak to Aurovilians from very different backgrounds in an attempt to 'take the pulse' of the community today. We have no illusions that we will arrive at anything definitive but certain themes keep recurring. These include concerns about increasing bureaucratization; the struggle to marry ideals with the increasing difficulty of sustaining oneself in today's Auroville; the feeling that the spirit of community is weakening; and the need for a more practical, less conceptual approach to issues like town-planning and education. Alongside this, however, is the sense that Auroville is still very much 'on the way', symbolized for many by the newly-completed Matrimandir.

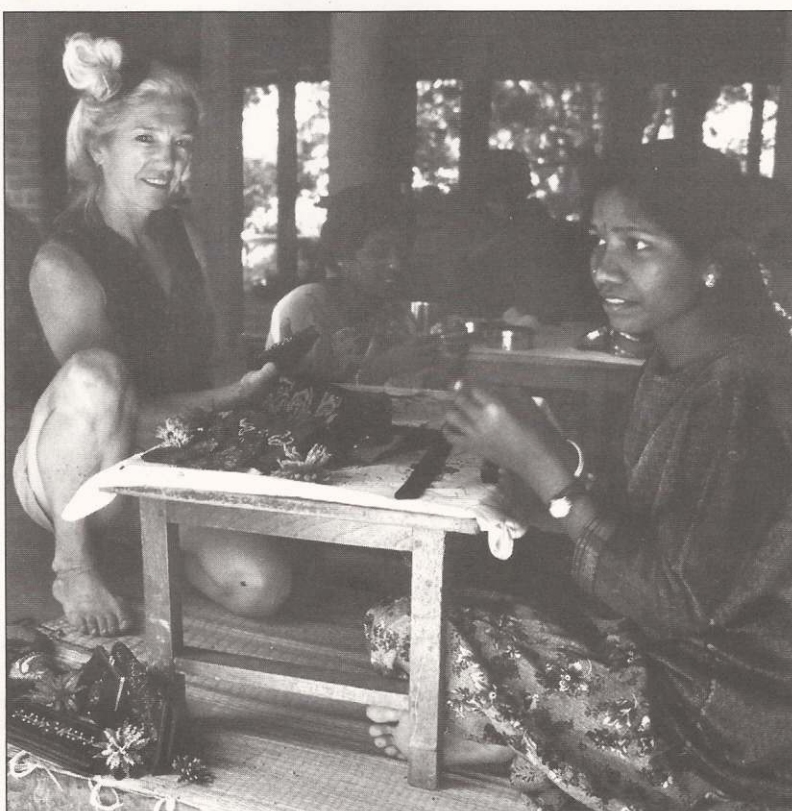
## "Something has to inspire us"

Gillian first visited Auroville in 1974. She came to stay in 1977 and now lives in Aurodam. For many years she has been the creative force behind Bijou, a bead workshop, but she's also a kind of trouble-shooter-at-large, picking up the pieces dropped along the way of our community process.

"I seem to be attracted to the things that nobody else wants to deal with. Basically, my work is damage-control. If I see something which is dangerous or stupid or not working, I usually go and try to make it work. I don't like seeing things which don't function properly because nobody bothered to think them through or tried to make them work."

It sounds as if she'll never be out of a job. "True. Most of my projects are never-ending. Take Kuyilapalayam. I started getting involved in Kuyilapalayam village in 1992 and have been trying to clean up the mess there ever since. When I started there, it was a real village – the village elders came to lay a foundation stone of any new construction I was undertaking, everybody was willing to cooperate – but that era is over. Now, nobody is in charge and the growing urban atmosphere has covered over the sense of community. This makes my work much harder."

"I worked for many years on my own, organizing street-cleaning, beautification projects, garbage collection, community toilets etc. At one time a group formed, the



Gillian (left) and Mala at the Bijou bead workshop.

Kuyilapalayam Development Council, and a lot of good work was done in collaboration with the village leaders.

Then something shifted and the group fell apart. I seem to have staying power – or maybe I'm just the cat

that can't retract its claws – because I'm still hanging in there. I know if I stopped garbage collection along the road in no time it would be like another tsunami aftermath. I also keep the public toilets maintained and functioning.

"The next step which is really needed is to give every house in the village a toilet. I have not found the power to achieve this."

Gillian mentions that a few weeks back she woke up early one morning, crying. "I'd read in the News and Notes that Auroville had just got three crore rupees [about \$ 740,000] for housing and I remembered that almost nobody in the villages has a toilet. Where are the three crores for them? Why isn't the government doing more for them concerning basic things like sanitation and clean water? The present mess could continue for another 50 years if something doesn't intervene."

"I also feel the time has come for Auroville to grow up, to take a leap into a new level of operation. Auroville is 40 years old now, and all we've got is dust in our eyes. We need to deal with things when they arise and to deal with them practically – I'm a very practical person."

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## "We can't afford to eat at Auroville restaurants"

Asking three women who have grown up in Auroville to talk about the present day's reality in an hour was unrealistic. Even after two hours there was still much to tell...



Lakshmi, Amudha, and Pushpa

"In all my years in Auroville, I have never eaten at Auroville restaurants. I can't afford it!" It's a shocking statement in today's Auroville, and it comes from a young woman who was born and grew up in Auroville: Lakshmi, administrator at Nandanam Kindergarten and a member of the Auroville Council. "You shouldn't complain," interrupts Pushpa, "not if you are wearing gold jewellery!" All three laugh out loud.

Lakshmi and Pushpa, who have been teaching in various Auroville prep school schools for the past 17 years, are two of the three Tamil Aurovilian women who talk to me about the changing Auroville. The third is Amudha, who has been teaching at the Kindergarten for over 25 years.

All three grew up in Auroville. Amudha is the oldest, "the big sister of the others," as she says. She joined Auroville at 16, leaving home against the wishes of her family. Pushpa is of bi-cultural heritage, with a Tamil mother and an Australian father.

She grew up in the beach settlement of Sri Ma. Lakshmi's parents are Aurovilians; she grew up in Aspiration community.

So what is this gold jewellery story? Lakshmi explains. "When Tamil Aurovilian women complain about Auroville products being unaffordable, many non-Indians take a look at the jewellery we're wearing and tell us 'What! But you are wearing all that gold?'" "They don't understand that the jewellery is our savings," says Amudha. "In times of emergency, we sell it to cover expenses." "Also people don't know the difficulty we go through to save a 100 or 200 rupees every month," adds Pushpa, who has a few pretty gold trinkets adorning each ear. "Foreigners deposit their money in a bank. Tamil women buy gold," she sums up matter-of-factly.

### Issues of education

Is life tough for the Tamil women of Auroville? There is a silence before Lakshmi speaks out. "There are quite a few problems which are probably unique to us. We do not eat at Auroville restaurants, and we won't buy many of the Auroville-made products because they are too expensive. We have to be very economical, because we have to meet expenses which others don't."

A major expense, it appears, is education. This is a touchy subject. While they all agree that "primary and middle school education in Auroville is great," they are concerned about the education the Auroville high schools provide. "The focus is on foreign certificates (British system) which are use-

ful if you want to send your children abroad for college. But we want our children to study whatever they want right here in India. And education for that type of certificates is not given importance. We have to send our children outside Auroville. But though Auroville's higher education is free within Auroville, Auroville doesn't pay for higher education outside. And that doesn't sit well," says Amudha. All three have their children studying outside Auroville. "People here don't understand that most of us came from families with little or no education, so this is very important to us. Instead, those of us who put our kids into outside schools are accused of betraying the ideals of Auroville," adds Pushpa.

"It wasn't an easy decision," says Lakshmi. "I wanted my daughter to do all her education in Auroville. But she decided otherwise and wanted to study in a regular school in Pondicherry. I was embarrassed; it felt as if my daughter was turning her back on Auroville. On top of it, it was a going to cost a lot of money and demand many sacrifices from the family. We were not sure how we'd manage as both my husband and I are working for Auroville services and receive only a basic maintenance. But my daughter insisted because she wanted to study at the Kalakshetra dance school to learn Bharatanatyam." The family gave in. And as time went by, Lakshmi viewed the experience more positively. "It is not as I feared. My daughter's connection to Auroville has not disappeared. On the contrary, she has become more focussed and disciplined and maintains strong contacts with her Auroville friends."

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# Governing Board and Advisory Council meet

The members of the International Advisory Council had their meeting from August 29-31. The Governing Board met on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

“This is my 16<sup>th</sup> visit to Auroville and these visits seem to have one thing in common, namely that there is always a Problem with a capital ‘P’ to be resolved,” said Dr. Karan Singh, opening the interaction between the Governing Board (GB) and Auroville Working Groups on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The ‘P’ in question was office order 105, which made co-signing of all cheques of Auroville’s Unity Fund by the Secretary mandatory. This order had been fiercely objected to and, in consequence, the operation of the Unity Fund, which receives all donations from India and abroad, had come to a complete halt.

The matter was not only a subject of discussion within the Board. Earlier, two members of the International Advisory Council (IAC), Mr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi and Mr. Doudou Diène, had spent half a day discussing it with a large group of Aurovilians. They listened to concerns that Auroville’s autonomy would be affected by the order; that the order would reduce Auroville to a Government Department rather than the autonomous body the Auroville Foundation is supposed to be; that only an estimated 5% of Auroville’s total income comes from government sources and there seems to be no good reason why Auroville should not be allowed to manage the funds collected by the Aurovilians themselves; and that, if Auroville was seen as a ‘government project’, people might leave Auroville while others would be discouraged from joining. A comparison was made with the well-known Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan in West Bengal, which could not attain its original objectives as specified by Rabindranath Tagore due to too much government interference.

The IAC, in its minutes published immediately after its meeting, reflected that though Aurovilians are the main actors of Auroville’s development, there has been and continues to be a



On his recent visit to Auroville, Dr. Karan Singh visited the Matrimandir and spent some time in the Chamber. Foreground from left to right: Dr. Karan Singh, Pashi Kapoor, Alain Grandcolas and Roger Anger.

strong commitment of the Indian Government “without which the realization of Auroville’s ideals would be impossible. The role of the Government is to protect and to facilitate Auroville’s development in all its aspects. As and when possible, all decisions should and must be taken by the Aurovilians, in consultation with the representatives of the Governing Board. The Auroville Foundation can and should intervene only if there is incompetence or if the issues require the participation or involvement of the Government of India.” Calling for transparency, empowerment, participation and networking, the

Council proposed that the Secretary, instead of being co-signatory, should become one of the executives of the Unity Fund which would thus make co-signing redundant.

The Board, too, reflected long on the issue. While its ex-officio members, representing the Government of India, stressed the applicability of well-tested government control systems on Auroville, others stressed Auroville’s autonomy. Finally, a solution was worked out for a trial period of 6 months. The proposal of the IAC was modified to the extent that the Finance and Administrative Officer of the Auroville

Foundation would become one of the executives of the Unity Fund; and it was agreed that for all cheques below Rs 500,000 no co-signing would be required.

The solution was accepted by Auroville and has meanwhile been implemented. A review after six months will show if there is any true need for the co-signing, and if there have been any problems operating the system. In the meantime, the applicability of government rules to an autonomous body like the Auroville Foundation will be studied further.

Will this issue be the last big ‘P’ for some time to come? It may be. But most certainly all ‘p’s will be overshadowed by an event with a capital ‘E’ which was the second main topic on the agenda: the celebration of Auroville’s 40th birthday. At the instigation of the IAC, and with the approval of the Aurovilians present, the GB decided to extend invitations to the present Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koishiro Matsuura, former Secretary General of the UN Mr. Kofi Annan, and former Secretaries Generals of UNESCO Mr. M’Bow and Mr. Frederico Mayor, to attend the celebration on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The topic ‘Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity’ has been chosen as the theme of the symposium on that day. “This event,” said the IAC, “will further Auroville’s ideals and development and enhance its visibility in India and in the world as a model experiment in the creation of a unitary vision that takes into account spirituality, cosmopolitanism and sustainable development.”

Both the IAC and GB members left Auroville satisfied. Also members of the Working Committee of Auroville’s Residents’ Assembly (RA) expressed satisfaction with ‘good meetings’, which were seen as a further step towards a participatory government of Auroville that includes all three authorities of the Foundation: the GB, the IAC and the Residents’ Assembly.

Carel

## Introducing Vishakha Desai

Ms. Vishakha Desai, President of the Asia Society, New York, visited Auroville for the first time to attend the meeting of the International Advisory Council.

Vishakha Desai was born in Amedhabad, Gujarat, shortly after Indian independence. Her parents had been active in the Indian independence movement, and she grew up with the new ideals of a young nation, based on non-violence, going beyond creed and caste and with a new kind of spirituality. “That is where Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy came in,” she says. “My mother in particular was touched and she became a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and so fed my interest.” Asked if this was the reason why she decided to become a member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council, she laughs and says, “Well, Dr Karan Singh knew about my mother’s connection to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and when he asked me he did pull my heart strings. Also, he himself is rather a special human being and, given his distinction, it is rather difficult to say ‘no’ to him. So I didn’t really have much choice.”

Vishakha received her B.A. in political science from Bombay University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Asian Art History from the University of Michigan. “I first went to the USA as a high school student on a student-exchange scholarship. My parents encouraged me to do that, which was quite progressive for that time. They felt it was necessary that their children came to know about the world. They never worried that by leaving India I would lose my Indianness.” She later returned to the USA to do her masters, then got married to American Robert B. Oxnam, a China scholar, and became an American citizen.

Didn’t that affect her Indianness? “By no means,” she says. “I always had a position from which I could connect to Asia, for example as a curator at The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

But when I joined the Asia Society in 1990, it was an ideal position from which I could connect my Indian roots to Asia.” The Asia Society, founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller III, was initially established to promote greater knowledge of Asia in the U.S.A. Today the Society is America’s leading institution dedicated to fostering understanding of Asia and communication between Americans and the peoples of Asia and the Pacific. “It’s a non-profit, non-partisan educational institution,” says Vishakha, “and its focus now is on interconnectedness of cultures, economies, the effects of globalization, and pressing concerns in Asia, including human rights, the status of women, and environmental and global health issues.”

When asked what it was like to give up one’s nationality to obtain another, Vishakha explained that it is not ideal. “For me, one of the reasons to become an American was that I wanted to



Vishakha Desai

participate in life in America. Another reason was that I travel a lot and that, contrary to the situation of Indian nationals, Americans rarely require a visa.” But she is happy that the Indian government has opened up the possibility of so-called ‘dual citizenship’ for Indians living in the USA. “I’ll definitely go for it,” she says, and underlines that it is important that India is opening up. “As India becomes more globalised and is on its way to become a global leader, it is very important that India changes the strict rules, not just for persons of Indian origin living abroad, but also for non-Indians living in India, including Aurovilians of foreign origin. For those people India should create a permanent resident status, like the green card status in the USA. This will benefit India as well, as it will get globalised from within. The Indian government should treat foreigners living in India in the same way it wants Indians living abroad to be treated.”

Asked about her impressions of Auroville, Vishakha replies that it is still too early to say anything. “I am particularly interested in Auroville as an experiment in creating a new kind of community in the world which has a tremendous potential for other communities. But for now, I’m just observing and learning.”

Carel

## AUROVILLE’S 40TH

### Why celebrate?

I am a bit confused by this stuff flying around Auroville about whether or not we have anything to celebrate on Auroville’s 40th birthday. No one can stop a celebration, and it is true that we don’t make celebration a part of our community life; all the more regrettable, as truly there is much to celebrate here.

So here are a few things right ‘off the top of my heart,’ that I believe are worth celebrating.

First, in the words of a friend: “We can celebrate the spirit of innovation and personal initiative that has endured and blossomed in Auroville.”

Then I would add my own reasons why we should celebrate: that so many of us who have grown up here, return to join out of our own free will. Not because we don’t do well outside, but because this Dream and whatever bits of it exist in this environment makes more sense to us than all the success other societies can offer us... Or that we are recognised as one of the largest successful reforestation projects the world has seen.

On a quieter level we can celebrate the fact that people from all over the world meet, work, dance, sing and learn together everyday. We have our conflicts, but we also have the less broadcast moments of the heart.

I want to celebrate the very large family that I have the privilege of living amongst, greeting, and networking with in goodwill. And even if I may find some of my relations difficult, I will be there for them in a time of need...

When I see our children, and our youth, then I really want to celebrate. Where else in the world do different age groups not disown each other? The caring that goes on between the old and the young; the feeling I get when our teenagers greet me; or the knowledge that all of us – babies to elders – can still meet at a concert – party and dance together.

Let’s celebrate that Auroville isn’t a community of ‘saints’ dressed in white, in denial of their humanity and replace it with the light of consciousness.

I believe we owe it to Her to celebrate the basic sincerity in our blundering efforts to keep Her Dream from getting lost in a tightening web of bureaucracy. And to celebrate the freedom we have to exercise and question our administrative body and remould it to our best capacity, albeit clumsily in the absence of examples. It could all have turned so bad, if it wasn’t for the Grace that steps in, into each of our lives, the moment we can say: ‘Mother, now I surrender.’

Finally let us celebrate that we are here together, finding our way on the path that is also the goal. The path towards Human Unity, and the integrated becoming conscious of the individual. In human history this is barren and uncharted territory.

So go for it!  
Celebrate without shame!

Ange



# "I felt like an Aurovilian on the Board"

Recently a new member joined the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation: Ms. Ameeta Mehra.

"I have had a long association with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother ever since I was in college," says Ameeta Mehra. "Something within me turned towards them and in an aspiration for knowledge to understand life I started reading their works. I worked for four years at Mirambika, the free progress school in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi branch, and started to regularly visit the Ashram in Pondicherry. Gradually a series of inner experiences convinced me that it is the purpose of my life to offer myself to Their work."

Ameeta is the newest addition to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, and has the distinction, at 41, of being its youngest member ever. About her induction on to the Board Ameeta is as surprised as everybody else: "On the recommendation of Dr Karan Singh, a board member phoned me about 3 months ago to see if I would be interested in taking up this work. I was a little reluctant, as I have a lot of work to do, and said I would think about it. There was actually no urgency as nobody had yet resigned from the Board. Then suddenly, about 12 days before the Board meeting, Dr. Chattopadhyaya wrote a letter to Dr. Karan Singh saying that he had to resign for health reasons. With commendable speed Dr. Karan Singh wrote to the HRD Ministry and barely 3 days before the meeting I learned that the Ministry had appointed me so that I was able to attend this Board meeting. Normally, such an appointment takes between 3-6 months. I can only explain this as



Ameeta Mehra

an intervention from above."

Ameeta's reference to 'a lot of work' appears, on further scrutiny, to be an understatement. In her own words, she is a workaholic. Her main job is running the Usha Stud farm, India's leading stud farm at Gurgaon near New Delhi, which was started by her late father and has meanwhile bagged five Indian awards for 'best Indian stud farm'. Usha's race horses are sold as far away as Singapore, Dubai and other places. The farm prides itself in breeding 11 Indian Derby winners, a record unmatched anywhere else.

"We have a horse-darshan each day," says Ameeta. "I start early in the morning and go from farm to farm to see every horse. My father

believed that 'nothing fattens a horse more than the master's eye,' similar to the way that you develop human potential and growth. So each horse comes and stands before me every day. I sit in my 'office' under a peepal tree, with my vet and managers, we have a cup of coffee, and 100-150 horses file past. Each horse stands for perhaps 30 seconds. We see the health, the well-being, the way it stands, the eye of the horse, if it looks happy, what its body language says, its attitude. It has become instinctive work, and I've learned to pick up things without words. If there is a wound somewhere, if something seems not right, we take the horse aside and focus on it, and the doctors check it out. It is

this attention and care to each horse, looking at them, inspecting them each day, that makes the difference.' Then I move to the next farm. This is my main work, which of course also includes the Farm's day-to-day operation and management of its 150 staff.

A different line of work is running the Gnostic Centre, a place consecrated to the vision and work of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, situated in the midst of the Usha Stud Farm. The Centre was started in 1996 by a group of like-minded young people, who wanted to create a place of beauty where the growth of consciousness is the primary motive-force for the courses and teacher-education programmes offered there. It houses a pre-nursery school called 'L'Avenir,' and has a library, a health centre, a meditation space, and a concentrated place of silence where recently the relics of Sri Aurobindo were enshrined. A few of its professional managers have lived and worked in Auroville for a couple of years. It publishes a bi-monthly newsletter called 'The Awakening Ray'. Ameeta herself visits Auroville 4-5 times a year, and has been interacting with many Aurovilians.

If the Auroville connection through the Gnostic Centre is longstanding, Ameeta's own relationship

to Auroville began even earlier, when she was only 21, on her first visit to Auroville. "I was walking down the path to the Matrimandir when suddenly, I do not know where from, as there were no flowers around, a beautiful orange-coloured hibiscus flower flew almost into my hands. Seyril [a American devotee who died a few years ago, eds.] who was then working in Matrimandir, and was accompanying me immediately cried out that this was very, very significant. I asked why. Seyril explained that it was the flower of Auroville and that this was a sign of welcome and showed that I would have something to do with Auroville. I thought to myself, 'well, I don't know about that' and left it at that."

"Yesterday evening, when I visited the Matrimandir after the Board meeting, this experience came back to me. I still don't know what the connection to Auroville is, but it seems, at some level, to be very deep. At the Board meeting, I saw how suddenly I was projected into the middle of Auroville's problems and projects which was at the same time exhilarating and exhausting. I became very conscious that I had been inducted into the Board for a purpose. If you ask me about that experience, all I can say is that I felt I was needed, and that I felt like an Aurovilian on the Board."

In conversation with Carel

## AUROVILLE AND INDIA

# Community media network launched

A two-day workshop to promote awareness of the relevance of community media (local radio and television) was held at Auroville from September 13-14, 2007. The key issue was the potential of community media to address local information needs and enable participation from marginalized groups. The workshop was organized by UNDP, various NGOs, and Auroville Radio.

The workshop specifically focused on the challenges that emerged from the recent legislation enabling community radio in India to become a reality. Participants pointed out that almost a year had passed since the Government of India endorsed the guidelines. However, grassroots communities have not been able to get a community radio station off the ground. In sharp contrast, campus radios in universities have been operational since 2000. The participants are concerned about the complex license process. They also talked about the need for low-cost and mixed media technologies to ensure that the voices of the marginalized are heard.

The keynote address, by Ms. Rama Kashyap, Social Equity Advisor for the United Nations Tsunami Recovery Support, highlighted the efforts of the United Nations in supporting community media initiatives in India. She gave the examples of *Nammadhwani* in Karnataka and *Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli* in Tamil Nadu which function on the principle: "By the community, for the community and with

the community."

Special Deputy Collector (R&R), Villupuram District, Mr. Subramanian appreciated the potential applications of Community Radio in the coastal regions that are prone to frequent natural disasters in facilitating dissemination of information and communication. He assured all possible support from the district administration.

Mr. Sam Pitroda, Chairman, National Knowledge Commission, in his pre-recorded message called for a large-scale push to initiate at least 1000 stations within the year. He expressed concerns over the ban on news and current events under the Community Radio policy as the role of the community radio is to facilitate exchange, and inform people of news and events of local importance. He also stressed the need for accessible and affordable technologies so as to enable more Community Radio Stations to emerge.

At the conclusion of the workshop, the South Indian Community Media Network was launched. The aims of this network is to take the community media movement forward and to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources. The network also formalized *The Auroville Declaration* which highlights the key issues of concern on the policy and practice of community radio. This will be presented in the future to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

From a report by AurovilleRadio



## HOUSING

# The housing conundrum

Housing is the main problem for the 120 or so Newcomers, and also for some Aurovilians. There are just not enough houses, apartments or even keet huts available. Some Newcomers leave in frustration.

Bunty of the Housing Service explains the situation, or tries to, as it is complicated. "Since 2000, increasing numbers of people are joining Auroville, including many from the local area. Auroville has about 25 so-called 'Newcomer houses,' where Newcomers can live for a period up to 18 months. But people continue to reside there after they have become Aurovilians. One reason is that there are not sufficient possibilities to build in Auroville; another reason is that quite a few of the new Aurovilians have very little or no money to contribute to a new house or apartment because they live off the maintenance they receive for their work in Auroville."

Building more houses and apartments is the obvious answer, but over the last years large housing complexes have not got off the ground. For example, the construction of the Citadines Housing Project has been delayed by 2 years. Initially planned as a twin of the Creativity project, it has since moved to a location behind the Town Hall and its foundation stone has only just been laid. The Swayam housing project has been waiting almost three years to get building permission. Building permission for a plot of land behind the Madhuca community has also not been given. Building within the borders of existing communities is almost impossible, as its residents often object to the years of building activity next door. Meanwhile, the list of those needing a house is becoming longer and longer. Why are the permissions not being given? Bunty has no answer.

Are other possibilities available? Bunty grimaces and talks about the problem of renting houses. "Newcomers are often forced to rent a place. Some Aurovilians control two or more houses in Auroville. They may have got into this position in various ways: for example, by building an extension to their existing house, initially for personal use, but which is later rented out to recover the investment; or because of a change in a family situation – two people start to live together so that one house has become empty. Also sometimes the family unit breaks up and it is difficult to maintain the asset hence renting is seen as a solution. Some, of course, do it purely for commercial gain. The situations are often not clear-cut. But what is clear is that the Housing Service has no control. We estimate that about 60 houses are being 'rented out'. Rents vary from Rs 3,000 to

Rs 30,000 (!) a month. We have no problem that Newcomers contribute to the running costs; but we have a problem with the notion of rent as it is against the principles of Auroville. But so far, the community has not addressed the issue though everyone is aware of it."

Is it possible to rent a house outside Auroville? "Yes," says Bunty. "There are houses available in the surrounding villages and at rates much lower than those in Auroville. But here the Newcomers run into a potential problem with the Entry Service, for Newcomers are supposed to live in Auroville. It is a frustrating situation because it is already happening with some Aurovilians, so how can we ask Newcomers not to? Newcomers want to live in Auroville and not in the villages, but there is no choice."

Yet, in Auroville quite a few houses stand empty. Bunty acknowledges the fact. "This is the sad state of affairs. Often we at the Housing Service are not informed that a house is not or is only half occupied. Some people who have virtually left Auroville keep control over 'their' house in case they come back. We consider it the responsibility of the neighbours to inform us but this does not happen very often as people either don't want to be unpopular or are personally involved in the matter." Some people, however, allow a house-sitter to take care of the house when they are out of station. Bunty explains, "Ideally, a caretaker contract is made between the parties together with the Housing Service on behalf of Auroville. This contract specifies how long a person can live in the house and details who is responsible for payment of bills for house tax, water and electricity, and the position of long-term ammas and gardeners. But there are quite a few people who bypass the Housing Service. They prefer to make their own arrangements instead. This trend is rather unfortunate."

Years ago, the Funds and Assets Management Committee formulated a detailed Housing Policy which is regularly updated. "It is not implemented," says Bunty, "at least not where it really matters." Auroville suffers from a lack of authority to enforce its own rules. "We have no teeth," says Bunty. "If a situation gets out of hand, the matter is often referred to the Secretary of the Foundation. But we have to solve our problems ourselves. We are trying to develop a collective, yet we all have the habits of individualistic development. It is no different from the rest of the world. This must change if we want to be different. We must change."

Dianna



# "Auroville will become what it's meant to become"

Alain Bernard came to live in Auroville in the early 1970s. Over the years, he has been prominently involved in many aspects of Auroville's organization, notably education, finance and governance. Today he works at the Auroville Coastal Area Development Centre and participates in the work of the Auroville Press. He is also a member of the Security Task Force.

**Auroville Today:** *You've lived here for a long time. How do you perceive the Auroville of today?*

**Alain:** Auroville at present can be a bit disconcerting. Take the land issue. At a recent meeting, somebody said there is no need to worry about Auroville not being able to acquire all the land because it is Mother's project and She will look after it. What do I know? But, objectively speaking, if She is looking after the land acquisition then She doesn't seem to be making such a good job of it!

Regarding land, there is also the complication of Aurovilians relentlessly trying to implement plans made many years ago without seriously considering new developments happening around us. For example, at one time Paul of Maroma wanted to buy land to the north of Auroville as a site for a new workshop. The then Secretary, Mr. Bala Baskar, supported this. He warned that a huge financial power was growing around Pondicherry and it would try to bulldoze everything in its way, so Auroville needed to acquire as much land as possible. But our town planning group opposed it because they said Maroma had to be sited in the Industrial Zone. So it didn't happen.

*Perhaps they feared that Auroville would be somehow diluted, weakened, if they modified the plan?*

Perhaps, but why are we afraid of this? Yesterday, when I visited the Matrimandir, I had a strong impression that, come what may, Auroville will become what it is meant to become. I also feel that when we have a bigger population we will be more of a power in the region and, if we have the right consciousness, this will mean that we will be able to acquire land we have 'lost'. That story is not over.

*There seems to be a lot of fear and insecurity in Auroville at present.*

Yes. Partly it's to do with the Indian visa laws – the fact that people who have lived here 40 years have no special status, they can be told to leave at a moment's notice. Even though the Government of India has, broadly speaking, dealt very fairly with Auroville and the Aurovilians and it is not likely to happen, still there is a de facto insecurity. Also, Aurovilians are not getting younger so if they had to return to their country of birth many of them would have a very hard time, particularly those who have no personal resources. All these are like layers and layers, and they make people very sensitive to issues of money and visas.

In addition, quite a few people living on a maintenance feel insecure when they see that some fellow Aurovilians are sometimes treated with brutality if their activity comes under scrutiny. While we have very high ideals, we do not have a practical economic philosophy with clear principles. This is a real problem. To take a practical example: how do we evaluate the true "usefulness" of an Aurovillian to Auroville? Surely the economic criterion is only one among many.

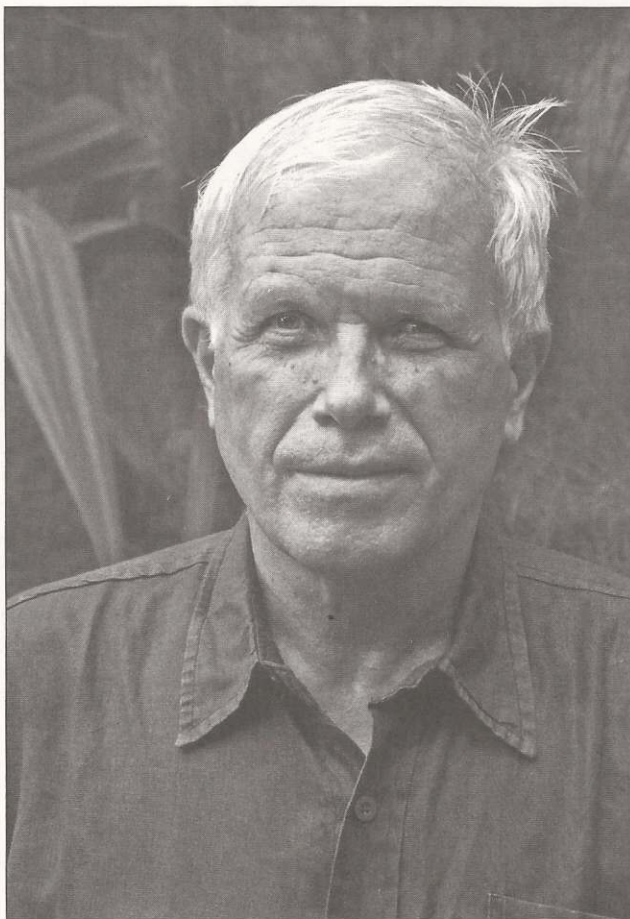
Then, when you see an apparent drive from some quarters to force Auroville into a more bureaucratic mode, you realize Auroville could end up as a kind of department of the government and you wonder whether you would want to live under such a regime. Even I considered living elsewhere. But then, if I returned to France, what would I do there? At the same time, it's true that the kind of abiding faith which I had in Auroville for years is not exactly the same now.

*Some years ago, you stepped back from playing such a prominent role in the community. Why?*

For one thing, I've been a bit burned by incidents which have made me lose confidence in the fairness of this community. For

example, when there was voting for our first Working Committee, I was one of the candidates. But a campaign was waged against people like me, perhaps because we were seen to be too closely associated with a particular orientation, and, through a system of negative voting (which was only used this one time), we came bottom of the poll.

Since then, I have repeatedly declined to be on Working Committees. After all these years, I don't feel like being in the



Alain Bernard

forefront any longer. I prefer to support, to advise – and, anyway, I believe that younger people should take the lead now.

One thing I feel is that, in our meetings, we have lost the capacity to 'listen'. In the past, I felt that in meetings people had 'antennae': they would be listening to what was going on, but at the same time there was a deeper listening going on because they knew that the answer had to come from somewhere else. I don't get that feeling now. Most of our meetings have become 'flat', horizontal. I think we need to discover the vertical dimension again.

*You seem to find the present situation rather bleak.*

There have been advances. I feel the present Working Committee has behaved commendably in calling together competent people to discuss specific issues: they have not succumbed to the pressure of creating so-called 'representative' bodies.

I always felt that the Working Committee and Council should tackle problems through giving small groups of competent people the responsibility to go into something and make proposals. After that, of course, the proposals should be subject to community-wide debate, because there is still the danger of a

small group wanting to control. That's a big problem we have in Auroville – groups who want to control, who want to 'clean-up' Auroville or impose some kind of uniformity. I'm not a control person; perhaps I'm even a bit too loose. But my main feeling is that if someone is doing a good job, you support that person, even if all the 'correct' bureaucratic procedures have not necessarily been followed. And if they need to follow specific procedures, you explain this to them with sensitivity. Unfortunately, good communication is not a forte of some of our present groups....

*Have your attitudes changed over the years? At certain times you have been associated with groups and individuals who held strong views.*

Ideologically I have never been extreme – I'm more a 'floater' than someone who is driven by an overwhelming passion – but it is true that I have been associated with remarkable individuals like Satprem and Kireet Joshi. When Kireet became Chairman of the Governing Board I had high expectations: I felt he could help Auroville improve a lot. I must admit I was somewhat disappointed. He has this very high conceptual vision, but when it comes to applying it to ground realities, there is always a difficulty. Kireetbhai is a wonderful person and I have enjoyed immensely working closely with him, but it shows that there probably cannot be any 'saviour' of Auroville. I expected too much.

In fact, I would now question an overwhelmingly conceptual approach to doing things in Auroville. I'm quite certain that the reality of this place is wideness – that there are many different paths to the ideal. This is probably why so many different things coexist in Auroville at present.

Kireet, though, has played a very important role in Auroville's development – in particular, in the formulation of the Auroville Foundation Act. Kireet said then that we had to make a sacrifice – ideally, he said, the government should not be so heavily involved in Auroville – but he felt there was no other way to protect Auroville. Because while we can see the inconvenience this Act is creating for us, we don't see the problems it has avoided. Suppose we had no legal status, imagine the kind of pressure we would be under from local government, MLA's etc. So I think the reality is that Auroville still needs quite a lot of protection from and the involvement of the central government because, in India, nothing big can happen without its support.

*And the support of Something Else?*

Yes. In the Auroville story, there have been quite a few miracles, and the passage of the Foundation Act was one of them. Imagine, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1988 the Act hadn't even been drafted, yet on September 5<sup>th</sup> it was passed by both houses of the Indian parliament. This must be a record. Moreover, through some Divine *maya*, the Act was passed unanimously by the whole house. So I'm certain that Auroville had a very special support at that time, there was clearly a Divine intervention.

*Do you feel that Auroville still has that support today?*

When I visited Matrimandir yesterday I came back with the feeling that Auroville is far from over. I also think the world evolution is also going on, although Auroville's role in that is something of a mystery. I'm reminded, though, of the time Mother redefined heroism. She said that today to be heroic is to be united. I believe that. Maybe now that the Matrimandir is completed, there is a new possibility for the Aurovilians to come together. For the Matrimandir is surely a very powerful statement.

*From an interview by Alan*

## "Money shouldn't be king in Auroville"

"Auroville is becoming commercialized and growing farther from Mother's ideal." Newcomer Saskia Kamphuis lives and works in New Creation. "When I read the *News and Notes* it is very much about money and enterprise," she adds. As she is fresh to Auroville she clearly sees the aspects that should be improved upon. Like providing fresh organic food on a wider scale all year long. Saskia cannot understand that organic bread, for instance, is not available in Auroville. The reason is simple. There is no organic wheat available on the market. Saskia is also amazed that three months per year there is poison everywhere in and around Auroville, because of the cashew spraying. Awareness programmes for the local Tamil cashew farmers have so far had no effect. "I see a big gap with Europe concerning ecological and health issues," says Saskia.

A year ago, the south of France was still the home of Saskia Kamphuis who has an English mother and a Dutch father and was born in Wales. Now Saskia lives in New Creation, together with

her Aurovillian partner Diksha who is known for promoting wheatgrass and organic vegetable juices. Saskia came to Auroville when she was at a crossroads in her life.

"In France I asked myself: who am I?" she recalls, "and full of questions I went to a channeler, a person who can tell your future by using a pendulum. It was amazing what came out. The lady told me that very soon I was going to travel, most probably to Asia. And that I would find work to pay for my travel." And so it happened. About the same time Saskia saw photos of the tsunami-affected Auroville region in a magazine. In the article the Auroville website was mentioned and immediately she knew she had to visit Auroville. "At that time I knew nothing about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who are now playing such an important role in my life."

She first came for three months. "As soon as I set foot in India all went well for me. I arrived at New Creation where I could work in Andre's boarding school." But she had to return to France where she worked in a holiday resort and did simultaneous translations. Nine

months later she returned to Auroville with an Entry Visa.

Speaking about the future, she hopes that Auroville will be a city of alternative transport, with electric vehicles (which are already operating on a small scale). She hates the heavy traffic in and around Auroville. "Coming from Holland, where the bicycle is almost holy, it is strange to see that in India there is so little respect for cyclists."

Another issue is the sound pollution. The loudspeakers from the temples drive her crazy. She hopes that there'll be a way of reducing the decibel levels without upsetting the religious beliefs of the villagers.

If living in Auroville is such a challenge, why stay? Saskia does not have to think long. "I love working with the Tamil kids in Shankar's New Creation Bilingual School. They have nothing and are happy with anything. And here I can be who I am and can discover myself every day."

"I can only hope that Auroville will turn into a more service-oriented community and that money will not be king."

Robert



Saskia



# "Be who you are and do what you believe in"

Luk was 8 when he came to Auroville with his Belgian parents in 1978. Shanthi was born in Edaiyanchavadi. They married ten years ago.

"Our marriage was one of the first in Auroville between a Westerner and a Tamil," says Luk. "Some of my friends were apprehensive, and in the village they worried about what would happen to Shanthi if I were to leave her. Initially my parents probably must have thought that I was having one of my crazy ideas again (I was famous in the family for doing wild things), but when they realized that I was serious, they welcomed the idea. Shanthi's parents were very supportive. It was a very big step in both our lives."

As a child, Shanthi had studied at Udavi School. Afterwards, she got a job in the Auroville Boutique, which is where she met Luk. "I was doing some programming for the Boutique," explains Luk. "When I saw her there, I somehow hoped my programme would have plenty of bugs so I would have an excuse to keep going back!"

After their marriage, Shanthi continued her studies. Then a friend suggested she might enjoy working at the Auroville kindergarten. "It's a wonderful place for someone like me who loves children. I've been there seven years now."

Eighteen months ago, their son Rohin was born. "Almost from the day of our marriage there was a big pressure from my family for us to have a baby," says Shanthi. "At first I told them I wanted to finish my studies, later I said I had my work. But finally I ran out of excuses, and we were both eager at this point to have a child." "We also thought I would soon be too old to be a dad!" adds Luk with a laugh.

Is there also pressure from Shanthi's family for Rohin to be brought up in the traditional Tamil way?

"No way," says Shanthi. "Of course they sometimes suggest that we do traditional things. Certain things, like ear-piercing, I won't do, but when they make other suggestions I tell them I have to talk to Luk. Then, if we say no, the family accept it; they say it's up to us. Actually, I was never extreme in following the traditional ways. Perhaps that's why I'm together with Luk."

Do their lives in Auroville at present revolve around their work and their home?

"Very much so," says Luk. "Actually, before I met Shanthi I was quite social. There was football, parties, movies. After we met, I enjoyed stepping back to concentrate on our relationship. But then this work thing took over. You go to work in the morning, come back at 5, go out to sports and return at 7. By that time you're too pooped to go out to a performance or movie. It's really like the rhythm of an employed person in the West."

"But now our son is making us go out into the community more," says Shanthi. "We're meeting other parents and children at the crèche and at Certitude some afternoons." "Recently we went to see Rama and Tashi," says Luk. "Rama was a really good childhood friend but we lost contact at some

after the break I realized how much I enjoy teaching and being around youngsters".

Luk remembers that when he started the Centre for Further Learning he felt inspired. "I put in my own resources and energy, often I was cleaning up the building on my own. I was driven by a real

more difficult," says Shanthi. "I was lucky that I could be full-time with Rohin for so long. Many mothers have to go back to work early because now the policy has changed and it's difficult to get maternity money for more than six months."

"That's why we need people in decision-making positions who can make decisions not according to rules but according to the person they have in front of them," adds Luk. "We should build a society based on trust, not rules."

"Actually, a lot of people are reflecting about their role in Auroville and about how things are at present. Recently I was talking to Denis who runs the Pour Tous supermarket. He gets a lot of criticism from people who say that having separate accounts and issuing bills is against the ideal of no money exchange in Auroville. But while the new Pour Tous Distribution Centre operates differently – everybody makes the same monthly contribution and no bills are given – you can be sure that most people who shop there are shopping up to their limit. The mindset hasn't changed. So for me the point is not to pretend to be something you are not – that's the hypocrisy I have a hard time with here. You can be rich, you can be poor, there can be different paths, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you be who you are and that you do what you believe in."

Do Luk and Shanthi share these feelings in community meetings?

"I never went to a meeting," says Shanthi. "Perhaps I should try one time." "I don't go to meetings now," says Luk. "I prefer to work, to teach; I consider I'm more useful to the community in that way. For me, Auroville is also very much about working on myself. That's why I don't get involved in the political stuff."

Have they ever considered leaving Auroville?

"When Luk was upset about things in Auroville, I wondered if we should not go out to Belgium for some years and come back later," says Shanthi. "But Luk said no, it wasn't his style, we'll manage."

"If Shanthi honestly wants the experience of living in Europe," clarifies Luk, "we'll do it. But I wouldn't have an easy time working there, and I would love Rohin to grow up in Auroville. I loved my childhood here. There's so much greenery, so much space here, and it's an amazing opportunity for children to grow up in a multi-cultural society."

"Ultimately, it's so important to discover the reason why you live, to believe in that and really do it and not let external forces dictate your life. If you believe in something and you do it, all the other things fall into place."

*From an interview by Alan*



Shanthi, Rohin and Luk

point. It was so nice to be with them again. It made me realize how much we have to share with each other, how important it is to keep friendships alive, yet how separated, individualized Auroville has become in comparison with the early days.

"When I came in 1978," recalls Luk, "there was more of a community spirit, but no schools, so two of us kids went searching for adults to tutor us." That self-help spirit remained with him. After Last School he went on to pursue 'A' level studies through correspondence courses. And this experience, in turn, inspired him to start the Centre for Further Learning (CFL) where young Aurovilians could organize their own further education without having to leave Auroville. Subsequently, CFL became Future School.

Luk taught at CFL and Future School for ten years before taking up computer programming and, for a short period, animation. Recently he has returned to teaching maths part-time – "because

intensity to make something happen, to do something for the community. But after many years I suddenly wondered, 'Now what?' Somehow, and for some reason, my batteries had run down."

"Actually, during the last few years I went through a period when I was quite cynical and upset about Auroville. This partly had to do with my financial situation. I worked in the school for many years but the maintenance I received was inadequate to live on: it's no fun to be told your account is locked when you go shopping at Pour Tous. So I felt I had to look for better-paid work in Auroville, something I never would have thought of earlier."

"So the financial aspect was one frustration, and there were others, too, that were bothering me. But then, I've come to a decision in my life, which makes me feel peaceful, and that is I'm here for the ideal and I have to believe and trust in that again, regardless of the exterior situation."

"Financially Auroville is becoming more and

## "Something has to inspire us"

*continued from page 1*

"Now take the road story." Gillian is warming up.

"A few weeks ago an earthmover [hired by a telephone company to lay a new cable] made a total mess of the road from Certitude to Matrimandir. It rained just after the work was done creating a very dangerous situation for everyone. Did anyone go and fix the road? No. Did anybody feel responsible? I wrote letters to the Working Committee, the Council, to L'Avenir d'Auroville, to the Road Service coordinator, asking if any of them felt they had some responsibility for fixing it. Only Martanda of the Road Service replied. He told me he was waiting for the next big rain before he would work on it. Unbelievable. We're trying to build a city and we can't even repair a road."

"We need a Municipal Council to field these kinds of things, to ensure they are taken care of by people who are responsible."

But Gillian's frustration is also directed elsewhere. "One of the issues I have at present is with some of Auroville's important working groups: when something important has to be addressed they're not there. Take the Visitors Centre, where I'm one of the executives. One day we received a letter from the Secretary stating he was taking over the running of the Visitors Centre Parking, that he

was installing his own staff and that our watchmen should be fired. It seems that somebody had given him a distorted version of what was going on at the Centre. Due to the Working Committee's much delayed response, this became a crisis situation. They couldn't figure out that their allegiance was to the Visitors Centre. They felt they had to support whatever the Secretary wanted."

"Later the entire Visitors Centre team met with the Working Committee and answered all the doubts that the Secretary had raised. After hearing from the 10 representatives of the Visitors Centre, all heading different departments, it was clear that the place is functioning at a very high standard. It was a very good meeting. But when we received the minutes of the meeting they didn't reflect this and finally it took the Working Committee months to reply to the Secretary. That's pathetic."

So does she feel there are too many theorists, idealists, in Auroville and not enough people getting their hands dirty?

"Well, I'm the kind of person who works out in the field and I don't meet a lot of other Aurovilians there. But that's OK, we all have our individual calling."

No rays of light then?

"Yes, some good things are happening. For many years there has

been a deep polarization around Matrimandir and the Master Plan which made most Aurovilians step back and not want to be involved. I feel that some of these things have been resolved now. What's happened at Matrimandir, for example, is magnificent. It's an inspiring sign that in the end the true Auroville does manifest."

She feels, however, that there's still a lot more work to be done regarding the Master Plan. "Recently there was a push to get the Crown Road completed and L'Avenir d'Auroville set up a sub-group to make a proposal to the Secretary about how to spend the grant he had received. They invited me on to the group. For weeks we discussed, amongst other things, cycle paths to be included in the proposal. When the first draft of the proposal was presented to the group there was not one cycle path. When I asked what had happened to the cycle paths, I was told that the Secretary only wants roads. I said, 'But what do we want? If you don't ask for something, you don't get it. Put them back in and if he says no we can discuss it further with him.'

"Then I missed one sub-group meeting. The next meeting I attended there's a new proposal for a paved road from the Solar Kitchen to Bharat Nivas, but no cycle paths! It's

unbelievable. Finally they were included. Phew!"

Are we talking about a clash between two radically different visions of the city?

"It could be one way of expressing it. Actually I feel that the Aurofuture team have been overwhelmed for a very long period of time. They have been trying to look at the city plan as a whole and have not been able to focus on anything in enough detail to see it as a functioning living reality. I also feel they got stuck on certain ideas that really haven't evolved and kept pace with cutting-edge developments around the world, particularly in regard to traffic movement and regulation. The present plan to build a Crown Road which virtually creates a wall of traffic circling the inner city is a classically outdated example of this thinking."

"In the process of making a proposal a subgroup, which includes both members of the L'Avenir team and other Auroville architects, came up with the idea of designing and building a stretch of urban environment that will be the Crownways, instead of the Crown Road. The idea is to create a traffic-free development hub, essentially a pedestrian environment with non-polluting public transport and bicycles, which is just what we want the city to be."

"The sub-group, led by Gundolf and David Nightingale, have drawn up a plan for a beautiful urban environment using the original Galaxy concept as a base but they have made it come alive. This is very inspiring and one of the pivotal movements that can deeply nourish our collective aspiration and will to manifest Her City."

"The Master Plan and the idea of the city have not been a powerful source of inspiration for the majority of people due to the polarisation it has always created. I feel the concept of creating a long-awaited urban environment can bridge the different visions of the City the Earth needs, as it infuses the original impulse of the galaxy envisioned by Roger into a living micro-reality."

"I also feel that a certain bureaucratization is spreading through Auroville, particularly in our economic policies which are increasingly administered with a cold corporate hand. Many of us feel this is far from Mother's vision and the Auroville spirit."

"Yet, if we can keep in mind that we are all involved in a huge, long story, things always look better. I remain committed to Auroville and ready to go on facing all the difficulties and enjoying the victories that will come."

*From an interview by Alan*



# "Everything is accelerated here"

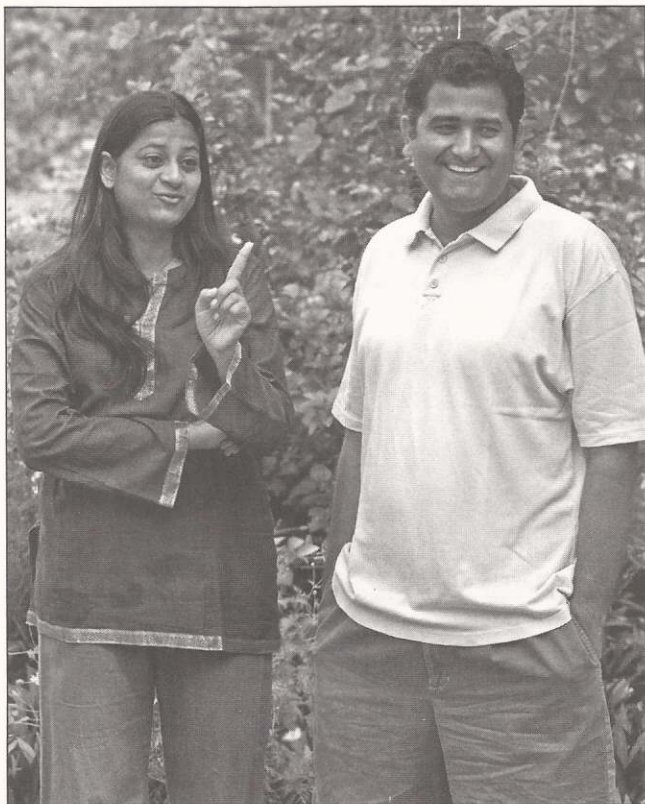
Lalit and Shailaja came to Auroville 9 years ago. They live in Courage community with their daughter Sagarhika.

"Let's celebrate!" says a young Indian couple. "Indians love to celebrate. Let's reflect on Auroville's remarkable achievements on our 40th birthday, and celebrate!"

"We come from North India and have been in Auroville for nine years now and are very happy here. It is an amazing place on many levels and has helped us, if not forced us, to grow and develop. Everything is accelerated here. It is always inspiring, even though it can often be a 'bang in your face.' Lalit tells me this as he excuses himself while quickly eating his lunch at 3 p.m. before picking up his daughter from the school bus. He is a very busy man and takes his work in town planning seriously.

What can be done about the housing difficulties in Auroville? "My attitude to the housing crisis is to ask myself how I personally can help to improve it. We have the Mother's vision of a collective in front of us and that must be our vision also. How we establish this is up to every single one of us. Everyone plays a part, whether they are in planning, architecture, road building, or whatever. Look what we have already accomplished; the Solar Kitchen where everyone can eat and be freed from individual meal preparation; the Sports Ground for communal sports; Savitri Bhavan for Savitri studies, and many other facilities that enrich our communal life.

"The 40th birthday will be a perfect occasion for a celebration. By celebration I do not mean just a lot of noise, but a time for reflection. I feel this is important to our communal life, to pause and actually see what we have accomplished and feel proud of it." Lalit has to break off his passionate outburst and rush off into the rain to collect his daughter.



Shailaja and Lalit

Shailaja takes over. "Lalit and I live in two very different Aurovilles. Auroville treats each person according to their needs and the aspiration of their souls. I trained as an architect and that is one of my works here. I am also learning Sanskrit and chant mantras with the school children at Deepanam School. When my daughter Sagarhika was born, everything changed for me. We had decided to have a home birth – you can imagine how much that horrified my mother – especially since we didn't really have a home as we were house sitting at the time. Three days after her birth we had to pack up and move. My mother came to help me with the new baby, as Indian mothers do, but later I learned Auroville teaches you how to be a better mother than all the traditions or books. It brought out more aspects of my personality through direct contact with and responsibility for the baby.

"I have been forced to look inwards, to learn to trust myself. I must say it has not always been a bed of roses. But I feel what I have now is absolutely genuine, not based on habit or tradition. Lalit and I share all the chores and talk everything through day by day, which is necessary here as new situations crop up all the time.

"I meet in a *Satsang* group once a week with a few friends to read Sri Aurobindo's writings, and that is enormously helpful and inspiring. I have found Mother's writings appeal directly to the heart but Sri Aurobindo requires close and careful study. I firmly believe Sri Aurobindo has clear directions for the world today and the only way I can help is by trying to understand his teachings and by becoming more conscious. Only in Auroville could I live this combination of family and communal and spiritual life. It is a precious gift."

Dianna

## "We can't afford to eat at AV restaurants"

continued from page 1

And now I am happy that she'll have the opportunity to experience the world."

She makes a comparison with her own situation. "When I grew up, I had no one asking me what I wanted to do. I had a good education, but whatever I did afterwards came from my own initiative. But all the Western children I grew up with had a chance to go out; we local kids stayed back."

So how do they manage to pay for their children's education?

"Not easy!" says Amudha who has put both her boys through college and now through an MBA programme. "We save in many different ways; squeeze here, there and everywhere. Sometimes I feel I am drowning." A 2-year MBA programme in a regular university in Tamil Nadu, she says, costs over Rs 100,000 a year. "This is not counting the boarding costs that can add another Rs 40,000." Amudha got a loan from the Auroville Financial Service, but as of today, 80% of her maintenance goes towards paying off this loan. "Maybe Auroville is easy for people who make money outside and bring it to live here," says Lakshmi. "But for people who work here, earn here, and want their children to have a good education, it is like swimming against the current."

### Fighting for basic care

Growing up in the Auroville of twenty and thirty years ago was 'very different'. "I still miss those carefree days," says Lakshmi. "I had no idea that things cost money; I never knew what money was. If we wanted to go swimming, we could go. If we wanted to ride a horse, we could do it. But today, when my daughter wants to take riding lessons, I have to gently remind her that Rs 800 is too much for us."

"One can't compare Auroville then and now," says Amudha. "Then, the word 'community' carried meaning and warmth. Now the word has no meaning. People are living more self-centred lives, and money has become important."

Lakshmi narrates an incident. "A close friend of mine who is a teacher, recently became a mother. She and her husband both work for Auroville's services and do not have an easy life. They live on their maintenance. When the baby arrived, she had to stop working. She was told that Auroville's so-called Bridging Fund would provide for her for the time she was out of school. But the Bridging Fund only paid Rs 2,500 – half the maintenance. How can a mother live on that? If anything, she's going to need more of everything and not less! It was ridiculous. It seemed one of those Auroville policies that have probably been designed by people

who do not have to depend on their maintenance to survive."

The story, however, ended positively. Lakshmi pursued the issue and successfully argued for her friend and the Economy Group subsequently changed its maternity policy. Now mothers who work for Auroville's services are entitled to a full maintenance for 6 months as part of their maternity benefits. "It is like this for everything," says Amudha. "One has to fight constantly, and try to educate people and to make them see with their hearts and not their minds."

### The fate of the elders

Another issue close to their hearts is the fate of long-term Aurovilians or 'old Aurovilians' as they refer to them. "This is a serious point. For example, there are those Auroville women who worked for the Matrimandir construction; they did manual labour, carrying cement up and down for years. Now they are too old to work. But what they get as support is only a little cash every month: Rs 1,000 or Rs 1,500.

"What can that money do these days?" they ask. "If it were not for us children, their fate would be terrible." All three feel that Auroville should begin to think more broadly. "As a community we cannot ignore this population. We have to offer some basic shelter for them, take care of their food requirements, and provide health care – for this is the time when they need it the most."

"The old people are not shining anymore," says Lakshmi quietly. "They have given their shine and become worn out in the process. Now what is shining are the Matrimandir disks."

It is a bitter reflection. "We have to remember that these people chose to become Aurovilian at a time when it was not fashionable to be one," she continues. "They stepped out of the village and joined Auroville against a lot of opposition from their families. And we hardly acknowledge this population. A year ago, it was so heartening to see these old Aurovilians being honoured at Savitri Bhavan. We need more of this."

Amudha nods in agreement. "There is an expression in Tamil about the banyan tree. The original root of the banyan dies after giving its strength to the tree. And then it's the other roots that come down and provide the new support to the growing tree. This is symbolic of how the Auroville family should be. We leaned on our old people when they were younger and strong. Now it's our time to provide the support. It's not for nothing that the Banyan tree is at the centre of Auroville."

Priya Sundaravalli

## EDUCATION

# The singing children of New Creation

On August 26th the inauguration of the beautiful new Music Room in the New Creation community took place. It is a gracious semi-circular space with excellent acoustics, with a dressing room and bathroom attached. It owes its existence to the generosity of a music-loving donor who lives in New Creation.

The Music Room is now the home of the New Creation Children's Choir inspired by Aurovilian Young Mi, a dynamic Korean singing teacher who teaches Western classical music in Paris and comes here with her son during the school vacation. Young Mi lived in Auroville for 10 years from 1987 and worked in administration and the Visa Service and also taught piano and singing in Auroville schools. In 2004 she built her house in New Creation. "I asked myself what I could do for the village children who live here, and the obvious answer was to teach them to sing." Because of her Paris commitments, Young Mi can only come two or three times a year, but she packs a year's work into those few months.

"I passionately believe that singing is the best education for a child," says Young Mi. "It opens their spirit to beauty and develops a trust and harmony in their young bodies. It is especially good for these Tamil children who come from the most desperate village families and at first have very little power of concentration or self-esteem. To see them blossom under my eyes in only a few months is a miracle." She teaches them every day, sometimes for four hours, and says this can only be done as they live in the Children's Boarding House which is across the road. "This concentrated effort is necessary, as they have no sense of Western tone or music and have to be taught to listen and, of course, to be still and disciplined. The big problem in Auroville is that the children cannot give enough time for the intensive training necessary; it just cannot be done with two lessons a week. Here, with the children living so close to me, it is possible, though it means starting from scratch, absolutely rock bottom.

"This morning the choir sang at the Ashram for the first time, and in the evening they will perform in our brand new Music Room. We have only had a few weeks' preparation for these performances, and just two days ago I introduced some choreography which was complicated for them, but I am sure they can carry it through.



Young-Mi with the young singers after their concert at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

"My dream, which I know will be a reality one day, is to create a children's choir of a high standard that will be called 'Singing in India'. It will tour the Alliance Françaises in India and so give these children a chance to travel and see their country. In France there is what I believe to be the finest choir in Europe, *Sotte Voce*, and they have intensive residential weekend rehearsals, then do a tour every three months. We can do the same. We will need a pianist and a choreographer and about nine children who are prepared to rehearse everyday. The best ages are between 10 to 13 years; it would be nice to have younger ones but they may not get on so well because of the age difference. And they will have to know French as the boarders in New Creation speak French, although some of our songs are in English, and they even do one in Latin from Faure's *Requiem*."

Dianna

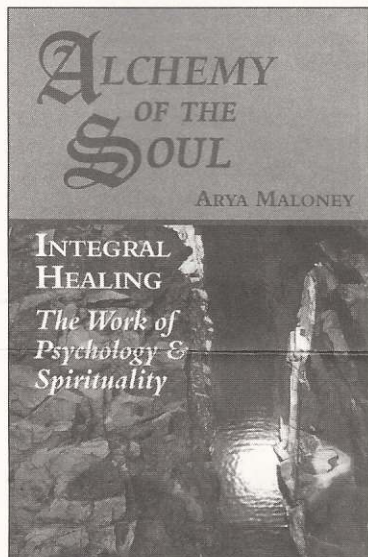


# Four new books on Psychology and Integral Yoga

One of the treats at the recent All America Meeting was to have present three therapists who have been deeply immersed in Integral Yoga for decades and have recently produced books reflecting their experiences for all of us to share. I've read all three, and a fourth even more recently come out, and find them more recently in the expression of the connection between psychology and Integral Yoga, helpful in understanding my own experience, and excellent material to share with others about the evolutionary perspective which I now take nearly for granted.

All of them emphasized the same important themes: widening the horizons of the psychological cosmos to include spiritual experience, finding the evolutionary psychic being behind the heart, seeing the pains of the "normal-neurotic" state most every human has to deal with as a natural phenomenon in terms of evolution of consciousness, giving enormous importance to a background of love and joy of being, and including the therapist's own development strongly in the conceptual picture.

I felt like writing to each of the authors to thank them, and so I will use that format for this review.



**Arya Maloney, Alchemy of the Soul, Integral Healing: The Work of Psychology and Spirituality, 2007, Blue Dolphin Publishing Company.**

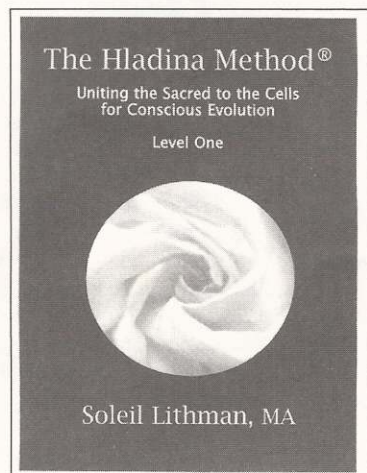
Dear Arya,

How much I appreciate the generosity of your sharing in this book – your own story, and the stories of your patients really “got to me”. The people-scape just doesn’t seem the same anymore, when I know that behind the smiles, polite conversations and eccentricities of so many are horrendous scenarios they have survived. It seems more and more miraculous that the world holds together at all.

But you haven’t just given me vivid examples in the case histories. Your studies in transpersonal psychology and familiarity with Mindell, Jung, Grof, Aminah Raheem, above all your deep understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and cosmology, made me aware that what I am experiencing as personal progress on the path is shared widely in the academic and clinical worlds of the practical study of consciousness.

I know that, despite the agnostic bias of western science and philosophy, studies have shown that many more people have had beyond-rational experiences than have not. Your book is important because it not only shares these experiences, but also gives a carefully explained and described context in which to understand them. By sharing the insights that modern psychologists have arrived at through their practical experience of working with people facing today’s problems, and then describing the map of consciousness which Sri Aurobindo has perceived, which includes not only several more layers of higher consciousness

but also an evolutionary perspective and an evolving soul to explore this new territory over many lifetimes, you gave me both a magnificent mental understanding of much of my own inner meanderings and a push to move onward.



**Soleil Lithman, The Hladina Method: Uniting the Sacred with the Cells for Conscious Evolution, Level One, Soul Fulfillment and Enlightening the Body, 2007, self-published manuscript.**

Hello Soleil,

It is a special experience to have someone who has been deeply involved with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for as long as you have also applied their teachings in their therapeutic practice. It’s generous of you to put into words what must be more of a felt-experience for you, something you keep on evolving moment to moment with your clients. Thanks for making the effort and taking the risk of being misunderstood in these deep and personal areas of consciousness. I guess it will take these individual acts of courage to bring what has been taboo into “normal” consciousness. And thanks for being so specific and clear about the method of working through the residue of our evolutionary journey, so we can take some steps to move on.

Psychotherapy still has in Auroville the sense of something you do only if there’s something wrong with you. Your explanation of Clearing Cellular Womb Residue makes it pretty clear that having resistances, obscurities, fears etc. are part and parcel of being in a human consciousness – something we should be addressing and dealing with, just like we learn to read, write, think logically, and operate software programmes. It no longer seems like a disgrace, but rather a duty to meet with an expert and take some regular participatory lessons in cleaning up the old psychological mess and letting in some light.

I like your emphasis on the heart, and creating clarity in the mind and perceptions to distinguish between the personal emotion heart centre at the front of the heart, the psychic being at the centre of the heart, and the Transpersonal Divine behind the heart. Like so many of the ideas you put forth, this is based in a deep familiarity with the insights of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and it is really refreshing to have some practical material emerge from our midst, imbued with the lived experience of operating informed by Their vision. I was also reassured that parts of the book are instructions to would-be practitioners who will be available to help when needed.

Your writing conveys well that your convictions are based on your own experience, and this makes me feel that we are all intrepid explorers in the ocean of being, that the possibilities are infinite, and that one of the joys of being is exchanging travel notes. And it is no small matter that your notes are clearly expressed, and have already proven capable of informing so many old-time Aurovilians.

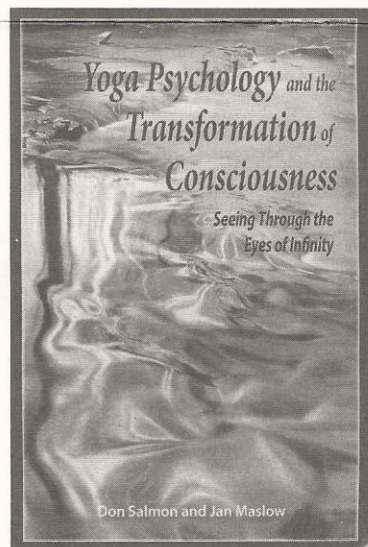
**Don Salmon and Jan Maslow, Yoga Psychology and the Transformation of Consciousness – Seeing through the Eyes of Infinity, 2007.**

Dear Don and Jan,

I know how long you’ve been working on this book, and I want to thank you for it. It breathes careful craftsmanship, and I especially like the man-woman collaboration.

It’s not an easy subject, psychology and changing the way we look at human nature, and you’ve been brave enough and hard working enough to address the huge question of what sort of universe we are living in – what sort of universe we are creating, actually, with our concepts and thought habits. I like the way you so fully and respectfully describe the “view from nowhere” (giving the scientists themselves credit for the name), and then consistently elaborate the contrast between that and the view from infinity. Although you don’t talk much about your own process, there is a clear sense I get of your own efforts to comprehend and experience what you are researching, and your compassion for the readers’ necessary efforts in following your painstakingly careful layout of the stages of development from an evolutionary point of view.

It wasn’t long before I realized that your descriptions of the Cosmos and then of the developmental psychological states were climbing the “World Stair” which Sri Aurobindo and King Aswapathi have made accessible to us Savitri readers. The detailed descriptions of each stage are so evocative that with a little bit of openness I could actually enter into and feel the qualities. How great to approach that ladder from a psychological point of view, with sci-

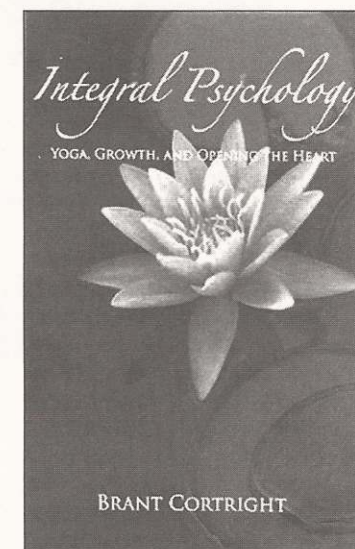


entific references, case histories, anecdotes and vivid new metaphors and similes. The creation myth is also being retold and retold in my days, and yours is rich in appreciation for its not having to be imagined as happening in a materialistic void, but as a bright birth in a vast and infinitely creative field of consciousness. “Consciousness is...the fundamental thing in existence...” – you begin every chapter with a variation on this quote from Sri Aurobindo, and pretty soon, thanks to your elucidations, it begins to sink in.

I like the way you consistently present the “yoga psychology” perspective as not a tentative but a legitimate point of view, with the records of yogis and the achievements of yogis cited confidently as examples of what is possible when psychology is practiced not just to address the problems of the sick, but as a field of human accomplishment to perfect and excel. And I really appreciated the examples of the newly emerging consciousness in such “zones of evolution” as Gaviotas community in Colombia, The Samatha Project to produce “professional contemplatives”, and the Contemplative Mind in Society project which introduces meditative techniques in the mainstream. But, why not Auroville? I’m sure you thought

about it, and I’d be interested to know why you left it out.

Anyway, it’s great that you are not afraid to refer to the reports of contemporary mystics and give credence to the possibility of an evolutionary step being taken Now, to look at the present global developments through the eyes of infinity. And you end with wonderful long quotes from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo describing the supramental consciousness, urging us to leap towards it. You are conveying not only the content of Their vision but much of the essence. Reading your book really left me inspired to renewed intensity in the yoga.



**Brant Cortright, Integral Psychology: Yoga, Growth and Opening the Heart, 2007, SUNY Press.**

Hi Brant,

I like it that you are willing to wear your intensity on your sleeve, listening to you speak convinces me that although your mental powers of memory and synthesis are enormous, they are

not over-riding a deeper, heart-based sense of knowing. And this new book really brings these two strengths to the fore. My sceptical mental side really appreciates the intellectual thoroughness of this book. Your academic acuity allows you to be filling in, from a deeper understanding of the field that Wilber seems to have missed in his spectrum of consciousness, the picture of humanity’s place in the evolution of consciousness as mapped out by both western psychology and eastern wisdom practices. As you fit the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together, (describing how the different schools of psychology cover the different levels of selfhood, for example) your familiarity with them demonstrates the very quality of wide tolerance needed. “Familiarity” is the right word here: you recognize each piece in its own right and also see its place in a whole bigger than any of them have done more than glimpse. As someone living in Auroville, I keep finding the western myopia in regard to explorations of consciousness really detrimental to a global understanding of what’s going on today worldwide.

We are on one rung of an evolutionary ladder of consciousness. Below us is a seething mass of animal instincts, but above us is a range of light. Western psychology is daily throwing more and more light on the instincts and conditionings of our present state, meanwhile reaching the limits of reason, while Eastern spiritual practices open up higher reaches. And as present day world citizens, we stand on a cusp, ready to seize on the tools while also recognizing the limitations of the many schools of thought in this very ancient and global research. I was reading your book after having read the others, and it seemed very fitting that it was such a synthetic work, providing me with a context within which to place the others.

Bhavana

## PASSING

# Mangesh Nadkarni

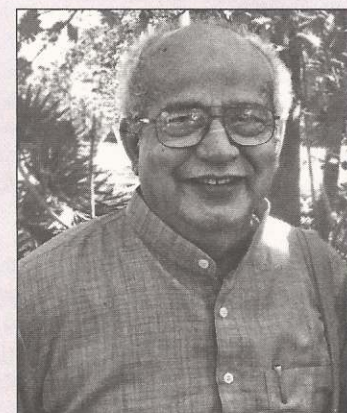
Renowned Sri Aurobindo scholar Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni passed away on September 23<sup>rd</sup> at his home in Puducherry. He will be remembered as a person who worked untiringly to help people understand Sri Aurobindo’s message. His lectures and papers in Pondicherry, Auroville, Nainital, and elsewhere in India, where he shared his profound insights, will remain highlights in the memories of many of his listeners.

Apart from lecturing, Nadkarni also authored some books. In *Aurobindo’s Opposition – Why the Indian establishment resisted* he broached the topic of why the Indian intelligentsia of the last half a century had problems with Sri Aurobindo. “Sri Aurobindo ... was in his views and in his vision so radical and so much ahead of his times, that he effectively alienated four of the strongest intellectual establishments in the country: the traditional Hindu religious establishment, the Gandhian establishment, the politically non-committed but Eurocentric university intellectuals ..., and also the leftist, communist/socialist establishment.” In the book *Hindu Muslim Unity* Dr. Nadkarni analyses the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. In *India’s Spiritual Destiny: Its Inevitability and Potentiality* Nadkarni examines some of the crucial problems facing India today from the spiritual perspective of Sri Aurobindo.

Nadkarni’s special gift, however, was to transmit his deep understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri*. In his lectures he often light-heartedly referred to himself as “a Town Crier for *Savitri*”. But there was more than mere explanation of the meaning of *Savitri*. “*Savitri* is a force, a unifying force” he said when he addressed his mixed audience consisting of Ashramites, members of the Sri Aurobindo Society and Aurovilians. “No matter where you come from, no matter how you begin, if you are an aspirant to the New World, if you want to join this pilgrimage to the new consciousness, *Savitri* has been given to all of us as a guide and a golden bridge.”

Those of us who had the privilege to attend Nadkarni’s lectures will sorely miss them. It is to be hoped that his recorded lectures will at some time become available in book form.

Carel



**Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni**

PHOTO COURTESY SAVITRI BHAVAN



# Sri Aurobindo's concept of freedom

An edited version of a talk given at the Nehru Centre, London, by Sonia Dyne.

None has ever explored the nature of freedom more profoundly and passionately than Sri Aurobindo. 'The longing to be free' he wrote 'is lodged in such a deep layer of the human heart that a thousand arguments are powerless to uproot it'.

Sri Aurobindo looked at the concept of freedom first through the eyes of a revolutionary political leader who was also a poet, and later through the eyes of the mystic and spiritual Master that he became. What does 'freedom' mean? How can it be realised for the individual and in the collective life of a nation? How do we strike the right balance between individual freedom and the collective interests of a society or nation? Why does the struggle for freedom, fuelled by brave and inspiring words, so often end in bloodshed and a new kind of tyranny?

In the course of a lifetime devoted to finding answers to these questions, he gradually developed an integral vision of human freedom that has become his legacy to India, and through India, to the world. For him, freedom was more than just 'a convenient elbow room for our natural energies'. For him, freedom was an eternal aspect of the human spirit, as essential to life as breath itself. His whole concept of freedom is based on the premise that there is in mankind an evolving soul requiring freedom for its evolution, just as there is in nature a secret urge towards unity. These twin demands of our nature, acting overtly or behind the scenes, act as a spur to progress until man fulfils his destiny to exceed himself. They must be reconciled if our questions about freedom are to find an answer.

My hope is that I will be able to convey something of that vision and to show how it developed and was enriched in the course of an extraordinary and often turbulent life. Tonight, almost on the eve of India's National Day, I can think of no more appropriate place to start than by the first part of Sri Aurobindo's message to the new nation, broadcast on All-India Radio 60 years ago:

August 15<sup>th</sup> 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. August 15<sup>th</sup> is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed on this day I can watch almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, although then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position...

This was a message that looked to the future. The achievement of Independence was only a prelude to India's future role as a world power – an essential stage in order that the qualities of India's soul might re-emerge from the sleep of ages and be given to the world. But at the turn of the last century the immediate need was the liberation of India from foreign rule. Nations, like individual men, cannot evolve to their fullest potential as long as the *swadharma* is not able to express itself freely in the collective life.

From a very young age Sri Aurobindo was a passionate reader. Shelley was a favourite; something of that poet's fervent admiration for

the ideals of the French revolution entered deeply into his consciousness. Later he would recount that he read over and over again Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*, with its passionate advocacy of freedom as an ideal because something in him responded to it. Even then he had an idea of devoting his life to a similar world movement in defence of freedom. At this time, and during his years at St Paul's School, he saw the French Revolution through the eyes of the English Romantic poets, and from them first learned the magical formula – Liberty, Equality,



Pencil drawing of Sri Aurobindo by The Mother, 1935

Fraternity. That formula would become central to his concept of freedom.

In London, and later at King's College Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo found himself drawn to the nationalist ideals of men like Charles Stuart Parnell in Ireland. One of his early poems in praise of Parnell is significant in the light of what was to come:

Patriots, behold your guerdon! This man found Erin, his Mother, beaten, chastised, bound, Naked to imputation poor, denied, While alien masters held her house of pride...

That image of the Mother in chains entered so deeply into his consciousness that it would become a rallying cry to galvanize the youth of India, and unite her citizens in their opposition to British rule.

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1893, Sri Aurobindo returned to India. He was 21 years old and had been away from the land of his birth for 14 years. The second great transitional point in his life was about to begin.

He began by immersing himself in every aspect of Indian life – her culture, her traditions, her religions, her languages (ancient and modern), the aspirations of her people. He taught English and French at the English College in Baroda besides a variety of other duties in the service of the Maharaja. And all the time he continued to write, not only poetry but letters and articles critical of the Indian National Congress for its lack of firmness in dealing with the imperial government. He became increasingly aware that his true mission in life was to work for the Independence of India from British rule and he threw all his energies into the struggle. Through political activity and his editorship of two influential newspapers, his fame and influence grew rapidly.

In his public speeches and writings, Sri Aurobindo began to lay stress on the importance of Independence not only for India's sake but for humanity as a whole. His concept of freedom had widened to embrace the whole world, and he had come to see clearly the importance of harmonising the claims of freedom with those of equality and brotherhood. Concerning the failure of the revolution in France he wrote:

It (freedom) is the goal of humanity, and we are yet far off from that goal. But the time has come for an approximation being attempted. And the first necessity is the discipline of brotherhood, the organisation of brotherhood; for without the spirit and habit of fraternity neither liberty nor equality can be maintained for more than a short season. The French were ignorant of this practical principle; they made liberty the basis, brotherhood the superstructure, founding the triangle upon its apex ..... the triangle has to be reversed before it can stand permanently.

Sri Aurobindo was convinced that, once given her freedom, India would develop in herself the means to reverse the triangle.

Inevitably, Sri Aurobindo's political activities and those of his associates brought him into conflict with the British in India. He was arrested on charges of sedition in 1908 and spent a year in the grim conditions of the jail at Alipore. It was a time of great significance in his life. He realised more vividly than ever before the one spirit that unites and moves mankind, and it changed his perception of the role that the political struggle had played in his life. It no longer seemed an end in itself, but only the beginning of his work to hasten the advent of a new consciousness in mankind based on the acceptance of human unity as a fact. His experiences while in prison convinced him of the truth long preserved in the ancient spiritual traditions of India. The only result of the wrath of the British Government, he wrote was that I found God.

Sri Aurobindo saw that a sense of the infinite pervading all things, even the most material, is native to the Indian soul: that sense is what makes true brotherhood possible. In the Human Cycle he wrote:

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity? The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul: it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the Divine in man and in all his being.

When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead, in all human beings.

When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity.

These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for Freedom, Equality, Unity are the eternal aspects of the Spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth, it is the awakening of the soul in man and the attempt to get him to live from his soul, and not from his ego, which is the inner meaning of religion, and it is that to which the religion of humanity must also arrive before it can fulfil itself in the life of the race.

After his release from Alipore, Sri Aurobindo returned to the political arena. He started an English language weekly paper, *The Karmayogin* and a Bengali weekly, he spoke at nationalist meetings and challenged the moderate faction for their lack of firmness. At this time he began to be

known in British circles as the most dangerous man in India. There was a real possibility that he would be arrested again. Being forewarned, Sri Aurobindo left British India and took refuge first in Chandernagore, and then in Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1910. He would remain there for the rest of his life, working out the vast synthesis of intellectual knowledge and spiritual experience that he called Integral Yoga. All the knowledge he had amassed during his explorations of Western and Indian philosophy, culture and tradition, was poured out into a series of studies published in serial form in a new journal called the *Arya*. It was an achievement without precedent, more than thirty volumes of philosophy, yoga, history, social and political studies, translations and commentaries on ancient texts, literary criticism, poetry, plays – a complete and integrated system of thought and knowledge that pointed to something beyond itself: the discoveries of the future. He had already prepared the ground for the independence of India. He had laid the sure foundation, now others would continue to build on it. His own work for human progress would no longer be on the surface for all to see.

The last 24 years of Sri Aurobindo's life were spent in seclusion, but that did not mean a withdrawal from life. He kept before him the ideal of freedom and knew from experience that true freedom has to be discovered within the human heart, has to flower into the acceptance of 'the other' as brother or sister, not just in theory but in fact. His final definition of freedom is a vision that transcends rational thought and leaps up towards an almost mystical insight:

Freedom is the law of being in its illimitable unity, secret master of all Nature: servitude is the law of love in the being voluntarily giving itself to serve the play of its other selves in the multiplicity.

It is when freedom works in chains and servitude becomes a law of Force, not of Love, that the true nature of things is distorted and a falsehood governs the soul's dealings with existence.

Nature starts with this distortion and plays with all the combinations to which it can lead before she will allow it to be righted. Afterwards, she gathers up all the essence of these combinations into a new and rich harmony of love and freedom.

Freedom comes by a unity without limits; for that is our real being. We may gain the essence of this unity in ourselves; we may realise the play of it in oneness with all others. The double experience is the complete intention of the soul in Nature.

Having realised infinite unity in ourselves, then to give ourselves to the world is utter freedom and absolute empire.

Infinite, we are free from death; for life then becomes a play of our immortal existence. We are free from weakness, for we are the whole sea enjoying the myriad shock of its waves. We are free from grief and pain for we learn how to harmonise our being with all that touches it and to find in all things action and reaction of the delight of existence. We are free from limitation, for the body becomes a plaything of the infinite mind and learns to obey the will of the immortal soul. We are free from the fever of the nervous mind and the heart, yet are not bound to immobility.

Immortality, unity and freedom are in ourselves and await there our discovery; but for the joy of love God in us will still remain the many.

This was Sri Aurobindo's last word on the nature of freedom.

## Correction

The statue of Sri Aurobindo near the running track on the ground of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi branch, (*Auroville Today* issue 222, page 4) was sculpted by Tapan Chandra Bhoomick 'Mangal'.

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