

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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Drawing by Pietro

Ganesh, 'Remover of Obstacles'

## Of egos and barrier-breakers

**"A**UROVILIANS have massive egos", the woman said, spreading her arms, hands held out dramatically each side of her head to physically emphasise the point. Then she went on to contrast them with Ashramites and local Tamil people she knew in Pondy, who she depicted as generally more gentle, humble, kind, sensitive, caring and unselfish. Obviously she expected that, being an Aurovilian myself, I would feel embarrassed by the comparison, but somehow I wasn't. I knew what she was referring to, namely something in the nature and bearing of Aurovilians that has at times been labelled arrogance, and which has been criticised over the years; but I felt she failed to understand the phenomenon in the context of Auroville.

Yes, on the surface Aurovilians often do appear arrogant, and maybe a few are just that, but what I feel the majority of Aurovilians exude, which is often mistaken for arrogance, is CONFIDENCE. Without it, Auroville wouldn't have got as far as it has.

Aurovilians have to be confident. One can't remain in Auroville for long if one has doubts as to why one is here, the work that

needs to be done, and the higher objective set before one. To abandon family, friends, a job and the comfortable security of one's own culture and country, Aurovilians have to be extremely confident regarding the greater importance of the ideal they have come for, the certainty of achieving it, and their own capacity to stay the course. Auroville is not a place for wimps or doubters! It's not that they wouldn't be tolerated; it's simply unlikely they would remain here for long.

Ashramites and others in Pondicherry, though they may know what The Mother wanted of Auroville, often fail to take into account the immense difference in circumstances they experience compared with Aurovilians. The Ashram in particular was progressively developed under The Mother's direct guidance for over 50 years. All its systems are in place, tried, tested, perfected and functioning with The Mother's approval. Auroville had no such infrastructure. For the first year or two only a handful of people were out here, struggling to survive. Some three years later The Mother was gone. She had conveyed a lot regarding the ideal, the spirit, the general conditions and how to live the life of an Aurovilian, but there was no

chance after early 1973 to seek Her guidance on the many difficulties that later arose, and on future plans. From 1973 the Aurovilians had to find their own way, establish their own systems, and go it alone. Correction: they didn't have to entirely go it alone, but they chose to do so. Again, that ego problem? Yes and no; I'd prefer to say it was their idealism. They measured the Sri Aurobindo Society as it was in the mid-seventies against their ideal, found it wanting, and felt they could move faster and more easily towards their goal independently. Underlying that decision was again their confidence.

The Mother of course was quite specific about what was expected of Aurovilians, but when it comes to the image I find myself drawn to Sri Aurobindo's stunning passage in Book III, Canto 4 of *Savitri*:

*"I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers  
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life  
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth:  
Forerunners of a divine multitude  
Out of the paths of the morning star they came  
Into the little room of mortal life.  
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,  
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,  
The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
The massive barrier-breakers of the world..."*

The passage ends with the two prophetic lines:

*"Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth  
And justify the light on Nature's face."*

Yes, I believe their tread one day will change the suffering earth, but that is clearly in the future. For now, the words I would focus on are "massive barrier-breakers of the world". Surely, that's what today's Aurovilians are expected to be.

What sort of person is going to be a barrier-breaker? To live in Auroville means to live with every type of difficulty, ranging from confrontations with nature—in the form of termites, snakes, ants, rabid animals and scorpions—to more mundane ones such as water shortages, cultural confrontation, bad roads, theft and insecurity. To participate in

**T**his issue is diverse, reflecting different interests and points of exploration within the community—with professional comments coming from outside the community on one of the topics. "What is the relationship between Integral Yoga and modern psychological approaches?" and "Are the Aurovilians arrogant?" are two of the questions that are raised and examined. Also, we present a portrait of a latter-day pioneer afforestation project; we examine the newcomer experiences of Auroville through the eyes of some 'victims', we interview the director of a much-acclaimed stage adaptation of *Savitri*, presented at Bharat Nivas recently; we explain why an Aurovilian has been offering daily 'pujas' for over twenty years at the Ganesh temple at one of the main entrances to Auroville.

Auroville means to try to reach an intangible ideal without knowing how to get there, and to accept the certainty of being frequently misunderstood and criticised in individual and collective attempts to do so. Those who are drawn here have to be endowed with vision, determination, commitment, steadiness, inner strength and idealism. They have to be the sort of people described in Sri Aurobindo's *The Hour of God*, people who "even though (they) fall... shall rise again".

Whereas one enters the Ashram specifically to do yoga, in Auroville this is not a stated necessity. The Mother simply invited to Auroville "all those who thirst for progress and aspire for a higher and truer life." On 10.11.69, She added that all an Aurovilian needed to participate was "the simple goodwill to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity".

In another statement, The Mother said, "I invite you to the great adventure..." Although the adventure referred to is ultimately an adventure of consciousness, still Her appeal seems to have been to adventurous-minded people; people often as not endowed with egos and vital natures, but specially with confidence in their ability to go through to the end, to find the golden fleece or pot of gold, to reach their objective, to achieve an ideal set before them.

Finally, what of the mixture and nature of today's Aurovilians? On first acquaintance, outsiders in particular often hasten to the conclusion that Auroville is full of the wrong type of people! Where is that high spirituality; that loving, caring openness and consecration one expects? Why is this person here? Why that? Aurovilians also look at each other and don't understand! Yet at the same time they believe that the mixture of people drawn here cannot be accidental. Behind the seemingly impossible mix they feel there is a purpose, and that each individual is here for a reason, representing—and working out—something for humanity. It's reassuring; but it's difficult. And to complicate matters the mix keeps changing. Mother adds new ones, removes old ones, throws in temporary influences, adjusts, kneads, presses, mixes and brings people into confrontation with each other again and again. Progress is

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## "As a newcomer you feel like a second-class citizen..."

They came to Auroville in February this year, intending to stay. Wyn, a woman in her forties with her seventeen-year old daughter Kelly. To all outside appearances, they got integrated quite easily into the community. Kelly joined Last School, Wyn took up secretarial work. Kelly's decision to leave, seven months later, resulted in family tensions as Wyn desired to stay. They left together recently—Wyn only for one year. *Auroville Today* asked them about their experiences as newcomers, which drive home the point that entry into Auroville is not easy and that the attitude of Aurovilians towards newcomers has not changed much over the years...

*Auroville Today: Wyn, you are one of the two editors of the recently published spoof 'Auroville News' because you felt that the present Auroville atmosphere is so heavy—nobody smiles!—that a good laugh was necessary lighten it a little. Many laughed and some even felt that this issue of the Auroville News should be compulsory reading for all newcomers. Reading between the lines it shows that it is not easy for the newcomer in Auroville. What is your experience?*  
Wyn: There is of course the good and the bad side. The bad side is that it is really difficult to get assimilated because Aurovilians are not very open to strangers. You have got to find your own way. People see that you are making mistakes and do not tell you that you are making mistakes. There is virtually no support. Now I had been here three times before, so in my case it was not so bad, but still...

The Entry Group has as a standard procedure to appoint someone as your contact person. The idea is good, but the implementation has to improve. In my case, after a first tea with my contact person I never saw her again! She said to come to her if I had any problem. But most people are reluctant to go to their contact persons with all the stupid little things they are confronted with in the beginning. How to open a bank account, how does Pour Tous function and so on and so on. We were lucky, as we soon developed individual contacts, but even with those contacts it was difficult. I had to find it out all for myself, and as I am stubborn I succeeded. Kelly knows that I was raving at times: why do these people not say something!! Someone else might just have given up.

Kelly: That is also my experience. I found it hard to get involved with the other kids, and I was definitely an outsider. If I happened to be around, they would call me in, but if I wasn't, nobody would take care to call me. I joined Last School, but there was a lot of indifference, and I noticed that the Auroville kids are not as open as I was used to in Australia. Over there, when new people come in, they are really open. I don't know, perhaps it is because they have grown up together, and perhaps they have lots of freedom here, they can do what they want and this and that. I was not used to that.

In Auroville you are thrown on yourself, you think much more of what you want to do, where you want to go, and you do not follow everyone so easily. I have become much more individualistic during my stay here.

The school itself was stunning me at first. The kids were extremely free, walking out of the class if they pleased, shouting at the

teacher, swearing and so on, not working. But later I got used to it, and since the blow-up at Last School that has changed a lot. They have become much stricter, and I was used to that in Australia. At first I found the level easy, too easy, but later it became more or less the same as I was used to.

### Why do you leave?

Kelly: I feel that I can do more at home in Australia. There I can do a lot with theatre, and with camera, video, and that is not here. There is an attempt in Auroville to do something with video, but that is not sufficient, there is no comparison with home. After that, I want to go to theatre school.

Wyn: Auroville has helped Kelly to mature, probably quicker than she would have done if she had stayed in Australia. But Kelly feels that she doesn't have enough to do here, while I feel—and that is the good side of Auroville!—that I am better here than at home. Here your age doesn't matter, and what you look like does not matter. I feel like a person here, while back there I feel like a has-been.

*Wyn, you complain about Aurovilians being closed up. Do you understand why?*

Wyn: No, I have not understood why. I have just noticed that people are not very welcoming and not very open to new interpretations or new views. I really do not understand why. Perhaps they have found something good and want to keep it for themselves, I don't know!! It is a strange attitude.

*Could it have to do with 'inner' work?*

Wyn: But take the example of a monastery. People there are totally concentrated on their

inner work, and they are so friendly and open and gentle and nice! There seems to be a bit of a conflict between what people are supposedly here for and their outward attitude. Why do they show that side? Perhaps there are some people here who do not want to be here, but most people are here totally voluntarily. Can't they be happy in what they are doing? In most parts of the world, people are not doing what they really want to do, and here people are doing what they think they want to do and it does not show!

And there is still that fantastic notion that newcomers do not know anything, that they should start from zero, that they should shut up in meetings. That feeling is very much still there, yes. You definitely feel like a second-class citizen. I believe that there is a lot of fear in Aurovilians, fear of interference, perhaps fear of contacting themselves, of seeing themselves through new eyes.

And I think perhaps there should be some class or something, where people can go and talk and get a interpretation of what Sri Aurobindo has written. I have tried to read Sri Aurobindo, and I find him far too intellectual. How can you work on a spiritual aspect if you cannot understand what a person is saying?

*You intend to come back.*

Wyn: Yes, after the summer next year. I am free to come back in March, but why to come back and suffer... I have just been through the summer! Then I would like to build myself a small house, preferably in the center, like near Samasti. I am critical, but also very positive about Auroville. I look forward to coming back.

*Interview by Carel on 11-9-1992*

## 'Auroville, alphabetically speaking': Wyn's dictionary

Of Egos... (continued from page 1)

hard to discern, but through all the difficulties one senses that She moves Auroville forward. And one trusts that that quality of the spirit, that determination, that confidence one sees in the individual Aurovillian is a key element, essential to Her work.

Aurovilians know they are here for a purpose; not an individual or collective purpose, but a divine purpose. And they know that for that purpose Mother needs a diverse mixture of people. Today's mixture certainly seems rougher and coarser than one would expect for a project destined to reach Auroville's high ideal, but it will almost certainly change. Later it may be very different. Perhaps in 50 or 100 years, with 5,000 or 10,000 or even the 50,000 here and all the systems set up, everything functioning smoothly, Auroville will be quieter, calmer, more 'inner', more like the Ashram; but for now the need is for a more robust type. Just as a building starts with the rougher foundation diggers; moves on to using the skills of masons, plumbers and electricians; and then in the final stages employs only the most sensitive craftsmen to complete the details and bring everything to perfection, so it must be here.

Meanwhile, the present need is for 'massive barrier-breakers'. Auroville, for some time, will require their dynamism, their energy, their enthusiasm, their innovativeness, their dogged determination in the face of immense difficulties, their sense of adventure, and—yes—what appears to be their "massive egos". But one day the foundation work will be over and a different type will be drawn here.

Until that time, many will misunderstand.

Tim

Wyn has contributed much to *Auroville Today*—not only her article "Why am I here?", but also her typing skills. Just before her (temporary) departure for Australia, Wyn published some more of her own writing, meant to bring smiles to the sometimes notoriously grim faces of the Aurovilians. She and Santo, both editors of our internal weekly *Auroville News*, brought out a spoof edition of this normally deadly serious paper. In it one could find, among other things, funny meeting reports; for example, suddenly some newcomers from Guinea Bissau with outlandish names had been admitted by the Entry Group; and at the end there was Wyn's dictionary, under the title "Auroville—alphabetically speaking". As the introduction has it, "this dictionary is a light-hearted and slightly irreverent look at Auroville and that diverse group of people known collectively as Aurovilians. It was written primarily for guests and newcomers, but hopefully, Aurovilians will also enjoy my view of 'Auroville'". It is hoped that these descriptions are taken in the spirit in which they are meant. There is no intention to give offence to anyone. My philosophy is: Try not to lose your sense of humour! Keep smiling!" Here are some extracts. The quotations have been taken from *Words of the Mother, Collected Works Vol.14*.

*"A smile acts upon difficulties as the sun upon clouds—it disperses them."*

**Aurovillian:** Someone who has resided in Auroville for at least one year—and who has then gone before the 'grand jury' (*Entry Group—eds*). Most Aurovilians start out as interested guests and eager newcomers, full of enthusiasm and energy. Then the dreaded malady, Aurovilitis, rears its ugly head.

**Aurovilitis:** There is no way of knowing who is going to be affected by this awful affliction. The most obvious symptom of having caught the bug is the seeming inability to smile. Badly affected persons not only don't smile, they lose the ability to look directly at a fellow human being, instead their eyes focus on a point over or beyond another's head or shoulders. Indeed, they appear to not even see other people, particularly 'new' faces.

The only sure way to avoid this plague is to keep smiling. Once infected, a possible cure is ten minutes of hearty laughter each day, preferably with the patient watching the performance in a mirror. Additionally therapeutic help would be to say a few welcoming or simply friendly words to a guest or newcomer at least every two days.

**Gecko:** These homely little creatures like nothing better than to use your favourite picture, or your floor, or your bed, or your head, as a toilet. They cling to the walls or roof of your home and quite uninhibitedly let nature take its course. They love to chirrup at each other at all hours of the day and night. They also have the very disconcerting habit of leaving their tails behind if you try to catch

them. What to do with three dozen gecko tails? Forget it—catch ants instead!

**Greenbelt:** Not an award for achievement in judo or karate, rather an award for lots of hard work and perseverance. Exploring, by bicycle preferably, along some of Auroville's more picturesque tracks will soon get you acquainted with the greenbelt. Don't worry if you happen upon the occasional wild-eyed, bushy-haired, gaunt and partially clad person, wandering wanly through the woods—it'll be a long-lost guest or newcomer (probably long eligible for Aurovillian-hood by now). You see, there are no signboards, and a sand path and a tree and a tree, and a tree, do look awfully alike!

*"Learn to smile always and in all circumstances; to smile at your sorrows as well as your joys, your sufferings as well as your hopes, for in a smile there is a sovereign power of self-mastery."*

**Language:** The 'official' language of Auroville is English—and what English! There is Indian English, Tamil English, American English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English and, of course, English English. Then all the varieties of accented English—French English, German English, Dutch, Swedish, Swiss, Belgian, Austrian, Italian and Spanish English and not to forget to mention Japanese English and even Russian English.

**Newcomer:** After three months' residence in Auroville, you are called a newcomer. This name is quite frequently used as a 'put-down'

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## "We must light a bonfire together"

Rain gusted against the roof, the wind howled outside, Russian voices filled the air. All that was missing was the samovar—and snow! *Auroville Today* was visiting Aspiration to meet some 'ghost' Aurovillians. In other words, our Russian friends who, though living and working in Auroville for over a year now, had somehow escaped mention in the Auroville Information Directory. "We inhabit some intermediate zone", one of them joked, as we explored together their initial expectations of Auroville, their experiences and their hopes for the future.

Igor, from Moscow, was a senior researcher in psychology and computer science at the Academy of Science. He arrived in Auroville with his wife and daughter in January, 1991, and is at present working as an archivist at 'Aurelec'. They live in Aspiration. Nina, his wife, is a biologist who specialised in the physiology of vision. Anatoly comes from Kiev, and is an engineer who specialised in vacuum technology at the Academy of Science. He came here with his wife in December, 1991, and works as a production manager at Auromodel Atelier. Tatiana, his wife, is a painter who has been interested in Indian thought and philosophy for nearly 30 years. She works in Auromodel Atelier—where they also have an apartment—as a designer and painter. Boris comes from Siberia. He was a biologist in the Academy of Science, and later taught ecology to children. He also translated some writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother on education into Russian. He came to Auroville in September, 1991, and at present helps in the manufacture of the disks for Matrimandir's outer skin. He lives in Aspiration.

*Auroville Today: Many of you first read about Auroville in an idealistic article in Komsomolskaya Pravda. How far did the reality match up to your expectations?*

Igor: My first impression was of a big discrepancy between my dreams and the reality. I'd expected the Aurovillians to have made major spiritual advances, but I discovered the same kind of consciousness here that I have experienced everywhere. It was very difficult for me to accept. But then I understood what Mother meant when she

said that we have to start with the current level of consciousness and work from there. Boris: I'd received quite realistic information about Auroville before I came, so I was prepared for many things. What did surprise me, however, was how difficult it was to find work here.

Anatoly: I wasn't surprised that Auroville was not more advanced because I knew that Sri Aurobindo had said that transformation could take thousands of years, and we are at the very beginning of that process. However, one thing did surprise me. When some of us tried to open our hearts and souls to other Aurovillians, we didn't receive the same response. I'd thought people here would be a little more open and sincere.

Tatiana: When I first heard of Auroville in 1972, I was young and very idealistic. Now I'm less so. However, I'm happy to be in Auroville because here I meet so many people who can understand me and have the same ideas as myself. This has never happened to me before, because in my country you could not talk about these things except to a very few people.

Nina: I agree with Anatoly that people are not so open here. But I also understand how difficult this yoga is, and what kind of problems it throws up.

Igor: This is important. Because now I understand that in a place like Auroville, where people are trying to change their consciousness more rapidly than usual, all our ancient reflexes come swimming up. At first I was surprised when I encountered these in the form of aggression and so on, but now I



A Russian evening in Aspiration... From left to right: Boris, Anatoly, Tatiana, Nina and Igor.

see that it's the best and quickest way to clean up our inner beings. Actually, I'm very optimistic about Auroville because every day I experience Mother helping me in a very powerful way with all my problems—and everybody in this room has had the same experience. Perhaps the outer difficulties here have made us listen more to this inner voice.

*The peoples of the former Soviet Union have had a very particular experience over the past 70 years. Sri Aurobindo has also written about the special qualities of the Russian soul. What do you feel that you, as Russians, can bring to Auroville in the way of insights and inspirations?*

Anatoly: One of the fundamental characteristics of the Russian people is that we like to live and to work together. This makes us very sensitive to certain things that are happening—or not happening—in Auroville. For example, many people from the West arrive here with money, and immediately start building their individual houses. But many of us from the former Soviet Union—and from other poorer parts of the world—have to overcome terrible difficulties to get here, we arrive with little money, but with a wish to work and live together to create a supramental consciousness. At the moment, it's difficult for people like us to manage to stay here. That's why we would like Auroville Fund to allocate a little money to build 20-30 capsules with a common kitchen for those who arrive like us, and who would like to get the chance to contribute to the community in some way. We feel the need for this very sharply because of our feeling of brotherhood—which perhaps is more acute in us than in other nations. Also, in our country at the moment, there is an emptiness of ideology. It's very important for the future of the country that the right ideas and ideals are taken up by our people's hearts and minds. So Auroville must keep a connection and an opening with our people, and not make it impossible for them to come here.

Igor: On a spiritual level, I cannot understand how it is possible to want to live separately, as some Aurovillians seem to want to do. Because when I understood through spiritual practice how many different levels of consciousness there are in this universe, I also understood that I could only advance by somebody helping me and, in turn, me helping someone else. We are all particles of the universal soul—this is not academic knowledge for me, but a real inner feeling.

Nina: We believe that without a community life we cannot progress...

Igor: It's our inspiration. That's why, when we are more settled here, I think the Russians

will help arrange for a more communal life on an external level in Auroville. Many spiritual communities have collapsed in Russia because it's very difficult to build a community on a spiritual basis alone. There's also a need for common work, common living. That's why, in the Russian monasteries, there was this very important rule that all the monks should come together, once or twice a day, for meals or an activity that united them.

Anatoly: I would like to see a more active spiritual life among people in Auroville. If there are a sufficient number of spiritualised beings in the world, it will have an immense effect...

Igor: Even in Russia, we have this saying that one holy man in an area of 200 kilometres radius can save everybody in that region!

Anatoly: ...so it seems to me that we have to direct all our energy to help create these people, to build such a force inside us that we become, or help others to become, supramentalised. I feel that Auroville is a very good place for this work. For all the Russians who have come here have had powerful spiritual experiences here.

*Is mysticism still a dominant note in the Russian character?*

Anatoly: In our country, so many people have survived so many difficulties over the centuries that it's impossible that a great mysticism should not grow in the soul of the Russian people. The outer difficulties forced us to look for a way out, for an inner, richer life that didn't depend on external circumstances. There's a marvellous passage in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The soldiers come to arrest Pierre and he says, "What do you want to arrest? My immortal soul?" This moved me so much.

Boris: That Russian sense of another kind of freedom is also shown in one of our sayings: "Even if you are surrounded by walls, you can always rise up to the sky." In other words, your soul is always free.

Anatoly: Before I came here, I didn't read *Mothers' Agenda*. But now that I'm reading it, and when I see those photographs of Mother's hands with their determination, I understand what a tremendously difficult work she was doing—and still is doing. I feel that if the Aurovillians are willing to do Mother's work, to fight so hard and to endure like her, then Auroville will live. Because those who do this spiritual work—this inner work which is the most necessary work in Auroville—will light a spark, will fire others, and, finally, together we will create a huge bonfire. But the only way to put fire in another's soul is sincerity...

*Interview by Alan on 25.8.92*



A painting by Elisabeth, a Russian translator, exhibited at Pitanga recently.

### Dictionary (contd. from previous page)

as in "You don't really understand the issue—you are only a newcomer", or, "You are not entitled to voice an opinion at this meeting, you are only a newcomer." Getting angry or defensive only confirms the opinion that you are not 'ready' to participate. Bide your time—you'll be an Aurovilian before too long; then you too can play the put-down game.

**Realised Being:** Someone who keeps repeating, "I never realised India would be like this", as they vainly:

- > try to get some Government Department to do some very simple paperwork, in a reasonable length of time;
- > try to get cool during the long, hot summer;
- > try to get clothes dry during the monsoon time;
- > try to sleep while the nearby village celebrates yet another holy day or marriage or festival;

> try to keep mosquitoes, termites, cockroaches (and rats, mice, ants, frogs, caterpillars—eds) from invading their homes.

Someone who keeps repeating: "I never realised how hard it would be, trying to become realised."

**Residents' Assembly:** A coming together of Aurovillians to resolve a problem or to formulate a new regulation. Usually everyone present at a gathering agrees to what is being proposed as only those in favour of a particular proposition bother to turn up at a meeting—dissenters prefer to remain in the background. They then call their own meeting to oppose what was agreed upon at the earlier gathering!

**Time:** You are now in India, where people's perspective upon time is quite different from that in the West. Do not expect things in a hurry. Learn to relax. Everything gets done eventually; slow down, take it easy. Nine hundred million Indians can't be wrong! □



# Integral Yoga and Psychology

## Is any Western system of Psychology compatible with Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga?

In February this year, Dieter and Marlies, who are Psychosynthesis therapists, gave two three-day workshops in Auroville. The courses were well-received (see *Auroville Today* #40) but triggered a discussion about the question whether Psychosynthesis or any other Western system of psychology is compatible with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. We have asked some people with experience

in both fields to give us their views: Dr. A.S. Dalal, clinical psychologist from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry; Dr. Carl Peters, psychologist connected to the Psychosynthesis Affiliates Institute in California; and Arya Maloney, a practising psychotherapist in New York who lived for some years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and in Auroville.

The value of contemporary psychological therapies to persons aspiring to participate in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is a topic I have pursued actively for the last twenty years. Part of this exploration has taken place in Auroville during the period I lived there. For many Aurovilians the attempt to work psychologically with forces such as fear, violence, relationship problems, etc. has produced beneficial change. Others have reacted strongly against these psychological adventures, charging that they call in the "dark forces", or are so limited as not to be worthy of recognition.

Any psychological approach, whether psychotherapeutic or yogic, is limited by what it envisions and by its goals. In this regard, to compare any contemporary therapy with Integral Yoga is akin to comparing bananas and penguins. Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's goals of "transformation of the physical body", a "Supramental Being", a "new race", "human unity"... are not on the agenda of any psychotherapeutic programme, or, for that matter, any other system of yoga. Since the aim of Integral Yoga is neither human perfection nor escape from the human condition into another world it must, necessarily, avoid a sectarian stance. The "human being", whether Marxist, Buddhist, criminal, freedom fighter, etc., is a transitional being, a laboratory for evolutionary experiments. The "new being(s)" could manifest at any space/time in the energy field we call earth—indeed, Mother reminds us that in her Ashram you can find the whole world!

We exist in an alchemical soup with many ingredients and many spices. These range from the supramental consciousness to the psychological forces that move a ritual murderer or a Saddam Hussein—all are used for the creation of a Life Divine on earth. It is precisely this non-sectarian working of the masculine and feminine energy we know as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that might allow us to consider the value of contemporary psychological therapies in this Great Passage.

This house we inhabit has many rooms, each with a different atmosphere. Some are suffocating, others more rarified, still others filled with ecstasy. Mostly we are identified with the foyer and a few adjoining rooms. We pace back and forth like caged animals, longing for freedom, but more often settle into our prison, barricade the doors and forget the myriad spaces beyond, below, above. This is the ego's experience—a jailed jailor locking out both outer and inner worlds and imagining himself a ruler. Deep in the recesses of this dwelling reside the King and Queen, aware of all the secret passages connecting the vast array of rooms. Messengers are sent continuously inviting the mad servant to the inner rooms, to the ongoing celebration of the royal couple. Out of fear and ignorance he fails to receive the invitation. This central court is the abode of the Soul or Self.

*"To compare any contemporary therapy with Integral Yoga is akin to comparing bananas and penguins." — Arya Maloney*

On this axis from ego to Self there is psychological praxis that serves the ego, i.e. egocentric, and praxis that "relativizes" the ego in the service of the Self. The former approach is exemplified in psychoanalysis of the Freudian variety. The latter is best expressed in the transpersonal therapies: the analytic psychology of Carl Jung; the archetypal psychology of James Hillman; the imaginal psychology of Mary Watkins; the process-oriented psychology of Arnold Mindell; Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis; Stanislav Grof's holotropic integration, etc. One of the common bonds between the transpersonal approaches is the perspective on the ego. As the therapeutic process unfolds the ego is experienced, not as the center of personality, but as an image or figure among numerous images in the psyche. Ego moves from the centre of the field of consciousness to the circumference of the circle.

The process-oriented psychology of Arnold Mindell is a transpersonal therapy that is aware of and utilizes the totality of our being—body, mind, emotions, spirit. The 'method' is to follow the process of the person by amplifying the signals or information appearing in the field. Six 'channels' are the vehicles for this information: visual (dreams, fantasies, images...); auditory (voices, music...); proprioception (nausea, heat, tingling...); movement; relating to others; world (synchronistic events).

A woman tells me a dream in which a huge multi-coloured snake is slithering around a courtyard bordered by several windows. The dreamer is watching a woman sitting, holding her baby, in one of the windows. The woman is oblivious of the snake and the dreamer is filled with fear. When I attempt to work on the dream the woman says she is too afraid to look at it. As she tells me this I notice that the upper part of her body is swaying back and forth much like a snake might move. I encouraged her to make the movement consciously and as she does this her eyes become slightly glazed and unfocused as if she is going into trance. At this point she remembers being hypnotized by a cult.

The above vignette serves as an example of following a person's process as well as the process of switching channels. The process begins in the visual channel (the dream), moves into proprioception (fear), next into movement (swaying back and forth), back to proprioception (feeling of being hypnotized) and finally a visual memory of the cult.

Mindell has taken his work beyond the therapy room to do conflict resolution in hot spots such as the Middle East and South Africa. He has worked with people in comas as well as in large group processes of 200 or more. What is the goal? "My spiritual belief

is that reality is potentially divine. Everything that is, lies enfolded in our total perceptual system." (Mindell, *Riding the Horse Backwards*, NY: Penguin, 1992, p.24)

I have often thought of Auroville while studying process-oriented psychology. Auroville is based on a dream which is manifesting in a collective body. This dream manifests through physical symptoms, absurdities, miracles, crises... The essence of Mindell's work is dreams manifesting in individual and collective bodies: "We are neither this nor that; we are a body which is in the midst of change and evaporating. We are timeless, thousands of years old, and involved with processes which go beyond our present identity. This gives us an eternal feeling, but one which is realizable right here in the moment." (op.cit., p.42)

Arya Maloney

*"The mental limitations of Psychosynthesis can be overcome by consecrating the work to the Divine and surrendering to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's guidance." — Carl Peters*

I came to Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Yoga in 1980 at the age of fifty-two during a life that even now includes a psychiatric career, marriage, children and a grandchild. My conscious spiritual journey began in 1962 with Zen Buddhism for thirteen years and then, starting in 1975, I became involved with Psychosynthesis. Psychosynthesis, a psychology which has an integrative/transformational aspect and which draws on Indian thought and methods, links well with Integral Yoga. It aims to help the spiritual seeker in two ways: through harmonizing conflicting motivations in the personality and through developing the will.

Psychosynthesis describes three levels of self: the personal self or 'I', the Higher Self, and the Universal Self. It distinguishes three respective levels of Will (corresponding to mental being, psychic being, and Atman); levels of collective consciousness; and 'sub-personalities'.

Sub-personalities occur as polar opposites within the personality, one member of the pair more dominant and on the surface, the ego suppressing the other one. This ego-defensive formation occurs when we are not mature enough to integrate opposing energies and stifle one of them to reduce inner tension. While necessary, this solution creates intolerance, and must, after a certain maturity has been obtained, be transcended via psychic transformation. Examples of these polarities are idealist-pragmatist, doer-inner critic, radical-conservative, artist-businessperson etc. As I write putting

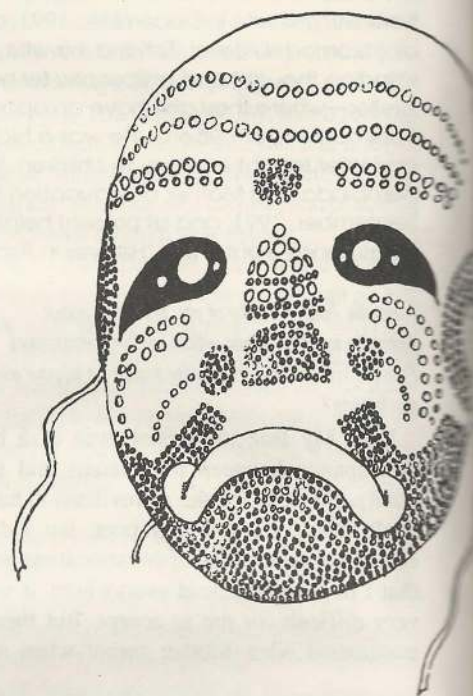
energies and images into words there is also the inner editor concerned with grammar, spelling, formatting, meaning etc... Unless these two work together cooperatively the writing experience is unpleasant and unproductive. The common polarization between mind and emotions results in discord both internally and between persons, often a couple, the opposition causing an attraction.

The process of harmonization in Psychosynthesis involves an integrative relationship between the personal self and the selfish sub-personalities. Through Psychosynthesis, the personal self detaches from the sub-personalities using the process of dis-identification. This is probably drawn from the Advaita process, "I have a mind but I am not the mind" and so on for the other physical and emotional levels, thus promoting the observer self. This witness working with the will, first personal then spiritual, forms an observer-director self. The methods practiced in harmonizing, such as an inner dialogue with sub-personalities and visualizations, are similar to those used by Mother.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother speak of multiplicity in the personality and its tendency for conflicting motivations. Mother encourages us to see these parts in the psychic mirror, to speak to them, to help them into the light—a hundred times a day if necessary—and to persist with this process for years.

Homogenizing the diverse elements, making them uniform, or conforming to a

(continued on page 4)





**"Psychology is the knowledge of consciousness and its operations. A complete psychology must be a complex of the science of mind, its operations and its relations to life and body, with intuitive and experimental knowledge of the nature of mind and its relations to supermind and spirit. A complete psychology cannot be a pure natural science, but must be a compound of science and metaphysical knowledge." — Sri Aurobindo**



DR. A.S. DALAL was born in Tanzania, and first came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on April 24, 1950. He described to us how the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and Mother was the turning point in his life. From 1952 to 1959 he stayed in the Ashram. Afterwards he undertook post graduate studies in psychology, and practised clinical psychology for 21 years in America. In 1986 he retired and came to live permanently in Pondicherry. A.S. Dalal is the author of a number of compilations of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and of *Psychology, Mental Health and Yoga*. His new compilation, called *Growing Within: The Psychology of Inner Development*, is expected to be published in the near future.

*Auroville Today: In your book Psychology, Mental Health and Yoga, you compare Western systems of psychology to the Integral Yoga as developed by Sri Aurobindo. One of these systems is that of the Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli, who introduced Psychosynthesis. Assagioli's concept of psychology includes a Higher Self, and his system is referred to as belonging to the group of 'Transpersonal Psychologies'. Is it at all possible to compare Psychosynthesis to Integral Yoga?*

Dr. Dalal: There are some similarities, at least superficially, between Psychosynthesis and Sri Aurobindo's yoga. Psychosynthesis uses the concept of the Higher Self, a concept which is absent in other systems of psychotherapy. And it speaks of two dimensions of growth, those of the personal and of the transpersonal self. The personal self is that which is proper to the individual; the transpersonal self goes beyond the person. Psychosynthesis states that by developing either the personal or transpersonal self only, one creates a disharmony in the being. The aim of Psychosynthesis is to develop and unify both the personal and the transpersonal dimensions, for which it has developed a number of exercises and techniques.

In Sri Aurobindo's terminology the term Self is used with a much deeper connotation. The term 'transpersonal' corresponds to the term 'universal' of Sri Aurobindo, as distinguished from 'individual' which is called 'personal' in Psychosynthesis. But Sri Aurobindo states that one cannot integrate the personal self—composed of many sub-personalities as they are called in Psychosynthesis—without discovering and bringing to the front the true individual Self, the psychic being which is a portion of the one Self.

Sri Aurobindo states that behind our surface personality made up by our physical body, our vital consciousness and our mental consciousness, there is an inner physical, inner vital, and inner mental consciousness, and that behind these three is the inmost being, the psychic. Discovery and identification with the psychic, followed by a psychic transformation of the surface personality, is the first major step in Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo and Mother have extensively spoken about the psychic: that it is the true undying being of each individual, which des-

cends into the evolution and grows from life to life. It develops from a spark to a more and more individualised entity, and in the course of many lives, comes more and more to the front and governs the outer being. So each psychic being has an individuality, which is different from the psychic being of another person. At the same time it is an individuality without a division, for it is one with all the other individual selves, it sees its own self in all other beings.

The concept of the psychic being as the true individuality is not to be found in any of the Western systems of psychology. Because of the absence of this concept, individuality is equated with the ego. This makes it impossible for the average Westerner to conceive of the transcendence or disappearance of the ego, for that is felt to be tantamount to the disappearance of individuality. From the viewpoint of yoga, it is a contradiction in terms to speak of the unified co-existence of the personal self (the false self of the ego) and the transcendent self (the true self).

*You said that the term Higher Self as used by Psychosynthesis and by Sri Aurobindo has different connotations. Could you explain this?*

Sri Aurobindo has classified many different levels of higher consciousness, which can be distinguished only by someone who has experienced them. Someone who works within the framework of Psychosynthesis, and who has an experience of another state

**"The concept of the psychic being as the true individuality is not to be found in any of the Western systems of psychology." — A. S. Dalal**

of consciousness which appears to transcend the personal self, is apt to attribute this experience to the Higher or Transcendent Self, as that is how any transpersonal state is conceptualized in Psychosynthesis. He lacks the knowledge and the experience to discriminate among the different transpersonal states of consciousness.

What makes this confusion greater is the fact that all that is transpersonal is not necessarily spiritual. According to Sri Aurobindo, the planes above the mind are the true spiritual planes. But there are other 'transpersonal' planes, for example the universal vital, a plane of consciousness which is certainly not spiritual. The experience which is induced by the use of drugs comes usually from this vital plane. So the 'transpersonal' experience of someone who participates in a Psychosynthesis workshop may not be anything truly spiritual, though it can be spiritual.

*One of the popular exercises used by Psychosynthesis is the guided visualisation technique: for example, the one in which you imagine going up on a mountain, where you find a Wise Being. You are asked to have a dialogue with him/her and receive answers to your questions. Later the message is always that the Wise Being is within you and in any future time you can go and contact him. What are we talking about in terms of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? Some kind of higher mental being?*

There is not one specific thing that the image stands for. For different persons it will mean different things. Some may contact a vital being—there are so many of these beings around us who can appear to us as the Wise Being—but depending upon the depth or level which an individual can reach, that particular image may also lead one to a contact with one's true self! The possibility of opening up to a lower or inferior type of guidance, a vital or mental force, is always there. That is why it is very important to be

as sincere as possible in one's motivation and aspiration. If there is an opening in oneself that attracts some of these lower forces, they will take the opportunity and take the guise of something higher and mislead the person. Sincerity is the greatest safeguard. Such beings can and have even taken the form of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to their own sadhaks, despite having Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's protection, so all the more it can happen with those who do not have this protection.

*So the key is sincerity. Mother says somewhere that if you sincerely want a contact with the Divine, whatever you take up can lead you to that. Can we interpret that in the sense that the exercises such as those offered by Psychosynthesis can be a help on the way?*

Certainly. Psychosynthesis offers good exercises, and many are identical to those given by Mother. For example the visualisation technique, which is nothing but a power of conscious thought formation, meditation, prayer, concentration, and so on. The dynamics of it all is that such exercises help to induce a certain state of consciousness which is favorable to receiving help or guidance from above, in which higher forces can come and do their work.

For practitioners of Integral Yoga, however, it is advisable to invoke the protection of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother before participating in such a workshop.

*Do you believe that Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's teaching can be used to create workshops like those of Psychosynthesis in order to practically solve deeper problems of an individual?*

I think it is possible to present through the format of a group workshop some of the principles of Integral Yoga in the form of exercises, such as those used by Psychosynthesis, for teaching certain basic things, such as understanding the different parts of the being or some of the practical applications of yoga principles in both physical and psychological self-healing. But yoga as a spiritual path can be taught only by someone who has attained self realisation to whose guidance one needs to submit oneself totally. In India, this role is taken up by the guru. For Westerners, The Mother observed:

"The Western mind always finds it difficult to submit totally to a Guru, and without total and unquestioning surrender to the Guru his help to you is paralyzed. That is why, generally, I advise Westerners to find the guidance and the Presence within themselves; it is true that this process is very often open to uncertainty and self-deception, mistaking some voice of the ego in disguise for the Divine's guidance. In both cases, it is only an absolute sincerity and an unmixed humility that can be your safeguard."

It is the Divine who really guides us, through whatever human being or system of growth. If the aspiration is sincere, one gets the necessary guidance. Thus any approach can be helpful, provided the system is not unsuitable for a particular individual. For example, Freudian psychoanalysis is unsuitable and can be harmful for a practitioner of Integral Yoga.

*Based upon an interview by Alan and Carel on 2-5-1992*

(continued from page 4)

standard is not the goal. Diversity and uniqueness consecrated to expressing the Divine here on earth must be the goal. Each sub-personality has a virtue that may initially be hidden or distorted. The idealist can envision future possibility, but this may be turned into a gloomy energy or his seeing may be twisted by desire. He must be helped to open up to superconscious energies. The pragmatist can get things done but perhaps in a mean and stingy way. We can help in connecting him with Mother's compassion and generosity. The Divine nurtures each part, each species, to ready them for the fullest expression of itself via infinite diversity.

Psychosynthesis, however, lacks surrender to the Divine. This stalls its progress at the level of the personal self (mental being) and is its main drawback. I agree with Dr. A.S. Dalal's criticism that Psychosynthesis does not discriminate well when evoking energies and beings for guidance, thus opening the door to false, even dangerous ones since the psychic surrender is lacking.

Psychosynthesis is the only psychology I know that systematically describes different aspects, qualities, and stages of the will and thus clarifies how to develop the will.

Psychosynthesis helps me use my personality in the world expressing Divine Love and Knowledge and in my work with others for their psycho-spiritual integration. The psychological methods used in harmonization help prepare the personality for psychic transformation. The mental limitations of Psychosynthesis can be overcome by consecrating the work to the Divine and surrendering to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's guidance.

Carl Peters



# Hermitage: An Abundance of Beauty

“When I came to live in Auroville, in 1988, I always had this feeling that I was too late, that I should have come 20 years before. I was jealous at not having had that pioneering experience of Auroville’s beginnings...”. Petite, fragile-seeming, but tough as nails, Agnes has found half an hour from her many chores—preparing food for the animals, making jams and cakes for Pour Tous, checking on the nursery—to talk to me over tea, in the living room of her house in Hermitage.

Hermitage, one of Auroville’s outlying settlements, is situated between the village of Morattandi on the highway to Madras, and the Lake Estate, 10 kilometres from central Auroville. Hermitage comprises some seventy acres of land, much of it pock-marked rocky soil, covering two hills, that slopes down to the broken table of an impressive canyon on one side, and some fairly new casuarina plantations on the other. One of the few places left in Auroville with open horizons and a sense of space, its stark beauty and physical isolation have attracted a handful of people since the land was first bought for Auroville in 1964—artists, hermits and pioneers—but few survived the harshness of the surroundings and its rugged demands for more than a couple of years. Broken concrete foundations and a couple of ruined huts, situated amidst blossoming bougainvilleas, in a fenced-in section on one of the hills, bear testimony to the various brief-lived attempts to settle Hermitage. The most recent one was that of Manuele, a courageous Frenchwoman, who lived here on her own for two years. This despite continual harassment from a gang of local pebble diggers, who, until then unchallenged, had been digging pebbles for years on Auroville land. However, she too was finally driven back to Auroville, after her hut burnt down in suspicious circumstances.

Before deciding to come and settle in Auroville, Agnes and her husband Bernd, both Germans (she of Norwegian ancestry), had been living in Delhi for seven years, where he had a job with the Goethe Institute. During this period they would visit Auroville at least once a year as they had a number of old friends living here. Their first impressions, like those of many visitors, were mixed—to say the least. “The people were both unfriendly and impolite. We sometimes took a motorbike and went around exploring on our own. The people in Auroville were very tough, some didn’t want any contact and were downright unfriendly at times. But strangely enough, we liked it more and more after each visit. It was the experiment, the attempt to live in a different way, to achieve a more conscious and truer life, that attracted me.”

They had already decided to move to Auroville, but on January 1st, 1989, they found out—two years earlier than expected—that they had been transferred back to Germany. They stayed up all night discussing whether they wanted to go back and earn some more money, before making the move to Auroville, or not. “But after having lived seven years in India, I couldn’t imagine starting my life again in Germany. I love India, even though at times it infuriates me.” Bernd then came down to Auroville on his own and visited Manuele in Hermitage. He had always dreamt about settling in a place with wide open spaces. “‘My Argentina’ he liked to call it, and when he came out here he

immediately fell in love with the land.” They returned together in May and he showed her Hermitage. “It hadn’t rained and was totally dry. There was nothing but pebbles, red soil, and a hot wind. He didn’t tell me he wanted to move here, he didn’t say much, he just asked me, ‘How do you like it?’ and all I said was ‘But it’s impossible to live here!’”

“We moved to Auroville, that Autumn, but I didn’t want to move to Hermitage immediately, I still wanted to look around for different possibilities. I saw a few places that could have interested me, but everything had already been done: the infrastructure was there, and there was nothing very pioneering left to do. I love nature and I love to create, and gradually Bernd’s optimism and enthusiasm became contagious and I started to like the idea of Hermitage.”

Meanwhile Agnes worked in Harmony Stall for a couple of months, writing bills, until she was offered a job in Transition as a crafts teacher. “I like children and always wanted to do something with them, but I had no idea how to teach as I had never done it before. I thought I was going to be an assistant. When I showed up the teachers were all so happy to see me and they said, ‘Now you’re going to have your class!’ I said, ‘What?’ and the next thing I knew they had pushed me into a class of my own and I had never taught before! The kids were actually quite sweet—a lot sweeter than I expected as a lot of people had told me how wild they were. And it all finally worked out all right.”

The survival and viability of any community in Auroville depends on water and the first thing to do once they had made their decision to move to Hermitage—they were staying in Certitude at the time—was to have a well dug. Village dowsers came to locate the water and Agnes who was on her own at the time (Bernd was in Germany) would drive out every day, once her work in the school was over. Her contact with the diggers and workers from the nearby villages was immediately very good: “Once when it rained I got stuck in the jeep. There was no road to speak of then, and I had lost my way, but the people who were digging the well saw me from a distance, and without my asking, they all rushed to come help push the jeep out of the mud—something that would never, in my experience, have happened in North India.”

The goodwill of the neighbouring villages and their support of what is being done in Hermitage was exemplified in another incident that occurred a few months later. One night the foreman from nearby Edayanchavadi suddenly showed up in Certitude, in a state of visible agitation. He told Bernd that dozens of the pebble wallahs had gathered on the hill intent on precipitating a confrontation and fight. Bernd jumped into his jeep and was gone. When he hadn’t returned an hour later, a group of friends, having been informed of the situation by Agnes, set out for Hermitage on motorbikes. But the Battle of the Hill was over, even before Bernd had arrived. A watchman and his wife who had been staying on the land

PHOTO ROGER



Agnes at Hermitage. “Petite, fragile seeming, but tough as nails...”

had managed to get away, she to her village and he to another. When Bernd arrived he saw a large gathering of people with torches on the hill and thought they were the pebble wallahs. However it turned out they were villagers from three different villages in the area—many of them women who had come armed with their coconut brooms and cuttis (grass cutting knives)—and who had managed, in a decisive show of concerted force, to drive off the pebble wallahs.

The dowsers found water and they proceeded to have a deep well dug in the hope that it wouldn’t dry up in the summer months. Finally the big day came when the well was to be inaugurated. It was late afternoon when a group of us piled into their jungle-painted jeep, Bernd at the wheel, and we set out for Hermitage—Händel’s Water Music on the jeep’s radio drowning out the barking dogs and village loudspeakers en route. By the time we arrived, a dozen or so workers and amahs had already gathered expectantly, and at sunset, as the sky was breaking up like a burning canvas, the pump was turned on, and when water gushed out, Agnes was so happy she was crying. “Because if you don’t have water you can’t do anything.”

The nursery was started in February ’90. “I had collected all the seeds myself, bicycling all over Auroville, looking at the different trees. I just collected everything I could find, not knowing whether they would take or not. I enjoyed splitting open the pods and soaking and preparing them, and wanted to find out for myself what grew and what didn’t.”

They received a grant from the Canada Fund, and by April—when work started on their house which was completed seven months later—20,000 trees were ready for planting in the nursery. They started planting in May—usually the hottest and driest time of the year. But the summer of ’90, because of the side-effects of a cyclone that eventually devastated the coast of Andhra Pradesh after hovering off Pondicherry’s coast for days, was extraordinary. It rained at least once a week from May until the onset of the winter monsoon.

Today thousands of saplings and young trees cover one of the hills of Hermitage, which, once a barren yellow, now shimmers in the haze and sunlight with a light green/blue/grey sheen. Fifty to sixty percent of the over forty species of forest trees they planted on 30 acres have survived the first crucial two years without watering. A friend comes out regularly from Auroville to help in the general work, and Agnes works three

mornings a week at Le Gourmet—Auroville’s food processing unit—which brings in just enough money to pay the wages for the watchmen and buy diesel for the pump. Hundreds of trees were planted one weekend by Johnny and teenagers from Last School—some of whom Agnes remembers suffered sunstroke by the end of the first day.

However, the considerable work done in a little over two years and its visible results are just a beginning, at least as far as Bernd is concerned. He sees the whole area that stretches from Oustery Lake to Aurobrindavan as one unbroken whole (see *Auroville Today* no. 37 for map of Bioregion), that if protected and left undisturbed will become a sanctuary where nature will regenerate itself as has occurred elsewhere on the Auroville plateau. In 1991 he oversaw the bunding of ten acres of Auroville land and fifteen acres of village land for a Wasteland Development project. This winter, he plans to take up bunding on 75 acres of village land on top of the watershed, along with finishing the natural thorny fencing on the second hill—10 acres of which he plans to devote to silviculture. This fencing is important, as even with a day watchman cows still invade the land and buffaloes come in the night to eat bananas and tromp through the nursery. He is also experimenting with vetyver grass as an alternative to bunding for water conservation and soil erosion control. Bernd’s overall vision for this important outpost of Auroville, whose name he feels should be “Abundance of Beauty”, is both ambitious and exciting: his dream is to one day see a forest stretching from Aurobrindavan to the Lake Estate. And it could be now or never, if one considers the belching smokestacks and spreading lights of Pondicherry’s industrial zone on the horizons.

I asked Agnes if being alone at times in Hermitage didn’t worry her. She laughed and said, “Not at all” before going on to add, “But there are moments when a telephone could help! Even if there are times when life is quite hard and tiring, Hermitage gives me both energy and strength to overcome them.” A feeling that Bernd shares: “I don’t feel that I’m putting energy into Hermitage, quite the contrary, its Hermitage and the land that give me energy!” Given what has already been accomplished in the last three years, the dream of an unbroken forest stretching from Aurobrindavan to Oustery Lake could well—if given the right support—become a reality in the years to come.

Roger



## 'Basically Blissful'

A NEW CREATIVE magazine was launched in August 1992 by Jocelyn of Silence. It is the collective work of a number of Auroville artists and writers who gathered together during a long hot summer and attempted to stir deeper and wider levels of consciousness.

*Basically Blissful* is what emerged. At its best the magazine is a celebration of a new burst of creative energy in Auroville. It is a gift to the community and as Jocelyn puts it: "It was a birthday card for Sri Aurobindo."

The writing works very well in places. Auroson's poem "Some through Fire, Some through Patience" has a beautiful quality and Anu's poem "Fire" is very strong. Ed's reflections on Rio are interesting and timely; Tai's ironic humour and wit were welcome, although some of his passages are arduous reading. Dee's insights show a real sense of honesty; Karina's drawings and Anu's poetry combined into an exotic dance of line and word. Vincent's still-life photo of a chair has a stark beauty and light. Jill's poems are sensitive images. Vici's is the dark commanding message of a young poet.

The photographs of sculptures didn't work very well for me. They were too static, not shot with a sharp enough focal lens to bring out their true force. In fact, the visual presentation of the magazine was uneven. There were long passages of text without any visual break and pages of multiple photo collages where one or two well-chosen photos by Sven and John Mandeem would have been better. What struck me most in terms of the magazine's content were Sri Aurobindo's pertinent lines from *Savitri*:

"Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth,  
And justify the light on Nature's face."

I also enjoyed Jocelyn's description of the hero in the planetary saga: "Something extraordinary happens to the hero which prompts his awakening. He fights his ego and wins his own soul." And I was moved by Dee's revelation that for the doer, all tasks, however humbling, have their divinity, are part of the luminous whole.

For a next issue, I would like to see a magazine with a more obviously coherent theme. A magazine that is daring and deep, but something more universal and relevant to the outside world. Having said this, *Basically Blissful* is a unique addition to the Auroville annals, and the concept of a creative magazine in Auroville should be supported.

Marti

## To all our readers

IN FEBRUARY 1993, Auroville will celebrate its 25th birthday. *Auroville Today* would like to devote its February issue to personal reflections upon Auroville's past, present and future.

We invite contributions of around 500 words from our readers: short essays, vignettes, reflections, articles, anecdotes, cartoons and photographs (b/w).

The deadline is December 1st, 1992.

Address: *Auroville Today*, CSR Office, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Fax: 0091-413-862216 (Center Guest-house). N.B.: Works only when there is no power-cut!

Performed in Auroville

## "A Greater Dawn"

On August 28th, Veenapani Chawla came to Auroville from Bombay's Prithvi Theatre with her touring production of "A Greater Dawn". This adaptation of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* concentrates on the debate between Love and Death, using this conflict as the basis for the dramatic action. The play starred Mita Vashisht as Savitri and K.C. Manadendranath as Death. Joy, from Auroville, took part in the chorus. In Bombay, the production received a favourable review from Meher Pestonji, the local reviewer for the Indian magazine *The Week*, who called the play "a masterpiece". *Auroville Today* had an opportunity to interview Ms. Chawla before the show that was held at Bharat Nivas auditorium. We asked her to describe the process that led to the production of "A Greater Dawn". She described her seven years of study leading up to this show, an intense period which led her first to England in the mid-80's, then back to India where she continued to explore the voice and voice training. She is not yet satisfied with the work, and even now is changing, improving, adjusting the sound and movement on stage. For Veenapani Chawla, adapting *Savitri* has become a process of transformation, a challenge and a great quest.

*Auroville Today*: It took you seven years to realize this production of *Savitri*?

Veenapani Chawla: The first thing that struck me was, alright, you have been exploring movement in theatre, but here is a text which is *mantric*, which needs to be explored with the voice; you have to get sound patterns, sound structures to work with this text. I decided to go to the various gurus of musical and theatre tradition in India, for training the voice and to see what kind of stylised sound I could get for these mantras. I went to England and had some training there, but it was very un-poetic—cut and dried physiol-

ogy, exactly how sound was created, but all the lovely, mystical notions one has about sound were completely destroyed. Back in India I studied with two very great singers from Delhi, and I discovered, to my horror, that whereas in England the training is excessively scientific, here it is absolutely the opposite, you learn by imitation, and there is absolutely no analysis about how you do what you are doing. I had to make a lot of discoveries, about voice and sound.

You were discovering a new vocal technique?

Yes, but I did not succeed entirely. I did manage to get somewhat of a methodology for training the actor's voice, but I was not able to get a sound pattern which was ready-made and from which I could derive a stylised way of speech. It was a big struggle. I had to just go according to the text.

What was your aim? What did you want to get?

I felt there must exist somewhere the possibility of putting this text to a very stylised structure—opera, Japanese 'Noh' play—that kind of thing. But I did not succeed, I did not find a structure that was suitable. I am still looking. Later I realised there were moments of choreography. I had the chorus moving, in a stylised way, and created the sound. In fact I did not know I was going to have a chorus until I wrote the script. It was a device I was compelled to use. I had Death and Savitri, the two extremes. So I needed the chorus to be there, to be the event, to be the symbolic dawn, to be the thoughts of Savitri, to be an extension of Savitri's emotions, to be the landscape around Savitri, to be that element of Savitri into which she plunges, which is death, unconsciousness, which then slowly gets transformed. So you find the chorus halfway through the play partly on the side of Death and partly with Savitri, and then it slowly moves on to Savitri's side. That's how you can express this whole process of transformation.

Interview by Jill

### 'SAVITRI' THE LEGEND

The story of Satyavan and Savitri is a well-known legend from the Mahabharata. In it the princess Savitri marries Satyavan, a hermit, the son of an exiled King. She is warned however by Narad the seer, that Satyavan would die a year from the date of their marriage. The strength of her wifely devotion is such that after her husband's death she has the power to confront Death, dialogue with him and trick him through argument into giving her husband back to her. She wins from him, as well, other boons—a restored kingdom and eyesight for her exiled and blind father-in-law.

### SRI AUROBINDO'S 'SAVITRI'

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is an epic poem consisting of approximately 24,000 lines. The legend becomes a symbol and transcends a mere story of conjugal love.

Sri Aurobindo describes the origin of creation; it arises out of the plunge the Supreme Original Consciousness takes into the Unconsciousness. He then describes the progressive evolutionary movement of this creation back from Unconsciousness to the Supreme Consciousness.

Although the evolutionary movement progresses because of pressure of consciousness from within, it is also aided by a catalyst from the Supreme Original Consciousness. At every leap in the evolutionary movement—as that which occurs between Life and Mind, for example—an emanation of the Supreme Consciousness acts to propel the movement forward.

The poem addresses itself to the problem of Death/Negation/Unconsciousness which is the greatest obstacle to the evolutionary movement. Although a necessary tool for some time, this impediment will go and creation will be released from the grip of Unconsciousness.

Satyavan is the "soul of the world" and Savitri the Avatar/Emanation of the Supreme Truth. She is born to save it from the grip of the Unconscious and Death and Ignorance.

Savitri's confrontation with Death is really a journey of the Avatar into the realms of Unconsciousness. She takes with her the transforming light of Consciousness into this Darkness so as to illumine it and transform it.

(Synopsis taken from the programme for 'A Greater Dawn'.)

## Thank you

(This letter is a personal one from Mr. Ojha to Alan, but as it addresses the larger Auroville, we took the liberty to publish it here—eds.)

Thanks for your paper, *Auroville Today*. As usual, I am very much impressed with the paper's get-up and its contents. I have also seen and read the interview with me with interest. Mr. Justice L.P. Nigam (Retd.), former Administrator of Auroville has also been reading this and has observed that items are interesting.

As said on the eve of my departure, Auroville and the Aurovilians are in our hearts and we shall continue to cherish the memories of Auroville and our association with you all.

Thank you once again for the affection and consideration shown to us. My wife joins me in sending you all our regards and best wishes,

Yours sincerely,  
P.N. Ojha.  
Lucknow.

## FDR

Re: possible error in quote attribution

As one who was alive and active during the 30's and 40's I feel quite sure that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" (quoted in our previous issue—eds), was said by FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) in his post-election inaugural speech to the Nation in '32 or '36.

It is, ofcourse, also possible that Churchill quoted FDR! But the original person, if FDR, should have the credit!

Eleanor, Auroville.

## 'IMAGINATION'

When you take the road from Discipline towards Kottakarai through the pebble canyon, you see at one point on your left a new structure. This is 'Imagination', one of Auroville's new workshops. What started as a dream for Dara, a printer and chemistry teacher from Argentina who came to Auroville in 1988, became a reality in May of this year. He had been working with Prema in the 'Auromodele Atelier' workshop and became interested in working with cloth. There he met a visiting weaver from Argentina, Luis Negrotti. Luis inspired him to start working with cotton. As the weaving workshop of 'Lotus' in Fraternity had been closed for several years, the idea was born to revive these crafts. Luis started weaving classes and his students happened to be mainly from Argentina! In December 1991, Dara was ready to set up a workshop, but to find the right place was not that easy. Between the town planners and developers, nobody could agree where to locate this cottage industry. At this point Dara's co-creators dropped out and he had to start in a temporary shed in Kottakarai Farm.

Now, when you enter the new workshop which found its permanent location on May 1st, you find yourself in a pleasant working atmosphere. You are welcomed by Dara amidst the clacking sounds of the looms. Freshly coloured bedspreads, curtains, tablecloths and bags are displayed. A few other Aurovilians are working in the same space. Uma and Wandana recently joined Dara. And Dorit makes items out of appliqué, using cloth woven on the spot.

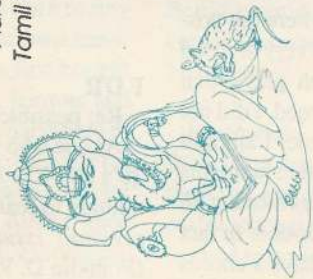
The art of weaving is a tradition in this area and so it was not difficult to find weavers.



By Airmail  
Bookpost

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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



In this issue:  
Perspectives on Aurovilians and on Yoga and Psychology;  
Hermitage; 'A Greater Dawn'; etc.

October 1992  
Number Forty-Five



Exhibited recently at Pitanga: A painting by Elisabeth from Russia.

## Jaya Ganesha!

Until recently, most Aurovilians may have been only dimly aware of the charming, brightly whitewashed little Ganesh temple situated on the corner where you make a right turn into Auroville, having passed Morattandi village and the community of 'Promesse'. But in fact, the plot of land on which it stands was one of the first to be acquired for Auroville—back in 1965. It was sold on condition that the idol of the Hindu god Ganesh which had been installed there would receive daily worship in the form of proper rituals and prayers. The Mother assured the landowner that this would be done.

Ganesha, the pot-bellied elephant god of whom, throughout India, so many images are made in all sizes and varieties, is a very popular and sympathetic god. His generous girth contains the whole universe; his trunk is bent to remove obstacles; he broke off a piece of his tusk and used it to write down the Mahabharata; he has four arms and his companion animal is the bandicoot, which is able to creep through small holes and cracks to achieve an otherwise unattainable goal. Ac-

cording to Sri Aurobindo, he is "the power that removes obstacles by the force of knowledge. He is the god of spiritual knowledge."

During the first years, a priest was engaged to take care of the daily worship. Then, a lady named Kusumben who lives in 'Promesse' took up this duty. Recently, she wrote in the *Auroville News*: "In 1972, I was approached to carry on the puja at the temple. Though at first hesitant to accept such an assignment, as I believed I had left behind all forms of idol worship, I did finally accept as I was informed that Mother particularly wanted some Aurovilian to take up this work. Now I have been offering daily prayers from 8.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. at the Ganesh temple for twenty years. To have Ganesh at the entrance to Auroville must indeed be a protection."

Aurovilians were invited to come to the temple on August 31st, Ganesha's 'birthday' and attend a special 'puja' (worship). In this way, many Aurovilians came to know 'our' Ganesh, who had been looked after by Kusumben so quietly and devotedly for 20 years.

Annemarie

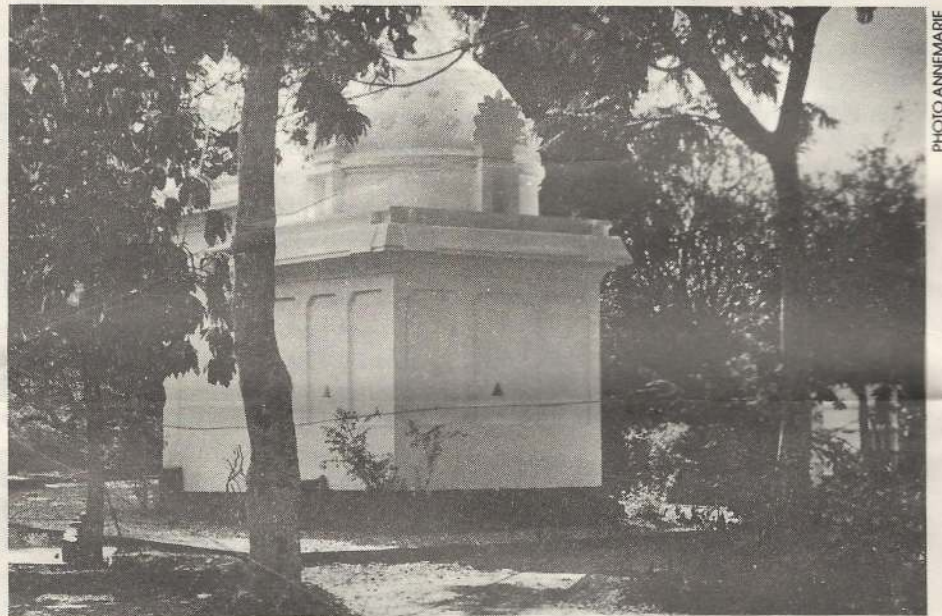


PHOTO ANNEMARIE

Ganesh temple at Auroville

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