

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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## Contacting the Essence

**A**uroville confounds all the usual expectations regarding what constitutes a spiritual community. There are no regular collective meditations, no 'sanctioned' spiritual practices, no special form of dress, while many Aurovillians appear to rush around running businesses, attending meetings, partying, like anywhere else in the world. Mother herself stressed that Auroville, unlike the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, "...is a town! Consequently it is the whole contact with [the] outside [world]". She also said that the Aurovillians had to go beyond different religious beliefs to discover the essence of all. "The need is for everyone to open within and feel the Divine Presence." And it is precisely in this aspiration that the Aurovillians, for all their surface differences, are united.

But how to contact this essence? For many, it is through the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the Force which they have concentrated in Auroville. Other Aurovillians turn for inspiration and help to teachers and practices outside the community. In this special 12-page issue we look particularly at the latter, although we also include an article by an Aurovillian who finds all the help she needs here. And we begin with an important new overview of the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother which demonstrates the magnitude of their achievement.

Other articles in this issue include a profile of a young Englishman on a walking pilgrimage through India and, in a somewhat different key, extracts from the unexpurgated diary of a young Aurovillian. And then there is the tale of the pink flamingo...



The Mother during a balcony darshan

"There is a very strong feeling—very strong—in the consciousness that the time has come. There are vast periods of time when things are prepared—the past is exhausted and the future is prepared—and these are vast periods of time, dull, colourless, when things go on repeating themselves, on and on, and it seems it is always going to have to be that way. And then suddenly, between two such periods, the change takes place. Just like the time when man appeared on earth. Now it's something else, another being."

From: Mother's Agenda, 22.5.68

## The Metamorphoses of an Avatar

**A**s Sri Aurobindo remarked later in his life, he realized the Supramental or Truth-consciousness<sup>(1)</sup> in his mind around 1919, and in his vital in 1921: this was the reason he gave for stopping writing the periodical, the *Arya*. In 1926, the Overmind<sup>(2)</sup> or Krishna consciousness descended into his body, something which the Mother described as very important for the Creation, and immediately afterwards Sri Aurobindo retired into his room for reasons connected with his yoga. The task ahead was the supramental transformation of the physical, the divinization of matter and of the body, the mutation of animal man into the supramentalised being. In this he was joined by The Mother who, after 1920, fully shared in his work and realizations.

We find glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's

**M**any people were convinced that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would transform their bodies and conquer death. Yet both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother died. Did they fail in what they set out to do? Or have we misunderstood not only what they came to do, but also what they achieved?

GEORGES VAN VRECKHEM sets out to answer these crucial questions in his new book, *Beyond Man, The Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, which will be published in an English edition this month. Here he provides a summary of his main argument for readers of Auroville Today.

unimaginable efforts to transform the physical in various letters. Some time in 1935, for example, he writes jokingly to Nirodbaran, a disciple, about his getting hold of "the tail of the supramental": "Now I've got the hang of the whole hanged thing — like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure."

But the resistance of the occult forces opposing the work increased in equal measure to his progress. In 1939, he fell and broke his thigh. And then the Second World War erupted and required his and The Mother's constant attention and interventions, and this state of affairs continued even after the war ended because of the seriousness of the global situation.

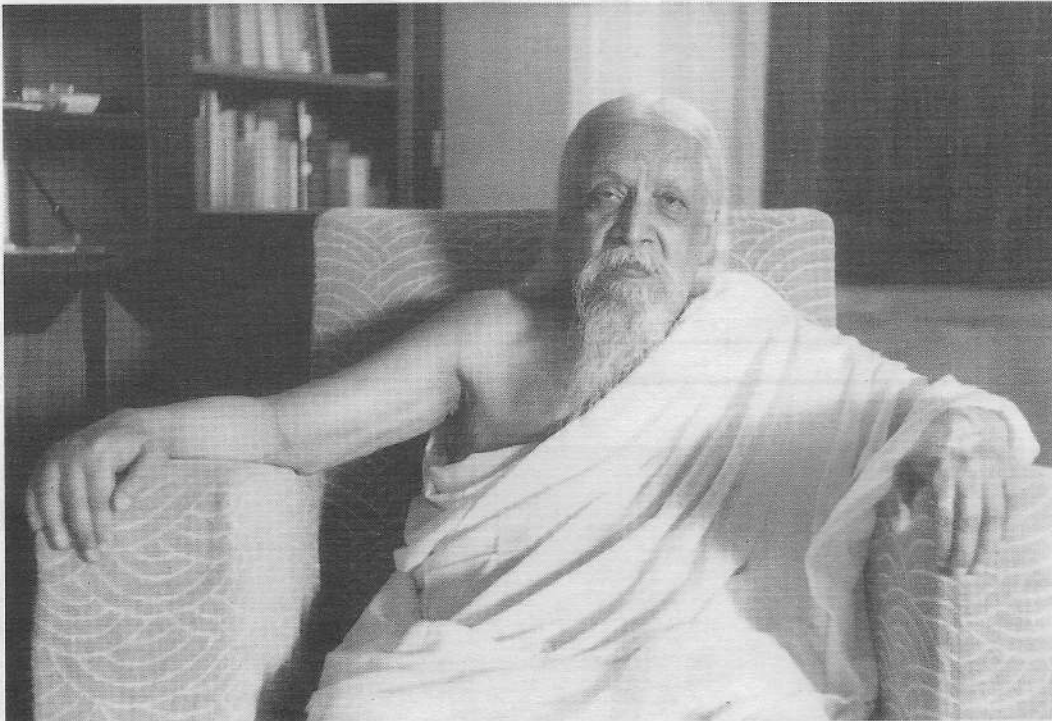
It was at this point that Sri Aurobindo

and the Mother saw the necessity of a conscious confrontation with Death. A factor in their considerations must certainly have been the age of their bodies and the enormous task still ahead of them. "We cannot both remain upon earth, one of us must go."

Thus for practical reasons unknown to us but connected with the Work, one of them had to go and work "behind the veil," probably to hasten the result of the Work, certainly because Death and everything related to it could only be transformed by confronting it with the full avatatic consciousness (an avatar is, according to Sri Aurobindo's definition, "the Divine manifest in a human appearance" — eds). This is what Sri Aurobindo has done. Far from being a failure, this was a conscious, super-conscious yogic Act: as The Mother said shortly after his passing away, "He was not

(continued on page 2)





Sri Aurobindo

compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality".

### The work continues

In fact, the work had never been interrupted. For, as the Mother recalled later, after the doctors had declared that Sri Aurobindo had left his body, she came several times and stood at his feet, and all the supramental force he had accumulated in his body poured into hers, so concretely that she felt it enter through her pores. "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realised in me. The Supermind had descended long ago, very long ago, into the mind and even into the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly, through those intermediaries. The question was about the action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the Supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light."

Sri Aurobindo had written about the Mind of Light in 1950 in his last prose writings, later published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. In those same articles he had also written, for the first time, about the need for the appearance of intermediary beings between man and the superman. The Mother would call these intermediary beings *surhommes* (often incorrectly translated as "supermen"-eds.) and define them as human beings conceived in the normal biological human way but having acquired a supramental consciousness. The supramental species, on the other hand, would originate in a yet unknown, occult way. In October 1958 she talked again about the *surhomme*, and said: "There will certainly be a considerable quantity of partial realisations... There will be a considerable number of essays, more or less fruitful or more or less unfruitful, before arriving at something that will resemble the superman..."

The first task she tackled after Sri Aurobindo's passing was the full realization of that intermediary being, of the *surhomme*. For while she had received the *surhomme* consciousness—the Mind of Light—from Sri Aurobindo, she had to work out its implications in her body. In the following years, we find indeed several confirmations of the progress of her work in

the cells. In April 1951 she talks about surrender: "This now has become the very movement of the consciousness of the cells." In the same month, she publishes in the *Bulletin* her "Experiences of the Consciousness of the Body", followed by "New Experiences of the Consciousness of the Body". The last series ends as follows: "In this intensity the aspiration grows formidable, and in answer to it Thy presence becomes evident in the cells themselves, giving to the body the appearance of a multicolored kaleidoscope in which innumerable luminous particles in constant motion are sovereignly reorganised by an invisible and all-powerful Hand. In 1954 the work of the Mother in the cells of her body clearly had reached a sort of climax. In November she noted that, "The cells of the body understand what the transformation will be... The cells of the body open themselves to receive the Force."

Then came a crucial event in the evolution of consciousness on earth. Sri Aurobindo's conscious entrance into Death and the unrelenting effort of the Mother in the years thereafter meant that the

**W**hen matter as we know it will be transformed – one of the tasks of the *surhommes* – the supramentalised body will be taken up by a mature, fully realized soul and will manifest on earth without the need for human parents.

Manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness in the earth-atmosphere could take place only six years later. It was the 29th February, 1956: "This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you," wrote the Mother later. "I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that 'the time has come', and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow."

The fundamental endeavour of the Avatar was fulfilled. In his communications with others, Sri Aurobindo always refused to look beyond the manifestation of the Supermind upon the Earth, for it made no sense to try to give an idea of the supramental to mental beings. The Mother her-

### SUPERMIND AND THE LIFE DIVINE

A Divine life upon earth, the ideal we have placed before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. The embodied being upon earth would have to rise out of the domination over it of its veils of mind, life and body into the full consciousness and possession of its spiritual reality and its nature also would have to be lifted out of the consciousness and power of consciousness proper to a mental, vital and physical being into the greater consciousness and greater power of being and the larger and freer life of the spirit. It would not lose these former veils but they would no longer be veils or imperfect expressions but true manifestations; they would be changed into states of light, powers of spiritual life, vehicles of a spiritual existence. But this again could not be if mind, life and body were not taken up and transformed by a state of being and a force of being superior to them, a power of Supermind as much above our incomplete mental nature as that is above the nature of animal life and animated Matter, as it is immeasurably above the mere material nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(from: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*)

self wondered if her work in her present manifestation was completed. "Now that the Supramental is there... is it that the mission of this form is ended?"

Now, of course, we know that it was not, for the Mother went on working in her body until 1973. And this suggests, in the light of the later realizations of the Mother described in many conversations, that the Avatar, in his/her Love for humanity has probably gone much farther than initially might have been intended. For even though the Supramental had been established in the earth-atmosphere, the realization of a new species of supramental beings might still have taken thousands of years. Yet, because the Mother went on fighting, suffering and realizing after 1956, the new species may manifest, she indicated, after something like 300 years, and the transitional being, the *surhomme*, may already be present on earth. For, as she noted in May, 1957, "Now, at this moment, that state (of the *surhomme*) can be realized on earth by those who are ready to receive the supramental Force that is manifesting."

"It is a new world that is born, born, born," she said in one of her most lyrical

who use nothing but their physical eyes, the victory will be apparent only when it is total, that is to say, physical... But this does not mean that it is not already won in principle."

Then came the time that she too, like Sri Aurobindo, had to withdraw from outer contacts for the sake of the physical transformation. This happened in December 1958 as the consequence of a serious physical crisis. During the following fifteen years, the transformation of the Mother's body is an enormously rich, varied, multifaceted, spellbinding and sometimes baffling process. Fortunately, from that time onwards her work is much better documented, thanks to the recordings of the Mother's conversations with Satprem which are published as the 13 volumes of *Mother's Agenda*.

### The cornerstones of the Mother's yoga

It's important to remember when reading these conversations that the Mother's unique experiences and realizations were the continuation of the path of the Integral Yoga, hewn out in the "virgin forest" by Sri Aurobindo and herself. The pillars on which she continued to base her effort were total surrender to the Divine, an absolute sincerity, a perfect equality, and the underlying principle of everything: the divine Unity.

We find her *surrender* on practically every page of the *Agenda* in what might be considered as her fundamental mantra: "Ce que Tu veux," "What Thou wants." It was her central attitude of unconditional openness, acquiescence, availability for the new creation, and her fundamental act in the long years of her ordeal. Of *sincerity* she had said: "Sincerity is the safeguard, it is the protection, it is the guide, and finally it is the transforming power." Essentially, it means that all parts of the embodied being are gathered and in direct contact with the core of the embodiment: the psychic being. "The very first necessity for spiritual perfection is a perfect equality", wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Equality is not the same as indifference; it is an active attitude based on the acceptance of the world, of all things manifested, all events, all experiences, for they can only come from the One, there being nothing else. Not only was equality so precious during the invasions in her body of the Golden Light or the red-golden Fire, it was also indispensable in the midst of the incessant swarms of vibrations surrounding her and

talks to her youthful audience at the Ashram Playground. "It is not the old one that is transforming itself, it is a new world that is born. And we are now fully in the transitional period in which both are overlapping, in which the old one still persists in an all-powerful way and entirely dominates the ordinary consciousness, while the new one is penetrating still very modestly, unnoticed – so much unnoticed that on the surface it does not upset much for the time being, and that even to the consciousness of most people it remains as yet imperceptible. But it is active all the same, it is growing, till the moment that it will be strong enough to impose itself visibly... This is a beginning, a universal beginning. Consequently, it is an absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable adventure... It is a new creation, entirely new, with everything it brings that is unforeseen, with risks and insecurities – a true adventure of which the aim is sure victory but of which the road is unknown and has to be cleared in unexplored terrain..."

In October 1957, she added, "For those



## THE MOTHER ON DEATH

Death isn't inevitable, it is an accident which has always happened until now (or seems to have always happened), and we have got it into our head to conquer and overcome this accident. But that means such a dreadful and gigantic fight against all the laws of nature, all the collective suggestions, all the earthly habits, that unless you are a fearless warrior ready to go through anything, you had better not start the battle. Absolute fearlessness is required, because at every step, at every second, you must wage a war against everything that is established. So it isn't exactly easy. Even individually, you have to battle with yourself, because if you want your physical consciousness to reach a state allowing the present physical consciousness to reach a state allowing physical immortality, you must be so free from everything the present physical consciousness stands for that it's a battle every second: every feeling, every sensation, every repulsion, everything that makes up the fabric of our physical life must be overcome, transformed and freed of all its habits. That means fighting every single second against thousands and millions of adversaries.

From: *Mother's Agenda*, 14.10.1953

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Death is the decentralization of the consciousness contained in the cells of the body. The cells constituting the body are held in a certain form by a centralization of the consciousness within them. As long as that power of concentration prevails, the body cannot die. It is only when that power of concentration ceases that the cells are dispersed. Then the body dies. The very first step toward immortality is therefore to replace that mechanical concentration by a voluntary one.

From: *Mother's Agenda*, 17.12.1969

rushing through her, the tiniest pulse of which she was fully conscious of. The fourth fundamental feature of that yoga was the underlying principle of everything, the divine unity. All is one, all is one single Being. Unity is the basis; Unity is the stuff of experience; Unity is the aim of the supramental transformation.

Another important factor in the understanding of that terrible and glorious transformational yoga of the Mother is the "positional duality" in which she was existing. "There is the Mother who is carrying on the Sadhana and the Divine Mother, both being one but in different poises," Sri Aurobindo had written in a letter many years before. The Mother as a body in transformation did not know what was awaiting her the next moment or at the end of her adventure, but her soul, her higher consciousness (supramentalized and therefore divine) and her inner being as the Great Mother knew everything.

But what exactly was the goal of this transformation? What would be the qualities of a transformed body? A divine body, as Sri Aurobindo described it, will be activated by a divine consciousness, a unity-

consciousness. It will be able to be present in several places at the same time and to alter its shape at will; being divine, it will be immortal; it will not be subject to illnesses, accidents or fatigue. Its substance will consist of light in various densities; its organs will consist of light-stuff and be fully responsive to the variations of the central divine will in all their functions. That apparently impossible effort of a transition from the evolutionary phase represented by us, animal man, into the divine superman was Mother's work. Her body was the battlefield on which the forces of an established world fought for their survival against the forces of a future world.

## A new body

And so, thanks to the published conversations in the *Agenda*, we get some idea of the astonishing ordeals that the Mother was subject to in her last years. Often they seemed to be cyclic, a new transformatory phase announcing itself, the crisis developing in its full force, and then the Mother recovering from it, recuperating, assimilating what had been gained – and time and again wondering about the miraculous way in which the strength of the transforming forces was "dosed by the Lord". Now it was this body function or organ on which the transformative process was focused, now it was another. And the function or organ that had been allowed some rest for some time was suddenly taken up again for the transformative work.

Then came the day, in 1959, when for the first time she had the physical experience of the supramental world. At first she thought that her body, which at that moment became like the heart of the sun, would not be able to stand the fire and the pressure... but again the forces were dosed just up to the limit. And there, for the first time since 1950, she met Sri Aurobindo in his supramental body in the subtle physical where she said he has his home. This subtle physical, she explained, is a gradation of the supramental. "It is a world which is more concrete than the physical world." She was surprised to find that the supramental world was not far from the physical world and that is was waiting, fully developed, to manifest itself in matter.

From then on she moved, in the beginning rather abruptly, between these two worlds. Parts of her physical being belonged to both – a strange way of existing. Then in 1962 she underwent one of the great crises of her sadhana. Outwardly, she seemed on the verge of death, so much so that her entourage started preparing for the fateful event. "I am no more in my body. I have left it to the Lord to take care of it, to decide if it is to have the Supramental or not... If the purpose for which this body is alive is to be fulfilled, that is to say the first steps taken towards the Supramental transformation, then it will continue today... If the body is incapable of bearing the fight, if it has to be dissolved, then humanity will pass through a critical time..." But a couple of days later came the proclamation of the victory bulletin: "Suddenly in the night I woke with the full awareness of what we could call the Yoga of the World. The Supreme Love was manifesting through big pulsations, and each pulsation was bringing the world farther in its manifestation... And there was the certitude that what is to be done is done and that the Supramental

Manifestation is realised... The certitude that what is to be done is done."

The Victory was won in principle, but the Mother took up her body again to hasten the coming of the supramental world order. For the cells and the matter of which the body consists can only be changed if its foundations are changed or eliminated, and those foundations are the Subconscious and the limitless Inconscient. This, essentially, is the reason that no spiritual method has dared to take up the transformation of matter.

Now, in this new phase of her sadhana, the Mother would plunge into the horror of the Subconscious in order to transform it. Her struggles, her suffering are there in her *Agenda* for all to read. "I was all the suffering of the world, all at the same time." "One could say that, the whole time, I was nothing but one cry..." The ups and downs were becoming ever higher and deeper. And on top of all that she continued doing her daily tasks, running a community of about 2000 people, most of who had no idea about what was going on within her.

The question which preoccupied the Mother was how a supramentalised body would manifest. Finally, she had sufficient indications. A supramental body would first manifest in the subtle-physical. When matter as we know it will be transformed – one of the tasks of the *surhommes* – the supramentalised body will be taken up by a mature, fully realized soul and will manifest on earth without the need for human parents.

In the Mother there was now a lot of transformed, supramentalized, divinized matter. "The cells are conscious," she said simply, not all the cells but a sufficient num-

body. "But I had a completely new body, in the sense that it was asexual, it was neither woman nor man... Really a harmonious form. So, this is the first time... I was like that, I had become like that."

Considering all this, it is evident that the Mother had realized a transformed body in what she called the "subtle physical". One could call it the prototype, or the archetype of the future realisation. That was the stage the Work of the Avatar had reached. Not only was the Supramental manifested in the earth-consciousness, the prototype of the new, divine body had been realized as well.

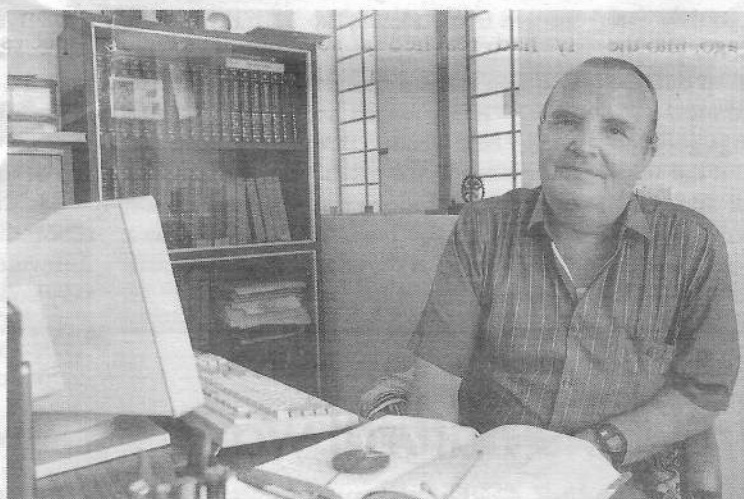
The Mother put off her gross material body on 17 November 1973. Can one call this "death"? She existed, and therefore exists, in a subtle-physical body more "concrete" than gross matter. What she has put off, and what rests there in that simple tomb in the courtyard of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is what she called the "residue," the untransformable part of her human body, one could metaphorically say "the outer shell." For her body too had been born from a human father and mother, and remained therefore in its gross material elements indelibly marked as animal-human. "There is what we might call the inner consciousness of the cells which is fully, fully conscious, but there is something that remains like this" – like a crust on the surface, untransformable – "It will only be the untransformable residue that... that really will be death," she explained.

The butterfly had been formed and existed in the butterfly-world, the shrunk-en remains of the caterpillar had been shed. We still have caterpillar eyes and cannot perceive the colourful light butterfly – unless we become to some degree butterfly-like ourselves. Who knows what goes on during that miraculous event, the pupation of a caterpillar into a butterfly? Science still has no idea. In the case of the complete Avatar called Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we have got some indications from the source itself. Putting those indications like the pieces of a puzzle together, the whole process looks to our mind coherent, understandable and positive. But in matters of spirituality, the ultimate proof is always the personal, subjective experience – a subjective experience that may be guided by an inner tuning to the invisible realities which attract our soul.

And Auroville? Auroville, the Mother said, will be "the cradle of the superman". Here, as elsewhere in the world, the preparation of matter for the supramental manifestation will take place through what the Mother described as "apprentice-supermen", all those "... who make an effort to surpass ordinary nature, all those who try to realize materially the profound experience that has put them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning their attention to the Hereafter or Above, try to realize physically, externally, the change of consciousness which they have realized inside themselves."

(1) "By a Truth-consciousness is meant – a Knowledge consciousness which is immediately, inherently and directly aware of Truth in manifestation and has not to seek for it like Mind." (Sri Aurobindo)

(2) "The overmind is the highest of the planes below the supramental." (Sri Aurobindo)



Georges

ber to begin forming what she termed "an independent conscious entity... capable of being conscious of Matter as well as conscious of the Supramental". And so we begin to hear about signs of a new body in her body. As early as January 1961, the Mother had talked about a greater being in her body. "It was as if it could hardly fit into it: it exceeded its limits. And it had such a compact power that it was almost annoying." "I am not very sure that I do not already physically exist in a true body," she said in August 1963. And in April 1969: "During the night, the body is tall and active, it does things. It is the subtle body that is doing things, that is active, that has an existence that is fully conscious. And it is different from this [the Mother touches the skin of her hands]." And then in March 1972: "For the first time, early in the morning, I have seen myself, my body. I do not know whether it is the supramental body or – how to say – a transitional body." Later she will confirm that it was a supramental



# Collective Life Individual paths

"Great indeed, but few are those to whom self-knowledge from within is thus sufficient and who do not need to pass under the dominant influence of a written book or a living teacher."

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*)

## Where to look for help?

FRANZ has been in Auroville since its early years. He is an artist, and at present works as a graphic designer for Aurelec.

"When, during the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society, Auroville disconnected itself from the Ashram, it also isolated and disconnected itself from India. Only now do we see that a living contact with the larger India is beginning to open up again.

"Why is this important? I think that most Westerners who come to Auroville have little understanding of the Indian character or of Indian spirituality. They want to learn, but certain things relating to the Indian temperament or spiritual experience can't be got from books and, at present, there's nobody in Auroville from whom they can get this experience either. So some people – not all – feel they have to step outside Auroville to experience these things.

"Clearly, Sri Aurobindo's yoga goes far, far beyond the other yogas. But the yoga of transformation is also of all things the most difficult. So where to look for help? Undoubtedly, you can get help in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. But the first step in the

Integral Yoga – quietening the mind, finding an inner peace and discovering the psychic being – is common to other spiritual paths as well and many techniques are available for helping in this. The process of spiritual discovery is a very individual one so some people, as a first step on the path, may visit centres like the Ramakrishna Mission or meet the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram to get a grounding in Vedanta. Others, following a different call, may learn about Buddhism under the guidance of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala.

"We are all beginners. Personally, I've learned tremendously from Ammaji (Mata Amritanandamayi). Here you have someone in a human body who is embodied Love. When you visit her you step into an energy field which is flowing with Love and Compassion. And when you see how she cares for her followers and their devotion to her, then you begin to understand, as a Westerner, what devotion and humility really mean.

"The learning doesn't have to come only through a teacher, however. It can also come through a place like Arunachala, the sacred mountain at Tiruvannamalai. Here there is such a solid peace that meditating on the mountain, at least for me, is completely different from meditating in Auroville, where life is much more active.

"Of course there are also dangers in going to other teachers. Sri Aurobindo said that the age was coming when all the spiritual teachings and techniques, many of which had been secret until now, would be available – and that many people would misuse them. There can be contradictions in other schools to Sri Aurobindo's yoga, and there are many traps into which an individual seeker can fall. This is why it is very important to develop discrimination, to be absolutely sincere, and always to have the Integral Yoga, to have Sri Aurobindo and Mother, as your point of reference. If you do this, then the whole process of going out to other spiritual centres or teachers can be a fantastic learning experience.

"Actually, I've never been disappointed

ronment, etc. Now, at least, we have the Savitri Bhavan group which is meeting every Sunday morning to study Savitri – which, for me, is the most beautiful vehicle of Sri Aurobindo's vision and a very good way for us Aurovilians to come into contact with his consciousness.

"Even if a group of people come together and meditate, something will happen, we will experience something. So why don't we do this? I'm sure that if more Aurovilians were meditating in the Matrimandir Chamber, we would be more aware of and open to what IS here at present.

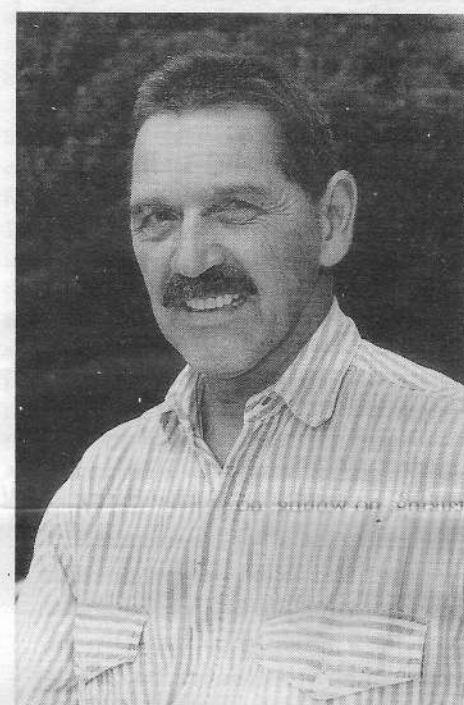
"Finally other teachings, other teachers, can give you something for some time, but then you feel, it's enough, I've learned enough, and you move on. But Auroville is a life's work: it requires this level of commitment. I wouldn't change Auroville for any other place because here you have the vision, the dream of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and you feel you can actively collaborate in their work because of their powerful atmosphere and presence."

From an interview by Alan

"Certain things relating to the Indian temperament or spiritual experience can't be got from books and, at present, there's nobody in Auroville from whom they can get this experience either. So some people – not all – feel they have to step outside Auroville to experience these things."

in Sri Aurobindo and Mother when I compare them with other paths: in fact, I've learned to value them, understand them in a much deeper, more living way through coming into contact with other teachings. Nobody, nobody has Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future. None of the others have solutions for the challenges we face, either globally or in our daily lives.

"In this sense, it would be wonderful if more things were happening here in Auroville on a spiritual level to add to the very solid work we've done on the envi-



Franz

## Sahaj Marg – the natural way

CLAIRE AND JEAN-MICHEL are an Aurovillian couple who have been working on themselves using the Sahaj Marg techniques and attending Chariji's sessions (see box) for nearly 10 years. They explain:

**Jean-Michel:** "The meditation is focused on the heart in order to regulate the mind. The intention is to bring the attention on the heart, on the divine light in the heart and then not to give any attention to whatever thought may come up. After some time, the thoughts are less disturbing and the mind becomes regulated."

**Claire:** "But we do not aim at an absolutely silenced mind. What I experience during meditation is that, even when thoughts are passing by, you are not attracted by them; as Sri Aurobindo puts it so beautifully, they pass by like birds in the sky. The result is a very quiet mind which easily focuses on the Divine light within. The cleaning process is there to facilitate the meditation."

**Jean Michel:** "You could say that meditation is more the opening of the heart while cleaning is based on the willingness to get rid of any impressions. In a way, cleaning is more an active process while

meditation is more relaxed."

**Claire:** "It is well-known that an empty and clean vessel is needed to receive something new without spoiling it. This is what makes the cleaning process so important."

**Jean-Michel:** "And then there is the capacity of the guru [Chariji] who is the living channel between the flowing divine energy and the seekers. He has an important role to play to activate our aspiration, to reinforce our will, to shake our ego... Most of his sessions are with a large number of people but his help moves each one individually."

**Claire:** "We are not so much concerned as to whether he guides us through our daily lives since this depends mostly on our own willingness. Chari is not very inclined to deal with petty matters, but he might give advice or work on some subtle level. Ultimately, we all have to refer to our own inner master, the one within..."

**Jean Michel:** "But let's make it clear that

"We use this practice of meditation on the heart as a help to constantly remember that we are not the doer but that the Divine is."

meditation and cleaning are not the goal, not the purpose. They are just a means, a tool towards the realisation of a higher level of consciousness."

**Why Chariji?**

**Jean Michel:** "I was looking for someone, travelling through the ashrams of India, but did not really find what I was looking for. The Ananda Ashram of Ramdass was the only one where I really felt something. When I came in 1985 to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I read Satprem's books, then went on to Sri Aurobindo's. But how to proceed? The intellectual approach and even intuition were not sufficient, I wanted some practical help to bring some inner discipline into myself. We happened to go to Chariji without any previous information, but when we saw him something clicked, and it was

Sri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari, abbreviated as Chari or Chariji by his followers, lives in Madras. His teaching of "Sahaj Marg" which means "the natural path," has attracted thousands of people in India and elsewhere in the world, including some Aurovilians. Chari succeeded his master Babuji as President of the Sri Ram Chandra Mission in 1983.

Sahaj Marg is essentially Raja Yoga based on Patanjali. It consists of two techniques, one of meditating on the heart and the other of cleaning: the cleaning of all the impressions one gets every day and those which are stored from the past. Along with these techniques, there is a yogic transmission of Divine energy, called "Pranahuti", through the guru to the seekers.

obvious."

**Does it mean that you went from Sri Aurobindo to Chariji?**

**Claire:** "No, Sri Aurobindo is not in the background. I do not see that there is any incompatibility. I believe there is one Divine plan for all. I often refer to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as theirs is such an inspiring work, but I feel I am at the very beginning stage of spirituality and need a technique to open my heart. By the way, with this practice of Sahaj Marg, I start understanding what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak about in other than merely



## Vipassana Meditation

BHAVANA has lived in Auroville for a long time. But for the past 13 years she has followed a daily practice of Vipassana meditation, and she spends about one month a year in retreat at a Vipassana Centre. What drew her to this technique? Bhavana writes:

I'd been about 10 years in Auroville and had moved from running a leather workshop in the greenbelt to working on Matrimandir. There was like an inner voice saying to me, "All right, you've made it from the periphery of Auroville to the Centre, you're working on the Soul of Auroville in the morning, on alternative energy projects in the afternoon – but IT'S TIME YOU GET ON WITH YOUR INNER WORK!!"

And then one day a guest named Juliane (to whom I am ever grateful) gave me a schedule of Vipassana meditation 10-day courses. The brochure said we had to be SILENT for 10 days and would learn an ancient technique of meditation. I was attracted to the silence, and I'd always thought I should meditate, but when I sat down nothing ever happened to make me continue... So, I signed up and went to Hyderabad.

What we learned and how we were taught is simple. You practise concentrating the mind on the breath, and then observing the sensations on the body, how they change and how to develop equanimity toward them.

Mainly, you get A LOT of practice – 4.30 in the morning till 9.00 at night! – just sitting and practising. Nothing else to do, no talking, no writing, no reading, no working – just practising keeping your mind on your breath, then body sensations, taking food and sleep – that's all. You break through all your resistances and distractions, you bear the aching back and knees, you DO IT, you MAKE IT. By the end of 10 days it is possible to sit for an hour without moving, and I'd learned not to expect visions or psychedelic experiences, but just to practise, strengthening attention and awareness of what is happening right now, in my mind-body. I liked it so much I cried when it ended!

Vipassana is a training for the mind, a process of purification of the mind, and only as the mind becomes more clear can one understand and explain the process properly. Vipassana, although originally taught by the Buddha, is not taught by my teacher (S.N. Goenka) as Buddhism". Just like Mother, he avoids all religions. Vipassana is taught as a technique of meditation which has immediate beneficial effects in the daily life. Goenka is not calling people out of the

world; in fact, practitioners are encouraged to marry and practise together, and no one is allowed to earn a living from teaching Vipassana, so even ardent meditators have to continue to carry on their jobs in the world. In these external things, Goenka has adapted the context of the Buddha's meditation teaching for the modern world, but the essence and details of the technique of purification have remained carefully preserved, practised and passed on over the last 2500 years.

I've often contemplated the question of whether Vipassana fits with the Integral Yoga.

During the first course, there was a point where I felt, "Oh dear, this is another path, and I've been in Auroville with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for so long, and I know switching paths is not good – what shall I do?" The moment I said this to myself, I also answered, "Look, what you have seen during this meditation time is the mess your mind is in – all contorted with cringing and hiding – there is no point in relying on thinking, better follow your intuition, which brought you here, and do what the teacher says." So I did, and found over the years that all my doubts and questions have been answered progressively by my own intuitive insight.

Later, back in Auroville I re-read The Synthesis of Yoga and found that Sri Aurobindo was recommending that every sadhak find his own path, and that it could indeed include traditional practices, only one should not become attached. Furthermore, "equality" is the basis of his yoga and the main quality being developed in Vipassana is equanimity. Also, since the technique keeps attention focussed on the body, it seems to be in accord with the Mother's insistence on the importance of the body in the Integral yoga. And lastly, Sri Aurobindo says that we must follow our inner guide, and I felt a very strong clear connection with Vipassana – and so I adopted it as my discipline within the Integral Yoga.

A few months later at another 10-day course, I had a very strong impression of the Mother on the balcony looking down on me meditating, smiling approvingly and saying "Now you're working, now you're

least one can work more easily on one's own limits."

Claire: "None of us here is an Aurovilian just by chance. But it gives this obligation to deepen your life."

Jean Michel: "Some people might think that as we are already in Auroville and in touch with Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teaching, we have achieved something. But that is not enough. This is the daily practice we need as a very basic step for our sadhana."

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Based on a talk with Carel



Rabiya (left) and Bhavana

working."

The Vipassana meditations gave me daily practice in calming and concentrating my mind and the process of developing equanimity toward the body's sensations was clearly working to bring peace in the vital. This was reflected in my daily life in more tolerance, less depression, less obsession. It was also resulting in my being able to understand much better whatever I was reading of Sri Aurobindo, Mother, Satprem, Sri Ramana, Sri Ramakrishna, Upanishads, Gita, etc. And occasionally, I'd have "visions" or "good ideas" in meditation which were manifested in Auroville (the Gift of Auroville soil at the AUM meeting in 1984 for example, the Good Work Fair, or even the *Ballad of Kaliveli Siddha* which was just performed) – many inspirations for the work, and a sense of the worlds of consciousness beyond the limitations in which we are usually contained.

You know, when Mother was alive I got one written communication from Her. She wrote, "We are here to manifest the supramental, not follow all the impulses of the

lower vital." I remember thinking then, "Why is she talking to me about the supramental? I don't understand anything about it. That's Her work, I'm minding the cows over here in AuroDairy." But now, I do understand her note, I know something of what she meant, and I sympathise with Her having to deal with all our ignorance. And I think it's the practice of Vipassana which has brought about that change in me. It may be that any technique I had adopted and practised as ardently would have yielded equally good results, but I feel that the application of a discipline, the direction of a teacher, the times of retreat, and particularly the non-religious nature of this technique have been especially suited to the Auroville situation.

I feel like these days that I work for Auroville "out of my Vipassana practice" – I mean, from the peace of mind and confidence and faith in the Divine which Vipassana establishes in my being. So you see, I really don't feel I "go out" – I'm going "in" to my centre, which is at the centre of all, Auroville also.

## Suf-fused with Love

RABIYA came to Auroville in 1993. She had been a spiritual seeker for many years. In 1982, while still in America, she was initiated into Sufism, and this practice became a central part of her life.

"Sufism, a mystical path with its origins in the Middle East, teaches you to open your heart in order to achieve union with the Divine. You could call it a yoga," Rabiya says. "Its practices are based on meditation, mantra and breath. There is a strong tradition of Sufism in India. It was introduced in America in the 1970's."

"There are millions of ways to go, but we all have the same destination. What Sufism has taught me is to honour the light. There was a feeling for me when I was initiated of going through a door when you don't know what's on the other side. Just being led by my heart, because love is the essence of Sufism. It's very evident that this devotional way is my way, but the way of devotion is not so much evident in Auroville."

Next August, Rabiya will return to America to join a new Sufi community in the Southwest. She has no regrets about leaving Auroville because "It will be wonderful to be part of this new adventure, to be there from the beginning." But she will

always be connected to Auroville. "I feel like a global gypsy," Rabiya says. "But I have great hopes for Auroville. I feel like people are getting more solid in their own path, so they're less worried about others. When you are feeling well, you can open up and acknowledge other paths and trust everyone to find their own way. After all, no one can tell another person what their path is. Of course in Auroville, everyone should be well grounded in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings also."

Has she ever felt Sufism and the Integral Yoga were incompatible? "No, never," Rabiya replies. "When I read *The Life Divine*, I was very touched. It's completely compatible with Sufism..."

I asked Rabiya if she had anything else she wanted to say to Auroville.

"Open your heart, Auroville," Rabiya answered. "Express it and create a space for Love. Mother had such a loving heart. Enjoy. Let's have lots of joy in Auroville."

From an interview by Jill

### Sahaj Marg – the Natural Path (contd.)

intellectual terms. I suppose that if I would have known The Mother in her physical body, it might have been different."

Jean Michel: "The need for the human contact was essential for me. Chariji describes himself as one of the numerous wells available to drink from. And he says that if one day you feel that he cannot take you any further, you may go and look somewhere else. We have to be honest with ourselves and see if progress is still going on... Till now, I am very satisfied with his help. I see myself changing, perhaps not as fast as I would like to, but at



## Completing the Circle

PAULETTE came to Auroville in 1985 after being connected with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for twelve years. She has done extensive research into the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and has published various compilations.

**“W**hen some Aurovilians say that nobody should seek spiritual knowledge outside Sri Aurobindo and Mother they ignore certain things. Sri Aurobindo, for example, never claimed to have discovered anything new in his presentations of involution and evolution, of an ideal society or the supermind: they are a synthesis of the basic tenets of Hinduism. The main differences between his path and previous paths of yoga are, firstly, that he saw the descent of the supramental consciousness as the crowning of his yoga and, secondly, that he expected all humanity to undergo, by stages, this transformation and not just exceptional individuals as in the past.

“Sri Aurobindo's yoga involves three realizations and transformations – the psychic, spiritual and supramental transformations – but the means for achieving the first two, which are absolute prerequisites for achieving the final one, are common to all paths of yoga. In this context, it's worth remembering that Auroville is not the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and that, unlike for the Ashramites, Mother never enforced any specific spiritual path on the Aurovilians. She said that goodwill, a willingness to work for human unity and to be a willing servant of the Divine Consciousness were enough. Of course, Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's works have everything within them that you need to make spiritual progress, and to follow this path is ideal for an Aurovillian. But I see spirituality like a supermarket. Not everybody should be expected to eat caviar, particularly if they need, at some stage, something simpler or easier to digest – this is why there are so many different spiritual paths in India, paths

to suit differences in individuals' inner natures and predispositions. Sri Aurobindo is not easy to read or understand; he himself said that his path was very difficult, and that the realizations proper to it begin where the other paths finish. So if you are not ready to start with Sri Aurobindo you should start somewhere else. In this sense, there should be complete freedom for Aurovilians to pursue their own spiritual paths: nobody should try to impose anything. The only problem that must be guarded against is someone saying, “My path is the only path”, because this is turning it into a religion in the narrow sense of the term.

“My understanding of all of this came gradually. When I first came to the Ashram, immediately after Mother left her body, I was drawn by the revolutionary side of Sri Aurobindo. This appealed to me because, like many other students in the late 1960's, I was a revolutionary myself, and since

**“My guru is the ideal society, and I will always be attracted to attempts at creating the ideal society. And since no one has gone so far as Sri Aurobindo in exploring this ideal, and no one has tried to implement it so perfectly as Mother has in Auroville, then this is my place.”**

childhood I'd been dreaming of an ideal society. When I arrived I didn't know much about him, but as I read him more deeply and talked to his disciples, I was completely taken over because I recognised he was describing my dream. I had turned to yoga as a devotee, a bhakti...

“But how to put his vision into practice? In the Ashram the goal of supramental transformation was pursued on an individual basis, while Auroville, which Mother

described as ‘the cradle of the supeman’, called for a collective yoga. This was one of the reasons I left the Ashram to come to Auroville, because Auroville was founded to realize an ideal society.

“However, when I arrived in Auroville I couldn't understand what was happening here; there was so much confusion regarding what Mother had wanted. And so I began researching into the archives, reading the original documents, to find out what Mother had truly intended. It was clear to me that whatever Mother said I would surrender to, and I assumed that once the Aurovilians understood what Mother expected, they would do the same. But even after publishing my research things moved very slowly and there was much discord. All this was extremely painful to me: it was such a contrast to the Ashram where, having an inner relationship with two of Sri Aurobindo's major disciples, I had bathed in a very special atmosphere.

“So I felt I had to leave Auroville, to find a place with a deep spiritual environment where I could continue to research into Sri Aurobindo, Mother and yoga. I went and stayed at Vivekananda Kendra, and then at Ramana Maharshi's Ashram and then at Mata Amritanandamayi's Ashram in Kerala. At each place I was welcomed and invited

“These experiences, however, were essential: they were all helping complete a larger mosaic. At Mata Amritanandamayi's Ashram, for example, I came into contact with a specific path of yoga. Her way is that of the heart and of a very tough karma yoga which her followers do out of adoration of the guru. This fascinated me, and yet it ultimately brought me back to Auroville. Because I realized that while there are exceptionally pure beings, their followers are much the same everywhere. What made Ammaji's Ashram so attractive was the presence and charisma of the living shakti, a force which could dissolve mountains and make elephants fly. This helped me finally feel compassion and understanding for the Aurovilians, for many of them had never met Mother, and many had jumped straight into Auroville without having undergone any spiritual apprenticeship.

“Other things also decided me to come back. Some of the long-term Aurovilians who had been rigidly fundamentalist in their approach, excluding all other paths of yoga, began to open up to the true spirit of India's heritage. Also I finally realized that my guru is even beyond Sri Aurobindo or Mother who, for me, have no longer a form but are infinite, one with the Supramental Consciousness. My guru is the ideal society, and I will always be attracted to attempts at creating the ideal society. And since no one has gone so far as Sri Aurobindo in exploring this ideal, and no one has tried to implement it so perfectly as Mother has in Auroville, then this is my place.

“Yet while I know now I will never be able to quit Auroville, I continue my experimenting and searching. Sri Aurobindo described his yoga as a synthesis of all yogas. You don't have to do all the other yogas, but he asks us to become aware of the essence of each of the other paths and to perfect them within the path of the Integral Yoga. If, however, you are unable to do this, you can eventually seek it outside from the masters of these other paths. Within this context, I went on exploring

(continued on page 7)

## Summa Theologica Auroviliana or “No, not on the cheek...”

BILL came to Auroville in 1973. After working on Matrimandir for many years, he is now Director of the Centre for Scientific Research and a member of the Auroville Today team.

**T**oo much belly gazing on the spirituality of Auroville, spare us. Nonetheless, as an advertized spiritual community, there is that need to continually clarify the misunderstandings and controversies that abound and persist around us and within us. Yes, it is all right to discuss them. Traditional observers of the Auroville scene look for traditional spiritual practices. New age observers look for New Age practices, and so on. All are disappointed.

From within Auroville, there is a cacophony of critics of various persuasions. If I tell you the secret of spirituality, you won't believe me. But I can tell you some history. Personally, I have always felt the need of teachers, guides and community. The first girl I really seriously kissed, you know, with beating heart and sweating palms (mine, not hers) whispered to me: “No, not on the cheek, on the lips!” The teaching has always been there when I needed it. Most of us can look back on our lives and agree to that, I think. When the going got pretty

rough in Auroville in the mid-seventies, Mother Meera, then a teenager in Pondicherry, advised me: “Have faith, and keep going.” True, you can get the same advice from most rickshaw drivers. That's the beauty of it. Someone might also ask: “Do you need Mother Meera when you have Sri Aurobindo and Mother?” No. “Do you need Sri Aurobindo and Mother when you have your own soul?” No. But they really help because I am still what I am – not fully out of the ignorance.

While I was contemplating coming to Auroville and pondering the risk that it involved, Swami Muktananda happened to be in California and gave me a swat with his bunch of peacock feathers. I left immediately for Auroville. I probably would have anyway, but who knows? It was like the Zen Master in Japan who gently placed his stick against my spine: I straightened up. At this stage of the game, most of us have some knowledge of the basics and theory of spirituality. I know myself as a luminous

being who looked at this life from the subtle dimension and chose to come down the “amber stairs” of birth and learn my way out of the ignorance. I know myself as an immortal in a universe created and sustained by Love. All is one. These are the clichés of our time. Can I always see or hear the truth of them? No. This is why I need all the help I can get. And that help is always available. And it comes from many sources, from the 10,000 year old verses of the Vedas, from Caroline Myss's new book *Anatomy of the Spirit*, from the *Five Tibetan Rites* (a physical exercise program), from the music of Mike Rowland, etc. The ultimate pragmatism of the spiritual law of “whatever helps” only brings us back to the basic point that everything can and will help, if we have the consciousness to experience it as such.

Once as a child I had the experience that all is one. My education and culture

**“Before I came to Auroville, while pondering the risk that it involved, Swami Muktananda happened to be in California and gave me a swat with his bunch of peacock feathers. I left immediately for Auroville.”**

taught me the opposite, so I forgot the experience. I had to work my way back, through study, through practices, through a way of life, a path. Now I can see all of it as a preparation for Auroville. When I finally got to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the treasure was obvious. Others have not been so lucky. Not everyone can see how their work clarifies all life as yoga, or how it affirms process and evolution. And it goes much further: “No religion,” though I am still inclined to that mentality. Slowly I move on from thousands of years of war, torture and “the truth is on my side.” I don't have to burn or be burned at the stake anymore. That's a relief, though it is still a tendency that is not yet extinct. If I feel like consulting some guru or palm reader, that is not heresy or the abyss, though my mind in its play and multiple personalities may invoke that judgment down on myself. And someone in the community will reflect it back to me. The purist, the clown, the saint, the sinner, all the players in the drama, act, perform and have a moment of attention until the alarm goes off and it is time to wake up. Me, Auroville, the world, wake up slowly. What a grace that there is always something or someone who puts a hand on my shoulder reminding: “Come on, it's time to leave another night behind.” Because I am really lucky, sometimes it is an angel who kisses me on the lips.

BILL



# Living the Integral Yoga with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

BHAGA has lived in Auroville for many years. For some time now she has been giving introductions to the Integral Yoga for guests and newcomers, introductions which she has recently supplemented by inner 'exercises' as described by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother themselves. Here she describes something of her own spiritual journey.

How did I go about my own *sadhana* (practice of the yoga) since I came to know of the Integral Yoga? Looking back, there are several episodes I can now identify as important:

In my late twenties, life had become meaningless and uninteresting for me, unless it could be changed into something truly worth living, that is, something based on true love and true joy. So, it was only when I discovered the Integral Yoga that I became interested at all in life and also in yoga. Only the Integral Yoga addressed that still vague, but very intense need for a "Life Divine" that I felt, and only that yoga gave the clear means to make life a divine life, right here upon Earth. So, from the start, I put all my concentration on the Integral Yoga, believing that it contained all the answers I would ever need to achieve that great evolutionary goal.

The opening pages of *The Life Divine* were my first contact with Sri Aurobindo, and they gave me a really illuminating answer about the meaning and purpose of life. But I quickly realized that it was not in *The Life Divine* or in any other rather "introductory" books that I could find the practical details needed to actually practise this Yoga. So, before I discovered the several volumes of *Letters on Yoga* which would later on be just what I needed, I proceeded to explore all the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in my own way: I just leafed through them and marked for myself everything which immediately made sense to me, or gave me a flash of intuitive perception of a Truth, or simply touched me, or gave me some kind of method I could start experimenting with right away.

Little by little, all the long or short passages that I kept collecting in that way like gems became my growing treasure, the

spiritual honey I could feed on and draw inspiration from at any time, while at the same time forming the basis on which I actually started to practise the Yoga. My favourite "gems" I found especially in *Thoughts and Glimpses*, and in *Thoughts and Aphorisms*, and also in the last paragraphs or pages of each chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Usually the body of each chapter gives the necessary information for the mind, and then, at the end, Sri Aurobindo delivers the final "blow" by giving

**"Just reading through all this vastness and magnificence and depth cannot but have an effect on your consciousness."**

ing you, in a few lines or paragraphs, a taste of the actual spiritual experience he had been speaking of before. And all of a sudden it is as if a window or a door opens in front of you, and you get a brief, but full blast of the real thing! It used to take my breath away, chapter after chapter it was so incredibly beautiful. And when, still later, I became sufficiently fluent in English to plunge into *Savitri*, it was like feasting on beauty at every line... what a treat! And just reading through all this vastness and magnificence and depth cannot but have an effect on your consciousness, and as you read again and again for the sheer delight of it. In this way, reading became a part of the transformative process which the yoga basically is for the consciousness. You start breathing another air, and living more and more in it.

At the beginning, my approach to the Yoga was very mental; I had closed myself

Finally there is something else which sets Sri Aurobindo's yoga apart. For as part of the process which culminates with the transformation of the body, it deals with one's unconscious, with one's own darkness. And it is by showing that the only way of resolving our personal impossibilities is by offering them to the Divine for transformation that this yoga, unlike the others, leads one all the way through to the final resolution.

"Mother said of the Ashram — but it obviously applies to Auroville as well — that when you are outside your obstacles are lessened, but so are your virtues. In other words, as soon as you come to Auroville all the worst tends to rise up in you or happen to you because this is the place of realization, and realization cannot happen unless all the darkness is dealt with. Moreover, since this yoga is a collective yoga, you are dealing not only with your own difficulties, but also with the difficulties of humanity as a whole, of which we are a mirror. This is why it is so slow, so difficult. But once you are in the game of Auroville, you can't walk out..."

*From an interview by Alan*



Bhaga

completely to all the joyful *bhakti* (love for the Divine) which had been so spontaneous for me as a child; as a young adult, my own sharp mind had become the only thing in the world that I trusted. But after a while, trying to figure out how exactly to effect in myself the numerous changes I could already see were needed, I had to realize that my mind—and, for that matter, any human mind—was quite incapable of doing it, and that I would need advice and help. At that time the word "guru" would have been unacceptable to my fiercely independent Western mind; but "advisor" or "guide" was okay. But who?...

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were obviously the very best possible advisors and guides regarding the Integral Yoga they themselves had elaborated, and to reach the evolutionary goal they had revealed to humanity; that they were supposedly "dead" was no problem for me. I just started addressing myself to them inwardly, and putting directly to them whatever important question or problem I did not easily find the answer to in their books. And, every time, I did get the answer, either inwardly, or in their books after all, or through the unfolding events that followed in my own life.

After some time, proceeding in this way, the most-needed inner event happened: the breakthrough into the space of the soul (the "psychic being", as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother call it) and the subsequent coming to the front of the psychic being itself—mostly, I believe, thanks to the one-pointedness and the intensity of my thirst for it, reinforced by the non-stop practice of the inner "exercises" described by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to help that happen.

This started the long process of "psychic transformation" of my outer nature (mental, vital and also physical) which is still going on in me. But the action of the psychic being and the total *bhakti* and surrender to the Divine (the Divine as The Mother, particularly, and as the Beloved of our soul) which it characteristically provokes, also called in the direct action of the Grace from above; the Divine Force then started opening first the higher, and, much later also the lower, chakras to the Higher Consciousness in a process that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother call the Spiritual Transformation—which is also still going on in me, along with the Psychic one; the two are meant to complement and help each other, before any direct supramental influence is possible and any real "supramentalization" can start. The cells' consciousness may awaken quite early though, as I saw.

So, my own spiritual development happens to have been a rather "typical" example of the way it generally unfolds in the Integral Yoga, as described by Sri Aurobindo and by The Mother—especially in her Agenda; and it is entirely thanks to them that it has happened and keeps happening in me as the days and years go by. The inner relationship which started from the beginning with them in a quite natural and simple manner has deepened into constant reliance. I felt also growing in me an overwhelming gratitude and love for them, as I discovered more and more, in Mother's Agenda particularly, the long ordeal both of them have accepted to go through in order to usher this poor world into the Supramental Era it needed so badly. How to thank them enough?

*Bhaga*

## Completing the Circle (contd.)

various paths, particularly those connected with the psychophysical changes due to yoga. Besides picking up Hatha Yoga, I also got initiated by two Tamil Siddhas in Kundalini and Kriya, and I also investigated Mantak Chia's Tao. Yet the words which the Kundalini yogi addressed to me were echoed by all the rest: "Your guru remains Sri Aurobindo. Pick out from these other paths whatever can be used for your *sadhana*, but whenever you feel anything contradicts Sri Aurobindo's teachings, drop it." So I never once had any inner conflict.

"At last the sense of India took over. It is in India that Sri Aurobindo and Mother created their laboratory to evolve the future being and future society: it could be nowhere else. So I felt the need to go back to the very origin: the Vedas, Vedanta, together with the Shakti cult of the Mother. The living embodiment of this India, land of the Rishis and of the Sanatana Dharma is the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, with whom I have been acquainted for two years now. It feels like completing the circle, fitting all the elements I had been exploring for so many years into one indissoluble whole which links past and future.



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

# JESSE'S DIARY

JESSE was our guest editor for the last issue and, somehow, he just stayed on, drinking coffee. So we asked him to give us some pages from his December diary. This is what he came up with.

## FRIDAY

**H**ave an Auroville Today editorial meeting at 9.30 a.m. Wake up at 9.00 a.m. Hurriedly eat breakfast (papaya, toast, tea) and try to start the Bullet. The Bullet; my first motorbike. "Don't buy a Bullet" they all said. Weighing in at close to a quarter of a ton and drinking more fuel than a battleship, the Bullet is a 'living' history of automotive technology. But it starts. Arriving at 9:45 a.m., I'm technically late for the meeting but effectively early in Auroville time. Only one other person has arrived and we chat leisurely for another quarter of an hour before anyone else turns up. By about 10:30 there's five people (Roger, Alan, Annemarie, Tineke and myself) and we're all engrossed in conversations that have nothing to do with the purpose of the meeting – finishing the January issue. But by 11:30 all that has changed; most of the proposed articles for the February issue have been read and commented on and the January issue seems to require no more work than a casual get-together next Tuesday. The meeting winds up there and we go our separate ways.

This time the Bullet starts, no worries and we're off to the petrol station for a top-up. Twelve litres and a few kilometres later, I notice a slight wobble in the steering. Half an hour later and it's patently obvious my back tyre is flat. I'm too far from anywhere like the workshop at Abri to make a pit-stop so I pummel on to Sincerity leaving a wide veering groove in my wake. Pumping yields no joy - it seems the tube's been wrecked only recently (I wonder how). The tyre's pretty bald too, I notice, and resolve to catch the next Auroville bus into Pondy to purchase new tyre and tube. That can wait until tomorrow. My problem now is how to get to Transition. I have Free Choice Theatresports with the young dudes and it starts in 20 minutes. Adhara leaps to the rescue and offers his bicycle - problem solved. I cycle off with Jyotis laughing and wolf-whistling (ironically) at my bum disappearing through the trees. Of course, there's no Free Choice and all the kids have gone home, but I manage to find some of the teachers eating cake. I pilfer some and depart. The day is not a complete loss.

## SATURDAY

Up at 8:30 to meet a Korean film crew here to make a documentary on Auroville. Anne from Prayatana is chaperoning them around for ten days and she's asked me to 'do something' with them for a day. "Whatever you want. You decide," she says.

At Anne's I am introduced to Mr. Pa, Mr. Lee and Mr. Yu, who all bow as they shake my hand. Hoping to establish a less formal relationship, I make several attempts in broken English to establish Mr. Pa's first name but manage only to get the extended version of his family name. I consider calling myself Mr. Jesse for the sake of continuity. After formalities, we decide to head for our first destination, Aurobrindavan, where it is rumoured there is a battery-charger that will fit one of their exotic cameras. The road there becomes so muddy

we stop the car and walk the last hundred metres to the main building, ankle-deep in mud, in ridiculously heavy rain. There we meet Jurgen and Olga who mercifully make us tea and toast.

The batteries, unsurprisingly, don't fit Jurgen's charger. The crew decide to make the most of it and interview Jurgen as he takes them on a slushy tour of sustainable agriculture in Aurobrindavan. They're so content filming saplings and dams and rivulets that we overstay our time there by two hours. Our eventual departure is marred by Mr. Pa forgetting his camera in Jurgen's office. The door is locked and Jurgen's nowhere to be seen. Mr. Pa and I make the half-kilometre walk (still in thundering rain) back to his house to get the

CARTOON BY EMANUELE



Mr. Lee, the cameraman, displays such enthusiasm and agility getting all-angles shots of Johnny milking that twice the cow flinches, almost kicking over the bucket.

keys. We have to get him out of the shower. Finally back at the car, we get bogged in the mud and spend fifteen minutes pushing the car free.

We spend that afternoon at Fertile, where Johnny and I bring in the cows and he milks them. Mr. Lee, the cameraman, displays such enthusiasm and agility getting all-angles shots of Johnny milking that twice the cow flinches, almost kicking over the bucket. In the end Johnny has to say: "Cool it with the camera." On our way out Johnny asks me to drop off some milk in Kottakarai. By then I'm glad to have an excuse to escape my Korean friends. We head back to Prayatana where I parked my bike. I say farewell, juggling the milkcan between my legs so I can drive without it falling.

Kottakarai, Poppo's house. No problem, I'd been there once before last year. I'll just whizz down, drop off the milk and go home. By about the third bend the road is looking pretty muddy. A hundred metres on, the whole bike disappears in brown muck up to the engine, and stops. I'm still holding the milkcan between my thighs. When I put my legs down I have to use one hand to hold it. The stand is useless, not to mention buried - I'm stuck!



At the Christmas Fair: masked musicians Wazo, Rolf and Pascal

## WEDNESDAY

The day of the Christmas fair, or "Unfair". Arrive at the Information Centre to find general activity. No one's really sure what they're meant to be doing but everyone's doing something. The stalls have been put up. There's throw-the-ball-and-dunk-the-guy-on-the-chair Dunker Shon, shooting polystyrene rats at Bandi-shoot, and can-you-hit-the-thing-hard-enough-to-ring-the-bell Bonger Spronger, Dawn's delicious vadai and much more. There's a gang struggling to rig a flying fox (you glide down a cable on a pulley) with a hand-powered winch, ratcheting the cable tighter and tighter until it creaks and pings under the strain. I move elsewhere. Jyotis asks me to help her set up the Bank. She wants ropes strung between poles to guide the inevitable queue. I

grab a crowbar and begin to dig narrow deep holes. I put in six poles and am in the process of digging the hole for the seventh when I strike something hard beneath the ground, I hardly notice. It's only when a small fountain erupts around the crowbar that I realise something's wrong. Waterpipe. I've punctured a waterpipe. Suddenly, the entire Information Centre has no water. Close to 500 people coming and no water. I tell Ramesh and a couple of the Information Centre staff and we begin to dig up the pipe. It's deep, so it takes a while but eventually the pipe is exposed. They wrap it in a strip of cycle inner tube and it's fixed - at least until the water service arrive.

Now it's getting close to 1:00pm, Unfair opening time. I run around telling people what we're going to do. I'm not exactly sure myself, so I make something up. The plan is this: the crowd follows me in and I dance around showing them each game one by one, at some point Himal will whizz past on the flying fox and I'll end up getting dunked on the Dunker shon. That's the plan. With no time this year to prepare an elaborate opening ceremony, Johnny and I improvise a ribbon that seals off the Unfair at the gate and with Himal dressed as a

guard, and me as captive, we cut the ribbon and parade into the Unfair, musicians playing. Unfair has opened. I lead the crowd from game to game, Himal whizzes past on the fox and I skip towards the Dunker Shon. As I sit on the dunking chair I hear someone shout: "No, no the other way, the other..." but it's too late. The chair flips and in I go, unceremoniously. Anyway, the fair has started. I walk around to see how other people are doing. Someone whispers: "Announce the bank, announce the bank." So I call out: "The Bank is now open." There's a noticeable change in the mood of the crowd as two-thirds rush in the direction I've just indicated.

Sitting at a table surrounded by about twenty shouting people, I find Jyotis and Elodie - the Bank - frantically dispensing "Quits" (this year's Fair currency). It's ten free for every child and the Bank has it under control, just barely. I ask people to step back from the table and approach one at a time. The crowd cooperates easily, but I can see that unless I stand there repeating the request, chaos will again resume. For the next three hours I become the Bank's security guard. After three hours of policing line-cutters, shooing off Quitscalpers and chasing away Fair sharks, interest in the Bank begins to dwindle and at the first available opportunity we collapse.

Then someone asks me to emcee the Cake Competition. Distinguished cake-judges appear from the audience and we parade before them a delicious array of tempting pastries. There is judging and final selection. Prizes are given to all contestants and then the cakes, as per tradition, are 'auctioned' off. This is more shouting madness. I develop a headache and go home to take a shower.

I return at 7.30 to perform in the play we've been rehearsing for a week: "The Man Who Knew Too Much". A big white shadow-screen has been put up. Backstage there's furious confused activity with much "What do I do again?" and "Here, try this wig on". I rummage through great piles of boxes and fabric and sticks trying to find props while 'outside' the crowd is making it clear it's impatient. Suddenly the lights go down and the play begins. A week ago no one, not even Johnny, knew the story and now here we are performing it in front of I don't know how many people. Incredibly, it goes okay.



# Of Flamingoes, Storks and Rare Birds Saved

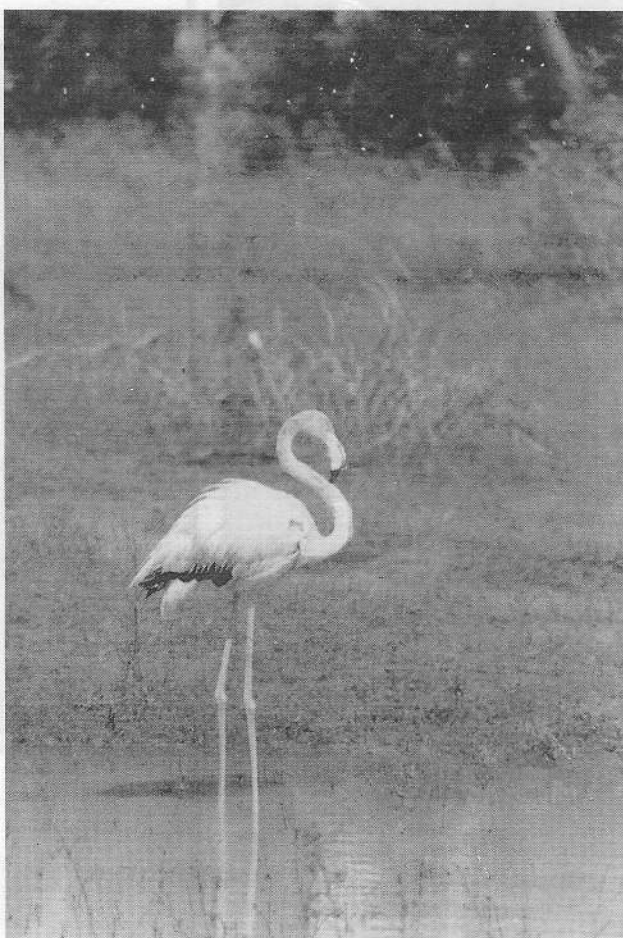
Mid-afternoon, Roger was having a Pepsi in Kulapalayam when Rauf arrived with the Forest Officer in his jeep. It soon transpired that a drama was in the making...

Kulapalayam culvert, the gloaming. As the cows return, little children in their blue uniforms carrying blackboards half their size are gathered on the bridge before the Banyan tree, along with an assortment of stalled drivers and a variety of vehicles: bikes, mopeds, cars and bullock carts. I stop and look out at the red lake formed by the recent rains next to the palm tope and the small temple shrine. There in the ochre dusk, long feet perched in river mud, a lone flamingo stands. "Tiens", I tell myself, musing on the symbolism of birds—and stray birds at that—"I wonder what Rauf will have to say about this!"

Dr. Rauf Ali, a biologist and, as he sees it, lone representative of the scientific community in Auroville, is the author of the widely read weekly column "Roughspeak" in the local *AVNews*. Although a few members of the community probably boycott it on principle, it is essential reading for others, including Officers of the Foundation (from one of whom he has even received complaints when it doesn't appear). That its readership also includes flamingoes, however, comes as something of a surprise.

His column of late had started becoming cryptic, an amalgam of veiled references and graphs delineating dire goings-on. And then, literally out of the blue, came the one-liner that launched a thousand tea-shop speculations: "The flamingoes have arrived." Rauf was surprised, even taken aback by the response. People would stop him on the road and slap his back "That was a good one." Interpretations ran our gamut of extremes, and Rauf was at pains to explain that for once he had meant nothing at all, that he was certainly not referring to French tourists and was simply announcing the fact that the migrating flamingos had finally reached Kalivelli Tank, 10 kilometres north of here as they do every year.

When I saw him at Pour Tous the next morning, I walked over and said: "So, the flamingoes have arrived, check out the culvert." He looked at me slightly askance. But on my way back two hours later, there he was with the crowd on the bridge, standing jaw agape near his jeep staring out at the lone lost flamingo. I found out from an



The lone flamingo

After School student that his brother Aurodevam from Kulapalayam had saved the bird the previous day by buying it from some fishermen who had been planning to eat it for dinner. It would seem that it was not the first bird this boy—something of a nature lover—had saved in this way, and that he was presently off to Madras trying to get a local paper interested in the story.

In a parallel development a young Aurovilian, Anand, had two days before bought a stork from another group of villagers and was housing and feeding it in Prarthana. He was planning to release it once it regained its strength and the rains let up.

Now it just happened that a group of Forest Officers

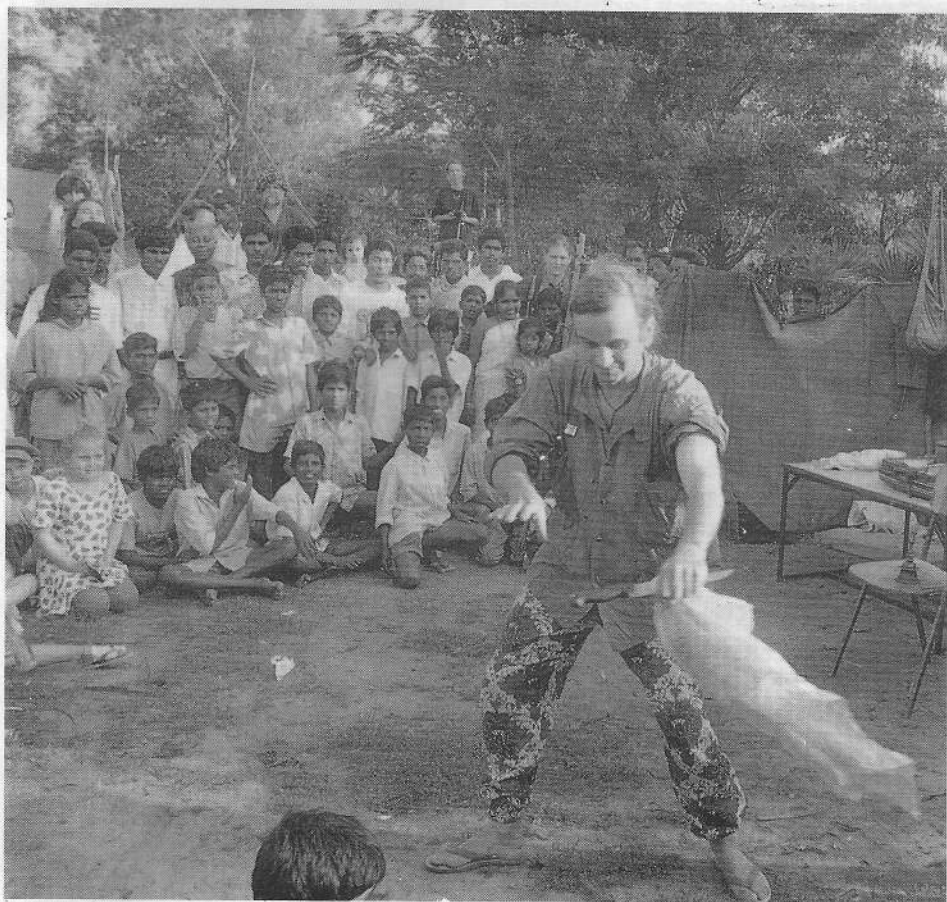
were in town attending a workshop and that the District Forest Officer of Villupuram had dropped in to say hello to old friends. Mid-afternoon I was having a Pepsi in Kulapalayam when Rauf arrived with the Forest Officer in his jeep. It soon transpired that a drama was in the making. It is against the law to privately keep endangered species of wildlife, but the boy's brothers had refused to hand over the bird to the officer; in fact, they had hidden it as they were afraid of being arrested and it was nowhere to be found.

But on receiving the promise that nothing would happen to them and that their good deed in saving the bird would in fact be officially commended, the large bird was carried out from their hut by two of them and handed over to the officer in his jeep. My return from an evening walk coincided with the arrival of Rauf and the Forest Officer at Prarthana where they encountered no problems in retrieving the large stork which was brought out of the youth compound by a burly, moustached handler. I doubt that the Forest Officer could ever have imagined that he would be returning to Villupuram with two large, beautiful and endangered species of birds in his jeep as a result of a half-day social visit to Auroville!

A couple of sunsets later I was sitting on Rauf's patio consulting Salim Ali's *Handbook of Birds Of India and Pakistan* which weighs in at an impressive four kilos. The flamingo is described as a resident, nomadic, and locally migratory bird, both capricious and sporadic and therefore totally suited to Auroville. They could even be used as croquet mallets at meetings during their probationary year, but given their experience with Alice in Wonderland, this might not encourage a massive migration. On the folklore front the chiefly terrestrial marsh-hunting stork is generally considered a bird of good omen and harbinger of luck. In the Moslem world for instance it is considered holy as it builds its stick platform nests in abandoned mosques.

The last news of the two birds came from the Director of the Anna Zoo in Madras who phoned to say that they both had been happily housed in the new Anna Zoo, at Vandalur near the airport, where upon arrival they had indulged in a fish-feeding frenzy the likes of which had never been seen before.

Roger



At the Christmas Fair: Jurgen's Magic Show



At the Christmas Fair: "Dunker Shon" wet dip

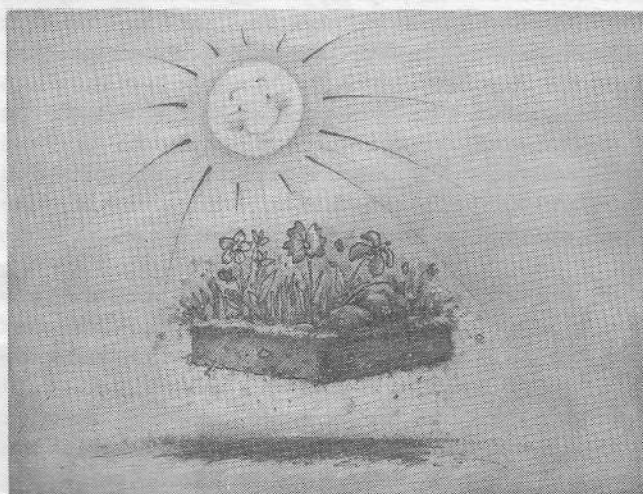


# LAND PURCHASE

One of the major problems hampering the further development of Auroville is the incomplete ownership of the land. Of the total of 5,850 acres needed for the township and the protective Green Belt only about 45% has been acquired so far. A group of concerned Aurovilians are now working hard to accelerate the process of land acquisition. Among their initiatives are the sending of letters to friends of Aurovilians worldwide as well as to business contacts in India requesting donations. Another idea is to raise funds through the selling of beautiful postcards, an example of which is to the right. The postcards are photographs of trees and natural landscapes around Auroville, taken by Regina, and drawings by Emanuele. The cost of each card (Rs 40 or equivalent) represents the purchase of one square metre of land (the approximate cost of one acre of land in Auroville at present is \$4,000). The cards are also available as sets: 4 different photographs for Rs. 150 and 5 different drawings for Rs. 200.

Donations in the form of cheques or bank drafts (made out to "Auroville Land Fund") should be sent to:

**Auroville Fund (Land Purchase), Aspiration, Auroville 605101, India.**



Further information about the land purchase situation can be obtained from:

**Auroville Land Fund,  
Bharat Nivas, Auroville  
605101.**

**Fax: 0091 413 62274.**

**E-mail: landfund@  
auroville.org.in**

*One sample from set  
of 5 (colour) drawings  
by Emanuele*



• ***The Vedic Epiphany, Vol 3: The Vedic Fulfilment*, by Prof. V. Madhusudan Reddy. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1996, Rs 300.**

• ***Purushottama Yoga: London talks on The Life Divine*, by Prof. V. Madhusudan Reddy. All-India Press, 1996, Rs. 100.**

Professor V. Madhusudan Reddy, one of the most eminent scholars of Sri Aurobindo's work, died, in December, 1996. He was Chairman of the Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad, an advanced centre of Integral and Future Studies which The Mother called "The University of Tomorrow". Professor Reddy wrote 29 books, many of which are devoted to disseminating the inspiration and thought of Sri Aurobindo. He was also a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, and on the occasion of its meeting in Auroville on the 14th of August, 1996, he took the opportunity to launch two new books: *The Vedic Fulfilment* and *Purushottama Yoga*.

*The Vedic Fulfilment* is the third and concluding part of his magnum opus, *The Vedic Epiphany*. The first part of the trilogy, *The Vedic Vision*, explains and interprets the vision of the Vedas and the "affirmative spirituality" of the Rishis, the second part, *The Vedic Action*, focuses on the action of the Vedic gods, while the third part completes the account of spiritual evolution with Sri Aurobindo's vision of 'a divine life in a divine body'. For, as Professor Reddy observed, "It has been rightly observed that if one leg of the arch of human destiny is in the Veda the other is in *The Life Divine*. For what has been envisioned by the ancient Rishis finds its victorious consummation and fulfilment in Sri Aurobindo".

*Purushottama Yoga* is based upon a series of talks Professor Reddy gave at the Auromira Centre in London on *The Life*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Divine*. He discusses and explicates, among other things, Vedanta, man as an evolutionary phenomenon, the triple transformation and the vision of divine life.

"These books," explained Professor Reddy, "are meant for scholars, particularly non-Indian ones who have no direct access to the ethos of Indian spirituality, but also for seekers everywhere."

"There is a worldwide interest in the rediscovery of the wisdom of the Vedas", noted Dr. Karan Singh in launching these books, "for the Vedas contain a wealth of material which remains valid today for both our inner and outer development. These volumes by Professor Reddy represent a valuable addition to the literature on the subject and will be read and appreciated not only in India but also in the rest of the world."

Alan

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***Down Memory Lane*, by Shyam Sunder Jhunjunwala. Published by Sri Aurobindo's Action, 1996, Pondicherry. Price Rs 130.**

Shyam Sunder's new book contains his reminiscences of a number of well-known Ashramites and the narration of a series of direct experiences with The Mother, when She asked him in February 1971 to work with Her daily on the management of Auroville. Shyam Sunder kept some scattered notes during the first year of his work

with the Mother and, from February 23rd, 1972, onwards, recorded daily notes after each meeting. These notes, which form the second part of his book, indicate the way the Mother answered a large variety of questions which were put in front of her for the management of Auroville. Few of these questions and answers however offer really new material, and the accurate rendering of Mother's oral statements is of course always open to doubt.

The author's otherwise fond reminiscences of well-known Ashramites unfortunately contain acrimonious observations in cases where the author felt badly treated by the person. The book is also clearly an attempt to clarify issues relating to Shyam Sunder's past involvement with Auroville.

For those not familiar with Auroville's history or the Ashram, the book has little to offer.

Carel

\*\*\*

***The Organic Farming Source Book*  
Edited by Claude Alvares  
The Other India Press, Goa  
ISBN No: 81-85569-30-4  
Pp. 344, Price Rs. 250**

This is India's first resource book on organic farming. The book, edited by noted environmentalist Claude Alvares, is a devastating critique of the "green revolution" in India and its anti-nature technology. Bernard Declercq, a long-term Aurovilian, has contributed, among other things, a chapter about the principles of organic farming. Other contributing writers include many friends of Auroville connected to the organic agriculture movement such as Dr. Vandana Shiva, Dr. K. Vijayalakshmi and Shirin Gadhia. It is hoped that this book will stimulate general interest in organic agriculture in the country.

**Aurovilians of the following nationalities presently reside in Auroville. These figures include children and newcomers.**

INDIAN	395
FRENCH	242
GERMAN	179
ITALIAN	57
DUTCH	48
AMERICAN	47
BRITISH	35
SWISS	28
SPANISH	28
RUSSIAN	25
BELGIAN	19
SWEDISH	17
CANADIAN	16
AUSTRALIAN	16
UKRAINIAN	14
AUSTRIAN	9
ARGENTINIAN	7
BRAZILIAN	6
TIBETAN	5
SRI LANKAN	3
SLOVENE	2
JAPANESE	2
NEW-ZEALANDER	2
ARMENIAN	2
COLOMBIAN	1
MAROCCAN	1
IRISH	1
FRENCH-SPANISH	3
INDIAN-GERMAN	2
FRENCH-GERMAN	2
FRENCH-BRITISH	2
FRENCH-IRISH	1
INDIAN-BRITISH	1
ITALIAN-SPANISH	1
FRENCH-SWISS	2
TOTAL	1221

**Further breakdowns:**

Aurovilian adults	793
Aurovilian children	276
Newcomer adults	122
Newcomer children	30
(Temp. out of station)	116

Data as on 5th November, 1996,  
provided by the Auroville Visa Service



# And we were one...

What does it mean to "put on a show"? This time it meant performing a play involving ten Aurovilian actors, five children dancing, five actors joining us from Kuilapalayam's Revolutionary Flame Theatre Company, two musicians from Periyamudaliarchavadi (the fishing village near Repos), selected music for almost every scene, set building, costumes, lighting, the playwright (Bhavana from Verite), T-shirt design, and programmes to print. And meanwhile the rain, driving, incessant, poured down in bucketfuls from an unceasingly grey sky, making transportation horrendous, the roads a muddy mess... Yet, somehow, we managed to pull it off, to make it happen: for four damp and mucky nights (two with rain, two without), there was actually something to focus on larger than our individual selves. We all moved as in a dream, protected by the Grace and the sincere belief in our combined effort. Everybody came. It was as it should be, as it could be.

It is a sweet story, the legend of Kaliveli Siddha, with the yogi and the temple dancer and the prophecy which has been picked up by Auroville and become part of our founding story: "The sun-eyed children of a golden dawn will come and make a garden here, beautiful beyond compare, you will see," says the yogi, modifying his curse on the people who had cast doubt on the purity of his relationship with the temple dancer.

Bhavana wrote a funny, lively poem which I adapted for the stage. The whole thing started a year and a half ago, and for a while we stumbled around, trying to

Scene from  
*The Legend of  
Kaliwelli Siddha,*  
with (standing)  
Marco as the priest  
and Srimoyee as  
the temple dancer

decide whether to use dancers who couldn't act or actors who couldn't dance. Now, of course, we can say it couldn't have happened any other way.

Somehow the play is complete, it has an integrity of its own and, yes, we could fix this scene and change that bit of staging and fiddle with this or that, and yet... I like it the way it is. It is a first, good effort of a very new group of actors who, in spite of all their grumbling and complaining, I think, are glad to have been a part of this show, are happy to have lived together for so many months in another world, and were finally ready to share it with an audience.

Can we let it go? Do we perform it again? At this moment, I don't know. What's important is that we did it together. And at the end of every night, in a circle of silence, we held hands and we were one at that moment.

Jill



PHOTO: SVEN

*O you potent Fire, you are the Lord of everyone. You congregate all the people. We have ignited you on this altar so that you may bestow on us all kinds of prosperity.*

*Ye all come together, have one voice together, together kindle the truth in your Mind, like the Gods of yore, illuminating each other, accomplishing their individual responsibility or sadhana.*

*The Supreme has ONE thought, ONE consciousness, ONE mind, ONE memory; realizing this I offer you one oblation to the FIRE within us all with ONE mantra of unity.*

*Let your hearts be together as one, your desires equal, let your minds be as one so that you may be happy together.*

OM Peace Peace Peace.

(We received this Rig Veda poem from one of our subscribers on the occasion of the New Year, and wish to share it with all our readers.—Eds.)

## BRIEF NEWS

### MATRIMANDIR

There has been much discussion recently, both inside and outside the Matrimandir Forum, about how to move forward at Matrimandir where major areas of work have come to a halt due to unclarity regarding certain design and technical matters. We hope to be able to report on new developments, as well as providing some insight into the particular challenges of building our "soul", in one of our forthcoming issues.

### NEW CHAIRMAN

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan has been appointed Chairman of the Auroville Foundation to replace Dr. Karan Singh, who has been elected a member of India's Rajya Sabha. Under legal provisions, the post of Chairman of the Auroville Foundation is incompatible with being a member of the Rajya Sabha. Dr. Karan Singh will continue to be a member of the Governing Board.

### Leave India notices

A delegation from Auroville has met with the Home Minister and the Special Secretary of the Home Ministry to voice the community's concern about the Leave India notices issued to Alain Bernard, Juanita Cole, Jean-Jacques Prigent, Jean-Marc Dupont and Golam Mohebbi and the Government's request that they leave India immediately. The grounds for the notices are now being re-investigated. The Home Minister also consented to see if Gilles

Pfeiffer, who left Auroville in November as a result of a Leave India notice, can return to Auroville.

### URN VANDALISED

On Sunday, December 22, 1996, two mentally deranged people vandalised the Urn in the Amphitheatre. They were stopped after removing the lid of the Urn and subsequently expelled from Auroville. After an official assessment that the contents of the Urn had not been disturbed or tampered with, the Urn has been sealed again.

### REMARKABLE ALIGNMENT

On January 23rd, 1997, an exceedingly rare planetary alignment took place. On this day the three outer planets Jupiter, Uranus and Neptune, were conjoined for the first time in almost 200 years. Joined by the Sun, and with the full moon opposite them all, this planetary cluster centred on the first degrees of Aquarius.

Depicted on an astrological chart one sees a perfect, six-pointed star, similar to that which also forms part of Sri Aurobindo's symbol.

### Note to our readers

Recently some subscribers sent us cash subscription money enclosed in an envelope. Not only did the money disappear from the envelope en route, but the addressee of a letter with cash is actually punishable by law. Therefore please send us cheques only. (The editors)

### Postscript

Early this morning, I was plucking flowers for my room. Routinely, without giving it much thought. There was this hibiscus bush with big, bright flowers on a long stalk, perhaps in an effort to catch the sun. I broke one off and as this intense red, vibrant flower lay upturned in my palm, something stirred deep within me, with a tangible pressure in the heart region. How do I describe it? It was not just a joyful appreciation of the flower's colour, texture or form. It was an intimate contact with the force that was radiating from the flower itself... a moment's awakening into Love.

I guess, rather than our turbulent emotions and clumsy attempts to love, one lives to be seized by such moments alone.

Bindu

(Two of our editors, Bindu and Bill, will be out of station for some months.

Bill's piece in this issue was sent by email, and Bindu left the above gem on the computer...—Eds.)

### How to subscribe

Subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International Centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovillians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

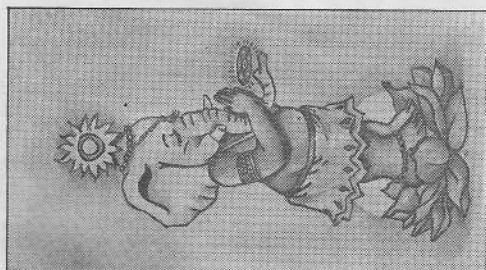
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BY AIRMAIL  
BOOKPOST

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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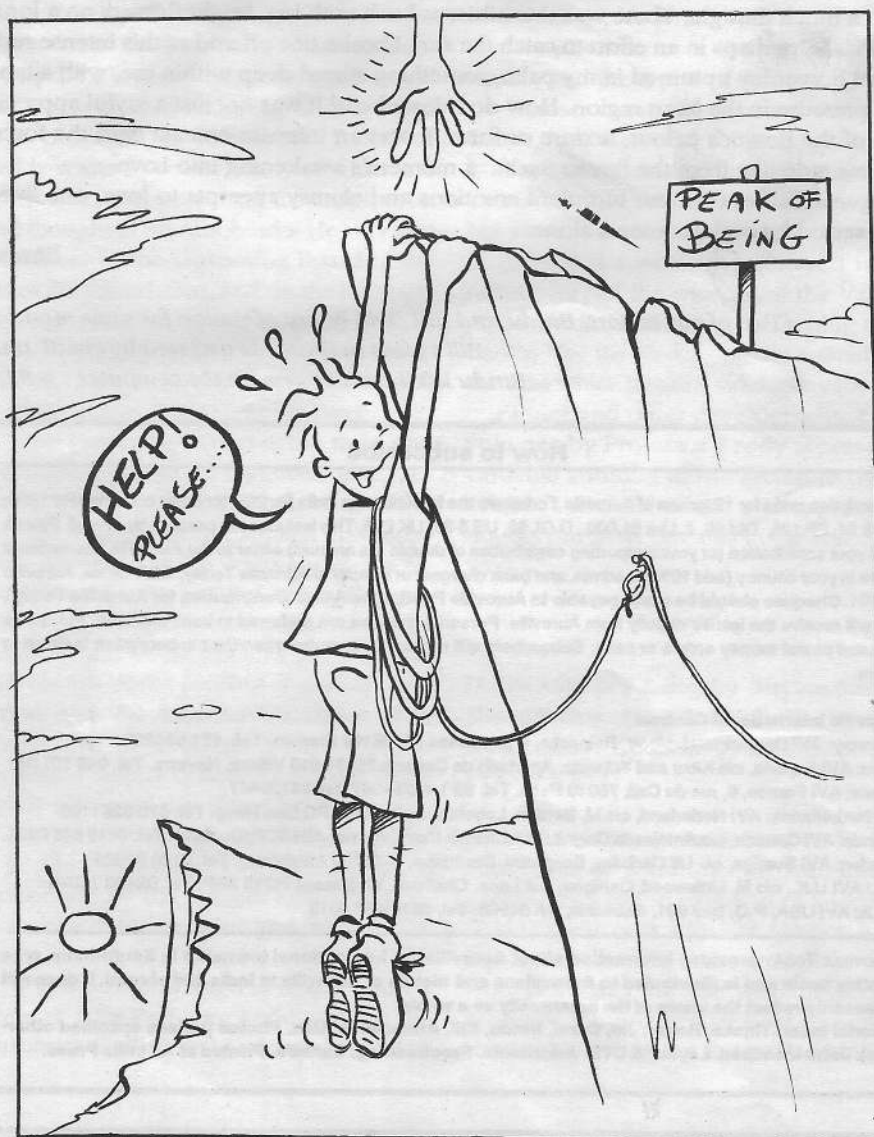


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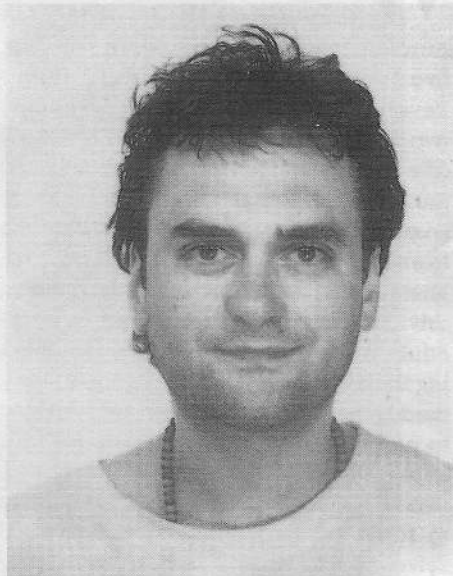


CARTOON BY EMANUELE

# The long walk

- a Westerner's pilgrimage through India

What is a young, apparently sane, Englishman doing walking the length of India? Rory Spowers stopped briefly in Auroville recently during his epic trek and Auroville Today took the opportunity to try to find out.



Rory: "India has this capacity to force one into the present..."

"The origins of this trip go back seven years when I and three friends travelled from the south to the north of Africa by bike—actually a three-seater tandem my brother bought from the props department of the BBC! When we reached northern Sudan we ended up walking long distances beside the Nile. It was an amazing experience because we passed through all these villages where there was nothing to tell you which century you were in. It was then that I decided that one day I would go on a long walk.

"I had always been obsessed by India, but it was only three years ago that I realized that my walk should be a pilgrimage through that land. This was connected with my discovery of Sri Aurobindo, whose writings increased my interest in the concept of the Divine Mother, the *shakti* or feminine aspect of the Divine, but it was largely triggered by my coming into contact with Mother Meera who, basically, turned my life upside down.

"So I began planning a route that would take me through some of the shakti peeths of India—the fifty one sacred sites associated with the feminine energy of the universe—beginning at Kanyakumari in the very south and ending in the north of Assam at the Kamakshya Temple, the most important shakti shrine in India. Here, every summer, the monsoon rains drive iron oxide up from the ground to turn a spring in the temple red, representing the menstrual blood of the Earth Mother.

"Planning is one thing, execution another, but I was given another push when, totally unexpectedly, I won a cash prize in a newspaper competition which asked people to describe the travel challenge of their wildest dreams.

"So there I was in September, standing at Kanyakumari with the seas of three oceans converging behind me and all of India rising up in front. It was very daunting. In fact, the first two or three weeks of my walk were a huge shock to my system and, once or twice, I came very close to giving up as my feet developed huge blisters and sores. Gradually, however, my feet developed a better relationship with my boots and now I'm more into the rhythm of things.

"A Westerner walking the roads of India is something of an oddity but a surprising number of people walked right past me without registering anything at all. Other reactions varied from total hysteria to blank incredulity, particularly when, tired of the noise and pollution, I left the main roads and started walking through the paddy fields and dry river beds of the Cauvery Delta. But as soon as I explained to people that I was on a *yatra*, a pilgrimage, everybody seemed to understand.

"At first I kept asking myself, Why am I doing this? Is it just material for a book? Is it for myself? Or am I on a pilgrimage to the Divine Mother? But as I walked on the questions dropped away and I no longer worried about why I was doing it or even where I would end up. India has this capacity to force one into the present and I found

myself living more day by day, without expectation. I was reminded of how I felt in Africa, of time expanding and of an inner opening. But there it happens through the huge expanses of nature whereas here, in India, the widening, spiritual aspect comes seeping through all the human activities going on around one—through the endless rituals, shrines and temples.

"My first big shake-up along the way was Tiruvannamalai. I'd already spent a week in Pondicherry and somehow, in spite of the wonderful atmosphere of the Samadhi, it hadn't worked for me. But then I got a chance to visit Tiruvannamalai and I felt immediately at home in that more traditional Hindu scene. In fact, my whole perception of things was changed by encountering Ramana Maharshi's self-enquiry method. I'm still inspired by the wonderful vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother regarding the evolution of consciousness and cellular transformation, but as a personal teaching I can more readily apply Ramana's approach. I also spent six days in Tiruvannamalai with an amazing dreadlocked old man who looked like a Vedic Rishi. Nobody knew where he came from, but he had an amazing power: whenever I sat with him my mind became completely quiet. And then there was the sacred mountain, Arunachala, from which I could hardly drag myself away. One of the unforgettable moments was walking round the mountain on the night of Kartikai Deepam (the main festival of the year), accompanied by two hundred chanting devotees as a cauldron of burning ghee flickered away behind clouds on the summit.

"In this sense, it's definitely developing into an inner journey for me, and one which will probably take me through many more different turnings before it's finished. Tiruvannamalai was the right experience for me at that moment, but it won't be my last. By the time I reach Calcutta I may be a complete atheist!

"As for Auroville... it's wonderful to know that a place like this exists. It's an unbelievably ambitious project which is still in its infancy. Yet Matrimandir already has an enormous power which staggered me, knocked me out. I'm very much drawn to this place, and yet I can't imagine myself living here. It's like my relationship to India with which I've been grappling for years. A part of me would love to live here, but another part isn't quite sure I could make it. It's such a huge change..."

From an interview by Alan