

AUROVILLE TODAY

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The Dalai Lama visits Auroville

Twenty years ago, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Auroville for the first time, and since then the Tibetan connection has remained a strong one. On the 23rd and 24th December we were honoured to welcome him once again. Although he came primarily to lay the foundation stone for the Pavilion of Tibet, he also visited the Matrimandir and Matrimandir Nursery (where he was particularly interested in the orchids); Forecomers, which is one of the first afforestation communities; an

exhibition of photographs on the theme of Tibetans in exile; the Visitors Centre; the Centre for Scientific Research and Transition, where he enjoyed a relaxed interchange with the teachers and students.

He also addressed Aurovilians and friends in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas, stressing the need for humanity to embody the universal values of compassion and love, of which he is such an inspiring example. An Aurovillian

expressed the sentiments of the whole community when giving the vote of thanks: "In 1954, The Mother expressed her Dream: 'There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world, and obey one single authority, that of the Supreme Truth.' Your Holiness, you have a dream of a future Tibet that would be a zone of peace and a spiritual sanctuary for mankind. May both these dreams prevail."

In this issue of AUROVILLE TODAY we try to capture something of the unique flavour of a visit which touched the hearts of one and all and relit the smiles on so many faces. We also honour the memory of another great man—Mr. J.R.D. Tata, the Indian industrialist, aviation pioneer, and staunch supporter of Auroville—who died at the age of 90 on 29th November in Geneva.

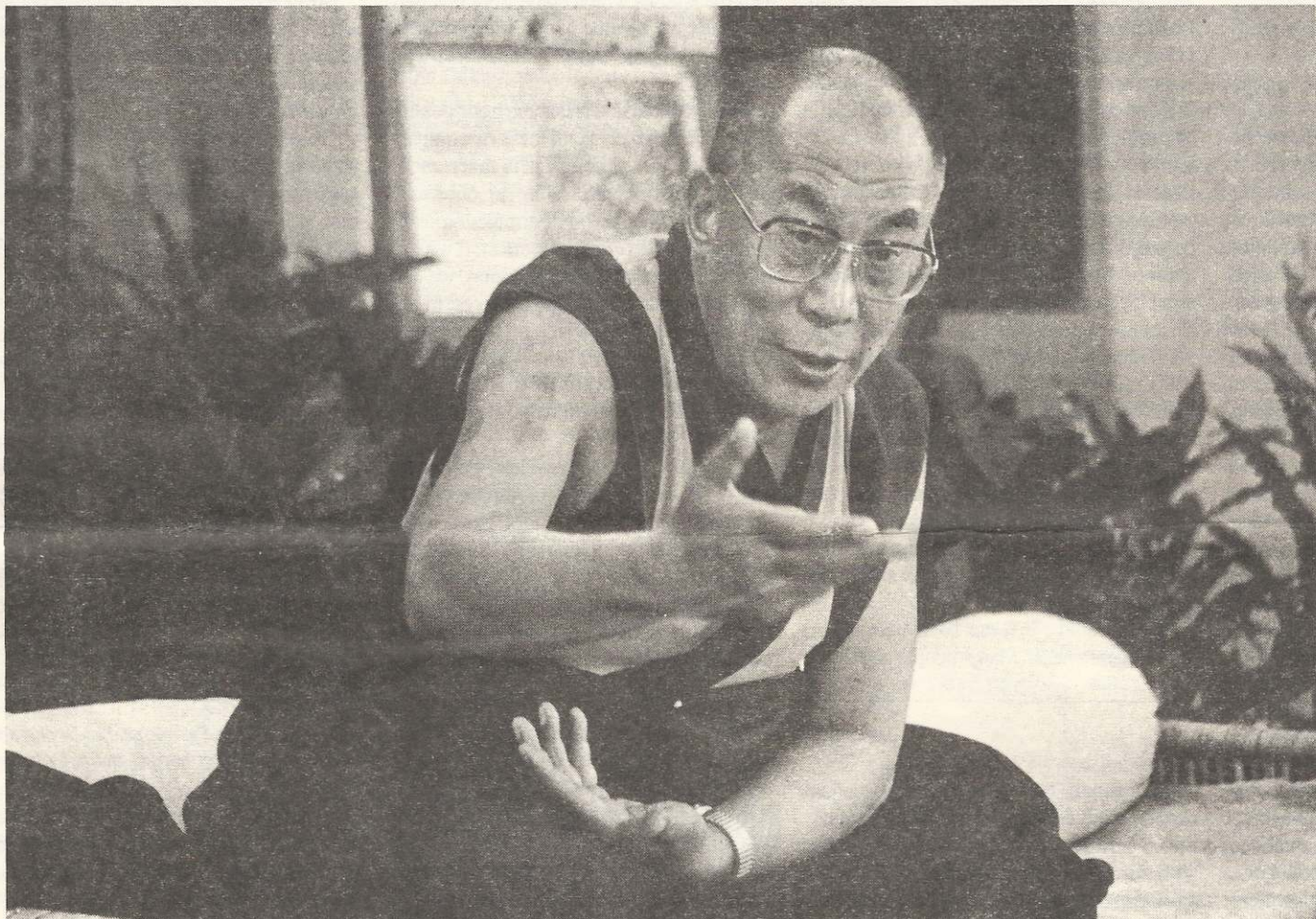


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEN

"Our whole future depends on secular moral ethics"

Early in the morning of the 24th December, AUROVILLE TODAY was granted an interview by His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Kottakarai Guest House.

AVT: In 1973 you met The Mother in Pondicherry. What are your recollections of that meeting?

Dalai Lama: Yes, I remember that meeting quite clearly. She was sitting in her chair... It seemed it was difficult for her to speak, but the atmosphere around her was not only nice, but meaningful. There were two or three persons with me and I asked about the future. I can't remember her exact words but the meaning was that the future was hopeful and positive.

For Tibet or the whole world?

For the whole world, for humanity.

Yesterday you visited the chamber of Matrimandir. What were your impressions?

It's difficult to reach... (laughter) The main hall which you have completed is very

nice, and inside it's very calm, very peaceful. I spent a few minutes in meditation.

Have you noticed any changes in Auroville since you were last here?

One thing that has surprised me very much was that when I first came the land was barren. I remember the sun was out that day and I was wondering where the best place was to find some shade. Today you needn't worry about that! It's full of trees, it's almost like a jungle! Now you're probably worried about snakes, and yesterday I even asked if there were any elephants here! (laughter). Today in many parts of the world we're very concerned about deforestation. This type of project of restoration is really marvelous. If the people involved in this work here could use whatever experience they have gained, and find the opportunity to extend their work to a high altitude place like Ladakh, if it works there we could adopt it in a future Tibet.

Also, I have found here a very good sense of community; you are a determined people, you have an objective, will and

determination. I've also found you have an incredible relation with the local people and they participate fully. I feel this type of teamwork should spread to other places.

Do you see that we can help you in a future Tibet?

Certainly. Your spirit of dedication, your vision and sense of community and your clear acceptance and realization of the value of spiritual things are very important. You see, there are many projects that are very good for material development but are often lacking in spiritual value or realization. In other cases, there is an emphasis on spiritual things but with a neglect of practical progress. Here I found a combination of the two. Certainly we can learn many things from you and the members of the community here can help us in many fields.

Do you feel that there is a new consciousness, a new force at work in the world?

That's a difficult question. On the mysterious level sometimes I feel there may be some energies or forces, but it is difficult to be definite about it. One thing I believe

is that if our mind remains calm when we are facing serious problems and difficulties, we have the ability to find different alternatives. We have such a wonderful human intelligence and imaginative power. So therefore, when things become really desperate, it helps to open our mind. And today I think we are passing through exactly that kind of period of difficulty.

Is humanity at a crossroads?

I think so, I think so.

What is the path that we should take?

My basic belief lies in a combination of material and spiritual development. It is not necessary to be religious-minded, for even without religion there are many secular moral ethics and, I think, a secular spirituality. That means the basic human values such as compassion, love and a willingness to forgive. These I usually call the human spiritual qualities. I believe we learn these basic qualities from our parents, particularly from our mother, or anyone who shows us love and compassion. We learn these deeper human values from that

(continued on next page)

Our basic nature

On the morning of the 24th December, after laying the foundation stone at the site of the Tibetan Pavilion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas. Here follow edited extracts of the speech.

I'M extremely happy to be here again in Auroville, to meet again all the people who are dedicated to their work, and to achieving their goals.

Since my last visit [twenty years ago], I'm extremely happy to see much progress and development. This happened because you fully dedicated all your time and your energy to a certain principle. Also, you work here as a team and with, I think, a very good sense of community. In addition, I noticed there is a very, very good harmony, a good relationship, with the local people, and many local Indians seem to enjoy working with Westerners. This is very good. You have the spirit of community, irrespective of religion, culture, or race. That's really what we need.

Today humanity, in spite of many achievements in material development, is still facing many problems. In fact, we are also facing new problems. Generally speaking, many people of the rich nations, in spite of the comforts they enjoy, deep down experience some kind of mental unrest; in the developed nations some kind of moral crisis is also happening. Again, the gap between Southerners and Northerners is still there. In one part of the world, the standard of living and standard of education and health is quite high, and there is a lot of surplus. But in the developing world, millions of people—the same human beings, who have the same flesh, the same human minds, and who have the same innate desire and right to live a happy life—are facing starvation. Now that situation is not only morally wrong, but practically is also a source of problems. There again, the environmental problem is now a very serious matter.

So, when we think about these things, we realize that one or two individual nations cannot solve these problems. Humanity has to work as one team. But when we try to practice this, it is very difficult. I believe that Auroville, and other small individual institutions or organizations, are actually working in that direction. So your work, your dedication, in the long run will be extremely beneficial for humanity. We really need the inner force with which you fully dedicate yourselves to your work.

According to my experience, calmness of mind is the one, essential factor. When your mind is calm, then it automatically brings patience and also your health is improved, which allows you to work even harder. And I believe the basic factor in peace of mind is compassion, or human affection. The reason is that when your mind, your heart, is more compassionate, then automatically some kind of inner door opens, and through that you can communicate with fellow human beings, without any difficulties, whether they're somebody you knew before or not. Immediately you feel, 'Oh, another human being, our brother, our sister'; you can communicate heart to heart. That immediately expels fear, doubt. But if you feel here (pointing to his heart) hatred, jealousy, then it automatically closes your inner door. As a result, you find it difficult to communicate with fellow human beings because of your own negative feelings. So you automatically develop suspicion and doubt, and that suspicion and doubt brings fear. So for peace of mind, human love and compassion, loving-kindness to all, is the key factor.

Now, I believe that our basic human nature is gentleness. Many people feel that

human nature is basically aggressive. Let us examine this. Certainly, anger, hatred, greed exist. If you look at human history, the aggressive elements in human nature did much wrong. However, the dominant force of our mind is certainly affection or gentleness. For example, our life begins with nourishment by our mother's milk. The baby has a very close feeling with its mother; without that the child will not suckle. That is the most important period of our lives. And during this period, there is no room for anger, only for affection. Then look at education. When we are getting lessons from a person who shows us compassion and has a sense of concern for us, then the lessons which come from that person really have value for us, they go deep, not only into our brain, but also deep into our heart!

So, my conclusion is that the basic quality of human nature is gentleness or compassion. However, although it is much more logical if we act according to our basic nature, we often act in contradiction to it. But if we make a conscious effort, if we use our intelligence and determination, we can change, we can transform ourselves, in the same way that the barren land in Auroville was transformed into a land full of life. With effort, I changed my mental attitude to a certain extent, and it brought much benefit to myself.

When we talk about religion, we immediately get the picture of a temple or different rituals. These are not necessarily religious things. Generally speaking, religion is to do with the positive mind. The positive mind is that which ultimately brings us happiness, and the methods which produce happiness are the essence of

religion. Meditate upon compassion. That is true religion! Because while you meditate upon compassion, you cannot think about hatred.

At the deeper level, of all major religious traditions the general concept of compassion is the same. Once we realize this, it automatically brings genuine respect towards all other major religions, and creates a foundation for the development of harmony between different religious traditions. This is very crucial.

So, those people who feel O.K. with what I am saying, try to experiment in your daily life. Spend at least a few minutes a day analyzing these things. Then try to develop compassion, and eventually compassion will become part of your life. Then, you'll be a truly happy person. On the other hand, if you find my talk does not have much relevance to your daily life, then just forget it. (Laughter) No problem.

[After a vote of thanks in which the wish was expressed that the Dalai Lama's dreams of a free Tibet as a spiritual sanctuary for son and mankind would prevail:]

Tibet as a civilization is as old as the Chinese civilization, and with its unique environment and because of the introduction of Buddhism Tibet developed its unique cultural heritage. Tibet is a separate country from China—of that there is no doubt.

Since the Chinese invasion, a lot of destruction and human suffering has happened. I truly believe that if the invader had brought us good things, then the past would be past. But the reality is that they brought us misery and fear. The Tibetan crisis has different aspects—environmental, racial discrimination, cultural genocide and human rights violations. Today Tibet is passing through a difficult period so we need your help. I really appreciate your concern and your sympathy and understanding. Thank you very much.

Interview with the Dalai Lama (continued)

period, from birth. Religion comes later. Of course religion has a great potential to help humanity and these basic human qualities can be strengthened by religious belief, but if we go deeper, even without religion there can be genuine spirituality.

Will traditional religions still have a role to play in the future?

Sometimes I've described religion as a luxury item. Now for the survival of the individual or the survival of humanity or the world, religion has an important role to play. But we can also survive without religion, provided that the basic human qualities are there. Without these basic human qualities we cannot survive. Our whole future must depend on what I call these secular moral ethics. These are the foundations of human existence. In order to make clear these basic values and their importance, I described religion as a luxury item. Many people consider that religion is not very relevant to day to day life. Their attitude to religion is indifferent. Simultaneously these people don't care about human values such as love, compassion and forgiveness, and they confuse these values with religion. This is absolutely wrong. You can be a believer or unbeliever, that is up to the individual, that's each person's right, but there is no choice between being a compassionate or non-compassionate person, as I believe that compassionate moderation is the basis of our happiness, our mental stability. And for our daily life as well as the

world's future, mental stability and calmness of mind is a crucial factor for a good life, a positive life. World peace—peace with our fellow human beings, peace with animals, and peace with the environment—is much dependent on that kind of mental state.

How would you define the essence of Tibetan culture?

Tibetan culture has developed due to many factors, environmental, climatic and others, but Buddhism is the major factor in the development of Tibet's unique culture, which I call a Buddhist culture. Even non-Buddhist Tibetans have adopted the mental attitudes and way of life of Buddhist culture. That culture is based on the practice of compassion and tolerance.

Is that culture under threat?

Yes, of course. Quite strangely, outside Tibet, although we are not in our own country and are in a different environment, I think we've kept our Tibetan spiritual identity. Inside Tibet, because of the overall situation in Tibet which is very tense—but where of course the Buddhist faith as well as the feeling for freedom is very strong—the Tibetan people's behaviour sometimes seems less tolerant, they immediately lose their temper and their emotional control over small incidents. This I feel is a clear indication of how much damage is happening inside Tibet.

Can you transplant that essential Tibetan culture back into Tibet?



Yes, of that there is no doubt. Of course, unless the situation changes and becomes positive it is difficult to think of returning. At the moment in the bigger towns such as Lhasa the majority of the population is Chinese. So one major factor is the Chinese population influx. Because of the majority Chinese population the Tibetan minority is compelled to speak Chinese and act like Chinese. This is the major negative factor. When in the future things change, we can of course re-transplant. I keep saying that one of the main tasks for Tibetans outside is to keep the Tibetan deeper spiritual values, no matter what the difficulties. So that when things change and we return with freedom, then it is our responsibility to restart.

Your Holiness, your main reason for coming today is to lay the foundation stone of the Tibetan pavilion. What for you is the significance of a pavilion of Tibetan culture in Auroville?

I think we have some potential to make a little contribution for the betterment of human beings. We have a legitimate right to participate with you! (laughter)

Do you see this Pavilion as having a significance stretching beyond the boundaries of Auroville?

A symbolic significance, yes. I was very moved, very happy, when I was told that some earth from Tibet was brought here.

It was an eight kilo brick! (laughter)

Sometimes this works on a mysterious level. For the human mind, when you know that there's something from Tibet here, you feel a special relation.

I feel that Tibetan culture with its unique heritage—born of the effort of many human beings of good spirit, of its contacts with Chinese, Indian, Nepalese and Persian culture, and due to its natural environment—has developed some kind of energy which is useful, and very helpful, towards cultivating peace of mind and a joyful life. I feel that there is a potential for Tibet to help humanity, and particularly our Eastern neighbour, where millions of young Chinese have lost their spiritual values. In this way I feel very strongly that Tibetan culture will have a future role to play in humanity. So therefore, wherever there are spiritual centres like Auroville, if Tibet can participate it can be a way or a channel to communicate Tibetan culture to other people.

I have dedicated the rest of my life to demilitarization on a global level. As a first step, Tibet should be a zone of peace and completely demilitarized, so that in the future we can help not only China and India but also the world community. This is my vision and hope for the future.

Interviewers: Alan, Roger, François.

Tibet in Exile

White crane!

Lend me your wings

I shall not fly far.

From Lhathang, I shall return.

(From Poems of the 6th Dalai-Lama)

Situated on the roof of the world, Tibet is a country which historically covered 2.5 million square kilometers bordering India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, E. Turkestan, and China. Secluded for centuries, Tibet had little contact with the outside world, a phenomenon that encouraged the image, fostered by mystics and intrepid adventurers such as Alexandra David Neel, of a colourful forbidden kingdom of magic and religious mystery, a hidden land of snows ruled by mysterious God-kings. Tibet's independence and seclusion from the outside world was to come to an abrupt end with the Chinese communist invasion of 1950, an event whose consequences were to plunge Tibet and its people brutally into the 20th century and the nightmare of the last thirty years of its history.

The Religious Kings and the Spread of Buddhism

Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet through royal patronage between the 7th and 9th centuries, paradoxically enough in a period of military expansion during which Tibet became an established power in Central Asia and its empire reached its apogee. The first of the great kings—referred to by Tibetans as their 'religious kings'—was Songsten Gampo who ruled from roughly 627-650 A.D. He married princesses of China and Nepal who were both Buddhists, built the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, and gave the Tibetan language a script based on the North Indian Gupta Brahmini script. During this period of imperial expansion, in 763 A.D. Tibetan armies even captured the Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an (present-day Xian). A peace treaty was eventually concluded with China in 821 or 822, the text of which is inscribed in three places: one outside the Emperor's palace gate in Ch'ang-an, another in front of the main gate of the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, and the third on the Tibet/China border of the time at Mount Gugu Meru.

From the 10th century onwards, Tibet's influence as a political military power declined, whilst Buddhism gradually took root and spread throughout the country, despite resistance from the aristocracy and the practitioners of the deeply entrenched shamanistic Bon tradition. If the first flowering of Buddhism in Tibet was much influenced by contacts and cultural exchanges with the Buddhist monasteries of North India, the effects of the Moghul invasions were in the long run to isolate Tibet. As a result the specific tradition of Tibetan Buddhism was to grow, later spawning a number of different branches and sects: the Nyingmapas, Sakyapas, Kargyupas, and Gelugpas, and develop in a highly colourful and independent manner.

The Mongols and the Lamas.

The Mongols invaded Tibet in 1207 and the traditional concentration of secular and religious power in Tibet can be traced to the close relations that were established between the Mongol leaders, starting with Genghis Khan, and the Tibetan High Lamas of the Sakya sect who served them as

religious advisers and were granted viceroy powers over sizeable portions of Tibet. With the waning of the Mongol Empire (the Tibetans freed themselves from Mongolian rule in 1358), the power of the Sakhyas declined. The void was filled by the rise of the Gelugpas, a reformist sect popularly referred to as the 'Yellow Hats', who gained the support of both local rulers as well as the Mongol chieftains on the northern frontiers. The title of Dalai-Lama which means "Ocean of Wisdom" was first conferred on Sonam Gyatso, the high priest of the Gelugpa sect, in 1578, by Altan Khan, a Mongolian Chief in Eastern Tibet, who had converted to Buddhism. The succession of the Dalai-Lamas is based on reincarnation, and a certain number of physical signs, visions and omens point to the Dalai-Lama's new incarnation. It is an unique institution that has historically come to combine religious and temporal power, and to this day commands an almost absolute allegiance from the Tibetan people. In 1642 the Fifth Dalai-Lama—known as the Great Fifth—reunified Tibet with the help of the Mongols, visited China at the invitation of the Ming emperor who recognized him as an equal, and established the traditional Tibetan system of government referred to as the "harmonious blend of religion and politics" that was to survive until the Chinese invasion of 1950.

After the death of the Fifth Dalai-Lama there followed a chaotic period of Tibetan history, characterized by Manchu as well as British interference into Tibetan affairs, the latter connected to Imperial rivalries in Central Asia at the turn of the century. The Thirteenth Dalai-Lama had to flee his country twice but returned in 1912 following the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in China. Chinese troops and representatives were then expelled and for the next 35 years Tibet was to pursue an independent path, remaining neutral in both World Wars, participating in international conferences and concluding its own treaties. Between 1911 and 1950 Tibet served as a buffer between India and China, but due to its policy of peaceful isolationism relations were limited to its neighbours such as India, China and Nepal as well as Great Britain.

But storm clouds were gathering, and despite the first attempts at modernization initiated by the 13th Dalai-Lama, Tibet remained a secluded monastic state. When the 13th Dalai-Lama died in 1933 he prophesied an impending period of Great Darkness when the foundations of the Tibetan state would be attacked from outside and within, and all beings would be sunk in great hardship and fear.

Invasion and Exile

Prayers were offered throughout the land for his swift reincarnation, and the present fourteenth Dalai-Lama was born on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Wood Hog year of the Tibetan calendar (6 June 1935) in the Ambdo region of northern Tibet. He was recognized, as a child of two and a half, following a number of signs and visions. His parents' house with a roof of turquoise tiles, as well as a neighbouring monastery with jade and gold rooftops was seen by the regent in a vision in the waters of the sacred

lake of Lhamoi Latso. He was recognized by the Tibetan National Assembly and formally installed on the Lion Throne on February 22nd, 1940. When after years of civil war in China a communist government was proclaimed in 1949, their leaders announced that the revolution had not ended and further "territories" including Tibet were yet to be liberated. They entered Eastern Tibet and in October 1950 captured the town of Chamdo. The Tibetan Government, dismayed by the events in Eastern Tibet, requested that the Dalai-Lama be invested with his full temporal and spiritual powers, and on November 17th, 1950 the Dalai-Lama assumed control of the state from the regent, at the early age of sixteen. In September 1951 thousands of Chinese troops entered Lhasa. If the first years of occupation were relatively benign, and the status quo in Tibet kept intact, Mao had every intention of turning Tibet, whose Northern borders he had skirted on his Great Long March, into China's new "northwest frontier". And when the Dalai-Lama met Mao in 1954, the Chinese leader was to make the ominous remark, "Religion is poison."

In the years that followed, roads were built and maps redrawn. The entire province of Ambdo and large parts of the eastern Province of Kham, comprising almost half of Tibet, were incorporated respectively into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan. Guerilla warfare then broke out in Kham and smouldering resentment finally turned to full-scale revolt in 1959.

The Lhasa Uprising

Thirty thousand Tibetans, many of them refugees from the outlying regions of Tibet, surrounded the Summer Palace of the Dalai Lama in March 1959 two months after he had passed his rigorous religious examinations that confirmed his accession to the Lion Throne, fearing his abduction by the Chinese.

When fighting broke out, the Dalai-Lama fled Lhasa at night, and, with a small retinue and an escort of the renowned Khampa guerrillas, was led across the Himalayas and into India where he has lived in exile, working for his country's cause ever since.

Terror

The repression that followed the Lhasa uprising (according to Chinese statistics 87,000 were killed in Central Tibet alone), has characterized much of the Chinese occupation of Tibet ever since. Within a few years, 75,000 Tibetans had followed their leader into exile, and in 1960 the International Commission of Jurists after an intensive independent examination of the question published two reports in Geneva on Tibet: "The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law" and "Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic", in which the International Commission considered the Chinese guilty of the crime of genocide and the intent to "destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such". The United Nations passed three resolutions between 1959 and 1965 reiterating Tibet's right to self-determination. Famine was widespread throughout Tibet in the early sixties, in part due to the Chinese insistence on changing the traditional Tibetan barley crop to wheat unsuited to Tibet's high altitude, which led to a series of disastrous crop failures. Meanwhile a vast network of prison camps dotted the barren north-eastern reaches of the country. The Chinese Cultural Revolution saw a frenzy of destruction in which all but thirteen of the monasteries of Tibet were destroyed, religious literature burnt and artefacts and treasures plundered. Today Tibetan sources estimate that more than a million Tibetans have died as a direct result of the Chinese occupation.

Hand in hand with this policy of repression, the Chinese have been bringing in vast waves of settlers with the intention of turning the Tibetans into a minority in their own country. The Chinese, who control the economic and bureaucratic infrastructure of the country, now outnumber Tibetans in all urban centers including Lhasa. In the province of Amdbo with its low lying fertile lands, Tibetans now make up only 20 per cent of the population, and in Greater Tibet, Tibetan sources now estimate that 6 million Tibetans have been outnumbered by over 7 million Chinese.

This policy of immigration goes hand in hand with a vast exploitation of Tibet's mineral and natural wealth which includes over 126 different types of minerals, and according to the Chinese themselves the largest uranium reserves in the world. The Chinese military presence in Tibet includes nuclear missile installations, and the Tibetan plateau is being used for underground tests as well as a site for the dumping of nuclear wastes, which the Dalai-Lama spoke out against as recently as December 1993.

The ecological balance of the Tibetan plateau is also being seriously altered by the indiscriminate slaughter of its once abundant wildlife, growing desertification, and the degrading of the country's fragile high grasslands due to overgrazing and inappropriate farming practices—linked to the pressure of shifting population patterns. The cutting of over 40 percent of Tibet's forests has been linked to the silting up of the Hangho, Brahmaputra, Yangtse and Indus rivers as well as to changing global weather patterns.

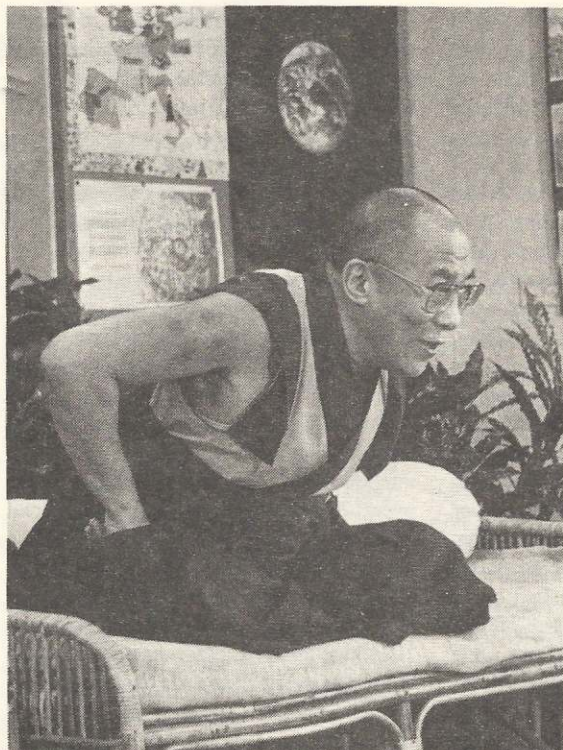
Despite a face-lifting process of liberalization by the Chinese authorities in the late 70's and recent plans of the Chinese authorities to encourage foreign investment in the so-called Tibetan Autonomous Region, the Lhasa riots of 1987 brought to the world's attention the fact that all was not well in Tibet.

A Future's Dream

However after years of looking the other way, the world is beginning to wake up to the predicament and the tragedy of Tibet. In 1991 the U.S. Congress declared Tibet to be a country under Chinese occupation, while the European Parliament followed suit in 1992 coming out in support of self-determination for Tibet. This awakening has a lot to do with the personality of the Dalai-Lama and his tireless dedication to the cause of his people and the values of universal responsibility he upholds. Politically he has chosen the path of realistic pragmatism, proposing, to the dismay of some of the more radical elements of the Tibetan diaspora, autonomy as opposed to outright independence from China, and he envisages a democratically elected government in the future Tibet where human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed. Some of these views were first made public with his five-point Peace Plan in Washington D.C. in 1987. This called for negotiations with the Chinese Government on the future status of Tibet and the relations between the Tibetan and the Chinese people. Later the same year, his Strasbourg Proposal called for a "self-governing political entity in association with the People's Republic of China." In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

If and when he returns with his people from exile, the challenges facing the Tibetans of rebuilding their society on a democratic and multi-cultural basis will be enormous. And yet the Dalai-Lama's vision of Tibet becoming a protected biosphere and a spiritual sanctuary of world peace open to seekers of the world is an inspiring one worthy of the age that seeks to dawn.

Roger



... speaking with teachers and students at Transition

"High ideals can be somewhat impractical!"

THE Dalai Lama's visit to Transition School to meet Auroville teachers and students resulted in a most relaxed and informal encounter. Here are edited extracts from the dialogue that took place:

The Dalai Lama: Are you still following the same system of education that you were following twenty years ago?

A teacher: Yes. We have no examinations, but allow the children the freedom to progress each in their own way.

Dalai Lama: From an educational point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this system?

A teacher: Having no set syllabus, we can adapt the material we provide to the needs of each child.

Dalai Lama: After twenty years of using this approach, what difference do you notice between the students who have experienced this approach and those who have been in good schools elsewhere? Is their attitude to life different? And the quality of their relationships with others?

A teacher: I think one of the main advantages of Auroville education is the quality of the human contact that takes place, the development on the human level that happens as a result of the children here being brought up in contact with so many different cultures. They are citizens of the world rather than of one culture. From an intellectual point of view, our students are behind. But we find that when they transfer to outside schools, they are able to make up the missing links quite fast. And on the human level, they adapt very well.

Dalai Lama: If a child lags behind in a subject, what do you do?

A teacher: We do the maximum possible with friendly persuasion. Our basic principle is that what has to emerge in the child has to emerge from within. Until that happens, there may be a period of relative chaos. But we don't compromise on this principle.

Dalai Lama: This is quite profound! However, when we talk about human unity, I think it is almost impossible to make one culture for all, or a citizen of the world who has all these different cultures. Cultures are man-made and create division between people. Forget about cultures! We need to return to basic human feeling, to natural values, to genuine human affection. These are the same in whichever culture you come from. We cannot abolish man-made cultures, but we must base them upon basic human values like compassion.

A teacher: Sri Aurobindo and Mother spoke of the development of the psychic being, the soul, as being the only factor that could harmonize different cultures.

Dalai Lama: That's true.

A teacher: We have read what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have written about the ideal education, and we'd like to practise it. The difficulty is, how to get there, how to transfer what we would like to transfer to the children? The goal is very high and our aim is geared to the future. But perhaps we should try to make the best of what we have at present.

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Tibet and the Golden Sun

My wish is to climb the snowy mountain
along with the wave of this music.
My wish is to go and touch the palace towers
tipped in golden rays.
My wish is to chat with those women
who weave their yarns for garments
with colours plucked from the rainbow.

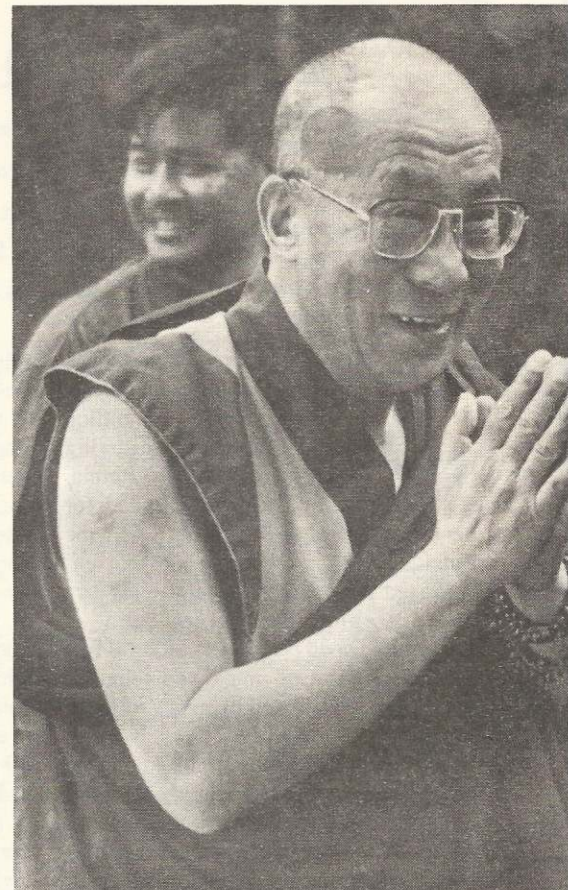
A magical world;
inside, the sounds of bells,
chanting of drums
and smoke of oil lamps and amber.

Is it far away, Tibet,
upon the roof of the Himalayas?

Let us fly there, unfurling fresh new wings
to see the golden Sun close-up.

Comrades!
Let us go there
as silken white clouds,
and sow the seeds of liberation.

Meenakshi
(presented to the Dalai Lama on this visit)



... laying the foundation stone for the Tibetan Pavilion near Bharat Nivas. The brick was brought from Tibet by Claude.



... at the Forecomers Forest Nursery



... greeting Aurovilians. Right: Claude, who organized the visit.

Auroville and Tibet

Auroville's relation with Tibet goes back to February 28th, 1968, when Tibet was represented at the inauguration ceremony of Auroville. In 1971, the Mother accepted twelve Tibetan children in the Auroville schools, and they studied here until 1978. In 1973, the Dalai Lama visited Auroville and Pondicherry for two days and met the Mother.

Cultural and educational exchange programmes between Auroville and a number of the Tibetan communities in exile have been dynamic and ongoing. In 1985, a group of five Aurovilians visited the Tibetan settlement of Mundgod at the invitation of an environmental organization, Appropriate Technology for Tibetans (Aptt), which is based in the U.K. and is dedicated to assisting the Tibetan communities in India with advice on sustainable development. Since then, a growing number of Tibetans have been coming to Auroville for training in various fields. Many of these trainings have been sponsored by Aptt. In the medical field, the personal physician of the

Dalai-Lama, Dr Tenzin Choedrak and teams of doctors from the Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala have visited Auroville to give seminars on Tibetan medicine. In 1993, CSR, in conjunction with the Tibetan administration in Dharamsala ran a one-week workshop for Tibetans on the theme of a sustainable future.

Monks of the Gyumed Monastery have already inaugurated the site of the future Tibetan Pavilion (see also AVT of April '93). An architect's model for the pavilion includes a room for permanent exhibits, a library *cum* study room, a cafeteria and guest facilities. It will be built with cost-effective construction techniques such as ferrocement and stabilized earth blocks promoted by the Centre for Scientific Research. Its estimated cost is 26 lakhs (U.S. \$86,000). Fundraising is being done by Aptt, Julian Lines of Auroville International USA and Patrick Debage of AVI France. The contact address in Auroville: Claude Arpi, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, South India.

Transition... (contd.)

Dalai Lama: I agree. Ideals are necessary, and they should be much higher than today's reality. But sometimes high ideals can be somewhat impractical (*laughter*). Knowing that, you have to make great efforts; intellectual efforts, by which you create a mental blueprint of what you want to achieve and the stages to get there, and physical efforts. However, if in spite of these efforts there are great difficulties, you may have to admit that the ideal is a little bit too high, and you may have to find other ways and means. (*laughs*)

It is clear that the kind of human society which develops in the future must depend upon how we educate our children. One of the basic aims must be to cultivate the basic human values in the child's mind. What is lacking in education today is the spiritual side—but this is not necessarily the result of any particular educational system. Education depends very much on the quality of the educators. The crucial need is that the teacher should cultivate genuine human feeling and demonstrate human values. The teacher-student relationship should be a family relationship.

Again, competition is not necessarily bad. There can be both positive competition and negative competition. For example, if there are no examinations, the student may become less concerned about his studies. Until the date of my final examination was fixed, I never paid much attention to my studies. (*laughs*) But then I worked very hard!

Student: How did you do? (*laughter*)

Dalai Lama: Not bad... and probably my name helped me a great deal! (*laughs*) In fact, I heard that my teachers said afterwards that if I had studied like the other students, I would have done wonderfully! (*laughter*) But, of course, I had lots of excuses as I had many other responsibilities.

Aurovillian: What was your education like?

Dalai Lama: It was basically Buddhist philosophy. Generally, in our system there is much discipline. But our teachers have a genuine concern for the students, and the students have a sense of respect for the teacher. In modern educational institutions I think this is lacking.

During the past thirty-four years in India, we have tried to keep the spirit of Tibetan culture alive while we have been in exile. To achieve this, we created separate schools for Tibetans—and Pandit Nehru was fully supportive of this—in which a modern education would be given without losing the traditional Tibetan values. The results of this experiment, however, are still not clear.

Your educational system here is also still young. It's a wonderful experiment, and because it is an experiment, you will have problems because you have no other models to learn from. But don't be discouraged!

Teacher: We would like to express, on behalf of all the teachers, our feeling that Tibet must be free—and soon.

Dalai Lama: Thank you. I feel very strongly that if Tibet survives, it can play two important roles. Firstly, Tibet is placed between the two most populated countries in the world, China and India. If Tibet is free, and free of weapons, it is the best security for China and India. Secondly, Tibetan culture is a peaceful culture. Buddhism is not alien to the Chinese mind, but today, because of Marxism, millions of Chinese have very low morals and their culture is in crisis. Therefore, the spirit of Tibetan culture can make a great contribution not only to the Chinese but to the betterment of humanity as a whole.

Edited by Alan



... looking at a photovoltaic panel and solar cookers at the Centre for Scientific Research



... under the Banyan Tree, after visiting the Matrimandir.

PHOTOS BY JOHN MANDEEN

Remembering a friend

As announced in the previous issue of AUROVILLE TODAY, Mr. J.R.D. Tata died on November 29th in Geneva. J.R.D., as he was known, was head of the foremost industrial house of India, a pioneer aviator who set up Tata Airlines—which later became Air India—and the recipient of India's highest honour, the Bharat Ratna. J.R.D. Tata's connection with Auroville dates from 1969 when he attended an Auroville exhibition in Bombay and met, among other people, Frederick, with whom he formed a close relationship. He was a staunch supporter of Auroville during the critical period of its conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society, he was Chairman and trustee of 'Auromitra', a legal body set up in the late 1970's to facilitate the flow of funds into the community, and he was Chairman of the both the first and second International Advisory Councils of Auroville set up by the Government of India.

The following appreciations by various members of the community illuminate both his rare personal qualities and the crucial part he played in Auroville's struggle for self-determination.

Frederick: "He was an adventurer, he loved a challenge"

Ever since J.R.D. Tata left three weeks ago, I've felt his presence very strongly in my heart. When I think of him now, I remember something that The Mother said when Sri Aurobindo left his body—that to mourn him was to insult him. However, I'd like to recall, in a spirit of joy, some of the remarkable moments that I witnessed when this man, in order to stand for what he felt was the truth, became like a fiery instrument that would not budge for any external authority that opposed him.

Many of these moments occurred during crucial moments in Auroville's struggle for self-determination in the late 1970's and early 1980's, during which time his interventions were crucial. At one time, for example, there were expulsion orders against eight Aurovilians. Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister, had overturned them on the personal guarantee of Mr. Tata, but the Indian bureaucracy being what it is, there was still a strong possibility that they would be carried out. I phoned Mr. Tata in Bombay and asked him if he could help in communicating this to Mrs. Gandhi—thinking that he could get one of his men in Delhi to contact the Prime Minister's office. To my astonishment, I heard him saying to his secretary, "When is the next plane to Delhi?" He took it, saw Mrs. Gandhi himself, and the matter was settled.

On another occasion, when Francis and Savitri—two Aurovilians who were victimized by the Sri Aurobindo Society—were in danger of being re-deported from India, it seemed as if the Chairman's office of Tata Sons, the largest business house in India, was largely occupied for over two weeks in nothing else but trying to ensure that these two rather doubtful looking characters were not sent back to the U.S. Again, when Auroville was under very severe attack—superficially from the Sri Aurobindo Society, but actually much deeper forces—only a few people outside Auroville recognized the danger, or were willing to help. Tata was one of them, and, along with Satprem, Kireet Joshi and Bijoy Singh Nahar, he became a trustee of 'Auromitra', which was created as a legal body to allow funds—which had been cut off by the Society—to flow into Auroville once more.

Incidentally, his relationship with Satprem was an indication of how much he was able to stand above his personal preferences and recognize something deeper. For Tata and Satprem, as per-

sonalities, were very far apart. But Tata could sense greatness and, as in his relationship with Nehru, could respect those with whom he would not always agree. It was Tata, in fact, who, along with his great friend Yolande, was instrumental in saving the tapes of The Mother's conversations with Satprem—later published as Mother's Agenda—when the Ashram wanted to get hold of them in order to censor them and control their publication. Satprem was later to express his gratitude to Yolande and Tata for having protected, at such a critical juncture, these records of Mother's experiences, "these fabulous documents... which had to be saved for the Earth".

Tata never met Sri Aurobindo or The Mother, but he was fascinated by the fact that, as he put it, "This old lady called young people to build a new city—and they actually came!" He was an adventurer, he loved a challenge, and he related to this aspect of Auroville, to the spirit of experimentation and nonconformism. One story demonstrates his sense of values in this respect: At one time, there was a very unfortunate incident of physical violence in the community which shocked us deeply. However, the incident was publicized by those people who wanted to put Auroville in a bad light, and those of us who were then on the Auroville Co-operative (a group who, among other things, represented the community to the outside world eds.) wrote a letter to people like Tata to try to explain what happened. When I saw him next, he told me, "I know about human nature. Of course it's shocking that these things happen in Auroville, but what shocked me more was that the Co-op tried to explain it away like any other institution would do." And that's why, when he visited in February this year, he stressed so strongly that Auroville should not become another establishment, another institution, but should keep the pioneering spirit alive.

There were other aspects of Auroville he related to strongly. He once said that he liked coming to Auroville because he liked the smiles on the faces of the Aurovilians—maybe in his life he didn't see enough of this. Then again, in spite of his eminence, of the great respect he enjoyed, he was a very human and simple man. He was very much against any pomp and ceremony, against the accumulation of wealth, and the simplicity and idealism of the early Aurovilians attracted him. He also wanted to help Auroville's outreach towards the poor, towards rural India—he felt Auroville had a very important role to play here. He once said that he wanted, in his life, to be able to repay in some degree what he had



J.R.D. Tata

PHOTO LEO RAU

Francis: A giant...

The first time I had contact with J.R.D. was in 1976 when Auroville was having a slight misunderstanding with the Sri Aurobindo Society (S.A.S.). Part of the consequence of the misunderstanding was the Society's effort to get the 'trouble-makers' out of Auroville and out of India. After much to-do, their plan was basically successful as Savitri and myself were escorted to the plane by the police and flown out of the country.

Three months later, to everybody's surprise Savitri and I walked into Bombay Airport. We were arrested immediately and informed that we would be put on the next plane out of India. All this took place during India's National Emergency, and reaching the people who would be able to help us was extremely difficult. Frederick, who met us at the airport, informed J.R.D. what was happening, and for reasons which are still unclear to me, J.R.D. took up our cause and started a sixteen day saga of telephone calls in his efforts to free us. When the word got out that J.R.D. was on the case, suddenly we got more attention than if we were real somebodies. We were camping in the V.I.P. lounge of the airport. The police who were guarding us would salute every time we

walked by. The airport officials were falling all over us, even while they were wondering who the hell we were. Then the C.I.D. showed up. They were very, very polite, but very efficient in their questioning.

Two days later, we were collected by a very beautiful lady, who whisked us away in a new Mercedes car to a modern guest house that belonged to one of J.R.D.'s many companies. The next day, the same lady arrived and drove us to Tata House for our meeting with J.R.D. I cannot remember what I was expecting, but I do remember that I was so surprised by his manner that I had difficulty in speaking (which was unusual for me). Here was the giant of industry and one of the most influential people in India, yet he had absolutely no pretensions. He instantly put both myself and Savitri at ease, even to the point of listening to some of Savitri's jokes and teasing me for being distracted by the lady who was our guide. During tea, we thanked him over and over again until he became a little embarrassed by it all. He told me to stay out of trouble.

The man was a giant and a true human being at the same time, which is a very rare combination. I was only one of many who experienced his generosity and influence.

Krishna: "I felt proud of him"

One can remember J.R.D. Tata only in superlatives. I met J.R.D. a few times in connection with Auroville work. Each time, I felt proud of him as a fellow Indian. During his last visit to Auroville in February, I had the privilege of meeting him alone for a few minutes. Frederick introduced me as 'Major Krishna Tewari'. J.R.D. was very quick to correct him, putting out his hand and saying 'General Tewari'. He was all there, in spite of his age.

Many years back, some of us had gone to Delhi in connection with an exhibition at which Auroville had a stall. We were invited for tea at Tata House. After tea, he decided to go to the exhibition. Getting into his limousine, he caught me by the arm, made me sit next to him and with his typical sense of humour said, 'Let's take the General for a ride'.

His remarks would never fail to touch the heart of the person he addressed. One respected him not just for his age and status, but for his sharp intellect, his memory, feelings and concern for others. His commitment to population control was inspirational. One feels grateful that the Government of India gave him due recognition through the award of the Bharat Ratna. J.R.D.'s reaction when he heard the news—"Oh my God! Why me?"—was typical of the man. The likes of him are so rare in India's long history."

received. And it's worth remembering that the whole philosophy of the House of Tata, which was set up by his grandfather, was to plough back the profits into social service.

Like all great men, J.R.D. Tata was a man of seeming contradictions. Although he had a deep love of India, and was a great believer in the Indian people, he was educated abroad and he spoke few words of any Indian language. He was a simple, yet also highly sophisticated man who always claimed that he'd never received a proper education. So when something like Auroville came up which, in terms of its Charter, aimed at unity through the integration of diverse elements, it must have carried a great attraction for him.

Tata never said that he was a believer in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, although, in his last years, his refusal to commit himself became like an increasingly thin shield with which he protected himself. Last February, during his last visit to Auroville, he was resting on a bed after a meeting. Then he called me over and said, 'Tell me.' And I knew what he meant. So I talked about Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and the essence of Auroville—and it was as if his soul was already preparing for his next future. And the last time I saw him, in August, he wanted to hear more about the adventure of Auroville, to do more for Auroville. He was vibrant, like a child... and now I feel as if his next life had already begun."

(From an interview with Alan)

"Unity in variety is the plan of nature"

Rod Hemsell, who lived in Auroville with his wife Kirti and two children and was one of the early pioneers, was one of the people who represented Auroville at the Parliament of the World's Religions held recently in Chicago. As Auroville's participation in the Parliament has been a topic of discussion within the community, AUROVILLE TODAY asked Rod for his comments. He sent us the following article, which has been shortened for space reasons.

Swami Vivekananda gave the keynote address at the Parliament in 1893. He spoke six different times at that first congress, in which he discussed specifically the underlying unity of the three schools of Vedanta. He made the statement "Unity in variety is the plan of nature", and extended his metaphor of unity beyond Vedanta, first to include Buddhism and Jainism, and then to all the major religions.

In an early essay on the Isha Upanishad, "All that is world in the universe" (probably written around 1909, to be found in the Centenary Library, Vol. 27), Sri Aurobindo took up Vivekananda's discussion of Vedanta in very similar terms, and he articulated a special psychological thesis, perhaps essential to any discussion of unity in diversity where human culture is concerned: "The three philosophies (Adwaita, Vishishtadwaita, Dwaita) are simply three different standpoints from which we envisage one single truth, that nothing eventually matters in the world except God and the goal of existence is to attain him. And I may add my own conviction that all three are necessary soul-stages." This conviction was later to underpin Sri Aurobindo's synthetic view of philosophies, sciences, and religions in *The Life Divine*.

I have personally come to view each religion and philosophy as representative of a soul-stage, a relative standpoint through which we pass, to which we give greater or lesser emphasis, as we move on towards truth. And I acknowledge Sri Aurobindo as the fosterer of my insight. I am also aware of the historical synchronicity of Vivekananda's presence in America with the opening of the floodgates of Eastern wisdom into this country, "the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer" as Sri Aurobindo put it, referring to "the going forth of Vivekananda" (Karmayogin, p.37, Cent. Lib. V.2). And these were some of the thoughts that occurred to me when a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association in

America asked if I would care to make a presentation at the 1993 Parliament, which wished Sri Aurobindo's thought to be amply represented. How fitting it seemed that now, after a hundred years of development, this message should again be seen and heard by such a Congress, in the radiant forms of Savitri and Auroville.

The venue was none other than the same Palmer House (Hilton Hotel) of a hundred years ago, in Chicago: hundred foot high frescoed ceilings portraying gardens of delight in early American styles; hundred foot long, red carpeted halls immortalized by the tread of a century of socialites, celebrities, gangsters, and other denizens of various lighter or darker planes. "Was this the old world or the new?" we asked.

There were six thousand people registered to attend the talks in this building, and they were dispersed on five floors, in some sixty rooms with a seating capacity of from 20 to 500. From Saturday, August 28, through Saturday, September 4, there were 194 major presentations and, as I look over the schedule, approximately 120 minor seminars and lectures per day: a total of seven hundred events, at least 30 occurring simultaneously every hour on most days, almost all of which I would personally have considered attending. This was a potpourri of spiritual and/or higher to mid level mental fare beyond the wildest dreams of the most deprived connoisseurs.

I was particularly interested in hearing Raimundo Panikkar speak on "Religious Identity". As far as I know, he is one of the foremost commentators on the Vedas alive today, and the closest to Sri Aurobindo in his interpretations. Moreover, he is in his eighties and I thought this might be my only chance to hear the man himself. As it turned out, he looked forty, jumped four feet onto the podium, and spoke non stop with such eloquence that I thought he would surely still be around for the next congress. His subject was "pluralism," the theme of the whole Parliament, and he was its definition. He is a professor at Benaras Hindu University and the University of California, a

Catholic Priest with Ph.d.'s in Chemistry, Philosophy, and Theology, and what he said, roughly paraphrased, was: "I am a Hindu, I am a Buddhist, I am a Christian, and I find no conflict in such a position. What is needed for the future is a mutation of religion, beyond doctrine, which allows for the exploration of, identification with, and growth within the psychological and mythological content of all spiritual traditions, and a synthesis such as, to give a solitary example, the genius of Sri Aurobindo was capable of achieving."

There we all were: Bryan Walton, Paula Murphy, June Maher, Sally Walton, Luc and Suzie Venet, Seyril, Paul Edmonston, and Kirti and myself. The hall was full to overflowing with many Indian faces that I recognized, and many new ones. It was to be a slideshow and panel discussion on Auroville: An invitation to the City of Human Unity emerging in India. Bryan, June, Paula, and I had worked on assembling what we felt was a good visual retrospective and historical commentary, and it did flow well, when it finally took off. But first Dr. Karan Singh arrived, with a considerable retinue, to deliver an introduction on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution. This seemed to go rather well, I thought, though the hall meant for a hundred and twenty was trying to squeeze in a hundred and sixty, and was rather stifling. At the end of the slide show, we assembled a small panel to answer questions, with a brief sequel by Robert Muller, Chancellor of the University of Peace in Costa Rica, on the relevance of living centers of international cooperation and spiritual aspiration emerging at many sites around the world. This was an inspirational, global context in which to view Auroville, and it began a fruitful discussion of environmental ethics and practices, both positive and negative, in the world. The context and gradual growth of Auroville in rural India then became the topic of focus, the role of Matrimandir was

discussed both critically and spiritually, the role of the Indian government was aired to some extent, discreetly, and for the most part we were able to field these and other questions in such areas as demographics, education, village development, and so on in a reasonably down to earth way. As always on such occasions, the presence of Auroville itself was tangible enough to prevent too much abstraction, and to give those present, both who know it personally and who are relative strangers, a vivid sense of something uniquely valuable happening on the many levels of being in that special laboratory of evolution.

It was the certainty of such an affirmation, modest, subtle, yet very familiar, and of the importance of its morphic field in this context, which I think had motivated many of us to undertake this venture to the Parliament of the World's Religions: to simply offer Auroville, a symbol of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to this rather special cross section of the world community, among these people much like ourselves who obviously came consciously to seek the means of at once sharing and transcending their highest aspirations, to feel gropingly and much less confidently for what might be next. For the first Parliament had evidently reached its maturity. The idea of acknowledging the kinship and underlying unity of religious traditions, or at least of the people who sincerely adopt them, seems now to be an established fact, at least among such an elite. For most of the priests, professors, and general public at this conference, these are no longer real problems. But from the melding of those streams something else has to come forth, a new fecundity and potentiality; the pressing need for a greater truth was being made evident, was being glimpsed behind the scenes, the facades, the mental constructs, in many of the eyes and hearts and voices with whom we made contact continuously throughout the week. I often thought that if we had had a year together in that hotel, the rate of change in the world towards that something else would perhaps be increasing even faster than indeed it has already shown impressive signs of doing, even in the most external, social and political world contexts.

To bring together a large congress of so many of the world's sincere seekers was undoubtedly to bring together a conference for the world. To the extent that their practice together achieved real openness, their visions and aspirations may someday become realities. Perhaps, in another hundred years, we'll see the fruits. □

Peace, Peace, Twelve, Twelve

About fifty people came to the Amphitheatre to take part in the world-wide twelve-minute universal peace meditation on the twelfth day of the twelfth month—at twelve o'clock GMT in the area the Mother called 'Peace'. The names of all the countries of the world were read out from the inscriptions on the tiles that surround the Lotus Urn where handfuls of earth from around the world were placed in 1968 at Auroville's inauguration. Each participant placed a flower on the urn at the end of the meditation.

Christmas and New Year

This year, Christmas was definitely celebrated with gusto. On Christmas eve, a series of colourful and varied events took place on the festively decorated open-air terrace of the Visitors Centre. Children of Transition School dressed in many different

B r i e f N e w s

costumes presented dances and rhythmic exercises, and a number of clownesque figures occupied the stage thereafter, exciting hilarious responses from the ubiquitous children who afterwards received presents from beautifully decorated big boxes. The Visitors Centre also organized New Year's Eve celebrations with Indian music, a dress-up party (Indian costumes only) and disco. At Pitanga Hall, Sunil's New Year Music was played at midnight.

Dance improvisation

"Dance—and especially dance improvisation the way I approach it—deals with the constant search for the appropriate movement. It is a continuous tuning of the different parts of the body to each other and

to the body as a whole, unfolding and interacting in a creative flow, inspired by the music." This description is part of Paulo's announcement of his solo dance improvisation performance. And the many people who witnessed it in Pitanga in the morning of December 19th, saw and felt how deeply he had managed to express the inexpressible through movement and silent concentration.

Gold for Matrimandir

Matrimandir has received the first kilogram of 23.5 karat gold for the disks that will cover the globe's outer skin. In all approximately 19 kilos will be necessary to cover 4,500 square meters of disk surface. The gold will be processed into small leaves

of 8.4 x 8.4 centimeters with a thickness of 0.1 to 0.2 micron each, before being applied to the disks.

East Coast Road

The future of the controversial East Coast Road (see AVT no. 42) has been put in doubt as its main sponsor, the Asian Development Bank, has suddenly decided to review the entire project. The review decision follows sustained efforts by environmental groups and Aurovilians to have the project in its present form halted.

Kathak Dance performance

Dancers from the "Kathak Kendra" of New Delhi provided Aurovilians with a feast for the eyes when they performed on December 29th in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas. Kathak is a classical Indian dance practised in North India. Originally, the Kathaks were a com-



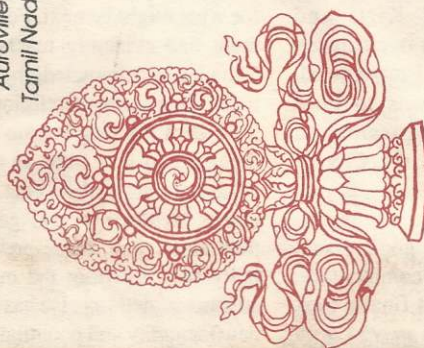
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In this issue (8 pages):
Visit of the Dalai Lama; Remembering J.R.D. Tata;
Parliament of World Religions: Nirodbaran's Talk etc.



THE DALAI LAMA WITH AUROVILLE CHILDREN

PHOTO JOHN MANDEN

A TALK

KEEPING IT SIMPLE: Nirodbaran at Pitanga

Sunday, 12th December. I'm walking through the afternoon fields on my way to Pitanga, the venue for a question and answer session with Nirodbaran—a former attendant of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and author of various books including *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* and *Sri Aurobindo for all Ages*—who is visiting us once again from the Ashram. But what do I expect? Frankly, not very much. I haven't been able to frame any question that I'm burning to have answered, or which is not answered already in one or other of his books. And the fields, glittering in the low December sun, tempt me to continue my walk.

But I turn in at Pitanga gate. It's four o'clock and he is late. On the walls, some kind of photographic exhibition. I begin desultorily glancing at the photos. And stop, transfixed. Beautiful, heart-wrenching images of Tibetans, captured by the internationally-celebrated photographer Raghu Rai: of a solitary monk high on a jutting peak, of Tibetans waiting in the pouring rain for the Dalai Lama, of fierce dialectical battles in a monastery courtyard, of a monk ascending through a trellis of roses. And of the Dalai Lama, compassionate, joyful, seeming, as always, to be enjoying some cosmic private joke...

I walk into the Dance Hall, full with something close to tears, with memories of my first visit to India in 1979 when I taught English to Tibetan villagers in the compound below Tashi Jong monastery, high up in the foothills of the Himalayas. And I sit and wait for Nirodbaran in a silence which becomes increasingly dense.

Nirodbaran enters, nodding to left and right, with a firm stride that belies his ninety years. He doesn't want the prepared easy chair, but something more austere, upright. It is brought. He hangs his stick on the back, sits; a solid block of force. I'm impressed... but still bothered about those questions. Are we going to waste his, and our, time with

the trivia of our doubts and obsessions? Shraddhavan collects the prepared questions—including one very long one which seems to confirm all my fears.

But then Nirodbaran quietly, implacably puts the whole batch aside. "I don't think you need to worry about all these questions. They are just intellectual nonsense. (laughter) The Mother said that work is the body's prayer. So if you work in a spirit of devotion, if you offer your work to The Mother, the answers to all your questions will come on the way. If you do your work wholeheartedly, with love, if you always try to do better, your consciousness is bound to be lifted up; and the main thing is the progress of consciousness. These questions like "What is yoga?", "How to do yoga?" etc.—in the Ashram many have never bothered about such questions. They simply work with devotion, and as they work, their consciousness develops and the understanding comes. Even if I told you something now, it would only be for the intellect. You must experience the thing yourself. Once you've done this, you will find a mine of gold within you.

"As for Sri Aurobindo's yoga—nobody can do it alone. They do it for us if we have the aspiration, if we surrender. The Westerners have a great vital capacity—I see that from what has been achieved here in Auroville—and the work that you've done here cannot have been done without some inner development. But that vital has to be surrendered to a higher force. And this is bound to happen here because the City of Dawn has been taken up not by man but by the Divine. So you are very, very fortunate to be here now—such opportunities come only once in millions of years. Now you must simply be good instruments of Their force. *Namaste.*"

I'm walking back through the fields, tuned, vibrating quietly to a note so simple, yet so surely struck... Why can't it always be like this?

Alan

Brief News (continued)

munity of story tellers who were attached to temples. It began as an oral tradition and gradually added mime and gesture. In the 15th and 16th century this developed into a dance form, and with the advent of Muslim rule, Kathak moved from the temple to the court. Kathak came to be recognized as having two major schools: the Jaipur *gharana* and the Lucknow *gharana*.

Auroville witnessed a performance from the Lucknow *gharana*, and was graced by a solo performance by Pandit Birju Maharaj, the greatest living master of this dance tradition. The flamboyant dancers who all seemed to be virtuosos created an atmosphere that many Aurovilians will remember. □

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AVI Italia, c/o Emanuele Scanziani, Via Mazzini 19, 24100 Bergamo, Italy.
AVI Nederland, c/o M. Berden, Lobellalaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag, The Netherlands.
AVI Quebec, c/o Denis Henley, 847 Chemin Perry, Aylmer (Quebec), J9H 5C9 Canada.
AVI Sverige, c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borgholm, Broddebö, S-59700 Alvidaberg, Sweden.
AVI U.K., c/o M. Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W.Sussex, PO18 8SP, U.K.
AVI USA, c/o Jack Alexander, P.O.Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA

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