

## The new edition of Sri Aurobindo's Letters on Yoga

**T**he *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* is nearing completion. Among the last volumes to be published are four volumes of the *Letters on Yoga*, containing many letters which were not included in the previous *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* edition. Why were the letters written, what is their importance, and how is it that so many new letters have been included in the new edition? Bob and Medha, who have been working on the new edition in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, explain.

**Auroville Today: What are the Letters on Yoga?**

**Medha:** Sri Aurobindo never wrote a book called *Letters on Yoga*. The four volumes are a compilation of letters he wrote to individual disciples who asked him questions about the Yoga or wrote to him their experiences, dreams, visions, etc. The first compilation, made by Nolini-da but with the approval of Sri Aurobindo, came out in 1933. It was called *The Riddle of This World*. Two more compilations of letters, *Lights on Yoga* and *The Bases of Yoga*, followed in 1935 and 1936. Nolini-da arranged the letters subject-wise in these compilations. Sri Aurobindo then read the letters and revised some for publication. He took a keen interest in the whole process of publication, even going carefully through the press proofs and galleys. In fact, for the first book he suggested the title *The Riddle of This World*, and he also wrote the Publisher's Note for it. A larger edition of these letters, edited by Kishor Gandhi, began coming out from 1947. Sri Aurobindo revised many of his letters for this edition by dictating the changes to Nirod-da.

**Bob:** In these letters Sri Aurobindo explains everything about the Yoga, its philosophical background, its psychological framework, and practically how to do it. Reading these letters is a very fine way to learn about Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and also to learn about Sri Aurobindo himself, because his personality comes through.

I see these letters as a tangible way by which Sri Aurobindo could support the disciples. When he came to Pondicherry he was seeing his disciples daily. After 1926, when he retired to his room, he saw them only a few times a year at darshans. So the letters became his only external means of contact with them, and through the letters he guided the disciples, inspired them and encouraged them; also he supported the Mother in her actions.

Writing these letters was an extraordinary act of compassion and caring. He wrote for many hours each day for several years in the 1930s. He shortened his hours of sleep and strained his eyesight as he dealt with all the requests for information and for help in the Yoga. He answered the disciples' questions, cleared up their doubts and gave them the promise that his help and the Mother's was always there.

**The Mother had a serious illness at the end of 1931 and her direct physical contact with the disciples was curtailed for some time. Is this when Sri Aurobindo started writing the letters?**

**Medha:** No, he was writing letters much before that: the earliest letters we include in *Letters on Yoga* were written in 1927. Disciples used to write to Sri Aurobindo or the Mother daily about what had happened to them on that day, and when a question was asked, it was more often Sri Aurobindo who would answer in the margin or on a new page. Some of the questions were very trivial, and these he would answer briefly, but some questions led him to make important explanations of his Yoga and of many other matters. Not all the letters he received were in English, though. Many did not know English and therefore wrote to him in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, all of which he



Sri Aurobindo, ca. 1915-1918

read fluently, but he answered in English.

**Bob:** It is true, however, that there may have been a connection between the Mother's illness and his letter writing. The primary period of letter writing – between 1932 and 1938 – began soon after her illness. Perhaps because the sadhaks did not have contact with her for many weeks when she was ill, Sri Aurobindo took up the slack through letter writing and then continued even when she was better. It is worth noting that the letter writing was a collaborative effort with the Mother. Sri Aurobindo would sit at a table with the letters and daily reports from departmental heads around him, the Mother would be nearby on a couch and he would regularly ask her with reference to a letter or a report, "What is this about?" or "What should I say here?"

**Medha:** It's interesting that in 1926 he declared he was going into seclusion because he had important inner work to do. But then he was submerged under this deluge of correspondence! Sometimes he mildly observes, "If only you fellows would allow me to do some work..."

**How do the Letters on Yoga relate to the rest of his oeuvre? Do they break new ground? Or do they simply augment what he has already expressed in his major works?**

**Bob:** I think what is new in the letters is the way the Mother is presented. She is referred to in other works, but in the letters She really comes forward. Sri Aurobindo stresses the need for the disciple to

know, love and serve Her, to follow Her and have faith in Her. To offer everything to Her. Also, in the major works Sri Aurobindo's tone is somewhat impersonal, while the letters are more personal – direct, simple, and pitched at the level of the person he is writing to. This makes him as well as his message very approachable.

**Medha:** Another thing that is new is the term "psychicisation" begins to appear in the letters; you don't find this in the major works published in the Arya. Also the term "Overmind". When someone asked Sri Aurobindo why "Overmind" doesn't appear in *The Synthesis of Yoga* as it was first published in *The Arya*, he wrote that at that time "the name 'overmind' had not been found, so there is no mention of it." But in the letters, post-1926, he explains what Overmind is and his realisation of it. If you read the letters of the early and mid-1930s to some of the disciples, you get a glimpse into the state of his *sadhana*. It is fascinating. For example, when the *sadhana* went from the Overmind into the physical consciousness, he writes that now there is so much mud because he is digging into the subconscious. In one letter he writes, "The creation had to be postponed, the process changed, and, instead of doing all from above, it became necessary to come down into the lower vital and material nature for a long, slow, patient and difficult work of opening and change."

**Bob:** When we speak of Sri Aurobindo's letters we should keep in mind that besides the *Letters on Yoga*, we are publishing four other volumes of letters. These are letters on himself and the Ashram, on the Mother, and on poetry and art. In these other volumes we learn more about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and the actual practice of Yoga within the Ashram community. We find, for example, that *sadhana* in the early days was really very difficult. We might think it would be easy since Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were there, but it was not easy – there was great pressure on the sadhaks to change, and they resisted! All this comes out vividly in the new volumes. But we also learn of Sri Aurobindo's great solicitude, his deep concern for the sadhaks, his patient handling of their problems. And then, especially in his letters to Nirod, we learn that he had a terrific sense of humour.

**What are these new letters which are being published in Letters on Yoga?**

**Bob:** We are adding many new letters to this edition – in fact, one third are new. By 'new' we mean that these letters have not appeared in the Centenary edition. Some of them have been published elsewhere, mainly in books and journals associated with the Ashram.

**Medha:** But there are many letters which have not been published anywhere before. The Centenary edition came out in 1972. Over the years the collection of letters in the Archives increased. We received new correspondence when disciples passed away, or when people like Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran very generously gave us all their letters because they knew we would look after them properly. When we receive any correspondence, we immediately make photocopies and then put the originals away for safekeeping in cold storage. It is only the photocopies we work with. Of course, we don't have all the original letters Sri Aurobindo wrote to the disciples. For example, a whole suitcase of his letters to Dilip Kumar Roy arrived in 1998. Dilip's Ashram wanted to keep the originals, so we photocopied them and gave the originals back.

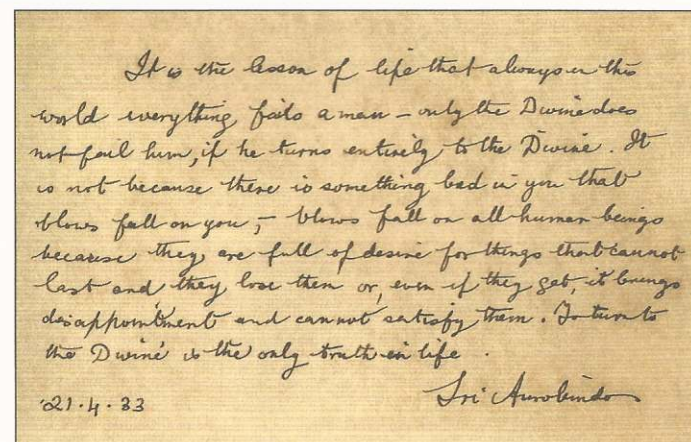
As this collection kept increasing we had access to letters which the Centenary edition editors did not. As a result, we will be publishing four new volumes of the *Letters on Yoga*, as three as in the Centenary edition. Also, some of the letters which appeared in the Centenary edition are in a different form in the new edition. For example, when Dilip Kumar Roy typed up Sri Aurobindo's letters to him, he abridged a few of them and they were published in the abridged form. We got to know this only when we received the originals and began to compare them with the published ones.

**Are you publishing all of Sri Aurobindo's letters that are in the Archives' collection?**

**Medha:** No, a selection has been made. We had a team who went through the letters very carefully, deciphering them – we have some superb readers, not just because of their familiarity with the material but because they have an inner sense. A pre-selection of letters was typed by this team on the basis of certain guidelines. Then a final selection was made and typed copies of the letters were proofread twice against the originals to ensure accuracy.

**Bob:** However, when you read our new collection you will find some repetition because we don't want our selection to be in any way severe.

*continued on page 6*



**Left: A letter of Sri Aurobindo. The text reads:**

It is the lesson of life that always in this world everything fails a man – only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you – blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life.

Sri Aurobindo  
21.4.1933



# Developing Maroma

**“Y**ou have got to move. If you don't, nothing comes to your table,” says Paul, who together with Laura, has been running Maroma for over forty years. They are just back from an extensive visit to Vietnam and Thailand, “to learn from incense and body care manufacturers there, to see if there is scope to expand our market, and to find new suppliers of raw materials and semi-finished products.” The visit, according to Laura, was successful on all fronts. “It should have a positive impact on our product development and sales.”

The visit became a necessity because of changing markets. “The last financial year has been our best ever; but the outlook for 2013-2014 is not all that good,” says Paul. “Our distributors in the UK and Italy have sold their businesses and we are still in the process of developing our relationship with the new owners. We are not yet sure to what extent they will continue business as before; they might be only interested in a selection of our products. For example, the company in the UK has already a line of bodycare products and might decide to only carry our natural Colibri sachets. This year's turnover may be less than last year's due to this.”

“We are developing new markets,” says Laura. “We are optimistic that in the future we can start exporting our products to Thailand – the Thais love perfumes – and to four and five star hotels in the Maldives. We are also in the process of exploring the Korean market and increasing our presence in



The new machines for manufacturing Maroma's bodycare products

Japan.” The market in the USA, she says, is stable notwithstanding huge competition, while in India it is on the rise.

“The fact that many of our products are natural is a big advantage. In the USA, for example, some of our products are available at Whole Foods, a chain of more than 340 natural and organic food supermarkets. They sell organic foods, meat and poultry free of growth hormones and antibiotics, unprocessed grains and cereals and so on. They maintain lists of which ingredients can be used in the bodycare products they sell. Maroma's products are accepted because of the natural ingredients used.”

Maroma, explains Paul, has been following the IFRA guidelines, the International Fragrance Association based in Geneva, since 1998. IFRA publishes a Code of Practice, a comprehensive document that lists all products that are safe (3,090 substances according to its latest update) and those that are banned or restricted for use in fragrance products (174). The Code is regularly updated by the Research Institute for Fragrance Materials (RIFM), the scientific arm of IFRA, which employs dermatologists, pathologists, toxicologists and environmental scientists. “By following IFRA, we observe the Code of Practice and so are assured that our products are safe for use by the consumer,” says Paul.

For unknown reasons, India is not a country member of IFRA, which means that many Indian incense and bodycare manufacturers may be using unsafe substances. “We have an advantage here,” says Laura. “Indian customers are becoming increasingly conscious about the need to purchase safe and high-quality products. Also, we list INCI (International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients) on our Body Care – a complete list of all ingredients, whereas in India, the norm is only to list the ‘Key Ingredients’, not showing the preservatives and other synthetic ingredients. That is our strength and explains why Maroma is successful selling its products in India.” Maroma runs three shops – in Auroville, Pondicherry and Chennai – and also sells its products through Auroville.com, the two Naturally Auroville Boutiques in Chennai and via a range of retailers in India and distributors internationally. “We get many enquiries both from India and abroad from people who visit the shops and see our products there.”

Developing new markets goes hand-in-hand with developing new products. Maroma's development department is now working on a new line of perfume diffusers and on creating a new avenue, called ‘the art of dining’. Laura refuses to divulge details – “just wait a few months – and then you'll see!”

## Managing costs

Cost management is another challenge. “We

have started importing unscented incense sticks,” says Paul. Increasing labour costs forced this step. “For many years, we employed women who hand-rolled incense sticks. One woman can roll 3,000 sticks a day. But those times are coming to an end. The ladies are employed elsewhere at Maroma and we now have a semi-automatic machine which extrudes 3,000 sticks an hour.” The imported stick incense is competitively-priced. “If we want to remain in this business, and adhere to delivery schedules, we have no other choice.” Maroma also uses machines for body care products and soaps. “In 10 years, most work will be mechanized because of the ever-increasing salaries,” predicts Paul.

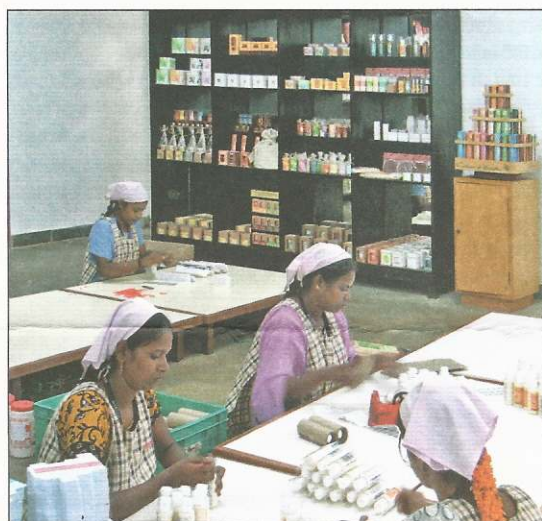
To move towards sustainable energy and eventually reduce electricity costs, Maroma has gone solar in a big way and has now its own 10 kW grid-connected solar power plant. Any shortfall is supplied by the Tamil Nadu grid, while surpluses are exported to the grid. “The system has led to a reduction of our energy costs, even though we continue to depend on the TNEB for running the heavy equipment such as our cold storage rooms.” Maroma's air conditioners are gradually being replaced by new ones which run on solar.

## The future

Though Maroma's outlook is essentially upbeat, Paul and Laura are concerned about the future, in particular about how Auroville's businesses can continue to contribute to the growing needs of Auroville. “Over the years Maroma has made very substantial contributions from its profits,” says Paul. “And it will continue to do so. But we are worried about how Maroma – and many other Auroville businesses – will be able to do so in a more distant future. Many of Auroville's business managers have been working now for more than 25 years. Concerns are felt regarding how they can live at a dignified standard after ‘retirement’. We see few of the next generation coming forward to take up the work.”

“Paul and I take Maroma home with us and discuss business issues at the dinner table,” adds Laura. “But many people do not like to work full time, seven days a week. And even fewer people like to run a business that has many employees. Today's applications for setting up new businesses in Auroville are all restricted to businesses employing one or maximum two people. Is this going to generate the required finance to take care of Auroville's budget?” “Auroville needs to study its business development,” says Paul. “We are still far from what Mother has envisaged.”

*In conversation with Carel*



Packaging bodycare products

# Auroville's e-commerce is on the up and up

**A**n article in the Business Review section of *The Hindu* of May 20, 2013, addressed the growth pains of big Indian e-commerce companies, such as India Plaza, Flipkart and Myntra. After years of operation and investing millions of dollars in staffing, customer care, warehouses and advertisements, these companies still do not make profits.

“But the Auroville Online Store, also known as Auroville.com [pronounce ‘Auroville dot com’] does,” says Ulli. “In fact, we started making profits about three months after we began operations in November 2008. As we do not have a warehouse, don't advertise and have minimal running costs, our turnover and profits have steadily increased. In the financial year 2011-12, we had a turnover of Rs 50 lakhs; in 2012-2013 it grew exponentially to Rs 70 lakhs, with a profit of about 14 lakhs. Our monthly contribution to Auroville is now Rs 30,000.” In addition, Auroville Online sets aside Rs 50 from every order for planting a tree in Auroville and customers are encouraged to make a donation for this purpose when making a purchase. “Last year we donated Rs 1 lakh to the Forest Group, enough for 2,000 trees,” says Ulli. “Over the years, we have donated Rs 4.7 lakhs for this purpose, which includes 1.7 lakhs from customers' donations.”

“We mainly use the registered and insured postal parcel service of the Indian Post, or courier service if that is specifically requested. We are now among the major clients of the Indian Post in Puducherry, with a monthly expenditure of around Rs 1.5 lakhs. Shipping costs account for about 20% of our turnover,” adds Suzanne. “We do not stock products. The moment a

product is purchased we request the unit to deliver it to us within a day or two so that we can ship it out immediately.”

The Auroville unit has to respond quickly. “A delayed response, or, worse, a reply ‘sorry, it is out of stock’ or ‘we don't make that product anymore’ is not acceptable,” says Suzanne. “A unit that offers a product through Auroville Online must keep that product in stock, even if it takes months before someone purchases it. If they decide to no longer make that product, they have to inform us so that we can remove it from the website. A laid-back attitude is not acceptable in this business.”

“It's a particular headache if those products have been ordered from abroad,” says Ulli. “The customer can pay by debit and credit card in US Dollars, Euros, British Pounds and also through Paypal. If a product cannot be supplied, we have to return the foreign currency payment. For payments made through Paypal it is extremely difficult to return the payment in view of the restrictions imposed by the Reserve Bank of India.” This difficulty notwithstanding, Auroville Online offers full refunds for any returned product, except for food and perishable items.

Today, Auroville Online sells products of about 40 of Auroville's 120 commercial units. “We do not sell just any Auroville products,” says Ulli. “We have requirements: it must be produced by a recognised unit, the unit should be contributing to Auroville, and the products should be of a high quality and correspond to Auroville's ideals.”

“Often our clients ask if a product is entirely made in Auroville,” says Suzanne. “We guarantee that all products are manufactured by Auroville units. Some units, such as Aurospirul,

sell 100% made-and-grown-in-Auroville spirulina and neem products; we even publish its test certificates on the spirulina's microbiological qualities and the near-absence of heavy metals. But many other units purchase their raw materials outside Auroville, though they are usually very conscious about where those materials come from and the circumstances in which they have been produced. For example, some garment units use only organic cotton and not cotton that has been grown using chemical pesticides; and all units want to make sure that their raw materials have not been made using child labour and have been manufactured in ‘fair trade’ circumstances.”

With about one third of all of Auroville's commercial units offering their products through Auroville Online, Suzanne says there is scope for expansion. “The marketing has always been the weakest aspect of Auroville business. Selling through Auroville Online can become very profitable. We can host more products, provided the unit executives act promptly and supply us with the product whenever it is sold, so that we can send it out immediately. We can even host one-of-a-kind products, products that are unique, provided the executive sends us a high quality photo of each product and informs us immediately when that product is sold through another channel so that we can remove the photo from the website.”

“We are working on our presentation,” says Ulli. “The website is a bit dated and the navigation could be improved. But our main concern is to get high-quality product photos and decent write-ups of each product and information on the unit; that would do wonders for sales. Not all unit executives can offer that.”

Customer care too has to be further developed. “Customers have a need for communication and we offer an email contact for that,” says Suzanne. “We not only get questions about the products, the mode of payment or the delivery times, but also about Auroville in general or about Auroville products we do not carry and about issues that have nothing to do with our work. For example, a lady who had had a caesarean and who had developed too much fat in the midriff section asked if we had a product that could help her slim down. Another person wrote that he had met ‘an Auroville yoga person’ on the road and could we give the name and contact address? Funnily enough, we managed to find that person!”

Auroville Online operates from the Lumière premises in the Fraternity workshop area. “It's getting tight,” says Suzanne. “We will need to expand soon, both the number of employees and our working areas. Today we ship Auroville's products to over 80 countries, with the ratio India-abroad of 50-50. Packing and shipping takes a lot of work – especially because we try to avoid plastic and often pack a product in hand-stitched cotton. But the customers like it. As a man from Greece wrote, ‘The packaging was very good ... I especially liked the care that went into the cotton wrapping on the box.’”

“Made with love in Auroville” is the motto under which Auroville Online offers Auroville's products. “We pride ourselves on the quality and fineness of all products and also on the ethical way in which they are produced,” it says on its home page. Try it out at [www.auroville.com](http://www.auroville.com)!

*Carel*



# Our man in Chennai

Jean François is remarkably relaxed for a man who runs three shops in Chennai and soon may take up a fourth in Hyderabad. “I came to Auroville 15 years ago expecting to lead a nice life in an international community. I was happily putting down roots working for Auromodèle Atelier when, one day, the Mother sent me to Chennai,” he says, a little resentfully. “At times, I was really upset with her and kept asking her, ‘Why did you do that? Why?’”

A clear answer was never given but he admits that Chennai hasn’t turned out too badly. “Mother has given me a good life with a wonderful place to live, even though it’s busy and challenging. But it’s a lonely existence, a solitary outpost.” He has an apartment in Auroville in Arati which is used by other Arati residents whenever he is not there, which is most of the time. He visits Auroville “less often than I should. I miss the quiet evenings at the Matrimandir.”

It took some time for people to get used to the idea that an Aurovilian could live and work outside Auroville. “In the beginning this led to a visa problem, when a former Secretary of the Auroville Foundation questioned my living in Chennai,” he says. “But we explained that I am as much an Aurovilian as someone living in Auroville and he withdrew his objections. Since then, there are no longer any issues. The concept of an Aurovilian living and working outside Auroville for an Auroville unit has now been accepted.”

Naturally Auroville, the boutique in Chennai’s Nungambakkam



Interior of the Naturally Auroville boutique Nungambakkam

district, opened in 1999 after the attempt to run a mail order business under that name had failed. Jean François took over, reached agreements with all the creditors and slowly made the shop the success it is now. In 2009, he opened Naturally Auroville’s second and larger boutique in the Kalakshetra Colony in Besant Nagar. In addition, since 2010 he has been managing the Maroma Boutique in the Express Avenue mall in Chennai’s Royapettah district.

It is no mean achievement. The boutiques are open from 10.30 in the morning till 21.00 at night, with two teams of employees working in shifts, every day of the week, public holidays included. “The rents are high, and so are the salaries as we only employ people who are fluent in Tamil and English,” he explains. Altogether, the shops have more than 30 employees. “They work well,” he says. “But I have to be here every day – when I am not, sales slump.”

He stresses the need to give first-class treatment to clients by welcoming them and offering refreshments. “There is no tourism in Chennai, and Western expatriates are not buying today. 90% of our customers are Indian, 10 % Korean. There are many regulars. We keep them informed about our new products, and often change the shops’ interior designs.”

Do the Auroville units keep offering new products? “No,” he says. “Auroville’s product innovation is slow. Moreover, what the Auroville units produce is not always what the clients want. But as I have contacts with the clients, I know the market. Some Auroville units are now making products according to my designs. Shradhanjali, Mandala Pottery, Auroville Papers, Athena and Maroma manufacture products made exclusively for Naturally Auroville. As the products sell well, everybody is happy.” Contrary to other Auroville Boutiques, Naturally Auroville does not take products on consignment. “We noticed that we get better quality products if we buy them. We own the stock, and what doesn’t sell goes to the discount corner.”

Maroma’s incense and bodycare products account for the major part of the turnover, closely followed by the spirulina produced by Aurospirul. “We sometimes get people who come with a doctor’s prescription for Auroville Spirulina,” he says, laughing. Other popular products are Auroville’s lampshades, jams and marmalades and bakery items. Apart from scarves, the shops do not sell Auroville garments. “We also carry some non-Auroville products designed by me, which are not in competition with Auroville products,” he says. New products that will soon hit the market are serving trays, cushions and t-shirts carrying cartoons by Emanuele – products aiming at foreigners, which Jean François wants to sell through airport shops.



Jean-François

The Hyderabad boutique will be the next venture. Jean François is a friend of a well-known Indian film actress – “sorry, I can’t disclose the name” – who owns a house in Hyderabad. As a special kindness to Auroville, she is willing to rent out the ground floor. This will be the third *Naturally Auroville* boutique. It is scheduled to open in September this year.

Carel

The *Naturally Auroville* boutiques are located at Khader Nawaz Khan Road, Nungambakkam, and at 38, Rukmani Road, Kalakshetra Colony, Besant Nagar. The Maroma shop is on the first floor of Express Avenue Mall, Royapettah, Chennai.

## Developing socially-conscious business

Auroville products are known for their beauty and their inherent aesthetics. But there is a deeper aspect which they don’t yet communicate: that of Auroville’s aspiration to contribute to a holistic, sustainable and socially-conscious vision. For all of Auroville’s products should be made with the ideal that they contribute to the good of the planet and its people.

This was the vision of Auroville’s garment unit Upasana when, two years ago, it decided to go 100% organic. The decision opened up new horizons. “Everybody was enthusiastic about the idea and inspired that a company could think like that and do it. And that was what made us decide to start Janaki,” says Uma, the executive of Upasana. Together with her partners in Mysore, who also were interested in communicating the grandeur of the dream of Auroville, in May 2012 the shop Janaki was opened as a ‘House of Conscious Living’. It offered clothing made from organic cotton and silk, organic food, and organic body care products.”

The shop quickly became the talk of the town. Yet, it soon became obvious that there was only a small market for Janaki’s high-end products in Mysore. “The turnover was insufficient and we had no choice but to change the shop’s concept.” The shop was renamed ‘Maya’ and now sells general Auroville products and souvenirs, such can be found in the shops at the Visitors’ Centre.

But it wasn’t the end of Janaki. “The Janaki vision still stands and is getting stronger,” says Uma. “I have been making presentations in major cities in India to introduce the Janaki concept, and it is being well-received. The people of India are expecting such an approach from Auroville. We would like to start with five shops in different part of India. But we are still looking for partners who are willing to be the drivers for these outlets.”



The information centre at the Auroville Outpost



Janaki's mission statement

A novel idea was put to test when, on February 28th this year – Auroville’s birthday – the Auroville Outpost was opened on the East Coast Road at Periyamudalyarchavadi, near the Auroville junction. It has an eatery, the Tanto Pizzeria; an Auroville shop, La Boutique; and Janaki, a lifestyle store. “This concept appears to be moving well,” says Uma. “Janaki is sure to break even this year, and I expect the two other units to do likewise.” She believes that the concept of three such units operating jointly could also work elsewhere in India. But Uma feels that Auroville should concentrate more on offering organic food items. “Auroville should insert the message of Auroville at every little opportunity – also in its food items. That’s what the world expects from Auroville.”

### Developing business

All entrepreneurs know that for business to succeed, risks must be taken and possible losses have to be accepted. “Upasana has been taking many risks,” says Uma. “We have a history of doing work for purely social causes, unrelated to profit maximization. That side of our business was developed with Tsunamika, after the devastating tsunami in 2004; then with the silk weavers in Varanasi, followed by the cotton farmers around Madurai, the Small Steps programme and the small handicraft industries in Tranquebar. Janaki Mysore was another risk which cut deep into our profits. We decided to go this way because we believe that the only future of business is socially-conscious business and that that’s what Auroville must promote! For in the future, socially-conscious business will become increasingly acknowledged.”

But business in Auroville faces a number of problems. “A major one,” reflects Uma, “is that we have not yet assimilated business as a part of our collective yoga. For many years there has been talk about expanding Auroville business – but no action has ever followed those talks. Auroville is frightened about risk-taking. There is no development fund, and the FAMC will not provide loans to commercial units. Neither will other commercial units help out. They were all enthusiastic when we told them about the new outlet in Mysore and were happy to sell their products through our shop but nobody wanted to join in the risk-taking. The FAMC and the commercial units are inclined to maintain the status quo. But in that way, Auroville business will soon become obsolete.”

### Angel investors

For Auroville’s business to develop the need is for ‘angel investors’, people who believe in the ideals and who are ready to invest money knowing that the returns may be marginal or zero or that they might lose their investment. “Millions of rupees are pumped into the social sector as donations, but the concept of this kind of social investment hasn’t yet caught on. I would welcome it if a social business development fund could be created by wealthy Aurovilians or friends of Auroville outside who pool their excess resources to promote socially-conscious business. It is the need of the hour,” says Uma. “We would need to hand-pick people to manage such a fund, and ensure that the money is used for socially-conscious business and not just for any business. It is a very specific work. Then, we would have to look for partners who uphold these ideals and who would like to run an Auroville retail outlet in one of the big cities, and help them to start.”

For without partners and angel investors, Auroville business will not or will only develop slowly. This became obvious when a few months ago a space in a prime cultural location in New Delhi was offered to Auroville at a low rent. “In one way it was a brilliant proposal,” reflects Uma. “But the location in a cultural section of New Delhi was not good from a purely business perspective. Also, we couldn’t find the person who would be willing to carry it forward. It would have been a heavy yoke on our neck, and without a deep-pocket organisation to back us up, it would have become a financial disaster.”

### Youth involvement

One of the recent projects of Upasana is Rohini, a six-unit apartment coming up in Swayam for youth wanting to volunteer in Auroville. “Upasana is working with volunteers who can’t find a place to stay in Auroville and who are renting sub-standard accommodation in the villages. That made us decide to create Rohini, where six volunteers can live, each having a room and bathroom, and with a common living room and kitchen.”

She mentions that it is difficult to employ Auroville youth. “I often can’t afford to employ them as they expect to be paid at the level they can earn outside. I would like to work with them to create wealth for Auroville but currently it is not possible.”

She reflects, “We have become used to a lifestyle which we cannot afford on the basis of our maintenance. Auroville’s economy is really a conundrum. The way it has developed, we cannot afford it ourselves. Our products are too expensive for Aurovilians who are living on an Auroville maintenance. For those people, even eating out in an Auroville restaurant is too costly. We need to reconsider the system.”

In conversation with Carel



*India achieved independence on August 15, 1947. At the request of All India Radio, Tiruchirapalli, Sri Aurobindo wrote a message for broadcast. Mentioning that August 15th is also his own birthday, Sri Aurobindo writes that he takes this coincidence not as a fortuitous accident "but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement."*

*The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. "India today is free," he writes, "but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established."*

*Perhaps because of the shadows thrown by Partition, not many people know how the dangers of an India divided into hundreds of independent territories was avoided. On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birthday and India's Independence, we publish this article.*

On the 15th of August, 1947, India achieved independence. But it was a fissured freedom, and the separation of Pakistan from India continues to haunt the sub-continent even today. Yet, events could have turned out far worse. For even before Pakistan and 1947, there were two Indias. The Viceroy at Delhi lorded over one; aided by British Governors in all the 11 provinces, and an interim government composed of elected Indians. This was British India, the India where "Congress and the Muslim League wrangled, and where Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah moved freely, spoke freely, worked freely – though not yet as freely as they wished."

And then, there was the India of the Princely States; covering two-fifths of the land mass, and with a quarter of India's population, the Princely States numbered 601, ranging in size from the vast Kingdom of Hyderabad with 14 million people and a territory the size of Britain minus Scotland, to over 327 petty States, with an average area of 20 square miles, an average population of 3,000, and an average revenue of 1,000 UK Pounds a year.

Today not much is remembered about the erstwhile Princely States of India. What was their relationship with the British? What role, if any at all, did they play in the fight for independence? What was the constitutional relationship they enjoyed with the Paramount Power? What happened to them as independence approached? Moreover, few know how narrowly India escaped sinking into the quagmire of disintegration after the British left. Indeed, it seems almost miraculous, given the disparate nature of the States and their rulers, that the integration of the Princely States was completed less than one month before India achieved independence.

#### The Princely States

The Princely States were spread out all over India. One could not travel between Bombay and Delhi without crossing at least 30 boundaries. Though they were of many kinds, they all had one thing in common: they were, in theory, independent of Delhi, and all laws passed by the Government in British India. The sole authority they recognised was that of the Crown, whose policies they agreed to follow. All dealings with the Viceroy were in his position as the Representative of the Crown, and not as the Governor-General of British India. There was a Political Department in Delhi which looked after the affairs of the Princely States and appointed the British Resident to each State. The Residents closely monitored and watched over the States, but rarely meddled with the State's internal affairs. The Ruler could spend his money on meaningless extravagances, as long as he did so on his tours abroad; he could get away with murder, as long as it was not too openly committed; he decided what form of justice, if any at all, should be enforced in his state through his police, what taxes people should pay, what schools they should attend, what duties they should perform. Often taxes were arbitrary: when a Ruler wanted a new car, he simply added a 'motor tax' to be borne by his people until his new fancy could be paid for. Within his boundaries, he was the first and last word on his people's destinies.

The lot of the common man, except in progressive States like Mysore, Travancore, or Baroda, was pitiable and uncertain. Arrogance, a lack of genuine concern for their subjects, superficial living, wasteful expenditure – and often scandal – characterised most of the Rulers of the Princely States of India. The Nawab of Junagadh, for example, spent more money on his kennel of dogs than on hospitals. Many rulers spent more time in Monte Carlo and Paris than they did in their palaces.

Indian political leaders weren't particularly charitable in their views on the Indian States. In his autobiography Nehru remarks, "A sense of oppression comes, it is stifling and difficult to breathe, and below the still or slow moving waters there is stagnation and putrefaction. One feels hedged, circumscribed, bowed down in body and mind. And one sees the utter backwardness and misery of the people, contrasting vividly with the glaring ostentation of the prince's Palace. How much of the wealth of the state flows into the Palace for the personal needs, and luxuries of the prince, how little goes back to the people in the form of any service... A veil of mystery surrounds these States. Newspapers are not encouraged there... Literacy is very low... Special laws protect the princes from criticism, even in British India, and within the States the mildest criticism is rigorously suppressed. Public meetings are almost unknown..."

#### The Chamber of Princes

The First World War broke out in 1914, and in Britain's hour of peril, the Rulers rallied behind the British and did all they could, offering both their personal services, as well as the resources of their State. They helped Britain with men, material, money, and a few even served as officers in different theatres of war. The war effort meant closer cooperation was needed, and periodical conferences were held between the States and the Paramount Power. This led to the inauguration of the Chamber of the Princes with 120 members representing 235 Princely states.

The Indian Legislature, meanwhile, began to press for a greater say in the matters of the States, who in turn, naturally opposed such a move. As various demands for Dominion Status, Home Rule, and complete freedom engulfed the sub-continent, the British Government reiterated that nothing would be done without the consent of the Princes. The Princes too were emphatic in their stand that their views and their State's 'independence' would have to be taken into account in any discussion concerning the future of the yet unborn Indian nation. Their contention was that they were independent sovereign powers who had entered into treaties with the Paramount Power, the British Crown, only in the fields of foreign relations and external and internal security. They were Kings and Queens in their own right, and therefore the States could not be compelled to transfer their loyalty to, or to maintain treaties with, a future third party, the government of an independent India. These views were supported by the British, but were vehemently contested by the Indian leaders who maintained that the relationship of the States was not with the Crown, but with the Government of (British) India, and as such, with any Government succeeding the present one.

There was a lull in matters relating to the States after the outbreak of the Second World War. Instead, the issue of splitting British India into two independent states became prominent. Jinnah declared in 1940 that the Muslims must have a separate Independent State of Pakistan. The demands of the Muslim League and the counter-claims of Congress came to dominate the political scene of India.

#### Towards Independence

By the summer of 1945, when the Second World War was ending, the British Government decided to work with Indian leaders to realise full self-government for India. A Cabinet Mission published a 'Memorandum on States' Treaties and Paramountcy', which affirmed that "when a new fully self-governing or independent government or governments came into being in British India, His

# The Integration of the

Majesty's Government would cease to exercise the powers of paramountcy." This meant that all treaties between the States and the Crown would cease to exist; no obligations would remain for either party. All political arrangements would be brought to an end, and it would be up to the States to forge new relationships between themselves and the successor government or governments to British India. The British Government also decided to create a Constituent Assembly and charged it with drafting the constitution of India.

On the 20th of February, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee declared in the House of Commons that Britain would transfer power to Indian hands no later than June 1948 and that Admiral Viscount Mountbatten would take over as Viceroy of India. Less than four months later, in June 1947, Lord Mountbatten announced that His Majesty's Government was ready to relinquish power to two governments, India and Pakistan, on the basis of Dominion Status, 'around 15th August 1947'. As regards the States, he maintained that the proposals mentioned in the Cabinet Mission Plan remained unchanged. This meant that, when the transfer of power would take place on August 15th, paramountcy would lapse, and the States would be independent – all of them, the largest as well as the smallest. They would have the right to expel troops of the Indian Army stationed in their territories due to earlier treaties with the British; Indian railways, which had run through their States under agreements with the Crown, could now be stopped; Indian post and telegraph offices would be closed; right of passage from one part of India to another could be withheld. And all this, not in some remote corner of India, but potentially in all the 601 States all over British India. Worse, more than a 100 million people would have little say in their destinies, and would continue to be deprived of independence and democracy.

In the meantime, the process of disintegration had started. On 11th June 1947, Travancore (in modern-day Kerala) announced that it had decided to set itself up as an independent State after 15th August, and that it was soon going to appoint a Trade Agent in Pakistan. On 12th June, the Nizam of Hyderabad also declared his intention to be an independent power. On 14th June, Congress strongly condemned the "Balkanisation of the country" and reiterated its position that no State had the right to declare independence and live in political isolation from the rest of India. Jinnah promptly issued a statement 4 days later saying that the States were free to remain independent if they wished, and no power had the right to compel them to do anything against their will. And so confusion prevailed.

The possibility that two-fifths of the land would return to an ambiguous political isolation was dreadfully dangerous to the integrity of India. The unification of India seemed doomed to failure just at the time when it was most likely to take place.

#### Winds of Change

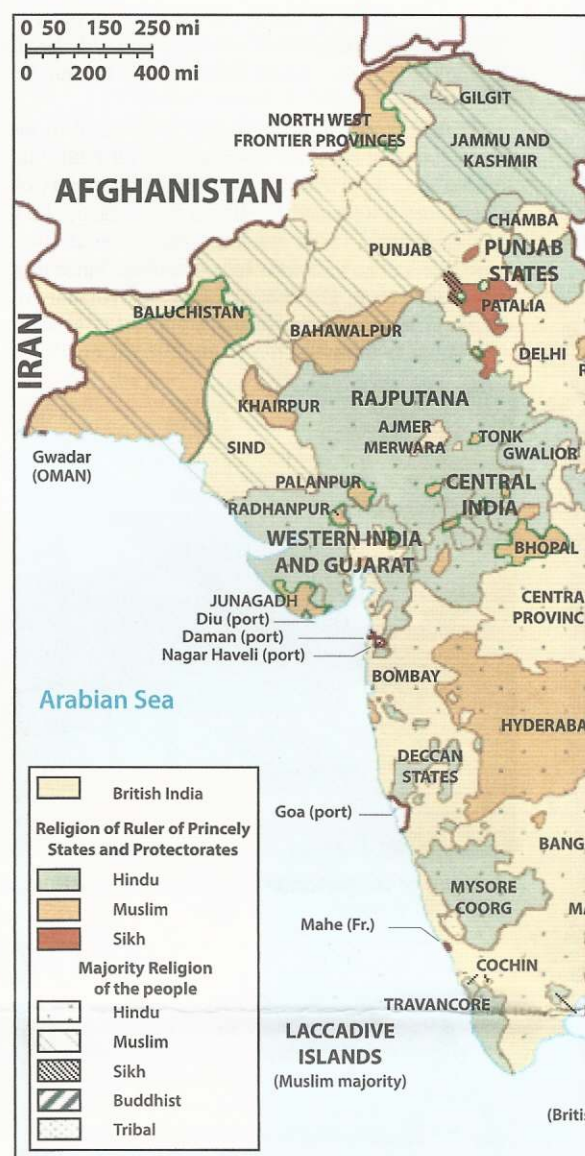
To turn the tide, Congress decided to form a States Department to secure the integration of the Princely States and chose Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the strong man of the party, to lead it. Patel picked V.P. Menon for the job of Secretary of the States Department. The combination of Menon's shrewd intelligence, and Patel's forceful personality was to prove a formidable combination.

With approval from Mountbatten, Menon started working at once. By having paramountcy lapse the moment the British left, India would have to negotiate with each and every State over every little arrangement – army, railways, post, customs, currency, and others. But with only eight weeks to go, Menon proposed that the Princes could be approached and asked to accede under only three headings: Defence, External Affairs, and Communications. Menon realised that so far it had been the British who had been protecting the States from civil revolt, and with the British gone, in case popular agitations began, except for a few larger States which had their own well-established armies, the other States could only turn to India or Pakistan for help. Sardar Patel realised what Menon was hinting at – Sardar Patel was the head of the underground Congress movements in the Princely States.

Menon also thought that the lapse of paramountcy was actually a blessing in disguise, for it gave India a completely clean slate to start with. If paramountcy had passed on to the successor governments, all the treaties between the States and British India would have passed on too – and some of these treaties included clauses of non-interfer-

ence. To attempt integration with hundreds of different States with many treaties in place would have turned out to be a nightmare.

Menon had another brilliant idea – he enlisted the support of Lord Mountbatten, whom he felt would be very influential with the Princes, especially because of his personality and royal connections. Nehru also agreed to entrust Mountbatten with the task of negotiating with the Rulers on the issue of accession and also with dealing with Hyderabad.



Map of India with British

#### The meeting of 25th July, 1947

The very shortness of time proved an advantage for Sardar Patel and Menon. On the 25th of July, just 3 weeks away from Independence, a momentous meeting was held with the Princes. Menon had prepared the Instrument of Accession – the treaty which would pledge the Princes to the Indian Dominion on the three subjects of Defence, External Affairs, and Communications. Mountbatten was at his charming, spectacular best. Personally, he was by now fully convinced that the States had to choose either India or Pakistan; independence for them was not an option. Despite the heat of July, the Viceroy arrived in full Viceregal uniform, "his chest flashing with a breastplate of orders, decorations and medals. He looked every inch a cousin of the King, symbol of their hopes, protector of their privileges." He used all his persuasive skills, in turn bullying them and then playing to their little self-interests. He warned them that after 15th August he would no longer be in a position to mediate on their behalf as Crown Representative, and that Congress may not repeat their offer; but he also promised them that he would persuade Congress to continue giving them honours and titles. As Leonard Mosley writes in his book *The Last Days of the British Raj*, "As the Princes sweated in the heat of the Delhi summer, he picked them out like schoolchildren and asked them whether they would sign. The expression on the face of even the richest of them was the sad, lost look of men in defeat."

There were no angry outbursts; Mountbatten had that remarkable skill of making the most unpleasant of moments palatable, even humorous. Every now and then, the hall would break into spurts of laughter. Mosley recounts that when Mountbatten questioned the Dewan of one large State whether his Maharajah would sign the Instrument of Accession, the Dewan said he had received no instructions from his master. When the Dewan reiterated he did not know his master's mind, Mountbatten promptly stared into a glass paper weight and said, "I will look into my crystal



# Princely States of India

ball, and give the answer." Pause and heavy silence. "His Highness," continued the Viceroy dramatically, "asks you to sign the Instrument of Accession." The Princes broke into laughter; there was a round of applause. Indeed, the Princes were signing their own doom, but Mountbatten made it easier and more bearable.

One by one, the Princes of India lined up to sign the Instrument. The Maharajah of Baroda was the first kingdom to accede to the Indian Dominion; he signed, clasped his hands around Menon's neck,

which flanked both Dominions, to meet Jinnah in the hope of a good deal. Jinnah was overjoyed to see them – perhaps other Rajput States would accede to Pakistan too if these two did so. He slid across a blank paper to the Maharajah of Jodhpur and said, "Write your terms on that, your Highness – and I will sign them."

Jodhpur turned to Jaisalmer and asked him whether he would join him. Jaisalmer's contention was that in the event of communal troubles, his State should be allowed to remain neutral. Jinnah assured him that there would be no such troubles anyway, and that he should not worry himself unnecessarily. That was it. Jodhpur realised, probably for the first time, what he might be getting into. He returned to Delhi to think things over.

Once in Delhi, Menon arranged for a meeting with Mountbatten. Mountbatten told Jodhpur that while he could accede to Pakistan if he wished, did he realise what the consequences would be? His decision to join Pakistan might also cause communal unrests within Jodhpur State. The Maharajah promptly replied that Jinnah had given him a blank sheet of paper to write his own terms. What would they give him? Menon replied, "I'll give you a blank sheet of paper too, if you like. But it will bring you nothing but false hopes, like the other." Three days later, Menon went to the Jodhpur Palace, and the Maharajah signed the Instrument of Accession; the Rajput States were saved from joining Pakistan.

## Bhopal and Indore

A few days later the Nawab of Bhopal signed too. In spite of his active efforts against accession, his surrender was dignified and he wrote to Sardar Patel that though he had fought hard to preserve the independence of his State, having conceded defeat, he would be as staunch a friend as he was an opponent.

Indore was another recalcitrant State. It had stayed away from the meeting of July 25th and the Maharajah had desisted from making contact with any one, not even the Maharatta Princes who were delegated to meet him and persuade him to sign. Subsequently, the Maharajah met with Lord Mountbatten; in the course of the meeting he did not commit himself either way. One morning, however, the States Department received, in an ordinary postal envelope, the Instrument of Accession signed by the Maharajah.

Thus, one by one, the States geographically contiguous to the Indian Dominion signed. Dholpur, Bharatpur, Bilaspur, Nabha – one after the other, they fell in line.

Three States, however, continued to hold out even beyond the 15th of August. Impending chaos had been averted, but the position of Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Junagadh was still uncertain.

## Junagadh

Junagadh was a rich and small principedom in Kathiawar. It was ruled by the only Muslim king among the Kathiawar States, and its Ruler, the Nawab, was passionate about breeding dogs and hunting. He had over hundred and fifty dogs in his palace – each with its own room, attendant, serving table, bed, and telephone.

In the meeting of the July 25th, the Nawab had indicated he would accede to India. This was thought natural – nine-tenths of his subjects were Hindu, he was surrounded on all sides by rulers who had opted for India. Its nearest link to Pakistan was by sea, 385 kilometres away. However, he was secretly in touch with Pakistan.

It is doubtful Jinnah really wanted Junagadh – it would have turned out to be an administrative nightmare. But Junagadh was a pawn in the games Congress and the Muslim League were playing at the time. All eyes were trained on a more important State up north, the prosperous and beautiful mountain kingdom of Kashmir. Sri Hari Singh, the Ruler of Kashmir, had not yet decided in whose favour he would accede. The situation in his State was the exact opposite of that of Junagadh – he was a Hindu Maharajah ruling over an overwhelmingly Muslim population. For Jinnah, Junagadh was the testing ground for Congress.

After being persuaded that if he acceded to India it would mean the end of his dogs, hunting, and concubines, and that Pakistani armed forces would move in to curb any uprising against him, the Nawab sent out a press statement that after much

consideration about the welfare of the State and its people, he had decided to accede to Pakistan.

When the Indian States Department read about the accession in the papers, they were thunderstruck. Even Jinnah knew the impossibility of the situation. Junagadh was not one tract of territory; several of its enclaves were inside other States which had already acceded to India. In the middle of Junagadh itself were a number of Mangrol enclaves, all acceded to India. This was an out and out political fiasco.

Hindu refugees soon started pouring out of Junagadh. At the same time, Junagadh forces moved into the Mangrol enclaves located at the heart of Junagadh territory. This was the chance for the India to act. By moving into Mangrol, Junagadh had committed an act of aggression and breached Indian territory. The Indian Army laid a blockade on Junagadh, and a few weeks later it marched into Junagadh, laden with supplies; the forces were given a rapturous welcome by the population. The Nawab had already fled to Pakistan on his private plane with as many dogs as he could take. He had also taken with him the entire cash balance of the State, apart from jewels, shares and securities.

## Kashmir

As independence approached, the Maharajah of Kashmir desisted from saying anything. He did not wish to accede to Pakistan personally, but did not particularly like the Congress – and Nehru. But Kashmir was a crucial State. It shared borders with both India and Pakistan; it also shared borders with Tibet, China, Russia, and Afghanistan.

Even then, it was clear that if the destiny of Kashmir wasn't settled, there would be open dissent between the two new Dominions. The Maharajah had indeed a tough choice to make. On one hand, if he acceded to Pakistan, the non-Muslims of Jammu and Ladakh, as well as a number of Muslims supportive of the Congress, would resent such action. If he acceded to India, there would be revolts in Gilgit as well as in the border areas contiguous to Pakistan. The Maharajah could have called a conference of the representatives of the people and ascertained their views, but he was in no mood to do so, and continued toying with the idea of an independent Kashmir. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir then announced that it would like to negotiate Standstill Agreements with both Pakistan and India. Pakistan signed one, but India desisted for the time being, wanting to study the implications of doing so.

Relations between Pakistan and Kashmir, however, steadily deteriorated, even after the Standstill Agreement. Pakistan, Kashmir claimed, had cut off crucial supplies – petrol, food, and other essential commodities – in a blatant violation of the Standstill Agreement, and in order to coerce the Ruler. Border raids were also being carried out.

The Maharajah, however, continued to procrastinate long after 15th August. On 22nd October, 1947, an all-out invasion of Kashmir began. Pathan tribesmen, backed by the Pakistani army, invaded the State. They advanced rapidly towards Srinagar. The Maharajah appealed to India for help the next day. It was decided that Menon should fly immediately to Srinagar to ascertain the situation before any precipitative action was taken. Menon found the Maharajah in a state of helplessness. There was practically no State Forces left; most of the Muslims in the army and police had deserted. An atmosphere of calamity hung over Srinagar. Menon advised the Maharajah to leave Srinagar along with his family and possessions. Menon himself left early the next morning, and went straight to a meeting in Delhi. Mountbatten believed it would be improper to move troops into a State which was at the moment an independent country. He further expressed his view that accession should be "conditional on the will of the people being ascertained by a plebiscite after the raiders had been driven out of the State and law and order had been restored." This was readily agreed to by Nehru and other ministers.

Menon flew to Jammu, where the King had arrived by car after a whole night's driving, and got the Instrument of Accession signed by him. Menon then returned straight away to Delhi, and went into another prolonged meeting. There is an interesting account of this meeting and of the events thereafter from Sam Manekshaw, the first Field-Marshal of the Indian army:

"The cabinet meeting was presided over by Mountbatten. V.P. Menon handed over the (Accession) thing. Mountbatten turned around and said, 'Come on Manekji (He called me Manekji instead of Manekshaw), what is the military situation?' I gave him the military situation, and told him that unless we flew in troops immediately, we would have lost Srinagar, because going by road would take days, and once the tribesmen got to the airport and Srinagar, we couldn't fly troops in. Everything was ready at the airport.

"As usual Nehru talked about the United Nations, Russia, Africa, God almighty, everybody,

until Sardar Patel lost his temper. He said, 'Jawaharlal, do you want Kashmir, or do you want to give it away'. He (Nehru) said, 'Of course, I want Kashmir.' Then he (Patel) said 'Please give your orders'. And before he could say anything Sardar Patel turned to me and said, 'You have got your orders'.

"I walked out, and we started flying in troops at about 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock. I think it was the Sikh regiment under Ranjit Rai that was the first lot to be flown in. And then we continued flying troops in. That is all I know about what happened. Then all the fighting took place."

Jinnah considered officially sending Pakistani troops, but decided not to when he was told that as Kashmir had legally acceded to India, British officers serving in the Pakistani army during the interim period would not participate in such an effort.

On October 30th, Pakistan issued a statement that the Kashmir accession was "based on fraud, violence, and as such cannot be recognized." It was the beginning of a conflict that remains unresolved to this day.

## Hyderabad

Hyderabad was a State whose coffers were full, whose Nizam was strongly anti-Congress, and which had a well-trained and equipped army. It was determined to remain independent at any cost. 15th August came, and went. Elaborate negotiations involving Hyderabad, the Indian Government, and Mountbatten dragged on. The days turned into weeks, the weeks into months. By June 1948, Mountbatten, who had until then been confident of resolving the problem of Hyderabad in India's favour, left India. By now, the minority community was holding all the important offices of the State, and the Razakars – the Nizam's fanatical army – was in control of the cabinet. Hyderabad also believed that India would not be in a position to do anything forceful because her hands were full dealing with Kashmir. The situation in Hyderabad rapidly deteriorated after Mountbatten's departure. As a hostile State right in the middle of India, the danger was real.

On September 9, 1948, after much deliberation and procrastination, the Indian Army was ordered to enter Hyderabad State and restore stability both in and around the State. A week later, the Nizam surrendered. The integration of the Princely States was, finally, complete.

## In Retrospect

The momentous event of the integration of the Princely States has been overshadowed by the most painful holocaust in the sub-continent's political history after British India was partitioned into the two dominions of India and Pakistan. In the nine months between August 1947 and the spring of 1948, between fourteen to sixteen million people were displaced from their homes, one lakh women were kidnapped, and over six lakhs were murdered – men, women, children, the young, the aged, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh. It was a costly price for freedom.

It is perhaps because of this that not many people remember the serious threat of the balkanisation of the country when the British Government decided to adopt the policy of 'lapse of paramountcy' upon independence. Not many, even today, recognise the almost miraculous series of events that prevented that threat from realising itself. On the 15th of August, 1947, the impossible, it seemed, had been accomplished. Within a span of three weeks, almost all the 600 States had acceded to India and the whole country had been united under one political umbrella, securing the fundamental unity of the country. The proud Princes had signed on the dotted line and the Princely States were merged into the Indian Union after centuries of independence from the rest of the sub-continent. India was now a single federation, its provinces and States integral parts of it.

On closer scrutiny, the rapid sequence of events pertaining to the integration of the Princely States in a short span of time has a feel of the miraculous to it. I believe Sri Aurobindo's short but clear reference to the integration in his Independence Day message quoted at the beginning of the article is significant, and an indication perhaps that Something Else worked, unfelt, through the protagonists of these events, that a higher Power prepared the circumstances and issues that led to the formation of the essentially united India we live in today.

Devdip Ganguli

This is an edited version of an article which first appeared in the August 2007 issue of Mother India. The author has relied primarily on two sources: "Integration of the Indian States" by V.P. Menon, and "The Last Days of the British Raj" by Leonard Mosley. Material from these books has been freely woven into the article. The author can be reached at devdipg@gmail.com



India and the Princely States

and wept like a child. The Maharajah of Bikaner followed suit; one of the rajahs had a heart attack immediately after signing.

However, the problems were far from over; this but was an easy beginning. A number of States had still to sign the Instrument of Accession. These were the important States of Hyderabad, Travancore, Kashmir, Mysore, Bhopal, and Jodhpur. A few small States – like Junagadh on the Kathiawar coast, in modern-day Gujarat – also held out.

## Travancore

The Dewan of Travancore had gone back to his State a little discomfited. He had been informed by Menon that in the case of a Communist uprising in his State, the Indian Dominion would refuse to help his State if he remained independent. The Dewan informed the Maharajah of Menon's and the Viceroy's advice that he sign the Instrument. In the meanwhile, the underground Congress organisation in Travancore started demonstrations against the Ruler. There were clashes in the streets, and the Dewan was seriously injured when he was stabbed by an unknown assailant. The Maharajah wired to the Viceroy his decision to sign the Instrument; Sardar Patel promptly called off the demonstrations. It was a clear demonstration of the power of Congress to express dissent forcefully in the Princely States; the message was not lost on the others, and more States signed the Instrument of Accession.

## Jodhpur

The Ruler of Jodhpur was a young, happy-go-lucky Hindu Ruler who liked polo, flying planes, and women. He was reckless and extravagant, and definitely not looking forward to life as part of the Indian Dominion. His State flanked both India and Pakistan, and he was within his right to accede to Pakistan, even if his subjects were in majority Hindus. The Maharajah of Jodhpur took along with him the Maharajah of Jaisalmer, another State



# On Sri Aurobindo's Symbol

On 15th December 1962, while conversing with Satprem, the Mother looked at a bundle of old documents from Max Théon's 'Mouvement Cosmique' and told Satprem: "It amused me to look again at this first bundle because... look at this symbol. [Mother shows him the cover of a publication of the 'Mouvement Cosmique']"

Satprem: Yes, I have seen.

The symbol is interesting.

Satprem: It resembles that of Sri Aurobindo.

I am the one who designed that of Sri Aurobindo after this one. Look, the square they designed at the centre is very elongated. The one we did here is more correct: Pavitra made it equal. But that of the 'Revue Cosmique' was elongated with the lotus at its centre. It is the same [as that of Sri Aurobindo], it is just that it is elongated so that the square meets the points were the triangles meet. I keep this to show it to Pavitra because this is what I had tried to do at first. But obviously that which we have now is correct. It is Théon who told me that it was Solomon's Seal.

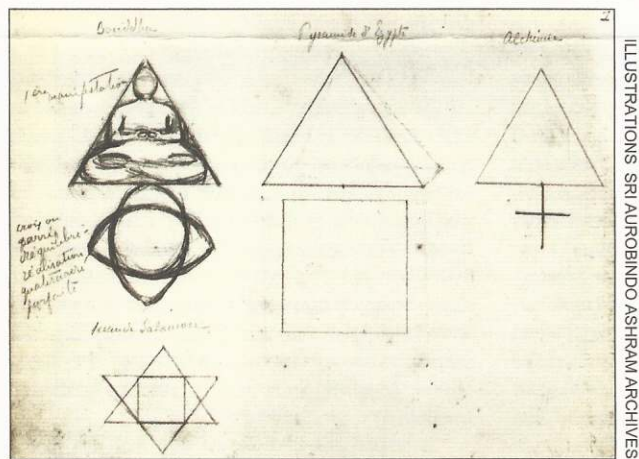
Making sense of this conversation requires knowing what these two symbols were.

**Around 1902:** It is through Louis and Claire Thémanlys, who were friends of her brother Mattéo, that the Mother got to know about the 'Mouvement Cosmique', its leaders (Max Théon and his wife), its publications and its symbol. Mother contributed to the *Revue Cosmique* and twice lived in the house of the Théons, who were at that time her instructors in occultism, at Tlemcen, Algeria.

All the publications of the 'Mouvement Cosmique' had this symbol on their cover:

The similarity with Sri Aurobindo's symbol is obvious because they have the same components: the opposing triangles, the square inscribed in them, the water in the square and the lotus floating on it. The differences lie in the triangles' proportions and in the manner the water and the lotus are represented.

**1909-12:** The document below was found among the Mother's manuscripts of the period 1909-12.



On this sheet of paper, are drawn three equilateral triangles, one square and two other figures:

Above the three equilateral triangles she wrote respectively:

Buddha Pyramid of Egypt Alchemy

Next to that with the Buddha, she wrote: *1ère manifestation [first manifestation]*

Below the Buddha, She drew two intersecting ovals forming a sort of cross and wrote:

*"croix ou carré d'équilibre – réalisation quaternaire parfaite" [cross or square of equilibrium – perfect fourfold realisation].*

Below these two intersecting ovals, there is a design similar to the symbol of Sri Aurobindo but without water and lotus. Above it the Mother wrote: 'Sceau de Salomon' [Solomon's Seal].

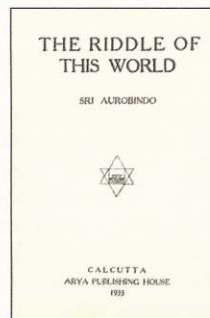
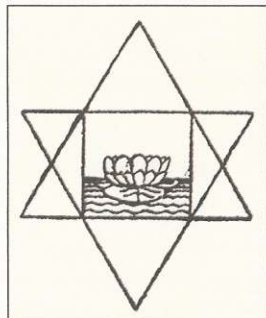
Interestingly, the proportions of this design made by the Mother are very close to the final version of Sri Aurobindo's

symbol.

**Around 1910:** Nolini Kanta Gupta wrote in his 'Reminiscences': "It was Sri Aurobindo himself who told us about a French lady from Paris who was a great initiate. She was desirous of establishing personal contact with Sri Aurobindo. That the Great Soul whom she meant was no other than Sri Aurobindo would be evidenced by a sign: she would be sending him something that he might recognise. That something was Sri Aurobindo's own symbol – in the form of a diagram, known as Solomon's Seal. Needless to add, after this proof of identity, steps were taken to facilitate her coming."

There are doubts about the authenticity of this account, so one should not attach too much importance to it.

**1933:** A first version of this symbol is printed for the first time on



the cover of a book written by Sri Aurobindo:

An article published in *Sri Aurobindo Archives & Research* in 1979 comments:

"Some time after the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry in 1920, the six-pointed star enclosing a square containing water and a lotus became the symbol of Sri Aurobindo."

It is not known exactly when the symbol was designed, but its first appearance seems to have been on the cover and title page of the 1933 edition of Sri Aurobindo's *The Riddle of This World*, published by the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.

The Mother told Satprem that she designed this version of this symbol on the basis of that used by Théon. In this version the two triangles are equilateral, as is the case in the hexagram, but they cannot be inscribed in a circle because they do not have the same centre.

The Mother subsequently explained the significance of this symbol:

*"The descending triangle represents Sat-Chit-Ananda.*

*The ascending triangle represents the aspiring answer from matter under the form of life, light and love.*

*The junction of both – the central square is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme – the lotus.*

*The water inside the square represents the Multiplicity, the Creation."*

The symbol shown with this significance is the first version of Sri Aurobindo's symbol.

**Around the mid 1950s:** The Mother combined the first version of Sri Aurobindo's symbol with her symbol for the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and she wrote beneath,



*The effective manifestation of Ishwara and Ishwari in union.*

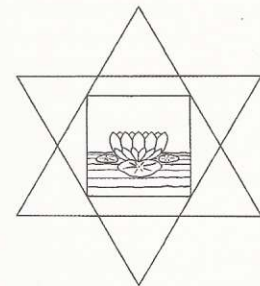
*The effective manifestation of Ishwara and Ishwari in union.*

Notice that, as the first version of this symbol cannot be inscribed in a circle, its top and bottom branches stick out of the circle within which the four other branches are inscribed.

**27th October 1962:** A second version of this symbol is approved by The Mother. The article in *Sri Aurobindo Archives & Research* notes that:

"It was apparently regretted that this earliest form of Sri

Aurobindo's symbol, with its top and bottom outside triangles larger than the other four, did not have the harmony of proportion of a true hexagram. So in 1962 another design was made, in which the ascending and descending triangles form a true hexagram, but in which the angles of the central square do not touch any of the points of the triangles' intersection. This figure could, of course, be inscribed within a circle. The new design, put in final form by Pavitra, a French disciple close to the Mother, was presented to her on 27 October 1962. At that time she approved of it, signing it and writing: "This is the correct symbol of Sri Aurobindo."



The conversation with Satprem quoted at the beginning of this article took place seven weeks after this second version of Sri Aurobindo's symbol came into being. Hence it is to this second version that the Mother referred when, comparing it to the Symbol used by Théon, she said that the latter was "elongated" and about this new version She said, "obviously that which we have now is correct" and said that it is Solomon's Seal.

**Prior to July 1964:** A third and final version was approved.

Excerpt from the article published in *Sri Aurobindo Archives & Research*:

"In spite of the Mother's satisfaction with it at the time, the design of October 1962 [2nd version] was used for no more than a year and a half. It appeared on the February 1964 edition of *Sri Aurobindo's Evolution*, but sometime before July 1964 a new design was prepared, which was first used on an edition of that date of *The Hour of God*."

The Mother probably asked again to Pavitra to come up with this third and final version of Sri Aurobindo's symbol. We do not know what her instructions to the designer were.

The designer could have opted for it to be inscribed in a circle or in a square but instead he opted to give to the two triangles two 52° angles – which means that these triangles have the 'golden proportion' ( $\phi = 1.6180339...$ ), as is the case for the vertical section of the great pyramid of Giza. The author of this final version must have designed it intentionally but, was it at the Mother's request? The 'Golden Number' has been known since antiquity because it has a beautiful proportion which is found very often in nature. This number has been used to give beautiful proportions to buildings such as the Pyramid of Giza, Athens's Parthenon, the seat of the U.N. in New York, etc.

It is interesting to note that, speaking of the symbol used by the 'Tradition Cosmique', Pascal Thémanlys explained that, "This sign evokes among other things the union of the active and passive principles and doubtless also the Wisdom of Chaldea, of Egypt and of Hindu India."

Obviously, the hexagram (Solomon's Seal) stands for Chaldea's Wisdom, the square and the upstanding triangle (symbolise a pyramid) stand for Egypt's and the lotus in water for Hindu India's.

Although, in the West, the hexagram is most often associated with the Jewish faith, it is not an exclusively Jewish symbol; it is also found on Hindu temples, on Buddhist, Muslim and Jain structures, books, paintings and mandalas.

Théon, who was a Kabhalist, said he was the heir of a tradition which predated that of the Jews and that of the Vedas. Mother told Satprem She had spoken about it to Sri Aurobindo who had said that there may indeed have been such an earlier civilisation.

The known history of the Jews starts with Abraham leading his people out of Chaldea (in modern day Iraq) and they spent more than five centuries in Egypt until Moses led them out of it. It is thus possible that the Jews absorbed some of these two early wisdoms.

Could the symbol used by Sri Aurobindo originate from or symbolise the earlier civilization he referred to?

Gilles Guigan

This article is based upon and elaborates upon the article 'The Symbol of Sri Aurobindo', published in the December 1979 issue of 'Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research'.

## The new edition of Sri Aurobindo's Letters on Yoga

continued from page 1

We want a large body of letters to be available to readers. As to the internal structure of the *Letters on Yoga*, we have pretty much followed the structure that was made by Kishor Gandhi for the *Centenary* edition. First we have letters on the philosophical and psychological aspects of the Yoga, then come letters on the methods of practice. After that come letters on the characteristic experiences and realisations of the Yoga, and finally letters on the transformation of the lower nature. We've also provided a lot more titles and subtitles so that it's easy to find one's way in this vast sea of letters. We have also added more embedded notes. In his letters Sri Aurobindo sometimes refers to something which is clear to the person he is addressing, but not to the general reader. So in brackets we provide information about what is referred to so that

the reader can grasp the context.

**Medha:** Sri Aurobindo did not want the original question of the correspondent to be included when his letters were first compiled for the early editions. Neither did he want the sadhaks referred to in the original letters to be named for, he explained, this would raise "needless criticism and controversy while the same thing put impersonally is better received and more easily adopted". We have followed this practice, as did all editors in the past, in the latest edition of *Letters on Yoga*.

*I suppose the big question for many of your subscribers is, when will the final volumes of the new edition of Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works be ready?*

**Bob:** One reason it has taken so long is that the

number of letters is overwhelming, far more than we had originally anticipated. Our files on these letters fill 83 boxes! The first volume of *Letters on Yoga* is already published. We will try to get the other three volumes out by the end of next year. When they are published, along with three other volumes (*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *Vedic and Philological Studies and Writings in Bengali and Sanskrit*), the subscribers will at last have all of Sri Aurobindo's works. After that, we will work on the index and glossary.

*What is your experience of working for so long and so closely with Sri Aurobindo's letters?*

**Bob:** It is a blessing, a great privilege, a joy. We are learning about the Yoga but we are also learning about them, and this is bringing us closer to them.

We are learning how much they loved and cared for their disciples. This work is a way for us to offer our service to the Mother. Our duty is to do the work as well as we can. We hope that those who read these letters will benefit from them as much as we have done.

**Medha:** I can't put into words the experience of working daily with these letters. When I came to the Ashram I never thought I would get this work: I don't know what I've done in my past lives to deserve this rare privilege. The atmosphere, the spirit in which they were written is still very much there in these letters. So what I do now when anything goes wrong, or if I have a question, is I open a box, I read a few letters, and I get the answer. This has happened time and again. This is the kind of effect that his letters have. One can only be grateful.

From an interview by Alan



# AuroHost, a homestay network

If there could be a database of Auroville-related people worldwide willing to host one another, wouldn't that make travelling a more integral experience? The good news is that now there is AuroHost.

**A**uroHost is a project of Auroville International (AVI) USA which aims at encouraging friendship and collaboration within the global Auroville family. It is funded by the Foundation for World Education (FWE) and the work was delegated to the IT team in Auroville led by Manoj who gave it its present form of a homestay website.

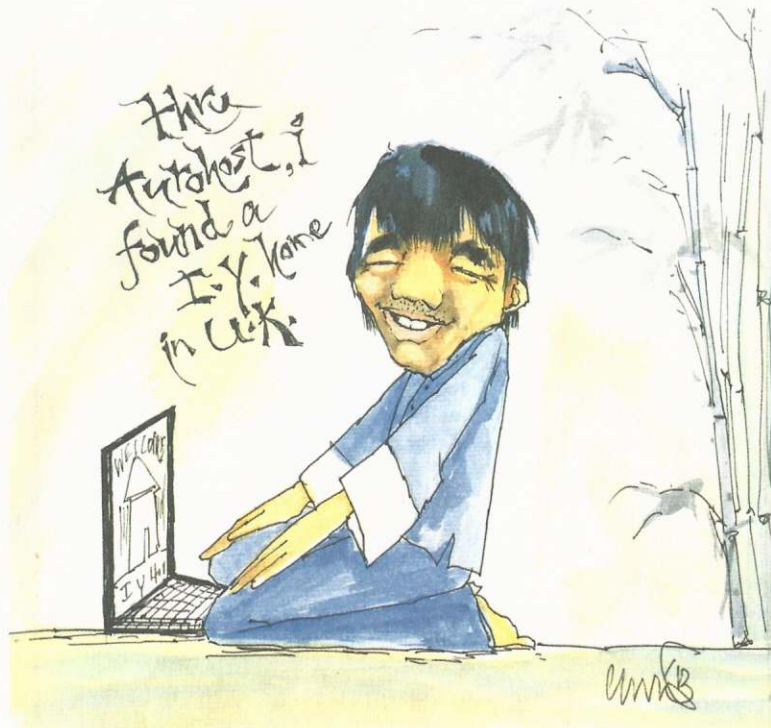
AuroHost is meant for Aurovilians and Newcomers, AVI members and close associates. Anyone can register as a friend or potential traveller. The information to be shared is one's email id, physical address, phone number, a good recent photo and a reference person's address. Once the reference person confirms the applicant as a trusted member or friend, and the administrator approves, the registration is complete and access to the database is given. If one signs up as a host, one is expected to provide a bed/couch and breakfast facility for a minimum of two nights.

The website has been designed to easily navigate and provide quick steps for hosting requests. Simple traveler and hosting guidelines underline the larger goal of nurturing friendship and trust. It is a safe and easy way for potential travellers to connect with and possibly stay with others around the world. No money is involved, just the sincere desire to connect.

## Background

The need to have a hosting database of like-minded people arose simultaneously in the minds of two people – Auroville-born Nilauri Markus and FWE board member Gordon Korstange. Nilauri recounts, "I lived in Auroville until I was 17. I went to the USA to experience the outside world. Although I did well in the USA, I thirsted to see the rest of the world too. So, when I was done with my first two years of college, I decided to take a break from my education and travel around the globe. I didn't have the financial resources, so I worked for the summer, and saved up enough money for my ticket, and about \$300/month of travel budget. That wasn't going to get me any hotels, not even youth hostels. To make this work, I was going to have to network. This was in 1990, when the internet was not yet part of everyday life. I contacted all my family and friends in Auroville by post, asking them for contacts they had around the world. People sent me addresses of their relatives and friends overseas, and I compiled this into an 11-page list of addresses and phone numbers, and took off. Over the next 9 months I met family I had never known, I stayed with friends I hadn't seen for years, and met new people connected to Auroville in some way or another. I was plugged into the Auroville network."

For Gordon, the case was somewhat similar. He recalls, "The idea for AuroHost began after a trip we made to Europe where we spent a month staying in several different countries with people with connections to the Integral Yoga (IY), some of whom we knew and some not. What if, I wondered, I was going to Iceland where I knew no one and wanted to find out if there was someone who was an IY person? What if I had to go to Kansas for mundane



reasons and wanted to find out if there was an IY person in Topeka? So I began to think in terms of a database of people in the IY who might give a traveller shelter, or at least arrange to meet me when I came to their area. Having no ability to do the computer work that would bring this into being, I contacted various people, among them Nilauri, who I thought could do the work."

"In 2001, I started working for AVI USA full-time as its Executive Director," continues Nilauri. "I had a fabulous opportunity to put all my time and energy into networking between Auroville and the USA. I saw this as a great opportunity to rekindle

my idea of a global Auroville-related network of travellers and hosts." In hindsight Nilauri recounts, "At the time there were discussions about specific logistics. How would we make it equitable so that certain hosts weren't taken advantage of? How would we avoid Aurovilians becoming burned out by requests to stay with them from overseas, or Aurovilians using the system without also being hosts themselves? Would the network be open to all people in the yoga, or just to Auroville-related people?" Although these were important issues to consider, the solution was to continue nurturing the project with trust and goodwill. "There was lots of goodwill," continues Nilauri, "but the time and technology were not quite lined up yet. Implementing it back then would have been a much bigger effort than it seems today."

Gordon explains, "The problem was always how the site would be administered and by whom, plus who would have admission to the database."

"In the last year or two," says Nilauri, "the project was rekindled. The time was right. The technology was easier to implement. And most of all, Jeanne and Gordon, who have supported this idea from the very start, were able to get funding for it from the FWE who also saw the vision."

"We put in a grant to the FWE which was accepted and gave the job to Manoj Pavitrani in Auroville," says Gordon. "This grant has been the impetus for the web site to manifest."

Manoj, who created the website, says, "We looked at other similar models and studied the best possible workflows, created a wire-frame and mock-up models and programmed it based on *Drupal*, a popular open-source content management system. The website is now being tested to see if everything works as envisaged. Once we are satisfied with the smooth functioning of the site, we will open it up to the community. We will continue to solve the issues as and when they come up."

For the moment, until the site is successful, the programme will only be accessible for those related to Auroville. Afterwards it will expand to embrace the larger IY family. AuroHost is here to foster trust and simplify the process of connecting with everyone in this family. "After all the preparation," says Gordon, "AuroHost can only succeed if members of the worldwide Auroville-related community register as hosts and guests. We invite them to visit the site at <http://www.aurohost.org> and join the 25 already there to create a world-wide network."

Mandakini

## ALTERNATIVE HOUSING

# Rooted to tree-tops

**P**hillip has lived in Auroville since he was four. Its experimental lifestyle has shaped him; here, getting involved often means being in nature and doing things differently. At school, he was interested in improving the way he learned. While his classmates took the usual time to graduate, Phillip took an extra six months, doing one subject at a time. After graduating, he stayed on to teach Geography and Chemistry. He took his students on field trips to study local subjects. Those field trips helped him learn much about India's wild life and the eco-systems of places in South India like the Point Calimere wild life and bird sanctuary. He also studied the water systems and collected data about ecosystems in other South Indian sanctuaries.

Then Rolf, his teacher at Future School, suggested that he should study

at university. Phillip applied to two different universities in Germany but was rejected on the grounds that his documents were not properly submitted. So he decided to explore Europe instead. "Actually, what drove me to Europe," he says, "pedalling through three seasons and ten countries on the back of cheap mountainbikes, was a passion for travel and exploration rather than a search for universities."

He returned to India on an invitation from John the prawn, an American scuba diver, to do an advanced scuba diving course in the Andamans, along with other Aurovilians.

That was five years back. Now at the age of 26, Phillip builds tree-houses.

Building tree-houses is not impossible but it is difficult. To be a tree-house builder you have to be an all-rounder. First, you need to know trees. It means you have to be an arborist.

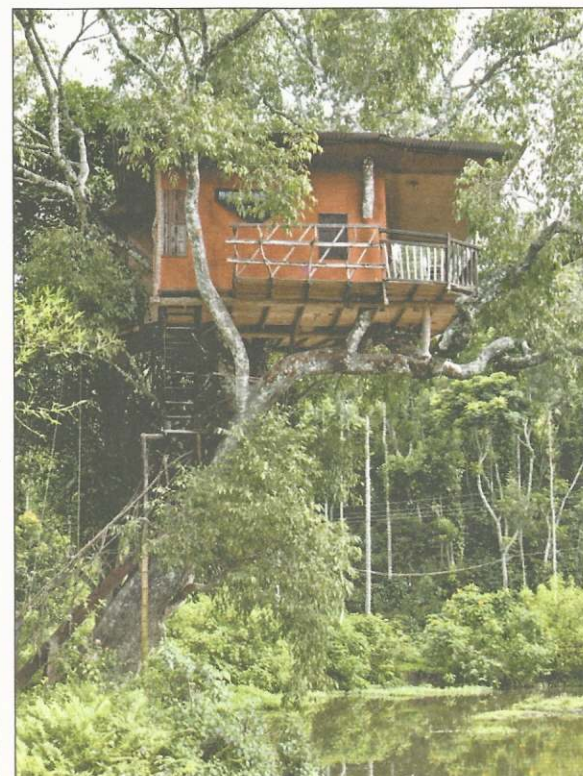
You have to know what a tree's strength is, its nature, growth, spread of its branches, etc. and you must learn pruning. Pruning is a science as well as an art. Phillip learned these things while working with Island, an arborist who started Tree Care in Auroville some years back.

Then you must have the ability to balance all of that non-growing housing matter on a tree which is an asymmetric, constantly-growing organism. You need, also, to know a million things about building and building materials: carpentry, plumbing, lighting and everything else that a builder must know. Above all, you must be a romantic to do this odd sort of thing. But if you were Phillip, perhaps it would be easy.

Phillip built his first tree-house in Newlands when he was only twelve. It was made out of bamboo.

A house in a tree must be as light as possible but not so light as to be blown down in a storm. "All my houses survived Cyclone Thane", he says, "except one!" That exception was improved upon. Phillip and his team simply changed the angle of the floor and slid it to sit on to the reclining trunk. That experience taught him never again to overload a tree with building material.

His team experiments with different materials to build suspended tree-houses. Heavy duty harnesses and belts, bamboo, jute, coconut fibre and other light but durable materials are



A tree-house built at the Elephant Valley eco-lodge in 2009 by Geo, Island, Nikolai and Phillip

PHOTOS COURTESY PHILLIP

allows a certain leeway so as to avoid the danger of cracking. But doesn't that make the house swing in the wind? Phillip says that the house must not be attached to the tree. In fact, tree-houses unify and strengthen trees. While Thane was raging in Auroville, Phillip was in his tree-house at the Youth Centre. "It was swaying like a boat!" he says. "But that happens only in strong winds. Mostly they are stable."

People call on his skills a lot, both in Auroville and outside. He has built a tree-house at the Elephant Valley Resort in Kodaikanal and another in Goa for an American client.

Tree-houses are attention-grabbing oddities, but can they be permanent dwellings? Phillip believes that they can if you know how to understand a tree. If you want to live in a tree-house you've got to live with the tree and, he adds mischievously, "just like if you want to marry, you have to live with the wife!"

So while maintenance is a must, well-maintained tree-houses can be permanent dwellings. Although a postman may think twice before delivering your second letter...

Charu

For more information about the many activities Phillip runs with his team, including constructing houses in almost any kind of environment, gardening, landscaping, environmental consultancy, carpentry and timber craft, arboreal architecture, tree surgery and technical pruning, visit Tree-House Community at <http://fili-pav.wix.com/treehousecommunity>.



Phillip with the tree house at the Auroville Youth Centre which came down with its tree during Cyclone Thane



# Discovering the Soul of America - a step in human unity

The unity of all the nations is the compelling future of the world. But for the unity of all nations to be possible, each nation must first realize its own unity.

*The Mother*

**T**he fierce urgency of our global need and, as Sri Aurobindo put it, the demand of the Time-Spirit on the human race that it find subjectively, not only in the individual, but in the nation and in the unity of the human race, its real self and live according to that inspired this year's AUM (All USA Meeting) conference as an offering to the evolutionary work of the Divine Mother.

The core organizing team of Soleil, Wolfgang, and John Robert set out on an ambitious adventure 12 months before the event to create a program that would support deep and profound experiences of the soul of the USA for participants.

From the beginning, the team held that even a small group of people can act as a homeopathic dose of transformation if they can touch a nation's soul together, in its truth and living consciousness. Therefore, the conference program was designed around elements from the Soul of Nations workshops already created and tested successfully in Auroville in 2011, and in a number of other countries.

In this way AUM 2013 became a kind of workshop-conference with group exercises. By "soul" is meant our innermost being, which is found in a subjective experience. So the soul of our nation cannot be fully known as an objective entity, but can be found through the subjectivity of our own soul. This is why, on the last day, participants were invited to connect and to work with the soul quality and shadow aspect of their nation to which their body reacted most intensely.

Some participants experienced a very specific quality as central to the soul of the USA. Integral Yoga author Michael Miovic presented this quality as the *muladhara chakra* in an entertaining slide show which showed that one of the central soul qualities of America is the psychic presence found in the land, flora and fauna.

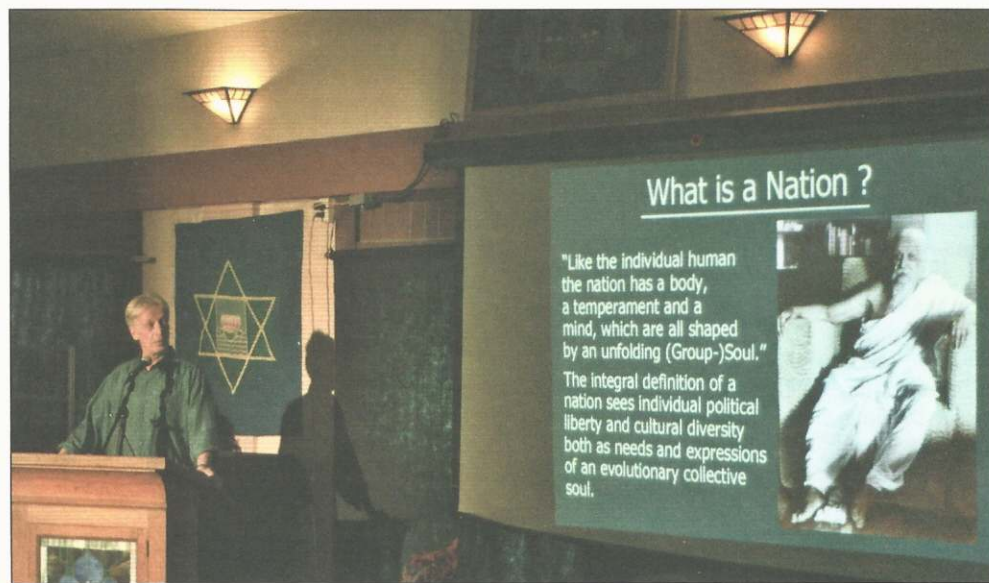
Woman Stands Shining, a Dine (Navajo) poet and ceremonial leader, also spoke in her talk about the essential identity of the Native American spirit with the land and nature. This theme came through again in Barbara Shor's sacred, animal communication workshop. Actually a strong component of this AUM endeavor was to seek a partnership with the deep

consciousness of Native American people, which carries essential soul roots of the present USA. Woman Stands Shining was indeed a shining star in this regard. Her Summer Solstice Ceremony and drum journey took people to an experience of oneness with the land and with our greater unity consciousness.

In other presentations, she also helped participants to recognise the holocaust of Native peoples (9 out of 10 were obliterated) in America and some shadow aspects that are still in need of healing. The process of soul discovery of the nation implies facing the national shadow and finding the love and the strength to overcome them. Wolfgang in his introductory slide show on the evolutionary aspects of nations, as well as Woman Stands Shining in her talk, suggested Truth and Reconciliation Committees as a potential tool and example to heal unhealed wounds in a national society. Integration of the still neglected Native American heritage could also be fostered by a true national Commemoration Day in the USA.

In fact, many of AUM's participants spoke of significant steps of healing and progress during these days.

Additional presentations, ceremonies, meditations, discussions, and other activities by people from around the world broadened and enriched the AUM experience. Vera from



Wolfgang giving his presentation on the nation soul

Auroville led a collective sound journey into the American soul with the Singing bells; John Robert informed us about the amazing democratic achievements of the Iroquois Confederacy; Nadaka, Gopika, and Keshava fed our souls with Indian chants; while Raina Imig and Woman Stands Shining talked about East and West perspectives on the Divine Mother. Tuning into this, participants created mandalas.

On a practical level, the logistics flowed well. A wonderful caterer provided delicious organic locally-grown veggies and ethnically-diverse meals. Volunteer helpers did untold hours of work through the year and on-site, designing a website and printed materials, driving shuttles, cleaning and arranging tables and

chairs, arranging flowers, etc. Many felt the Grace supporting this conference.

The Aurovilians and Auroville International people who were present will hopefully take back a new inspiration with them to Auroville. The International Zone groups, for example, can replicate practical elements of this conference to discover the soul of nations and to integrate and heal the past. The AUM organizers hope that Auroville's International Zone one day will become a starting point for similar integrating initiatives in many countries.

There will be follow-ups from this AUM, including a discussion and sharing forum on the themes and discoveries of this conference. John Robert, whose vision is of an Institute or Center for the American Soul to widen, deepen, and carry forward into action these themes and discoveries, also drafted a public statement for this year's AUM (see below).

A longtime member of AVI USA and the American Sri Aurobindo Association summarized this conference as "A groundbreaking AUM, that went where no AUM had gone before!"

*Wolfgang, Soleil and John Robert*

Joerg Roettger, a German film maker, will create a professional documentary of this conference. After its completion the film can be ordered through the organizers and other sources. To see some visual impressions of AUM 2013 and news of follow-up activities, go to: <http://www.collaboration.org/aum/2013/post-aum/index.html>

## Excerpt from the drafted statement of AUM 2013

"We invite citizens and friends to acknowledge the crucial role Native Americans have played in constituting these United States, and welcome the equally crucial role they will play in bringing the soul qualities of this land to the forefront of consciousness and of practice. We joyfully anticipate sharing America's soul work with them and with other members of the American peoples.

"We have discovered by experience that each nation, just as each individual, has a similar healing and transformative work to do: to confront the shadows of its past and present through soul discovery and to recognize and evolve the genuine qualities of that unique soul.

"This is an essential portion of the world's evolutionary work. We believe that only through this transformation can nations rise up to play their part in the world symphony of the future in a progressive peace and human unity."

## NEW BOOKS

# The Mother's Yoga 1956-1973

**T**he *Mother's Yoga* is a new two-volume compilation from *Mother's Agenda* that focuses on the *Agenda's* core content, the Mother's "yoga practice to prepare her physical body for the new Supramental consciousness".

Compiled by Loretta of Auroville, in hard cover with a fine physical presentation, this work brings together in a condensed form the Mother's descriptions of her yogic experiences and their development from 1956 to 1973. Thus, the content of this set of books is among the most fascinating and important in spiritual literature.

The selections are quoted verbatim from the *Agenda*, are arranged chronologically by date, and include the volume and page numbers from where they were taken. This differs from the unpublished compilation, *Notebook on Evolution*, which was

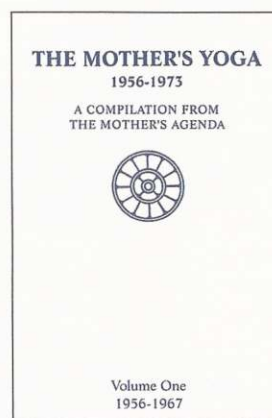
privately distributed and is available on the internet.

In the *Notebook*, the translated text is somewhat different and its selections are undated except by year, making it difficult to locate the corresponding text in the *Agenda*. The present work also is more than twice the length of the *Notebook* and includes most but not all of its passages. Most of the selections are relatively lengthy and continuous with no text omitted within them, so it doesn't feel like a patchwork.

This compilation does not include any of Satprem's side comments which are included in the *Agenda*, nor does the compiler add any new ones. In this respect it differs from Satprem's *Mind of the Cells*, which is more a summary and interpretation of the contents of the *Agenda* given through Satprem's perspective along with many quotes. As in the *Agenda*, the present work does include Satprem's helpful descriptions

of the Mother's gestures and moments of prolonged silence, as well as her emphases on certain words, indicated with all capital letters. It also follows the method of the *Agenda* in putting Satprem's questions or comments to the Mother in italics, and while I felt this was sufficient to distinguish them from Mother's remarks, someone pointed out to me that they are not set off with extra space from the Mother's, making it less easy to differentiate.

Of course, any compilation involves the necessity to make many choices about what material to include and what to exclude. It is a selection of the relevant content, and there are no clearly defined lines to distinguish relevant from irrelevant material.



While it is easy to exclude discussion on obviously different matters, in many cases the choices are not so clear. In a few extracts, one finds really interesting and useful commentary about human psychology or aspects of spiritual practice, but which do not seem

directly related to the Mother's yoga. In other cases, one can find in the *Agenda* comments very relevant to her yoga but which have been excluded. But given such inevitable difficult and disputable choices, the selections taken here seem to cohere very well and also to flow nicely, such that one gets a better sense of the developing progression in Mother's yogic experiences and in the changes occurring in her body consciousness.

For those who have avoided tackling the *Mother's Agenda* due its massive length or other factors, this shorter two-volume set may be for you. Of course, there is fascinating material in the *Agenda* that has been left out, but this set has the benefit of being focused on the essential. For those who have already read the *Agenda*, the set provides easier access to the most important material, and by bringing it together more concisely, gives a different and powerful reading experience.

*Larry*

*'The Mother's Yoga, Vols. 1-2' (2012, 886 pages) is compiled by Loretta, published by Mother's Photographs, Auroville, and printed at All India Press, Puducherry. It is available at Savitri Bhavan, Auroville and at VAK, Pondicherry.*

*Price in India Rs. 600.*

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**Editorial team:** Alan, Carel, Larry, Mandakini. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu.

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