

AUROVILLE TODAY

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SPIRITUAL SEARCH

Some feel that Auroville's material development has overshadowed its spiritual raison d'être. Others feel that the yoga of Auroville is Karma Yoga, and that the unique collective yoga that is Auroville is a new experiment which cannot be compared to, or judged by, the more established standards of traditional yogas and disciplines.

Ultimately, the guru is within. But the guiding voice in the heart is frequently drowned amidst the clamour and strife of our collective uproar.

Maybe as a result of this, some Aurovilians over the years have felt the need to search out realised beings and gurus who can provide help in tackling such problems as going beyond the ego and contacting the psychic.

This need is not exactly a new one, but as Auroville enters a new phase the question is, are we capable of looking at and accepting diverse approaches to a shared goal in a wider way than we have been doing in the past? For many fear that Auroville could be diluted by too much diversity and a proliferation of different paths.

And then, when we speak of spirituality, what does this mean in the context of Mother's bodily experiences that devastate the ancient divisions of 'spirit' and 'matter'?

Some feel that to speak of spirituality only reinforces the old division, while others feel that experiences of an inner dimension should not be talked about.

And finally, as of August last, there is the Silence of her Chamber...

Drawing by Janina Stroka
Courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

"I'm always very keen to move on..."

Edith Schnapper, ex-chairman of Auroville International UK and long-term friend and supporter of Auroville, left her body last December at the age of 82 (See *Auroville Today*, no.36). Last summer in England, along with her close companion Joy Calvert, she spoke freely about her extraordinary life—a kind of spiritual odyssey—to a friend on the *Auroville Today* team. We are publishing it here both as a tribute to a remarkable person, and as an inspiration for others.

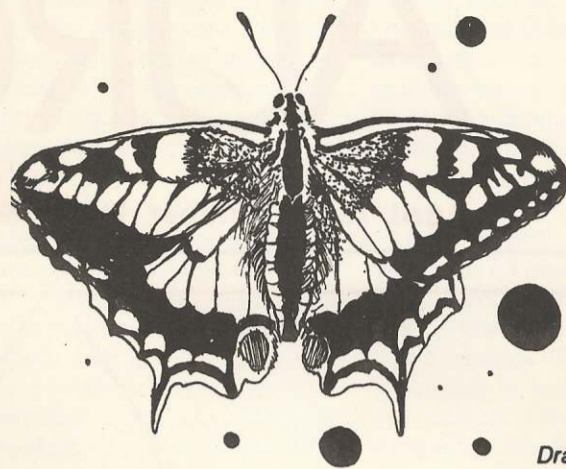
Edith was born in Frankfurt in 1909. "I was very lucky in my early childhood because, even before I went to school, I had an inner guide. This was a great secret which I knew I must not tell anybody, not even my mother. And I was told I must never ask his name. Every night, before I went to sleep, he came and instructed me in a very simple way about things like self-discipline. During the day, however, I forgot about this and was a perfectly normal child. This guidance went on for years, through most of school, and then it faded out but was never quite lost during my years at university."

After taking degrees in musicology at Frankfurt and Berne Universities, she moved to Cambridge, England in 1938 to continue her musicological research.

When the war broke out, Edith was called up to be an ambulance driver. "When I was on call, I was never worried. But when I lay in bed and heard the enemy planes coming over, I was very frightened. So I asked myself, 'Why are you afraid?' For a long time, I couldn't understand. Then, one day in our garden in Cambridge, I was asking myself this question again. There was this beautiful Buddleia tree, and when I looked up, the tree was absolutely full of light, light was streaming out of it. And

Britain, delving into cathedral libraries and the musty basements of old schools, in an effort to catalogue all extant manuscripts of Old English music. She spent her evenings in strange hotels and boarding houses, continuing her researches into the religions of the world. During this time, she came across a book called *Experiment in Depth* by P.W. Martin. Martin was a Jungian psychologist who specialised in dream interpretation. His work with the female psyche interested Edith, and she organized a Cambridge group to explore his approach. Around the same time, her interest in comparative religion led her to set up a small undergraduate society for the study of religions. It was one of the first groups in England that opened the doors for Hindu swamis, Tibetan lamas, Thai Buddhist monks and others to share their beliefs with Westerners. In 1960 the then unknown Maharishi Yogi, founder of TM, came to address the group, assuring a packed student audience that one day he would be world-famous.

THE FIRST CONTACT. Another of the visiting speakers was a Hindu called Pandit Rishiram. He gave Edith two books to read, assuring her, "These little books have changed my life. You're ready, you're ready for them!" The books were Sri Aurobindo's *Basis of Yoga* and *Light on*



Drawing by Peio

vice, and after Edith and Morwenna participated in it a number of times, he told them they were ready to be initiated as Sufis.

"I wasn't keen", said Edith, "but Morwenna said 'Why not?' So we had this ceremony in my house in Cambridge. There was a lot of mumbo-jumbo, the parson appearing in a seamless robe and so forth. Then he asked us, 'Are you ready to be initiated?' I said 'no', because I was thinking of my inner guide. There was a terrific tension in the room, and everybody went red. Finally, I told them I couldn't give up my inner thing. 'Oh, you don't have to do that', said the parson, and he went ahead and traced the winged heart on our foreheads, the sign, he said, by which we would be recognised after passing through the gateway of death.

After the initiation, the parson told them he would now introduce them to a real Sufi master. This was Vilaiyat Khan, for whom Edith developed great respect and affection. It was the first time that, with some reservations, she took some teaching from a living master."

THE TURNING POINT. The next turning-point was a crucial experience Edith and Morwenna had while staying at Morwenna's house in Ireland. They were following one of Vilaiyat's meditation practices when they suddenly became very uncomfortable. "Something was battling inside us. The Sufis, like all the other yogas I had come across until then, taught practices for the upward movement, through the saraswara to the higher spheres above the head. But during that meditation in Ireland, something very powerful was coming down, preventing the upward movement. I remember Morwenna getting up, taking down her book and saying, 'This is much more like Sri Aurobindo's yoga'". They wrote to Nolani in the Ashram, describing what had happened, and he immediately wrote back, telling them it was Sri Aurobindo's Force and they must on no account push against it. "The great surprise to me," recalled Edith, "was that what was coming down was totally physical, and I felt it in my entire body. Until then, I had always thought that spiritual experience happened somewhere in the higher spheres, over the head. But Sri Aurobindo makes clear that as his Force descends, it purifies all the centres, taking in the entire body, whereas the other yogas practise going up, through the unpurified centres, and so leave the body behind. It's because of this that Sri Aurobindo and The Mother can talk about the transformation of the body and matter, and why Sri Aurobindo said that his yoga begins where the others end."

The experience in Ireland also clarified something else for Edith. "Many spiritual teachings involve what is termed 'spirit

transmission' and can only come through a living, personal guru. But in Sri Aurobindo's yoga this is not necessary. We all received the Force and, in a way, were initiated by this experience in Ireland, thousands of miles away from the Ashram in Pondicherry."

On her return to Cambridge, Edith told Vilaiyat Khan what had happened. He came to her house, and they meditated together. "Afterwards," he told Edith, "I could feel something coming down which comes from the very highest." But he was upset because what was happening could not be accommodated within Sufism, and the break between him and Edith was inevitable.

"After Vilaiyat disappeared from our lives, we decided once again to go and visit the Ashram," said Edith, but it was to be many more years before the visit materialized and, in the meantime, a small group formed around Morwenna and Edith to discuss Sri Aurobindo's yoga and to share their individual experiences. "At these meetings, there was always a lot of talk about 'The Force'", remembers Joy, who was to become Edith's close friend and associate in the final years, "and everybody seemed to be experiencing it except myself!" In the early days of the group, the focus was very much upon Sri Aurobindo, reflecting Morwenna's difficulty in accepting The Mother. Edith also admitted that at this period, "I was not at all attracted by The Mother. It was all Sri Aurobindo." She also continued to struggle with the feeling that she should not accept any guru because of her experience with her inner guide. One night, however, all this changed. She had a clear vision of ascending a staircase. In front of her, descending, was Sri Aurobindo. When they met, He put his arms around her...

In 1965, Edith's book *The Inner Odyssey* was published. It charted the stages of the inner spiritual journey based upon her research into different religions. It was to be followed, many years later, by *The Spiral Path* which continued to elucidate the path in simple language, drawing upon Edith's own experiences. In many respects, it is an ideal introduction to spirituality for Westerners.

THE ASHRAM AND AUROVILLE. Finally, in 1969, Joy in her no-nonsense way precipitated the long talked-about visit to the Ashram. "I said, 'Let's go to Pondicherry and see what we think of this woman they call The Mother!'" Within some weeks of arriving, a friend arranged for them to meet Her. The experience was overwhelming. "One felt tremendous love flowing from Her," remembers Joy, "and also this terrific compassion." "There was this switch-over in Her look", recalled Edith. "At one moment, it was very penetrating, looking right through you, and then She would switch

"The great surprise to me was that what was coming down was totally physical, and I felt it in my entire body"

somehow I understood that this was the answer to my question—that there was no need to be afraid because this light was in everything. But who knew this? I decided to find out. I went straight to the sacred scriptures of the world and read furiously in all of them—and I discovered that they all spoke of this light, as well as sharing much else in common. It gave me the idea to draw up a small anthology of extracts from different sacred scriptures based upon this unity of perspective."

Meanwhile, the war had ended. Edith wanted to complete her Ph.D. in musicology, but her new tutor was less sympathetic to the radical approach she had adopted from a professor in Germany, and her thesis was rejected. Edith was deeply disappointed, and it took her many years to come to terms with this. Much later, though, she remarked, "If my thesis had been accepted, I would have gone into academic life and probably never discovered Sri Aurobindo and the Mother."

However, Edith was appointed editor of the British Union Catalogue of Old Music, a job which caused her to travel all over

Yoga. Edith read them, and was in a dilemma. "Because of my childhood experience of the friend who came at night, I had always promised myself not to join any spiritual group as it would betray this inner thing. But when I read these books, and the first twelve chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, I had to say 'yes' to everything that man wrote..."

Eventually, Edith decided to visit the Ashram in Pondicherry. It precipitated a crisis with P.W. Martin, the Jungian, who told her, "Don't do it. You'll be swallowed up by the archetype of the great mother." "Well," recalled Edith later, "that was the end of my association with his group!"

Meanwhile, Edith had read the first book by a Westerner about Sri Aurobindo's yoga—*Founding the Life Divine*, by Morwenna Donnelly. She corresponded with Morwenna, and they became friends, although Edith was not yet prepared to join her in the 'Aurobindonian Yoga'. One day, Morwenna persuaded Edith to meet an old Church of England parson who was also a practising Sufi. He had devised a Sufi ser-

Janina Stroka exhibition in Auroville

Janina Stroka was born in Poland in 1909 and joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1956. There she developed her particular style of painting, in which the colours are symbolic of a state or a plane of consciousness, and in which every line or form seeks to reflect the higher aspiration of man and his inner life.

At the moment of her death in 1964, she was in psychic contact with the Mother, who told her, "Yes, you have truly participated in the work for the future, you have put the earth in contact with one of the forms of the new manifestation." (See box)

With the cooperation of the Ashram, some of her work was exhibited in Pitanga Hall and in the Centre for Indian Culture for a few weeks.

Mother on Janina's passing (Mother's Agenda, 11th August, 1964)

I remember, the very day when Janina died (she died around 6 o'clock in the Morning, I think), around 4 o'clock in the morning, something made me suddenly take interest in this question, What will the new form be like? What will it be? I was looking at man and at the animal, and then I saw that there would be a far greater difference between men and the new form than between man and the animal. I began to see certain things, and it so happened that Janina was there (in her thought, but a material enough and very concrete thought). It was very interesting (it lasted a long time, nearly two hours), because I saw all the timidity of human conceptions, while she had made contact with something: it wasn't an idea but a sort of contact (with a future reality). And I had the sense of a more plastic Matter, more full of Light, much more directly responsive to the Will (the higher Will), and with such a plasticity that it could respond to the Will by taking on variable and changing forms. And I saw some of her own forms, forms that she conceived (rather like those beings who don't have a body as we do, but have hands and feet when they will it, a head when they will it, luminous clothes when they will it—things of that sort), I saw that, and I remember I was congratulating her; I told her: "Yours

was a partial, but partially very clear perception of one of the forms the new Manifestation will take." And she was very happy; I told her: "You see, you have fully worked for the future." And then, suddenly, I saw a sapphire blue light, pale, very luminous, with something like the shape of a flame (with a rather broad base), and there was a kind of flash - pfft! - and it was gone. She was not there anymore. I thought: "Well, that is odd!" An hour later (I saw that around 6 a.m.; all the rest had lasted about two hours), they told me she was dead. Which means she spent the last moments of her life with me, and then, from me, pfft! went off towards a life elsewhere.

It was very abrupt. She was so happy, you know. I told her, "How well you have worked for the future!" And all of a sudden, a sort of flash (a sapphire blue light, pale, very luminous, with the shape of a flame and a rather broad base), pfft! she was gone. And that was just the time when she died. It is one of the most interesting departures I have seen - fully conscious. And so happy to have participated! ...I myself did not know why I was telling her: "Yes, you have truly participated in the work for the future, you have put the earth in contact with one of the forms of the new Manifestation."

back to normal." Edith's last resistance to The Mother disappeared.

The Ashram, however, was less overwhelming. "I could never feel at home there," said Edith. "There was something I had to make myself do in order to conform to the general atmosphere. I remember that when Joy and I meditated for the first time around the samadhi, we both fell asleep!" But they did meet Satprem, and were very impressed by his devotion and personality. "One of the things we asked him about," said Edith, "was whether we could do the yoga of Sri Aurobindo if we didn't live in the Ashram—a view that had been impressed upon us by certain people in the Ashram. 'Absolute nonsense,' he said, 'of course you can do the yoga in the West. But it may be more

Were they ever tempted to live her permanently? "I wanted to support Auroville in all ways that I could," said Edith, "but I also felt that in this lifetime my place has been to be outside Auroville, because I felt that Auroville needs supporters outside very badly." 'Outside', from 1976, meant 'Boytons', the beautiful fifteenth-century house nestling in the rolling English landscape, a place into which Edith and Joy infused their care and consciousness, and which became a place of sanctuary and reconnection for many Aurovilians abroad.

Did they ever have doubts about the future of Auroville? "We never felt that Auroville was not the right place, in spite of the difficulties," said Edith. "Auroville is so

with the 'collective yoga', what she once called 'the future yoga—a seed for the world'. But what is this 'collective yoga' and how, for example, does it differ from the yoga as it is practised in the Ashram? "There is all the difference in the world between the yoga as it is practised in the Ashram and in Auroville. Doing the individual yoga together—which is what is happening in the Ashram—is not collective yoga at all. The Ashram yoga is very much a preliminary to what happens in Auroville. In fact, it seems that The Mother thought that one can do the collective yoga without having gone through the whole process of the individual yoga, as She said that to live in Auroville all you have to do is to try to become a faithful servitor of the Divine."

"Nobody knows exactly what 'collective yoga' means, but the only thing I do know is that it does not mean putting individual stuff together. Somehow, it means that you feel deep down, in all you say and do, that it is not your individual self that motivates you. It's an awareness of a total oneness and interconnectedness between environment, nature and people. In this context, many of the terms that Sri Aurobindo used, like 'integral yoga', have now taken on a much larger meaning. 'Integral yoga' now means more than integration of different aspects of the being. It also refers to the integration of individuals who discover a common basis within and between them. For in the collective yoga there is the realization of the total interconnectedness of the individual parts, so that you cannot do anything without influencing not only your immediate environment but EVERYTHING, which again points to The Mother's saying that there is only one energy, one force. This oneness with nature—which for Auroville is one of the most important things—this exchange between vibrations going into you from the environment and going out from the individual towards nature, is not, I think, a realization that is present in the Ashram. And, even in Auroville itself, the fact that whatever happens in one part of Auroville has its effect upon the whole is not understood by many people. In fact, I only felt this on my last visit here—that there are Aurovilians who are very dedicated and doing very important

work for Auroville, and yet they don't have this understanding, they haven't caught this vibration. The difference is quite palpable."

In recent years, Edith became excited by some of the discoveries associated with 'The New Physics', especially those relating to non-locality, vibrational fields and the effects of consciousness upon matter, because they seemed to parallel some aspects of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's work. In particular, she often referred to Rupert Sheldrake's concept of 'morphic resonance' and 'morphic fields', where certain vibrational patterns can be communicated anywhere in the world through being received by anyone or anything on the same vibrational 'wavelength'. "Perhaps," she once mused, "in Auroville one of these very potent morphic fields is being created—and perhaps 'Boytons', where we are trying to create this collective vibration too, is another one. Joy and I have often said that we don't know if what we are doing in this corner of England is having any influence elsewhere, but it's quite likely. Personally, I am certainly being pushed more and more towards the attempt of living and creating what Sheldrake called 'resonance' in my everyday life. Sometimes I meditate to enhance this, but never to withdraw from life."

All my life I've been very attracted to moving on to something new. In the early days of the group in England, we all experienced the Force, and afterwards some people felt they lost the contact. But I feel very strongly that this belongs to a certain phase, and that to try to hang on to it can hinder your progress. I feel that in Auroville this same Force is everywhere, and as long as you can open yourself to that Auroville atmosphere, which is the Force, then it has the same power to change you as when it first came down upon us many years ago in an individual form. And this is where surrender comes in, because we have to allow the Force to do the work, and not to pull at it.

As for me, I'm not interested in looking back, because I'm always very keen to move on to the next thing."

Interview by Alan

"Many spiritual teachings involve what is termed 'spirit transmission' and can only come through a living, personal guru. But in Sri Aurobindo's yoga this is not necessary."

demanding, more difficult to do it there." When the break between Satprem and the Ashram occurred, they were naturally on his side. "Which made us," noted Joy with typical English understatement, "somewhat less popular in the Ashram."

Meanwhile, however, they had had their first contact with Auroville, arriving one morning in the delivery van, perched on top of bags of vegetables. "The first contact was not very encouraging," recalled Joy. "We went to Aspiration, and nobody spoke to us. Then we found someone planting a tree, and he looked at us as if we were some kind of obnoxious insect!" Edith, however, immediately felt at home in Auroville in a way she had never felt in the Ashram. "I felt very much that Auroville was the new thing..." Over the years, they began to visit regularly, staying in many different communities.

new that mistakes and upheavals are bound to occur. To do this yoga, you have to get out of the old thing, and the old thing is very, very strong in us. When people criticize Auroville, they forget how totally new the thing is and how, especially with the collective yoga, everything has to change. It's hardly begun. Nevertheless, the very preliminary stages of the gnostic society, as described by Sri Aurobindo in the last pages of *The Life Divine*, are clearly happening here. The Mother never had any illusions about the stupidity or whatever of the Aurovilians. But it didn't make any difference because Auroville will be built in spite of them, because, as The Mother says, She has put her Force here—a Force I can feel everywhere in Auroville."

COLLECTIVE YOGA. In her final years, Edith became more and more preoccupied

The yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is different from other paths. Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"This yoga is new as compared with the old yogas:

1. Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven and Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence. . . as a distinct and central object.
2. Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realization for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here. . . .
3. Because a method has been precognized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aims set before it, viz. the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature" . . . (From Sri Aurobindo, 'Letters on Yoga')

One question that arises is, can other realized beings or spiritual paths help us in the preliminary stages of this yoga, or have Sri Aurobindo and Mother provided us with all the help that we need?

On these pages, we present two approaches. We also print an extract from a biography of Sri Aurobindo where he describes how he reformulated his sadhana which, in the early stages, had drawn upon traditional yogic disciplines, in order to make it more available for his followers. The two new emphases involved guidance by the psychic being and the need to open to the divine force; sometimes referred to as Mother's force or, simply, the 'Force'.

How Sri Aurobindo re-oriented his yoga

Realizing that most sadhaks would have difficulty following the path that he himself had taken, Sri Aurobindo began in the twenties to reformulate his sadhana in terms appropriate to neophytes. He introduced nothing completely new, but changed the focus in two important respects: in regard to the soul or 'psychic being' and in regard to the Mother. In the *Arya* he had placed special emphasis on the role played by the mind in sadhana. 'Man is a mental and not yet a supramental being', he wrote in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, 'It is by the mind therefore that he has to aim at knowledge and realise his being.' This emphasis was in accord with his own nature and experiences. It was through the silent mind that he had realized Brahman, through the higher levels of mind that he was approaching supermind. But Sri Aurobindo was aware that the ordinary mind has built-in limitations. Its characteristic operation is analysis: division and arrangement. But truth is a unity that can only be grasped by a synthetic vision. The analytic mind is 'incapable of knowing the supreme Truth; it can only range about seeking for Truth, and catching fragmentary representations of it, not the thing itself, and trying to piece them together'. The levels of mind above the ordinary intellect, known to us as the sources of intuition and genius, do not have these inherent limitations; but it is not easy to establish a reliable contact with them. Many so-called intuitions are really the results of ordinary, sometimes rather tortuous reasoning, or even disguised subrational impulses. Sri Aurobindo cautioned beginners against uncritically following guidance that claimed to be intuitive. Instead, he advised them to follow the promptings of their soul. Since the word 'soul' is used rather

vaguely in English for a number of different things, he preferred to employ another term he had borrowed from The Mother: 'psychic being'. From about 1926 he began to lay stress in his talks and letters on a process that he called the 'emergence' or 'coming forward' of the psychic being. It was this that his disciples should aspire for, for when the psychic came forward, all the rest would become safe and easy. 'When the psychic being comes in front,' he wrote in a letter, 'there is an automatic perception of the true and untrue, the divine and the undivine, the spiritual right and wrong of things, and the false vital [i.e., of the life-force] and mental movements and attacks are immediately exposed and fall away and can do nothing. Eventually the entire being would become transformed in the mould of the psychic. Then the more difficult, and dangerous, spiritual and supramental transformations could proceed more smoothly.

The second change of focus concerned the role of what Sri Aurobindo called the 'divine force' or the force of The Mother. The principle of his yoga, he explained, was for the sadhak to open himself to the influence of this force: to aspire for its intervention, to reject everything that acted against it, and finally to surrender to its workings. To do this sincerely was, he said, not an easy task. One had to offer oneself completely, without making any personal demands. At the same time, one had to be vigilant that the force that one opened to was the real divine force, and not a disguised movement of the ordinary nature, or even an undivine or 'hostile' force.

(Taken from the book "Sri Aurobindo, A Brief Biography", by Peter Heehs, Oxford University Press, with the permission of the author)

"What I am missing is a collective intensity"

Alain Bernard came to Auroville in the early nineteen seventies. Since then, he has been actively involved in community administration and educational research.

Auroville Today: While Auroville has made some obvious progress on the material level, there are questions about its "spiritual" development.

Alain: We are in between - the trusted recipes of the old world do not work but the new has not yet manifested. Visitors come and they don't see any external manifestations of a "spiritual" community except Matrimandir, which stands as a testimony that there is something else. However, Matrimandir makes no economic sense and to build it before we are well established could be seen as a drain on precious resources, manpower and all that. Yet it is "the soul of Auroville" and is supposed to bring people together - although, at present, it apparently has the opposite effect. But there is a deeper unity, a commitment to do it, and even though people are fighting about many aspects of its construction, they build it. They are united at that level. I believe Auroville is meant to manifest concretely the next step humanity has to take, which is not to separate spirituality and life. I believe our deeper purpose is to have a life that is simultaneously contemplation and action, and of being simply open to what is meant to come, which was Mother's attitude. The result often seems contradictory to us, although for Her there was no contradiction because She knew. Maybe the only chance for Auroville to get into its true development would be if there were people here who could sustain that kind of a thing, a capacity to be open and to receive answers whenever needed. Then we would see an Auroville that would really move - until then, we are only slogging along! Most of the time Auroville seems to be more a study in dis-unity than unity. Maybe it is bringing us to the point where we see that true unity has to come from another dimension. Maybe the next step requires a different knowledge, a different awareness. But what I am missing here at the moment is a collective intensity. It does not look as if we are, as a community, intensely searching out the new way that Auroville is meant to manifest. I cannot speak for individuals. I know that there are people here who have a personal intensity. But as a collective, I feel something is lacking.

What could we do to create a more collective spirit? While we have Sri Aurobindo and Mother, some Aurovillians feel the need to go outside and include other spiritual approaches in their personal yoga.

People say it is first a matter of individual transformation and they are right. But there is the other aspect, the collective. I have felt

resentment about people whom I felt were advertising other approaches. Gurus who have their own ashrams and centres should not be advertised in Auroville and people should not proselytize. What to do to create a more collective spirit? I don't know. I suppose we have first to have a need for it. Do we have a need for it? This is a question for all of us.

There seem to be two basic points of view in Auroville. Firstly, that the work of Sri Aurobindo is unique and not to be mixed in any way with other approaches because they obstruct it. Secondly, as it begins where other Yogas end and nobody has reached that point yet, other spiritual paths can help us with the preliminary work, and we shouldn't embark upon Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Yoga until we are properly prepared.

That is a distortion that has even been used with the *Agenda*. Some people say, "Don't read it because it is at such a level that you shouldn't touch it before being ready for it". I feel it is just the opposite because Mother stressed simplicity and gave away many occult secrets in the *Agenda*. It is because the times have changed. You see everywhere on earth things happening that were unthinkable a few years ago. It is not because mankind is better but because everything is different now. I believe Sri Aurobindo and Mother have opened new ways. It is not as if you have to complete course A before going on to course B. Of course, there is the necessary inner preparation and, for that, depending on one's individuality, different methods can be chosen. But I believe that the *Agenda* itself is a way. I believe it puts you in touch with the new vibration brought in by Sri Aurobindo and Mother. The *Agenda* has a power, it is power. It takes you on the path.

In the earlier years in Auroville you found it easier?

Yes. I remember great moments of intensity, some of them during the fight with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS). Moments when I felt a great presence of Mother, of love which was amazing. After the eighties it became rarer and rarer. To what are we dedicated today? I can say education and environment and so on, but where is the dedication to a true Auroville? We don't even like to sit together as a community anymore. What has replaced that now for some are parties and the like . . . All that creates, I believe, an unfavourable environment for The Mother's work upon us as a collective. Sometimes, I feel that if we were all together able to make a little effort at the same time, there could be marvellous results, things could move fast instead of being stuck. I hope one day such a moment will come.

Based on an interview with Alan and Bill.

When I was asleep in the ignorance, I came to a place of meditation full of holy men and I found their company wearisome and the place a prison; when I awoke, God took me to a prison and turned it into a place of meditation and His trysting ground.

from Sri Aurobindo, 'Aphorisms'

"You cannot do the integral yoga without doing yoga!"

Franz has lived in Auroville since the early 1970's. At present, he manages 'Prisma', a graphic design unit. Hélène came to Auroville about nine years ago. She has worked in the 'Laboratory of Evolution', helping to compile texts on Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga, and related spiritual paths. Recently, both of them began visiting an ashram in Kerala which has formed around a remarkable woman, Mata Amritanandamayi (known as 'Amma' to her devotees). Born on September 27th, 1953, she is seen as an incarnation of divine love, 'Ananda', by her followers.

Auroville Today: You have both visited Amritapuri ashram in Kerala a number of times to meet Mata Amritanandamayi. Why?

Franz: I've lived in Auroville for twenty years now, and I've come to a point where I'm asking myself what I've learned spiritually here. Because when I look at myself and others, I'm shocked by how little progress there seems to be in Auroville on this level. We still seem to be at the preliminary stage of ignorant human beings struggling with the imperfections of the lower nature. Of course, there is much guidance in Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's books, but you have to be very strong to progress just by reading books, for we have no realised beings in Auroville. So, a few years ago, I began searching in India for people who could help me at least to get to the point where Sri Aurobindo's yoga begins. In other words, to achieve peace of mind and to learn how to be without ego and to surrender completely to the Divine. I tried various spiritual disciplines like Zen and Vipassana, but it was always a struggle for me to achieve a certain state of peace. All this changed when, a few months ago, I visited Amritapuri ashram for the first time. Because there is a being, Mata Amritanandamayi, who has achieved "sahaja samadhi" (Sri Aurobindo refers to it as "the waking state of samadhi" Eds.), and just to be in her presence brings a great peace and harmony. There's so much joy and ananda there—something I miss very much in Auroville—and I've never received so much spiritual help so quickly. It's like taking part in a beautiful game that helps you achieve certain things that you've been striving for for years.

Hélène: I've discovered that my nature is such that I need to make contact with living yogis. Sri Aurobindo talks about how to work with The Mother—how to call her to bring peace and to help with problems—and this is a great help. But to be in the presence of the Divine Mother (see footnote) is very inspiring because you actually experience more quickly than if you were alone what Sri

Aurobindo is writing about and how The Mother works. If you are sincere and ask for this help, you can solve problems there in a few days that have been with you for many years. It's like a play with her in which you become like a little child and she indicates what you have to do. Sometimes, I even ask for a specific sign to show that I'm on the right path—and suddenly I see it. I just have to laugh!

Haven't Sri Aurobindo and Mother put their force upon Auroville? Isn't all the spiritual help that we need available here, without having to look elsewhere?

Hélène: Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work has tremendously accelerated the progress one can make in reaching the Divine, but the means to reach the Divine have been known for thousands of years, and they haven't changed. Of course, once the supramental level is reached, it's a different story. But up to that level, we can be helped by the old yogas. For example, there are a number of yogis in the world and in India who have achieved 'sahaja samadhi', which is the highest realisation of the old yoga, and which is a state in which one is completely free of ego. This is an absolute prerequisite for doing Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga which, Sri Aurobindo pointed out, begins where all the other yogas stop. In Auroville, nobody has achieved this. So if we can find people elsewhere who can help us to envisage this level, we should be very grateful. In fact, there are many such people who would be willing to have some kind of interchange with us here if we would be open to it. The main thing to understand is that there are many stages in the yoga of transformation, and there are no short-cuts. You cannot do this yoga without doing yoga! And Mother never said that we should only do the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in Auroville. The most important thing is to reach Divine consciousness by any means. For 'human unity' means being in union with the Divine, which is the first great realisation.

Where would you draw the line? Would you have all kinds of yogis and sadhus coming to Auroville and performing their rituals here? And how would you discriminate between the genuine and the false?

Hélène: When someone has attained 'sahaja samadhi', the energy is unmistakable. I've observed several of them, and what they do is far beyond ordinary human possibilities. They don't sleep, they hardly eat. Any yogi who has attained this consciousness cannot harm us, because they are totally free of ego. And Mother says in the *Agenda* that to organize Auroville we need two or three beings free from the mind and the ego—in other words, two or three yogis in 'sahaja samadhi'. With those yogis below this level of realisation, however, we should be more careful. Regarding those on these lower levels, Aurovilians should be free to make their own contacts, but not to bring them to Auroville.

Franz: We need not worry about yogis pouring into Auroville. For while they have

great respect for Sri Aurobindo and Mother, many of them feel there is too much confusion in Auroville and they are not prepared to come at present.

You both seem to have encountered a spiritual intensity outside Auroville which you have not experienced here...

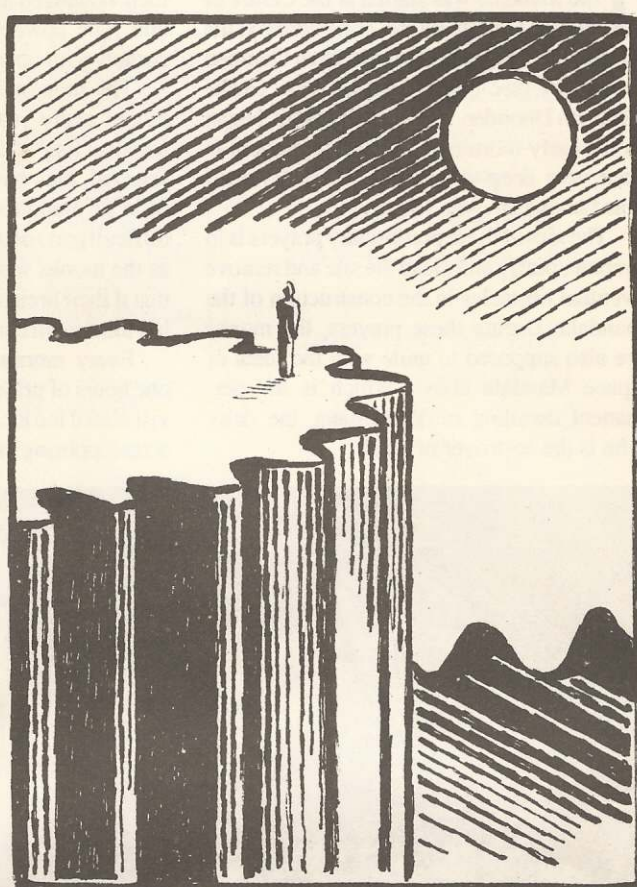
Hélène: Yes, and this is where Auroville is failing. Auroville was meant to be a kind of Jerusalem whose spiritual influence would spread naturally, because of its specific atmosphere, throughout the world. But it's not happening. In fact, the outside world is influencing us. And this is why we haven't grown significantly in population over twenty years. We are not a spiritual magnet.

Franz: Increasingly now people are coming to

Auroville not so much for a spiritual purpose as to do afforestation, town planning or to participate in community life. These people often know very little of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and nobody really helps them to learn. There should, at least, be a place or a group which can help them to understand the fundamentals of this yoga.

Auroville has reached a dangerous point in its development. Our young people are growing up without any spiritual guidance. If this goes on, we'll become like anywhere else on the planet.

Hélène: Even among long-term Aurovilians there is much ignorance about the yoga, about the different stages and about terms like the 'gnostic society'. For example, some people believe Mother said that Auroville will be the cradle of the new species, but She said it will be the cradle of the 'superman'. The superman is a yogi who has attained 'sahaja samadhi', but the new species is far, far beyond this. At least in the Ashram sadhaks could benefit from the peace brought by Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and use this as a base to progress. In Auroville, however, we are at the beginning of the beginning. And we talk about transformation of the body! We should at least try to



understand the basics by reading books like Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga*.

Franz: It's interesting that we're open to certain practices in Auroville and not others. For example, the other morning Tibetan Lamas consecrated ground in Auroville for the future Tibetan pavilion. It was beautiful, but we should realise that these are Tantric practices. Somehow, we don't have a problem with this particular form, partly, perhaps, because of the Dalai Lama's past association with Mother and Auroville. On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be any opening or interest in the Vedic knowledge preserved even now in the temples of South India, which can also teach us a great deal.

Finally, has your contact with spiritual teachers outside Auroville helped you to understand better the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Mother?

Franz: Absolutely. In fact, I've only been able to understand Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga through being in contact with such people, because they've helped me experience what I'd only read about before.

Interview by Alan and Annemarie

The best one can do is not to have any prejudices or preconceived ideas or principles — oh, moral principles, fixed codes of conduct, "what must be done" and "what must not be done," and preconceived ideas with regard to morals, with regard to progress, and then all the social and mental conventions — there's no obstacle worse than that. I know people who wasted dozens of years trying to overcome one of those mental constructions!

If one can be like this, open — truly open in a simplicity... you know, the simplicity of ignorance that knows it's ignorant... like this (*gesture, hands open*), ready to receive all that comes... then, perhaps, something will happen.

Naturally, the thirst for progress, the thirst to know, the thirst to transform yourself, and above all the thirst for Love and Truth — if you can keep that, then you go faster. Really a thirst, a need, you know, a need... All the rest doesn't matter, what you need is THAT.

Taken from *Mother's Agenda* 1964
Volume 5, page 225-226

The path of works is in a way the most difficult of God's triune causeway; yet is it not also, in this material world at least, the easiest, widest and most delightful? For at every moment we clash against God the worker and grow into His being by a thousand divine touches"

from Sri Aurobindo, 'Aphorisms'

A Sand Mandala

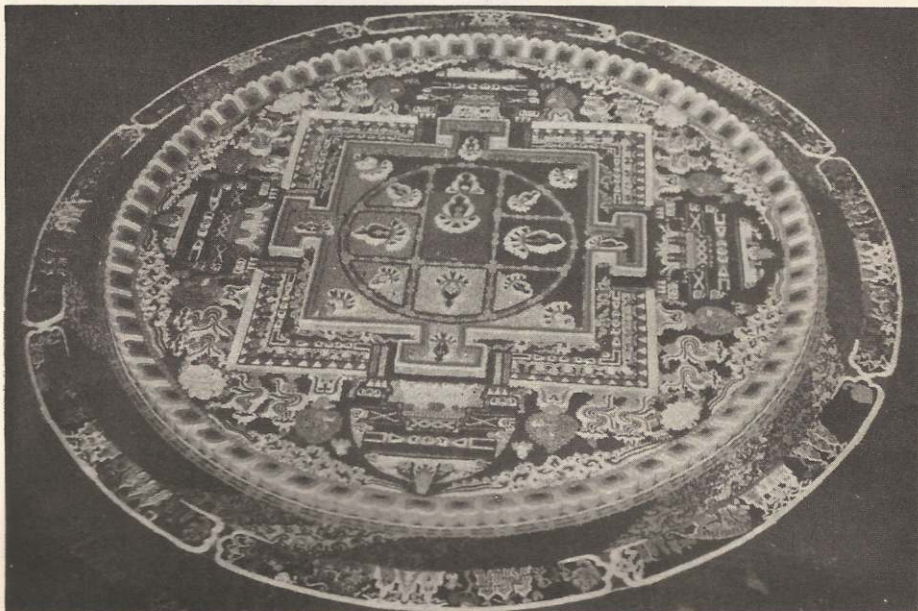
The Mandala was started at the Centre of Indian Culture on the 21st February, the Mother's Birthday. Six monks from Gyumed monastery (see below), led by Ven. Geshe Tsultrim Dhonden, a very senior lama, began in the early morning by chanting prayers in their very deep voices (for which Gyumed was famous all over Tibet).

The aim of these preliminary prayers is to prepare, purify and clean the site and remove eventual obstacles in the construction of the mandala. During these prayers, the monks are also supposed to unite with the Ideal or Space Mandala above, which is the permanent dwelling of Yamantaka, the deity who is the destroyer of death.

then visualized as being that particular Buddha. The powder is poured through metal cornets with openings of different sizes.

The monastery of Gyumed selects four monks every year to learn the technique of constructing the mandalas. Before being selected, they have to complete 5 to 6 years of basic Buddhist studies. One of the most difficult parts of the training is breath control, as the monks work so close to the mandala, that if their breathing is not perfectly controlled the design can be spoiled.

Every morning the monks started with one hour of prayers, during which time they visualized the ideal form of the mandala. The actual pouring of the powder would start



Then the creating of the Mandala began. The basic structure of the mandala was marked out, and the Master and monks visualised the Space Mandala above them. They then prepared their colours. Many different colours are needed to construct a mandala and, if the patron is extremely wealthy, these can be made from ground precious stones, coral, and even powdered gold. It is said that the more precious the elements used in the mandala, the more benefit one can get out of it. In Auroville, the colours were made of marble ground into different grades of fineness, depending on the part of the mandala it was intended for, and dyed in five main colours, one for each of the Buddhas of the five families. Each coloured powder is

soon after 8.00 a.m. and would last until 6.00 p.m., with just a small break for lunch. And this for 7 days!

On the afternoon of the 27th February, the Mandala was completed and the final prayers were performed through which the Ideal Mandala is brought down and merged with the Sand Mandala. On the morning of the 28th February, hundreds of visitors came to see the Mandala, amongst them some members of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation.

The Mandala was later destroyed. Part was thrown into the sea and the rest was spread over the site of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in Auroville.

— THE MONASTERY OF GYUMED —

Originally one of the two tantric colleges of Lhasa, the monastery was founded by Sherab Senge, the most eminent disciple of Je Tsongkapa, in the fourteenth century, and has been reestablished in Hunsur near Mysore in Karnataka State.

The monastery performs in exile all the rituals that were traditionally performed in Tibet. In particular, the monks are experts in constructing sand mandalas in relief. Normally, mandalas are used in initiation ceremonies, but in Auroville no initiation took place.

Consecrating the land for the Tibetan pavilion

On 29th February, thirty-six years after the descent of the Supramental consciousness, the land for the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture was consecrated by the monks of Gyumed Monastery. To prepare the land to receive the Pavilion, a prayer called in Tibetan 'Sa-Tsog' was recited by the monks. The prayer requests the landlord of the site (located behind the Bharat Nivas Kitchen) for permission to use the land.

The second prayer was a 'Feast Offering'. It is done to propitiate the local deities and request their help and participation. Then the monks performed a consecration ceremony, and finished with a request to the Protectors of the Dharma to protect the area. After the prayers, water from the sacred Vase (Bumpa) and other offerings were spread over the site.

Secretary arrives

Mr L.K.Tripathi, the newly-appointed Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, assumed his responsibilities on February 17th, 1992. Mr Tripathi was born in Orissa in 1948. After pursuing studies in Political Science at Allahabad University, he went to the U.K. in 1969 to take a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) degree at Leeds University.

In 1971, he joined the Indian Administrative Service, and since then many of his posts have been in Tamil Nadu. The more important positions he has held include Deputy Collector, Madurai, and Collector, Kanyakumari district; Chief Administrative Officer for Hindustan Aeronautics; and he has been the Secretary for three major departments of the Tamil Nadu Government - Housing and Urban Development, Industries and Agriculture. His particular interests are in urban development, marketing and management.



Mr. Tripathi has visited the Ashram a number of times in recent years, and he told *Auroville Today*, "I volunteered for this post of Secretary of the Auroville Foundation because I thought it could be an opportunity to help build up this beautiful international city which was envisaged by The Mother."

It took a week to complete this Mandala which was made of fine marble powder dyed in five main colours.

"I would like to see Auroville becoming more international"

Dr. Krishnan had a distinguished diplomatic career, culminating in his appointment as India's ambassador to the United Nations. Subsequently, he was chairman of the Africa Fund (set up by the Non-Aligned Movement to help countries bordering on South Africa), and Dean of the School of International Studies at Pondicherry University. At present, he is a member of the Executive Board of UNESCO, as well as a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. When he visited Auroville recently, *Auroville Today* asked him how he viewed the role of this Governing Board.

"I'll give you a very personal appreciation. The Foundation has come into being only very recently, and the community is in the process of adjusting itself to this structure. I believe that the community has to run its own affairs, and ultimately it is the general body or a general assembly that has to decide any problem, any future plan, anything at all. It is the community that will discuss, decide and go ahead. The role of the Governing Board is one of a catalytic agent, which will help the community to move forward and give a certain amount of stability, particularly in the light of some periods that Auroville has passed through. I see the Board in the role of overseeing, helping, guiding and advising. "Part of the role of the Governing Board is also to ensure the projection of Auroville to the outside world. This will be a continuous process, not a one-shot affair. It is important that those who are drawn here are true converts in the spirit of Auroville, and do not come here for other reasons and bring in value systems which do not correspond to the spirit of Auroville. In this respect the choice of the members of the International Advisory Council—the function of which is to ensure that the ideals of Auroville are protected—is of the utmost importance, and I am very happy that Mr. Maurice Strong and Mr. J.R.D. Tata have already expressed their willingness to join.

"When I speak of projection to the outside world, I do not mean going for a kind of sales campaign. Of course every effort should be made to give as much information as possible, but Auroville should beware that it does not draw in the wrong type of people. Auroville has 24 years of growth behind it. For many of those years, Auroville has been under a cloud, and now it has just come out into the sunshine. So it is important that whoever is coming into the community is always properly integrated. A sudden increase in population might make that process of integration very difficult. We may come to a critical point—like after the completion of Matrimandir—where suddenly everything sparks into place, and such a sudden expansion happens. Matrimandir might give a tremendous impetus to everything.

"I would like to see Auroville becoming more international. I am concerned that we have so few people from Africa, Latin America and East Asia. Our core at present is Indians, mainly from Tamil Nadu, and Europeans. But Auroville is well aware of that.

"I feel rather privileged to be chosen as a member of the Governing Board. I do not know whether I can contribute very much, but to the extent that I can I would like to help Auroville build itself up and become a strong dynamic community."

Interview by Yanne

LETTERS

Gratitude and joy

(This letter, which has been edited, was received by the community of Aspiration—Eds)

Dear Auroville,

Words cannot describe the gratitude and joy that I feel for all that you have done for me during my too-brief first visit. Many things that you (and I) see in me on the surface are not an accurate reflection of the inner transformation in process. Many things have happened. Many seeds have been planted. These I will nurture and together we can share the blossoms.

Being with you puts me so at ease, that the need to express thanks or even say good-bye vanishes in the presence of your divine spirit.

So I went to Mother at the Samadhi and I thanked her for inspiring the divine presence in you in so many wonderful, unique, amusing and delightful ways and providing the opportunity for you to manifest the Divine in such creative, useful and important ways, so that I could come and experience it as I did and am still doing. Know that I will cherish this not as a 'memory' or 'experience' but as an inspiration that will continue to live and grow.

Until our next meeting, Love,

Bill Leon
Colorado, USA

Auroville is not free

May I be allowed a general observation concerning the project of Auroville itself?

In an Auroville newsletter, dated December 1991, I came across the following: "Asian Rainbow Week, a meeting sponsored by the Department of Sports and the Ministry of Human Resources. The countries represented were Afghanistan, Auroville, France, India..." Here I suddenly felt a knot in my stomach and my throat tighten. Because Afghanistan remains governed from Kabul by a government that was installed and artificially supported by the ex-USSR, against the majority of its people.

I did my national service in Kabul for 16 months. I know the Afghan people and their faith well. In September, 1978, I was the first Frenchman to be arrested and imprisoned by pro-Soviet Afghans and interrogated by the KGB. I was accused of being a spy for the CIA. At night, I would hear the screams of tortured prisoners... However, I have no regrets because I met God in those prisons, through the gaze and the hearts of the Afghan people.

Nonetheless, as a result of this I feel I have the right, if not the duty, to express how deeply saddened I was to find out that Auroville takes part in gatherings where Afghanistan is represented by usurpers. I have understood something. Auroville is not free. Situated on the territory of India, it is thereby enfeoffed to the powers that be in Delhi. Could this situation ever change? Somehow, I very much doubt it.

This explains my pain when I see Auroville lacking the means to realize its dreams while participating in pretences in the guise of youth meets, while the real youth of Afghanistan is in the mountains, fighting every day in the name of freedom, dignity and God.

G.G.

(The original letter, which has been shortened, was published in the French Auroville International newsletter of February, 1992. Eds.)

BRIEF NEWS

International Advisory Council

Mr. J.R.D. Tata, eminent Indian industrialist, has also agreed to be a member of the International Advisory Council. (In our previous issue, we already mentioned Maurice Strong.)

Turtles Hatch

In our last issue of *Auroville Today* there was a report on the Sea Turtle Conservation Project at Quiet in Auroville. A few weeks ago, 129 tiny sea turtles hatched from 140 eggs. Students from the school and everybody lucky enough to pass by during the birthing days, helped assist the little ones through the breakers as they swam with great determination straight for the horizon. They begin a life voyage that could last up to 200 years. In 20 to 30 years, the females will come back to Quiet to lay eggs. Surprisingly, even some of the eggs bought in the Pondicherry market hatched in spite of the theory that they couldn't have possibly been fresh enough. The project will become a permanent feature of Quiet.

Governing Board meeting

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation met on February 28, 1992 with only a few members present: Dr. Karan Singh, chairman, Mr. Krishnan and Mrs. Aster Patel. Mrs. Bilkees Latif and Dr. Kapila Vatsayan had to cancel their programme at the last minute. Other members had intimated earlier their inability to come. Apart from meeting among themselves, the Governing Board also met with some Auroville working groups. The major topics of discussion were the Matrimandir and how to guarantee the freedom of action of some commercial units that have become part of the Auroville Foundation. Concerning Matrimandir, Dr. Karan Singh again expressed his desire that a major part of the construction (all that concerns the Inner Chamber, if possible the skin and a few pe-

tals) be finished by the end of this year. He would like Matrimandir to be the focus of attention for Auroville's Silver Jubilee celebrations between February 21-28, 1993, for which he intends to invite many eminent people. With representatives of Auroville's commercial units, including Aurelec, the Governing Board discussed their needs and the possibilities of their functioning independently from the Auroville Foundation. Dr. Karan Singh asked the Secretary, Mr. L.K. Tripathi, to find a workable solution which takes into account their concerns as soon as possible.

Exhibition of Auroville Artists

There will be an exhibition of the work of Auroville artists at the TUFA art centre in Trier, Germany, between 1st and 14th May. (Trier is near the German, French and Luxembourg borders). Among the artists who will be represented are Rolf, Ireno, Christine, Zabeth, Mayaura, Stefano, Pavitra, Roy, Vincent and Auroson.

Savitri in performance

Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* has been dramatised by Veerapani Chawla and presented to theatregoers in Madras under the title of 'A Greater Dawn'. It has been well-received, and she plans to present it at the Ashram as well as in other major Indian cities.

We have also been informed that Pandit Ravi Shankar will present the World Premiere of *Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, involving music, dance and poetry, in Bombay on February 6th., 1993, in celebration of the 100th. anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's return to India. The script will be written by Richard Alan Hartz of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, in consultation with K.D. Sethna and Nirodbaran.

Ravi Shankar writes, "I consider this major project of international significance and the culmination of my life's work."

Birthday Week Events

This year, Auroville's 'birthday-week' included February 29th, the day on which the Supramental Descent took place in 1956. During this week, a number of cultural and other events took place, some of which are listed below.

- February 21st: Mother's birthday is celebrated in an atmosphere of quiet concentration, and many Aurovilians visit either Mother's room in the Ashram, or the Matrimandir Chamber. The creation of the sand mandala begins at the Centre for Indian Culture (see also elsewhere in this issue). At 5 o'clock in the evening, people concentrate on Mother's recorded reading of the Auroville Charter in the Amphitheatre.
- Sunday, 23rd: Aurolympics Day. This time with a treasure-hunt and breakfast in the Greenbelt, lunch at Quiet Beach, and sports and games in the afternoon at Certitude.
- Monday evening, 24th: Children perform Bharat Natyam dance at Bharat Nivas.
- Wednesday evening, 25th: An enthusiastic crowd attend a live concert by Aurovilians of classical vocal music and piano.
- Auroville's birthday, 28th, 5.30 a.m.: Traditional birthday bonfire and Mother's organ music. Many people

from Pondicherry and other parts of India are there, outnumbering the Aurovilians, and at 6 a.m. long queues form for a visit to the Matrimandir Chamber. At the Centre of Indian Culture the sand mandala is completed. In the evening, 'The Mother's Little Magic Theatre' perform 'A Rainbow Dream' with music by Igor; direction by Coni and Paulo, with the participation of Auroville children.

- February 28th and 29th: An 'open-inside-air and fire grounded waterspirit art exhibition environment' is created by Auroville artists in and around Rolf's house at Ami.
- February 29th: In celebration of the anniversary of the descent of the Supramental a concert is given at Ravena by Shri Devi Prasad on sarod and Shri Rashmi on tabla.
- March 1st: "Invocation", a programme of devotional music at Bharat Nivas by Shoba and her group from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Dawn, February 28th, 1992

*The fire ablaze, the crowd
dense, restless.
Then, thin fragile tones
from a distant organ:
She is playing, calling
a new world.
Quietly She plays on
for those who want to hear.*

*Dense world, busy world—
but She is there.
Listen, beyond, beyond,
She is playing
to call a new world.*

Annemarie

New Publication

Savitri: Seminar Outline and Workbook

On 29.2.92, William Netter released with a certain flourish a fifty-page booklet he has called "An invitation to approach Savitri". It provides a twelve-line summary for each of the forty-nine cantos of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem. Additionally, there is a one-line descriptive title for each canto. William has divided *Savitri* into three parts: The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, The myth of Savitri and Satyavan, and The Yoga of the Divine Mother. At the beginning of each of these parts is an index of cantos with Sri Aurobindo's titles next to a short title referring to the story line. A space for notes is left after each canto summary.

Mother unceasingly praised the power and value of Savitri: "Savitri has an extraordinary power, it gives out vibrations for him who can receive them, the true vibrations of

each stage of consciousness. It is incomparable, it is truth in its plenitude, the truth Sri Aurobindo brought down on earth".

As William wrote on the back cover of his book: "We hope that this foretaste will lead to the deep, rich experience which is Savitri."

Copies available from: William Netter, Samasti, Auroville 605 101

Price: in Auroville Rs.93, in India Rs. 100 (includes postage) Abroad: US \$ 6.- (includes air-mail)

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

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ANKE AND MICHAEL
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In this issue: Spiritual Search

April 1992- Number Thirty-Nine



Painting by Rolf

International for 2000 years...

Arikamedu must already have been a prosperous harbour some hundreds of years before Christ. Many merchant ships from the Mediterranean moored in the estuary of the Ariankuppam river.

It must have been with great wonder that the sailors discovered the richness of the country, the dark-skinned and joyous population with their warm hospitality, and the refinement of their religious festivities. They must have noticed the women with their gait of princesses, adorned with multi-coloured pearls, with gold and silver, and wearing earthen water-pots for crowns. After a year of travelling, it must have been good to rest in the shade of the mango-trees in the villages, to take a siesta in brick houses with thatched roofs, fanned by a girl with a palm leaf.

Yet, when flocks of white birds flew over, migrating to the West, they had to think of leaving, for the birds were announcing the big black clouds which would bring torrential rains. The foreign traders had to quickly sell off their Roman, Greek, Spanish, Gaelic and Persian cargos for a good price, and buy spices, oils, silks and cloth, gold and silver, wood and precious stones, pearls and mysterious ointments for the Roman beauties—all that one could sell for a good price in the big towns of the Mediterranean coast.

The sails were hoisted up before the first raindrops splashed on the decks. They said good-bye, they left with heavy hearts but happy to have done good business. They would come back the next year, God willing.

Arikamedu is situated 12 kms from Auroville, but 2000 years separate us from its inhabitants. This ancient Roman centre was discovered in 1937 by Jouveau Dubreuil, excavated in 1941 by Brother Faucheux and in 1945 by Sir Mortimer

Wheeler, and finally in 1948 by J.M.Casal. The work was stopped at the time of India's Independence. Recently, a new team led by an Indian woman, Mrs Vimala Begley of the Smithsonian Institute who lives in the USA, decided to open the site again. Three years later the earth was dug up again to yield its secrets.

Now, in 1992, five trenches of 4 x 4 meters and 2,5 meters deep have been completed under the direction of an American, Steve Sidebothan, with the help of some ten Indian students. The excavations yielded foundations of houses, residential walls, a well, various earthen pots, crockery, food remains and an impressive quantity of pearls, which were dated as being from the 1st century B.C. They are being studied by an eminent specialist, Peter Francis. It was also found that an enclosing wall must have existed alongside the river.

Unfortunately, the Arikamedu site will be closed shortly, undoubtedly for a long time.

I'm wondering... Will there be Auroville ruins in 2000 years? What will remain of the Matrimandir? Of the disks? Of Last School? Of Bharat Nivas? Of the industrial zone? Of our beautiful homes? Will archaeologists come and dig up the Auroville site?

The fact that European travellers lived so close to Auroville and that it was only 300 years ago that the French, the English, the Portuguese and the Danish had settlements in or near Pondicherry, makes me think that this corner of the earth already had an aspiration to become international; and I feel, being an Aurovilian, part of this adventure of consciousness which is linked to this long line of adventurers, of emigrants, pioneers—with one additional dimension: that of Human Unity.

Yanne

THE EXCAVATIONS conducted at Arikamedu by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1945 and Jean-Marie Casal from 1947 to 1950 produced evidence from different sections and strata of the site—including Iron-Age pottery and fragments of glass bowls from the Roman phase—that has led modern archaeologists to suggest that Arikamedu was a trading port for over four hundred years from ca. 250 B.C. to A.D. 200. It also points to pre-Roman trading contacts between South India and the Mediterranean, as the Roman phase of Arikamedu is only thought to have begun towards the beginning of the first century A.D.

The pre-Roman phase of Arikamedu has some interest for us as a megalithic Dravidian burial site was discovered some years back in Auroville. Six years ago, crowbars hit granite at the bottom of several tree holes. This aroused interest as the nearest granite outcrop is 25 kms away. With the removal of topsoil, a huge granite slab, weighing two tons, was exposed, along with an iron axe and hundreds of pieces of broken pottery shards. A carefully dug test pit, next to the slab, revealed a sarcophagus or coffin in terracotta measuring 80 x 120 x 90 cms. It was ornamented in relief with ram horns facing west. Similar sarcophagi have been found near Chingleput and are indicative of megalithic Dravidian man belonging to the South Indian Iron Age (ca. 1400 B.C. to 100 A.D.) Megalithic burial sites found in India include cairn circles (made of huge boulders), capstone burials—such as the Auroville site Dolmens, menhirs, and cists, which are dressed-stone box burials. The Auroville megalithic men lived at a time when the established iron-age cultures of the North were extending their influence into the South. The boundary of Ashoka's empire stretched from Goa to Nellore, below that flourished the independent Tamil kingdoms. The kings fought each other for control of the fertile deltas and ports which brought abundant wealth and contact with the outside world. It was a period of scientific and technological advancement which coincided with a cultural crystallization of early Tamil literature. Short graffiti in a Tamil-Brahmi script were found by Wheeler in 1948 in Arikamedu, and some of the inscriptions corroborate the names of certain kings and places mentioned in the earliest extant Tamil literature.

