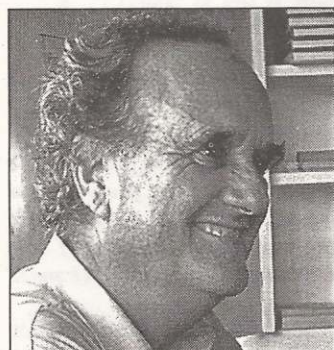


# Auroville Today

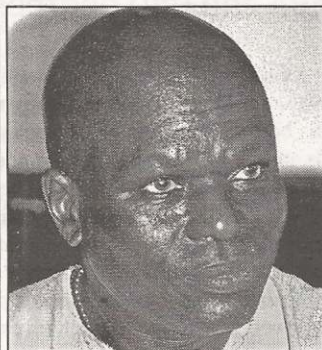
APRIL 2005, No.195



Sir Mark Tully



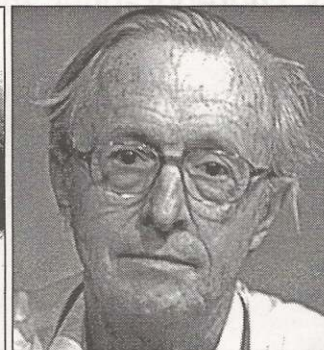
Dr. Mallika Sarabhai



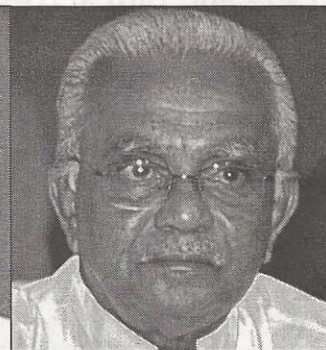
Dr. Doudou Diène



Ms. Malini Parthasarathy



Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi



Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne

It's probably fair to say that the members of the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation do not impinge much on the consciousness of many Aurovilians. After all, they only come to the community once or twice a year, and then only for a few days, and even when they're here their agenda is so organized that they often meet no more than a few residents. No wonder that many Aurovilians, when asked to explain the function of the Governing Board or International Advisory Council, throw up their hands and look blank. This may be about to change, however, primarily because of the quality and commitment of those who have now agreed to serve on these bodies. Last month, many of them visited Auroville to attend meetings, and this gave us a chance to reacquaint ourselves with old friends and to welcome new ones. For the March issue, we interviewed Dr. Karan Singh, who is returning as Chairman of the Governing Board. In this issue we welcome back a former member of the International Advisory Council (IAC), Dr. Ariyaratne of the Sarvodaya movement. We also interview three new members of the International Advisory Council – the writer and journalist, Sir Mark Tully (the new Chairman of the IAC), Dr. Doudou Diène, special rapporteur for the U.N. on racism and racial discrimination, and Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi, who has been adviser to two Presidents of the European Commission – and two new members of the Governing Board: Mallika Sarabhai, dancer, social activist and writer, and the senior journalist and part-owner of The Hindu newspaper, Malini Parthasarathy. We are fortunate to have such visionary and committed friends at a time when Auroville, like the world, is entering a new and challenging phase in its evolution.

## "No full stops!"

Sir Mark Tully is a much-admired writer and broadcaster who has lived in India for over 30 years. He is also the Chairman of the newly-appointed International Advisory Council and recently attended their first meeting in Auroville.

**AUROVILLE TODAY:** When you write or broadcast about India, what is your perspective? What is the lens through which you look?

**Tully:** It's interesting that you mention lenses, because I was thrilled listening to Dr. Gangadean at the Youth Conference when he described how we all look through different lenses, but the crucial thing is to understand other people's lenses as well as our own. I think that is one of the fundamental things I've learned in India. I'll explain this in terms of my background. Although I was born in India, I was educated in an English public school, and it was a totally rational education. You learned that there was only one way to do things, and your job in life was always to find that one way. The only bit of my education I enjoyed was going to chapel: later I studied at a theological college for two terms after graduating from Cambridge.

So, partly because of this tramline-like education and because of the way that Christianity was traditionally taught, I grew up believing that Christianity was the only way to God. But when I came to India, it became obvious that many of the Hindus and Muslims I met were genuinely seeking after God, and it occurred to me they were seeking after God rather than saying they had found God or knew God. Therefore it became clear to me that Christianity could not be the only way to God. However, as someone who loved and still loves Christianity I didn't want to lose it, so I had to find a way of remaining a Christian without denying there are other ways to God. And then, thinking about it further, I realized that I could learn from the other ways to God as well. This is what India brought me, what has become a part of me, and it's been profoundly important.

I'd like to add one thing which may be a little contrary to the thinking in Auroville. I believe that most of us need to stand in tradition. I've had a pretty wild life as a foreign correspondent, and I think in the end if I hadn't always had this deep love of Anglicanism I would have become a cynical old bore, propping up bars. I do find sometimes that when people talk of spirituality they seem to be denying the validity of religion, but to me the two go hand-in-hand. Actually, I think one of the things we need to do is to re-spiritualize religion, because one of the weakest points in my theological education was that it was all dumped on me from outside: you learned the catechism, the creed etc. but you were not really taught anything about spirituality. Christianity, even now, is still far too predicated on the moral content and not enough on the spiritual content.

*You seem to feel that India has been saddled with an alien mindset as a hangover from colonialism.*

I do believe that, I believe there is a colonial inferiority complex which has allowed elements of the colonial era to be perpetuated. Look at the Indian bureaucracy, for example, or the position of the English language as the lingua franca of this country. I know the huge advantages that accrue, but we must also see that it affects the development of Indian languages, which are hugely rich, and it denies the language of the elite to millions of Indians.

On a larger level, I fear now that India is being threatened by a new form of imperialism which is cultural imperialism, and when I wrote *No Full Stops in India* my aim was to say that there are Indian ways of doing things, that India has a wonderfully rich culture of its own, so don't let it all be swept away. I'm not saying India should go back to a golden age, but do we want a true India or an imitation America? In other words, I think the whole money-culture, consumeristic thing which is coming up is fundamentally un-Indian because in Indian culture the emphasis is upon having enough but not more. There can be no consumerism without greed, and greed is one of the greatest enemies of spirituality because it takes you down a completely different path.

So I believe you should be able to get the best out of modern culture but at the same time stand firmly rooted in your culture.

### Extracts from minutes of an unofficial meeting of the Auroville International Advisory Council (I.A.C) on February 22nd, 2005

Present:  
Sir Mark Tully, Chairman,  
Dr. Doudou Diène  
Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne  
Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi

We had a long discussion on our functioning as the I.A.C. We distinguished two main functions of the I.A.C.

The first is to advise the Board on the development and management of Auroville. We feel that in order to fulfil the first function according to the Act it is desirable that we should:

1) Meet at least twice a year in Auroville preferably at the same

time as the meeting of the Governing Board, or in liaison with any meaningful event of Auroville.  
2) The meeting should at least last for 2 days.

3) There should be during the meeting an opportunity to meet the Working Committee, the Auroville Residents Assembly, the Governing Board, and any other group which wishes to see us.

4) In order to be able to advise, we would like to be informed and consulted on the draft agenda of the Governing Board.

This will enable us if necessary to suggest matters which might be discussed by the Governing Board. We would like also to receive in due course the minutes/proceedings of the Governing Board Meetings.

We also feel that, along with the Governing Board, we should be consulted by the Government of India when any important decision has to be taken on the develop-

ment and management of Auroville.

The second function of the I.A.C is to be an interface with the outside world: in order to perform this function it will be necessary not only to promote Auroville to the outside world but also to strengthen Auroville's contacts with that world.

#### Transparency

We feel it is important that the citizens of Auroville should be informed about all our deliberations, including these minutes, by putting them on the Auroville Intranet or by any other means.

#### Conformity with The Mother's Vision

In all our deliberations or actions we will always bear in mind that it is our duty to promote the ideals laid down in the Charter of Auroville proclaimed by the 'Mother' on February 28, 1968.

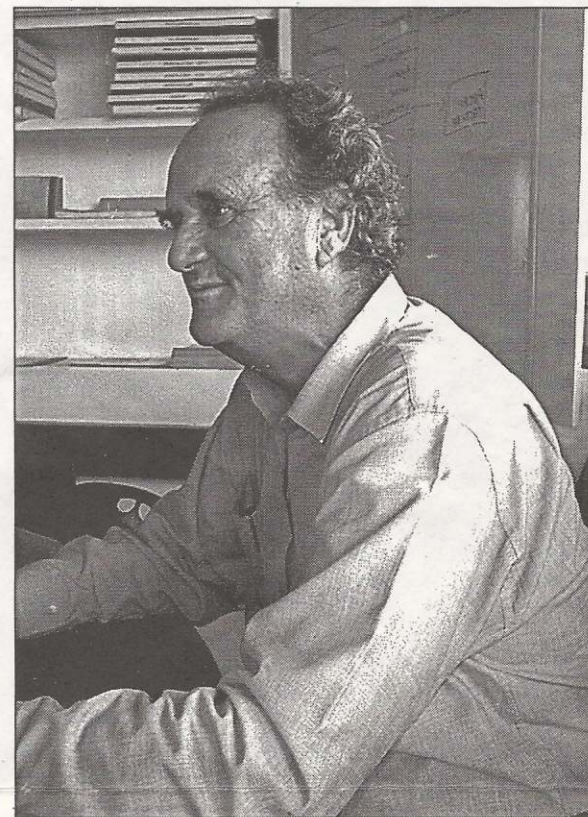


PHOTO BY ALAN

*Are you hopeful that India will be strong enough to resist this cultural colonialism?*

I'm not at all despairing, although I do sometimes despair when I see all these ghastly shopping malls coming up in Delhi, the dreadful advertisements on television and, in my own profession, how the journalist's role has been suborned by commercial considerations. One of the things about Indian culture is its adaptive nature because it doesn't see things through final lenses, because it regards life as a search and as a business of finding balance. One takes great comfort from the longevity of Indian culture, although one wonders if it has ever been subjected to such a mighty onslaught.

*continued on page 3*

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• Frozen Grace and other dances  
• Brief news page 10



# "More of India needs to be in Auroville, more of Auroville needs to be in India."

Mallika Sarabhai is a woman of many interests. She is a Bharat Natyam and Kuchipudi dancer, social activist, feminist, stage and film actress, choreographer and writer, and holds MBA and PhD degrees.



**A** Today: Is this your first visit to Auroville?

**Mallika:** No, the second. I first visited Auroville six or seven years ago, and spent four days here. My impressions then weren't positive. While the experience of being in the Matrimandir and meditating there was extraordinary, I had many questions about the community. I spoke to a lot of people, I am fairly sensitive in picking up vibrations, and I thought many of them were there simply because it was a good deal. For nobody is asking you anything, there is no demanding authority. And I thought that surely was not the idea. Not that I wish individuality to be regimented, but I didn't see a common sensibility.

**Then why, if you had such a negative impression, did you accept the invitation to become member of the Governing Board?**

Because I think the possibility of Auroville is incredibly exciting and in whatever small way I can, I would like to contribute to it. I believe in communities that can change the world and I do not think that such an exceptional idea exists anywhere else. The level of some of your people here is exceptional. But I think you need to impact more than just your own community, and not only commercially by selling beautiful products. More of India needs to be here and more of you needs to be in India. You are not on a separate planet.

**Are you familiar with the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother?**

When I was 17 my mother Mrinalini Sarabhai, a Bharata Natyam and Kathakali dancer, created an interpretation of Savitri. She had met an extraordinary composer from New York, Joel Thome, who was deeply into Sri Aurobindo's work and who

had been working for years on a score *Savitri the Flame of the Future*. Six or seven years later he came to Ahmedabad and they created a dance piece together. That was my first encounter with Sri Aurobindo's work. Within two years we did two versions of it, one to Thome's very New Age music, and another for young people, using passages from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri and Indian music. Otherwise I have not read a great deal of either Sri Aurobindo or The Mother.

**You proposed to the Board that it initiates an in-depth investigation of Auroville...**

I have been speaking to a lot of Aurovilians since my nomination to the Board. I have been receiving letters and articles every day and I realized that there are groups in Auroville which have very different perspectives. So I proposed something based on my own experience. My mother had founded the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in 1949 in Ahmedabad to teach Bharata Natyam and Kathakali in the state of Gujarat. At the time, south-Indian classical dance and music were not understood and the notion of Gujarati girls from 'decent' families learning dance and taking it up as a career was unpalatable. My mother's work was successful; the perspectives on dance gradually changed and Darpana expanded to become an umbrella institution not only for Bharata Natyam and Kathakali, but also for other traditional performances such as theatre and puppetry which were facing extinction.

But when Darpana was heading towards its fiftieth year, we realised that a change was needed. I invited two professors from the Indian Institute of Management to conduct six months of intensive discussions with the artistes and everybody at

Darpana from the gardener upwards, in order to discover what their personal aspirations were, both for themselves as individuals and for the institution. As a result, there were dramatic changes.

One was the shutting down of the dance teaching department as this work was now being duplicated by many dancers all over the city. Another change was to turn Darpana into an institution for creative, cutting-edge thinking artistes to come together and think about world issues and explore how the arts could impact these issues. Darpana became committed not only to promoting genuine art, but also to using art to further socially-relevant causes such as protection of the environment, non-violence, fostering creativity etc.

Yet another major change was Darpana's management. My mother ran Darpana in a time when institutions needed to be led by a leader and there was a hierarchical structure. At present there is a different management style, a result of Darpana becoming a 'flat' horizontal organization where each person carries responsibility. For if you want every single individual to have a stake in an institution, each of them needs to feel that his/her voice is not only heard but counts. The exercise was an extraordinary experience for many people. The fact that these professors came to spend hours with each individual was very enriching. Major issues came out, sometimes arising from silly things. The very fact of just voicing them got rid of much negativity. Darpana has metamorphosed into a forward-looking institution very different from what it had been.

Because we went through this exercise at Darpana, I suggested to the Board that this might also work for Auroville – even if you would not immediately act on it. Let everyone over the age of 10 have an opportunity to talk about their understanding of what Auroville is so that the community can re-centre itself. For every generation needs to reinterpret the Dream and the ideals for themselves.

**Was the idea appreciated in the Board?**

Very much so. The Board is aware that only two or three hundred people are running Auroville, and not the 1200 adults Auroville has. There may be hundreds who feel that 'we are never going to have a chance anyhow, so what's the point.' That would be sad for such a small community. And if you expand to 50,000 people, how are you going to get their active cooperation? Surely the beginning of self-growth, illumination or enlightenment, whatever you call it, is to be able to clearly voice one's opinion and be heard.

**An exercise like this for Darpana, which has less than fifty like-minded people, is easier than for Auroville with 1200 adults of widely different backgrounds.**

I am not saying it is going to be easy. An experiment like this is never easy. But the exercise itself might make it clearer for the larger community to understand 'who feels what' as a first step of even saying what is wrong. Today, most people are not even voicing what they feel.

**You are known as a firebrand social activist and have had many stand-offs with the Gujarat government.**

I continue to have them. I have raised my voice to ensure that the violence against Muslims in the riots of 2002 is addressed by the judicial systems. I filed a public-interest petition in the Indian Supreme Court against the Gujarat government for its role in the riots, calling for the protection of the rights of those injured, for a thorough investigation and for the punishment of those responsible for the carnage. So far, not a single person has been convicted in the genocide cases.

But Darpana and I have since been targeted by state authorities. One night, more than 200 right-wingers tried to break into Darpana. We received threats that bombs would be thrown inside. My passport was confiscated, charges were filed against me and there have been five police and two Central Bureau of Investigation enquiries. Artistes were phoned that their children would be abducted unless they gave evidence against me. This was all done to get me to withdraw the public interest petition. I live in a state where a right-wing government rules and I am a thorn in their flesh. But they found not an iota of truth in any of the allegations and I have won all the cases. We at Darpana lived through it together. Not one single faculty member left Darpana and they stood by me like a rock. But even today the telephones of the artistes have not been reconnected.

**Why did you continue to live in Ahmedabad?**

Because it would be a victory for them if I give up, and I have ultimately to live with myself. It would be a disgrace to me and to my family. I have fighters on both sides of my family, who fought for everything they believed in. I believe in the Indian constitution and am fighting for every Indian to have an equal right to live in our country.

**You mentioned how Darpana is an institution for creative thinking artists. So what is the relevance of classical Bharata Natyam or Kuchipudi dance when art has to move forward?**

Indian classical dance has an infinite alphabet; and it is hugely relevant. It is not a question of getting rid of one tradition to start another. You cannot say that in order to reach out to the sky, you should forget the roots. The roots are there not to hold you down, but to give the energy to make the branches strong so that they can reach out and assimilate other influences. Indian dance has that in-built possibility of change. The *Natya Shastra*, India's ancient text on dance and stagecraft, says at the end of 1,500 pages 'These are just the rules. Interpret them as you will.' Our classical dance is a language which can talk about anything. How you do that is your own choice. I reconnect with it constantly because it gives me a new energy, and there is the sheer joy of the form. If you have the impression of Bharata Natyam being a form frozen in time, then you have only seen it danced by boring dancers. Bharata Natyam as a form can be electrifying.

When I perform, I usually start with the absolute tradition, then go to something which moves in two or three aspects, and afterwards proceed to something which completely bypasses tradition. In that way the audience can see the continuity. Most countries try to rediscover their

past, but in India the past lives with the present.

**You mentioned in your public talk to Auroville that the five years of your acting as Draupadi in Peter Brook's stage and film versions of the Mahabharata have vastly changed your life.**

Those five years were difficult. Draupadi has always been one of my favourite women. I fought a lot with director Peter Brook and playwright Jean-Claude Carrière – who after all were Anglo-Saxon males and I was the only Indian on the set – about my understanding of Indian civilization, Hinduism, the Mahabharata, the role of Shakti, and the concept of male-female parity in Vedic times. Hinduism is the only religion where women were not subservient to men; they were conceived as equal and that had vast consequences for the psyche and my performance of Draupadi.

The Mahabharata also led me to a better understanding of non-Western cultures. Before, I used to read Western books and was studying Western culture. But Brook's Mahabharata company included Africans, Eastern Europeans and Asians. The interaction opened my eyes to the sensitivities of those cultures, which were, I felt, closer to the Indian culture than the West. The Westerners had a completely different attitude than the Asians or the Africans. For them nothing was sacred. To give a simple example: a European sat during a performance with his feet stretched out towards the performers. I asked him not to do that, as it is disrespectful. He listened to me then, but after the performance I had to put up with an hour-long debate on why it was disrespectful. But the Africans and Asians immediately understood what I was talking about.

When I ended my work in the Mahabharata, I was no longer a dancer and an activist, but I had become a performer who used activism and performance together. All the work that I have done since then is really a result of those 5 years.

**Will you come to Auroville only to attend Board meetings or can we look forward to a performance?**

We from Darpana would love to come and do things together. There are so many possibilities! I would be happy to come as often as you want, I would also be happy to send people from Darpana – let's build bridges! One idea could be that the Darpana group would come to Auroville for a week or so to give three or four completely different performances with discussions and workshops. As all of our performances are socio-politically orientated, issues of gender, female infanticide, HIV, illiteracy, foreignness and Indian-ness are regularly highlighted. Aurovilians should also come to Darpana to create something together. There are immense possibilities for collaboration.

Perhaps I could also perform my latest piece *Western Woman*, which I presented with Italian actress Rita Maffei on the occasion of the Women's Day celebration in Udine, Italy. The piece looks at the West's perception of India as instant nirvana and the Indian perception of the West as instant riches. The entire show is a search for how one can get the best of both worlds. (laughing) Now wouldn't that be interesting for Auroville!

Priya and Carel



# We need to improve Auroville's image

She is known as feisty, anti-communalistic, and an advocate of press freedom. Malini Parthasarathy, part-owner and senior journalist of the daily The Hindu speaks about her first impressions of Auroville, on the function of the media and her role as a Governing Board member.

**A** Today: Is this your first visit to Auroville?

**Malini:** Yes, but I could only visit Auroville for a short time. I attended some of the presentations by the Aurovilians to the Board and the Board meeting itself. I must say I am impressed by the remarkable commitment of the people I have met. Yet, I also felt that Aurovilians are still struggling to find their identity and haven't yet found the way for Auroville to develop.

**How is it that an editor of The Hindu, based in Chennai, has never visited Auroville before?**

Probably because too little of Auroville's ideals and its work are known to the outside world. I was born and educated in Chennai, yet I hardly know anything about Auroville, which is in my backyard so to say. Because not much is known, people easily get the impression that Auroville is an island, cut off from the rest of Tamil Nadu, from the rest of India. Take the afforestation, for example. When I came in, I was impressed by the work done. I was sad to return later to the barren landscape around it. I am aware now that Auroville has been doing reforestation on some areas in the bioregion, but if you do not know this, you have an impression of a self-absorbed community with little concern for its immediate environment, as the contrast between Auroville and its surroundings is so stark. This ignorance has to be addressed. I would like all of us, the Board and the Aurovilians, to come up with proposals for improvement. For the better Auroville is known, the more empathy and warmth it will receive from the outside world for Auroville's vision and for its plans to become a universal township.

I was happy seeing the presentation of Auroville's tsunami relief work and to hear that it has brought many contacts with the officials of the district and with the governments of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. But you'll have to make sure you don't lose the momentum.

**Do you mean to say that Auroville should become more Indianised?**

No, please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that Auroville should be indigenised; that would not be fair to the

original concept. The interactions with Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry are important, of course, but they should not be considered as predominant. Auroville is meant to be a universal township. There is no need to be apologetic about that. And I am also aware that Auroville is primarily meant to be a spiritual community, so you have to balance the inner and outer work.

**Do you have any knowledge of the underlying spiritual ideals of Auroville?**

I have read Sri Aurobindo's writings, and always felt a great respect for Sri Aurobindo, first of all for his nationalist fervour and secondly for his spiritual work and legacy. For my own spiritual explorations his writings have been an input. I do not know that much about The Mother.

**How did you become a member of the Governing Board?**

I was taken by surprise when I was phoned by the Human Resource Development Ministry and asked to be on the Board of the Auroville Foundation. Perhaps the invitation came because some of my ideals coincide with those of Auroville. As Executive Editor until recently I have wielded a role in the daily news coverage, and have written extensively on domestic and foreign policy issues. I am known in my writings as being against fundamentalism, against communalism, against any kind of religious imposition. I have always advocated the need to strengthen the secular and democratic orientation of India's political system. This position has drawn the ire of the previous government which, in my view, presented a rather fundamentalist Hindu vision of Indian society. Ultimately there was a confrontation with the Government of Tamil Nadu. In November 2003, the Tamil Nadu State Assembly sentenced the publisher, myself and two others from The Hindu to 15 days in prison for "breach of privilege" after The Hindu had criticised the arrest of an opposition figure and the harassment of independent media. We appealed against the decision and the Indian Supreme Court suspended the orders. It all boiled down to the freedom of the press, whether the press had the right to report and criticise the deterioration of civil liberties.



PHOTO BY CAREL

I am drawn to the idea of a universal township, as I believe it to be in line with the Indian Constitution which talks about civic identity rather than a Hindu cultural identity. As such, Auroville could be a possible microcosm of what India is meant to be. When I was asked to become a member of the Board, I saw it as an opportunity to contribute to this legacy.

**You are an advocate of press freedom, yet you also criticised the Indian media for their obsequious towing of a certain political agenda.**

Yes, in a piece written for the annual issue of the Delhi-based journal Seminar 'India 2004, A Symposium on the year that was' in January 2005, I criticised the over-estimation of the Hindutva phenomenon by the media and their disinclination to ask hard questions. They did not examine the authenticity of the issues inspired by Hindu nationalist leaders. Looking back at the content that filled newspapers during the sway of the previous government, it appeared that little was happening apart from propaganda assaults by overzealous Christian missionaries and Muslim terrorists planting bombs in public spaces. Many major publications

and television channels painted a picture of Indian society well on its way to becoming a Hindu one, purging itself of the 'alien elements'. During the Ayodhya dispute, for example, the validity of the argument for a temple at the disputed Babri Masjid site was hardly questioned. Another example is the Gujarat Assembly elections in December 2002 which led to a victory of the ruling party. As that same party was accused of having had a covered hand in the slaughter of thousands of people in the riots earlier that year, the media were hard-pressed to find an explanation for the victory. Many insisted that the electoral success did not represent a justification of the carnage but that it only showed that Indian political parties, particularly the Congress, would have to 'update' its political vision to accommodate the new political reality of the Hindu cultural consciousness.

When the Congress-led DNA won the Lok Sabha elections, the media spoke of 'a stunning upset' and a 'shock defeat' for the BJP. But it rather showed how unprepared the media themselves were and to what extent they were disconnected from the ground realities. They had concentrated on the wishful

Hindu nationalist campaign of an 'India Shining' and had failed to properly register the concerns of the voters. I concluded my article stating that the Indian media cannot afford to make this kind of mistake again if they intend to fulfil a credible role in the democratic process.

**You are obviously a very busy woman, having done many impressive interviews with important national and international figures such as various Prime Ministers of both India and Pakistan, with Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf and with the then U. S. National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice. Does such a schedule leave you time for Auroville? How do you see your personal involvement?**

I am on a sabbatical now, so I definitely have more time for myself. But I do not want to make any grandiose presumptuous statements. Basically I will help you whatever I can to realise the ideals you came for, help you to remove the bureaucratic impediments to this vision and probably will also nudge Auroville to become better known. Any time you want me to come down, I'll be willing to do so.

*In conversation with Priya and Carel*

## INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

### "No full stops!"

*continued from page 1*

The most important thing now is that the propagators of this new culture should change, in other words, the change has to come from the West. And there are signs that more and more people there are beginning to realize that you cannot go on in this barren manner, and that externally almost all the threats that the West is facing are the result of their own policies. I believe profoundly that there is a huge lesson for the West to learn when it comes to terrorism, and that is that the West, without condoning acts of terrorism, has to understand what made those men drive those planes into the World Trade Center. We have to understand that, to a large extent, it was driven by a fear of Western culture which is seen by some as godless and obscene. So if the West is really going to deal with this terrorist problem, it has to look at itself.

**You've never been to Auroville before. Why?**

It had not really impinged on my consciousness. When I was asked to come on this Council what struck me was that most of the things that have happened to me have been chance, fate. So when out of the blue I was invited I felt it was fate again, and I'm sure that I will learn a huge amount from this experience. There was also a feeling that it's extremely ungracious to refuse such an honour, because this is much more important than a lot of things I am asked to do.

The last three days in Auroville have made me very excited by what I've found here. One of the things which have impressed me tremendously is the number of people who have lived here for a very long time. Then again, the subjects that are talked about here are so much more interesting than in other places, there is the whole ambition of this place, and it is all about what I believe should happen. The very fact that you're seeking not to have money here I think is wonderful, and the fact that you talk about 'divine anarchy' is

such a wonderful counter-blast to all that I fought against in the BBC, which was the over-managerial control of the corporation.

It seems to me what you're trying to do here is something very brave; you're trying to apply ideals, and that's always going to be hugely challenging. I said to my colleagues on the Council that we're tremendously enthused, we really want to play a role, but to continue with that enthusiasm, to keep it going, is going to be our problem.

**In terms of resolutions the IAC has already taken, it sounds as if you've set off at a gallop...**

We all feel that in that document [see box on page 1] we have set ourselves a task. We want everyone to know what that task is, and we want to be kept up to the mark. I think what we want to do is to take part in the evolution of Auroville, but we all realize that this evolution does not happen simply by what I could term the hand of God, it requires effort. We have set

off at a gallop, but we have to keep going. I don't like the idea of galloping myself, I prefer slow and steady progress.

**You're a stayer!**

I stayed in India, and that sometimes requires considerable staying power! But I have been enormously rewarded for staying in India, it's been a wonderful life and I'm passionate about this country. At the same time, I was born and educated British and it would be absurd for me to turn round and say I have become an Indian. I don't think that, like a snake, I can just slough my skin, and I don't want to because I also owe a huge amount to Britain, I owe my whole Christian culture to it. So I see myself as British but deeply influenced by India.

**You were born in India, you have lived here many years but in your books on India you often seem to feel yourself an outsider. Is this a source of discomfort?**

Of course, it's not necessarily a

comfortable position. But there are also advantages. If you are utterly monocultural, if you say to yourself 'This what I believe in and nothing is going to change this' it is perhaps more comfortable, but it's less challenging. Also because of my position I see things slightly differently to both Indians and British, and that is useful sometimes; it means I can bring a different perspective. It's not a position where you're permanently comfortable, but I don't think life should be like that. No full stops!

*From an interview by Alan*

**Sir Mark Tully was the BBC's correspondent in India for 22 years. He has made radio programmes and published a number of books about the subcontinent, including 'No Full Stops in India' and 'India in Slow Motion'. In 2001 he was knighted for his services to broadcasting and journalism.**



## "Auroville is an experience"

Mr. Doudou Diène is the Special United Nations Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. He works together with the Commission on Human Rights. During his stay in Auroville he gave a lecture on dialogue and conflicts between civilizations. Auroville Today spoke to him about his work, his interests and his perceptions of Auroville.

**A** V Today: In your lecture you said that intolerance and racism are on the increase everywhere in the world.

Doudou Diène: Sadly so. There has been an alarming resurgence of conventional racism and insidious new forms of discrimination and racism. I recently submitted a report to the Commission on Human Rights on contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia directed against Muslim and Arab peoples in various parts of the world.

We found that there have been increased attacks and assaults on these people, their property and their places of worship in several parts of the world, particularly in the United States of America and in Europe. Also, the legislation adopted in several countries to strengthen national security and combat terrorism has had a negative impact on Muslims and Arabs. In several non-Muslim countries, political and media figures publicly defame Islam and equate Islam with violence, terrorism and cultural and social backwardness. A culture of violence, discrimination and fear of the other is being nourished in the popular imagination by the press, books, television and film; and there is the re-emergence of the concept of the foreigner as an alien.

This all is a direct, proven and recognized consequence of the events of 11 September. But it can also be seen as a sign of the beginnings of a conflict between civilizations. We have issued a number of recommendations to the Commission on Human Rights to stem the tide.

**Can you highlight some of these recommendations?**

We advised the Commission to take preventive measures to guarantee that Muslims and Arabs can freely exercise their religion and culture, and that their cultural sites and places of worship are protected. We also recommend that their fundamental rights are protected, such as the rights to equality before the law, personal integrity and a fair trial. Equally important, we advised the Commission to pursue a strategy to root out the culture and ideology of discrimination, xenophobia

and intolerance. The dialogue between cultures, civilizations and religions should be promoted and centre on three main objectives: to enhance mutual awareness of cultures, civilizations and religions; to encourage cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism; and to create conditions that will lead the followers of religions and spiritual traditions to reflect on their shared values. Another recommendation was that states should pay special attention to the way in which history is written and taught.

**Why this stress on the teaching of history?**

When we talk of a dialogue of civilizations, we usually approach this ideologically or politically. But it is also very important to go back to history to understand the interactions and contacts between people through the ages. For example, there are many ancient connections between the Dravidian people of South India and people of Africa, Dravidians appear to have migrated thousands of years ago from the south of Africa to India. It is also known that there have been African kingdoms long before the Han dynasty in certain parts of China and Russia. So when you are speaking about human unity, you can look at the political and spiritual dimensions, but you should not forget the historic dimensions. The last frontier that is being researched now is tracing the genetic origins of mankind. This shows, for example, that 27% of the Chinese are genetically African.

**The spiritual dimension of human unity is close to the heart of Auroville.**

(Smiling) Sri Aurobindo is one of my teachers. When I started to become more sensitive to spirituality and higher values, Sri Aurobindo was one of those whom I read and who very profoundly influenced me. I have read many books of Sri Aurobindo, and in my talk I quoted one sentence of Sri Aurobindo which I read over 20 years ago, and which still guides me: "I see my soul travelling through time."

**What were your perceptions of your first visit to Auroville?**

I read about Auroville after having read Sri Aurobindo many years ago. But whatever I read had not prepared me for this experience! Here there is a vibration, a vitality both in the commitment and the engagement of the residents, but more importantly also in the interactions between the human beings living here and nature. Your attempt to translate spirituality into practice cannot be grasped if you don't come here and see it. Auroville for me is not something you can read about. Auroville is an experience.

This being said, I hope that we, the members of the International Advisory Council, will be able to help Auroville in two directions so that the Auroville experience will not be an isolated light. Firstly, we will help to make the ideals of Auroville better known to the outside world. This we will do both individually and collectively. Secondly, we are going to promote more cultural and spiritual pluralism in Auroville, because we think that important parts of the world are not represented here: for example, almost all countries in Africa and the Middle East, many countries in Latin America, and the Far East. For the Auroville experience to be meaningful, Auroville has to reflect the diversity of the world. Lastly, we want to promote the interaction between the different organs of the Auroville Foundation: the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council, and the Residents Assembly. These bodies have to be put in a dynamic interaction, so that all of them within their own mandate can help Auroville.

Auroville is also fragile in the sense that the interaction between the Auroville residents and the local people has to be stronger on all levels. Auroville should be aware and sensitive to the risks of a social divide between the wealthy and the poor which may weaken the ideals of Auroville

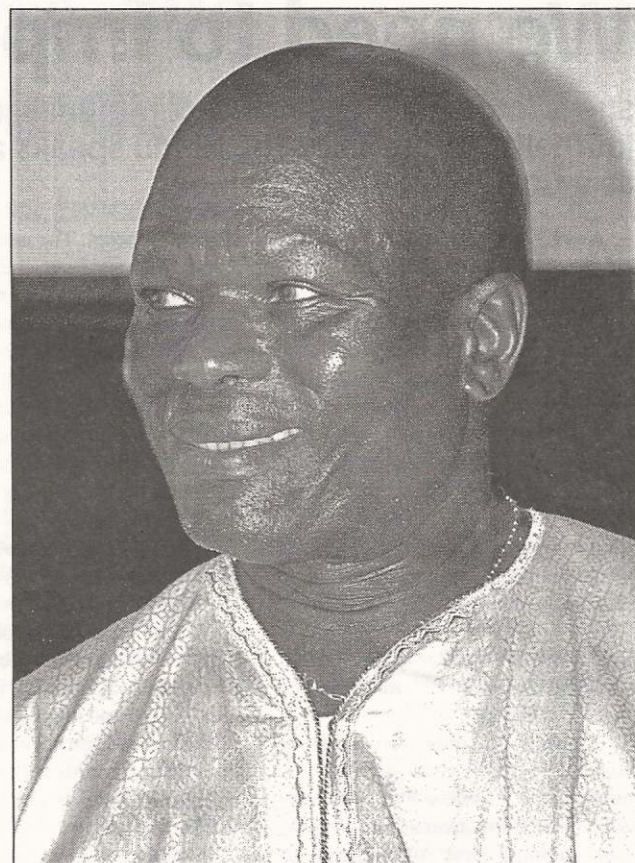


PHOTO BY CAREL

and the unity which is being practiced. The example of Auroville will also depend on the way Auroville connects to the outside world, is informed and sensitive to what is going on there and relates to it.

**Will you be coming to Auroville more often than once a year?**

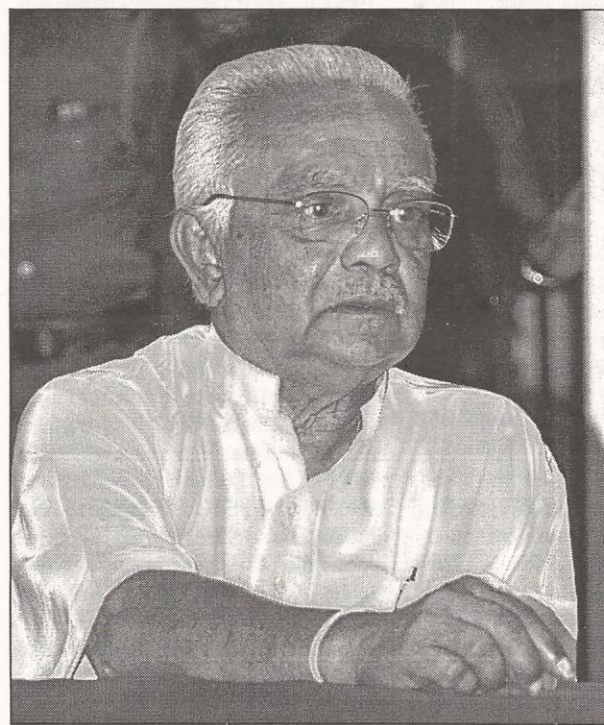
To assume our mandate, one meeting a year is not enough. The half day meeting this time was ridiculous! I proposed to my friend Aster that the IAC have at least two meetings a year that would last at least two days. Also our meeting should be coinciding with the meeting of the Governing Board, so that we will be informed of what they want to do. We also want to meet with the Residents' Assembly.

I may add on a personal level, if God allows me with my life and my health, and if my impossible job gives me time also, I would like to come here not as a member of the council but as someone who really would like to grow. I have been very impressed by the general atmosphere. Since I discovered Matrimandir, I have been going there every day to meditate.

Carel

## "I'm willing to make any contribution to Auroville"

Dr. Ariyaratne of the Sarvodaya Movement returns as a member of the IAC



**A**uroville Today: The effect of the tsunami on the fishing villages near Auroville was terrible, but it also strengthened human unity. Was it the same in Sri Lanka?

Dr. Ariyaratne: Yes. Within hours of the wave, government troops and LTTE cadres had put down their guns and were working together to save people and bury the dead. This was a great spontaneous thing which shows that, even when people have been involved for many years

in armed conflict, they are basically human beings who would like to live together in peace. Actually an unbelievable number of people from civil society rushed to help.

**Was the relief coordination good?**

Not always. The military was well-coordinated – soldiers came from different armies around the world, they were sent to a particular area, did everything they could and many now have left. Then the international organizations rushed in. While some do a good service, many set a bad example as to the evil effects of money. They immediately brought luxury vehicles for their own use, they offered huge salaries to local people, they were not transparent in their dealings, they were haphazard in their operations and they have done great damage to our values and our culture. You see, when you come to a country, you must work with the organizations that are

already in that country; you should support them, not weaken them by weaning away their best workers.

**What has been the role of the Sarvodaya movement?**

Our approach is what we call the 5 'R's' programme: relief (we have distributed supplies to about half a million families), rehabilitation, reconciliation (we help all, irrespective of their faith or politics), reconstruction and reawakening. Of

the 15,000 villages we had already been working in, 226 were affected by the tsunami, and some of the things we'd established – like rural banks – were completely washed away. So we placed in each village 10 or more people from our Peace Brigades and they are carrying out a 12 point programme. This includes programmes for women and children, water and sanitation, psychosocial treatment, housing etc. It's important to understand that we are not only rebuilding homes but rebuilding families and the spirit of the community.

**How is the relationship with the Sri Lankan government? Do they see Sarvodaya as a competitor?**

Every inefficient government servant looks upon us as a competitor, efficient people cooperate with us and help us. Actually, while the government's approach in such situations is different from that of the voluntary organizations – the government always begins by commanding, controlling, while we begin by consulting and cooperating with the victims – we always try to work out a modus operandi. The government certainly consults us – I recently had a long interview with the Prime Minister.

**You've agreed to come back onto the International Advisory Council. Why?**

I truly admire the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as a way of unifying spiritual and physical forces in the world, and I consider that Auroville as a community has gone very far in this direction. There has also been a very important professional or technological input into Auroville which is another thing which we in the Sarvodaya movement can learn

from. So while at first I wanted to refuse a second term on the Council because I am too busy, when Dr. Karan Singh, whom I have known for almost 30 years, wrote to me I agreed to come back. Personally, I'm willing to make any contribution I can to Auroville, whether I'm a member of the IAC or not.

**How do you understand the function of the International Advisory Council (IAC)?**

Sarvodaya also has an Act of Parliament which governs our work, and we have incorporated 14 bodies into our structure as we have evolved, so I have some idea as to how a complex community of Auroville's nature can function. Concerning our role as members of the IAC, firstly I look at the spiritual component. This means that every person in this community is important, and it's important that everybody outside this community gets some kind of inspiration from the spiritual work that is being done here. Secondly, I feel it is our duty, in a spirit of brotherhood, to tell the Working Committee, the Residents Assembly, the Governing Board or the Government of India if we have any concerns about the way they are functioning vis-à-vis the ideals of Auroville. I certainly won't hesitate to do this. You see, I allow my heart to guide me. Sometimes, my intuitive kind of contribution has upset some people. On the other hand, I feel that intuition is far superior to knowledge.

**Can you run a huge organization like Sarvodaya on intuition alone?**

That's what I'm doing.

From an interview by Alan



# "A massive paradigm shift is underway"

Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi is a theologian and researcher in global cultural transformation and has been advisor to two Presidents of the European Commission. He is also a new member of the International Advisory Council. Here he gives his views on a global paradigm change and how this may affect Auroville.

"Samuel Huntingdon wrote an influential book postulating that the biggest problem that will face the modern world is a clash between civilizations. He's wrong. The vast majority of inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogues are a complete waste of time because the clash today is not between different civilizations or religions, but between different paradigms or world views which are held within the same religion or society.

"There are three radically different paradigms that are operating in the world today, and they can be termed the 'pre-modern', the 'modern' and the 'transmodern'. If we take religion as an example, the pre-moderns or fundamentalists in every religion say the same – 'the women are the problem', 'we are against abortion' etc. – while the moderns want a rational religion which is separated from politics and state affairs (one of the dangerous consequences of this separation is that in 'official' politics today there are no ethics, only facts). Then you have the transmoderns – that's where you find the majority of women, the young – who are actually looking for spirituality rather than religion. The difficulty comes when you mix moderns with pre-moderns – there is an immediate clash. The transmoderns are tolerant, but they are completely ignored by the other two positions who continue to fight. That's the situation, not only in religion but in all fields of life.

"While fundamentalism is still strong in certain areas, the dominant paradigm of the past 200-300 years has been modernism. Modernity was a fantastic liberation movement from obscurantism; we used reason to free human creativity and we invented science and technology. However, this liberation movement has become a prison. Why? Because now we see that this modern approach is also intolerant, and, like the pre-moderns, it has a clergy. The modern clergy, who are listened to by all governments, are the economists and the technocrats. And what blocks modernity now is a secular religion, with its Pope, cardinals, priests and Inquisition, called Free Trade.

"So that's modernity, which is no more than a rational form of fundamentalism. It's very serious, but it's also coming to an end. Why? Because a massive paradigm shift is underway. Studies reveal that about 20% of the population of the West realize that if we continue along this path we will destroy ourselves and our environment, so they are silently changing their values.

These 'cultural creatives', as the American sociologist Paul H. Ray calls them, watch less TV and read far more than the average citizen, they prefer homeopathy and other alternative medicines to allopathic treatment, and they are seriously concerned about ecology, climate change and the challenge of sustainable development. They are also very interested in alternative economic thinking, sustainable economics and knowledge economics. Many have forsaken 'workoholism' and decided to devote more time to their families and communities. Significantly, two thirds of cultural creatives are women. Now, the 19th century writer on political economy, Arnold Toynbee, says that at every moment of cultural change 5% of the citizens silently prepare the new culture. When you see that this time it may be 20%, it means that this time the change will be bigger, deeper and more drastic than ever before. And this is why the patriarchy and, to a lesser extent, the 'moderns' are becoming so aggressive: they sense that their time is over.

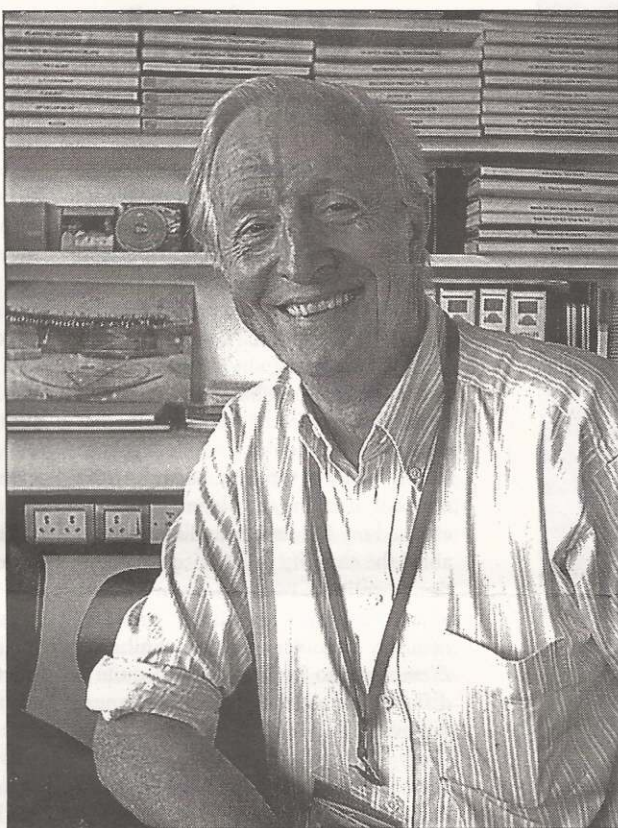


PHOTO BY ALAN

"The paradigm shift is happening in many different fields. For example, the traditional relationship between men and women is now being replaced by egalitarian models. This had to happen as the male, patriarchal values only work in an 'infinite' situation where there don't seem to be any boundaries, but not in the closed system which we now realize is the situation of our planet. Now it is the values of caring and conservation rather than aggressive colonialism that are needed, and that is why women worldwide are leading the change.

"Another area of change is business. Recent surveys suggest that 5% of business people are no longer interested in just making big profits. Many business people come to me and say, 'I'm successful, rich, but I've gone through a personal transformation. From now on I have decided to care for the common good of humanity, to invest a portion of my money and skills in this because I see that governments are not taking up their responsibility'. And what happens? Because of this new spirit, the intangible value of their companies soars. Interestingly, they continue to make excellent profits, although it's no longer the first consideration of their leaders..

"Transmodernity is also post-industrial. In other words, we are entering a post-capitalist society where financial capital is less important than human capital, where the brain and not the machine is the most important tool of production. Adieu Marx, c'est fini! Not everyone understands this. There were those who invested massively in the dotcom phenomenon thinking that just having new tools of production meant they would make huge profits. But the only survivors of the dotcom crash were those who understood that they had to change their whole way of operating – to change the vision of their company and the way it relates to the stakeholders and the larger community.

"Another area of global transformation is politics. The founders of the European Union created the

first transmodern political animal which is actually post-state, a zone of absolute non-violence between States. This is a great achievement. The problem is that the constituent States have still got the old mentality. They do not understand that they have created an eagle; they want a chicken! So they keep reproducing the image that the EU is a super-chicken, a super-state, and they all keep on trying to get the biggest piece of the pie. Stupid!

"So the paradigm shift is everywhere – in relationships, business, the economy, politics, the new sciences, psychology etc. Now let's look at spirituality. Barbara Marx Hubbard, who is President of the Foundation for Conscious Evolution, says that transmodernity is about the universal man, about *homo universalis* rather than *homo sapiens*. And *homo universalis* wants a personal involvement in the spiritual search, not to have a priest tell him, 'I know God, trust me, I am his intermediary' (I know all about this 'religious transfer': I was a priest for 12 years and we were told how to make people dependent upon us, not to make them free).

"This generation does not want to be put in any club or religion; what they want to discover is the authentic spiritual path. And what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother propose is exactly that. They even go further and say it is possible to have a city where everyone is engaged in that search, a city with no religious authority or guru. This makes people spiritually responsible because, among other things, it means that everyone is obliged to refer to his or her own shadow if something goes wrong.

"What The Mother and Sri Aurobindo represent is one of the greatest spiritual and intellectual achievements of the 20th century: along with Teilhard, they are the great thinkers whom the 21st century will remember. In 1968, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were voices in the wilderness, but the world conversation is catching up with them. For what The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are proposing exactly corresponds to what the young transmodern generation is looking for.

"Auroville is still largely unknown. But be very careful, because you correspond exactly to what between 100-500 million people are seeking. The day they know about you, you will need the army here to protect you from being overwhelmed!"

From a conversation with Alan

## The Pioneers of Consciousness

On returning to Europe after visiting Auroville, Marc Ghisi wrote an article, from which the following extracts are taken.

Can you imagine a city where the average citizen you meet in the streets, after a short moment of contact, may be speaking about the necessity to take distance from one's ego in order to go towards one's deepest self where a spark of the divine has to be discovered? Is it possible to imagine a city, which for the last thirty years has been the process of being constructed, with the aim of raising the level of consciousness of Humanity?

You would probably say that this is pure utopia. And you are totally right. I would even go further saying that this is radically impossible. Because the very project of raising the level of Humanity's consciousness is basically aiming at transforming human nature, lifting human nature to another level. All people of common sense will agree that this project is crazy, totally impossible...

And yet this city exists, and I have visited it. And I am still in a state of shock.

After a lot of difficulties, as if fate was against this visit, I finally managed to arrive in Auroville on February 20th, 2005. Auroville is being constructed a few kilometres

inland from the sea, north of Pondicherry, in the south-east of India. The city was founded on February 28th, 1968. In the years since then, the first pioneers succeeded in transforming the desert area into a sub-tropical forest full with birds. Access roads look more like forest roads than city entrance highways. There isn't even a sign board on the main entrance road. One has the impression of entering a construction site! And it is a construction site, but what kind of construction site!

It is a very authentic human construction site, but also a spiritual builder's yard! Indeed, there are problems and defects in this city and the Aurovilians don't shy away from openly discussing them. The growth of the city is too slow. There are too few citizens. There are many disagreements with regard to the city's future and to what the priorities are. Some residents criticize fellow citizens as being profiteers, or betraying Auroville's ideals. Others consider that the local, Tamil villages are not yet well enough integrated into the city.

And yet, despite all these defects, it is a unique place of individual and collective spiritual growth. This is the reason why the shadows are so visible, as they are proportional to the light and to the energy radiating from the place. The fact that those flaws

and problems and challenges are so openly discussed has deeply reassured me. I had been afraid to encounter a sort of angelic pretension that everything was OK, and that there was no problem, possibly because everybody was already at another level of consciousness! This 'angelism' would have been indicative of a false spirituality, and, potentially, of a sectarian movement.

What it boils down to, one of the residents told me, is that if you are not deeply, profoundly serious about this spiritual research and growth, both at the personal and collective level, you won't make it here, you just won't stay here, you will leave.

I have been deeply impressed by meeting with residents who have lived for thirty or almost forty years in the city. When listening to them, one gets the sense of the very genuine, widening experiences they have gone through, and of their persistent determination to build this city and to work on themselves. And one realizes that without this they just wouldn't have found the stamina to stay.

At the level of my own intellectual and spiritual reflection with regard to the actual paradigm shift towards transmodernity, I got the surprise of my life by discovering this very first transmodern city. Yes, the Aurovilians are in perfect accordance with everything I wrote in my book. I

now can say: "Transmodernity exists; I have seen it in this city." Although it was the first time I was visiting Auroville, I had a distinct feeling of being at home. And I think that this impression was also shared by the Aurovilians that I had the joy to meet. There was from both sides the strong impression of recognition, of being on the same wavelength. Amazing, fascinating and very stimulating indeed.

Coming back in Europe, the contrast is not so much the drastic change of temperature. No, the real contrast is the level of energy, which is so much higher in Auroville. I have seen this energy sparkling in the eyes of Paolo, a young boy, whose parents recently decided to join Auroville. He was full of inner joy. He told me that he was happy to be, for the first time, in a school he was enjoying. His creativity was bursting. He told me that he had learned to have a real contact with ponies, to familiarize with them, to have a real, living understanding with them. This boy was touching and beautiful.

Here in Brussels, I keenly sense the difference of energetic level. Residents of Auroville do not feel their energy does. This entire town, despite all its shadows, is at a higher energetic level. It's an extraordinary realization.

This very audacious project, this 'superhuman' project, could not be launched but by two beings of exceptional spiritual power: Ms Mirra Alfassa, called "Mother" (1878-1973) and Aurobindo Ghose, called "Sri Aurobindo" (1872-1950). They consecrated an important part of their lives and certainly of their extraordinary spiritual energy to transform and raise the level of human consciousness. And Auroville is possible precisely because of the energetic breakthrough these two beings achieved, individually and together. Auroville is like the incarnation, the materialisation of this spiritual victory they won for the sake of Humanity.

At the personal level, one of the strongest experiences for me has been the visit to the 'Matrimandir', this sacred space in the centre of the city, which has the shape of a golden flower. From the moment I entered that unique place, I sensed a very exceptional energy that didn't correspond to any religious or other place I visited in my life. I had the impression of being flooded by and connected with an enormously powerful cosmic energy. I had the inner sensation of being visited, connected, cleansed, energized. I was, briefly, transformed by something absolutely beyond my understanding. I have lost the control of my life, a bit.



# A Visual metaphor of human unity

The work of Italian Aurovilian Ireno Guerici.

It was a photo taken a few years ago that triggered the idea for the recent exhibition *Links – Geometries of Unity* by photographer Ireno Guerici at Gallery Square Circle. "I was compelled to take the picture of these two people," says Ireno, "a woman and a girl, two separate individuals so different in body size, shape and age who seemed so perfectly 'linked' together creating a harmonious whole." (photo left, third from top). He adds, "At the moment of taking the picture the scene escaped my full understanding and disabled the capacity of my visual perception to split the two persons into being able to say who is who!?" Simultaneously, another photo exhibition *Elements* also by Ireno but of quite a different nature took place in Pitanga. Auroville Today, which has published many of Ireno's photographs over the years, spoke to him about his work and the new directions he is taking.

"The two exhibitions are completely different in aesthetics and theme; they are complementary, like two parts of the same person," says Ireno. "*Links* is more related to people, with a stress on inclusion, acknowledging the reality around. *Elements*, on the other hand, is a work of exclusion which is more personal in nature, where I try to keep out the numerous influences that interfere with the creative process, like the use of the mind."

Photography, for Ireno is not just an attempt to capture something beautiful that is isolated from the rest. Instead, he tries to acknowledge the importance of everything. "I don't try bring to the attention a single 'privileged' moment that is disconnected from the surrounding reality. Otherwise it would only be a creation or a product of my ability to see and report. I prefer

instead to immerse myself in the totality of the apparent chaos with an attitude of inclusion. To me, this brings the awareness to the enormous complexity of connections existing in various planes – visual, physical, spatial, and psychological, and reveals an amazing and unsuspected harmony."

His lens capture the inter-connectivity between elements – human, animal, earth and heaven. They appear as extensions of each other. "Everything is equal, everything is meaningful," he says. The photos bear witness to this statement – linear continuities lead the eye; form, shape, sculpture and geometries underscore his visual metaphors.

Ireno's photographs also bear a distinct personal style – a physical proximity that draws the viewer into the intimacy of the moment. "I like to be as close to the subject as possible, trying to become, as much as I can, a part of it." He adds that this approach to photography was perhaps influenced by his very first contact with India and its reality. "I was standing in a queue for passport control after landing in the Mumbai airport. The Indian man in front of me was constantly leaning his back on my chest while the one behind me was treating me the same way with his chest on my back. I felt like a ham in a sandwich, and I was really disturbed, partly because of the great heat, but mainly because of this 'attack' to my privacy by people I didn't know at all. But now, that very incident is the base of my deep appreciation for this country and its people who have never forgotten over the millennium, that we are one and we are all interconnected."

How does Ireno get access to such private spaces in his photographs? "Perhaps there is a way to approach a situation and cultivate it," he muses.

"People have said that they don't notice me, but I think it is a mixture of reasons. I have been living here for many years. People know me. They know that I am a friend, so I am allowed to approach that half metre closer that makes the difference." This acceptance, he says, has given him the confidence to go into places where he is not known. "Indians especially, are amazing," he shares. "They accept nearly anything as long as you are not coming in with violence or with an intent to disturb." A smile plays about his lips. "You can photograph the most intimate situations. You can go into the middle of a marriage – even between the bride and the groom, and they will accept you and forget that you are there." Ireno believes that only when he becomes part of what he is photographing does the magic occur. "There is a stronger feeling of presence," he explains. "And you really come to live in that small moment yourself. It is completely different from photographing with a telephoto lens, which to me is a bit like stealing. It is easier to do, but is more invasive because you are shooting without being noticed and without being allowed."

Sometimes Ireno finds himself making spontaneous but unconventional decisions that artistically make sense. He shows a photo which has a hand within the frame (photo top left). It belongs to him. "This is from a series of four shots, and somewhere I felt that it was incomplete even as I could sense a great potential. Suddenly without thinking I decided to place my hand inside the frame, and at the same time one of the boys rearranged himself differently – moving his hand on his head. The combination of these two elements changed and completed the picture.

And perhaps I will go as far as to say that maybe this is one of the best photos I was lucky to take." He points out to the bow and arrow form hidden in the photo which he discovered after the shooting. "The unplanned inclusion of my arm is the essential element that completes the bow," he explains.

In his exhibition *Elements*, Ireno plays with the theme of matter and light. It is abstract in imagery, with recognizable and unfamiliar objects that appear densely material, yet full of light. "It was an attempt to transform matter," he says. Technology came to his aid. "The computer can also be a way of individual expression by really exploring the software tools." This to him comes closer to the process of painting. "It involves going to the hidden spaces within yourself to find what you want to express."

The path of photography is deeply fulfilling for Ireno, yet he is also disheartened by the lack of support and acknowledgment by the people involved in the work of Auroville's liaison with the outer world. "There is not much effort to use and appreciate what artists in Auroville have to offer," he says. He shares a recent experience that was disheartening to him. "I had been invited to be part of a group organizing the cultural programme for the UNESCO youth conference. I mentioned that the photo exhibition of *Links* would be happening at the same time, and suggested that it might be relevant for the participants to see since the theme of the exhibition was human unity. Sadly it was not included in the programme even though the exhibition was just 50 metres away from where the conference took place." He points out the irony that a work on human unity done within Auroville by an

Aurovilian was ignored whereas films, over a decade old and available in the open market, were included in the programme.

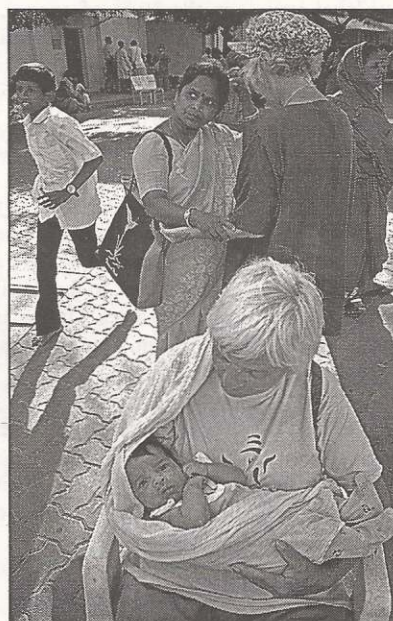
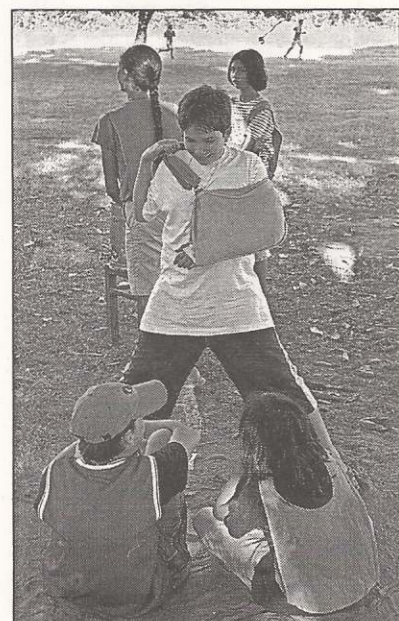
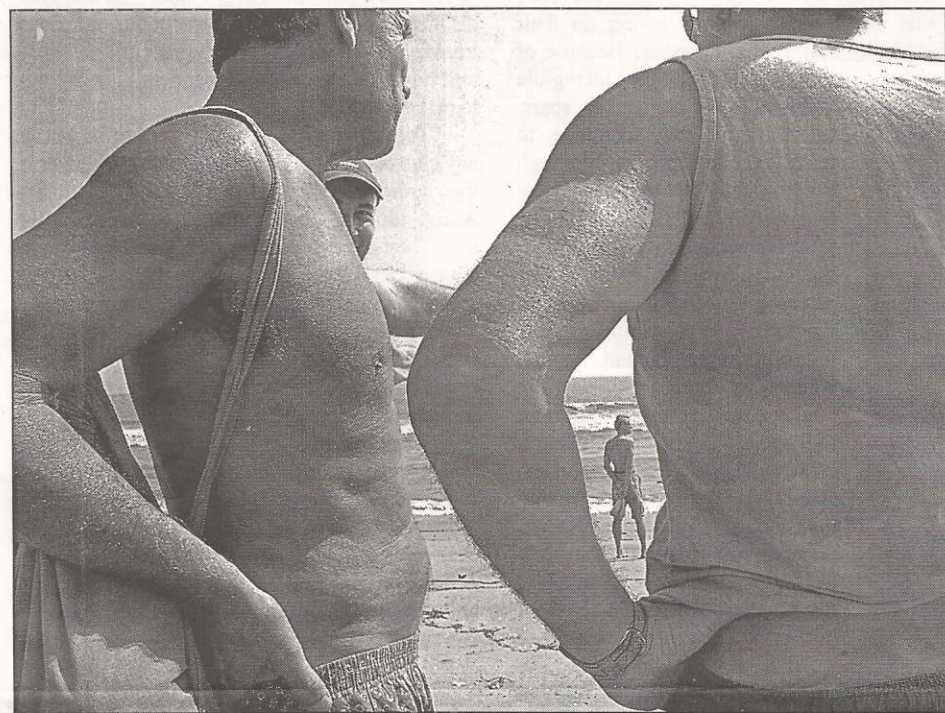
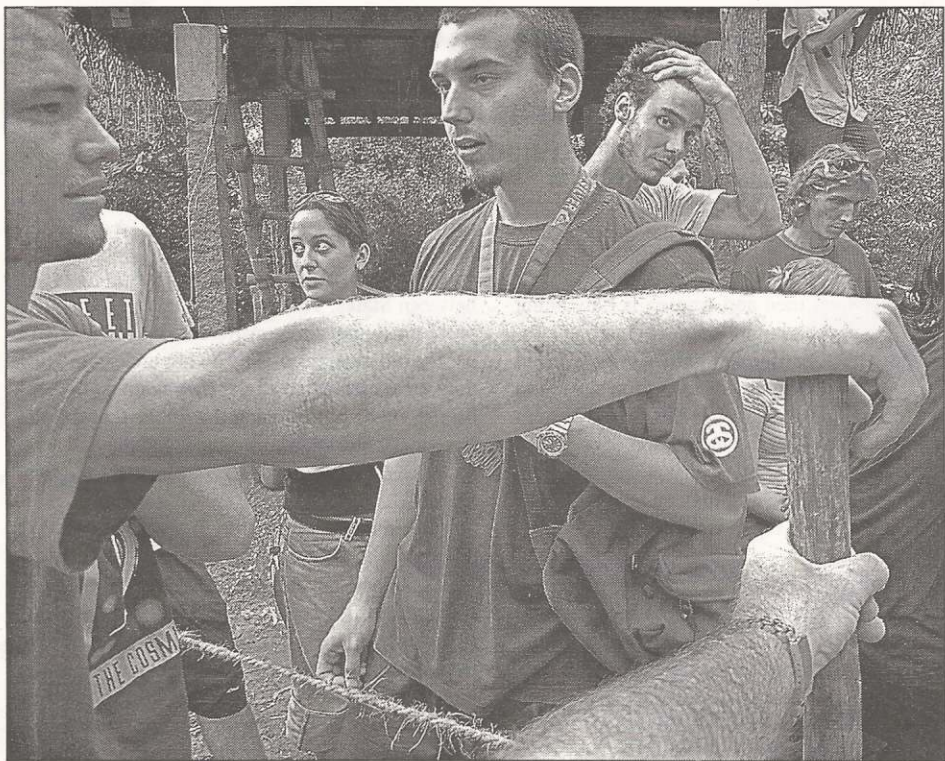
Ireno feels that though the ultimate reward of photography comes from doing the work, holding exhibitions and sharing it is an additional bonus. "I see it as an opportunity for the work to grow," he says. "Exhibitions can create interest, and the interest can generate more opportunities for you to be able to work with this expensive medium; and perhaps to materialize some of the many projects lying in the drawer!"

Opportunities have opened up. Photos from *Elements* and from *Light*, a previous exhibition, are now off to the USA to two cities on the East coast. "A special shop in Boston is going to display some of my works, and I am also having a good friend, who has appreciated the work and is helping to organize an exhibition in New York. Also a photo book celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pondicherry is scheduled for release this summer. It's a beautiful coffee-table book and the experience of doing it has been a delight because Pondicherry for me is first the town of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother."

Why does he also not bring out a regular annual 'Ireno' calendar, something a few of us have been waiting for ever since his very popular 2002 creation? "It's a question of money. I've four or five themes lined up. If only someone is ready to invest in and market the calendar, I will try to make a unique and beautiful product." Seeing the quality of his photographs in these exhibitions, this is unlikely to be an understatement.

Priya Sundaravalli





## A Visual metaphor of human connection

The work of Italian Aurovilian Ireno Guerici.

It was a photo taken a few years ago that triggered the idea for the recent exhibition *Links – Geometries of Unity* by photographer Ireno Guerici at Gallery Square Circle. "I was compelled to take the picture of these two people," says Ireno, "a woman and a girl, two separate individuals so different in body size, shape and age who seemed so perfectly 'linked' together creating a harmonious whole." (photo left, third from top). He adds, "At the moment of taking the picture the scene escaped my full understanding and disabled the capacity of my visual perception to split the two persons into being able to say who is who!" Simultaneously, another photo exhibition *Elements* also by Ireno but of quite a different nature took place in Pitanga. Auroville Today, which has published many of Ireno's photographs over the years, spoke to him about his work and the new directions he is taking.

"The two exhibitions are completely different in aesthetics and theme; they are complementary, like two parts of the same person," says Ireno. "*Links* is more related to people, with a stress on inclusion, acknowledging the reality around. *Elements*, on the other hand, is a work of exclusion which is more personal in nature, where I try to keep out the numerous influences that interfere with the creative process, like the use of the mind."

Photography, for Ireno is not just an attempt to capture something beautiful that is isolated from the rest. Instead, he tries to acknowledge the importance of everything. "I don't try bring to the attention a single 'privileged' moment that is disconnected from the surrounding reality. Otherwise it would only be a creation or a product of my ability to see and report. I prefer

instead to immerse myself in the totality of the apparent chaos with an attitude of inclusion. To me, this brings the awareness to the enormous complexity of connections existing in various planes – visual, physical, spatial, and psychological, and reveals an amazing and unsuspected harmony."

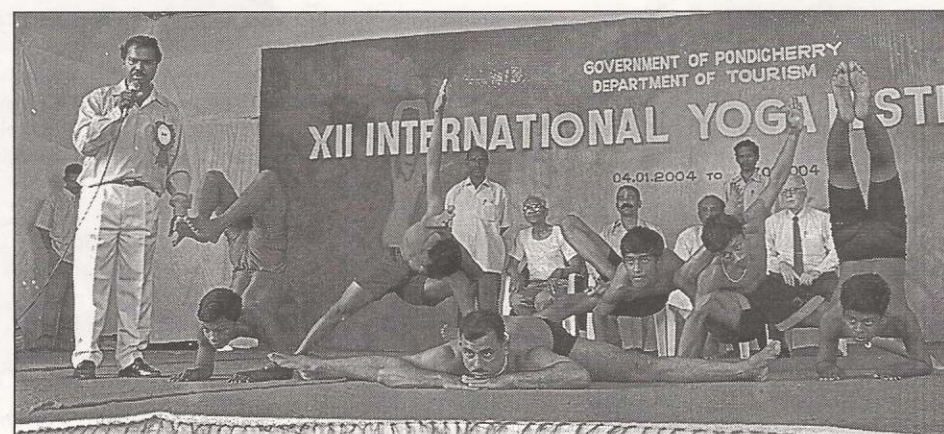
His lens capture the inter-connectivity between elements – human, animal, earth and heaven. They appear as extensions of each other. "Everything is equal, everything is meaningful," he says. The photos bear witness to this statement – linear continuities lead the eye; form, shape, sculpture and geometries underscore his visual metaphors.

Ireno's photographs also bear a distinct personal style – a physical proximity that draws the viewer into the intimacy of the moment. "I like to be as close to the subject as possible, trying to become, as much as I can, a part of it." He adds that this approach to photography was perhaps influenced by his very first contact with India and its reality. "I was standing in a queue for passport control after landing in the Mumbai airport. The Indian man in front of me was constantly leaning his back on my chest while the one behind me was treating me the same way with his chest on my back. I felt like a ham in a sandwich, and I was really disturbed, partly because of the great heat, but mainly because of this 'attack' to my privacy by people I didn't know at all. But now, that very incident is the base of my deep appreciation for this country and its people who have never forgotten over the millennium, that we are one and we are all interconnected."

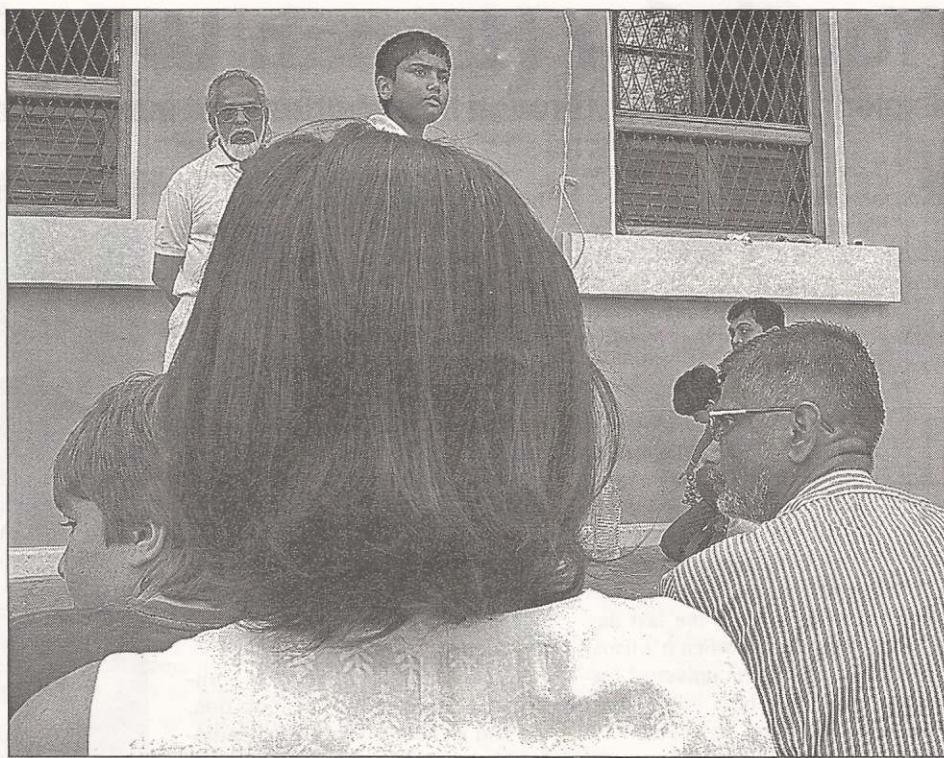
How does Ireno get access to such private spaces in his photographs? "Perhaps there is a way to approach a situation and cultivate it," he muses.

"People have noticed me, but I think for many reasons. I have been in Auroville for many years. People know that I am allowed to approach closer that makes them accept me, he says with confidence to go into situations not known. "Indi- amazing," he says, "nearly anything as coming in with v- intent to disturb," his lips. "You can intimate situations. middle of a marriage the bride and the g- accept you and f- there." Ireno believes becomes part of wh- ing does the magic stronger feeling explains. "And you in that small mor- completely different ing with a telepho- is a bit like stealin- but is more invasi- shooting without- without being allow-

Sometimes Ireno makes spontaneous decisions that art. He shows a photo within the frame belongs to him. "Th- four shots, and son- was incomplete ev- great potential. Sud- ing I decided to pl- the frame, and at t- the boys rearrange- – moving his han- combination of t- changed and comp-







## Human unity

said that they don't think it is a mixture of people living here for the first time. They are friends, so I am not sure that half metre difference." This, he says, has given him the opportunity to go to places where he is not usually seen, especially, are the people. "They accept you as long as you are not violent or with an attitude. A smile plays about the mouth of the photograph the moment you can go into the room – even between the room, and they will forget that you are there that only when he is that he is photographing occur. "There is a sense of presence," he says, "really come to live in the moment yourself. It is not from photographing a lens, which to me is easier to do, because you are being noticed and loved."

Ireno finds himself in a but unconventional way, which has a hand (photo top left). It is this is from a series of photographs where I felt that it was as if I could sense a presence without thinking of my hand inside the same time one of them himself differently on his head. The two elements created the picture.

And perhaps I will go as far as to say that maybe this is one of the best photos I was lucky to take." He points out to the bow and arrow form hidden in the photo which he discovered after the shooting. "The unplanned inclusion of my arm is the essential element that completes the bow," he explains.

In his exhibition *Elements*, Ireno plays with the theme of matter and light. It is abstract in imagery, with recognizable and unfamiliar objects that appear densely material, yet full of light. "It was an attempt to transform matter," he says. Technology came to his aid. "The computer can also be a way of individual expression by really exploring the software tools." This to him comes closer to the process of painting. "It involves going to the hidden spaces within yourself to find what you want to express."

The path of photography is deeply fulfilling for Ireno, yet he is also disheartened by the lack of support and acknowledgment by the people involved in the work of Auroville's liaison with the outer world. "There is not much effort to use and appreciate what artists in Auroville have to offer," he says. He shares a recent experience that was disheartening to him. "I had been invited to be part of a group organizing the cultural programme for the UNESCO youth conference. I mentioned that the photo exhibition of Links would be happening at the same time, and suggested that it might be relevant for the participants to see since the theme of the exhibition was human unity. Sadly it was not included in the programme even though the exhibition was just 50 metres away from where the conference took place." He points out the irony that a work on human unity done within Auroville by an

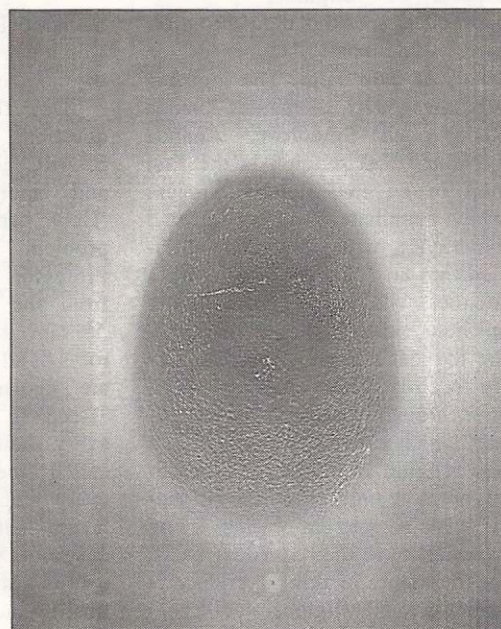
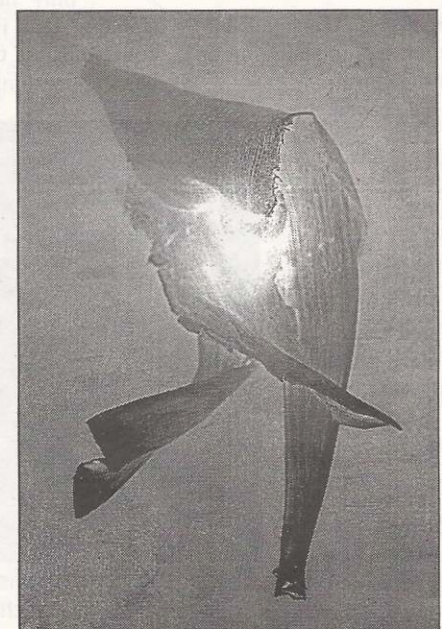
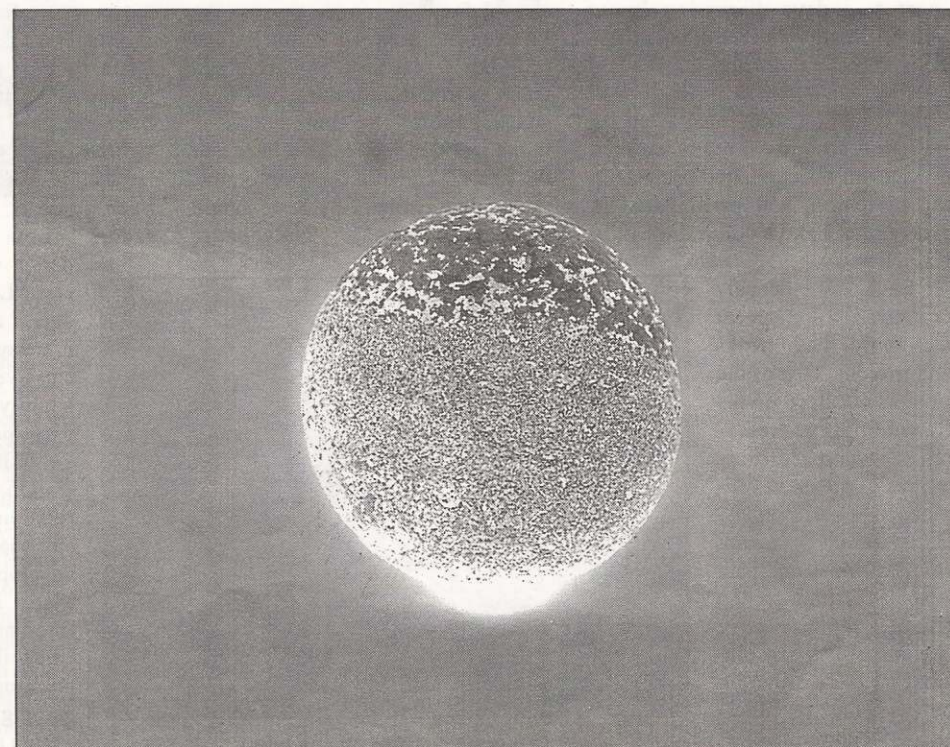
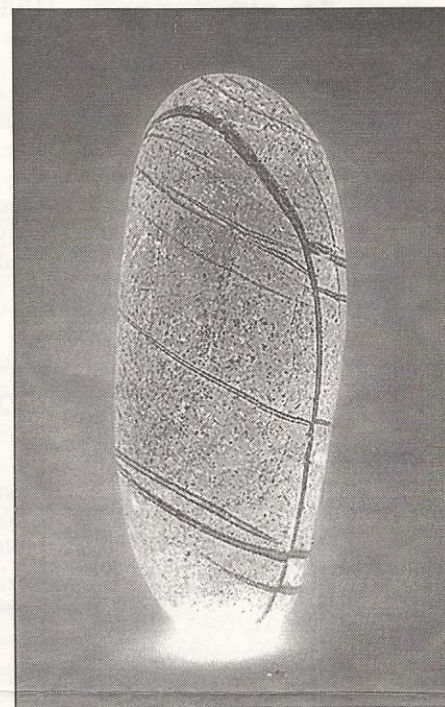
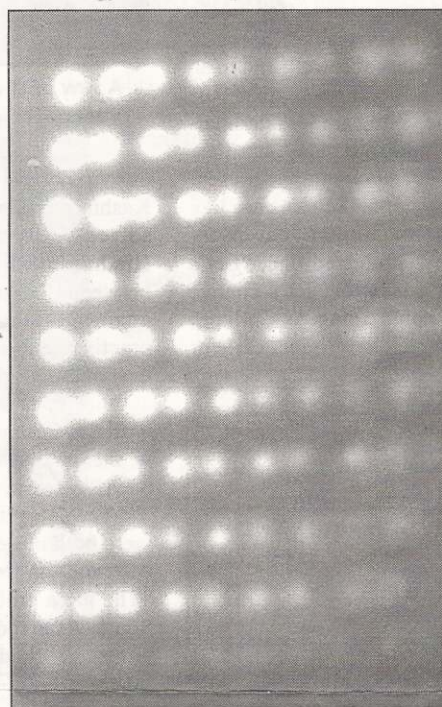
Aurovilian was ignored whereas films, over a decade old and available in the open market, were included in the programme.

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# Youth for Human Unity

Exploring new values through inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue

*"If we keep the dream we can transform the system."*

*"We will create a common language of love to communicate across the world."*

*"It's so obvious, so simple, unity means dropping all the barriers between us."*

Listening to the high-powered idealism of the delegates at the concluding session of a recent five day conference in Auroville on human unity, it was difficult not to be a tiny bit sceptical. After all, we've heard all this before, particularly on the last day of youth conferences when it's usual for delegates to affirm universal fraternity and make high-toned commitments. This time, however, there were indications that this group was different: that, rather than simply parroting phrases from the 1960s, they were grafting their idealism onto a sturdier stem.

The international conference, "Youth for Human Unity", was a collaboration between the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), Auroville, and UNESCO and was part of UNESCO's worldwide inter-religious dialogue programme. The main aim of the event was to create dialogue between the major religions and young people of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) region as a means – as the website put it – "to overcome the conflicts of the region and build peaceful, tolerant, multi-cultural societies". The official delegates came from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal, Singapore and Auroville, but there were also participants from Germany, USA and Austria. They spent five days discussing issues like spirituality and religion, education, art and culture and science and integral development. As if that wasn't enough, they also went on field trips around Auroville, worked on tsunami relief, visited projects in the bioregion, and participated in group games and a cultural event in Kalabhum.

Such a densely organized event inevitably had peaks and troughs. One of the troughs occurred on the first morning of presentations when representatives of different religions – Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism and Buddhism – spoke. Although the Hindu representative began positively by elucidating the distinction between the 'essential' and 'non-essential' aspects of religions, subsequent speakers tended to offer merely thumbnail sketches of the tenets of their faith. The morning was salvaged by Ashramites Ananda Reddy and Sraddhalu. Ananda explained that religion is the first step in an evolutionary process which culminates in direct spiritual experience, while Sraddhalu clarified that all religions begin with a founder who has a transfiguring spiritual experience, but that after the founder's passing the disciples try to cling to the original experience through creating forms and rituals which eventually ossify into a new religion. Religions, he concluded, promote unity when the emphasis shifts back to the original living experience, to their spiritual basis, for the nature of this experience is common to all religions.

The real gift of the morning, however, was the young delegates' feedback in the plenary session after they had discussed the issues in small groups. "Religion is like scaffolding," said one, "within which the higher faculties can emerge. When the edifice of the spirit is built, the scaffolding is no longer necessary." "As long as mankind is afraid," opined another, "there has to be a transfer of authority to a higher power. As long as humanity is not ready to break away from the security of ethics and morality it is not ready for the adventure of the uncharted sea which is the spiritual experience." Wow!

The theme of the second morning was 'Explorations in education, art and culture'. The delegates listened dutifully to an exposition of UNESCO's programme for peace education ("every teacher needs to become a peace educator") and to an Aurovilian's perception that the minds of the young are less rationalistic, more intuitive today, but then they really got stuck into the present education system. "Schools are like conveyor-belts, turning out packaged goods," protested one. "Let's not correct education, let's change the whole damn thing." "Children don't quarrel about religion, caste or

## Official delegates:

India (including Auroville) (40)  
Pakistan (5)  
Sri Lanka (4)  
Bhutan (4)  
Nepal (3)  
Maldives (2)  
Singapore (2)

nationality. It's their elders who teach them to do this. So education should focus on understanding the differences between cultures and religions," reasoned another, "and teach us to think for ourselves from an early age." "The longest distance in the world is between the head and the heart," added a budding orator. "Every educational system should try to close this gap." "Grow better



Group discussion on the lawn

human beings!" was the sound-bite which came closest to summing up the mood of the morning.

Day three posed the questions, 'How can the SAARC countries unite?' and, more particularly, 'How can the Kashmir problem be solved?' Professor Kittu Reddy from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram stated that the roots of all social problems are egoism and desire. "Deep in the centre of every being is a jewel called the Divine, and every step to reduce the layers – like egoism and desire – which cover it over is a step towards spirituality and the solution of



A few of the delegates of the International Youth conference. From left to right back row: Binodh, Zahid, Pratap, Deshen, Muna, Tenzen, Arjun and Lakshminarayan. Front row: Lamsalanki, Meenakshi, Emmanuelle (Auroville Today), Kiruthika, Manmeet and Khalid.

our problems." For Kittu, the Kashmir problem can only be solved through solving the Hindu/Muslim problem, and unity between Hindus and Muslims can be attained through understanding and practising the common spiritual values of their religions. Indeed, as another speaker put it, this, along with the dropping of 'national egos', is the key to the unity of all the SAARC countries.

The delegates, in their feedback, were both more immediately practical and more idealistic. "The main problems facing South Asia today are religious fundamentalism, overpopulation and illiteracy," was one analysis. "To solve the India/Pakistan problem," said another delegate, "we should begin by having student exchanges because this is the best way to break down the divisions between our countries. Send students, not ambassadors." "Love across borders," was another cry, "Let's encourage cross-border marriages." "If we can live together so happily for three days, then why not forever?" asked Zahid from Pakistan.

On the fourth day the relationship of science to spirituality and integral development was examined. Marc Luyckx Ghisi, an International Advisory Council member, began by pointing out that a major paradigm shift is under way – from a belief that reality is only matter, to an understanding that it is not matter but consciousness that is primary. This has implications for science: a new

science is evolving whereby the old rational, analytic approach is giving way to what Ghisi termed the 'spiritual sciences'. "At this level, we can begin to investigate matters like life after death." "Is Singapore a developed country? Is India?" asked Toine van Megen in an attempt to get the delegates thinking about the real meaning of 'development'. "Integral development," he suggested, "is when there is growth of all parts of the being, both inner and outer."

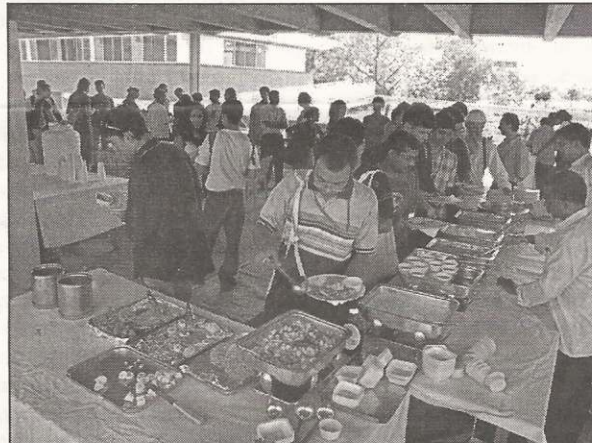
more willing to bring change to their communities. They also had a deeper understanding not only of the obstacles to human unity – "war, cynicism, emphasis only on external growth, not being unified within" enumerated one delegate – but of the means to achieving it. "We need to work on two levels; on the material level there should be education for all. On the spiritual level, we should work on the evolution of consciousness. That's the key. Once that's achieved, unity will come automatically."

Using the form of a 'Wisdom Council' the delegates then framed some agreements. These included, "To have a positive attitude, to project onto the world what we want it to be and to commit to change", "To educate ourselves in consciousness development, peace and spirituality" and "To create a common language of love to communicate across the world."

All somewhat 'sixties', perhaps. But the crucial difference from the students of the 1960s was that these participants had a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness of inner and outer, and thus of the need to work on themselves as an essential part of any change. They also saw the need to serve their communities by being role models (Gandhi's statement, "Be the change you want to see happen", was quoted more than once) and of the futility of playing the blame game. "We agree to take responsibility for our thoughts and accountability for our actions," was another of their resolutions, "to reach out to others and share responsibility for the challenges of the world today", while one of the delegates characterized a 'good decision' as "one in which you step back and do it for something larger than yourself".

This generation are facing global challenges of a magnitude never experienced before. If the 'Youth for Human Unity' conference is anything to go by, some of them have the will, the maturity and, crucially, the new understanding and consciousness to help pull the world back from the brink. If only, that is, their elders can learn to step aside gracefully, and in time...

Alan

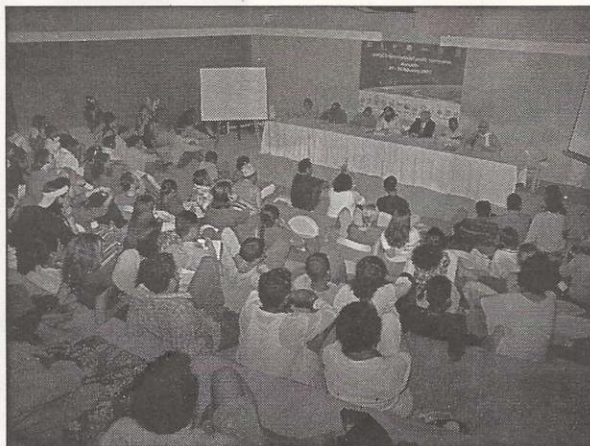


Lunch in the new cafeteria at the Town Hall.

Raman Nanda, special rapporteur for the conference, offered his own definition of integral development. "How many times have you falsified the result of a scientific experiment so that it fits with your teacher's expectations?" he asked. Everybody's hand shot up. "It's time you began to trust in your own experience," was his comment. "Until you have lived something, experienced it, it can't really exist for you."

The feedback on this session was more muted, possibly because some delegates felt overawed by the topic. One delegate, however, pithily summed up his understanding of the morning's discussions as, "Science describes the how, spirituality the why."

The final morning of the conference was devoted to evaluation and the framing of resolutions. The feedback regarding the organization and impact of the conference and Auroville was overwhelmingly positive. All the delegates felt more open to others and better equipped and



Plenary sessions in the new auditorium of the Town Hall



# "We have so much in common..."

Zahid Shahab Ahmed from Islamabad, Pakistan was one of the representatives of his country at the International Youth Conference held in Auroville recently

This is the second time Zahid comes to India. "India is really like my second home," he confesses. "The people here are fantastic. I feel there really isn't much difference between Indians and Pakistanis. We share so much, have so much in common: our cultures are very similar, our customs, even our culinary habits. Our languages, Hindi and Urdu, have a lot of similarities too, and I don't find much difficulty understanding and speaking Hindi myself."

Like a vast majority of Pakistanis and Indians, Zahid is an avid cricket fan, and he sees cricket as a unifying force between the two countries. "Last year, when the Indian team came to play in Pakistan, it was really amazing! There were Pakistanis waving Indian flags, and Indians waving Pakistani flags, and everybody was hugging each other," he remembers, "I believe these kinds of exchanges can really bring the people of both countries closer together. This year

the Pakistani team is coming to play in India. I am really looking forward to that series. The outcome doesn't matter so much, whether it is Pakistan which wins the matches, or India. What matters is the game, and the spirit."

Asked what else he feels could be done to bring both countries closer together, Zahid speaks of the group exchanges between India and Pakistan, which have been regularly happening over the past year. "Those exchanges are great, and should continue," he believes, "But until now, the period of stay in the country is limited to one week or ten days, which I feel is really too short. One needs more time in order to get to know the people and really understand their culture, and also draw the parallels and realize the similarities between both our cultures."

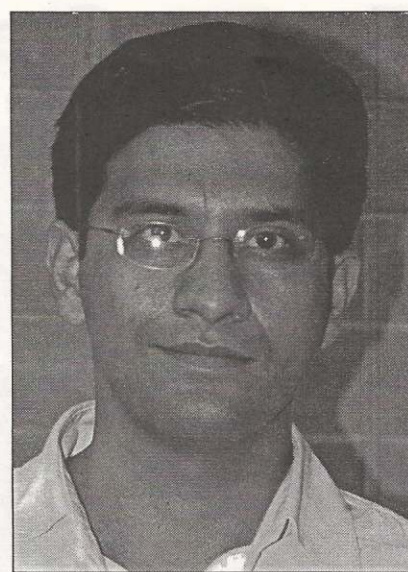
"And then there could also be students, and even teachers' exchange programmes, between universities of the two countries," he continues with

enthusiasm. "I think that would be great and could also go quite a long way to improving relations between both countries."

Then he goes on to speak of the complicated process, in both countries, of the issuing of visas for those on the other side of the border. "The process should be made more simple, and the people, whether from Pakistan wanting to visit India, or from India wanting to visit Pakistan, should be made to feel they are welcome." He also stresses that there are thousands of families which were separated during partition, and whose divided members now live on both sides of the border. "Imagine how these families on both sides of the border are missing each other," he says. "I feel at least their cases should be treated differently, that those who have direct relations with the other country, who have blood relatives there, should be given visas more easily, at least to attend marriage ceremonies or for the death of a relative.

These things are sometimes very important."

Above all else, however, Zahid feels very strongly that establishing long term peace between India and Pakistan lies in the hands of today's youth. "One of the great causes of conflict between both nations is that they are not willing to forget the past. They are still living in the past. And I feel that today the youth from India and Pakistan is realizing that. They are also realizing the negative impact of nationalism and of focusing too much on partition and the wars when studying the history of both countries. I think that when today's youth have positions at the policy making level in both countries, we can then expect political changes within and between both countries and positive changes in their relations. As both countries are now atomic powers, there is an urgent need, now more than ever, to take the issue seriously and strive towards peace. And it is the youth of today



who have the energy, the motivation and the willpower to bring about change and strive to establish peace between both countries."

Emmanuelle

Having completed his masters in sociology, Zahid Shahab Ahmed is currently working as a social researcher in the fields of conflict transformation and human rights.

## Young voices

Young International delegates share their views

### On dialogue between the youth of different countries, and how it could influence society at large

"The youth today are more open minded, because history has not had as much negative impact on their minds as it has had on the previous generations. Dialogue between the youth is of great importance because today, due to globalization, a change in their mind-sets could influence the whole world."

Zahid Shahab Ahmed, from Pakistan

"Today in India and the SAARC countries, 55% of the population is made up of youth. So I really think that if we all get together, and get a voice together, then it's really going to make a difference! We are the foundation of the future."

Pratap Sinha, from Uttar Pradesh

"It is time we set aside all the differences, all the conflicts that we may have had in the past and start again. And for that we need to know each other and not just know each other from a distance. A dialogue is a very personal way of meeting someone, getting to know someone, through where they come from, their culture, their background, and appreciating people for who they are and not the kind of picture other people or the media might want to project of them."

Manmeet Kaur, from Delhi

"When there is something to be proven or some experiment has to be done on a large scale, first the scientist takes a small sample and performs the experiment. If it is successful, he will do it on a larger scale. This conference, which has brought young people from different countries and religions together, was definitely a success, so it means it could be replicated on a larger scale."

Lakshminarayan, from Hyderabad

"As we have seen in world history, youth were behind every great revolution, and I believe that the youth of today can really bring about change."

Khalid Wasim Hassan, from Kashmir

"This conference has made it really clear that it lies in our own hands to bring about change and that if we want

to change something we have to start with ourselves. We cannot expect the world to change if we're not willing to change."

Muna Wagner, from Germany

"When we go back home, we may not be able to do much, but we will still carry what we have learned with us. And when we bring up our children, we will bring them up with a vision of human unity."

Kiruthika Ramanathan, from Singapore

### On the important issues which need to be addressed in the world today, in the SAARC region in particular

"One of the greatest problems the region faces today is that of inequality. If you look around, you will see that all the delegates who have attended the conference are from middle class or well to do families. There is absolutely nobody here from the base. And this is what is the problem in the world today: while the upper and middle classes are getting richer and richer, the base is getting poorer and poorer, and the rift is growing. Something has to be done about it and I think part of the solution would lie in education."

Kiruthika

"I think the developed countries should give a big hand to integral world development. We should also strive to harness all the earth's natural resources in a sustainable, democratic way."

Lakshminarayan

"Especially in India and Pakistan, when we think about development, we most of the time neglect to focus on peace and human rights. When we talk about peace, and then spend a big amount of our budget on arms, we are also neglecting the rights of the poor people in our countries."

Zahid

"Intolerance is also a major issue. We have to start respecting diversity in all its forms."

Manmeet

"Most conflicts are happening because of the identities people take

on, whether national, religious, or other. A lot of the present problems could be solved if all these identities were set aside and we all realized that we're all members of the human family."

Lamsalanki Pariat, from Meghalaya

"Today, a lot of us are becoming very materialistic. And conferences like this one remind us of the importance of spirituality, which is really the base of everything."

Deshen Tshering, from Bhutan

"I feel that what we should focus on is inner development along with outer, material development. Both are necessary in the world, but there should be equilibrium. Inner and outer development should go hand in hand."

Tenzen Topden, from Tibet

### On the dream of unifying the SAARC countries on the lines of the unification of Europe

"When we think of a south Asian union, we should remember that the circumstances here are very different from those in the European countries. Because in the SAARC countries, for so many years we have not even been willing to have free exchange among the people and to have free trade. We should first find solutions for all the conflicts which we are having, and strive for peace in the region."

Zahid

"In Europe, it started with economic cooperation between the countries, and only later on did it become a political union. I think that the SAARC countries could follow in their footsteps, setting aside political conflicts and other issues to cooperate at an economic level. I think that could be a first step."

Khalid

"A common currency and the opening up of the borders for trade would definitely help in the unification of the SAARC countries."

Lamsalanki

"Intercultural meetings like this and economical reforms, which help all the nations develop at the same pace, could be a first step. And to fos-

ter marriages amongst different countries and religions I feel would help too."

Meenakshi Arora, from Dehli

"If a union is to come about it will certainly be different from the European Union, because our economic structure is not half as developed as theirs is. I also think that if it does come about, it will be at a cultural level first and political differences will get solved later."

Viral Doshi, from Pondicherry

"I think taking the European Union as an example is not a very good idea because it is a limited economically-based cooperation, and I think we would need to take it much further than that, by extending it to culture and education for example."

Manmeet

"I think such a unification would be difficult, but not impossible. And I believe focusing on peace talks, conferences like this one, and cultural and religious exchanges between the SAARC countries would be a first step."

Tenzen

"I believe that there can be a certain unity developed in south Asia, but I don't think it should end there because I think that would be only the beginning. It has to go beyond capitalism, beyond economics, to true human unity."

Muna

### On Human Unity, the theme of the conference

"I compare human unity to a seed, from which grows the tree of world integral development, and whose fruits are peace, harmony and concord."

Lakshminarayan

"Human Unity for me is the earth as a garden and human beings as the flowers."

Lamsalanki

"For me it is meeting each other with love and humanity."

Meenakshi

"To me, human unity is having deep roots of universal responsibility in

your heart. And universal responsibility means that you feel the sufferings as well as the happiness of the people all across the world, without considering the barriers of gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality."

Zahid

"Human unity is cooperation and respect for each other."

Binod Raj Pandey, from Nepal

"(Spirit + energy + music + love) - (ego + desire + expectations) = human unity, that is how I can define it."

Pratap

"For me human unity will be achieved when every one of us can do what we like but in a way that doesn't affect others negatively. It has to have a good influence on everybody: ourselves and those living around us also."

Deshen

"When everyone can do what they feel from their heart is right without being discriminated against."

Muna

"Human unity is simply every human having three qualities: understanding, truth and tolerance."

Arjun

"It is understanding each other and not fighting for meaningless things like nationality, colour, and religion. It is living in peace and harmony."

Sujith Chaminda Jayasekara, from Sri Lanka

"Coexistence, tolerance, cooperation. In other words, being human."

Khalid

"I feel that if the following three are fulfilled, human unity will follow: First of all, spirituality must replace religion; secondly learning must replace education as we now it; and thirdly, consciousness must replace egoism."

Kiruthika

"Human unity is about realizing that we are part of a global whole and that we all play a very important part in it. Unity is finding one's place in that whole and appreciating and respecting the other person's place in it also."

Manmeet

As told to Emmanuelle



# Frozen Grace and other dances

An impression of Japanese Odissi dancer Masako Ono



PHOTO BY MANAS DAS

A short and rather bland email announcement mentioned that Japanese dancer Masako Ono would give an Odissi dance performance in the Sri Aurobindo auditorium of Bharat Nivas. Nothing new, was my first response. After all, there have been many Odissi performances in Auroville, several of excellent quality, and what more can be expected? Still, the name was intriguing. Why does a Japanese dance Odissi? And what qualities would she bring to it?

The performance provided all the answers. A speaker explained that Masako fell in love with India at a very early age, later majoring in Indo-Pakistan studies and learning the two major languages of Hindi and Urdu. She also learned Indian dance, starting with Bharata Natyam and Kathakali, before finally settling for Odissi, which she studied with masters such as Protima Gauri Bedi, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and others.

Masako showed how beautifully a foreigner can ingest the spirit of Odissi and give it expression as delicately and convincingly as an Indian born. Her first dance "Nagendraraya - Salutations to Shiva",

choreographed by Naba Kishor Mishra using traditional Odissi music, expressed power and vigour as well as refinement and grace.

But there was more. Not restricting herself to pure Odissi, Masako presented a self-choreographed piece called The Dance of the Crane which also had elements of Tai Chi, Chi Gong, and Flamenco. Performed to music of the Bamboo Orchestra, this was an absolute delight. She danced the story of a crane (the national bird of Japan) who, rescued from a trap by a poor man, transforms herself into a woman to repay his kindness. After helping him out of poverty, she turns back into a crane. In this piece Masako identified her own life story with that of the crane - a Japanese woman coming to India to pursue Indian Classical Dance, finally transforming herself into a new Masako now with both Japanese and Indian elements in her dance.

The last dance of this far too short performance, aptly called 'Frozen Grace,' was once again choreographed by Masako. This dance is based on a Haiku written by Japanese poet Ryotei Fukuda. He describes a butterfly at its life's end, in a freezing cold winter, flying to the sun, pushing itself to reach higher. The

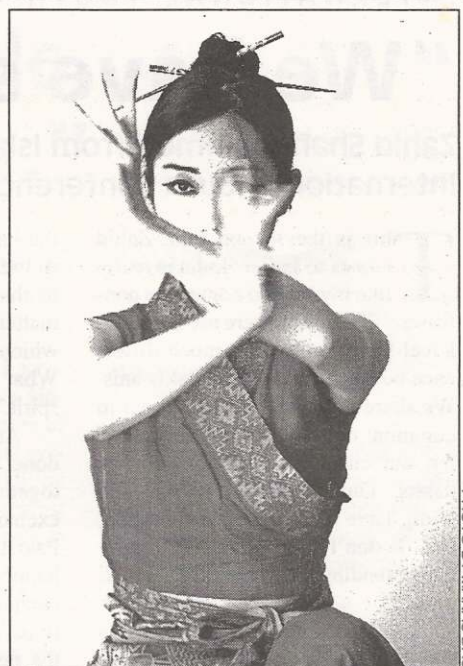


PHOTO BY MANAS DAS

Bamboo Orchestra again provided the music, and the audience was transfixed by Masako's delicate movements, the stilling atmosphere, and the final realisation of the butterfly's aspiration. Once again Masako showed how the dance expressions of various cultures can be amalgamated to reach a transcending form, aspiring, as the butterfly, to reach ever higher.

Carel

## In brief

### Matrimandir

The work of modifying the ceiling of the Inner Chamber has begun. This includes changing the way the air-conditioning system feeds in through the ceiling, moving the artificial lights and installing the new heliostat. In consequence, the Chamber will be closed from March 15 for a period of three or four months. Meanwhile, the deep blue meditation chamber in the Peace petal, one of the twelve petals surrounding the Matrimandir, has been opened. Two more petal meditation rooms will be ready by the end of March. To enable completion of the construction within two years, a fundraising campaign has been launched to raise the Rs 6 crores (US \$ 1.5 million) which are needed.

### Matrimandir broadcast

On March 9th All India Radio broadcast a 26 minute programme on Matrimandir, consisting of interviews with Roger Anger and a number of Aurovilians.

### 33rd Anniversary of For All - Pour Tous

On the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of Pour Tous on March 14th, there was a guided tour of the new building under construction next to the Solar Kitchen, together with a short presentation on how its commissioning could enable Auroville to take a major step towards an economy that would be more in tune with its ideals.

### No more pesticides

While the habitual spraying of cashews tops with pesticides has restarted, the campaign 'no more pesticides' has once again set-up its stand at the cashew trial plot on the road near the Solar Kitchen to demonstrate organic farming and

integrated pest management. Leaflets in Tamil and English are being distributed and neem oil is available as an organic pest controller.

### Study on green corridor

The Auroville Planning and Development Group approved a study to be done on the location of the green corridors and parks in the Master Plan in view of the ground realities.

### Future water situation

As the wells in the Residential and Cultural Zones are showing a diminishing output, the APDC is studying the possibility of integrating the water supply. A large study on water in the Auroville area is also being undertaken.

### Solar water heating mandatory

The Tamil Nadu Government has made it mandatory for new residential buildings from 139.35 m2 and commercial buildings from 464.5 m2 area to install solar water heating systems. The measure has been taken to promote renewable energy in the state.

### Reducing electricity bills

Auroville Electrical Service, Auroville Renewable Energy AuroRE and Auroville's Future have taken the initiative to inform Aurovilians about the actual amount of TNEB electricity Auroville is consuming and how much it costs, with the aim of reducing consumption and promoting switching to renewable sources of energy.

### European identity

The International Zone Group organised an interactive seminar to explore the question of European

identity and discover the real basis for unity among the European nations.

### Canada Pavilion

A plot for the Canadian pavilion in the International Zone has been identified. An 'INUKSUK' (stone monument in the shape of a man which the Inuit people from the far north erect to mark a particular or sacred place) will be built there in the coming year.

### Story-telling

Costa Rican Edgar Ortiz, a professional storyteller and performer, presented a story-telling show 'Stories, Lies and Exaggerations from Latin America' at the Visitors' Centre.

### Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

An exceptional concert on electric cello by cellist Michael Fitzpatrick, who has worked with His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the historic Compassion Project involving Tibetan and Trappist monks, was given at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

### Violin and piano concert

Bernard Wacheux on violin and Heinrich K. Weihrauch on piano gave a concert in Pitanga presenting works from Duke Ellington, Bartok, Massenet, Kreisler, Brahms and others.

### Organisation workshop

A one day workshop with Helga Breuninger, Eike Messow and Kambiz Poostchi from the Breuninger Foundation on organisation, dialogue and team building



was held at the Town Hall.

### Kala Kendra

Under the titles 'Conscious colours' and 'Light Secrets', a joint exhibition of paintings by Prafulla Dahanukar and photographs by Gopika Kartikeyan took place in Kala Kendra. It was followed by 'Exploring Gaia', an exhibition of paintings by Audry.

### Women's Day

On March 6th the Mirra Women's Group celebrated Women's Day at Kalabhumi with their own creative crafts bazaar and a cultural programme.

### Auroville International

The Auroville International desk has shifted to the completed Phase I of the Unity Pavilion where it joins the International Zone Group office and the Russian Pavilion desk. A 'Concept and Planning' office for the International Zone will soon come to the Unity Pavilion as well.

### Sangamam

Employees of Auroville units and individuals were offered a number of cultural programmes at the annual Sangamam celebration.

### English plays

Two short English plays, "Mother's Day" by J.B. Priestley and "A Distant Relative" by W.W. Jacobs, performed by Thomas, Anandamayi, Guy, Loretta, Bobby and Johnny, and directed by Ellen, were staged at the Bharat Nivas auditorium.

### Passing

Gerhard Stettner, a German Aurovillian who was one of Auroville's early pioneers and returned in 1999, passed away on March 22nd. He was 56 years old.

### Corrections

In the March issue the name of the author of the first Student Reflection on page 5 was accidentally omitted. The student was Mukta

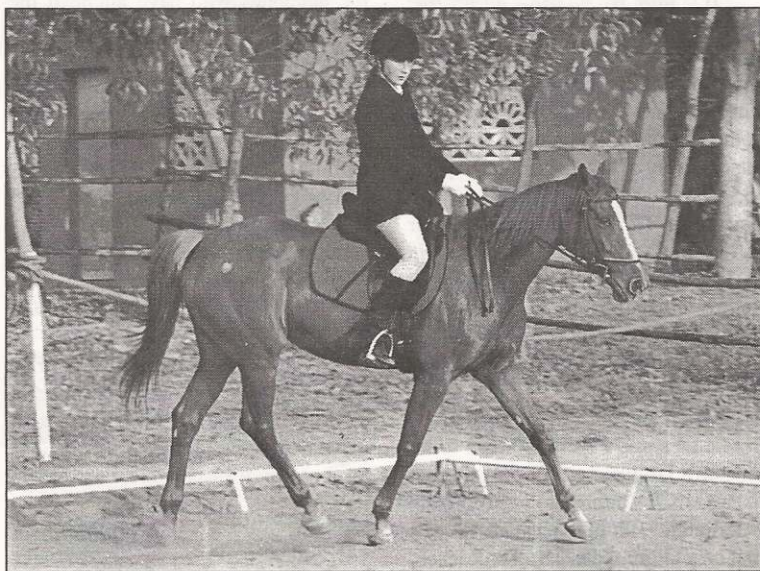


PHOTO BY AUROVILLE

Red Earth Riding School organized the Auroville Horse Tournament 2005 with dressage, show jumping, tent pegging and, for the first time in India, a Derby Course. Photo: Maya doing preliminary dressage.

### Subscription information

◆ One year subscription rate: India Rs. 250; other countries Can \$51, € 37, US \$38, UK £25.  
◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 450; other countries Can \$92, € 67, US \$68, UK £45.  
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