

# Auroville Today

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## One family

This February, for only the second time ever, an Auroville International meeting was held in Auroville. A perspective.

Often it's all a matter of timing. The first time many Aurovilians heard about Auroville International (AVI) was at the fag end of a hot, fraught Pour Tous meeting in August, 1983. As people got up to leave, somebody announced that Aurovilians had to decide, at that moment, on the wording of the statutes of a new organization to be based in Holland. "Sounds like another takeover," someone sourly remarked. In 1988, when the AVI groups decided to hold their first meeting in Auroville, their timing was again spot on, for they managed to arrive at a moment of maximum tension in the debate over Aurelec and the community's relationship to the Government of India. The result? Many AVI members felt overwhelmed, their concerns ignored in the larger imbroglio. "I never want to meet here again", grumbled one of AVI stalwarts as she prepared to return home.

But this year AVI returned, and this time it was different. For one thing the meetings were held in Vérité, far from the madding crowd, so that one of the complaints was that too few rather than too many Aurovilians turned up for the sessions. This was not just a matter of geography: there continues to be widespread ignorance among Aurovilians concerning the purpose and work of the Auroville International Centres and their relationship to Auroville. One of the main purposes of holding the meeting here was to remedy this, which is why, on the first morning, the AVI members spoke about what made them take up this work. It was a profoundly moving session – as they talked of their 'love affair' with Auroville and of the challenges they faced in communicating its spirit in places like Russia, Kazakhstan and South Africa, the depth and quality of their contact was evident. Afterwards, one senior Aurovilian, who was attending such a meeting for the first

time, said it had completely transformed her view of AVI: she understood now that we are really one.

During the afternoon session another relationship was explored – that of Auroville to the United Nations and its affiliated organizations. In recent years, concerns about securing the land and thus the integrity of Auroville's development have led to a number of initiatives aimed at increasing funding and gaining protection from adverse development. Interestingly, at least three of these initiatives involve the U.N. or its agencies [see page 4].

Discussion of possible links with the U.N. led onto the second main topic of this year's AVI meeting – the development of the International Zone. Dr. Ananda Reddy began with a remarkable presentation on how to find one's nation soul. We were then reminded that Mother had wanted governments to be directly involved in the construction of the pavilions. In this context, there was a proposal that an appeal be made to UNESCO, through the Government of India, that governments of member countries follow up on UNESCO resolutions supporting Auroville by actively participating in the development of the International Zone as an international university campus devoted to human unity and global understanding. The AVI General Assembly presented this proposal to the Governing Board for their consideration, with the further suggestion that each government might send a few outstanding

The opening session of the Auroville International meeting in Vérité Hall.



PHOTO: MARTIN LITTLEWOOD

young people to Auroville for some months in order to understand the purpose of the International Zone. On their return, they would report to their government how it might best participate and be represented in the Zone.

It's easy to get high on ideas. Which is why, after the various pavilion groups had presented their plans, it was important that Gilles Boulicot and Angad weighed in with reality checks. Gilles pointed out there is little water in the International Zone, and that rainwater harvesting can be an expensive proposition even for generously-funded pavilion projects. Angad mentioned that some of the inhabitants of neighbouring Kottakarai village are very frustrated. In the early years much of their land was sold to Auroville but some of the villagers now find themselves with no money, no resources, and no jobs. Recently an extension of Kottakarai, Bharatipuram, has come up. These villages are situated partly in the International Zone, but Angad suggests that they could become living exhibitions of vibrant local culture rather than their being housed elsewhere in model colonies: "To develop the International Zone at the expense of the villages is absurd."

The last full day was taken up with guided visits to the International Zone and the Information Centre, and a tour of the endangered lands of Auroville. In the afternoon people broke up into smaller groups to discuss in more detail topics like fund-raising, the presentation of Auroville in the mass media, and linkages with the U.N. and governments.

Was this meeting a success? In many ways, yes. Veteran AVI meeting goers talked of experiencing a different community this time – quieter, more relaxed, but also more professional in its practical approach to the challenges of living here – and many were touched by how readily Aurovilians welcomed them as co-partners. To take but one example: at last summer's AVI meeting in the USA a proposal was made to include members of the Centres as full partners in the International Zone group based in Auroville. When the topic came up for discussion this time there was clearly trepidation among AVI members that the Aurovilians on the International Zone

group would express reservations. In fact there was no opposition, and most of the discussion focused upon keeping the organization as fluid and open as possible.

There were still complaints from the Centres that they were sometimes left out of the loop, notably over the provision of information material like new brochures and videos, but these came across as niggles rather than indications of major fault lines. Nevertheless such concerns touched once again upon the larger question of the raison d'être of the Centres and their relationship to Auroville. Over the course of the meeting various interpretations of this were offered: the AVI members should be 'watchdogs', ensuring that Auroville moves swiftly towards the ideal of a moneyless economy, the AVIs are there to raise funds and disseminate information, the AVIs can keep Auroville in touch with a larger world, the AVIs can promote research into areas essential to Auroville's development etc. etc. There is some truth in all of these. However, they all imply an instrumental relationship – the AVIs are there merely to serve Auroville – whereas the profounder truth may be that members of AVI are carrying the ideals of Auroville out into a wider world, attempting to embody, practice and anchor them amongst lifestyles and in cultures which are frequently not sympathetic or supportive. This is truly the yoga of the market-place, one of the hardest of all, and it's high time Aurovilians treat AVI members with the respect and appreciation due rather than viewing them as Aurovilians manqué or mere support troops.

In fact, from an occult point of view it's likely that all those connected to Sri Aurobindo and Mother have already been together many times through the ages. Thus any attempt to make distinctions between Aurovilians and members of AVI is ridiculous. We're family, one family, inspired and inextricably linked by a common ideal.

If this year's meeting has in any way illuminated this truth – and the evidence from some of the attendees is that it has – then it has more than fulfilled its purpose.

Alan



Participants in one of the small group discussions

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# New life for the circles

The income-sharing experiment called 'circles,' started in 1999, is being given a substantial boost by the New Dawn circle experiment.

In 1999 the so-called "circle" experiment was started. It aims at making a step towards an economic system characterized by no exchange of money inside Auroville, and by the community taking care of the basic needs of the individuals dedicated to Auroville. The biggest challenge was that many Aurovilians lived on an inadequate community maintenance and could not make ends meet. To deal with this challenge, groups of people created circles, each with its own common pot. The income of each member is put into the pot, and each member draws from the pot whatever s/he deems necessary. The common pots of all the circles together were in turn considered as one pot, which means that a deficit of one circle was to be compensated by the surplus of another. The commercial unit Maroma provided an additional buffer to cover consolidated deficits.

When the experiment was reviewed in February 2001, it appeared that about 80% of the circle participants are those who have an inadequate community maintenance. The difference between what is needed and what the community pays is on average Rs 1,000 a month. Being a member of a circle gives the possibility of getting a somewhat larger maintenance. However, the pooling of individual maintenances proved insufficient to provide for the basic needs of all circle participants, even though some circle participants with personal resources contribute more than just their own expenses. [see also AVToday April & November 2001]. Since then the number of people who continue to donate

more to the circle than they take out has steadily decreased. The fires of enthusiasm seem to have dimmed.

## The New Dawn circle experiment

"It's time for a system overhaul," explained Alain Grandcolas of behalf on the New Dawn circle. "We studied once again what Mother had said about the ideal economy. And that brought us to a different set-up, with the following parameters.

1. The circle should provide only the basic minimum goods in kind to the members (this scheme is called Prosperity and allows for no exchange of money within Auroville for obtaining the needs of the body).

2. The circle should also provide a minimum pocket money of Rs 1500 per month.

3. The circle should have a special fund for basic needs that are not covered from the monthly Prosperity.

4. The circle is not meant to cover housing requirements. These requirements are addressed by the Housing Service.

5. Each circle member should contribute to Auroville through a full-time work, recognized as such by the Auroville Maintenance Group.

6. Monthly maintenances are paid directly into the circle account. Self-supporting people are expected to contribute a minimum of Rs 4,000 to the circle account.

The New Dawn circle has been testing each of these parameters for the last two years.

## Providing goods in kind

Providing goods in kind instead of allowing circle members to shop at Pour Tous and at the Bakery and be tempted by articles not really needed, has led to substantial savings. "Once every week a list is distributed of the basic items to which a circle member is freely entitled," explains Shraddhavan, "and the products of those lists are home delivered. The list is regularly updated, and there is sufficient space to allow for an individual's special requirements. In fact, we noted that the basic needs of each of our circle members are different, but we have been able to meet them." The basic needs covered under 'Prosperity' are nutrition (lunch and dinner through the Solar Kitchen, breakfast, milk, bread), Pour Tous (a weekly delivery of basic items - toiletries, cleaning items, household items, simple medicines and stationary, supplementary food), Nandini (clothes and soft furnishings), health (through the AV Health Fund), water, electricity and community expenses, photocopies, petrol (in New Creation) and telephone bills (up to a maximum of Rs 600 for two months). All of these basic services of Prosperity are provided by the New Dawn Circle equally for each of its members, whatever their contribution into the Circle budget.

## Pocket allowance

In addition to "Prosperity" New Dawn provides to each member a minimum "pocket allowance" of Rs 1,500 to cover extra individual needs, which is deposited by the Circle into the "Kind" account of each individual

member. This pocket money can be used to cover articles from Pour Tous that are not included in the weekly request form for basic items, for Auroville restaurants, purchases from Auroville boutiques etc. Up to half the monthly allowance may be drawn in cash for expenditure outside Auroville.

## Sunchild Fund

For other basic needs that are not covered by the Prosperity scheme and which members cannot cover themselves, the New Dawn Circle has created the "Sunchild Fund". This fund provides for non-recurrent and exceptional expenses, such as dental treatment, bike repairs etc. Each month Rs 200 per member is deposited from the Circle budget into that Fund. Withdrawals from this fund can only be made with permission from the circle executives, or, when it concerns large amounts, with approval of the entire circle.

## Sharing maintenance

The maintenance of every member is put fully into the Circle and each one is free to spend any other income in the way s/he likes. If someone works part-time and receives half maintenance, participation in the circle would be possible but pocket money is not given.

## Pilot project

The New Dawn circle experiment can be regarded as a pilot project. "The New Dawn circle is a cross-section of the Auroville community," explains Alain. "There are 21 people.

Seven of them are Indian, of which three come from the surrounding villages. There are four Russians and ten westerners. Fifteen of our members depend on community maintenance, six members are self-supporting. We know now how much each circle member costs the circle. We calculated that if everyone would use all the services to the full, the costs would be Rs 4,500 per person per month. But they don't. We have been spending only Rs 3,800. When members have high electricity bills - for example if they need air-conditioning - or high telephone bills, they keep these bills outside the system."

Can the New Dawn experiment be translated into an all-Auroville experiment? Alain thinks so, but advises caution. "Our present circle is the result of an organic growth which lasted two years. It would be best to experiment with one new circle of about 20 people in order to get more experiences with fresh members and test our pretty strict monitoring to avoid any possibility of abuse. For a system comprising 600 Aurovilians and newcomers, two full-time monitors posted in the Financial Services and one coordinator for each circle of about thirty members would be required to meet the individual needs. The system can be financially independent if self-supporting people participate. The objective is that the present existing ratio of 2/3rd of the Aurovilians who are on community maintenance and 1/3rd who are self-supporting, would be reflected in an all-Auroville experiment.

Carel

## MATRIMANDIR

# The peace area walk

The Matrimandir Workers team organizes Sunday morning walks in the Outer Gardens.

"And over there", our guide explains, "towards the North, there will be a hill, made of the excavated soil of the Matrimandir foundations and the future lake. Mother wanted to have fir trees planted on it, for She said, 'one day it will snow in Auroville'". A ripple of amusement ran through our group and I had a light-hearted thought, imagining future Aurovillian children skating under a peaceful sunset on a frozen lake in the reflection of Matrimandir. White blankets of snow and ice-covered waterways with skaters under a wide expanse have always evoked a deep sense of peace in physical nature.

We, a group of around 40 people, are on the Peace Walk near the service entrance of the Matrimandir workshops. The excursion takes us around the area designated to be the outer gardens of the Matrimandir with tall trees, hills and a lake winding through them. At least that is the "park concept" as explained by Walter, John and Arjun, our guides. But they allude also to another concept, the "architect's concept", in which a large lake is envisaged that, according to them, will eliminate all of the 380 planted trees in the area. They emphasize that the trees "cannot be touched" and that makes their point of view quite clear.

We had gathered at the office building around 8.30 in the morning. After being given a map of the area and a coloured card with an artist's view of the park, we set out on the 1.5 hours tour. First we moved out of the gate onto the road towards the Centre of Urban Research. We pause at the "elephant's ear" tree at the crossroads. It appears that some land hasn't been bought yet and the actual boundary is about 100 m from the designated perimeter of the Peace

area that will fringe the Centre of Urban Research. We follow the road through the service gate, past the hill and continue along a path through a grassy field with neem and other trees towards an experimental section of the lake. The lake depth will be on average four meters and there are a number of methods available to prevent water seepage: a variety of soils, concrete or clay as used in ancient times. "But", explains Walter, "a German laboratory successfully tested the local red soil mixed with a small quantity of bentonite as an affordable means to create a leak-proof lakebed." Apart from seepage there is the problem of evaporation. It is estimated that about one centimeter per day will evaporate from the surface. That would mean a loss of about 300 cubic meters of water for a medium sized lake. This brings us to another problem: how to fill the lake and replenish the daily loss? The aquifers are depleting already rather rapidly for various reasons, including the fact that over the last few years the monsoons have been insufficient. John mentions that a desalinisation plant working on solar power has been operating in the US and could be a solution. However, he couldn't give an answer yet about the area of solar panels or the funds needed to set up a similar pilot project here. I wonder if this will be a feasible solution. For instance a highly developed country like Israel, with acute potable water problems, has desalination plants, but it has decided to ship fresh water by tankers from Turkey on a long-term basis.

But we leave the technical aspect of the gardens behind and wander through beautifully forested nature, over hillocks and under more than 120 varieties of trees. We pass by Champaks, Transformation (Indian cork) trees,

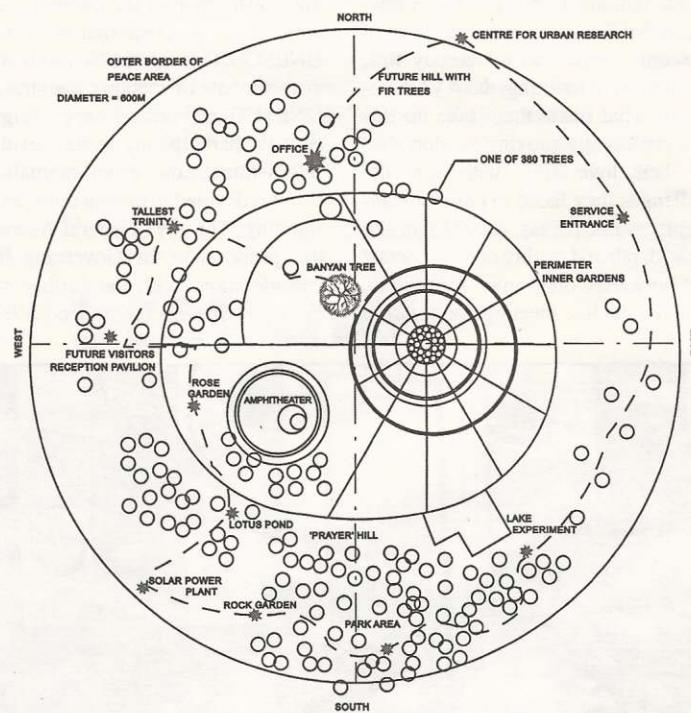
the exotic African Baobab that will grow a mighty trunk, and the Australian Rainbow Eucalyptus with its many-hued bark shining in the sun. At the Rock Garden we look expectantly around for the promised refreshments. But to no avail. We continue past the solar power plant that can supply 38 KW for the MM lighting and some pumping. Finally the lemonade catches up with us in the grove of artistically-trimmed citrus bushes that have fruits the size of berries. We have our refreshments near the small lotus pond. The swaying lotuses in the pond are delightful to behold.

The next stop is the Rose Garden. We enter under an archway of American rose stock planted 8 years ago. It is from a centuries-old variety, which gives less flowers and fragrance, but proves really strong in this winterless climate. The hybrid roses from Bangalore typically wither after a period of three to four seasons. For this reason most roses around this well-laid out gar-

den are sturdy country roses.

From the Rose Garden we arrive at the West axis. Along this path the visitors walk to the Matrimandir. We turn towards the present perimeter of the Peace Area where the future Visitors Reception pavilion will be built. This will become the main entrance to the area. We continue along the perimeter under large trees. At one place we come upon the tallest trinity in the park: a Peepal, a Wisdom and a Eucalyptus tree. We turn towards the centre and arrive at the Banyan tree. After taking seats under the shady canopy our guides explain again that all what we have seen this morning will be swallowed up by the big lake of the "architect's concept". I wonder if the Peace Walk will end for me on a not-so-peaceful note. But then the voices hush and, inwardly smiling, I look up: the birds overhead have the last word.

Dirk Kievith



The route of the Peace Area Walk



# AVI beginnings

There were two attempts to create Auroville International before the third finally bore fruit.

Mother in conversation with Satprem:<sup>1</sup>

And Auroville is a great Adventure.

Have you met the Persian? ... He wants to "help" in the creation of Auroville. He already has a society, "Auroville International," and he is going to start his action - he's travelling here and there. He's a man who knows four or five languages, and he has the mind of an inventor. ... He likes to organize, but he is ... as I said, he loves adventure, it's in his temperament (after all, inventions are adventures, and that's how he is). So he's already founded a society called "Auroville International" with members in Europe and its head office in the United States ... the whole outfit. As for me, I watch and have great fun! In appearance he's very surrendered and devoted, but ... For the moment, I don't have proof it's anything other than a "necessary appearance." But he's nice and a man of real goodwill.

The "Persian" Mother was talking about was Jean M. Ahy. His idea to start an international organisation called Auroville International with head office in New York, had been well received by Mother. She had approved of Auroville International's status, objectives and working methods "for a realization of unity and harmony," and had also blessed Ahy's intricate organizational chart of Auroville International, consisting of 15 departments and an even larger number of sub-departments.

When Ahy went to New York shortly afterwards to start the organisation, the idea floundered. The American law on foundations had just changed and it was impossible to decide on the legal status of Auroville International. The already printed brochures of 'Auroville International Inc.' were kept in the cupboard. One and a half years later, when there was clarity on the legal status, there was no money to pay the legal fees and other expenses. Ahy's financial situation had deteriorated, Auroville International's creditors were pressing for repayment of their loans and the work was stopped. Though Ahy managed to repay the loans, his attempt to create Auroville International fizzled out. In later years individuals in

Pondicherry tried to (mis)use Auroville International's brochures for fundraising purposes, but in truth, the attempt had died.<sup>2</sup>

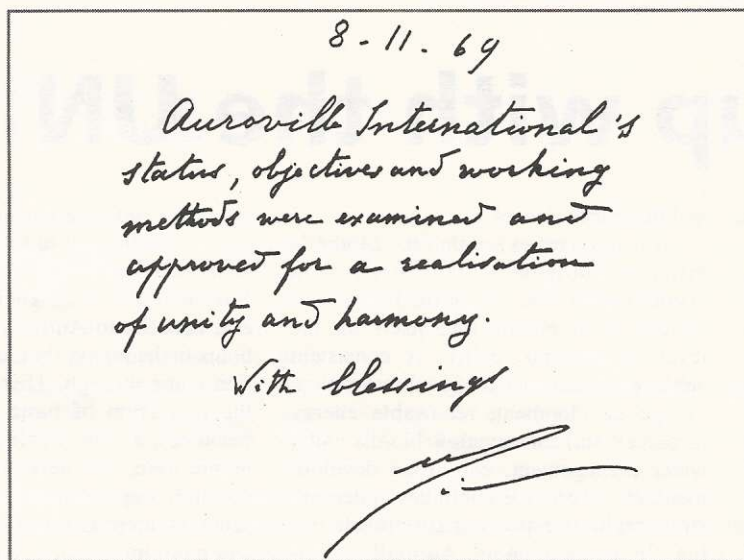
## Second attempt

Meanwhile, it had become obvious to friends of Auroville in Europe that something needed to be done to help the fledgling Auroville community. At a meeting in Paris on February 2nd, 1972, individuals from France, Great Britain, Holland and Switzerland came together and agreed on creating Auroville International Europe with a seat in Switzerland. For unknown reasons, this attempt too never materialised.

The years that followed witnessed the increasingly bitter struggles between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville. In June 1976, the European Centres signed a declaration stating that they no longer had confidence in the trustees of the Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Society and the Auroville Trust (Auro Trust) while remaining committed to support the progressive growth of Auroville. The paper was signed by the four existing Auroville International Centres (France, Great Britain, Sweden and Switzerland), who obviously had been created independently from Ahy, two Sri Aurobindo Auroville Societies (Holland and Belgium), the Sri Aurobindo Centre in Cambridge, the Sri Aurobindo Society in Great Britain as well as the German Aurora-Zentrale der Freunde Aurovilles (Michael Klostermann), the Italian Centre Anandamayi and the Spanish Auroville Relaciones.

## Third attempt

In November 1981, a year after the Government of India had passed the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, three Aurovilians, Dorothee Hach, Yusuf Kassim and Peter Anderschitz decided to make an extensive trip through Europe and call upon all of Auroville's friends to see if their interaction with Auroville could be intensified. They found the situation changed. Old contacts were no longer available, new people had come forward. The trip culminated in a conference in Auroc, Bergerac, a small place in the south of France. That there were high hopes for this meeting was indicated by letters of support received



Mother's seal of approval

from the Auroville Cooperative [a predecessor of the Working Committee], from Sri Aurobindo's Action Center in Boulder, Colorado, from the Instituto di Ricerche Evolutive in Rome, and from Matagiri in New York. This meeting was an eye-opener. It appeared that the fight between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society had not been the only one. German, Italian, British, Dutch and Swedish representatives recounted the struggles they had gone through in their countries, resulting in the need to set up new organizations. It had become necessary to counter the false propaganda current throughout Europe that Auroville was finished. And deformations harming Auroville were rampant, such as those in the publications of Michael Klostermann in Germany.

The meeting brought fresh energy. It was agreed that each group should have a legal structure, which should be recognized by Auroville as its official representative in a country. It could then approach the government and institutions in that country for help for Auroville. It should also obtain tax-exempt status, so that it could serve as channels for donations to Auroville. Some representatives were already in the process of creating legal institutions. Spontaneously, these institutions came to be called 'Auroville International Centres', though hardly anyone was aware that Mother had blessed such an organization twelve years earlier.

The meeting also agreed that henceforth meetings of Auroville International would be held every year in a different country, which has happened ever since.

## The umbrella organisation

Around November 1982, Dr. Kireet Joshi, then Educational Advisor to the Government of India and Special Secretary at the Ministry of Education, visited Paris. Kireet,

who had been instrumental in creating the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act 1980, was briefed on the work of the various Auroville International Centres. He expressed the need to create an umbrella organization; a legal body of which all these Centres could be members and which in turn could apply for registration with international organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO. In the months that followed, the statutes of such an organization was drafted, discussed in Auroville and New Delhi, and once again discussed in detail during a special Auroville International meeting in Paris in February, 1983. It became the main - and hotly debated - topic of the next Auroville International meeting in June 1983 in Laubach, Germany. Fears that Auroville International might become another organization that could 'control' Auroville or the other Centres were expressed. Shouldn't the final incorporation wait till Auroville had explicitly agreed on it? The meeting felt it shouldn't, for very good contacts with UNESCO had meanwhile been established. Mr. M'Bow, the then Secretary General of UNESCO, was a member of the Auroville International Advisory Council set up under the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act and the way seemed open for Auroville Internationals' registration with UNESCO. It was also pointed out that the Indian Government intended to promote a resolution on Auroville in UNESCO's General Conference in autumn that year, in which the Auroville International Centres would be mentioned. The meeting then unanimously agreed that the registration take place on August 15th, 1983.

A letter dated August 12, 1983, from the Auroville Cooperative to all Centres, concluded the matter. "The Auroville representatives to the Laubach meeting have returned. It was decided to have a last meeting on the subject... We decided to simply look through the statutes, quietly, methodically, all together... we came then to that question "Why Auroville International? And what is the relation with Auroville?" ... And the necessity became apparent for a legal international body giving form to the already existing body of people around the world for which the name of Auroville is a hope. ... We can say that on that day began the reality of Auroville International in Auroville... And we wish to state that we want Auroville International to be created, to develop, and to work towards its aims."

Auroville International came into being on August 15, 1983.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mother's Agenda, Vol X, 15, November 1969

<sup>2</sup> "Some Facts about Auroville International"

by Helga Ahy, 1973, Auroville Archives

<sup>3</sup> Declarations, correspondence and minutes

AVI meetings: Auroville Archives.

## In brief

### Mother's 125th birth Anniversary

To celebrate Mother's 125th birthday a function was held at the Savitri Bhavan with Dr. Nirodbaran as special guest and Arindam Basu speaking of his experiences. Another coming together was organized in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium with an audio-visual presentation of Mother's music and photographs.

### Aravind Eye Hospital

On February 21st, the President of India, Dr. A.P.G. Abdul Kalam, inaugurated the new Aravind Eye Hospital in Pondicherry. The building was designed by Auroservice, Pondicherry and the Auroville Building Centre.

### Water crises

A meeting on the worsening water situation was convened at the Town Hall in order to start a process of interaction with Aurovilians for the establishment of a water consumption campaign. Due to a lack of rainfall for the last few years, the upcoming summer months are expected to present some difficult challenges. Water is a limited common resource and solutions have to be found and policies created to protect and benefit the community.

### Matrimandir lake

An extensive proposal from the German engineering office of Harald Kraft to create a large lake around the Matrimandir which would serve for Auroville's water supply appears to be unsustainable, not only due to its high estimated costs of € 95 million (US \$ 103 million. Rs 500 crores). but also in relation to the existing environment.

### Kalively Watershed

Sophie Violette and Nathalie Gassama, two highly qualified water scientists of the renowned French Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS), gave a presentation in CSR on the origin of salinity and the ground water circulation in our area.

### Ring road problems

Residents of the Residential Zone are objecting to plans of the Interim Development Council to manifest a part of the future ring road, projected to fully encircle the city area and carry the city's main traffic, through the Residential zone.

### Matrimandir Tora

The unfortunate acronym Tora (which reminds one of the battle cry of the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbour, a notorious prison in Cairo, and the mountain range in Afghanistan which was recently intensively bombed by the Americans) stands in Auroville for Task-Oriented Residents' Assembly. The Working Committee called a Tora to come to a harmonious agreement for the completion of the Matrimandir and its environment.

### The Grand Egyptian Museum

A design from the Auroville architect team Brand New Day for a new museum near the pyramids to house Egyptian antiquities such as the Tutankhamen collection, has been selected to be part of a publication showing the most significant design proposals that reflect the vision of modern, global architecture.

## MATRIMANDIR

# Governing Board intervention

During the 27th meeting of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, held on the 14th February 2003 in Auroville, the concerns regarding Matrimandir were considered in great detail. Discussions were also held with the members of the Working Committee and their invitees, the Auroville Council and the Matrimandir Workers Team.

The Governing Board had studied all the papers presented in respect of Matrimandir. The Board noted and appreciated the procedures which were followed by the Residents Assembly. However, it was painfully noted that there was disagreement on important issues. It was felt that these

issues needed to be resolved as early as possible and that agreement should be arrived at by a concerted effort of all concerned before the conclusion of the Governing Board Meeting.

In response, a further meeting was held in order to narrow down the differences and disagreement, and to arrive at an agreement. At this meeting representatives of the Working Committee, the Auroville Council and the Matrimandir Workers Team were present as well as Roger Anger, Member of the Governing Board. It was finally agreed that there will be a Matrimandir Core Group consisting of five Members, namely Roger Anger, Arjun, Frederick, Ulli and the Secretary of Auroville Foundation.

All the designs of works to be done will be presented by Mr. Roger Anger. Wherever there are areas of agreement, the works will be carried out expeditiously. In case of disagreement, the matter will be taken up by the Core Group which has the liberty to devise its own ways for arriving at an agreement. If agreement is still not reached, the matter will be referred to the Finance Committee of the Auroville Foundation, and if necessary, to the Governing Board. The resolution also states that Roger Anger is the Architect of Matrimandir and Auroville, to realise Auroville according to the vision of the Mother.



# Linking up with the UN

A major portion of the discussions in the Auroville International meeting this year dealt with ongoing efforts as well as those made in the past relating to Auroville's more meaningful and visible participation in the international arena, namely the United Nations and its organizations. Significantly, the first tangible step into the UN was taken during the Mother's lifetime when she sent one of her young scholars to represent Auroville at the 1970 UN Youth delegation in New York. Aster Patel, a prominent member of Auroville since 1977, recounted the activities at the three-week conference when she, in collaboration with youth selected from around the world, enthusiastically set about devising more holistic approaches to issues of world poverty, industrialization, education, etc. Sharing her UN experience with the AVI members visiting Auroville, she emphasized the Mother's deep interest and hope in having Auroville's "universal" values and ideals become part of the UN's policy framework through the Aurovilian model of sustainable, integral living on the material

and the spiritual level.

It is not hard to see that the Mother's vision of Auroville as "the city the earth needs" and as "the city of the future" has already been manifesting itself on the level of material reality. A consistent achiever in areas of ecological restoration, village development, renewable energy resources, soil conservation, bio-diversity, water management, eco-urban development, etc., Auroville continues to demonstrate multiple aspects of sustainable living. In recognition of Auroville's balanced approach to conservation of its natural resources and the development needs of the local communities, international organizations like UNESCO and the European Commission's Asia Urbs programme have extended opportunities for Auroville to promote and share its vision of a sustainable future with other cities elsewhere.

In the context of Auroville's integrated management of bioregional development, Constance, a prominent member of AVI-USA, has initiated a team effort through the Auroville Foundation to gath-

er relevant information and to create a sufficient database in order to apply for the UNESCO nomination of Auroville as a Biosphere Reserve. There would be several benefits to Auroville and its neighbours in the region should such a nomination come through. These would include the protection of basic land and water resources, a more stable and diverse economic base, long-term inter-disciplinary research opportunities for international scholars interested in studying Auroville, and more importantly, a healthy environment for the regional communities and their children. Auroville's biosphere reserve would encourage the growth of similar communities across the world, given that Auroville's living model of sustainability has already been demonstrated on a scale that is significant in the global context. Complementary to the effort behind the potential Biosphere Reserve status for Auroville is the attempt underway for the possible inclusion of Auroville on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The initiative for the latter has come from Luigi and his Town

## Auroville and UNESCO

Since UNESCO has its headquarters in Paris, AVI France became the natural link between Auroville and UNESCO.

Yanne, who, together with her partner Croquette now divides her time between Auroville and France, joined AVI France in 1993. She took up the responsibility for maintaining relations with UNESCO.

Explains Yanne: "My role has been to try and make the members of UNESCO discover that Auroville exists, and that a lot of work has been done here in the fields of afforestation, ecology, alternative development and education. There is also the work which has been done in the bio-region and with the surrounding villages - in terms of education, respect of traditions and preserva-

tion of cultural heritage, that is part of humanity's heritage which UNESCO works at preserving. A lot of work that is done in Auroville corresponds to UNESCO's objectives. I present projects Aurovilians are involved in."

Although Auroville as a whole cannot be supported by UNESCO, as it is a Foundation under the Indian Government, certain of its projects and areas of action

can be recognised. This stamp of recognition from UNESCO can help raise funds from other donors.

At present Yanne is busy preparing for an exhibition on Auroville, which will be put up in the UNESCO headquarters from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2003. Such exhibitions have been held every five years; this one, coinciding

with Auroville's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, promises to be very important. A conference will be held and there will be an exhibition and slide show. The present Director of UNESCO will inaugurate the session. The conference will be held for the directors of the member country delegations of UNESCO. Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, as well as the Indian Minister for Education will be invited. Four Aurovilians involved in different fields will come and present their area of work.

"Together with Luigi, who, through Asia Urbs, has started to link up with the European Community, we have been in charge of all the administration and organisation for making this exhibition possible," explains Yanne. "Now I am in Auroville to meet with Aurovilians and see what they have prepared for the exhibition. The members of AVI France will be there to put up the exhibition, answer questions, and when it is over, take everything down again."

Emmanuelle



Yanne

## The French connection

Croquette, the chairman of Auroville International France and a long-time resident of Auroville who now spends his time between France and Auroville. He was here during the recent Auroville International meeting, but only participated in the introductory session. Besides having had many other obligations at the time, he felt it wasn't really important. "I have the impression, maybe I am wrong, that Auroville International believes itself to be an entity separate from Auroville, with its own reality. I consider Auroville International France as a service to Auroville, simply as a link between Auroville and the outside world. We do what we can for Auroville, and I don't see the necessity of participating in big meetings."

The main service being offered by Auroville International France is to give information about Auroville to those interested. Having lived in Auroville for many years, Croquette is in a good position to do so.

Today, in this Internet age, more and

more people also come into contact with Auroville on their own. Croquette feels that although the Auroville website is a good development, in some instances the way Auroville is portrayed is not very realistic. He gives a very simple example, which is just a question of vocabulary: "In Auroville we use the word 'community' to describe a settlement. The word has a very different connotation in Europe; it gives people the wrong image of reality in Auroville."

Another example he gives is of parents who want to join Auroville and read about the Auroville schools on the site. They arrive and are told that there is no place in the schools, there are not enough teachers, so their children cannot be accepted.

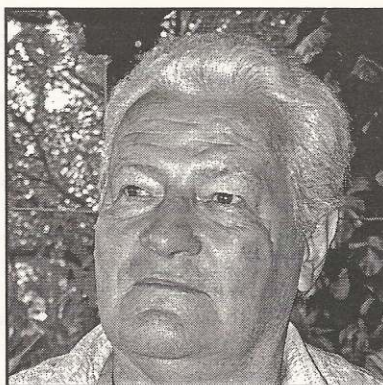
"We have to readjust the way we

portray Auroville," stresses Croquette. "Our work at Auroville International France consists of trying to give realistic information about Auroville, practical advice, so that people don't get the wrong ideas, or form false judgements. It is almost like "translating" Auroville into a language which will be understood outside."

Auroville International France is also involved in fundraising for Auroville. During the past three years, 12 lakhs Rupees (US\$ 24,000) were raised and sent to the community. "But we

don't want to create a special fundraising organisation," says Croquette. "Our main role is that of messengers between Auroville and the outside."

Emmanuelle



Croquette



# Liaison with South-Africa

Planning team at Aurofuture. For two reasons, both these nominations would help Auroville to consolidate its global presence. First, in sustaining its ideals through realizing its own development goals, and second, in sharing its own challenging, but successful experimental evolution with the world.

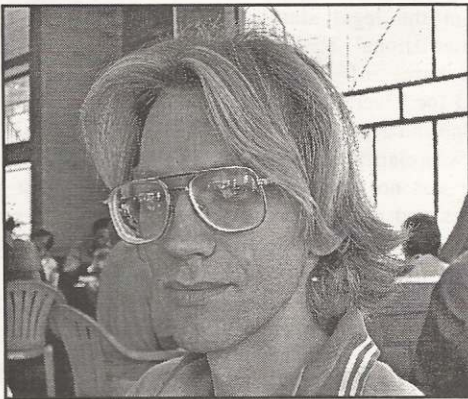
A more direct link with the UN, along the lines of the Mother's vision, was proposed by Marti, a long-term Aurovilian who is presently a Global Eco-Village Network (GEN) representative to the UN. The GEN is a network of 15000 communities around the world, of which Auroville is one. The time is not far, according to Marti, when Auroville in alliance with other small, collective communities could be called upon to offer solutions to world problems. In the October 2002 meeting at the Palace of Nations, such an alternative gathering did take place. For Marti, who was present, the confluence of individual energies may have been strong enough to affect some political decisions taking place in Washington at that very moment.

Abha Prakash

## Russian views

For many of the Russians delegates, this was their second AVI meeting and the first time they stayed in Auroville instead of commuting from Pondy. Almost all were from Moscow; there was one lone participant, Vladimir, from St. Petersburg.

Sergei, the Russian Aurovilian who also coordinates the Russian pavilion at the International Zone, was their official translator. However not much translation happened because of the difficulty of translating in real time, and because he was also responsible for recording the minutes of the meeting. Sergei confesses that the Russian group was glad that the talks were not translated right away since it forced them to listen more attentively. Understanding the context in which the discussions happened and having some knowledge of



Sergei

English helped them follow the meeting.

Sergei says that there is no official AVI Russia. However there are various groups practicing the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Russian groups are coming together and working synchronously. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2002, a meeting and a meditation gathering was organized to which the various groups in Moscow were invited. It was a very successful event. Last summer, Dr. Ananda Reddy also gave talks in Russia that were well received.

Sergei feels that while the Integral Yoga is practiced with intensity in Russia, Auroville itself is only beginning to be taken seriously. But what is most promising about the Russian group is that there is an eagerness to do liaison work to spread information about Auroville. An informative and beautiful website is also in the making. There is also an aspiration to express the beauty that the Mother strongly encouraged. The recital of Ludmila, a professional singer, at this AVI gathering is evidence of this aspiration.

Priya Sundaravalli

Jasmine is presently the Auroville liaison for South Africa, although she has also worked for Auroville International Switzerland and Auroville International Italy. She first visited Auroville in 1985 when she was a delegate at the International Youth Year Conference.

*During the meeting you said you saw many parallels between South Africa and Auroville. In what ways?*

South Africa has one of deepest shadows in terms of apartheid, huge inequalities and neglect suffered by the majority population. Many white South Africans don't want to look at this: there's a tradition of denial. I can't judge, but speaking to Aurovilians it sounds as if there is a certain lack of integration with the surrounding villages and that there are real issues of inequality



Jasmine

ty here too. This is not easy to solve on a material plane, but from my South African experience I've learned that inner equality is the basis, the precondition, of all outer equality.

Another parallel between Auroville and South Africa is that both have a

unique concentration of spiritual force. In South Africa this is particularly true of Cape Town which attracts spiritual teachers from all over the world. There is a great aspiration for change which is partly found in the white community's incredible resurgence of spiritual seeking, but it also finds its counterpoint in the innate and traditionally-rooted spirituality of the black community, a spirituality which has given them an incredible capacity to forgive and move on. I have a certificate that Africa's time has come, that a much stronger force is working for change, taking up whatever is there in terms of available instruments.

*Are Sri Aurobindo and Mother little known in South Africa?*

South Africa has a huge Indian population. Many of them have heard of Sri

## German impressions

Wolfgang joined Auroville International Germany ten years ago, and is the current chairman of the umbrella organisation Auroville International. He works in Berlin as a journalist and documentary film-maker, and also runs the office of AVI Germany. In 1972 he spent six months in Auroville, during which he had an experience of darsan with the Mother that changed his life.

*What are your reflections on this Auroville International meeting?*

Having the meeting in Auroville was a step forward in that it brought together Auroville International Centres and Auroville after a long time. This physical encounter is necessary, and I'm very glad

it's now been decided to hold the Auroville International annual meeting in Auroville on alternate years. Like all relations between human beings, it needs a re-evaluation and a re-appreciation from time to time.

*What do you think is the future of the Auroville – Auroville International relationship?*

AVI will continue their usual functions of fundraising and providing information to the public, but I feel now that that's not enough, we need to take another step.

I see the building of the International Zone as a common work that Auroville and Auroville International can undertake

together. This will give Auroville International a more visible function that will show how it can be of use to Auroville.

Also, I believe Auroville International can respond to Auroville's requests for assistance in creating a dialogue with the rest of the world. The Auroville process is so interesting – in some cases there are no results yet, (for example, the economy, politics), but the process is exactly what the world is looking for. So many people have lost the confidence to experiment after the disappointments of socialism, but the aim of human unity is still looked for. It's time to form a network to bring the Auroville experience to the notice of the world.

## Contact USA

Nilauro was born and raised in Auroville. While working on his degree as a marine biologist in the US, Nilauro became a member of the Auroville International-USA board. After graduating, he accepted a full time position working for Auroville International-USA.

*Why do you think it was important for this Auroville International meeting to be held in Auroville?*

I feel that a lot of people in Auroville don't quite understand what Auroville International is all about. The whole idea of having the meeting in Auroville this year was to help bridge the gap, to explore ways in which we could work together, especially with regards to the International Zone.

*Why do you find it important for Auroville and its international centres to build a closer relationship?*

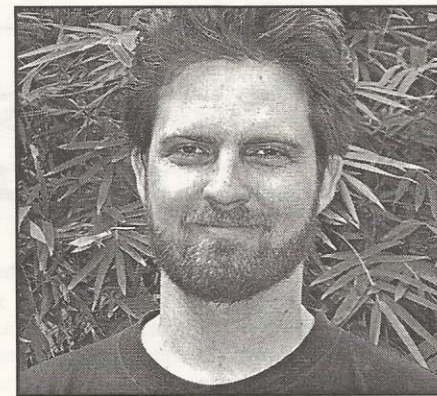
People have come from around the world to live and work together to create an actual human unity, which is implicitly an international idea. Auroville is not, and should never be, an isolated island on the globe: it has to interface with the world at large, and that is what the Auroville International Centres aim to do. The Auroville International Centres are like Auroville's fingers or roots in the world, providing channels through which energy of all forms can flow both ways.

*How would you explain to someone the role and importance of the Auroville International centres?*

Auroville is a global effort. People from around the world have come here to join a project, which aims to create Human Unity – an endeavour that cannot

exclude the rest of the world. The Auroville International Centres are there to help Auroville and the rest of the world interface with each other.

*During this Auroville International meeting, two important topics of discussion included working together to build the International Zone and an international proposal for support of the pavilions. What are your thoughts on these two points?*



Nilauro

At the last Auroville International meeting in California we unanimously decided to propose that Auroville's International Zone Group be expanded to include, among other things, certain members of the Auroville International centres. This makes sense, since the Auroville International Centres play a huge role in creating the national pavilions anyway. During the meeting in Auroville we were able to discuss this proposal with the community directly, and found that we were all in agreement with this cooperative step towards developing the International

Zone together. Initially Auroville International had suggested calling this new group the Expanded International Zone Group, but Auroville suggested that the International Zone Group be expanded as proposed, without changing its name. That is a definite sign of goodwill.

The other major decision of the recent Auroville International meeting in Auroville was to extend an invitation to the governments of the world to participate in developing the International Zone. This is a very big step, which has the potential of catapulting Auroville into a new phase of development.

*In general, how did you feel about this meeting?*

Overall, I feel that this meeting was productive. I like to see something concrete emerge from these meetings. In this case, Auroville agreed to work together with the Auroville International Centres in developing the International Zone, and we decided to appeal to the governments of the world to start work on their pavilions. These two decisions show Auroville's willingness to cooperate with the wider world. I'm very happy to see that.

*What would you like to see develop for the centres and Auroville in the coming years?*

During this meeting several Aurovilians realized what Auroville International is all about. With every other Auroville International meeting taking place in Auroville from now on, I hope to see even more people fully understanding the scope of our work, and look forward to the closer collaboration that will surely ensue.

Sunaura



# son with South-Africa

presently the Auroville International Centre for South Africa, although she has worked for Auroville International in Switzerland and Auroville International in Italy. She first visited Auroville in 1985 when she was a delegate to the International Youth Year.

*What did you say you saw between South Africa and Auroville?*

"South Africa has one of the deepest roots of apartheid, huge inequalities suffered by the black community. Many white South Africans want to look at this situation of denial. I can't speak to Aurovilians it's there is a certain lack of connection with the surrounding villages and the real issues of inequality."



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unique concentration of spiritual force. In South Africa this is particularly true of Cape Town which attracts spiritual teachers from all over the world. There is a great aspiration for change which is partly found in the white community's incredible resurgence of spiritual seeking, but it also finds its counterpoint in the innate and traditionally-rooted spirituality of the black community, a spirituality which has given them an incredible capacity to forgive and move on. I have a certitude that Africa's time has come, that a much stronger force is working for change, taking up whatever is there in terms of available instruments.

*Are Sri Aurobindo and Mother little known in South Africa?*

South Africa has a huge Indian population. Many of them have heard of Sri

Aurobindo but they tend to be in awe of him, and they turn instead to the more accessible teachings of Sivananda, Ramakrishna etc. Auroville, however, is little known.

*How did you experience the Auroville International meeting?*

After being away for so many years it was hard to catch up. The presentations were too short, there was so much input, so many threads I couldn't follow: for me the meeting could have taken ten days.

One of the highlights was the opening session in which people who had worked in Auroville International for a long time talked from their hearts about their experiences. It was important for the Aurovilians to hear this. One of my favourite comments came from Wolfgang. "Auroville has always been a

bit of a tough community," he said, "and so I prepared myself for a tough Auroville which would call forth a tough Wolfgang. But Auroville received us with an open heart, so I could open my heart and be a soft Wolfgang."

I thought that openness of heart was so important. If it could happen in this meeting, I've great hope that it can also happen in those areas of Auroville where there are historical tensions and where people find it hard to communicate.

All in all, this visit has been an amazing experience, and I go back enriched, hoping to build bridges. Africa has so much to give – joy, vitality, creativity, music, its connection to the earth – but it also resonates with much that is happening here. So each side has much to gain from the other.

Alan

## man impressions

ing joined Auroville International Germany ten years and is the current chairman of the organisation Auroville International works in Berlin as a documentary film-maker, and Vice of AVI Germany. In six months in Auroville, he had an experience of darkness that changed his life.

*What reflections on this international meeting?*

The meeting in Auroville was a great experience that brought together international centres and people from all over the world. This physical presence, and I'm very glad

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together. This will give Auroville International a more visible function that will show how it can be of use to Auroville.

Also, I believe Auroville International can respond to Auroville's requests for assistance in creating a dialogue with the rest of the world. The Auroville process is so interesting – in some cases there are no results yet, (for example, the economy, politics), but the process is exactly what the world is looking for. So many people have lost the confidence to experiment after the disappointments of socialism, but the aim of human unity is still looked for. It's time to form a network to bring the Auroville experience to the notice of the world.



Wolfgang

In addition, the unique Auroville experience has to be documented. It's not

enough anymore to tell interested people to come and live here, because many people aren't able to but they still want something that they can refer to. Until now it is incredible that there's not been a good book written about the Auroville process. Auroville just made a wonderful introductory film, an artistic work [Auroville: A Dream, see review page 7], but it's not for the mainstream. Maybe Auroville International could help to stimulate reflection on the Auroville process and help open the doors to the mainstream, to the UN, to academic and artistic fields.

Lesley

## ntact USA

was born and raised in the USA. While working on his degree as a marine biologist in the USA, he became a member of the Auroville International board. After he accepted a full time position for Auroville International in the USA.

*What did you think it was important for the International meeting to achieve?*

A lot of people in Auroville don't understand what Auroville is all about. The whole idea of the meeting in Auroville this year was to bridge the gap, to explore how we could work together, with regards to the international centres.

*What do you find it important for the international centres to achieve in their relationship?*

We come from around the world and work together to create a sense of unity, which is implicitly the idea. Auroville is not, and is not, an isolated island on the edge of the world. It is what the Auroville International Centres aim to do. The international Centres are like roots or roots in the world, channels through which energy flows both ways.

*Can you explain to someone the importance of the Auroville International Centres?*

It is a global effort. People from all over the world have come here to work, which aims to create a sense of unity that cannot

exclude the rest of the world. The Auroville International Centres are there to help Auroville and the rest of the world interface with each other.

*During this Auroville International meeting, two important topics of discussion included working together to build the International Zone and an international proposal for support of the pavilions. What are your thoughts on these two points?*



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The other major decision of the recent Auroville International meeting in Auroville was to extend an invitation to the governments of the world to participate in developing the International Zone. This is a very big step, which has the potential of catapulting Auroville into a new phase of development.

*In general, how did you feel about this meeting?*

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Sunaura

## The UK channel

Martin Littlewood is the Secretary of Auroville International UK and a long-term friend and supporter of Auroville.

*You've attended almost every Auroville International meeting since 1986. How does this meeting compare?*

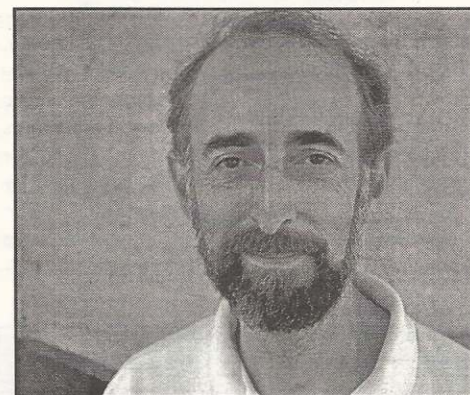
It was a different kind of meeting. As it happened in Auroville more Aurovilians attended than one would normally expect at such meetings, and this made it quite special. Also we'd never before in our meetings set out to present Auroville International to the Aurovilians.

There was a very nice quality to the meeting, the atmosphere was good, but I felt there was a lack of intensity compared with some of our previous meetings reflecting, perhaps, that we were not discussing 'hot' issues. In other words, this was primarily a getting-to-know-each-other kind of meeting where the outcome is perhaps less tangible than when you work through a difficult issue and come to a clear resolution. The real value of this meeting was in introducing Auroville International to Aurovilians. My only regret here is that comparatively few non-Auroville International related Aurovilians attended. I hope that next time more will be encouraged to come.

*Did the meeting change your understanding of the relationship between Auroville and Auroville International?*

No, it reinforced my feelings about what the relationship should be and what it is becoming. Of course, every Auroville International centre has its own

flavour and way of working, depending on the individuals involved. But as more Auroville International people come more often to Auroville, or are linked through the internet, we have a much closer contact with the day-to-day work in Auroville. So Auroville International becomes much more of an extension of Auroville in the outside world, a branch



Martin

of the same tree, rather than a separate organization.

*Is it important to keep the identity of Auroville International as a distinct body?*

Maybe what happens is that some members of Auroville International Centres lose their national identities when they're here in Auroville, so it's more like a meeting of Aurovilians from all over the world rather than a meeting of Aurovilians with national members of Auroville International. This doesn't feel like a problem at all!

Alan



# Mother's 125th birthday, February 21st

It is 5 am. Following a long line of candles from the Matrimandir office to the amphitheatre, I hear a softly sung Om, hymned by a group of unknown Aurovilians. One meter high cylindrical lamps, positioned in a wide spiral in the amphitheatre, bid a joyful welcome. My silent aspiration joins the harmonious singing. Then Mother's voice makes me sit upright. With halting voice, she recounts her experience of the night of April 12-13, 1962.

*Suddenly in the night I woke up with the full awareness of what we could call the Yoga of the world. The Supreme Love was manifesting through big pulsations, and each pulsation was bringing the world further in its manifestation. It*

*was the formidable pulsations of the eternal, stupendous Love, only Love: each pulsation of the Love was carrying the universe further in its manifestation.*

*And the certitude that what is to be done is done and the Supramental Manifestation is realized. Everything was Personal, nothing was individual.*

*This was going on and on and on and on....*

*The certitude that what is to be done is DONE.*

*All the results of the Falsehood had disappeared: Death was an illusion, Sickness was an illusion, Ignorance was an illusion – something that had no reality, no existence.... Only Love, and Love, and Love, and Love – immense, formidable, stupendous, carrying everything.*

*And how, how to express in the world? It was like an impossibility, because of the contradiction.... But then it came: "You have accepted that this world should know the Supramental Truth ... and it will be expressed totally, integrally." Yes, yes.... And the thing is DONE.*

*(long silence)*

*The individual consciousness came back, just the sense of a limitation, limitation of pain; without that, no individual.*

*And we set off again on the way, certain of the Victory.*

*The heavens are ringing with chants of Victory! Truth alone exists; Truth alone shall manifest. Onward! ... Onward!*

*Gloire à Toi, Seigneur, Triomphateur suprême!*

*(silence)*

*And now, to work.*

*Patience ... endurance ... perfect equanimity. And absolute faith.*

The silence in the amphitheatre is near complete.

The sun has meanwhile arisen. Only now I see that the cylindrical lamps have all been inscribed with Om Namo Bhagavate – 1800 times in all, I am told. Below the urn a beautiful image of a flower made of garlands becomes visible.

Bonne fête, Mother.

Carel

## RESEARCH

# Enhancing soil fertility with bioelectric eggs

How to harness living energies for Auroville Farms.

What strikes one about Rolf Brokmeier is his unusually luminous face, bright and intense eyes and a matching smile; perhaps a natural spillover from the energies that he deals with – cosmic cylinders with the charged quartz sunk into still water or the tall power-tower where one can get a cosmic ray shower... This morning I am at his home in Petite Ferme to cover his latest foray, this time it's into eggs – 'bioelectric' eggs to be precise. It is an exciting reporting assignment, and I immediately perceive that Rolf is a man of the future.

"It all began four years ago when I got introduced to the work of the late Viktor Schaubberger who spent his entire life experimenting with living energies," begins Rolf. He explains how Schaubberger (1885-1958) studied natural shapes and forms and the generation of energy fields around them, in the process gleaning profound insights into energetic natural processes still unknown to science. "I am now in contact with Josef Just, a German researcher who worked with Schaubberger's methods and who confirmed the improvement of soil fertility. Now Schaubberger's entire life works are held at the Pythagoras Kepler School in his original home in Austria."

Rolf patiently explains how Schaubberger viewed certain opposing forces, such as heat and

cold, expansion and contraction, electricity and magnetism, centrifugal and centripetal forces, gravitation and levitation etc. as manifestations of similar energies, but separated by an octave scale. These opposites are believed to be endowed with specific vibrational powers which are considered to be 'self-organizing intermediate vibratory matrices of immaterial energies', that bridge gaps between the will-to-create and creation, spirit and matter, and an idea and its manifestation. This is the basis on which one can supposedly generate bioenergies that can increase the soil fertility for several kilometers radius, using large egg-shaped containers buried in earth.

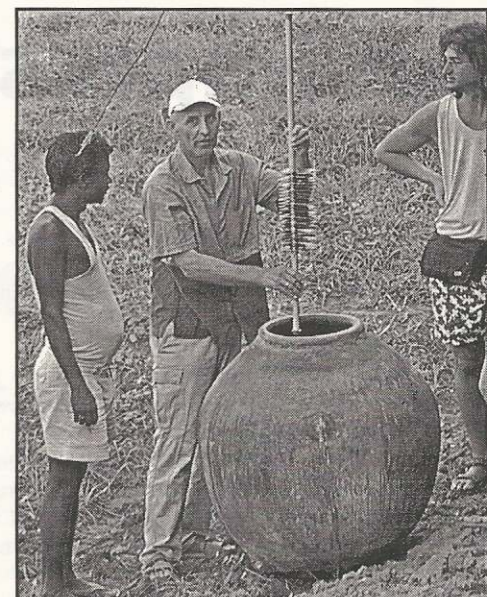
Whew! It seems to make sense yet is mind-blowing. How will AV Today readers react to all this...? The moment of doubt subsides as intuition kicks in asking me to shut-up and open myself. I feel a new respect for Rolf, and I am all ears to listen.

Rolf says that according to Schaubberger, the deep red ferruginous (iron-rich) earth that is found in the Auroville bioregion is 'relaxing' in nature and thus growth-retarding. This may explain the poor fertility of the region. In such an environment, the use of energy-generating sources such as these egg-shaped pots can improve soil fertility and have a significant

impact on yield and productivity of these farms.

With a small seed grant Rolf has begun testing in two fields at Siddhartha and Windarra farms. Both Herbert and Fredericke, who run these farms, have been open and encouraging. While Schaubberger used metal eggs, Rolf patronizes indigenous technology using low-fired terracotta pots which are available in the bioregion. These large pots, traditionally used for grain-storage, are egg-shaped and 90 cms in length. The pots are buried in the ground partially or wholly and arranged in a triangular pattern, with the tips located 11 metres apart. The pots are filled with water into which is inserted a vertical array of 24 beaten copper and zinc sheets arranged alternately along a cylindrical stem. The sheets of copper represent the female elements while the zinc is the male counterpart, and together they generate the bioenergies that affect soil fertility.

Rolf, like any true researcher, is well aware of averse factors – in this case the amount of rainfall, composting, local differences in the micro environment etc. – which can affect growth or yield. This has led him to maintain a meticulously detailed data log for each trial plot. He also believes that the human testers whose fields these pots are in should have an open attitude towards the experiment. Since there is no



Rolf lowers a vertical array of 24 copper and zinc sheets in a terracotta pot.

dearth of this in Auroville, one Sunday morning in early February a trial plot at Siddhartha Farm, which already contained 5 cm tall peanut plants, was seeded with three giant terracotta eggs. Observation and the recording of data is being carried out at regular intervals. The yardsticks of success or failure of this project will be the growth rate of the plants and the final peanut yield. Rolf's optimism and hope shines through and, as I leave, I cross my fingers sending up a prayer for a demonstrable success of this new experiment. For now, the giant eggs lie incubating in those two fields working their magic in Auroville's soil.

Priya Sundaravalli

## ENVIRONMENT

# Stepping up awareness

For two consecutive Sundays last month, Auroville residents were invited to participate in guided walks through the dense forests of the Newlands, Success, Forecomers and Ravena area. Part of the urgent "Land for Auroville" campaign, the walks, organized by residents of Newlands, were perhaps more instrumental in raising the awareness of those who came that it was possible to transform erod-

ed landscapes into beautiful, flourishing nature preserves.

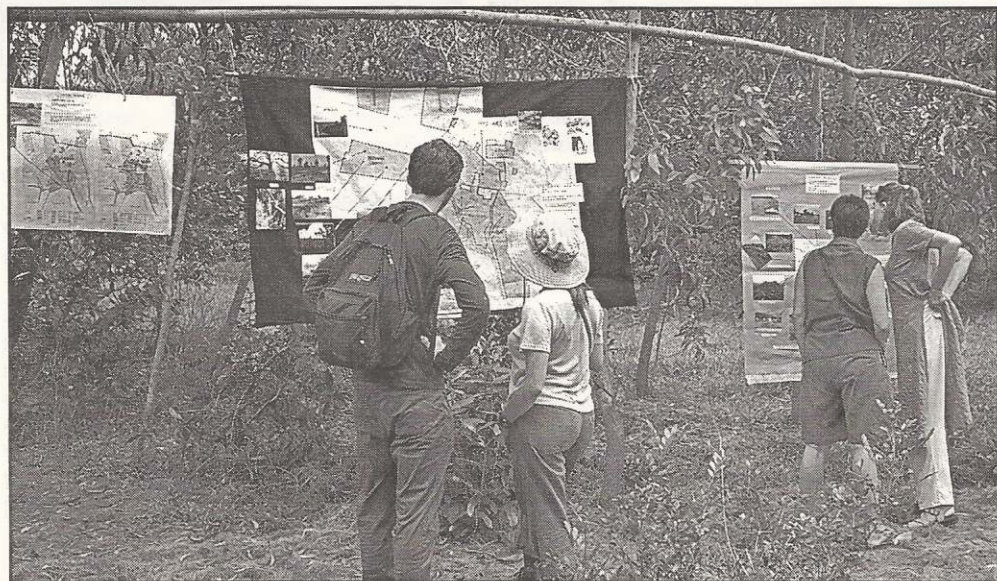
Except for the deep canyon gully that still cuts through these lands, few reminders of past human and elemental ravages remain. With the lush tree and bush cover, the ecosystem in these areas has regained its health to a degree that the local fauna has begun to use the habitat for long-term purposes. The Indian porcupine, for exam-

ple, has returned to the land after its restoration. Migratory birds of different types too have begun to frequent the forests. With the gradual silting up of the canyons certain types of foliage are finding hospitable terrain once again. Through intensive efforts in soil conservation, reforestation, and building of dams these lands are now sufficiently healthy to survive with a minimum level of maintenance.

Nevertheless, these nature preserves are still under threat from many quarters and therefore need to be consolidated. Plots of village lands that are scattered in the midst of these forests need to be bought as soon as they are put up for sale. With the Pondicherry government having built low-cost housing colonies too close to the Auroville greenbelt limits, unsustainable urban practices are resulting in unauthorized cutting of trees and killing of animals and birds crucial to the health of these forests. Of the six pairs of the Great Indian Horned Owl that had nested in the Forecomers canyon until now, only a couple of their offspring remain.

Stepping through the Newlands and Success forest was a source of joy for many of us. Above all, they served as living reminders of the dedication and love with which some individuals nurtured them for years and years. Symbols of our own evolving journey, they are worth conserving and protecting.

Abha Prakash



Participants viewing area maps and other exhibits before the walk

## EXHIBITION

# Matter is Consciousness

This exhibition is a tribute to the late Italian artist and medical scientist Antonella, whose collection of acrylic and ink paintings "Energy-Matter: Amazement is the Core of Science" trace her deep interest and dedication to cellular yoga. Painted against stark white backgrounds with broad coloured borders in red, purple, and cobalt blue, Antonella's pieces project unique interfaces between parts of the human anatomy and symbolic geometrical shapes drawn in fine lines. Precise depictions of the human eye, the hand, the heart, assume transcendental beauty when interlinked with the painter's delicate representation of her inner, evolutionary consciousness.

A devotee of the Mother, Antonella recently passed away while on a visit to Auroville early this year.

Abha Prakash

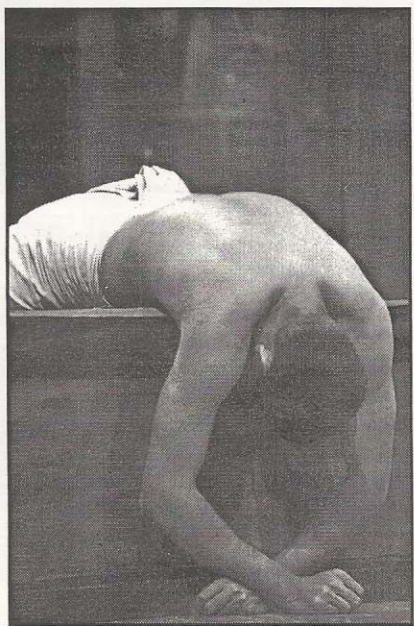




## Sacrifice

Tagore's *Sacrifice*, directed by Jill, was performed in Auroville and in the Ashram during February. Dealing with the issue of animal sacrifice among worshippers of Kali in rural Bengal, Tagore's play centres on the resulting divisive, power politics between religious and secular authority, the Priest and the King. Interwoven with this dramatic thread is the impact of the above patriarchal conflict on two women: the helpless peasant girl and the defiant Queen. The actual self-sacrifice of Jaisingh, the idealistic temple boy torn between his loyalties to Raghupati, the fiery priest (played excellently by Charudatta), and King Govinda, is a moment of great dramatic power with which the play reaches its finale.

Congratulations to Jill for her effective, open theatre techniques and



Partha as the sacrificed Jaisingh

to the various people involved with the stage-setting, costumes, sound, and lighting.

Abha Prakash

## DANCE

## Dharmatology

Norwegian-Indian "Free Radicals" came to Auroville to perform their latest work, *Dharmatology*. The group had been refining the work since December at Bangalore's Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, thanks to the sponsorship of five Norwegian cultural foundations. But the story began a few years ago, when Norwegian choreographer/dancer Ellen Johannesen and composer/musician Hege Rimestad realised that they both shared a fascination with Indian culture and decided to collaborate in exploring both the richness of the tradition and its impact on modern society. They travelled through India together two years ago, reading the Bhagavad Gita, improvising together, and trying to understand more deeply the process a westerner undergoes in India.

Together they recorded sounds that included temple noises and vegetable sellers calling their wares on the street. Hege built on her background in classical, folk, rock and improvised music by studying South Indian music

in Chennai, whilst Ellen studied Ashtanga Yoga with Bangalore guru Phatabi Jois. These experiences and recordings inform *Dharmatology*, which grew to include dancers Anne Katrine Haugen and Nakula Somana and musician Ashok Kumar.

The work opened with a wry commentary on perceptions of spirituality, with Somana recounting a tale of first arriving in the UK to study dance, and taking the London tube. "Everyone was sitting so still. I thought they were meditating and being spiritual. I thought I had arrived in a very spiritual country, because they were able to be so still. Indian buses are so noisy..."

This tale eased us into the moody soundscape, as Rimestad began to manipulate sounds from the sampler unit that were simultaneously mystical and suggestive of an urban context, setting the slightly disturbing, eerie tone of the piece. Johannesen introduced us to her extraordinary dexterity as she moved through some Ashtanga-influenced moves. Some sections

## EXHIBITION

## Tibetan thankas

A show of over fifty rare and seldom displayed Tibetan Buddhist Thankas (religious paintings on silk), with some dating from the 13th Century, collected from the monasteries of Likhia, Pang, Stakna and Lingshed in Ladakh, organised by the Dept. of Culture of the Government of India and the Central Institute of Buddhist studies in Leh, Ladakh, was held at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville from February 6th-15th. It was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Pondicherry. An extremely informative catalogue explained the complex meanings of these objects of devotion



and meditation that included Thankas of Lord Avalokiteshvara – the Bodhisattva of compassion – Amitabha Buddha (the Buddha of Infinite Light), White Taras, the eight manifestations of Guru Rimpoché, the 84 Siddhas and a remarkable 20th century Saraswati done in Tibetan style. Also highlighted were the close and millennial links between Indian and Buddhist art, particularly in the Himalayan

regions. The show continues to Bangalore and Bhopal.

Roger Harris



such a mix of spirituality and daily life. Things are so layered here compared to my society where there's only 4 million people and it's so simple and well organised."

She also talks of the need to surrender to India, as that's when something interesting happens. "At the end I'm doing a headless Kali dance, symbolising the losing of control... It's scary for us sometimes in India, it's deep and dark and ancient."

The group also spoke of the atmosphere between them and the audience at the Auroville performance. Somana says, "It was very magical. There was a strong connection with the audience, there were no barriers."

Lesley

## REVIEW

## New AV video

A new Auroville video based on Mother's text "A Dream", commissioned by the Visitors' Centre and financed by Stichting de Zaaier, has been released by Auroville Press. This 20-minute Auroville video is an aesthetic cinematic presentation of Auroville in all its diverse glory. The first half of the film, more fluid, visual, and auditory than the second half, focuses on the youthful, creative side of Auroville – its multicultural dance forms, art, pottery, and music that continue to enrich and coexist in a unifying whole. The narration of the Mother's Dream during this part of the film combined with the visual unfolding gives the viewer an almost mystical insight into what Auroville is striving towards. The camera then moves on to the service units of Auroville, interspersing the functional, human-centred activities with breathtaking views of the bioregion. Early morning sunrises filtering through the Auroville forest is one such scene that continues to delight the viewer long after the film is over. The last ten minutes of the film record voices of Aurovilians engaged in community work since the early days. Auroville's developments in various

fields including organic farming, and alternative technologies are at the centre of this piece. A short overview of Auroville's Foundation ceremony, in black and white footage, as well as the early work on the Matrimandir, lends it historical depth, in spite of it slightly jarring with the rest of the film in terms of its altogether different cinematic texture. The film ends with some individuals speaking about some of the challenges that Auroville continues to face along its unique journey. The faith that Auroville will and can manifest the Mother's vision despite all odds remains alive till the end.

More space, however, could have been given to the ground realities that complicate life for the 2000 plus residents of Auroville. This latest, soft-focused take on Auroville is, nevertheless, a treat on many levels. Beautifully produced by the Auroville Press and based on a script of Christine Devin, with photography by Olivier Barot, Basile, Gerard and Bernard.

Contact the Auroville Press, Aspiration, Auroville 605101, e-mail aurovillepress@auroville.org.in for further details.

Abha Prakash

## EXHIBITION

## Roses and ...

The salient point to remember seeing the exhibition of 'Roses and...' is that it lasts only about two weeks and that it might take a while before you can see it again, which is a great pity as Nele's varied paintings of nature – mostly roses, bamboo, shrubs, water lilies and leaves – decidedly deserve better than getting stocked. Why then does such a gifted artist show her paintings in the Aurodhana Art gallery in Pondicherry? Lack of exhibition space in Auroville is one of the obvious answers, now that every Auroville artist apparently tries to exhibit in the increasingly packed months of January and February.

For me the most striking paintings were those of roses in a variety of yellow colours – 'Ode to the Sun' would be a fitting caption – and the more modern looking collages of leaves. These are paintings to meditate on, trying slowly to get into the source of inspiration that lie at their base and so doing, entering into a beautiful aspect of nature.

Rumour has it that Nele might exhibit her paintings in autumn in Auroville – take note not to miss it.

Carel



Nele

## In brief

### Story-tellers

Norman, a well-known British TV and film actor, read a selection from his autobiographical short stories at Pitanga.

Martine Quentric-Seguy, a professional story-teller from France, beautifully enacted tantalizing tales for a packed audience in Pitanga.

### GAP

Visiting artist GAP presented an exhibition of Tapestry at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

### Bottom of the Deep Blue Sea

Overwhelming appreciation was expressed for the dramatic performance of *The Bottom of the Deep Blue Sea* by the Fertile Anarchist Resurgence Troupe at the Visitors Reception Centre.

### Piano recitals

Heinrich, Auroville's gifted musician, gave a piano recital at Salle Auropax and an organ recital at the Visitors Centre.

### Homage to Savitri

Amongst all the exhibitions on display in Auroville, the exhibition 'Homage to Savitri' in the Savitri Bhavan from the late Dutch artist Jacques de Jong takes a special place. As well as many paintings and text-picture combinations inspired by Savitri, Jacques with great concentration wrote out the entire poem (almost 24,000 lines) on a single sheet of paper of about one square metre.

### Pyramids Exhibition 2003

That Auroville is a successful breeding ground for budding artists was convincingly proven by an exhibition in the Pyramids showing the works of 12-19 year old students of Last School/Super School. The works on display were the result of a 2-weeks full-time commitment, cancelling all other classes. May we suggest that the works on display become part of an Auroville Arts library?

### Varanasi

Ireno Guerci, known from his paintings and yearly calendars, exhibited his often stunning photographs from the Indian holy city of Varanasi (formerly known as Benares) in Pitanga.

### Remembering The Mother

Dr. Prema Nanadakumar gave two talks, one in English and one in Tamil, at the Savitri Bhavan.

### Childrens' paintings

In the lobby of the Financial Service near Pour Tous paintings of children aged 3½ to 6½ years old were exhibited.

### Evolving vision

An exhibition of the original plans for the Auroville city and the Matrimandir, worked out by Roger Anger with The Mother, and of other archive material including Roger Anger's present concept for the Matrimandir gardens and the CIRHU complex, was hosted at Pitanga.

### Lectures

Dr. Anil K. Rajvanshi, director of the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) in rural Maharashtra, talked about the work being carried out at NARI and how spirituality and technology can work together for sustainable future. NARI was recently given the FICCI AWARD 2001-2002 for its work in rural development by the Prime Minister.



# A forecomer looks back

Bob and Deborah Lawlor are remembered as the first settlers in the area known as Forecomers. They left in the early seventies. When Deborah visited Auroville in January, Auroville Today asked her about how it all began.

It began by Bob coming upon the Ashram in 1965, and staying there for a little over a year. Then Mother told him on his birthday to go back to the USA and wind up whatever was there. I met him in the USA, and wrote to Mother asking if I could come with him. Her answer was a bit of a shock. She wrote to me, "When the need becomes imperative you will be welcome." Bob came back in 1968, in time for the inauguration ceremony of Auroville; I came a month or so later, in time for the April balcony darshan.

Shortly afterwards we asked Mother if we could settle in Auroville. She sent someone with a jeep to show us all the plots that had been purchased. The one we felt most attracted to was the most dramatically beautiful, though by far the worst farmland, the area around the canyon that Mother then named Forecomers. That name was not only given to the area. She also referred to us as 'the forecomers'.

We fell so much in love with that land – Bob was an artist and I was a theatre person and a dancer trained in arts. We used to make long walks to gaze at the land from different sides, sometimes calling each other to 'come over here, and look at the contour of the canyon from this angle!!' The palmyra trees, the vast plains, the deep canyons, there were so many aspects of nature to be worshipped and honoured.

So "Adam and Eve" went around admiring the landscape. There was a little mango grove there – it is still there – and between that and the canyon we built a storeroom which also served as our 'house'. We slept under a keet overhang in the open, and felt very isolated. I think we were the first people this side of Promesse who settled in Auroville. Later, others settled in the Certitude

great curiosity, being the first non-Indians many villagers had seen. Before Auroville came into existence, these villages had been very isolated. Though Sellakannan and Dhandapani worked wonders for our acceptance, we were still stared at constantly. For me as a woman it was particularly uncomfortable, but I learned to deal with it. As a theatre person I was used to an audience. But here there was an audience for everything: If my bike had a flat tyre I could be sure I would be surrounded by a crowd of onlookers watching how this 'different' person was solving the problem. We cycled a lot. All our food shopping came from Pondicherry, so I would cycle from Forecomers through the gully to Kottakuppam – where children would tease me by throwing stones and calling 'vel-lakachi,' meaning white woman – and then to Pondicherry and back with the big shopping bags dangling from the cycle, then pushing the cycle and bags through the hot sand of the gully back up to Forecomers. That was quite rigorous.

Also, in the beginning we had no water and once every couple of days a jeep would come from Promesse with a big milk container full of water. One of the first things I learned in Auroville was to take a bath with a quarter bucket of water. But if uncomfortable, it was also part of an exciting adventure. I was 28, Bob was 29. And if sometimes you got more than you'd bargained for it was

As soon as we were 'established,' Bob hired workers and started bunding the fields and planting ragi, sesame and other monsoon crops. Bob was working with the workers, dressed as they were, doing the same work, spending as many hours in the sun as they did, and that was highly unusual. We lived from my allowance of a US\$ 100 - 150/month, which supported 7 or 8 Tamil workers. The relationship with the Tamil people was very friendly. They understood sincerity. We learned a lot of them from these people who knew how to live on that narrow margin

## Extract from one of the letters from Forecomers.

Concerning a person who wanted to give up and go back to his home country: "He asked Mother. Her last reply was 'Those who stay here know that for them there is no other place in the world they could be. If that inner certitude is not with you then do what you must. I will always be one with you in your aspiration.'"

November 1968.

of starvation, still working with ancient tools – for example the wooden plough – and using an ancient technology, such as the bullock cart with wooden wheels. Bob had the first one made with rubber tyres, a wonder for the area!

We brought Mother a map of the land and asked her to put her finger where we should dig a well. She did that and we dug the well and then there was no water. Also one of the workers lost a tool down the well and it was a mess. So we figured Mother did not want it to be easy. Some time later we consulted a local diviner and made another well and that one was successful. When we finally got a well and had a bit of a garden, we offered the first fruits of the harvest to Mother and brought them to her room. Her smile was radiant. She was just wonderful, and said "Continuez!" Those meetings with Mother, on my birthday and in the context of Auroville, are amongst my most profound and cherished memories.

And then there was reforestation. Shyama and Frederick had started planting trees even before moving to Auroville. We planted as many as we could and when Francis joined us we began the Success nursery and were able to plant trees on a larger scale. This was not only a question of digging a hole and filling it with good earth, compost and the tree sapling, but also of watering the tree during its first years and guarding it against goats and other livestock. It is staggering to realize that now two million trees have been established in that way.

Bob got the idea to make a check dam across the Forecomers canyon. He got a grant from some friends in the USA – US\$ 500 – and in 1970 we erected the dam across the main area, 60 feet wide and 60 feet high. We covered it



The Forecomers canyon in 1968

with cement and did everything the German engineers who visited us said we should do. However, it broke during the first June rains and washed down the canyon. Luckily, nobody was hurt. Then we started a smaller dam, using stones and cement, and that one still stands today, although silted in. It made a wonderful swimming hole for some time.

Besides doing the cooking and maintaining Forecomers, I started to teach modern dance at Aspiration and do theatre. Theatre was very much appreciated. We did a performance in the Forecomers canyon itself in 1969, which I created on the basis of a poem called 'Praise' from a 18th century English poet, Christopher Smart. In this poem, Saint Cristopher everything. People came by bus from Pondicherry to see it. Bob and the workers had to make a road to get the bus to the edge of the canyon, and we guided people into the canyon. A tour guide took them around and from various nooks and corners in the sides of the canyon little performance pieces would be presented. Dhandapani and some of our workers were among the cast members along with Janet, Shyama, Dutch Lisa (with baby Grace on her hip), Austin, Frederick and others. And there was music. That play had a spirit that resonated with the new Aurovilians, in other words there was a sweetness and hopefulness about it that said something to which people responded. And that's why it is still

remembered, I guess.

This all happened during the time Mother was still in her body. Bob and I used to write letters to friends in the USA about what we did and why we did it. Those letters were unexpectedly returned to me later and photocopies are now in the Auroville archives.

In 1972 we left for a year. Bob wanted a break from the constant demands of the land and the community to read Sri Aurobindo for example, and study sacred geometry for which he had developed a great interest. We came back in early 1973 and we stayed till 1975, doing the chorella (algae) project. When, after Mother's passing, the so-called civil war started, things got very rough. We were dismayed. For we had always felt that excitement, that vision, that we were part of something that was radically new and important. And then it was broken.

Four years ago I returned to Auroville for the first time. Forecomers has become unrecognizable, with perhaps one or two trees I remember having planted. The plains have gone, the shape of the land has disappeared, a beautiful forest has come up. That that aspect of our work has so fully matured gives great joy.

Auroville has changed enormously since we left, for better and for worse. But I am hoping to come back and join the play again.

*In conversation with Carel*



The first Aurovilians dug, planted and watered

area and after some months the 'cave' arrived from Europe to settle in Aspiration.

We had the fortune of finding a man from Edayanchavadi named Sellakannan who became our watchman, accompanied by his little boy Dhandapani. The boy must have been 9 or 10 years old then [Dhandapani later became one of the trustees of Aurelec, eds.]. We were of course objects of

still...it was still so wonderful that those first three years we never ever thought of leaving for a holiday. There was something in the air...perhaps it was due to the fact that we were learning that the state of one's consciousness was influencing one's work. There was a kind of magic in that. Everything felt more intense than ordinary life. There was that conscious attempt to do everything with reference to The Mother.

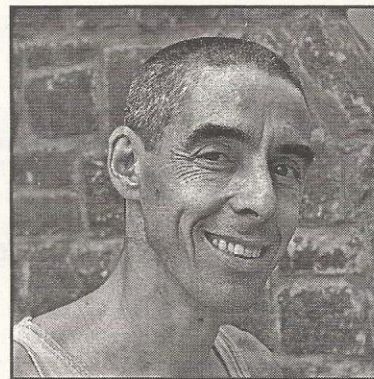
## PASSING

# Stefano

Stefano Moro, 47, from Italy, left his body on February 17th in his home in Aurodam. A resident of

Auroville since 1981, Stefano battled with a most aggressive form of cancer for over a year, opting for natural and alternative means of treatment only. During this time he determinedly built up an increasingly strong and alive connection with his inner self from which place he continued to radiate hope and faith, light and love to those who came in contact with him.

As long as he could, "Stef" as he was known, read works of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Satprem.



This strengthened and guided him in his integral yoga approach of actively, consciously confronting the karmic

formation encountered by him in this lifetime. "I'll work this out", he said, "even if it means I will die along with it." Stefano's courageous perseverance and delight gained from new inner discoveries during this painful venture impressed and uplifted the many friends who stood by him.

Hats off for this, Stef, and thank you for your music and presence while you were here. We'll hold you up and remember you.

*Mauna*

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