

ऋतम् • Ritam

Volume 7 • Issue 2 • November 2010

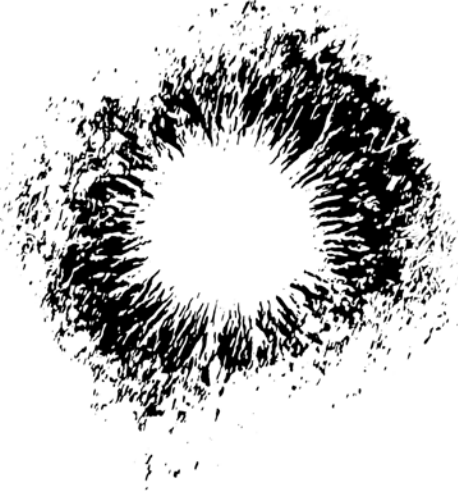


A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville

Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research

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Volume 7 • Issue 2 • November 2010



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RITAM

A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

Our aim:

- This is a journal under SAIER connecting the various units under its umbrella, with the focus on education and other related areas of research.
- The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.
- It will publish articles, interviews, etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.
- This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.
- The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.

Dear readers,

We look forward to your suggestions and comments. We would especially like to know whether you would want to continue to receive the journal by regular mail. All issues would also be up on the web at

<http://www.auroville.org/index/ritam.htm>.

If you are comfortable reading it there, we need not send you a hard copy. If you would like us to send a copy to others who may be interested in receiving one, do let us know. For the moment, we are not putting a subscription price.

Please email us at saiier@auroville.org in with your views and for any other information. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Editor

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The true and full spiritual aim in society

Some passages from Sri Aurobindo's writings

A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *dharma*. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter develops its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute

the distinct value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world.

The Renaissance in India (CWSA Volume 20 p. 56-57)

Does the future of humanity lie in a culture founded solely upon reason and science? ...

Is the progress of human life the effort of a mind, a continuous collective mind constituted by an ever changing sum of transient individuals, that has emerged from the darkness of the inconscient material universe and is stumbling about in it in search of some clear light and some sure support amid its difficulties and problems? And does civilisation consist in man's endeavour to find that light and support in a rationalised knowledge and a rationalised way of life? An ordered knowledge of the powers, forces, possibilities of physical Nature and of the psychology of man as a mental and physical being is then the only true science. An ordered use of that knowledge for a progressive social efficiency and well-being, which will make his brief existence more efficient, more tolerable, more comfortable, happier, better appointed, more luxuriously enriched with the pleasures of the mind, life and body, is the only true art of life. All our philosophy, all our religion,—supposing religion has not been outgrown and rejected,—all our science, thought, art, social structure, law and institution must found itself upon this idea of existence and must serve this one aim and endeavour. This is the formula which European civilisation has accepted and is still labouring to bring into some kind of realisation. It is the formula of an intelligently mechanised civilisation supporting a rational and utilitarian culture.

Or is not the truth of our being rather that of a Soul embodied in Nature which is seeking to know itself, to find itself, to enlarge its consciousness, to arrive at a greater way of existence, to progress in the spirit and grow into the full light of self-knowledge and some divine inner perfection? Are not religion, philosophy, science, thought, art, society, all life even means only of this growth, instruments of the spirit to be used for its service and with this spiritual aim as their dominant or at least their ultimate preoccupation? That is the idea of life and being,—the knowledge of it, as she claims,—for which India stood till yesterday and still strives to stand with all that is most persistent and powerful in her nature. It is the formula of a spiritualised civilisation striving through the perfection but also through an exceeding of mind, life and body towards a high soul-culture.

Whether the future hope of the race lies in a rational and an intelligently mechanised or in a spiritual, intuitive and religious civilisation and culture,—that, then, is the important issue.

The Renaissance in India (CWSA Volume 20 p. 67-68)

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence,

it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, sub-souls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth.

The Human Cycle (CWSA Volume 25 p.227)

A spiritualised society would live like its spiritual individuals, not in the ego, but in the spirit, not as the collective ego, but as the collective soul. This freedom from the egoistic standpoint would be its first and most prominent characteristic. But the elimination of egoism would not be brought about, as it is now proposed to bring it about, by persuading or forcing the individual to immolate his personal will and aspirations and his precious and hard-won individuality to the collective will, aims and egoism of the society, driving him like a victim of ancient sacrifice to slay his soul on the altar of that huge and shapeless idol. For that would be only the sacrifice of the smaller to the larger egoism, larger only in bulk, not necessarily greater in quality or wider or nobler, since a collective egoism, result of the united egoisms of all, is as little a god to be worshipped, as flawed and often an uglier and more barbarous fetish than the egoism of the individual.

What the spiritual man seeks is to find by the loss of the ego the self which is one in all and perfect and complete in each and by living in that to grow

into the image of its perfection,—individually, be it noted, though with an all-embracing universality of his nature and its conscious circumference. ... It is this kingdom of God within, the result of the finding of God not in a distant heaven but within ourselves, of which the state of society in an age of the Truth, a spiritual age, would be the result and the external figure.

Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the supreme, even the guiding aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure. As it was to some imperfect extent in the ancient Vedic times with the cultural education of the higher classes, so it would be then with all education. It would embrace all knowledge in its scope, but would make the whole trend and aim and the permeating spirit not mere worldly efficiency, though that efficiency would not be neglected, but this self-developing and self-finding and all else as its powers. It would pursue the physical and psychic sciences not in order merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but still more to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its masks and behind them. It would make it the aim of ethics not to establish a rule of action whether supplementary to the social law or partially corrective of it, the social law that is after all only the rule, often clumsy and ignorant, of the biped pack, the human herd, but to develop the divine nature in the human being. It would make it the aim of Art not merely to present images of the subjective and objective world, but to see them with the significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the Truth and Beauty of which things visible to us and invisible are the forms, the masks or the symbols and significant figures.

A spiritualised society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into

the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult. The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the cooperative kind, but to give to men—not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure—the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all. In its politics it would not regard the nations within the scope of their own internal life as enormous State machines regulated and armoured with man living for the sake of the machine and worshipping it as his God and his larger self, content at the first call to kill others upon its altar and to bleed there himself so that the machine may remain intact and powerful and be made ever larger, more complex, more cumbrous, more mechanically efficient and entire. Neither would it be content to maintain these nations or States in their mutual relations as noxious engines meant to discharge poisonous gas upon each other in peace and to rush in times of clash upon each other's armed hosts and unarmed millions, full of belching shot and men missioned to murder like war-planes or hostile tanks in a modern battle-field.

It would regard the peoples as group-souls, the Divinity concealed and to be self-discovered in its human collectivities, group-souls meant like the individual to grow according to their own nature and by that growth to help each other, to help the whole race in the one common work of humanity. And that work would be to find the divine Self in the individual and the collectivity and to realise spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest, richest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature.

For it is into the Divine within them that men and mankind have to grow; it is not an external idea or rule that has to be imposed on them from without.

The Human Cycle (CWSA Volume 25 pp. 255-57)

The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo – Mantra, Metrics and Meaning

by Rod Hemsell

As we re-read Sri Aurobindo in the most positive spirit of deconstruction, and with the most sincere aspiration toward the poetry itself – with which we have now been able to dwell for at least a few decades, those of us in our 40s, 50s, or 60s – it is his meaning that we should hope to hear, his intention that we should grasp, of which the text is merely a vehicle and a form of expression. Its meaning, and his intention, lie far beyond the form. And yet, as he explains, the form has been uniquely developed to carry the intention in a way that is unusually powerful and direct.

In the course that I have developed for the University of Human Unity in Auroville (universityofhumanunity.org), titled *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo – Mantra, Metrics and Meaning*, which you may download and either listen to or read, I have tried to show how the form and substance of his poetry are related, and how the technique that he developed conveys his intention in a particularly deliberate way. The technique he has called “*mantra*” and he has given the term a special meaning. Of it, he has written:

*“The Mantra is a direct and most heightened, and intensest, and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things.”*¹

Let us emphasize these phrases – *an intensest, and most divinely burdened, rhythmic word, which ensouls the mind with the inmost reality of things*. These are not terms and ideas with which we are very familiar, I’m sure. In fact, he says that our age is farther from such a view of poetry than any other has ever been! And yet, he

has given it a great importance. He has spent his yogic decades creating it, and he has said that it is somehow necessary for the future as a kind of intercessor:

*“... a greater era of man’s living seems to be in promise, but first there must intervene a poetry which will lead him towards it.”*² This is a theory of poetry as revelatory power and guide, whose purpose is to *“cleave the darkness, raise the Earth-soul to Light, and bring down God into the lives of men”*.³

Sri Aurobindo’s intention is to bring the future closer to us, understanding by this term “future” the greater potentials of consciousness that are yet to be realized by us, according to his vision. His poetry is essentially the expression of those greater potentials which he had realized, in a form that has the power to raise the vibration and expand the capacity of consciousness. As such, it shows us glimpses of the future and leads us toward it.

In order to create a poetry which has this power, both the form and the intention of poetry as we know it must change, and he has stated specifically what the nature of the change must be:

*“A spiritual change must come over the intention and form... It is a transition from the lyricism of life weighted by the stress of thought to the lyricism of the inmost spirit which uses but is beyond thought that has to be made.”*⁴

It is a change from mind and its preoccupations with life, to what he calls a higher intuitive thought and vision which grasps the innermost reality of things themselves. It is a seeing and

energizing consciousness of the being of things, which is beyond our customary ways of thought and perception. We are in the habit of thinking that what we know is a representation of things which we construct, and that we cannot know the being of things themselves. That is what we are taught. But Sri Aurobindo sees it differently. (And we have been told this by Heidegger as well, who also believed poetry to be a path to the knowing of Being, as opposed to a mediated rational way of knowing.) That conventional way of knowing is a limitation of the mind as it has evolved thus far, but it is not a permanent or necessary limitation. We have to evolve another way of knowing and of relating to reality. And how is it that such a possibility exists? This question is answered by Sri Aurobindo in what I believe may be the most important statement he makes in his book *The Future Poetry*:

*“The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions,—a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is **the soul of the body of sound**: it is a superconscious Nature-Force raising its material out of our subconsciousness but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this Force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative Speech...”*⁵

It is the “soul of the body of sound” – this sound that you are hearing from me at this moment and which unites us all in a single consciousness of meaning carried by language. The innermost reality of this being of sound is a truth-force, a divine shakti, that has been evolving “in a

fundamental way” – through language, for at least the past 40,000 years of human development, and perhaps since the beginning of life 3.5 billion years ago. This *shakti*, which manifests at the height of human evolution as inspired speech, is known in the Veda as Savitri, and it is this power of illumined speech that Sri Aurobindo has invoked to show us the way beyond mind into an intuitive consciousness of Being itself.

In *Savitri*, the Lord of Love addresses the Goddess with these words that define her nature and her mission:

*“O Savitri, thou art my spirit’s Power,
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God.”*⁶

*“O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.”*⁷

With this understanding, Savitri ceases to be merely a mythical figure and becomes the body of rhythmic sound. As such she carries Sri Aurobindo’s intention to us through mantric speech. This is Savitri. She is not in this book. She is in this sound, and in nature and in the universe. And She puts us in touch with reality itself.

Here we may begin to perceive the unity of form and intention. But there is yet another essential element of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry that we must take into consideration, which he has also written about at length: quantitative metre. If we scan his poetry according to the conventions of English prosody, we will not experience its power and we will miss a large portion of its meaning. As he explains:

“If we are to get a true theory of quantity, the ear must find it. It cannot be determined by mental fictions or by reading with the eye. The ear too, in listening, must exercise its own, uninfluenced, pure hearing, if it is not to go astray. So listening, we shall find that intrinsic or inherent quantity and the positional sound values ... the traditional

scansion is probably not accurate. ...it may even be said that all quantity in English is determined by weight, all syllables that bear the weight of the voice are long, all over which the voice passes lightly are short."⁸

I have dwelt at length on this principle in my course because Sri Aurobindo wrote a very detailed 45 page essay late in his life on what is perhaps the most unique and powerful feature of his poetry. His essay *On Quantitative Metre*, included in recent editions of both the *Collected Poems* and *The Future Poetry*, examines the metric structure of English poetry in detail, in relation to classical quantitative metre, and shows how he has employed his extraordinary poetic genius and yogic concentration to blend the two, as the key to creating mantric rhythms in English which convey the innermost meanings of things. He refers repeatedly to this metric structure as "*intrinsic or inherent*". It is a fundamental, natural element of spoken language, and yet it had not previously been deliberately employed in English poetry in a systematic way, as he has succeeded to do.

In an amusing example, he writes: "*If you hear an irate voice shouting 'Get out of there, or I'll kick you,' and have sufficient leisure and equanimity of mind to analyse the rhythm of this exhortation, you will find yourself in the presence of an excited double iamb followed by a vehement antispast, and can then conscientiously determine the rhythm of your own answer.*"⁹ This is in fact the way we speak naturally in English.

Now, let us try to hear the master at work in the poem *Savitri*, which may ostensibly be considered a poem in iambic pentameter, but where the principle of quantity, or the natural weight of the voice, determines both the rhythm and the meaning of the line. In most cases we will hear either three or four quantitative feet overriding and determining the variations of the underlying five accentual feet of each line. And we will begin to understand how this rhythmic pattern carried out consistently for pages and pages of lines sets

up a resonance and receptivity in the listener that allows the lucid and vivid transmission of realities that we would probably otherwise not be aware of at all. Here, again, is the voice of the Lord of Love to Savitri:

*"While the dim light from the veiled Spirit's peak
Falls upon matter's stark unconscious sleep
As if a pale moon beam on a dense glade,
And Mind in a half-light moves amid half-truths
And the human heart knows only human love
And life is a stumbling and imperfect force
And the body counts out its precious days,
You shall be born into man's dubious hours
In forms that hide the soul's divinity
And show through veils of the earth's doubting air
My glory breaking as through clouds a sun,
Or burning like a rare and inward fire,
And with my nameless influence fill men's lives."*¹⁰

In just these few lines we can hear distinctly and see clearly, in the ambient space of hearing and seeing (not on the page), both the essential form and the intention of this poetry. Especially if we can sense a burning inward fire, and are aware of the limitations of our narrow, culturally conditioned intellectual knowledge, we will certainly appreciate the possibility that an inspired poetry might move us towards new ranges of consciousness. As for the sound, can you imagine reading the last two lines above as an iambic scansion would dictate?:

*Or burn/ing like/ a rare/ and in/ward fire
And with/ my name/ less influ/ ence fill/men's lives.*

Instead of:

*[Or burning] [like a rare] [and inward] [fire]
[And with] [my nameless influence] [fill men's lives]*

And when we read the four lines that begin with "*And...*" we can hear a perfect illustration of one of Sri Aurobindo's most explicit characterizations of the mantric form: "*the powerful sweep, the divine rush, or the assured truth of tread of that greater word music.*" These are the principles of

that poetry of the future already seen, heard and expressed by him in thousands of inspired and perfectly structured lines.

Finally, just a few lines further along, we may again hear the voice of the Supreme assigning to her, with that assured truth of tread and greater word music of the mantra, the role that she, the personification of illumined poetic speech, shall have in helping us to achieve our future realizations.

*“The Spirit’s mightiness shall cast off its mask;
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the world’s course:
It shall be seen in its own veiless beams,
A star rising from the Inconscient’s night,
A sun climbing to Supernature’s peak.
Abandoning the dubious middle Way,
A few shall glimpse the miraculous Origin
And some shall feel in you the secret Force
And they shall turn to meet a nameless tread,
Adventurers into a mightier Day.
Ascending out of the limiting breadths of mind,*

*They shall discover the world’s huge design
And step into the Truth, the Right, the Vast.
You shall reveal to them the hidden eternities,
The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,
Some rapture of the bliss that made the world,
Some rush of the force of god’s omnipotence,
Some beam of the omniscient Mystery.”¹¹*

Notes:

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, 1997 ed., p.324
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 282
5. Ibid, p. 289
6. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, 1993 rev. ed., p.703
7. Ibid, p. 698
8. Op. cit. (FP), p. 332
9. Ibid. (FP), p. 341
10. Op. cit., *Savitri*, p. 703
11. Ibid. p. 704

Rod Hemsell is a teacher and lecturer on Sri Aurobindo’s poetry and philosophy who has been involved in the University of Human Unity project in Auroville since it began in 2006, and he is also the Principal of New Era Secondary School.



Some autobiographical poems and statements of Sri Aurobindo (1893 – 1944)

Collected by Shraddhavan

In this significant year – the Centenary of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry – it is interesting to look at some of the main stages in Sri Aurobindo’s life as reflected in his poems. This sonnet dates from Sri Aurobindo’s early years in Baroda :

I have a hundred lives

*I have a hundred lives before me yet
To grasp thee in, O Spirit ethereal,
Be sure I will with heart insatiate
Pursue thee like a hunter through them all.
Thou yet shalt turn back on the eternal way
And with awakened vision watch me come
Smiling a little at errors past and lay
Thy eager hand in mine, its proper home.
Meanwhile made happy by thy happiness
I shall approach thee in things and people dear,
And in thy spirit’s motions half-possess,
Loving what thou hast loved, shall feel thee near;
Until I lay my hands on thee indeed
Somewhere among the stars, as ’twas decreed.*

SABCL 5:125

In it we see the young man who had come from England as a rationalist and agnostic already turning, under the influence of the atmosphere of his homeland, towards the sense of a divine Presence and a destined realization.

Another sonnet refers to an incident which occurred, he has said, during his first year in Baroda :

The Godhead

*I sat behind the dance of Danger’s hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist’s whim
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature’s grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.*

*Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.*

*His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I :
I housed in me the Everlasting’s peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot die.*

*The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.*

SABCL 5: 138

Three other sonnets written in the 1930s refer to experiences which came to Sri Aurobindo when he was travelling with the Gaekwar in the 1890s:

The Stone Goddess

*In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, -
A living Presence deathless and divine
A Form that harboured all infinity.*

*The great World-Mother and her mighty will
Inhabited the earth’s abysmal sleep,
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.*

*Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
The secret of her strange embodiment,*

*One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.*

SABCL 5: 138

Adwaita

*I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.*

*Around me was a formless solitude:
All had become one strange Unnamable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.*

*A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
Only an incommunicable summit reigned,*

*A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.*

SABCL 5: 153

The Hill-top Temple

*After unnumbered steps of a hill-stair
I saw upon earth's head brilliant with sun
The immobile Goddess in her house of stone
In a loneliness of meditating air.
Wise were the human hands that set her there
Above the world and Time's dominion;
The Soul of all that lives, calm, pure, alone,
Revealed its boundless self mystic and bare.*

*Our body is an epitome of some Vast
That masks its presence by our humanness.
In us the secret Spirit can indite
A page and summary of the Infinite,
A nodus of Eternity expressed
Live in an image and a sculptured face.*

SABCL 5: 154

These were first 'pre-yogic' glimpses; Sri Aurobindo's first major spiritual experience happened, he has told us, in January 1908 when, after the momentous Surat Congress of December 1907, he returned to Baroda to meet Vishnu Baskar Lele. As a result of the method of concentration shown to him by Lele, Sri Aurobindo found himself in what he has referred to as his 'Nirvana Experience'. Yet he was still

in the midst of his political action, and had no intention of giving it up. He found himself in a state of silent Brahman consciousness while committed to a round of political engagements in Pune, Bombay and elsewhere. The following undated sonnet refers to that experience:

Nirvana

*All is abolished but the mute Alone.
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
Grow inexistent now beyond belief;
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.
The city, a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief
Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.*

*Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
Replaces all, — what once was I, in It
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.*

SABCL 5: 161

In a letter, Sri Aurobindo said of this poem that it was :

...as close a transcription of a major experience as could be given in language coined by the human mind of a realisation in which the mind was entirely silent and into which no intellectual conception could at all enter. ... I felt with an overpowering vividness the illimitability or at least something which could not be described by any other term and no other description except the "Permanent" could be made of That which alone existed.

SABCL 9:735

Only a few months later, in May 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested under suspicion in what came to be known as the Alipore Bomb Case. He spent the next year as an undertrial prisoner in Alipore jail, much of the time in solitary confinement. About this period he says :

I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have

been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in a forest, in an ashram or hermitage. For long I had made a great effort for a direct vision (sakshat darshan) of the Lord of my Heart; had entertained the immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the World, the Supreme Person (purushottam) as friend and master. But due to the pull of a thousand worldly desires, the attachment towards numerous activities and the deep darkness of ignorance I did not succeed in that effort. At long last the most merciful all-good Lord (Shiv Hari) destroyed all these enemies at one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the yoga-ashram, Himself staying as guru and companion in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. The British prison was that ashram. ... The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God.

Tales of Prison Life p.2

The following two sonnets, written in 1939 and 1938 respectively, evoke two of the major experiences which came to him during that time of seclusion and intense sadhana :

Krishna

*At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
 Into this universe terrible and sweet,
 I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
 Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.*

*I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
 And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
 And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
 And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.*

*Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
 Life shudders with a strange felicity :
 All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
 Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.*

*For this one moment lived the ages past;
 The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.*

SABCL 5: 139

Cosmic Consciousness

*I have wrapped the wide world in my wider self
 And Time and Space my spirit's seeing are.*

*I am the god and demon, ghost and elf,
 I am the wind's speed and the blazing star.
 All Nature is the nursling of my care,
 I am its struggle and the eternal rest;
 The world's joy thrilling runs through me, I hear
 The sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.
 I have learned a close identity with all,
 Yet am by nothing bound that I become;
 Carrying in me the universe's call
 I mount to my imperishable home.
 I pass beyond Time and life on measureless wings,
 Yet still am one with born and unborn things.*

SABCL 5: 134

Sri Aurobindo spoke about these realisations in the first public address he gave after his release, at Uttarpara on May 30, 1909.

Less than a year later, following an Adesh from the Voice which had been guiding him since January 1908, he travelled to Pondicherry, arriving on April 4, 1910. There he immersed himself in study of the Vedas, where he found illuminating correspondences with his own inner experiences. This led him to his path-breaking interpretation of the Vedic texts, and the vision and aim which lies at the root of Indian civilization.

The series of poems entitled *The Meditations of Mandavya* was written in 1913. One section of this series seem to refer to an experience of that time :

While on a terrace hushed

*While on a terrace hushed I walked at night,
 He came and stung my foot. My soul surprised
 Rejoiced in lover's contact; but the mind
 Thought of a scorpion and was snared by forms.
 Still, still my soul remembered its delight
 Denying mind, and midst the body's pain
 I laughed contented.*

SABCL 5: 86

On March 29, 1914, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother met for the first time in the physical. About her, Sri Aurobindo has written :

The Mother is not a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. She has had the same experience and realisation as

myself. The Mother's sadhana started when she was very young. When she was 12 or 13 every night many teachers came to her and taught her various spiritual disciplines. Among them was a dark Asiatic figure. When we first met she immediately recognised me as that dark Asiatic figure whom she used to see a long time ago. That she should come here and work with me for a common goal was, as it were, a divine dispensation. The Mother was an adept of the Buddhist yoga and the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita before she came to India. Her yoga was moving towards a grand synthesis ... it was natural that she should come here. She has helped and is helping to give a concrete form to my yoga. This would not have been possible without her cooperation. One of the two great steps in the yoga is to take refuge in the Mother.

(In a letter to Arabinda Basu)

He has also written :

Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher – although I have written philosophy... . I was a poet and a politician not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because [Paul Richard] proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review – and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically.

SABCL 26:374

In the *Arya*, the philosophical review which Sri Aurobindo produced all by himself from August 1914 to January 1921, he produced, month by month in instalments, the chapters of all his major prose works : *Essays on the Gita*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Human Cycle* (then titled *The Psychology of Social Development*), *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Upanishads*, *War and Self-Determination* and so on. His *Essays on the Gita*, as well as the first Part of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, declare the ideal of the Divine Worker, which Sri Aurobindo also expresses in a sonnet of 1939 :

The Divine Worker

*I face earth's happenings with an equal soul;
In all are heard Thy steps: Thy unseen feet
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front. Life's whole
Tremendous theorem is Thou complete.*

*No danger can perturb my spirit's calm :
My acts are Thine ; I do Thy works and pass;
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.*

*In this rude combat with the fate of man
Thy smile within my heart makes all my strength;
Thy Force in me labours at its grandiose plan,
Indifferent to the Time-snake's crawling length.*

*No power can slay my soul ; it lives in Thee.
Thy presence is my immortality.*

SABCL 5: 143

Sri Aurobindo himself lived as such a Divine Worker, acting from his cosmic consciousness. Towards the end of the 1930s, he found himself called upon to exercise his spiritual Force to influence political events in the world, which he saw could have terrible consequences for the progress of humanity and the Divine Work if ignored and left unchecked. A fragment from 1938 evokes for us an aspect of his awareness at that time :

The Cosmic Man

*I look across the world and no horizon walls my gaze;
I see Paris and Tokio and New York,
I see the bombs bursting on Barcelona and on
Canton streets.
Man's numberless misdeeds and rare good deeds
take place within my single self.
I am the beast he slays, the bird he feeds and saves.
The thoughts of unknown minds exalt me with their
thrill,
I carry the sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.*

SABCL 5: 120

But dealing with political movements, even very momentous ones, was not Sri Aurobindo's main concern. His aim was a profound world-

transformation. This meant grappling with the mysteries of the subconscious and the inconscient:

Pilgrim of the Night

*I made an assignation with the Night ;
In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous :
In my breast carrying God's deathless light
I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.
I left the glory of the illumined Mind
And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.
I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
And still that weary journeying knows no end;
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond time,
There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.*

SABCL 5: 132

His central effort was directed at coming into touch with a higher level of consciousness than had yet been at work directly in the evolving world, and to bring it into manifestation here, so that its Power of Truth could work more sovereignly for the fulfilment of the human aspiration. That power, that state of consciousness, he called the Supermind. A sonnet first drafted in 1938 and completed in 1944 gives us a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's own personal experience of that state.

The Golden Light

*Thy golden Light came down into my brain
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to Wisdom's occult plane,
A calm illumination and a flame.*

*Thy golden Light came down into my throat,
And all my speech is now a tune divine,
A paean-song of thee my single note;
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.*

*Thy golden Light came down into my heart
Smiting my life with thy eternity;
Now it has grown a temple where Thou art
And all its passions point towards only Thee.*

*Thy golden Light came down into my feet :
My earth is now thy playfield and thy seat.*

SABCL 5: 134

It seems that when Sri Aurobindo left his body on December 5, 1950, in pursuance of the work that he and the Mother had been engaged in for so many years, he carried that Golden Light with him. Many have seen it emanating from his body for days before it was interred on December 9.

The fulfilment of their joint work came on February 29, 1956. The Mother announced the Supramental Manifestation in two messages published in the *Bulletin* of April 1956:

*Lord, Thou hast willed and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.*

*The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth
is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.*

*It is at work here, and one day will come when
the most blind, the most unconscious, even the
most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.*

CWM 15:126.fj.

Now it is one hundred years since Sri Aurobindo fulfilled the prophecy given by a South Indian mystic, arriving in Pondicherry on April 4, 1910 :

*The Yogi from the North (Uttara Yogi) was my own
name given to me because of a prediction made long
ago by a famous Tamil Yogi, that thirty years later
(agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from
the North would come as a fugitive to the South and
practice there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and
this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of
India He gave three utterances as the mark by which
this Yogi could be recognized and all these were found
in the letters to my wife.*

(SABCL 26:373)

Today we can begin to see some first external effects in the world of this immense work which Sri Aurobindo, in his compassion, undertook

for the benefit of the whole of humanity and the furtherance of the Divine Purpose.

Considering all that he has achieved, including the undying legacy enshrined in his mantric epic *Savitri – a Legend and a Symbol*, which the Mother

has characterised as “The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision’, an impressive undated fragment which is clearly one of Sri Aurobindo’s metrical experiments can serve very well as our tribute to him on this significant Centenary :

All Gratitude to Sri Aurobindo!

Seer deep-hearted

*Seer deep-hearted, divine King of the secrecies,
Occult fountain of love sprung from the heart of God
Ways thou knewest no feet ever in time had trod.
Words leaped shining, the flame-billows of wisdom’s seas,
Vast in thy soul was a tide washing the coasts of heaven,
Thoughts broke burning and bare crossing the human night,
White star-scripts of the gods born from the presses of Light
Page by page to the dim children of earth were given.*

SABCL 5: 603

Shraddhavan

This is the Sanskrit name given by the Mother in 1972 to a young Englishwoman who had left her country, after completing studies in English Language and Literature as well as Library Science, to join the up-coming project of Auroville. Since 1999 she has been the Project Coordinator of Savitri Bhavan, a centre of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother Studies in Auroville.



The Word in the Rig-Veda and in Sri Aurobindo's epic poem Savitri

The inspired poetic Word was the means of passing on knowledge and experience by the Vedic Seers and by Sri Aurobindo, especially in his epic Savitri. What do the Vedic seers and Sri Aurobindo in their poetic creations themselves tell us about the Word, its nature and usage?

by Nishtha

At the outset it must be said that this study is not exhaustive and does not intend to cover all relevant passages either from the Veda or from *Savitri*. Its central idea is simply to make potential readers more conscious of the great value of these mantric texts and point out a possible way to approach these divine gifts to aspiring humanity. In regard to the Veda it must be said right from the outset that there exists the special barrier of the Sanskrit language in general and the multi-layer meaning of Vedic terms in particular.¹ In addition there is the all-pervasive Vedic symbolism. Sri Aurobindo often calls the Vedic Rishis “symbologists” and refers back to the period of the composition of the Vedic hymns both as the age of symbolism and the age of intuition. In fact Sri Aurobindo also makes much use of symbolism. In this study we will see that the Veda and *Savitri* shed light on each other in their symbolism.

But let us first ask the general question: what do the Veda and *Savitri* have in common? They are both mystic mantric poetry of the highest order. Sri Aurobindo refers to the Veda – certainly among Indian literature and scriptures, and perhaps even beyond – as “our supreme poetry”.²

They both bring forth an integral vision of reality and transmit it as revelatory knowledge and verifiable experience (and that does not exhaust the subject.)

What is the basic difference between them? *Savitri*, in its outer form, is one single epic poem written by one sole author, whereas the Rig-Veda consists of a collection (*samhita*) of more than one thousand hymns (*suktas*, meaning perfect utterances) of many different seers, spanning a time of at least several centuries. Even though some of the *Suktas* are made up of a considerable number of verses or stanzas they generally do not reach the length of any of the cantos which we find in the twelve books of *Savitri*. From that point of view one could say, with a few exceptions, that the Vedic hymns are even more concise than any paragraph in *Savitri*. Still, all Vedic hymns presume a common background, and many of them are related to the same theme but present it from different standpoints, a practice which we also find within the different books of *Savitri*.

It is a known fact that Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* makes abundant use of Vedic imagery as the carrier of his knowledge and experience. It might be worthwhile to remember in this context that in the period from 1912 up to perhaps 1920 Sri Aurobindo was studying and writing on the Veda on an almost daily basis, and also translated hundreds of its hymns into English. Among other reasons, it could have as well been due to this preoccupation with the Book of Mantra (the traditional name given to the Veda) that Sri

1 It is hoped that the content of this study might act among other things also as a catalyst for some readers to learn the Sanskrit language themselves, in order to have direct access to the Vedic mantric poetry.

2 In this context it is also necessary to mention the fact – of which hardly anyone even in India seems to be aware today – that besides the so-called Vedic chanting (which most likely was developed millennia ago to simply preserve the text and allow a single human being to retain by heart without distortions thousands of verses) these ancient hymns could also be read as metrical poetry. That Sri Aurobindo knew this – and even implied this fact when time and again he refers to the Veda in his work “The Future Poetry” – can be ascertained by his mentioning the need to restore the metre of some verses while he worked on their translation. And also Western

academic scholarship – even though until today it is not able to appreciate the esoteric meaning of these inspired hymns – has recognized this from the 19th century onwards and in recent years has created the website “Rigveda Metrically Restored Text”.

Aurobindo conceived the idea to do something of the kind – even though in a different form – for the present age in the much more easily accessible English language. At the same time we should not forget the fact that already before this period Sri Aurobindo was an accomplished poet and seer. But, knowing on one hand how central is the usage (and its constant mentioning in hymn after hymn) of the inspired Word to the Vedic seers, and on the other hand how much and in detail Sri Aurobindo writes about this fact in “*The Secret of the Veda*”¹, one could still dare the thought that it might have inspired him to do something similar.

The common vision in the Veda and in Savitri of the transcendent origin and creative power of the Word.

Let us begin now with some practical comparisons in regard to the transcendent origin of the Word as mentioned in the Veda and in Savitri. In Rig-Veda I.164 we read:

In the imperishable (place) of the illumining Word in the Transcendent Ether, all the Gods have taken their seat. Who does not know this (place), what can he do with the illumining Word (of the Veda)? But they, who know it, they sit here together in union. (39)

The radiant One has expressed herself in the forming of the flowing Waters. From one plane (of existence) she has manifested herself in two, in four, in eight, in nine planes. She is the imperishable with thousand (syllables) in the Transcendent Ether. (41)

From her flow out the oceans; by that live the four directions. From that moves the unmoving; by that lives the universe. (42)

In Savitri we find the following lines:

*A glimpse was caught of things for ever unknown:
The letters stood out of the unmoving Word:*

¹ For example: “To turn thought and word into form and expression of the superconscious Truth which is hidden beyond the division and duality of the mental and physical existence was the central idea of the Vedic discipline and the foundation of its mysteries.” (CWSA 15:433 fn)

*In the immutable nameless Origin
Was seen emerging as from fathomless seas
The trail of the Ideas that made the world ...*

(p. 40)

Each of the four last lines of Savitri can be related in many ways to one or other image of the above lines of the Rig-Veda; for example, we meet in all three verses the term “akshara”, which can be translated as unmoving, immutable, or imperishable. That is why we can relate “*The letters stood out of the unmoving Word*” as well as “*In the immutable nameless Origin*” to the above “*imperishable (place) of the illumining Word in the Transcendent Ether*” and to the “*imperishable with thousand syllables*”. Another correlation can be seen between “*Was seen emerging as from fathomless seas / The trail of the Ideas that made the world*” and the above “*From her flow out the oceans ... From that moves the unmoving; by that lives the universe*”.

From all this we can also deduct that on the transcendent plane or the superconscious we find an infinite potentiality of sound-forms, of which, in the context of human language, only a limited selection can be expressed through the organ of speech. Furthermore, in this context it is interesting to note that “akshara” is, in the later tradition, not only one of the names for the sacred syllable OM, but also the general name for all syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet, perhaps so as to suggest that each of its sounds is still connected with its imperishable origin, “the unmoving Word”. Then it is no surprise that in the Tantra all Sanskrit syllables are called “matrikas”, meaning little mothers.

Here are more lines from Savitri:

*In a sublimer and more daring soar
To the wide summit of the triple stairs
Bare steps climbed up like flaming rocks of gold
Burning their way to a pure absolute sky.
August and few the sovereign Kings of Thought
Have made of Space their wide all-seeing gaze
Surveying the enormous work of Time:
A breadth of all-containing Consciousness
Supported Being in a still embrace.*

*Intercessors with a luminous Unseen,
 They capt in the long passage to the world
 The imperatives of the creator Self
 Obeyed by unknowing earth, by conscious heaven;
 Their thoughts are partners in its vast control.
 A great all-ruling Consciousness is there
 And Mind unwitting serves a higher Power;
 It is a channel, not the source of all.
 The cosmos is no accident in Time;
 There is a meaning in each play of Chance,
 There is a freedom in each face of Fate.
 A Wisdom knows and guides the mystiered world;
 A Truth-gaze shapes its beings and events;
 A Word self-born upon creation's heights,
 Voice of the Eternal in the temporal spheres,
 Prophet of the seeings of the Absolute,
 Sows the Idea's significance in Form
 And from that seed the growths of Time arise.*

(p. 271)

*Onward he passed to a diviner sphere:
 There, joined in a common greatness, light and bliss,
 All high and beautiful and desirable powers
 Forgetting their difference and their separate reign
 Become a single multitudinous whole.
 Above the parting of the roads of Time,
 Above the Silence and its thousandfold Word,
 In the immutable and inviolate Truth
 For ever united and inseparable,
 The radiant children of Eternity dwell
 On the wide spirit height where all are one.*

(p. 282)

*The body's rules bound not the spirit's powers:
 When life had stopped its beats, death broke not in;
 He dared to live when breath and thought were still.
 Thus could he step into that magic place
 Which few can even glimpse with hurried glance
 Lifted for a moment from mind's laboured works
 And the poverty of Nature's earthly sight.
 All that the Gods have learned is there self-known.
 There in a hidden chamber closed and mute
 Are kept the record graphs of the cosmic scribe,
 And there the tables of the sacred Law,
 There is the Book of Being's index page;
 The text and glossary of the Vedic truth
 Are there; the rhythms and metres of the stars
 Significant of the movements of our fate:*

*The symbol powers of number and of form,
 And the secret code of the history of the world
 And Nature's correspondence with the soul
 Are written in the mystic heart of Life.* (p. 74)

Let us now look at three verses from a hymn to Agni, where we see how the Vedic seers seek after the higher planes of the Word. The translation is by Sri Aurobindo (in *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*).

*To thee men illumined come with their thinkings for
 the conquest, to thee the imperishable One [comes]
 with her thousands. (VII.15.9)*

*Let him become the father of the Father in the womb
 of the Mother; let him break out into lightnings in
 the Imperishable, let him take his seat in the native
 home of the Truth.*

*O wide-seeing Fire, God who knowest all births that
 are, bring us the Word with its issue, the Word whose
 light shines in Heaven. (VI.16,35,36)*

The different levels of the Word.

With these last lines we come now to another most important aspect of the Divine Word, namely its manifestation on different levels of consciousness. The “imperishable One” (*Akshara* in fem. gender) means here the Divine Mother in “the native home of the Truth”, which most likely relates to the transcendent and supramental level of the Word. In this context let us come to another quote from Rig-Veda I.164:

*The Word has been measured/out in four planes. The
 possessors of the Word of the soul, who have the intuitive
 intelligence, know them. Three are hidden in the secret
 cave and give (outwardly) no sign; the fourth (material)
 plane of the Word speak the humans. (45)*

In *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo refers to the creative aspect of the Word and to the “secret cave”:

*In the system of the Mystics, which has partially survived
 in the schools of Indian Yoga, the Word is a power; the
 Word creates. For all creation is expression, everything
 exists already in the secret abode of the Infinite, guhā*

hitam, and has only to be brought out here in apparent form by the active consciousness. Certain schools of Vedic thought even suppose the worlds to have been created by the goddess Word with sound as the first etheric vibration to have preceded formation. In the Veda itself there are passages which treat the poetic measures of the sacred mantras,—anuṣṭubh, triṣṭubh, jagatī, gāyatrī,—as symbolic of the rhythms in which the universal movement of things is cast. (p. 270-71)

It is in the later Tantric tradition that the four planes of the Word have been systematized into the following categories:

Parā-vāk, the supreme or transcendent Word;
Paśyantī-vāk, the seeing or illumining Word;
Madhyamā-vāk, the middle or connecting Word;
Vaikharī-vāk, the material or spoken Word.

Sri Aurobindo refers in *The Future Poetry* to these different planes of the Word, and especially to Paśyantī-vāk as the highest and most desirable form and goal of poetry:

The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions,—a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscient Nature-Force raising its material out of our subconsciousness but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this Force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative Speech, and the Tantric psychists supposed that this Power acts in us through different subtle nervous centres on higher and higher levels of its force and that thus the word has a graduation of its expressive powers of truth and vision. One may accept as a clue of great utility this idea of different degrees of the force of speech, each separately characteristic

and distinguishable, and recognise one of the grades of the Tantric classification, Pashyanti the seeing word, as the description of that degree of power to which the poetic mind is called to elevate itself and which is original and native to its manner of expression. The degree of word-force characteristic of prose speech avails ordinarily to distinguish and state things to the conceptual intelligence; the word of the poet sees and presents in its body and image to a subtle visual perception in the mind awakened by an inner rhythmic audition truth of soul and thought experience and truth of sense and life, the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object. The prosaist may bring to his aid more or less of the seeing power, the poet dilute his vision with intellectual observation and statement, but the fundamental difference remains that ordinary speech proceeds from and appeals to the conceiving intelligence while it is the seeing mind that is the master of poetic utterance. (p. 289-90)

Here is a passage from *Savitri* on the divine Inspiration that may give us a description of Pashyanti Vak or the Seeing Speech in its purest form:

*Oft inspiration with her lightning feet,
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind
Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things.
A music spoke transcending mortal speech.
As if from a golden phial of the All-Bliss,
A joy of light, a joy of sudden sight,
A rapture of the thrilled undying Word
Poured into his heart as into an empty cup,
A repetition of God's first delight
Creating in a young and virgin Time.
In a brief moment caught, a little space,
All-Knowledge packed into great wordless thoughts
Lodged in the expectant stillness of his depths
A crystal of the ultimate Absolute,
A portion of the inexpressible Truth
Revealed by silence to the silent soul.
The intense creatrix in his stillness wrought;
Her power fallen speechless grew more intimate;
She looked upon the seen and the unforeseen,
Ungessed domains she made her native field.
All-vision gathered into a single ray,*

As when the eyes stare at an invisible point
Till through the intensity of one luminous spot
An apocalypse of a world of images
Enters into the kingdom of the seer.
A great nude arm of splendour suddenly rose;
It rent the gauze opaque of Nescience:
Her lifted finger's keen unthinkable tip
Bared with a stab of flame the closed Beyond.
An eye awake in voiceless heights of trance,
A mind plucking at the unimaginable,
Overleaping with a sole and perilous bound
The high black wall hiding superconscience,
She broke in with inspired speech for scythe
And plundered the Unknowable's vast estate.
A gleaner of infinitesimal grains of Truth,
A sheaf-binder of infinite experience,
She pierced the guarded mysteries of World-Force
And her magic methods wrapped in a thousand veils;
Or she gathered the lost secrets dropped by Time
In the dust and crannies of his mounting route
Mid old forsaken dreams of hastening Mind
And buried remnants of forgotten space.
A traveller between summit and abyss,
She joined the distant ends, the viewless deeps,
Or streaked along the roads of Heaven and Hell
Pursuing all knowledge like a questing hound.
A reporter and scribe of hidden wisdom talk,
Her shining minutes of celestial speech,
Passed through the masked office of the occult mind,
Transmitting gave to prophet and to seer
The inspired body of the mystic Truth.
A recorder of the inquiry of the gods,
Spokesman of the silent seeings of the Supreme,
She brought immortal words to mortal men.

(p. 38-39)

In some of these lines one is reminded of verses from the Hymn X.125 where Vak, the Goddess of the Word, herself speaks:

I am the shining queen, the gatherer of the luminous treasures, the original Consciousness-force of all powers that take part in the sacrifice. The gods established me widely at many places as the one who enters multiply and is present manifold. (3)

... Whom I desire, I make him strong; I make him the possessor of the Word of the soul, a seer, one wise of understanding. (5)

On the head of this (manifestation) I bring forth the Father; my birth-place is in the Waters within the Ocean. From there I spread out along all the worlds of becoming and with my top touch the transcendent Heaven. (7)

Verily, I blow like the Wind and take into my rapturous grasp all the worlds and their beings. I have become manifest in a measure of greatness that is beyond this earth and beyond heaven. (8)

Besides the emphasis on the "Seeing Speech", *The Future Poetry* also mentions the formation of the Word as the Mantra:

*What would be the ideal spirit of poetry in an age of the increasingly intuitive mind: that is the question which arises from all that has gone before and to which we may attempt some kind of answer. I have spoken in the beginning of the Mantra as the highest and intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression. What the Vedic poets meant by the Mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm, chandas. For the seeing could not be separated from the hearing; it was one act. Nor could the living of the truth in oneself which we mean by realisation, be separated from either, for the presence of it in the soul and its possession of the mind must precede or accompany in the creator or human channel that expression of the inner sight and hearing which takes the shape of the luminous word. **The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form. And in the mind too of the fit outward hearer who listens to the word of the poet-seer, these three must come together, if our word is a real Mantra; the sight of the inmost truth must accompany the hearing, the possession of the inmost spirit of it by the mind and its coming home to the soul must accompany or follow immediately upon the rhythmic message of the Word and the mind's sight of the Truth.** That may sound a rather mystic account of the matter; but substantially there*

could hardly be a more complete description of the birth and effect of the inspired and revealing word, and it might be applied, though usually on a more lowered scale than was intended by the Vedic Rishis, to all the highest outbursts of a really great poetry. But poetry is the Mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. And the ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the Mantra because always it was this inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The Mantra in other words is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite. (p. 217-18)

To understand better the above description of the Mantra, let us have a look at a relevant passage from *The Secret of the Veda*, in which we find perhaps more distinctively a first clue for our own approach to both the Veda and Savitri:

The mantra, though it expresses thought in mind, is not in its essential part a creation of the intellect. To be the sacred and effective word, it must have come as an inspiration from the supra-mental plane, termed in Veda, Ritam, the Truth, and have been received into the superficial consciousness either through the heart or by the luminous intelligence, manīṣā. The heart in Vedic psychology is not restricted to the seat of the emotions; it includes all that large tract of spontaneous mentality, nearest to the subconscious in us, out of which rise the sensations, emotions, instincts, impulses and all those intuitions and inspirations that travel through these agencies before they arrive at form in the intelligence. This is the "heart" of Veda and Vedanta, hṛdaya, hṛd, or brahman. There in the present state of mankind the Purusha is supposed to be seated centrally. Nearer

to the vastness of the subconscious, it is there that, in ordinary mankind,—man not yet exalted to a higher plane where the contact with the Infinite is luminous, intimate and direct,—the inspirations of the Universal Soul can most easily enter in and most swiftly take possession of the individual soul. It is therefore by the power of the heart that the mantra takes form. But it has to be received and held in the thought of the intelligence as well as in the perceptions of the heart; for not till the intelligence has accepted and even brooded upon it, can that truth of thought which the truth of the Word expresses be firmly possessed or normally effective. Fashioned by the heart, it is confirmed by the mind. (p. 271-72)

This double aspect of the Mantra we find time and again mentioned in the Rig-Veda.

The thought (from the heart, mati) approaches the seven-rayed Lord of the Word (Brihaspati), the wise in understanding with the intuition of the Truth ...

With intense longing my affirming words go as messengers to the Divine Mind (Indra), — my yearning perfect soul-thoughts (sumati), that touch the heart and are spoken through the mind ... (X.47.6,7)

In this context we may recall some lines from *Savitri*:

*In the heart's profound audition they can catch
The murmurs lost by Life's uncaring ear,
A prophet-speech in Thought's omniscient trance. (p. 54)*

A Voice in the heart uttered the unspoken Name... (p. 41)

In regard to the important term Brahman – which is so central in the Veda, and which later in the Upanishads has become the word for the supreme reality itself – we find in *The Secret of the Veda* yet another passage where Sri Aurobindo goes more into detail:

Brahman in the Veda signifies ordinarily the Vedic Word or mantra in its profoundest aspect as the expression of the intuition arising out of the depths of

the soul or being. It is a voice of the rhythm which has created the worlds and creates perpetually. All world is expression or manifestation, creation by the Word. Conscious Being luminously manifesting its contents in itself, of itself, tmanā, is the superconscient; holding its contents obscurely in itself it is the subconscient. The higher, the self-luminous descends into the obscure, into the night, into darkness concealed in darkness, tamas tamasā gūḍham, where all is hidden in formless being owing to fragmentation of consciousness, tucchyenābhvapithitam. It arises again out of the Night by the Word to reconstitute in the conscient its vast unity, tanmahinājyāyataikam. This vast Being, this all-containing and all-formulating consciousness is Brahman. It is the Soul that emerges out of the subconscient in Man and rises towards the superconscient. And the word of creative Power welling upward out of the soul is also brahman.

The Divine, the Deva, manifests itself as conscious Power of the soul, creates the worlds by the Word out of the waters of the subconscient, apraketam salilam sarvam,—the inconscient ocean that was this all, as it is plainly termed in the great Hymn of Creation. This power of the Deva is Brahma, the stress in the name falling more upon the conscious soul-power than upon the Word which expresses it. The manifestation of the different world-planes in the conscient human being culminates in the manifestation of the superconscient, the Truth and the Bliss, and this is the office of the supreme Word or Veda. Of this supreme word Brihaspati is the master, the stress in this name falling upon the potency of the Word rather than upon the thought of the general soul-power which is behind it. Brihaspati gives the Word of knowledge, the rhythm of expression of the superconscient, to the gods and especially to Indra, the lord of Mind, when they work in man as “Aryan” powers for the great consummation. It is easy to see how these conceptions came to be specialised in the broader, but less subtle and profound Puranic symbolism into Brahma, the Creator, and Brihaspati, the teacher of the gods. In the name, Brahmanaspati, the two varying stresses are unified and equalised. It is the link-name between the general and the special aspects of the same deity. (p. 318-19)

Here are the opening verses of Rig-Veda IV.50 to Brihaspati, which bring us right into the heart of our theme:

O Brihaspati, they (the ancient seers) who take delight in the perfect perception and vibrate (with its flow) have (here) extended it for us – variously overflowing, streaming forward, wide and unquenchable. O Lord of the Word, protect its place of birth (the origin of its rising).

Here is an illuminating passage from Sri Aurobindo’s commentary on this hymn:

... the Rishis, meditating on the intuitions that rise up from the soul with the cry of Brihaspati in the sacred and enlightening Word, holding them firmly in the thought, became illuminated in mind, open to the full inflow of the superconscient. They were thus able to bring into the front of the conscious being that activity of the soul-thoughts which works usually in the background, veiled, and to make it the leading activity of their nature ... The ancient Rishis attained to the most rapid vibration of the movement; the most full and swift streaming of the flux of consciousness which constitutes our active existence, no longer obscure as in the subconscient, but full of the joy of perfected consciousness,—not apraketam like the Ocean described in the Hymn of Creation, but supraketam ... With this attainment of the full rapidity of the activities of consciousness unified with its full light and bliss in the human mentality they have woven for the race by the web of these rapid, luminous and joyous perceptions the Truth-consciousness, Ritam Brihat, which is the womb or birth-place of this conscient being. For it is out of the superconscient that existence descends into the subconscient and carries with it that which emerges here as the individual human being, the conscious soul ... (p. 320-21)

What the Vedic seer is describing in the above verses, we could also apply to our own studying of the Veda in general, as well as to the reading of Savitri in particular. For there, Sri Aurobindo also has brought for us into expression the supreme Word or “cry” of Brihaspati and when we meditate on those intuitions that arose from his soul, we can also get illumined by them, meaning we can get in touch with their light and power and awake to a new and higher perception of ourselves and everything else and allow it to mould our life. And through that we are also participating

The immortals, who were born before, have established for our immortality this cherished illumining Word (or, ray of light, arka). We invoke Brihaspati, the unobstructible, the pure-sounding sacrificial power of all dwelling-places (of the soul). (5)

He indeed is the pure One who seeks the purity, who with hundred wings and a golden shaft (of light) swiftly conquers the Sun-world. The Lord of the Word, sublime, he fully enters (the heart) and most creates for his friends a multiple sublimated (delightful) energy. (7)

Heaven and Earth, the two divine mothers of him the divine, have made Brihaspati grow by their (increased) might. O Friends, discern him, the Discerning one. May he create for the Word of the soul (Brahman) perfect passages (beyond) that are easy to cross. (VII.97.3,5,7,8)

Here are a few verses from another hymn where again we meet the two universal powers most needed for the efficacy of the Mantra. In the last verse is expressed in a most beautiful way how the presence of the Divine soul can increase in this world of darkness and ignorance.

Sincere in their thoughts and expressing the Truth the sons of Heaven, the heroes of the Almighty, - the Angirasas, establishing the plane of the illumined seer (the Sun), have held in their thoughts the original abode of the sacrifice.

With a true mind seeking the Herds of Light they approached with their thoughts the Lord of the Herds of Light (Indra). And the Lord of the Word (Brihaspati) with his self-yoked powers that protect each other from all lack of expression released upward the rays of illumination.

Nishtha Müller was born in 1956 in Germany and settled in Auroville in 1981. Already in the nineteen-seventies he had come in contact with the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and felt especially attracted to Sri Aurobindo's epic poem Savitri and his writings on the Veda, which he studies ever since. In recent years he is dedicating most of his time to Vedic research along with teaching Sanskrit grammar. During the past two years he also has written over a dozen articles on the Veda in the light of Sri Aurobindo for a widely read German magazine.

When he has conquered the plenitude in its universal form and has ascended Heaven with its highest seats, they make to grow the Lord of the Word, the fertilizing spirit, wherever they are, (for) they carry the Light in their mouth. (X.67.2,8,10)

To conclude this study, here are some more lines from Savitri and the Rig-Veda which might be seen as mutually-illuminating.

*Even now great thoughts are here that walk alone:
Armed they have come with the infallible word
In an investiture of intuitive light
That is a sanction from the eyes of God;
Announcers of a distant Truth they flame
Arriving from the rim of eternity.
A fire shall come out of the infinitudes,
A greater Gnosis shall regard the world
Crossing out of some far omniscience
On lustrous seas from the still rapt Alone
To illumine the deep heart of self and things.
A timeless knowledge it shall bring to Mind,
Its aim to life, to Ignorance its close. (p. 258)*

A soulful thought (mati) spoken from the heart and shaped into an affirming hymn moves towards the Divine Mind its Lord. When it is expressed it remains awake in the finding of knowledge. O Divine Mind, acknowledge what now comes into birth for you.

Ancient (and supreme) it indeed comes into birth from Heaven. Being expressed it remains fully awake in the finding of knowledge, - dressing itself in happy white robes. This is the ancient-born intuitive thought (dhi) of the Fathers. (III.39.1,2)



Auroville is 40 Years old ... and the Future

Marc Luyckx Ghisi

1. First contact with Auroville in 2005

The first time I came to Auroville, I came without any prejudices. I wrote an article about my first impressions in *Auroville Today* (February 2005). Is it a sect? Is it a bunch of crazy people in the wilderness? What is it? I carefully observed and I brought my wife with me, six months later. She is a therapist. And I asked her: “What is your feeling?” — because usually we are very complementary as she sees things that I don’t see. And she answered: “There is something here! There is some special and powerful spiritual energy. But it is not an easy task for the Aurovilians. I also feel a lot of suffering, because it’s not easy to live together in human unity without any conflict.”

I had three lives

I had three lives: first as a Catholic priest and Ph.D in Greek and Russian theology. This life ended when I married. My second life was in politics as an advisor to the President of the European Commission (executive and legislative power of the European Union) and now I am in my third life, which is more devoted to new education systems (Management Schools), writing books and advising (Auroville).

When I come to Auroville, often something completely unexpected happens to me. Not what I had expected... but just another thing is coming to me as a gift from elsewhere... That’s really special. I have received more from Auroville than I have given. I don’t even know if I have given something. But Auroville’s spiritual energy has produced unexpected spiritual changes in me. It’s a gift.

Exceptional beings... and a shadow.

Whenever I speak to any Aurovilian, I am always full of admiration. Almost everyone here has gone through a spiritual journey and is ready to speak about it.

And Aurovilians know each other, accepting the cultural and gender differences. They know each other, they work together, they appreciate each other, they deeply love each other – despite differences in language, race, mentality, or culture. There is a huge potential of “Human Unity” here.

At the same time the shadow of the “City of Human Unity” is there. As sometimes happens, the same people who love each other and appreciate each other suddenly cease to speak to each other for mysterious reasons...and for years. Auroville’s very shadow is the lack of human unity. Sometimes small conflicts can occur. Sometimes big conflicts are pumping everybody’s energy.

Danger of divinising Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

The more I think about Jesus, the more I think that the church has wrongly “divinised” this eminent prophet who was saying very deep and simple things like “the divine kingdom is inside each of you”. Which is what all the mystics in every religion always told us. But people seemingly didn’t like this simple but very demanding message, so they invented a new religion: Christianity. And this new Religion was exactly what Emperor Constantine needed in order to stabilize its empire.

I am not a specialist on Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Don’t ask me to dispute about this or that aspect of their teachings. But it seems to me

that they always said that they refused to create another religion.

And so it makes me sad when people seem to divinise Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, in the sense of creating a “new religion” centred on them. I feel this is exactly the opposite of what they had intended.

There is a difference between taking Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as a door of access to experience, and institutionalising them as the last possessors of the final Truth. The spiritual experience of who Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are is one thing. The fabrication of a belief and a means to legitimize one’s power and authority over others is another, which has nothing to do with spiritual experience. We have tried this already in the European Middle Ages with the Christian Inquisition.

2. Auroville is 40 years old. What has been achieved so far?

Still There:

The first strength of Auroville is that it is still there. It is one of the only 1968 initiatives which is still alive. In French TV, they had a big program on the subject: “What is left from the year 1968 projects?” What happened with all those alternative communities that were created then? Almost nothing is left: Auroville plus a few others like Findhorn in the North of Scotland and some “ecovillages”. That is all.

Exceptional spiritual journeys, but shadow:

The second strength is that whenever you ask people here, everyone has a beautiful and deep story to tell about a spiritual fight inside during one year, 10 years, 15 years, 40 years... Everyone has a story of “letting-go”, “surrendering”. It is remarkable. But, as I said before, this big light has also a shadow side of a comparable size. How to go through this collective shadow? I do not know. Until today, I have not found any therapist or spiritual Master who could help solve the problems linked to the collective shadow.

Very high level of Energy:

I also think that Auroville is a place with an exceptionally high level of energy. Matrimandir is a masterpiece. When I visited it for the first time after its completion, a word came to me: “*Opus Magnus*”. This is a Latin word that the alchemists were using in the European Middle Age, to name the transmutation of lead into gold, but more deeply, the internal spiritual transformation of the alchemist himself into an enlightened being. That was *the* “Greatest Work”, the most important work to be done in life.

Matrimandir is a “Great Work” in many senses. It is a transmutation of matter into gold, into a “chef d’oeuvre”, an architectural masterpiece. But it is also a symbol of the birth of humanity into another level of consciousness. It is finally, last but not least, an active symbol of the coming down of the supramental into humanity. It is enacting concretely what it symbolizes.

Matrimandir is for me like a “energy condensor”. It condenses the cosmic energy in a very powerful way. I would compare it with the French cathedrals which are also “energy condensers”. And my impression is that Matrimandir is about five times more powerful than the French cathedrals. If you are inside the Matrimandir, you have the choice between closing up because the energy flow is too intense, or opening up, and accepting to be transformed. There is no other choice. And some people don’t like that. Some other people come from far...

This means also that life in Auroville is a hard life because of this very high level of energy.

Sustainability and green alternatives:

Auroville is leading the way in many domains like wind energy, sustainable agriculture and energy, cleaning the landscape (Adyar Poonga Chennai project), sustainable town planning, alternative architecture, innovative education, social entrepreneurs, alternative healing, new gift economy, etc. Auroville has been for 40 years a pioneering place in many areas. It has

been globally faithful to Mother's charter. But the future is there...

Governance:

When I first came here, one of the most difficult points that appeared to me has been governance. How to invent a new system of governance which goes beyond democracy, and at the same time diminishes violence, enables the city's development and makes community life easy and fluid?

I have the impression that positive steps have been done in the good direction, even if there is discussion about them. Positive steps in politics are most of the time *silent*, because people complain only when things are going wrong. Globally, the community is slowly taking more things in hand.

- *The Working Committee* is working more efficiently and is better accepted by the Community. Working Committee after Working Committee, I see an improvement. This body begins to act in a way which becomes like an "executive" power of Auroville. And this is needed if the city wants to grow. Evidently Aurovilians will have to redefine this executive power in a new way. But in a city of 5000 inhabitants, outsiders have to be able to meet someone who is in charge, a kind of executive power. The pressure for this executive power increases also.
- *The Residents Assembly* is trying to reflect the citizens' opinions. Some do not agree and underline that the assemblies are not numerous enough. This is true. But is there not any progress? I feel there is. Will this body mature enough to represent really the public opinion of Auroville? Will it become a kind of "legislative body" of Auroville? Will it become like Auroville's Parliament? And is there any alternative than to mature towards a ("legislative") decision-making body? Will Aurovilians gradually understand the crucial difference between executive and legislative power?

- *Devolution:* Whenever I interact with the Governing Board of Auroville I see each time the further development of more and more devolution of power to the Aurovilians. Devolution is enacted concretely. The actual management of L'Avenir's transition is a good example of this devolution process. This pushes the Aurovilians to act more and more in a responsible way. And they are slowly finding their own way of governance.
- *Transparency:* Transparency is also increasing in a very subtle way. Accounting becomes more transparent. Not all and not yet fully, but there is a trend towards it. Once again, is there an alternative?
- *Auroville's protection by the Indian Government:* I have been happy to read an internal letter of the Prime Minister of India (dated of 2009) to some fellow Ministers. My interpretation of this letter is that the highest level of the Indian government wants really to protect Auroville as much as it can. This is excellent news. What I have understood is that, in order to enact this protection, their strategy is to *find ways to enhance the international status of this experimental city*. Will it be by UNESCO World Heritage status or another enhanced status? My understanding of politics is that the enhancement of Auroville's status is probably the only possibility to solve the difficult pending problems of Visas and Tax exemption. Auroville has allies at the highest levels of the Indian State. This is really good news. Nowhere else in the world would this be possible.
- *And the co-signing of all cheques by the Secretary of the Foundation?* My opinion is that in every country in the world, every administration has the tendency to control everything, because it is more safe. This is true also in France, Belgium, Germany, etc. I thus understand fully that this trend of "controlling" Auroville has emerged. And I also understand that this has provoked a lot of anxiety among the Aurovilians. This controlling trend had to be countered, and it has been done in a slow but efficient way. Nobody speaks about it now anymore. It is over.

- *And the judiciary power?* For the moment, if I have understood well, there is a de facto informal judicial power in Auroville: the Auroville Council. In a city becoming more important, will this Council not have to enhance its judicial competence? And not only in Indian but in international law systems? Should we not think about more jurists?

3. And Auroville's future?

The world consciousness is risingand catching up with Auroville ?

The world consciousness in matters of sustainability and collective survival is rising quickly. My impression is that the actual world is catching up very rapidly in this green economy and other innovative concepts and sustainable practices promoted by Auroville. Is there a danger that Auroville could lose its attractive force? I do not think so. Here is why:

The link between those innovative practices and the spiritual dimension is crucial.

The good news is that this spiritual dimension is really and deeply present here. Auroville contains a vast potential of genial innovators, precisely because everyone here tries sincerely to relate him/herself to the divine. And as Nicholas Berdiaev¹ once said, creativity happens when one relates to the divine inside. Creativity is a way to the divine. This happens in Auroville. But the challenge to Auroville will perhaps be to make this divine dimension more and more explicit, although in a very discrete way.

European (Western) youth is looking for this new link between sustainability and spirituality:

When I see my own children and European youth today, I feel a shift. They are attracted to Auroville not so much for the alternative technology, for the social innovations in governance and economy. Most of them are post-Christian and they are

looking for a new (transmodern) synthesis, a *new link* between a tolerant and (post religious) divine dimension in their lives and those new sustainable ways of living which they are also looking for. They want to prepare a future for the next generations, but they are also looking for an internal growth process. Why is Sadhana Forest so interesting for a lot of young people? Because it allows a very concrete spiritual experience of reconnection with nature. That's what the young generation is looking for: this new blending of spiritual dimension with the social and technological innovation. Auroville can provide this. How? Could this be more developed?

Did Auroville manage to bring Mother's spiritual message to the villages around ?

I am very impressed by all that Aurovilians have realized in and with the surrounding villages. They have greatly improved the material conditions of those villages. And they have created also a new generation of Tamil Aurovilians who are like the ambassadors of Auroville to the Tamil community.

But did Auroville succeed in transmitting enough the spiritual power of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's vision? Or did Aurovilians listen to what the Tamil community in Auroville and in the villages had to bring to them from Mother's message? Is the problem of the surrounding Tamil villages only a material problem? Are Aurovilians sufficiently touching the souls of Tamil people? And have the Tamil people many things to teach to us Western people? Are we Western people not too mental? Could we dream of a new type of dialogue on the spiritual dimension of life with the Tamil villages around? Allow me to dream of a new win-win type of dialogue between Auroville and the villages where everyone would bring its most intimate richness of soul.

Shifting from the industrial capitalist society to a post-industrial knowledge society.

In the first years Auroville had to plant trees and grow food. There was no other possibility. This was the agricultural phase of Auroville. The great

¹ Nicholas BERDIAEV: *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916) 1955.

<http://www.amazon.com/Meaning-Creative-Act-Nicolas-Berdiaev/dp/1597312622>

majority of jobs were in agriculture. And the only solution was a maintenance system. Then came slowly the industrial phase. Some companies were created, and some have succeeded in creating jobs and profits for the city.

We definitely will keep agriculture and industry but this is not where we will create the majority of the future jobs.

Today the whole world is shifting full speed to a post-industrial and post-capitalist knowledge society. Will Auroville lead the way in this shift or will it just follow?

Auroville has a potential to lead the way. That is why it has organized two Congresses on "Business and New Consciousness in the Knowledge Economy". This means also the the new jobs will be mostly *knowledge jobs*. It is urgent that 500 knowledge jobs be created here in Auroville for the young generation.

One question: how to imagine the future of the maintenance system

The "Maintenance system" has been established in the agricultural and industrial phases of Auroville. I am asking myself if the city will be able to maintain this system in its actual form, in the knowledge economy phase in which it is entering.

I am impressed by the important implicit knowledge present in almost all Aurovilians. Is it not time, now that the Matrimandir is completed, to push more Aurovilians to offer this knowledge/spirituality to the outside world in making it more explicit? Why not to value their important – but still implicit – competence in the outside world in a new way, while spreading Auroville's vision in a more expanded way? This could presuppose for some to work outside and earn a salary that is then given to the Unity fund?

Why not study seriously an alternative money system inside Auroville?

Why not also create new companies in Auroville that apply the Arvinda Eye Hospital model which is very much valued abroad¹. In short this hospital has two doors, one for the paying clients (20%) and another for the non-paying clients. And they are not making losses. Could this model not be applied here in some cases in Auroville?

At a deeper level, I also see Auroville as a precious place to learn and discover a new relation with money. Mother as a visionary was far ahead of the current system. We have a beautiful challenge of viewing *money as a positive force which is more inside us than outside*. All the growth in that direction is simple and linked to the growth in consciousness. Collectively we should also be making a shift. We live in a industrial society and a lot of our thoughts are still governed by the current system, and *fear of money* is one of them. In the knowledge economy, I have the intuition that money could be working at another energy level. So let us prepare for the future, by raising our money consciousness.

Auroville has the potential to be leading in this transition:

Yes, here once again, I think Auroville has a lot of potential. Because what is not yet written in the books is about the *new* management of this *new* society which is more human centred, and qualitative. And it *presupposes a higher level of consciousness: you cannot manage networks of knowledge creation and thus human creativity, like you manage a car assembly line at GM*. In Europe, in US, China and in India, the trend is to put the new (knowledge economy) wine in the old (industrial) bottles.

In other words most of the companies manage the new post industrial knowledge creation process with the old industrial machine-centred and

¹ See V. Kasturi Rangan and R.D. Thulasiraj : *The Aravind Eye Hospital, commentaries by Larry Brilliant and Girija Brilliant; Geoffrey Tabin in "Innovation" a quarterly Journal published by MIT Press, Vol 2, issue 4, Fall 2007.*

materialistic mentality. It is understandable, but it does not work. And this is one of the elements which is creating the world crisis we are in.

This is also the case in India where the majority of companies have still an industrial mentality, including some IT companies. My dream here would be that Auroville could become an important hub of the network of people working at the creation of a *new post-industrial Indian Dream*.

This is the main reason why I believe in the the creation of AIIM. (Auroville International Institute of Management). But are the Aurovilians enough aware of this transition?

This leads to a second dream I have for Auroville...

4. I have a Dream : Auroville as “Maverick University” for the 21st century

I am very positively backing the idea circulated in the Governing Board of the possibility for Auroville to become one of the 14 “Innovation Universities” (or the 15th maverick) envisaged by the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development. But Auroville should receive a “maverick” status, allowing a maximum of creativity and NO constraints.

Auroville has the seeds of such university. It should be a University for the 21st century, preparing students for a really sustainable and socially inclusive world with a spiritual non-religious dimension, a world of Human Unity.

CIRHU and UHU are already seeds of this idea. Further I see other germs all over Auroville. Here are some I see:

1. Center (“faculty”?!) of Intercultural Learning and Leadership for the 21st Century: Seed = Last School + all the village action groups.
2. Center of World Medicine, open to all medicines: Seed = Kailash Institute.
3. Center of Psychology and spiritual healing and growth: Seed = association of Auroville Therapists + Quiet group + etc.

4. Center of Sustainable agriculture: Seed = Farm Groups, etc and the botanic garden research + etc.
5. Center of Sustainable architecture: Seed = Satprem Earth Institute
6. Center of Economy & Finance: Seed= Auroville associations of (alternative) Business, ABC + groups studying alternative money systems.
7. Center of Management (for rich and poor): Seed = AIIM (Auroville International Institute of Management).
8. Center of Knowledge Economy and Management: Seed = Auroville Collaborative.
9. Center of Environmental Education: Seed = Joss' initiative in Chennai. Botanical Garden farms of Auroville
10. Center of reconnection with the cosmos: Seed = Sadhana Forest initiative.
11. Center of barefoot dentistry: Seed = Jacques Verré's action in the villages and in Auroville.
12. Center of body and mind reconnection, and new ways to spiritual growth through the body: Seed = a lot of research going on in Auroville, + Aloka & Joan... see their book.
13. Center of advanced language teaching, and healing of child disorders: Seed = Language Laboratory and Tomatis Therapeutic Institute.
14. Center of sustainable energy systems: Seed = Aurore & CSR Research Institute
15. Center of water: Seed = Aquadyn + Harvest + Palmyra.
16. Center of Bio Food: Seed = Mallika Sarabai's movie on Auroville's potential in this field.
17. Center of Women's empowerment: Seed = Bhavana. Tamaray. Upasana
18. Center for International kitchen and hotel management
19. Center of social entrepreneurship: Seed = Upasana, Well Paper / Small Steps / Kapas' organic cotton project / Tsunamika / Varanasi weavers.
- 20.

Method

The main principle would be

- “Learning by living and doing”
- Learning to be.
- Applied spirituality
- and afterwards, critical reflection with tutors.

The “students/ volunteers/ trainees” should go from one “Center” to the other. I just indicate a few Centers. There are many others. But this will and must function in a totally holistic way.

Curriculum

One should rather quickly imagine a 2 year curriculum, (= 2 year visas !!)

- where students can go from one center to another with certain rules.
- Where every student receives a tutor (who can be an eminent professor from abroad, or not). But we will need some big names to make things more acceptable.

Diploma/ certificate ?

It is also evident that we would not deliver any official recognized diploma but we will change

and transform the students preparing them for the coming century, in such a way that they will be accepted everywhere. The certificate could state :

'Mr/Ms has actively participated in and experienced the creation of a new type of society which we absolutely need for the 21st century. Here are the disciplines she/he has touched most: 1, 2, 3, 4.

The approach is experiential; it has taught her/him to BE. To be a a continuous learner, who is able to manage his/her continuous education by him/her self. She/He is more a learner than a “knower”.'

IBM, Infosys, Tata, Sun Microsystem, SAP, etc. Through my contacts at the highest level inside companies like IBM, TATA, INFOSYS, be it Indian or foreign business, I am convinced that they could be so interested in this type of new education system that they could propose contracts to all students coming out. This could be the way forward...to create a lot of *knowledge jobs* in Auroville.

MARC LUYCKX GHISI has advised presidents of the European Commission Jacques Delors and Jacques Santer. He was a member of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission from 1990 to 1999. In 2003, the innovative Cortugli Business Academy was founded in Zagreb with the support of the World Business Academy, pointing businesses toward the concept of profit as a consequence of the way one works for the common good. Ghisi is Dean of that school, which also prepares its students for the Knowledge Society and the EU Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010). He is also Senior Advisor to Business Solutions Europa in Brussels and Vice Chairman of the Auroville International Advisory Council, Auroville.



One Asia for One World

Jyoti N. Eri



New energies of light penetrated to our red earth during the month of February 2010. It was a first event in the history of Auroville: “ONE ASIA 2010” Auroville Asian Cultural Month was like a kimono which we offered at the feet of the Mother. Here I offer the story of its weaving process.

The present world is struggling with the idea of a globalization which is formed on a national, political and economical basis; here in Auroville we started a first experiment towards the unity of Asia through a spiritual and cultural approach. The current world map is based on national divisions, but from a spiritual or cultural point of view we have different definitions and currents of exchange which give us a totally different way of looking at the present state of the world. For spirituality, we can not deny the great contribution of India as one of the largest spiritual centres on Earth. One great significance of this cultural event was that it

took place in India, in her evolutionary psychic centre, Auroville.

Where is Asia in Auroville?

This Asian cultural exchange program started with an inspiration. Ever since I started my new life in Auroville in 2005, I was constantly feeling that I wanted to bring East Asian culture to Auroville, particularly the beauty of its art and culture. I have learned a lot of new things here, especially the great dynamism of spirituality in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; but I also found some things missing: something of the beauty and refinement emerging from receptivity to Nature that is characteristic of East Asian art and culture, and also some of the material perfections. Since I had a background in traditional art from my childhood in Kyoto, I always felt that I needed to contribute my experience to Auroville.

Auroville is a Universal township – naturally the people, energy and work of the Far-Eastern

countries are necessary, but I felt that we are not integrated enough into the everyday basis in Auroville because of the comparatively small representation of East-Asian peoples. At the same time, many non-Asian Aurovilians carry an Asian Spirit as one of their identities. So a strong need was felt to nourish and deepen their inner qualities.

There are Asian language classes, classes in Ikebana, Aikido, Tai Chi Chuan, even Calligraphy classes are held regularly in Auroville. In addition we prepare art exhibitions and dinner evenings. Following the increase of Asian cultural activities and more Newcomers from China, Korea and Taiwan, the idea of some collective cultural event emerged. Also, from 2008 onwards, suddenly many connections with East Asian art masters began to get established around myself and created an organic link among them. I felt as if I were observing an amazing chemical reaction. And the central medium of this happening was “Tea”.

Main theme, “Tea culture”

Tea drinking is quite particular in the Eastern countries and it may be difficult to understand for people who are not accustomed to Asian tea and have not experienced a “Tea Ceremony”. For example, a Tea Ceremony is conducted as a form of spiritual practice in daily life. Tea preparation, tea drinking and tea appreciation are one of the Arts which are applicable and valuable for life in any circumstances. This is why Tea Ceremony practice is called Cha-Dao or Chado—The Way of Tea.

Tea culture in the East comprises many layers of Asian aesthetics, such as architecture, garden design, flower arrangement, calligraphy and painting, music, poetry, pottery and handicrafts, martial-arts, philosophy, costume design as well as tea farming. Therefore the tea ceremony is a form of collective art and manifests a universal quality. It is very interesting to compare the various forms of tea ceremony from the various countries to discover their unique characteristics. The Tea Ceremony is practiced as a great instrument for creating peace and harmony

within diversity. But the procedures vary widely. This is why I chose the Tea Ceremony as the main theme of the event, although I didn’t know whether or not it really fits to Auroville. I started the preparation in an attitude of “let’s see what will happen”; but at the same time I had a silent certitude within myself.

Four renowned Tea Masters from China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan

One of the invitee tea masters, Master Chow Yu from Wisteria Tea House in Taiwan, conducted the tea ceremony according to Taoist and Confucian tradition – two main streams of spiritual tradition in Chinese culture before the rise of Buddhism. He explained the present situation of traditional Chinese culture in Taiwan. His father fled from communist China, therefore he grew up in a strong spirit of freedom since he was a student. One could sense his strong love of Chinese culture and wish for its unity in his talk, but he expressed them in a gentle and respectful manner. It is commonly thought that Taoism, which aims for individual achievement, and Confucianism, which aims at social achievement, are in confrontation, but Master Chow Yu explained that really they are complementary and give depth to each other. He said that the finest tea has subtlety in it. The search for this subtlety leads the drinkers into deeper contemplation and inner awakenings in a meditative state, and this profound experience takes us towards a unity of apparent contradiction or polarity. He aims to be a bridge between the past and future of Chinese culture and is very active in hosting exhibitions and stage performances of both traditional and modern art in his tea-house cum art-gallery. Here is a living example that tea culture can work to bridge diversities. A quiet and profound but aspiring freedom fighter is Master Chow Yu.

Master Liu Di was born in Yunnan province of China. She was born in a family which owns a tea-plantation and tea-house in Yunnan. She became the youngest and the first female tea master in an all-China tea ceremony contest. Currently she is learning about Eastern tea culture in Kyoto,

Japan, for her Ph.D. One of her dreams is to revive the cultural level of the Tang dynasty in China. The Tang dynasty is celebrated as the golden age of China and tea culture played a large part in its cultural development. Artefacts from the Tang dynasty are still recognized as the highest aesthetic of Chinese art. One reason for the flourishing of Tang culture was “Cosmopolitanism”. Master Liu Di practices Zen, and she was very happy to visit Kanchipuram, birthplace of Bodhidharma, the legendary founder of Zen. During her stay, she was also able to discover some of the cultural links between China and India by looking at the context of Silk Road culture. Her tea ceremony was presented in choreographic style and was graceful, noble and open-hearted. It caught the heart of the audience at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium as well as of the guests at individual tea ceremonies.

Another master is Rev. Kumgan Snim from Korea, who is actually a Zen monk and head priest of Miwangsa temple at the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. He offers and drinks tea with visitors to his temple from all over the world. He gives meditation retreat courses to participants ranging from neighbouring farmers to foreign Zen practitioners. Tea is an important refreshment during the meditation practice as it helps for constant concentration and energy. He says that he does not use the term “tea ceremony” but prefers “tea sharing”, as the word “ceremony” suggests something ritualistic and formal. He thinks the practice should be much more casual and accessible to everybody. Mental silence, humbleness and sincerity were particularly discovered in him by the audience through his way of tea. A Bhikshu — a shaven Buddhist monk — offering a tea ceremony in India was an inspiring sight all of us.

Master Soen Bisgaard is of Danish origin; he took Sannaysa in India at the age of 20 and became a tea ceremony practitioner in Japan when he was 30. Now he has been living in Kyoto, Japan, for 33 years and teaching the way of tea, mainly for Japanese and Danish students. He also promotes

the Japanese tea ceremony to Western countries. He learned and teaches the way of tea from the 400 year-old tradition of the Urasenke tea school in Kyoto. His presence was unique, as he could describe the Japanese tea ceremony through Western eyes and also from a Yogic point of view. He says that tea practice is an “active meditation” and requires concentration, perfection and harmony in every present moment; respect towards the guest for heart to heart communication, and purity in the whole setting are necessary to create an atmosphere of oneness. These compare well with the lights of traditional Yoga. He strongly emphasized the importance of discipline towards perfection in daily life, not only during the tea ceremony itself. With him, there were two major things that we glimpsed – Japanese’s intimate relation with Nature through the inner contact, and strong self-discipline for perfection. One could look at the Japanese tea ceremony as an instrument for sadhana.

Some tea masters offered tea ceremonies for Aurovilians and guests in small groups. The atmospheres were all unique but intimate and communicative. There were lots of discoveries and exchanges amongst the invitee masters and Aurovilians.

All the invitees carried their own spiritual tradition, and for them this event was the occasion for a first encounter with the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They did not have enough contact with the texts but their experience of visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and staying in Auroville, especially meditation in Matrimandir and their encounters with Aurovilians, were a first glimpse of the spirit of Integral Yoga.

Tea as a daily beverage

The ancient texts call tea —*camellia synensis*— “Immortal nectar” or “Rejuvenation Elixir”, particularly, it is suggested, when it is combined with the knowledge of Chi-Kong—the subtle energy practice. The latest scientific research describes some specific medical properties that confirm the remarks of the ancients. Tea contains a lot of Vitamin C. A bowl of Japanese powdered

green tea contains the equivalent of 10 kg of lemon – that is an unusual amount. And *Cathecin* is a recent discovered antioxidant substance that works directly on the cells. It helps damaged cells to recover their normal functioning and increases their activity. Therefore it has become known that tea can prevent cancer and has the possibility to transform cancer cells. Green tea in particular contains a lot of *Cathecin*. Thein (or Caffein) is contained in tea but the *Cathecin* counterbalances the negative effect of Thein which is physical excitement and restlessness. Nowadays, Taoists and Zen Buddhists practice the tea ceremony because of its medical effects. Tea also stimulates lymphatic drainage and reinforces the immune system. Those who practice Integral Yoga could deepen research on tea, as it has interesting effects on the physical/cellular level.

Other events

Apart from the visit of these four Tea Masters, we also invited *Tai Chi* Masters Professor Dung Shu-Hai and Master Yu, as well as *Gu-Qin* —Chinese harp— Master Wang Tai-Qin from Taiwan. A visiting Taiwanese vegan cooking group presented a workshop and a dinner evening for the community. There was a Noh theatre mask and calligraphy exhibition by a Japanese artist couple and dance performances by Ramli Ibrahim from Malaysia, a Tamil folk dance group and a group of visiting Tibetan students from Dharamsala and Chennai. A collective Asian Lunar New Year celebration was held on 14th of February. A photo exhibition “The Mother in Japan” took place in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. From Auroville, a group art show titled “Another Way of Tea”, an Ikebana Exhibition, a photo exhibit on the Golden Pavilion and various other exhibitions were held during the month. Many Auroville and Ashram artists were advised and encouraged by the visiting traditional art masters.

A Challenge for Everybody

In Auroville, there was not enough material nor organizational efficiency for receiving the invitees.

There is no comparison with the social structure and precise order in the Far Eastern countries. Some invitees had to suffer from this different flow of life that India has, a particular sense of time and procedure. Some of the expectations of the invitees were not fulfilled. Because of this, we the organizing team had to suffer together with them. But eventually most of the invitees expressed their satisfaction with the event and promised to visit Auroville again. It was a great joy to hear and also a relief for the staff. I am calling this event “a challenge for everybody”; but in fact, everything worked out very well, arranged beyond our human effort. It was indeed the moment from wonder to wonder, to see how things are perfectly placed from the invisible level to the visible level. It was nothing but *sadhana* for all the participants. There are many bright memories of moments with them; for example; we never thought that these masters would like to drink Indian Chai from roadside tea shops during the trip. The group of *Tai Chi* masters were amazed by the nature in India. Since *Tai Chi* Masters are sensitive to the subtle energetic field, they appreciated *Chi/Prana* particularly in Matrimandir and at the Samadhi in the Ashram. Grand Master Prof. Dung humorously remarked to Auroville’s *Tai Chi* teacher Marco and his wife Liliana “Maybe you don’t need to practice *Tai Chi* so hard in Auroville because the energy here is so strong, naturally daily life will be a *Tai Chi* practice.”

Achievement

I would like to share two secrets which made ONE ASIA 2010 a success. First, all the 12 invitees contributed their own flight tickets. For all of them, the visit to Auroville was for the first time, but they understood well the spirit of Auroville and its voluntary basis. Secondly, the willing participation by Aurovilians, their goodwill and intuitive approach helped in many situations. Those factors are beyond our personal effort and they gave a spark of living light and subtlety to the entire event. Most importantly, the light still remains with a feeling of gratitude in our hearts, even a long time after the event.

Future of ONE ASIA

The report of ONE ASIA 2010 was widely spread, going to UNESCO, H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama, Embassies, The Asian Society and other official institutions and individuals. Now the Taiwanese tea master is preparing an event introducing Auroville; also, a collaboration event with the Japanese Tea Master was held at his tea house in Taipei. The Korean master is willing to come back to Auroville to share the knowledge of Zen meditation with Aurovilians. Some tea masters are setting up their tea ceremonies using Auroville artists' works. The Chinese tea master is conducting his tea ceremony as a collaboration with an Auroville unit, Rangoli. In Auroville, Japanese and Chinese tea ceremony practices are being continued by the Aurovilian group. Some plans for future Asian events have come up. The One ASIA 2010 event was a significant contribution for the development of Auroville's International Zone, as for the first time Auroville Asian nationalities worked together for the community.

Vision

ONE ASIA 2010 is dedicated to the unity of the world, ONE WORLD. The unity of Asian peoples will contribute a lot for the world, as was clearly mentioned in some statements by Sri Aurobindo, particularly in his five dreams mentioned in his Independence Day Message of 15th August, 1947 for All India Radio. To realize this Dream, we have to take the necessary measures; historical, political and racial sensitivity might come up during the process; we need to be ready and receptive, also introspective to find the solution of those problems. Action for Unity is often presenting us with some essential difficulties, but that is only a necessary passage to go through. Spiritual aspiration will help us for the realization since its discovery leads us to inner Oneness. For this passage, I believe that Auroville is one of the most appropriate places, as we all came to live here with goodwill to realize Unity in Diversity.

I am particularly grateful to India as our host country for her great capacity for this great

adventure, her wisdom and generosity. I offer my sincere thanks to the Indian participants who considered the achievement of ONE ASIA important. We need to understand a lot about our neighbour countries and their cultures, religions, political situations and histories. The Islamic and Sufi culture is also active in Asian countries, but it was not represented this time. Other East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Mongolia as well as central Asian culture were not featured, apart from Ruslan's Kazakhstan yurt presentation. There is a lot of work to be done to make the project more complete.

So far, the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been well-accepted in India and the Western world. Now the door to the East is starting to open. We are receiving more people from the Eastern countries in Auroville over the last five years and we need to be ready to offer more information for those who are interested, who are athirst for the truer life and its willing participants. Many Chinese translations of the works of Sri Aurobindo have already been made by F.C. Hsu who lived in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the 1950s. A Japanese translation of "*The Life Divine*" and other works were completed by Professor Yamaguchi from Meiji University in Tokyo, and some informative books about Auroville have already been published in Korea. New people with aspiration and new energy are still awaited in Auroville. Auroville also needs to create further links with Eco/Self-sustainable Village projects from the Eastern countries and needs more collaboration with alternative and renewable energy researchers.

Tradition, Integration and Evolution

Some people have asked me why we invited so many of those traditional art masters who are linked to the knowledge of the past. Here is my answer: we present-day human beings in general have the tendency to judge and criticize the traditional and to blindly accept the new. Traditional society is often comparatively rigid and their structures may be unsuitable for the present day, but many jewels are also contained in them. It is necessary to know precisely about

their wisdom and accept the gifts of the traditions. Only then can we integrate it as one of our identities. Immediate or undigested rejection of the past will not give any powerful vision for the future. We are in Auroville where past and future creates “no contradiction”.

As organizer I hereby express my deepest gratitude to the supporters of ONE ASIA 2010 for their willing help, generosity and perseverance.

Thank you very much for all who made ONE ASIA 2010 possible and successful. And I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to SAIER and especially to Helmut who offered me the opportunity to write this article for *Ritam*. This offer was overwhelming to me at first, but now it has turned out to be a great opportunity to look upon the event as a whole, with fresh eyes.

My dearest Mother, what is next?

Jyoti N Eri, was born in a renowned artist family in Kyoto, Japan. He spend more than ten years for the apprenticeship of the traditional sculptures.

In Auroville, Jyoti is a calligraphy teacher and works in the field of art and culture. He also conducts comparative research on art in general through the light of Integral Yoga.

He wishes to bring the beauty of East Asia in Auroville.



A new approach to sustainability

by Alon Yakolchik and Batel Dinur

Auroville is expected to undergo a big change in the near future; by this social and physical infrastructures will be affected as well as the natural environment. Up to now, some Aurovilians have been very much involved in the organizational and administrative work trying to understand the overall picture of Auroville's evolution, while others have been less involved and some have even ignored it altogether. From now on, each participant in the Auroville experiment who will not try to understand the whole picture might find him/herself excluded from the new opportunities that arise.

Up to now, Auroville's development has been, by and large, a spontaneous development; each person was able to enjoy the freedom that the lack of central organisation implied, and find his/her unique way of being part of this unconventional experiment.

This phase in Auroville's development seems to have reached its full capacity; economically, it becomes more and more difficult to cater for the basic needs of 2000 inhabitants, while socially it is no longer a small group of pioneers willing to share the same plate.

Auroville's social and physical complexity is about to increase and Auroville should get ready to enter this new, perhaps less spontaneous and more "conscious," phase of its development. "Conscious" here doesn't have to mean more rules and regulations, only a collective consensus on a way to utilise the new possibilities which face Auroville, in a way that will benefit it, and thereby avoiding future conflicts. It is perhaps this unique point – described beautifully by complexity scientists "the edge of chaos" – which

is critical in any complex system's development – that can lead either to complete chaos or to a new, more advanced stage in a system's development pattern.

The spontaneous process of any society's development can be described as "subconscious" in that it is carried out before a conscious understanding has been fully acquired. The term "subconscious" is used to refer to those instances in which human beings pursue a new line of activity in any field without a conscious knowledge of the end results toward which they are moving, the obstacles and essential conditions for success, and the stages and principles governing the process of accomplishment.

Some Aurovilians think that there is no need to plan Auroville's development and that the whole idea is to let unorganised activities spontaneously create the society and the city's structure. According to Jacobs¹ et al. there is one central characteristic that most clearly distinguishes development from other forms of social change, but whose importance may not always be appreciated because it is largely non-material in nature. That characteristic is *organisation*. The essential nature of the process is the progressive development of social organisations and institutions that harness and direct the social energies for higher levels of accomplishment. Society develops by organising all the knowledge, human energies and material resources at its disposal to fulfill its aspirations. When Mother was approached with the idea that "many in Auroville say that an organised working is not desirable in Auroville; they are for spontaneous working," Mother responded: "*Spontaneous work can be done only by a man*

of genius. Is there anyone claiming to be a genius?”²

So how can Auroville move from a spontaneous, “subconscious” process of gradual development into a more organised, “conscious” and possibly more rapid development process? How can it develop an organizational structure which is flexible enough to enable decision making and at the same time allow the Auroville experiment to continue without leading it into a complete chaos?

Aromar Revi³, an international sustainability consultant, suggests the need for identification of potential areas of strengths in which initial development in Auroville can move ahead. This may be an important step in encouraging a new kind of reflection within Auroville’s community, which can generate a more conscious engagement where choices need to be made within the community and in relation to the external world.

According to Jacobs et al⁴, the success of any planned development effort depends on its ability to provide the necessary conditions and elements required for natural development. The stages that both processes must traverse and the principles that govern them are otherwise the same. Many planned development efforts fail because they are initiated with insufficient understanding of the essential conditions and the steps necessary to mimic the natural social process.

It may therefore be important to understand the natural, spontaneous process of Auroville’s development up to this point in time before attempting to take up any new organisational framework. This, according to our point of view, should be done through a participatory process of revealing the essential vital energy that exists in Auroville and generating a platform for its continued evolution. Sri Aurobindo sees the vital part of us as *“necessary to our completeness, but it is a true instrument only when its feelings and tendencies have been purified by the psychic*

touch and taken up and governed by the spiritual light and power.”⁵

The direction in which Auroville will choose to proceed depends on its accumulated knowledge as well as on its increasing awareness of the emerging opportunities and challenges that it faces. Jacobs et al. claim that the energy that drives the process is determined by the intensity of the collective social aspiration for higher levels of accomplishment released by this accumulated knowledge and growing awareness and that these in turn are strongly influenced by the level of organisation of the social collective. From this it can be concluded that social organisation is important not only as an outcome of such a process but also as its generator. In other words, the way in which Auroville is currently organised can be the tool or obstacle for its further development. A new energy or will for change, in itself, is not enough to drive this change forward, but it should be accompanied by an appropriate organisational structure that can accommodate it. It is therefore important for Auroville to invest some time and energy in defining a new organisational structure for itself that can enable it to rise to its next level of development.

L’avenir realized this challenge and decided to work towards developing a new approach to planning. That brings us to our role and our reason for coming here. From our point of view, ecological planning is firstly about recognizing the organisational vitality of a place. This requires at the same time a possibility to experience the place as “an insider,” as well as an ability to systematically analyse it as an observer.

We begin by dividing the collective into three fields of reference: the physical, the social and the natural. We choose to name them: (1)physical infrastructure, (2)social infrastructure, and (3) natural environment. Each field of reference, according to our observations, contains within it several sectors or ‘action groups’. In the physical infrastructure we identified: architecture, solid waste, water management, energy, mobility,

housing and food. In the social infrastructure we identified: health, education, economy, culture, communication, guests & newcomers, governance and villages. And in the natural environment we identified: agriculture/farms, forests, horticulture and land management.

Within each one of these sectors we begin to map the actual existing Auroville units and projects which compose it. We believe that the mere action of recognising one's position within and in relation to the whole system that is Auroville can make a difference. Simply by becoming aware of one's role within the whole, one's perspective can change. Or as Mother put it herself: "*One should make an effort to recognise the existence of the whole, that's all. It is to widen one's consciousness, just to become a little less tiny.*"⁶

A second step in the ecological mapping is to become aware not only of one's position within the whole but also of one's relationships with the other parts that compose the same whole. This is an important step which is usually not an easy one to take. It is at this stage that conflicts surface and disagreements arise. But it is also a beautiful stage where fruitful links are acknowledged and shared, and new collaborations suddenly become possible.

If we consider all possible links between the different sectors in Auroville, there are close to two hundred links that can be examined, but the initial stage is perhaps for each sector to identify the important links that it should put its emphasis on and develop from there.

The main assumption behind our proposal is that increased connectivity implies increased sustainability. The more connections that can be generated between the different units, projects and sectors that compose Auroville, the more sustainable Auroville will become. Systems thinking, ecological philosophy and complexity sciences all teach us that the connections between the parts of a system are the "essence" of that

system, its vital force. The more connections that exist between the different parts and different levels, the more resilient the system is considered to be – i.e. more sustainable.

Now, how does all of this relate to town planning and to Auroville's future planning in particular?

The main idea is to shift the focus of attention from the investment in isolated projects, which together compose Auroville's physical, social and natural landscape, into an investment in the interlinks among projects. What does this mean in reality?

Firstly, and most importantly, it entails reaching a consensus about the future line of development for Auroville. What is the main aim of Auroville? Is it still the same aim that Mother intended? If so, then how can it be manifested under today's ground reality? What is the economy going to be like in 15-20 years? What is people's standard of living going to be like? What is the future of the villages within Auroville? What is education going to be like? These are all essential questions that must be answered before any further development can take place, otherwise Auroville will soon be given away to local and international market forces (a process which has already begun), just like any other city in the world.

We would like to propose that planning is not just about designing roads, buildings and water bodies; these, in fact, are the outcomes of a much more complex task of decision-making on a plethora of interconnected issues regarding people's desired way of life. Auroville, as an experimental city, claiming to be the new "*city the earth needs*," should take its planning process very seriously, as an ongoing opportunity to bring its spiritual vision into material manifestation. It should ideally engage all its citizens in a conscious decision-making process regarding their future and the future of their shared vision. Ideally, Auroville should be able to continue its development in line with its original vision and aims, taking into consideration current ground

realities, which will allow its spontaneous, “subconscious” vitality to continue to flourish in a more conscious way

Planning rules and regulations may not be adequate in Auroville in the same way they are anywhere else in the world, since Auroville’s freedom is its main asset.

If Auroville wants to remain an experimental city and continue to draw people from all over the world who come to participate in an experiment and not simply live a relaxed life in a beautiful environment, then it should aspire to develop a unique planning process which is experimental in itself.

We therefore suggest that a substitute to planning rules and regulations in Auroville may be a set of questions that can guide an experimental and collaborative planning process. The questions will provide guidelines for anyone in Auroville who wishes to develop a new or already existing project in a direction that will promote increased connectivity with other Auroville projects. This will ensure, at least to some extent, that any development within Auroville will have to comply with certain agreed guidelines, not through imposed regulations, but through increased linkages.

In this way the “subconscious” development process will not be eliminated nor suppressed, but

kept in line with the aims of the Auroville project. According to Tan⁷, it is not the conscious mind but the subconscious mind that does the work of manifestation. You have to think about what you want at the start, and then “let go” by letting your subconscious mind take over the manifestation process. One will have to state what one wants at the starting point, and then one will receive a set of questions to guide the manifestation process. One will then have the creative freedom to think about ways to link with other Auroville projects. The planning permission will be based on the contribution of the project to the whole.

Notes:

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Agriculture in Transition - an Auroville view

by Bernard

Contrasting Perceptions

Organic farming is defined as a system of practices inspired by ecological processes in nature. It is a method of learning from and working in harmonious cooperation with natural processes and natural wealth. Beyond this a deeper philosophical and spiritual dimension can be stipulated – and this is where organic farming finds itself diametrically opposed to current conventional agriculture – expressing itself in an attitude of care and respect for all life on earth or a perception that Nature is Sacred. Most of the variants of organic farming such as nature farming, natural farming, biological agriculture, permaculture, bio-intensive and bio-dynamic agriculture can, if not entirely then largely, be covered by this definition.

Conventional agriculture, also referred to as chemical, intensive, or modern farming, on the other hand ends up coercing and exploiting nature in the name of maximizing food production. It is a constant struggle against the natural processes in which man has to overcome nature. Its underlying principle can best be illustrated by the word “cide” which means to kill; pesticide, insecticide, fungicide, nematocide, germicide, vermicide, bactericide leading ultimately to ...homicide ?

Another feature of this system is the “thingification” of the living. Plants and farm animals are ‘things, commodities’ with ‘x’ value or none. After sexing layer chickens, male chicks are roasted and fed to their little sisters. The leftover parts of slaughtered cattle, unfit for human consumption, are recycled within the industry, into animal feed for other cows. This feat of cannibalism has given the world a new type of sacrifice, that of offering hundreds of thousands of cows and birds on the

altar of the many armed goddess of so-called efficiency, utility or profit margins.

Organic farming follows and enhances the path of evolution while chemical farming entails devolution.

A number of allegations tend to stigmatize organic farming as primitive, unenlightened, an unproductive enterprise, good for the rich who can afford its produce but insufficient to feed the mass of the world’s population. These charges are typified by remarks such as “Will organic farming feed the world ?” or “Remember that organic farming brought about huge famines in the past”. It could be argued that no agricultural system will ever feed the ‘world’. All points to the fact that only a drastic change in mindsets and lifestyles, a veritable paradigm shift could lead to a socially just and hunger free world.

In contrast conventional chemical agriculture bears epithets such as scientific, superior and progressive, highly productive, the only way to feed the starving masses.

Both portrayals need a closer look.

There are 5 pillars on which the edifice of high input modern farming rests:

- Synthetic fertilizers
- Pest- and other cides
- Hybrids and HYV’s
- Heavy Irrigation
- High Energy Inputs.

All of these have come under severe critique for their numerous ills by public and scientists alike. Among the most renowned critiques are those of the Third World Network: there are Vandana

Shiva, C. Bourguignon, J.P. Berlan, J. Hamaker, L. Kervran, and many others.

Food that Fails to Nourish

WHO estimates that at present 3 billion people lack adequate nutrition (Kcal). FAO figures indicate that between 800 million and 1000 million people suffer from malnutrition, 616 million are affected by iron deficiency, 123 million are at risk of vitamin A deficiency, and 176 million suffer from goiter.

Medical researchers have noted that 58 % of patients hospitalized in the US are malnourished. (Peavy & Peary 1993:23)

Several studies have shown that the Food Value of chemically grown crops has declined drastically since the introduction and widespread use of agro-chemicals and heavy farm machinery.

DECLINE OF MINERAL CONTENT IN SOME VEGETABLES, 1914-1992

(PER 100 GRAMS)

	1914	1948 (average)	1992
Cabbage			
Calcium	248.00 mg	38.75 mg	47.00 mg
Magnesium	66.00 mg	29.60 mg	15.00 mg
Iron	1.50 mg	5.70 mg	0.59 mg
Lettuce			
Calcium	265.50 mg	38.50 mg	19.00 mg
Magnesium	112.00 mg	31.20 mg	9.00 mg
Iron	94.00 mg	26.25 mg	10.50 mg
Spinach			
calcium	227.30 mg	71.75 mg	99.00 mg
Magnesium	122.00 mg	125.40 mg	79.00 mg
Iron	64.00 mg	80.15 mg	2.70 mg

Source: To Love and Regenerate the Earth, Don Weaver 2002:172

When plants are force fed with chemical fertilizers ‘luxury consumption’ sets in. This means that “plants absorb excessive amounts of NPK to the detriment of other minerals called micro-nutrients and trace elements. (calcium and phosphorus, zinc, copper, magnesium, iron etc.). This happens even when minerals are abundantly available in the soil.” (Peavy & Peary 1993:15)

This explains the booming of pharmacies – springing up as mushrooms after a rain – in every nook and corner of the country. People are now driven to buy food supplements, minerals and vitamins which are missing from their plate and medicines to keep them on their legs. Deficiencies in the functioning of the human immunity system and many of the degenerative diseases associated with ageing are now being linked to such nutritional deficiencies.

The importance of the trace elements or micro-nutrients (metals such as gold, silver, mercury, copper etc.) in the transmission of information in DNA is a known fact. Studies have shown that the deficiencies in foodstuffs produced by modern industrial agriculture, solely relying on chemical inputs, are most likely responsible for the substitution in the core of the cell itself of certain essential elements by others, for instance zinc takes the place of silver when this element is deficient. Even very toxic substances such as cadmium can become a terminal in the DNA.

Food is not only less nourishing, it is often unfit for human consumption. Wheat grown in France has been reported to be inedible. Milk cannot be made into cheese because of heavy antibiotic use. Grapes cannot be fermented for wine. (Bourguignon 2005:127-128)

Agro-chemicals are also extremely powerful oxidizing agents (Higa 1996:72-74). This oxidizing property is transferred to the produce derived from plants grown with agro-chemicals. This causes allergies, impairs the body and its functions and undermines the immunity system. Besides, such foods are very poor in regenerative substances such as vitamins and natural antioxidants.

To add “value” to the fruits of the soil commercial food processing uses more than 6000 different chemical substances. The goodies used include Diethyl- glucol also used as an anti-freeze in cars, Amylacetate which does also a very good job as oil paint solvent etc., etc. (Gandhi 1994:61)

Pesticide Terror

Pesticides are needed because blown-up plants are very susceptible to all kinds of pathogens.

The serious ill effects and horrors of ‘...cides’ are universally known and widely accepted. Yet their widespread use continues unabated.

In spite of the extravagant use of chemical pesticides, pest and diseases are destroying about 1/5th of all crop production worldwide. (Robinson 1996:ix). There is a progressive insect resistance to pesticides rarely acknowledged by the promoters of chemical farming. Farmers have noticed, from the very beginning, that pesticides control only a percentage of pests while the survivors develop a resistance. Newer and more potent pesticides have to be introduced to control the super pests. In effect pesticides foster the evolution of increasingly robust pests.

Considering the fact that parasite damage does not occur in wild ecosystems, some researchers are asking the question “...why should such appalling pest and disease losses occur in agro-ecosystems, in spite of all this spraying... ?” “After all we do not spray wild plants and the world is still green” (Robinson 1996: ix)

If by breeding one can make tomatoes square why can there be no breeding for pest and disease resistant tomatoes and other crops ? “There are some powerful vested interests that are determined to maintain the status quo concerning crop breeding and pesticides” (Robinson 1996:123). The very same agro-chemical companies who produce poisons also control the seed industry. Breeding resistant varieties becomes an unprofitable business venture.

Motivated by profits, the agro-chemical corporations remain blind to suffering, deaths, & disabled children due to pesticide poisoning. The whole ugly issue of pesticide shows how crude humanity still is. It illustrates very well, what Sri Aurobindo points out, that man in his present make up is too imperfect, too ill equipped in his

instruments to be kept at the helm of a possible earthly evolution.

Let us put the chemicals back into their bottles before they put us into our coffins.

The Hype about Hybrids

There are two apparently opposing but complimentary forces in seeds as in all living things, the capacity to reproduce and multiply with *conservation* of existing characteristics and the possibility to *change*, to evolve. The capacity of seeds to multiply ‘true to type’ is a source of annoyance and insecurity for the seed industry. For after investing effort and capital in breeding and promoting new plant varieties, seed companies would lose heavily if farmers buy a few of their seeds and multiply them endlessly. In response to this ‘hitch’ research in hybridization commenced in earnest in the US in the 1920s after the rediscovery of Mendel’s work. Starting with maize dozens of plants – even animals – were submitted to this hybridization craze.

The launching of hybrids (hybrid in Greek means monster), is an attempt by the seed industry and its vassals to hijack and manipulate natural processes (the forces of conservation and change governing evolution of all plant life) for exclusive commercial advantage. In fact hybridization is a way of sterilizing plants. The offspring of hybrid crops is useless as seed material. The farmers are thus obliged to buy new seeds every year. In a single stroke the seed companies succeeded in sidelining the age-old, creative contribution of farmers in nature's progressive manifestation. Hybrids thus constitute one of the earliest in a series of successful ploys foisted by the seed industry to enslave the natural world of plants.

In the US “From the start of the development of “hybrids” (1922) – when the Department of Agriculture imposed the technique on reluctant breeders – to their conquest of the Middle West in 1945-46, the maize yield increased with 18% while that of wheat increased by 32%. But the small wheat breeders only serve the general interest,

while the “hybridisers” create a new source of profit and therefore become scientific heroes.” (Berlan & Lewontin 1998) It took 15 years of arrest of biological breeding methods for the hybrids to out-perform the open pollinated varieties.

The professed high yielding quality of hybrids, rather than being a feature intrinsic to the method, has more to do with pushed selection and the inputs that need to be pumped into the system (chemical fertilizers and irrigation). In turn this causes devastating ecological consequences. From the growers’ perspective, uniformity is perhaps the only advantage of hybrids, again serving only commercial interests.

A hybrid seed will grow normally, produce a uniform crop but the seeds thereof will not reproduce anything worthwhile further. It is ecologically incomplete; it cannot reproduce itself nor produce by itself. This absence of life force in hybrid food crops seems congruent with the decline in the human sperm count in the western world. This was revealed in the study of Dr. Niels Skakkebaek published in the British Medical Journal which shows that in the period between 1938 and 1990 the quantity of spermatozoids in the human sperm had declined by nearly 50%.

‘There’s more to yield than grain’ - High Yielding Varieties

Next to the hybrids with the entry of the High Yielding Varieties (HYVs), mainly in rice and wheat, the world seed and plant heritage received another major blow. These so-called HYVs came to be widely cultivated in the last part of the 20th century. Heralded as harbingers of a new era for humanity, they actually brought us to the brink of an ecological disaster.

While filling the treasuries of the richer countries, they created severe deficiencies in the diet of the peoples of the tropics, undermining their native strength and resilience. While these varieties are lauded for their ability to produce more grain, they in fact produce more carbohydrates

but lower percentages of minerals and other life giving substances. (Peavy & Peary 1993:15)

These varieties are also not high yielding per se. Their total biomass production remains the same. Only the straw to grain ratio was selected in favor of the grain. Such dwarf varieties produce much less straw. Less straw means less fodder for cattle which simply means less manure. (One afterwards remarks that there is not enough manure and organic matter for organic farming!) Hence synthetic fertilizers become necessary. Such varieties have thus led to the depletion of organic matter in the world’s agricultural soils. The shortage of straw has led to severe overgrazing of the commons. The destruction of the vegetative cover on grazing lands and forests has drastically increased the rate of erosion. This has caused the rapid silting up of water bodies and thus a decrease in irrigated area, inexorably leading to a degenerating vicious cycle.

The “new seeds”, as they are often called, are now against all ecological sense, occupying vast areas and pushing the native seeds, the landraces or heirloom varieties, out of existence. IR 36 created by IIRI in 1977 and supposed to resist 8 major diseases and pests, was during the height of the green revolution cultivated on 11 million Ha., an ecological absurdity. Two new viruses, ragged stunt and wilted stunt as well as BPH created havoc with this new variety and farmers lost heavily.

Yet not only are the native seeds used to “produce” the new seeds but without them no varietal progress is possible, a paradoxical situation.

Pondering over Productivity

If all the outputs and agricultural inputs are converted into energy units and the ratio is studied and analysed, it shows that traditional systems are outstandingly more productive and efficient than modern chemical farming. This is a common conclusion of most energy accounting studies, aimed at comparing agricultural systems, however varied they might be in their approaches.

It has been claimed that with modern farming techniques crop yields increased by 200 to 300%. That inputs have increased concomitantly by 1000 % and more is seldom ever mentioned. David Pimentel showed that it takes 10 calories of inputs to produce one calorie of food.

With modern practices, to increase the yield of rice by 8% an increase in energy inputs by 43% was required. In the case of wheat to boost the yield by 6% an increase in energy inputs up to 266% was needed. (Pretty 1995:62)

In the bio intensive method promoted by John Jeavons “ Energy consumption, expressed in Kilocalories of input, is 1/100 of that used by commercial agriculture”. (Jeavons 1979:ix)

In a polyculture system, 5 units of input are used to produce 100 units of food thus having a productivity of 20. In an industrial monoculture, 300 units of input are used to produce 100 units of food, thus having a productivity of 0.33. (Shiva 1996:17) A polyculture system is thus 60 times more productive than a ‘high yielding’ monoculture.

The Hidden Costs

Looming large over the failure of chemical farming to stand up to its claims of high efficiency and bumper yields, is the issue of its devastating effect on the environment.

Chemical Farming, which is so heavily dependent on fossil fuel, produces, as Fukuoka puts it, crops grown from oil rather than soil. A true organic farming on the other hand bases itself on carbohydrates (organic matter) rather than hydrocarbons (oil). This massive use of petroleum at every stage; fertilizer production, transport, irrigation, mechanized cultivation & harvest, together with the fact of fluctuating oil prices and limited reserves, have led to a belief that it might be the Achilles’ heel of chemical farming. But in fact the weak points are all over.

Water tables have dropped as much as the oil inputs have risen. Worldwide, people are over-pumping

groundwater by at least 160 billion cubic meters a year. Although today six billion people of the world share the same quantity of water shared by just one billion people in 1800 much of that water has become unfit for human consumption! Hybrids and improved varieties are very water demanding. These plants have been bred to direct all energy towards one particular yield at the cost of quality, pest and drought resistance, resilience etc. To produce 1 Kg. of sugarcane 1000 liters of water are needed in a conventional system. On the other hand innovations in organic cane cultivation by South Indian farmers have reduced the water demand by three quarters.

In spite of a science and technology at its peak and after many decades of drenching the world’s soils with its toxic substances, chemical farming has failed to provide. It is acknowledged that in spite of the tall claims of modern farming there is definitely a negative balance on its food security account.

Crop yields in spite of adequate application of synthetic fertilizers are at best stagnating. In fact since 1983-84 a decline in yields of cereals all over the world because of soil fatigue due to loss of soil biological activity is noticeable (FAO). Soil fatigue occurs on 10% of agricultural soils in France with a decline in yields ranging from 10 to 40 % in spite of good levels of potassium, phosphorus, nitrogen etc. (Bourguignon & Gabucci 2005:165) At Barrackpur Research Station yields of wheat have declined from 4.4 to 3.3 t/ha. and in Patnagar rice has fallen from 6.4 to 5.2 t/ha. (Pretty 1996:7)

Genetic ‘Pharming’

Critics have reacted to the flaws of chemical farming with genuine concern and growing alarm. Even the defenders of the conventional system now acknowledge the tragic side of the ‘old’ chemical approach, referring to it as a ‘necessary evil’. A new structure is now being erected to prop up the crumbling edifice of chemical farming – that of GMOs. Genetic engineering, euphemistically called genetic modification, is

the new banner signaling renewed hope, to not only solve pending challenges of eradicating poverty and hunger, but also save the world from the old chemical evils.

Take for instance herbicide tolerance, which encompasses 75 % of all commercial GMO plants (24 % are BT). How this can help to solve world hunger is a complete mystery. Plants are resistant to a complete herbicide because they can absorb huge quantities of it without being killed. They can actually store so much herbicide in their tissue that their growth is impeded. Therefore together with the herbicide-resistant component another component digesting some of the herbicides and transforming it into “degrading metabolites” is inserted in such plants. What the effect of such metabolites on the human body could be, is anybody's guess. Imagine an animal fed with herbicide-tolerant soya on a daily basis. The herbicide residue builds up in the tissue of the animal. What happens to people eating “herbicide” animal products, besides the dozens upon dozens of processed food stuffs derived from or containing herbicide soya ? What is the effect of the said metabolites in the fields, on rodents eating leftovers, on birds eating rodents? Herbicides can cause allergies, disturbances in the endocrinal system of adults etc. and can cause malformation in the brains of babies. The introduction of herbicide-tolerant plants has in the US, between 1997-2002, created an increase of 72 % in the sales of glyphosate – the one and future herbicide.

The fundamental premise of genetic engineering, bordering on superstition, is the belief that everything is in the genes to the exclusion of the physical and non-physical environment and the play of nature's creative forces. However, characteristics are seldom determined by a single gene. Some scientists are now talking in terms of gene sequences or by epigenetic pathways and cellular networks. The concepts of Morphogenic Fields, Morphic Resonance and Formative Causation are more illuminating in

the understanding of behavior patterns and their development. (Sheldrake:1988)

Genetic engineering is a technology designed specifically to transfer genes horizontally between species that do not interbreed. In her scathing critique of Genetic engineering, Mae-Wan Ho warns us that in order to “transfer genetic material and to overcome the power of rejection by the recipient organism, very potent pathogens (virulent viruses etc.) are used as vehicles. Though their mobility genes have been deleted, these pathogens can still attach themselves or recombine with other pathogens to form ‘super strains’”. (Ho:1997) **The inherent danger is that such pathological super strains are escaping into the environment with hazardous consequences.**

GMO's act as powerful agents that stimulate oxidizing processes in the human body. As a result some transgenic foods have caused irritation and “allergies” to consumers (Brazil nut in Soya). Rats fed exclusively with GMO feeds showed extreme anomalies in their physiognomy, brain deformations and tumors and severe liver defects!

In the case of Bt cotton, no one has the slightest idea as to what can happen to the human skin and health in general once such fabrics start to be worn. There are already remarks by farmers about allergic reactions while handling Bt cotton at harvest and storage. Complaints of crop failure in the same fields sown after Bt cotton throws up serious worries about the effect of transgenic crops on soil biological life and soil health. What about animals fed with Bt cotton seed meal and the possible hazardous effect on humans consuming such animal products ?

Even the much flaunted advantage of transgenic crops to stave off plant parasites is under a shadow of great doubt. “The genetically engineered resistances will fall easily within the capacity for micro-evolutionary change of the parasite. That means that the parasite can produce new strains which will be unaffected by the trans-

gene in question". (Robinson 1996:400) It has been predicted that within 10 years of its release insects will overcome the Bt. barrier (this is happening right now). Moreover the competition between this reductionist breeding mechanism and the adaptation of the parasite is expected to cause unprecedented environmental spoilage.

It is alarming that an increasing number of GMO's are literally thrown on the market with absolutely no concern about informing consumers. Watch out for potatoes with vaccines, whether you want it or not, frogs in tomatoes, scorpions in maize, fish in strawberries.....

"We don't have to guarantee the safety of genetically modified food stuffs. Our interest is to sell as much of them as possible" (representative of Monsanto, incidentally also the producers of 'Agent Orange' as quoted by V. Shiva).

The new turn in agricultural science which sees gene manipulation as the principle technological solution to feed the world, remains squarely within the same exploitative mindset as the earlier approaches with all its consequent ills. The hazards it engenders might be even worse. We are warned about the perils of genetic engineering even by eminent scientists "You can stop splitting the atomyou can stop using aerosols ... but you cannot recall a new form of life". (Chargaff as quoted in Goldsmith1993:316) Such a system cannot possibly accompany us on the path to our evolutionary destination.

Looking Back – India's Agricultural Heritage

The East can look back on a very rich and ancient tradition in farming. The West cannot. From the early middle ages even up to the times of the industrial revolution the West has repeatedly suffered scarcity and starvation. Looking back at its own past, the Western eye sees an agricultural tradition inseparable from dreaded episodes of food shortages and deficiencies. This perception, transposed to the East, has created a distinct Euro-centric stain, coloring post colonial attitudes towards India's agricultural history.

India is described, by the supporters of the 'modernisation' of Indian agriculture, as a land of starving millions, wrecked by famine, with agricultural practices and tools that haven't changed since the Vedic times, unscientific, backward, moribund, with no hope whatsoever.

In contrast are the descriptions of rural India by foreign travelers and the facts recorded by colonial officials. The descriptions of rural scenes in India by Chinese travelers Fa Hien (5th century AD.) and Huang Tsang (7th century AD), by Francois Bernier (1656-1688) and Mr. Le Tavernier (18th century AD.) about the marvels and abundance of India (Sonar Bangla) might be coloured with romanticism, though temple inscriptions in South India seem to confirm their view. From these inscriptions (9th to 12th century AD.) it appears that rice yields for instance were remarkable. They mention rice yields in Tanjavur equivalent to 12 to 18 tons per hectare, in Coimbatore 13 tons and in South Arcot 14,5 tons per hectare ! The same holds true for pre-colonial Africa and South America. Two French travelers, Poncet and Brevedent (18th. Century AD.) described the Gezira in Sudan as God's country (Belad Allah) by reason of its great plenty. The old Chinampas of Mexico, the ancient Waru-Waru of Peru or the Terra Preta of the Amazon were possibly the highest food production systems ever developed by man.

Many reports by British officials like A. Walker (1820) and Dr J.A. Voelcker (1893) equally point to surprising facts of abundance in India. One of the most detailed reports is by Thomas Barnard.

In the 18th century (around 1770), Thomas Barnard, a British engineer, conducted a survey in Chengalpattu district near Madras covering 800 villages. The results show the average yield of wetland rice to be 3600 kg/ha and 1600 kg/ha for dryland rice. In 130 villages the average yield for wetland rice was 8200 kg/ha, while the yields in many surpassed 10,000 kg/ha. The present day average for rice in the same area is

3177 kg/ha. The Indian average is 1667 kg/ha. (ICAR 1997:763)

Per acre productivity of wheat in India in 1804 was almost three times higher than that of England. In 1903 wheat production in the Allahabad area was about 4000 kg/ha. (Kate 1995). The average wheat production in France in 1985 was 3760 kg/ha.

The sophistication of agricultural practices in the 17-18th century was beyond even the comment of colonial officials. Technologies such as the use of seed drills and cropping of cereals with legumes had already been perfected centuries ago, while in Europe these were introduced as late as the mid 18th century.

In 1873, after the opening of the Suez Canal, the first wheat shipped from India arrived in England. The British envisaged India as a potentially secure source of wheat for the Empire. "Though much rice and wheat were exported, domestic availability grew at about the same rate." (Shiva 1991:57)

The export of food grains from India to the West rose from £ 8,58,000 in 1849 to £ 19.3 million in 1914. Oil seeds export increased from 2 million to the staggering figure of 5 million in a period of 19 years. (Since then the export of protein from India to the West is continuing unabated.)

Over and above the export of food grains, the Indian peasants were also burdened by heavy taxes, which were levied irrespective of prevailing conditions.

In 1750 the farmer had to pay for every 1000 units of produce, 300 units as tax, out of which only 50 units went to the Central Authority, the rest remained in the locality. But in 1830 the farmer had to give away 650 units as revenue, 590 of which went straight to the Central Authority.

Warren Hastings, in 1772 a year after the great famine of Bengal in which 10 million people perished, wrote:

"Notwithstanding the loss of at least 1/3 of the inhabitants of the province and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the net collection of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768... It was naturally to be expected that the diminution of revenue should have kept an equal pace with the other consequences of so great a calamity. That it did not, was owing to its being violently kept up to its former standard." (Shiva 1991:57)

"Out of the millions they collected in 1770-1771, the Company gave back 90,000 Rs. in famine relief – 90,000 Rs. for 30,000,000 people!" (Moxham 2001:42)

The 'Great Hedge', started by the East India Company, which became an immense impenetrable live barrier of thorny shrubs and trees 1500 miles long, was a part of the Custom Line that ran across the Indian continent. It was maintained by 12,000 armed guards to prevent untaxed salt and other essential commodities from reaching those who had always depended on such trade. The taxes were so high that people could not afford even salt.

The disturbances in Europe between 1914-1945 equally had a severe impact on food availability in colonized countries.

The 24 famines in the later part of the 19th century with a total of 20 million victims were the climax of decades of exploitation, rather than the failure of traditional agriculture to provide. The same is true of the Irish potato famine. When the potato crops failed throughout Ireland and one million people died from hunger, the British lords were exporting wheat and meat from their large well-endowed estates to England.

A return to the past, however glorious, is not possible or even desirable – Sri Aurobindo teaches us that the past is good where it belongs ... in the past.

What is to be remembered and kept for our future evolution, is that reverence for life, that

resilient spirit and the essence of its knowledge – the continuity of the living, the understanding that all is inter-connected, the living and the inert, and foremost that the earth is sacred, that nature is the Mother. The farmer is a co-creator in Her unfolding process. To be attuned to nature is to prosper, to go against her ends in ruin.

Genesis of Modern Organic Farming

The history of the present organic farming¹ movement starts with Albert Howard in India and Rudolf Steiner in Austria.

Howard declared that “By 1910, I had learned to grow healthy crops practically free from disease, without the slightest help from mycologists, entomologists, bacteriologists, agricultural chemists, statisticians, clearing-houses of information, artificial manures, spraying machines, insecticides, fungicides, germicides, and all the other expensive paraphernalia of the modern Experimental Station”.

His method, called the “Indore” process, was basically the traditional Indian farming system which he learned from the local farmers but strengthened with a proper composting technique. The work of A. Howard was widely publicized by J.I. Rodale in the US and became known and influential world wide. This new concept brought about spectacular improvements in agriculture and spread the world over.

Inspired by the work of Howard, Lady Eve Balfour², an agronomist, started her Haughley

¹ The word organic, derived from organism, was introduced by Lord Northbourne in 1940. In his view a farm is like a living organism whose interrelated parts form a living whole.

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo, in his ‘Back to the Land’ of 1908 emphasized the need for the growing middle class to return to the village to revive agriculture.

² Lady Eve Balfour was niece of Lord Balfour, Conservative British Prime Minister. At the age of twelve she decided to become a farmer. She was the first woman to take a degree in agriculture in England. At 21 she used her inheritance to

experiment in England. In her meticulously designed experiment spanning almost a decade she proved that organic farming can in all ways out-perform its chemical counterpart.

In the West, after WW I, chemicals were introduced in agriculture on a wide scale. The factories that produced nitrogen for the manufacture of ammunition and bombs now turned out urea for throwing on the land. But soon after this farmers began to notice the decline in the vital force of their seed material. They requested Steiner to enlighten them on this issue and in 1924 the renowned lectures on Agriculture took place in Austria. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer studied and developed the teachings of Steiner and refined the system now known as biodynamic agriculture. Pfeiffer brought biodynamic agriculture to Holland and later to America.

It was in the wake of WW II that modern chemical farming spread to all corners of the world. The industry that produced tanks and other war materials and vehicles on the conveyer belt now rolled out combine harvesters, pick-ups and tractors. No wonder that after the mechanical harvesting of beets or potatoes the fields look like “Verdun after the Great War”.

After Indian independence K.M. Munshi³, the first Minister of Agriculture, drew up a plan for renewing Indian agriculture. He was well aware that India should develop agriculture on its own inherent strength and tradition and not imitate the exploitative Western trend. Plan Munshi was rooted in the philosophy of self-reliance and strengthening the ecological base of agriculture, as expressed by Gandhiji, J.C Kumarappa, Meera Behn and Payarelal. The plan to rebuild and regenerate the ecological base of agricultural productivity was worked out in detail. It was founded on a bottom-up

purchase a farm. She became an expert in plowing with horse team and looked after the animals herself.

³ K.M.Munshi was a student of Sri Aurobindo in Baroda and was profoundly influenced by Him. Sri Aurobindo went out of his way and received Munshi in his room in 1950.

decentralized and participatory methodology. Repairing nature's cycles and working in partnership with the natural processes was viewed as being central to the indigenous agricultural policy.

Independent India however tragically abandoned this ecologically sound option, submitting instead to pressures from US institutions promoting the capital intensive, industrial model for a 'modern' Indian agriculture. The drought of 1966 and the heavy import of food grains were used to firmly establish new policies which continue to dominate the agricultural scene even today.

Voices of dissent never remain stifled for too long and there has been a healthy resurgence in recent decades.

Winds of Welcome Change – India/Asia

In 1984 the first all India organic farmers conference was organized in Sevagram, Wardha¹. For the first time the severe shortcomings of modern farming were thrown open for public debate. Startling facts about falling yields, declining soil fertility, tremendous losses of indigenous genetic resources, poured in from all sides. The restoration of forest cover, as a buffer for a sustainable agriculture, was given great importance. This event marked a revival of pride and confidence in India's hidden potential as revealed by outstanding individuals such as Dharampal the distinguished historian, Banwarilal Choudury, Gandhian and untiring village worker, Dhabolkar the eccentric agri-mathematician, young avant garde, Vandana Shiva, Korah Mathen and Claude Alvares and many others.

Since then organic farming has grown steadily and is thriving in many states as well as at the

national level. The Organic Farmers Association of India – OFAI – has taken the work of ARISE² a step further and is presently coordinating efforts of Indian farmers to remould Indian agriculture.

In Tamil Nadu the organic farming movement has taken remarkable shape in recent years. With more than 20,000 farmers shifting to organic practices in the last 3 years, this movement owes its success largely to the work of pioneering farmers and dedicated individuals rather than institutions. There are thriving networks within networks. A vibrant internal dynamism is obvious and large numbers of innovative farmers are now enthusiastic trainers. Their cowshed classrooms burst at the seams with farmers seeking change. Many farms deserve to be recognized as centres of excellent research. Publications, magazines and books on organic farming are flourishing. The leaders are constantly on the move, addressing farmers' gatherings attended by the 100s in villages all over the state. Although the focus is on developing and promoting organic farming techniques, the change being encouraged is wide ranging. The movement also addresses the need to revive Siddha traditions of medicine, the need to inspire youngsters to return to the land, the need to conserve natural resources and above all the need to love nature and serve her.³

Everywhere in India the organic farming movement is growing strong, with mounting numbers opting for ecological alternatives. The Organic Farming Source Book⁴ will soon have to run into several volumes.

The resurgence is not limited to India alone. Worldwide, farmers' movements filled with the spirit of their indigenous heritage have brought about unique and amazing innovation in farming. They have brought productivity on par without

1 Jaap and I were delegated to represent the Auroville Food Coop. We met people who surpassed us immensely. In subsequent meetings it was an honour for me to meet Dr. Richarria who related the whole Indian experience of rice cultivation and Marjorie Sykes who fundamentally questioned modernism.

2 ARISE, Agricultural Renewal in India for a Sustainable Environment was born in Auroville during an all-India organic farmers convention in 1995

3 The role of Auroville in shaping the movement in its initial stages is acknowledged by its leaders.

4 Published by Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa

the destructive consequence' characteristic of chemical agriculture. In many cases crop yields are now rising, doubling and even trebling the ceiling of conventional farming,.

'Masipag' in the Philippines created sophisticated organic practices based on indigenous genetic resources in rice cultivation that shadows the high input conventional system. Voly Vary Maroanaka or SRI, a rice cultivation method developed by a priest in Madagascar revolutionized rice cultivation to the extent that all modern rice research and breeding appears as a child's prank in comparison. In South America the Waru Waru are being reclaimed, the wonders of Terra Preta are being revealed and the original Indian communities are finding back their lost greatness. Every-where in the Western world, South America or Africa-organic farming is rising and becoming a force that can bring about the needed change in agriculture, and hopefully in society at large.

The Pathogen within Organic Farming

As organic farming makes rapid advances and offers bold technological alternatives, a familiar danger lurks menacingly round the corner – its abduction by big business interests. With the rising popularity of organic products, the tropics are increasingly eyed as cheap sources of organic foods for Western countries. The tropics are being invaded by the certification drive. As this is a costly enterprise, small farmers are immediately excluded. Large business concerns have entered the field attracted by bumper profits. Clever entrepreneurs are buying up agricultural land from poor farmers and besides making motorbikes or soap are now joining the organic bandwagon on a grand scale, raking in nice profits. The link between forests and farms has been driven to the background if not totally eclipsed. Trade across nations and even continents is as old as civilization itself but the extent and content were most likely very different then. While it is true that people in the cities have the right to safe food, and even if export of surplus foodstuffs can earn farmers a better income, certain questions still remain.

Is it socially sound to feed the rich in the West with organic food from poorer countries? How environmentally sound is it to transport food over large distances ?

The British colonial administration considered the availability of 200 kg. of food grains per person per year as the absolute minimum. Below that is famine. Food grain for human consumption as late as 1990 was 180 kg. per person. The per capita food grain availability in India in 2000 was 201 kg. Evidently this has not changed in the last 3 centuries and is the lowest in the world today! In this context can export of food be considered as fair trade ?

In Conclusion

Que sera? The future cannot rely on the conventional chemical farming system to provide food for the country or the world, to do so would be suicidal, an end to evolution. The road to farming practices of the past is closed. Its know-how and resource base are lost. And now the commercialization of organic farming poses if not a threat then at least a grave concern. Once projected as a viable alternative to ecologically damaging and exploiting ways of conventional agriculture, organic farming in its exploitative commercial form is now compounding the problem of food security in India.

In this period of transition, there seems to be a lack of vision as to which road to take for the immediate development of agriculture. Any randomly selected treatise on agriculture contains lamentations about the past, eulogies about modern farming and the promise of GMO's as the final solution. With the same breath, the importance of indigenous agriculture, farmers' wisdom and eco-sensitive practices are emphasised – a confusing khichdi of incongruous ingredients.

While ideal solutions are evasive as long as we remain within a limited consciousness, it is useful to constantly remind ourselves of the principles pointing in the right direction.

Bring the food economy as close to home as possible.

- Develop and use simple farming technologies following Nature as a teacher
- Maintain and enhance soil fertility within the economic catchment
- Conserve & optimise use of rain water
- Reduce fossil fuel dependence as much as possible
- Protect and conserve local biodiversity – forest species, cultivated plants, macro and micro fauna

AN AUROVILLE EXPERIENCE

In the mid 1990s, after moving from Annapurna, Deepika joined me in looking after the northern corner of Aurobrindavan. We worked part time, protecting the place, planting, making a good fence. After withdrawing from training activities and our work for ARISE in 1998, we took in an adjoining piece of Auroville land and decided to concentrate there on land regeneration work.

This is a small nook in a large tract of about 8000 ha. of gullies that stretch over Aurobrindavan and beyond towards Usteri. Overexploited by pebble and soil mining, repeated cutting and grazing of vegetation, the land has become a harsh expanse of pebbles and laterite chunks embedded in poor clays.

The broader convictions that form the background to our experiment are that:

- Wastelands and marginal lands (50 million ha. in India) have a productive potential that can certainly be restored, into productive forests as well as farms.
- This can be done – with simple techniques based on natural principles, minimum financial investments, resources from home and the immediate neighbourhood – in a way that is gentle on the environment and people.
- Food security at the home/community level, the oldest form of agriculture, is the only answer to insecurities created by global trade in essentials.

We are trying to translate these convictions into small scale activities on the land :

- Establishing Live Fences
- Conserving local forest species
- Creating small water bodies
- Planting mixed timber, bamboo and ‘useful’ species
- Setting up a Home Garden
- Establishing an Orchard

Building Soil & Feeding the Plant

The central challenge in every area of our work has been to restore soil fertility, especially for garden crops. While many would not even try, we would like our experiment to confront these questions:

Is it possible to grow food and other garden crops on such a devastated land ? Can this be done with an absolute minimum of external inputs ? Without bringing good soil and manure from somewhere and degenerating one place to regenerate another ? By buying compost from the villagers are we not compelling them to purchase fertilizers for their own fields ?

The theoretical basis of our work is drawn from the principle of optimum sunlight harvesting and creating a living soil which governs healthy plant growth in all natural eco-systems. This natural principle has been developed into efficient systems of farming by researchers such as Claude Bourguignon and by the Prayog Parivar of S.S Dabholkar. We are relying on both systems for developing a method suited for our specific conditions and needs.

Plants feed themselves for 95 % on the atmosphere and from sunlight, while soil contributes only 5% of the diet of plants. This might make it sound as if the soil is of little importance. But the fact that the total biomass volume of roots is greater than that of the leaves indicates how crucial the soil component is. Plants can favorably harvest sunlight and express their maximum potential only when soil conditions are ideal. The ease with

which roots can penetrate the soil and have access to a complete diet of minerals will determine the extent of optimal absorption of atmospheric elements. The crux is to obtain an optimal and clean leaf and canopy area by providing the best conditions for feeding roots along the drip line of the canopy.

The Prayog Parivar prescribes a method of soil building which imitates the manner in which soil is formed and maintained in a forest. If we look at the forest floor we see layers of leaves and twigs, pats of dung, bird droppings, rain, termites, ants, earthworms, burrowing animals and leaves again, year after year. For the garden we do something similar, using very thin alternate layers of leaves/biomass and soil to create beds and heaps. The process is further refined and enriched in numerous creative ways using neighborhood and home resources, recycling crop residues, charcoal, kitchen waste etc.

With this method it is possible to obtain the best possible soil which is required for optimum harvesting of sunlight and thus for optimizing production.

Adapting to our specific conditions we grow and use *Acacia coleii (holosericea)* and *Dodonea viscosa* as pioneers and recycle every bit of them for building soil for the garden area. With these hardy pioneers we have managed to grow our major biomass requirement on the site. Together with leaves gathered manually from the neighbourhood, and soil collected from deepening ponds, within a short time we were able to build up soil for the garden. We now have about 1000 sqm. of built-up 'forest' soil where we grow, every season, vegetables, herbs, flowers and conserve nearly 80 hardy plant varieties for home gardening. For fruit trees we are following similar techniques for canopy development. A whole line of bamboos was planted in heaps built up in the Prayog Parivar way, above the ground.. This method of soil building has been tried out in other locations in Auroville as well. In Maharashtra where Prayog Parivar originated,

there are productive organic farms obtaining stunning yields, in grapes, sugarcane, vegetables and other crops.

Behind the garden is a forest area requiring much less 'management'. Here the work, besides some protection and some inter-planting, is left mainly to nature. For the earth is not for man alone.

Commercial food crops have been developed with priorities such as short stature for ease of harvest, short duration, convenient transport etc. but rarely for food value, taste, nourishment – qualities that consumers need. Plant varieties suitable for home gardens are disappearing together with the skills and resources needed to grow them.

The home base of farming has suffered badly with the industrialization of agriculture. We desperately need to bring farming back home.

Mother visualized "A small house and a garden for everyone".⁸

⁸ from "The Aims of Auroville – following Mother's Guidelines" House of Mothers Agenda 1999

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Bernard was born in 1948 in a small rural village in Flanders (Belgium). Farm work was still relying on manual labour; together with other children and women he went from farm to farm helping with the potato, beet or wheat harvests and tending the cows (early mornings before and after school and during holidays). As a child he discovered that one could actually plant trees; fascinated by this fact he started tree-planting on vacant plots since the age of 7 or 8 years. As a teenager he joined the green movement as an active member, concentrating on promoting tree planting. Early on he got interested in yoga; but it took 10 years before he made the step to come here in 1975 to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He is still involved in land reclamation work in Auroville at Pebblegarden, Aurobrindavan, as that is one of the things the Earth needs rather badly in these times.

