

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Auroville's 40th anniversary



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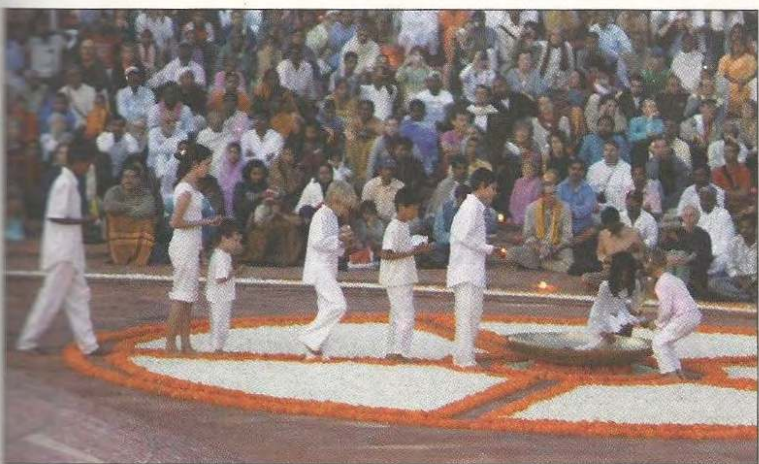


PHOTO GIORGIO



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Top: A packed amphitheatre at pre-dawn with the birthday bonfire

Left: Auroville children deposit soil collected from all over the world at the Kolam ceremony

Bottom left: The illuminated Banyan Tree at the Matrimandir festooned with jasmine garlands

Echoes. Before dawn on 28th February, over 4,000 people thronging the amphitheatre gazed at the traditional bonfire and listened to a recording of Mother reading the Charter during the inauguration of Auroville, forty years ago. As dawn broke, young and older Aurovilians dressed in white processed past the urn and then deposited sand from all over the world in a dish, recalling the mixing of the nations' soils in the urn on this day in 1968.

The birthday was given over to a symposium on the theme of *Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity*. Dr. Karan Singh was unable to attend, but former Director-General of UNESCO Mr. M'Bow, International Advisory Council and Governing Board members, representatives of Auroville International as well as Aurovilians gave their interpretations of human unity and how far they felt Auroville had progressed. In the evening there was a dance performance in the beautifully renovated Sri Aurobindo Auditorium of *Savitri, Flame of the Future* by the renowned dancer and Governing Board member, Mallika Sarabhai, and her troupe. The day ended with an all-Auroville dinner at the Solar Kitchen.

The 28th programme was the centrepiece of events which stretched over two weeks in late February and early March. They included a three-day exploration entitled *The New Dynamism of the material and the spiritual*; an all-Auroville sports day featuring the very first Auroville marathon; numerous exhibitions, including one on the theme of *The Mother and Auroville*; music and dance events; and a concluding seminar in the India International Centre in New Delhi where the speakers were Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Kireet Joshi and Michael Murphy. The Hindu, one of India's national newspapers, even brought out a four-page supplement on Auroville, including special messages of congratulation from the President and Prime Minister. And, in the midst of all this, a striking statue of Sri Aurobindo was erected in front of Savitri Bhavan.

Exhausting? Yes. Inspiring? At times, yes. Totally appropriate? This is less clear. For while the early morning bonfire worked its magic and Mallika's interpretation of the Savitri legend proved a fitting finale to the birthday, some felt that dedicating the entire day to talks on human unity somehow missed the point. For human unity cannot be grasped by the mind. It's a moving target, a work in progress where illuminations can spontaneously happen but where the smallest advance often needs to be wrested from the sweat, tears and forgetfulness of our daily lives. Let us hope that by our 50th birthday human unity will be so obviously manifest in Auroville that we'll no longer need to talk about it....

• Snapshots of a seminar
• Is the Auroville Foundation
an autonomous body?
• Int. Advisory Council meets
pages 2-3

• Sri Aurobindo's statue
• Mother and Auroville
• The Unity Kolam ceremony
• Savitri: Flame of the Future
page 4

• Profile of Manohar
• Anamika's smoke-fired pots
• 3-day psychology conference
• In seach of absolute wonder
pages 5-6

• Passing: Sam Spanier
• The Auroville look
• National mountain-bike race
• The Auroville marathon
pages 7-8

Snapshots of the birthday seminar

On February 28th a seminar on Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity was held at Bharat Nivas. In the morning session, Chief Guest Mr. M'Bow, former Secretary General of UNESCO and member of the first Auroville International Advisory Council, addressed the audience. His speech was followed by lectures of members of the IAC and members of the Governing Board. In the afternoon, Aurovilians and members of Auroville International spoke. The day was concluded with remembering Roger Anger. Here follow a few snapshots.

Karan Singh (Chairman of the Governing Board)

My very warm greetings and congratulations to all of you who contributed to the making of this place. The completion of the Matrimandir and the installation of the statue of Sri Aurobindo in Savitri Bhavan represents a new spiritual dimension in the growth of Auroville. I call upon all Aurovilians now to rededicate themselves to the future and to make the great vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother a reality. (recorded message)

Aster Patel (Aurovillian and member of the Governing Board, presiding over the seminar)

Unity is a passion of the soul and a need of the human being at all levels. The world has tried to achieve it by building up international institutions. These attempts have succeeded in widening and intensifying our need for unity but we still haven't found the solution.

Our experience in Auroville is that true unity can only be found where the collective is diverse. Somewhere in the core of our being we Aurovilians have savoured that unity in diversity, we know what it feels like, we know its value. But to create structures of life that reflect that deep unity is a step which we have not yet taken.

Mr. M'Bow (ex Director-General of UNESCO and member of the first International Advisor Council)

When we in UNESCO first heard of the plan to create Auroville we felt it had a deep significance. For we were looking for an international community dedicated to peace. That's why we supported in a resolution the decision to create Auroville. The necessity for Auroville was there yesterday and even more so today in a world of incomprehension, fear and prejudice. For Auroville is a place where prejudices are surmounted in order to achieve the ideal of human unity.

I encourage you to do what is necessary to make Auroville even more universal so that all peoples of the world may participate and recognise themselves here.

Mark Tully (Chairman of the International Advisory Council)

What has India taught me? That the basis of living together is unity in diversity. Part of the trouble today is that people try to impose monolithic cultures on others. The Indian tradition is about not doing that. Its tolerance comes from three small words in the Upanishads, *neti, neti, neti*, which mean 'not really' or 'not quite'. These words, we are told, should follow any attempt at defining God.

So, one of the traditions of India which help greatly if we want to live in unity is a suspicion of certainties. The other is the Indian tradition of balance and searching for the middle road. This involves continually examining our beliefs and certainties and seeing if we are taking things too far.

Doudou Diene (Member of the International Advisory Council)

We need to look at the drive for unity critically. Politically, unity has led to either domination or to the nation state, which, in turn, has led to the marginalisation of certain minorities and two World Wars. Economic unity, as it is presently interpreted, is leading to uniformity. Even in the religious sense, unity historically has led to attempts to proselytize, to dominate and to fundamentalism.

An African proverb says, in the forest while the branches of the trees are fighting each other, their roots are kissing. The branches are the diversity, but to find peace you should not cut the branches, because this will kill the tree. The only solution is to go to the roots, which is where universal values are being created and practised by different cultures.

What I like here in Auroville is that you attempt to practise unity every day. It is a great challenge. You know how difficult it is for people coming from different walks of life to live together. The world has not come up with a solution, nor can I give you any answers. You are only ones who can give answers through the way you decide, every day, how to combine your efforts to build schools, to create leadership, to relate to the Indian Government etc.

In other words, unity is an ideal which has to be constantly conquered.

Ameeta Mehra (Member of the Governing Board)

I, Mark Luyckx and Michael Murphy will try to imagine how Auroville and the world will develop after the 28th of February, 2008.

As the years go by, there's a sense that something is pushing the psychic being of Auroville to come forward. The structure of Auroville begins to change organically. In every work area facilitators emerge who want to create a new way, a way of harmonising people. Now circumstances become crushing if one does not follow that instinct, blows come whenever there is a movement towards the shadow.

By 2015 the town has developed – with new roads, new materials, new ways of expression. Auroville is vibrating with the cellular energy of the future. By 2020, when Sri Aurobindo said that India would have a new kind of spiritual leadership, Auroville is making its contribution to the entire nation. Auroville's experiments become an inspiration for those seeking alternative ways. By now the collective seems to have its own physical body which you can touch it when you enter Auroville. And those who touch it experience some



The speakers at the seminar: Dr. Karan Singh; Mrs. Aster Patel; Mr. M'Bow; Sir Mark Tully; Dr. Doudou Diene; Ms. Ameeta Mehra; Dr. Mark Luyckx Chisi; Prof. Michael Murphy; Georges van Vrekhem; Shraddhavan; B; Sonia Dyne; Serge; Deepti; Savitra; Claude Arpi; Julian Lines. Speakers in memory of Roger Anger: Chamanlal Gupta; Alain Grandcolas; Anumapa; Frederick; Pashi; Raman and Satprem

kind of transformation. The darkness still exists, but the balance has changed. Now the movement is always towards progress, and the darkness only serves to push towards greater progress.

Mark Luyckx Chisi (Member of the International Advisory Council)

In 2020 Communist China suddenly decides that the Chinese people can choose their President. They choose Madame Chang, a Nobel Prize winner for the environment. The first thing she does is she travels to India to make a pact of non-violence. Later she travels to India again and visits Auroville. She wants Auroville's help in creating in China a form of spirituality beyond religion as religion is still seen as a threat by the state.

She influences many other changes in the world. In 2042 she returns to Auroville. She knows the next step is to create a form of world citizenship and Auroville is the place to learn about this. She asks, "Can I cut and paste a hundred more Aurovilles in China?" This is the beginning of the supranationalisation of Auroville because everybody comes here to learn about world citizenship.

Michael Murphy (Member of the International Advisory Council)

The ancient Greeks said there were two kinds of time – *chronos* (one thing after another) and *hieros* (moments of fullness, of the sacred). The history of Auroville has alternated between the two.

I think the whole thing started in the gardens of the Matrimandir in 2008 when suddenly a new species of plant appeared spontaneously. This had never been observed before, and the only way to explain it was to say that something about matter itself had changed. The old habits, which humanity had believed were absolute laws, were changing in Auroville.

Compounding all this was the experience of people who came to the Matrimandir. Everybody felt some kind of presence, although different people experienced it differently. This led to renewed attempts to understand what happened to people who had deeply moving ecstatic experiences. At the same time, people discovered that Auroville was not only a place where people had incredible experiences but that people were working here on the big issues the world needed – like peace work and a new economics. Thus Auroville became more and more a place of international importance and influence.

Georges (Aurovillian)

The motto of the European Renaissance was: *nihil humanum a me alienum puto*, which is Latin for "nothing that is human do I deem alien to me". The same attitude of feeling nothing human as alien is one of the basics of the Integral Yoga. Starting at the point where one makes the decisive individual step, one has gradually to explore one's own complex personality. This leads to the increasing realization that one is a cell in the body of humanity, and that one has to acquire the consciousness of the self of that whole body before, as Sri Aurobindo taught us, one can go farther or higher.

Shraddhavan (Aurovillian)

When I came to Auroville I was interested in The Life Divine and the ascent to a higher consciousness. And this word 'Human Unity' seemed to me a little empty.

However, if you look at Sri Aurobindo's book 'The Ideal of Human Unity', he is not concentrating so much on the individual, he is thinking about how the world can be united. He and the Mother both say that such a harmony is absolutely necessary in order to give the conditions for preparing the next step in the evolution; and in order for humanity to move towards a better, nobler, and clearer future.

When I reflect on this, my feeling is that we have to see that all the 6 billion plus in the world are the soul – a portion of the 'one' – and it is really only at this 'soul level' that we can experience the oneness.

B (Aurovillian living in America)

When Mother spoke of human unity she also called it the supramental consciousness. It seems an impossible task to attain this. Yet in Auroville we've often been put in front of the impossible. Many years ago, Piero asked a small group of us Matrimandir workers to make two spiral ramps which would be self-supporting. All we had was a few lengths of pipe. One team had already tried and failed. We worked on it for two and a half years and finally we succeeded. Today, those ramps take you up to the chamber and for me this work is a very beautiful symbol of how we will get to the supermind, of how the impossible becomes possible.

Sonia Dyne (Chairman of Auroville International UK)

The things that unify us are much more solid, more fundamental, than the things that divide us. I like to think of human unity as a vast undersea mountain. Only the tip shows above the waves. But on that tip are concentrated all our differences, all our diversities and we are so preoccupied with them that we forget to dive down a little deeper, look at the foundations of the mountain.

Why do we cling to the illusion of our separate being? Are we afraid that we'd lose our individuality? If we can see it differently, if it becomes a matter of rejoicing that the other person is another form of ourselves, our consciousness will widen.

Serge (Aurovillian)

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo tell us that the unification of humanity is inevitable because it is the intention of the spirit. In fact, the first condition given by Mother for living in Auroville is to be convinced of the essential unity of mankind, and to have the will to collaborate for the material realization of that unity.

Now, 40 years after its creation, if individuals and working groups can claim a certain number of successes in certain area of activities, the manifestation of a divine unity in diversity – in our organization, in our economy, our education, our town planning – is yet to be demonstrated.

2008 can be the year of unity if we would only consent to unite all our efforts.

Deepti (Aurovillian)

Auroville is this divine game and I've been part of it since 1975. Auroville is impossible, but what else is there to do! It spoils you for everything else.

Unity is not something you can imagine with the mind; you have to live it. And in Auroville, with all the outer shocks, there has been this fabulous inner sweetness of the unity of oneness.

It is not something we've to find in the future. It's something we've to pull out from the profundities of our beings; it's there already.

The reason why India is alive and the reason why India can host Auroville is because it has kept alive this inwardness of knowing – that we are one.

Savitra (Aurovillian living in America)

What is my nationality? Auroville belongs to nobody in particular and I feel I do not belong to any country. I remember, in the early 1970s, driving a bullock cart into the local villages to get compost to replenish the soil. There were no separate nationalities on that bullock cart, although two of us were born in American, one in Canada and one in Africa. This was human unity in action. When we worked together, we got out of our heads and allowed the Divine Force to take us into a living dance.

Claude Arpi (Aurovillian)

I'm very disturbed by hearing some people say we are a government department. I met Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, and both were very clear that the role of the government is to protect Auroville, not to interfere. We are all grateful to the government for its support but I appeal to it not to interfere in our day-to-day functioning as this will kill any chance the Aurovilians have of achieving human unity, not only for themselves but also for the world.

Julian Lines (Chairman Auroville International)

This morning we witnessed a ceremony when earth from 120 nations was brought together. The idea behind it was that if we mix the soils together and then give them back to the world, we will create a vision of human unity, which is the larger vision that the world so badly needs.

Is the Auroville Foundation an autonomous body?

au-ton-o-mous adj. 1. Not controlled by others or by outside forces; independent. 2. Independent in mind or judgment; self-directed. 3.a. Independent of the laws of another state or government; self-governing. b. Of or relating to a self-governing entity. c. Self-governing with respect to local or internal affairs. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

“The Auroville Foundation is, like any government department, subject to all the norms and regulations applicable to Government departments and particularly in relation to handling of finances,” wrote advocate M. Bharathi of Madras in an extensive legal opinion obtained by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation in August 2007. His views, shared by some members of the Governing Board, were the basis of a contentious dispute in the meeting of the Governing Board in September last year.

The topic was financial matters: should the Secretary be a mandatory co-signatory of all cheques, and so virtually control all of Auroville’s expenditure? Or was this authority to be held by the Aurovilians themselves, as has always been done in the past? The Board, after hours of meeting, opted for a compromise solution. It made the Finance Officer of the Auroville Foundation a mandatory co-signatory of all cheques over Rs 5 lakhs, but only for a trial period of six months, which ends in March 2008.

On behalf of the community the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly accepted the decision of the Board, but stated that it wanted to study the applicability of government rules to a body like the Auroville Foundation. For more is at stake than freedom in financial matters. In question is the very freedom of Auroville’s residents to develop Auroville independently, and not as per government directives. Comparisons were drawn with Shantiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore’s world university in West Bengal, which, according to many, became paralysed due to over-regulation by the Government. Is Auroville doomed to the same fate?

The Working Committee decided to obtain

another legal opinion – not just from any lawyer, but from Shri Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney General of India and Senior Advocate to India’s Supreme Court, who ranks amongst India’s most eminent legal luminaries. Three questions were asked: is the Auroville Foundation an autonomous body or a government-controlled organisation? Is there any legal provision which makes it compulsory for the Secretary to be co-signatory to all cheques? And what is the position of the Residents’ Assembly vis-a-vis the Governing Board?

The legal opinion was long in the making. It arrived in January 2008. Its contents, however, were most enlightening.

Shri Sorabjee did not concur with the view of Mr. Bharathi. He first referred to the circumstances under which the Act came to be passed and the eloquent speech of Sri P. Shiv Shanker, then Minister for Human Resource Development, when introducing the Bill in the Indian Parliament in 1988. He had said: “The object of the Bill is to maintain the autonomy of the Foundation ... As far as the day-to-day activities are concerned, they will be looked after by the residents through appropriate autonomous arrangements, which will include Residents’ Assembly and its Working Committee. The idea underlying this arrangement is that the residents of Auroville should have autonomy so that activities of Auroville can grow under an atmosphere conducive to harmonious growth.” Shri Sorabjee then examined the provisions of the Act itself, and concluded that the Auroville Foundation is not a government body but an independent juristic entity and that the provisions of the Act *guarantee complete autonomy to the Foundation*. [emphasis added, eds.]

He further explained that there is no provision

under the Act nor is there any legal principle from which it can be inferred that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation must be a compulsory co-signatory to all disbursement of funds. “The Governing Board is free to authorize any person to sign the cheques for withdrawing funds from the Foundation’s accounts.” And he added, “It is significant that over the last 15 years this Fund has been managed by Aurovilians alone and this practice has not been doubted by any authority so far.”

Shri Sorabjee then investigated the role of the Residents’ Assembly versus the Governing Board. At first reading it appears that the Act gives all the powers to the Governing Board while the role of the residents, through its Residents’ Assembly, is only advisory. But Shri Sorabjee disagreed with this reading, and wrote “The role of the Residents’ Assembly is not limited to acting in an advisory capacity. While taking all decisions in respect of all activities relating to the residents of Auroville, the Governing Board is required to give due weight to the advice of the Residents’ Assembly since the Act envisages a specific advisory role of the Assembly in that behalf. The Governing Board cannot render such a role that is specifically envisaged by the Act redundant by unreasonably rejecting the advice of the Residents’ Assembly. At the same time the decisions of the Governing Board must subserve the objectives of the Act which are, inter alia, to further the development of Auroville and its residents ‘in accordance with the original charter of Auroville’ and to advance the ideals for which Auroville had originally been established.”

Shri Sorabjee then referred to the role of the International Advisory Council. “An important objective sought to be achieved by the Act, through the International Advisory Council, is to ensure that

the residents of Auroville are allowed freedom to grow and develop activities and institutions for the fulfilment of the aspirations and programmes envisaged in the Charter of Auroville. Like every power conferred by statute, the Governing Board must also exercise its powers purposefully to further these objects of the Act. The Act envisages that the three constituents of the Foundation [the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents’ Assembly] will work in harmony and co-ordination, with minimal governmental interference ... The decisions and functioning of the Governing Board and its decisions must keep in mind that the residents are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Foundation and the purpose of enacting the statute was not to ‘take over’ the properties of Sri Aurobindo Society but to consolidate the undertakings and facilitate the fulfilment of the vision conceived in the original Charter,” concluded Sorabjee.

As can be expected, Aurovilians were pleased with Shri Sorabjee’s unambiguous legal opinion. So was Shri Kireet Joshi, former Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, who, as Educational Advisor to the Government of India, had been responsible for drafting the Bill in 1987/8. In a letter to Shri Sorabjee, Kireet Joshi congratulated him for his brilliance in bringing out the intention behind the Act. “Your statement regarding the role that the Residents’ Assembly is expected to play and the autonomy of the Foundation as a whole makes it very clear that the Auroville Foundation can never be described as a department of the government,” wrote Kireet. “The conclusion that you have drawn emphasizing the need for harmony among all the three authorities of the Foundation is impeccable.”

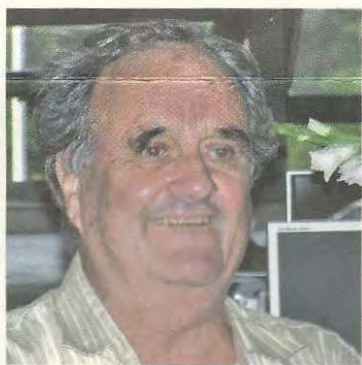
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International Advisory Council meets

IAC members Sir Mark Tully, Dr. Doudou Diène, Dr. Mark Luyckx Ghisi and Prof. Michael Murphy met in Auroville.

“Amazing.”
“Intense.”
“Impressive.”
These are some of the words in which the members of the International Advisory Council described the experience of their stay in Auroville this time. They interacted with members of various working groups and afterwards with the community in a question and answer session. “Please be open and frank,” asked Doudou Diène. “We face an almost impossible task advising you and we need your openness for our better understanding.”

They certainly got what he asked for and perhaps more than that. Major points of concern were passionately voiced, such as the autonomy of the Auroville Foundation vis-à-vis the government of India, the relationship of the Governing Board and the Secretary towards the Aurovilians, the feeling that the Residents’ Assembly decisions were not respected, and the visa issue. “We have a feeling that the Foundation is sort of closing in on our



Sir Mark Tully

lives,” explained one Aurovillian.

Sir Mark Tully responded. “These are not new issues,” he said. He recounted his talk the previous evening with Mr. M’Bow, the former Secretary General of UNESCO and member of the first International Advisory Council set up in 1980, who had told him that “These were the issues even then.”

The IAC, however, refused to take a stand for one side or the other. Setting the various bodies against each other, warned Mark Tully, is not the way forward but a disastrous course.



Dr. Doudou Diène

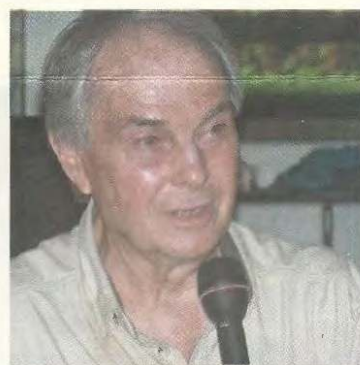
Only a harmonious cooperation between the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents’ Assembly can ensure that Auroville will develop according to its ideals. “We are very anxious that this balance should be maintained,” he said and recommended that the attendance of meetings of the Residents’ Assembly be strengthened.

The position of the IAC was more extensively stated in its minutes made public a few days after their meeting. “Given the sensitivity and deep concern shared with us by Aurovilians regarding this issue, we strongly believe that the roles and duties of the Governing Board, the Residents Assembly, the Working Committee, the International Advisory Council, and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation be clarified as soon as possible,” wrote the IAC. And it outlined 5 basic principles.

1. Respect for and full awareness of Mother’s ideals. Auroville is a human spiritual adventure that should be protected and nurtured. The Central consideration here is that these ideals permanently inspire the functioning and progress of Auroville and the solution of all its problems.

2. Aurovilians are the main actors of Auroville’s development.

3. There has been and continues to be a strong commitment of the Indian Government without which the realization of Auroville’s ideals would be impossible. The role of the Government is to protect and to



Prof. Michael Murphy

facilitate Auroville’s development in all its aspects.

4. As and when possible, all decisions should and must be taken by the Aurovilians, in consultation with the representatives of the Governing Board. The Auroville Foundation can and must intervene only if there is incompetence or if the issues require the participation or involvement of the Government of India.

5. In keeping with the newest trends in the international management circles, both in the corporate and in the non profit world, Auroville’s management should reflect transparency, empowerment, participation and networking.

The Council, reminding that these very points had also been raised by them in the previous meeting of the IAC, asked for a report on this issue for its next meeting.

The IAC minutes outlined three further topics of concern. On the disputed issue of land exchange the Council took an unambiguous stand. “In order to consolidate all Auroville lands within the city and in the green belt,” wrote the Council, “it is possible that outlying land will have to be sold or swapped. It is thus important that residents in the outlying regions understand these challenges for the future of Auroville, and consider seriously the possibility of moving to the planned city, with all necessary assistance and support.”

A second topic was the social and ethical challenges of the housing situation. “In line with Auroville’s ideals of



Dr. Mark Luyckx Ghisi

Human Unity, the housing policy should aim at diminishing the class divide between rich and poor houses inside and outside Auroville,” wrote the Council and added, “However, in recognizing the complexity of this issue, we simultaneously affirm the importance of ethical values, aesthetics, diversity in lifestyle, and freedom of choice. In all this we do not want to promote rigid rules and conformity.”

Lastly it recommended that Aurovilians strengthen their executive power now given by the Residents’ Assembly to the Working Committee. Underlining that the decisions be taken by this executive power are made in a competent and most transparent way, it then recommended that its term of office, which is now 2 years, be prolonged to 4 years, “in order to give them more time to learn practice and excel in their job.”

Apart from advice, the Council also offered congratulations. “The Auroville community cannot be congratulated enough on the achievements of these 40 years. The Matrimandir has been completed as the living symbol of Auroville’s pioneering generation’s soul searching, along with its power to create and manifest. One may safely say that not only the soul-symbol stands completed but also that the material foundations for a developing township have been laid, again through hard and inspiring work and creativity.” Added Mark Luyckx Ghisi during the community interaction: “We all have to say ‘thanks’ to The Mother.”

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The IAC members spoke to a packed house in the Town Hall

Three-day psychology conference in Auroville

The Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity was the venue of a three day conference with presentations on subjects like global warming, beauty, architecture, transformation, and economy. A fascinated audience listened to speakers Michael Murphy, Marc Luycks Ghisi and Georges Van Vrekhem among others. Excerpts:

Michael Murphy, member of the International Advisory Council and co-founder of the Esalen Institute in California gave a presentation on "Possibilities of a new matter and a new flesh". According to Prof. Murphy, "scientists are discovering more and more that great philosophers, like Plato, were also yogis. Things that were always taken as metaphors are real. Supernormal things, like stigmata are a foreshadowing of what will be normal in the future." At present his Esalen Institute is working on a database of supernormal human events. A group of scientists are trying to develop a theory about them. "We are strongly influenced by Sri Aurobindo, who wrote in his time about the Superman and described the transformation of the cells," says Murphy. He has found evidence in the archives of the Sri Aurobindo ashram of experiments that Sri Aurobindo did to find out more about "the overmind", as described in his book *The Life Divine*. "I found pages from him experimenting with it, saying 'experiment failed', but also 'experiment succeeded'. Michael Murphy invited the Ashram and Auroville to do more research together with the Esalen Institute.

Replace money by a 'chakra' system

Aurovilian Olivier Hetzel gave an insight on money. He sketched how money is created in the present world economy: "It is created out of debt. You go to the bank to take a loan on a house, that money is created and given to you. You have to pay it back. But what is not created is the interest you pay on it. It means that there is always a shortage of money and some of us have to go bankrupt." But according to Olivier there are other, more honest, ways of creating an economy. For instance the Auroville system of putting money on your account. "If you put one thousand rupees on your account, you can use the amount of one thousand credits. At the same time the organisation can put the money in a bank and get interest. In that way you instantly create two thousand rupees out of one thousand."

Olivier introduced a so called "chakra" system in which he sees seven levels:

1 The global common financial system in any presently known form, bank notes, credit cards, bank accounts, bonds, stocks, mortgages, mutual funds etc.

2 The community-deposit account (the Auroville cash account which is the first layer of community currency used for personal fund deposits.)

3 The community activity and exchanges account (the Auroville kind account) which is the virtual system of exchange amongst community services, individuals and activities.

4 The monastic or ashram system (the Auroville Pour Tous distribution centre) which provides for the basic needs of community members who contribute in recognized, meaningful ways to the collective through work, kind, or cash contributions.

5 The mutual credit system (ACCESS - Auroville's Conscious Community Exchange System for Sustainability), which allows for individual exchanges of goods and services on a direct and personal level and is very suited for art, healing, education and freelance skills.

6 The gift economy (free services) which

relates to the considerable and unaccounted help in kind we extend to our close friends and family members.

7 The economy of self (our personal spiritual connection), which refers to the amount and quality of time spent alone in dedication with our higher selves, as the preciousness of these moments often allows us huge savings of other life resources through inner intuitive guidance, insights and deep healings.

Olivier advised Auroville not to embrace any one of these methods, but to use all of them in a complementary way. On the same topic, Marc Luyckx Ghisi warned the audience of the dangers of the stock markets. According to

mobility does not mean cars?" And: "...man will soon discover that that true creativity that can provide perfect solutions to all earth's problems will come from spheres far beyond the human mind. He will have to climb much higher than he has ever done before. In fact, it is the beginning of a spiritual journey. Seghal sees the answer in Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. Sri Aurobindo writes that we need to go beyond the mind and reason. For if we examine carefully, we shall find that intuition is our first teacher. Intuition brings those brilliant messages from the unknown, which are the beginnings of higher knowledge. One will need to leave behind all that one knows, the courage to travel towards the

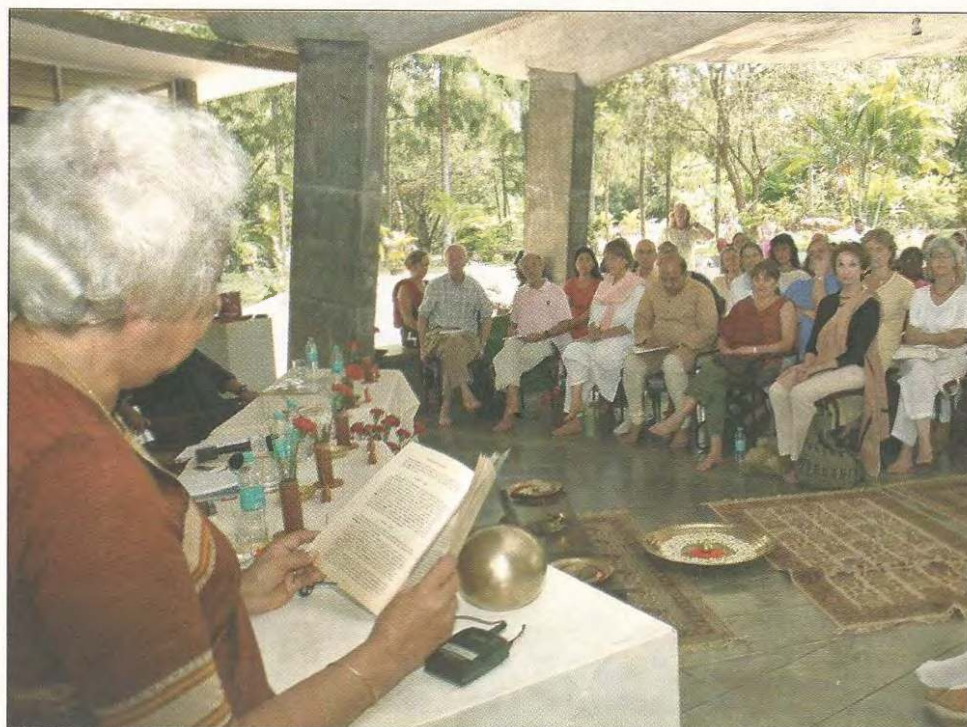
visions of the future. He wrote that a next evolutionary step is inevitable, a statement which, considering the evolutionary process, can only be doubted for fear that our Earth might not survive its present predicament. But the fundamental cause of this predicament is precisely the revaluation of all values required to create the new, as yet unknown ones. In this so-called post-modern period of a humanity caught in the vortex of its unification, Sri Aurobindo's vision provides us with the interpretation of the apparent chaos. "Mentally conditioned by the physical sciences, few people still believe in miracles, but I know of two which are historically proven. The first is Joan of Arc, the young French village girl who, at the head of a medieval army, defeated the English, put her king on his throne, and told her judges frankly: *Je suis venue de par Dieu* - I have come from God. The other miracle is Auroville, the utopia of all utopias, which after forty years in quasi impossible circumstances and despite all ordeals, is still here - and growing," concluded Van Vrekhem.

Towards a New Imagination

Another Aurovilian writer, Anu Majumdar, spoke about a New Imagination we are facing in the future. She took as an example the classic Indian tale the *Ramayana*: "When the *Ramayana* was serialised on Indian TV some years ago, week after week people wept with the noble heroes, all programmed by dharma, and with the sad and helpless heroines caught in their destinies. It was a pitiful tribute to Valmiki. But people just loved it. It was a phenomenal success." Anu compared this story with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. "In *Savitri* the battlefield changes. It is the inner war without escape, but no victory is declared nor revenge sought afterwards. *Savitri* is a gateway to the new myth", said Anu. "But it is difficult to find, for the news everyday is still about war. In his essay, *The Passing of War*, published in the volume *War and Self-Determination*, Sri Aurobindo wrote: 'The progress of humanity proceeds by a series of imaginations which the Will in the race turns into accomplished facts and a train of illusions... One of the illusions is the expectation of the passing of war. This grand event in human progress is always being confidently expected, but since we are now all scientific and rational beings, we no longer expect it by a divine intervention but assign sound physical and economic reasons for it... But now we see militarism and commercialism united in a loving clasp, driving by their force the most irrational, the most monstrous wars of modern times...' And Sri Aurobindo goes on to say that the illusion was to ignore the one thing that matters: human nature."

What then could be a new imagination that could transform the Will of human nature and life? Where could one possibly find it? The answer is Auroville, according to Anu. "It was right before my eyes: Auroville, a dream, still unknown and growing up in the world, a tiny blueprint for all the transformations to come. Not the literal story of Auroville and its few inhabitants, but that of the new consciousness which belongs to every single person on earth. And the power of this consciousness to transform the divisions of human mind and life with unity. Auroville, the Mother said, was the last hope against war and catastrophe."

Robert



Aster Patel addressing the audience at the seminar

Marc, who will publish a book on the subject, it is very hard to assess the value a company nowadays, for they are trading in non measurable products. What is the value of a computer programme that adds value to another programme? Marc Luyckx warned of manipulation on the financial markets. "One of the biggest threats for the future".

Computers are not intuitive

Ram Seghal addressed the audience on technology and intuition. Ram grew up in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is now Group Advisor at Rediffusion DYT and its group of companies. "Can technology lead us to our goal?" was his question. Ram Seghal described how Kasparov, the chess world champion, played against an IBM computer. He won 8 out of 10 games. What does Kasparov have that the machine does not? "The answer is: intuition", says Ram Seghal. He also gave the example of the visit of the world richest Indian to Kolkata (Calcutta), the city of his youth. Lakshmi Mittal was thrilled to see the changes. He was excited about the many flyovers, dotting the skyline of the city. "This is progress", he said. Ratan Tata, very recently, launched an inexpensive small car in the same city. The question Ram Seghal asked himself was, "Is it about economics or politics or is it about the acute shortage of higher intuitive power that is needed to build cities in which

unknown by braking all the shackles. This, I believe, is the path that the divine is unfolding.

Is the supermind an illusion?

A third speaker who quoted from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* was Aurovilian writer Georges Van Vrekhem. "Is Sri Aurobindo's theory of the supermind only a grandiose illusion", Van Vrekhem asked, "or will humanity die out before anything like the apparition of the supramental being can happen on our planet?" He continued: "Sri Aurobindo has made predictions. In his writings in the *Arya*, later published in book form, one can read that: 1. India had to become free; 2. Asia had to awake; 3. humanity had to become one; 4. Indian spirituality had to spread through the whole world; 5. the human species would be succeeded by a new species of supramental beings. It should be borne in mind that these predictions were made during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, when reasonable people could only consider them as chimaeras. In 1947, in a text broadcast on the occasion of India's freedom, Sri Aurobindo summarized these predictions himself and called them his 'five dreams'. When one considers what has become of these 'dreams' at present, one cannot but agree that all five have been realised to a considerable degree. Thus they may be held to be a rational justification of Sri Aurobindo's

EXHIBITION

In search of the absolute wonder

Under the title "Why Art?" five Aurovilian artists presented their work in the India International Centre in Delhi.

Auroville's 40th anniversary was celebrated not only in Auroville. Also in New Delhi an exhibition by Auroville artists was hosted. Paintings by Véronique, Aron, Karine, sculptures by Michel and photographs by Ireno were on show at the India International Centre Annex from February 21st to 29th. They drew a large audience.

Although modest in number,



Michel's sculptures

the works presented by these five artists reflected in a humble yet spectacular way their inner life and work in the Auroville environment. They also reflected their personal quests about the function and role of art.

Véronique had composed her chant of vibrant blue and fire-light on paper stuck on fibre-glass. The three works of Karine were almost an epiphany of light. Aron's works, at first sight, seem to take another path. His rhythm

is more solar, his colours are without ambiguity: red, blue, and yellow. Michel's sculptures, sensual studies of form and colour, represent more of an expansion of the vital and perhaps a certain sense of humor and joy. Last but not least, there were Ireno's three photographs in chamois tonalities, plays of light and shadow, transmitting a sense of mystery. The common themes linking the works were beauty and harmony. The exhibition was a visual delight.

Camille (AVI Switzerland)



Véronique's blue and fire-light composition

Sri Aurobindo's statue arrives

On Thursday, February 21st, The Mother's birthday, at 10.30 in the evening, the bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo's was carried to its final position in front of the white sweep of Savitri Bhavan. Ten at night seemed a rather odd time to erect such a precious statue. But architect Helmut explained that this was an extremely auspicious night, called in India *Guru Purima*: the day that the birthday of the guru coincides with the full moon.

"The statue was cast in bronze by artists from Calcutta at Lalit Verma's garden in Pondicherry. It was brought to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry for a blessing and then we brought it to Auroville. As the 21st of February was also *Masi Magam*, the day when the statues of the gods are taken from their temples to bathe in the sea, the streets were crowded with traffic, so we are lucky it got here at all," he says.

However, the crane that was supposed to lift the statue from the truck and set it on the plinth did not arrive. So by 11pm, after urgent consultations, Helmut and Lalit took matters into their own hands and had Sri Aurobindo carried to his final destination by a dozen men.

They heaved and pushed. The statue is more than 7 feet tall and weighs a good 400 kilos. Amid lots of shouted instructions, gesticulations, and waving torches, it was manoeuvred to the back of the plinth, and then with a collective intake of breath, hoisted up 75 degrees. Helmut rushed in with bolts to fix the base plate of iron, and then gave the final



Sri Aurobindo statue in front of Savitri Bhavan

O.K. And up it went, forever to gaze over the treetops to the West. I felt that Sri Aurobindo highly approved of the location of his statue.

Lalit explained the complex process of creating a statue of Sri Aurobindo. "There are only 10 or 15 photographs of Sri Aurobindo, and just one of him standing. So we had to be ingenious. We blew all these photos up to a

very large size and then surrounded by them, worked for a month doing sketches. Using these as a guide, we then created nine different full-size models, eight of which we rejected. Five artists from Calcutta then worked 12 hours a day casting in the age-old 'lost wax' technique.

"The statue is made of 85% copper, 5%

lead and 5% zinc, a traditional recipe from South India. To this Helmut has added some pieces of gold that his parents had left him. This was very nice, as gold gives off a particular vibration.

"This statue in Auroville is one of five in India made from the same cast, but this looks especially splendid as it is the only one that is standing in a spacious environment. It is quite perfect. I feel it expresses my love and respect for Sri Aurobindo best, and its creation has been an extraordinary privilege for me."

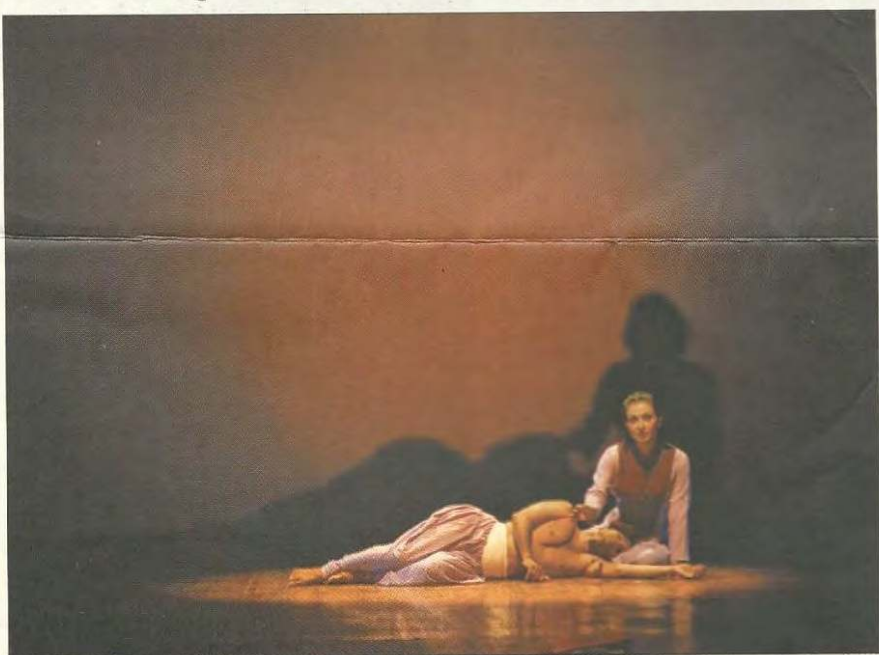
There the Master now stands, surrounded by a small lotus pond – majestic, noble, strong and commanding. His eyes are penetrating and his hands large and beautiful. His perfect form balancing the bold verticals of

Helmut's architectural creation, and his deep chocolate bronze contrasting splendidly with its dazzling white. His presence completes the beauty and splendour of Savitri Bhavan – as if he had been standing there forever.

Thank you, Dr. Karan Singh and Lalit, for your magnificent gift.

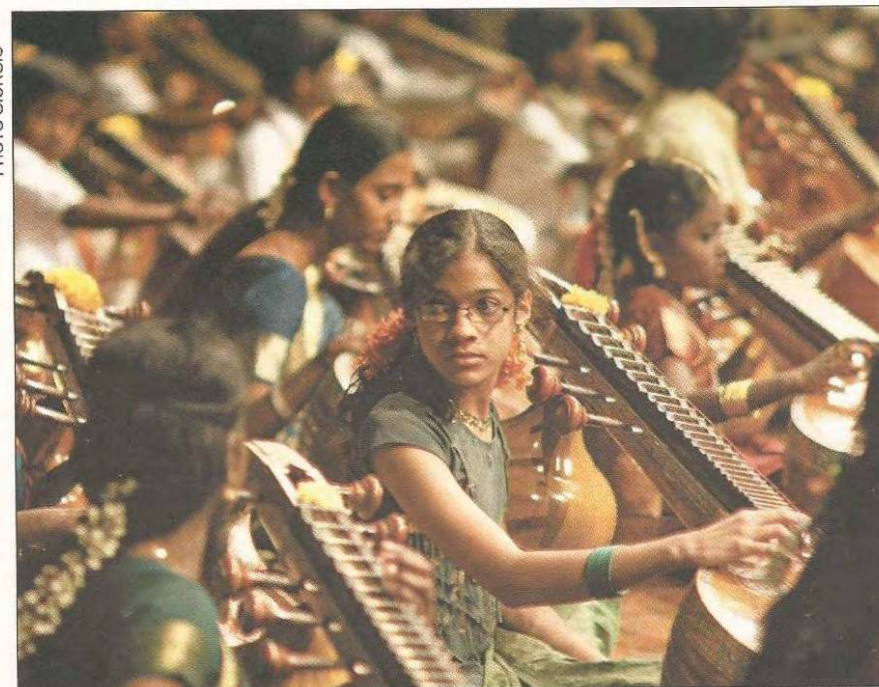
Dianna

Savitri, Flame of the Future



Internationally acclaimed dancer and actor and Governing Board member Mallika Sarabhai treated an Auroville audience to the premiere of her play *Savitri: Flame of the Future* set to music by American composer Joel Thome. The play was based on the *Mahabharata's* version of *Savitri*. The picture shows Savitri holding the dead Satyavan on her lap.

Dance and music mela



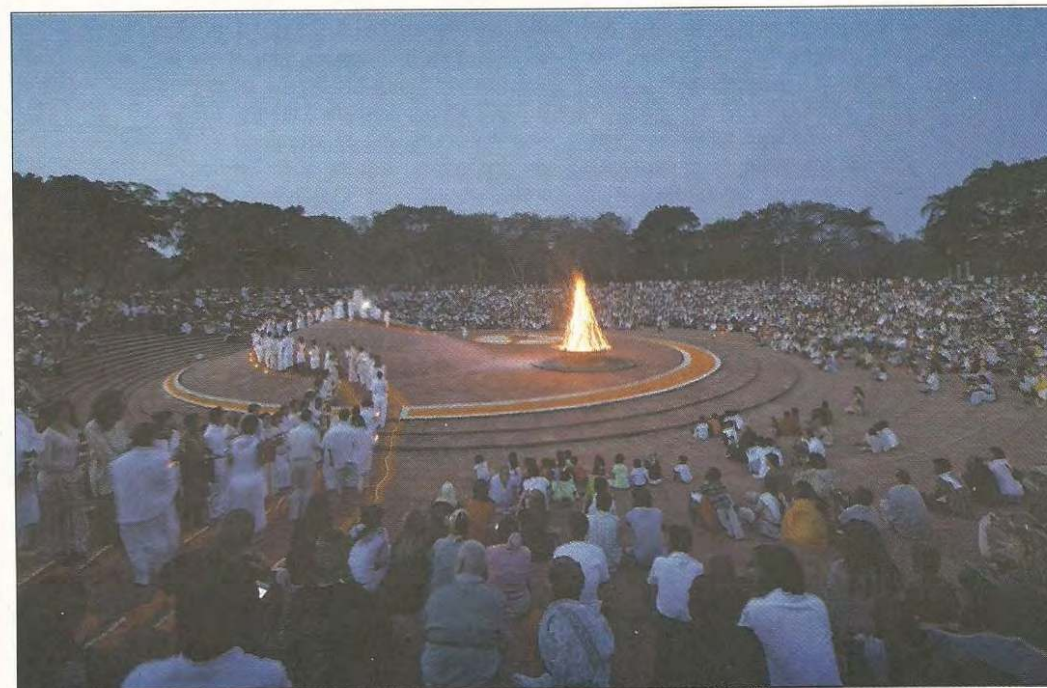
The evening of February 29th saw an outpouring of talent at the Sri Aurobindo auditorium. Bharat Natyam, Odissi and free dancers displayed their art and many musicians performed. The photo shows young veena players.

The Unity Kolam ceremony



At the initiative of Auroville International, the bonfire event of February 28th witnessed an unusual spectacle. When the bonfire was over, the sounds of gongs announced a special event. White-dressed children walking in a beeline brought candles to the urn in the amphitheatre, then walked down to the base of the urn to deposit a handful of earth in a container placed in the middle of the Auroville symbol. "It is the result of our aspiration to create an event that will reignite and rekindle in our hearts a remembering, and renewal of our true aim in Auroville to unite the earth for humanity as a whole," wrote Auroville International in the News and Notes to explain the event. "Over the last few months, people from around the world – friends and supporters of Auroville – have been responding to a call to send samples of earth." Over 120 samples from all over the planet have been collected from places including Mt Kailash, Easter Island, the dead city of Akhentaten and from land in the Netherlands that once was below the sea. The places where samples have been collected are highlighted – often with a photo and description – on a special website created to profile this event: <http://www.humanunity.info>.

In the early morning of the Golden Day, February 29th, the soils were combined as a symbolic gesture of a unified earth. The samples were packed into Auroville-made gift cards and distributed as an out-reaching gesture to the world which has supported and nurtured the vision of Auroville since it began 40 years ago.



"You change here all the time"

Manohar talks about his life in Auroville

I have been here for three years now and strange and wonderful things have happened to me all the time. One of the strangest experiences of my life happened on my first day on my own at the Auroville website office. I had been working there part-time for a week when I was told: "You'll be fine on your own; there's not much happening". This was 26th December, 2004. A couple of hours later the Tsunami hit and the world was at my website. There must have been 2,000 emails that day! A western guest wandered into the office asking if he could help and showed me what was on his camera. Photos of smashed houses down on the beach, a world scoop! That was my introduction to my new job.

Auroville gives me new presents every day. She has done her best to take me in. I love my job as webmaster for the Auroville website as I feel it is a window on the glass-house that is Auroville. It involves collecting information on the units, the artists, the schools, the meetings, everything that is going on in Auroville, and then updating the site every week. To help improve in our communication with each other is very important, and reporting on events like the Resident's Assembly, meetings and workshops through the Web is valuable work. When I was out of station for two months this year the website was my main source of information on Auroville, and I felt very much in touch and realized my work's value to the world.

I have also become involved in the life of Adventure community. I live in a keet hut with no electricity and only solar panels. If there is no sun there is no power, and we have to use candles: this changes your pace. It makes me conscious of nature and taking responsibility for myself. Sure, the heat gets me down sometimes in the summer, but that's just how it is in South India, and I must learn to accept it.

Adventure is a unique community as it is one of the very few that has experimented in truly living together, through establishing

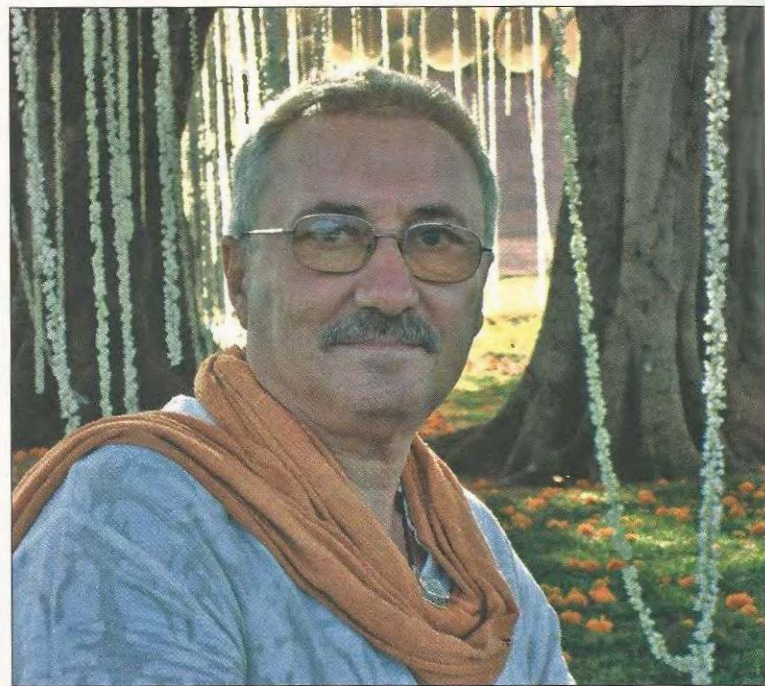
group meetings where we tried to share together on a deep level. After Wim, one of our residents, died the subtle patterns that united us began to disintegrate, and lots of old "unfinished business" as they call it, began to emerge. Things that were hidden began to creep out and trust began to disappear. I have learned that without trust nothing can function so I still try to retain my original feeling of trust as I have seen how devastating it can be when it is lost. Living in a community is difficult; it is like a marriage with 15 people.

Another insight I had was the difficulty Tamil people have adjusting to our way of life. A young Tamil boy joined our community. He had not left his family behind like we had, and so had responsibilities to them that we could not understand. The spiritual and material boundaries were blurred because of the proximity, and he could not handle the constant pressure.

When I first came here I wanted to live simply and only had a large rucksack, but on my return from Italy this time I had to pay a surcharge on my baggage as now I feel I need books, tapes and the necessities of my old life that give me pleasure and, yes, comfort. You change all the time here, and you are allowed to.

I have always been a very rational sort of man but I have taken the opportunity here of jumping into experiences that open up the other side of my being. I have done workshops in Reiki, non-violent communication, tai chi and yoga; not always easy for me, but very life enhancing and I am discovering a potential I didn't know I had.

The Sunday Savitri study group gives me a lot of inspiration. One day Shraddhavan asked me if I would like to give a power-



Manohar

point presentation of Huta's paintings and I eagerly accepted as I knew it would be a wonderful way to deepen my experience of Savitri. We eventually decided to make the paintings into 40 minute films with music and Mother's voice, and are now about half way through. It is such an honour for me to actually handle these precious paintings and be involved in this.

This is Auroville, always presenting new and marvellous opportunities if we have open eyes and hearts to see them.

At 61 I feel younger than I have ever felt. I feel full of curiosity for this Auroville experiment and am terribly proud to be part of it.

Dianna

"There's something transparent about it"

It's a comment often heard from those who come face to face with Anamika's clay creations. The imprints of smoke and flame upon their paper-thin burnished surfaces are like floating whispers.



Anamika giving finishing touches to a hand-built urn.

Anamika's smoke-fired pots are like meeting distinct personalities, all of them time-travellers. They may even have a quirky personality like a few at her recent solo exhibition in Auroville – a huge ball like pot with a tiny hole for a mouth, clownish in its gleeful rotundity. Or another one of terracotta, with an orange and black patina, its silhouette strangely reminiscent of a pasha's turban, or perhaps a perfume vial in the harem... Or the harmonious symmetry of the Native-American inspired wedding vase, its double-spouted mouths perhaps ready for the lovers' first exchange of wine in the mesa?

Then there are the innumerable 'rocks', eighty five in all, seeming to span the geological ages; each startlingly weightless in its air-filled void.

This is Anamika's first show in Auroville after 15 years of work in clay. The works exhibited in Kala Kendra's basement seemed right at home alongside the 3000 year old terracotta urns from Auroville's own archaeological digs.

Anamika has been involved in pottery since 1993. Unlike most Auroville potters, her rite of passage did not involve Golden Bridge, Pondicherry's pioneering pottery unit started by Ray and Deborah Meeker. "I am second genera-

tion – Ray and Deborah are my grandparents!" she says, her eyes crinkling with laughter.

Anamika came to Auroville in 1984 when she was barely 24. A nurse for the mentally-handicapped by training, she spent her early years establishing the Vérité community with Bill Sullivan and others. This was followed by a year's work at the Matrimandir office before she got involved in the Visa Service, and then with Francis and Govinda in starting the Auroville Bakery.

Nine years later, her entry into pottery came about under strange circumstances. "Chinmayi had gone to the Ashram pottery to learn but they only let her wedge clay for weeks on end. Then somehow she got accepted by Michel (of Flame pottery) as one of his students. I once mentioned to her (Chinmayi) how nice that she could do pottery, and she immediately said that she'd ask Michel if I could also become his student. And Michel, who usually says 'No', said 'Yes', and I didn't even have to ask myself! So there I was. And never before that time had I ever seen anybody make a pot – not even on the television!"

Anamika stopped her work at the Visa Service but continued baking bread, giving three days a week to pottery. "A year later, when I had barely finished my training, Chinmayi started her

pottery unit, Mandala, and she came to me and asked if I'd like to join her. "We went into production immediately. In the beginning there were no workers, and I didn't know anything. Plus we had to live from what we made."

How was the experience? "Well, you've got to be stubborn and really want it – otherwise you'd give up. Especially with throwing pots on the wheel. You know how it should be done, and how the end product should turn out. But your fingers and hands, they don't know – they just fumble about. So you try and try again."

"Then I realized that if I visualized how to do it, that it had an influence on my body. So often at night, before I went to bed, I would throw these imaginary pots!"

After fifteen years, Anamika has settled deeply into the rhythms of a potter's life. "I see now that I really need to do this work for my grounding; otherwise I would be so spaced out. And I don't think I would survive Auroville."

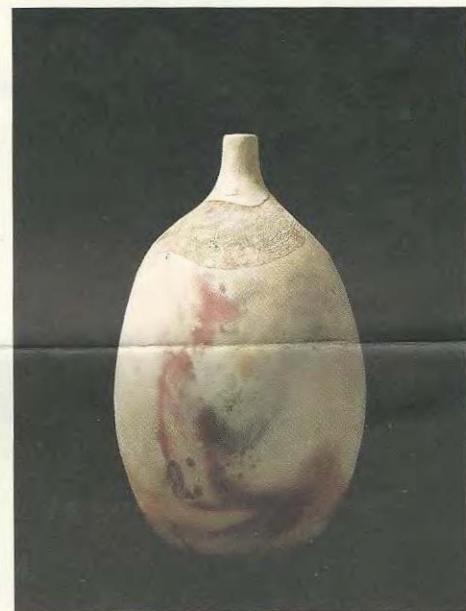
"Because in Auroville, if you are in meetings, you have to have a

very strong vital and a strong mind. My mind is quick, but it's not something that forces itself on others or puts itself out strongly."

Anamika also has another take on why she might have become a potter. "I have often wondered myself why I ended up with clay. Then I remembered something from my kindergarten days. We were 40 kids in the class and there was one clay table where once a week a few children were allowed to do something. In the beginning of the year I had my chance and I remember liking it sooooo much. So every week, when the teacher would ask who wanted to work on the clay table, I would eagerly put up my hand but never again got a chance. So there must have been something bottled up inside me from that time."

"And somewhere, The Mother has said that if you have a strong wish, you have to be careful. Because in another time in your life it might just come along, and maybe then it is not so necessary anymore!"

While Anamika does a variety of works through Mandala's production – tableware, murals, panels – a popular signature-piece is her bas-relief of two Indian gods: Ganesh and Krishna. It was Ganesh whom she first started out with. "I moved to Krishna much later," she says.



A smoke-fired creation

"You don't just start with Krishna – I didn't dare... You've got to have some sort of relationship with him! But Ganesh, who is a jolly fellow anyway is different – he makes life easy. I remember in the beginning how inspired I felt by some of the energies."

So why has it taken her so long to come out with a solo exhibition in Auroville?

"Perhaps it was my reaction to what I see in the art world – a tendency to play the role of the 'artist'; to be special and be seen and be written about so that you make a name and sell your stuff. All that turned me off."

"I don't feel I am an artist – I make things because I like to make things. So in order not to belong to 'them', I stayed in my corner. "But then recently something happened that helped me overcome this attitude. Michel, who is even more radical, refused to write anything about himself for a recent group show. His blunt response was 'I am a potter – what more can I say?' When I heard of this, I thought 'Yes – I don't have to play the game. I can just be myself! There is no need to hide.'"

The response to her show was overwhelmingly positive, and almost all of her works were bought, mostly by Auroville residents. "That was indeed a pleasant surprise," says Anamika. "I did not expect it. I am even more happy that the pieces remain in Auroville."

Perhaps an added motivation for the normally frugal Aurovilians to buy Anamika's beautiful pieces was that she was going to give all the sale proceedings to the Matrimandir. "It just felt right," she says earnestly.

The show generated Rs.31,000 for the Matrimandir, plus it made over a score residents extremely happy to own something so exquisite. Like the pasha's turban which sits under a spotlight on my own writing table.

Priya Sundaravalli

Devotional poetry

A new collection of devotional poetry by followers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother has recently been published.

The editors, Lloyd and Agni, spent over two and a half years trawling through numerous magazines, books and websites to come up with the most comprehensive selection yet of devotional writings by followers of the Integral Yoga. A veritable act of devotion in itself.

And reading this anthology it's difficult not to be moved by so many sincere outpourings of personal aspiration and of celebration of the Grace. The experiences described here will certainly resonate with and inspire many devotees, as will Sri Aurobindo's writings on poetry, which make up an invaluable appendix. In this sense, this anthology has an assured readership.

But good poetry, well, it's not. There are interesting pieces from writers like K.D. Sethna, Navoditte, Peter Heehs, Abha, Maggi, Lloyd and Sraddhavan. But you have to look rather hard to find them, and even harder to find the poetry of the "intuitive reason, the intuitive senses, the intuitive delight-soul in us" which Sri Aurobindo identified as markers of the future poetry.

The problem is that too many of the writers in this anthology seem to model their style upon that of Sri Aurobindo, a fatal error. Or else they believe that matters spiritual have nothing to do with matters profane and cannot bear the touch of clear, simple, everyday language; the spirit, they seem to believe, prefers either hushed obeisance or ornate Victorian English with the loud pedal fully depressed.

Surely someone, somewhere in the integral yoga is writing devotional poetry that doesn't exclude the world of relationship problems, global warming and supermarket malls. Which dares mention sex and the fears and challenges that real people face in their attempt to exceed the boundaries of the known and to emulate and celebrate the figures who inspire them. Which can take both the accidental and the eternal and cast them into forms which speak simply and clearly to us today.

Devotion: An anthology of spiritual poems.

Published by IntEnt, 2007. Rs 400.

Available from Auroville art, SARACON, Kottakarai, Auroville 605101. For further information can be had from chandresh@auroville.org.in

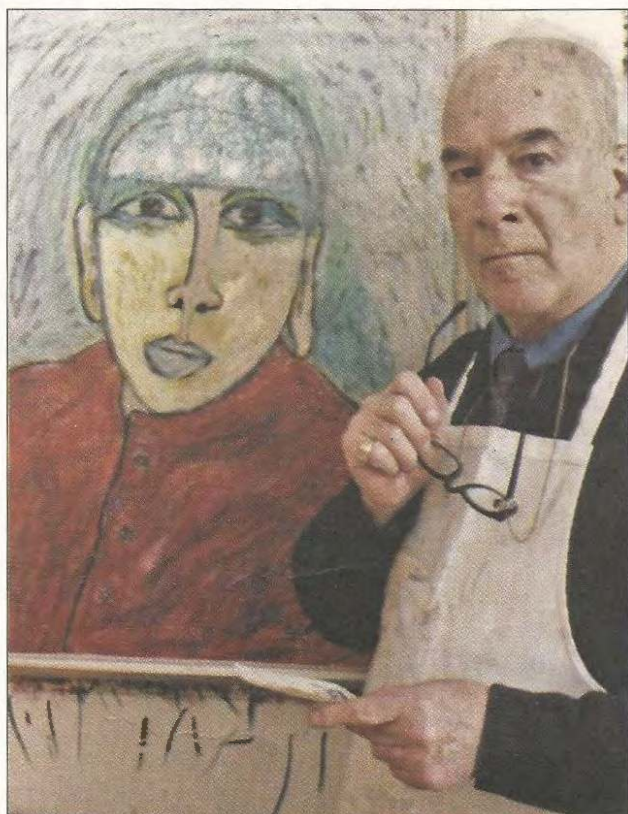
PASSING

Sam Spanier: A Divine Calling

On January 30, Sam Spanier, a warm, outgoing presence in Woodstock's artistic community, and a more private but powerful force in our spiritual community in America, passed away at the age of 82. It's not an exaggeration to say that he was loved by thousands of people around the world. A founder of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Centre in Mt. Tremper, Spanier was instrumental in bringing the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to this country. He identified himself most as a painter. His large, colourful canvases received solo shows in New York City, Paris and locally; the Woodstock Artists Association honoured him with its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

Before settling in Mt. Tremper 40 years ago, Spanier lived a true bohemian life, rubbing shoulders with many of the well-known people of his time, from Marlon Brando in New York, to James Baldwin in Paris. Born May 6, 1925 in Brooklyn, NY, he was the son of the late Isadore and Rose Brecher Spanier. He was gifted with spiritual experiences from childhood, showed early promise as an artist, and also as an actor. He worked in the theater for more than ten years until, in a production in Greenwich Village, he began to hear an inner voice urging him on to further spiritual discovery.

His spiritual search reached its culmination when, upon hearing a recording of the Mother's voice, he determined to meet her. In 1962 he travelled to Pondicherry.



Sam Spanier

Spanier spoke of "the feeling of total completeness, nothing needed, everything given, completely, completely with love", that he experienced in her presence. At their first meeting, she

told him, "You can be a link between East and West." Two weeks later, he had a vision, as clear as a slide show, of a centre he was to bring into being. When asked to verify his vision, the Mother gave her blessing. He returned to New York City, but it wasn't until 1965 that he felt the inner guidance to come to Woodstock to look for land. After two months of searching, he was shown the land in Mt. Tremper, and heard inwardly, "This is it." The Mother herself named the land: Matagiri, which in Sanskrit, means "Mother's Mountain".

Matagiri for many years functioned as a live-in ashram, and Spanier, always paying careful attention to the inner guidance he himself received from the Mother, stood at its helm and offered guidance to the many seekers who passed through.

Matagiri has continued, under the stewardship of Spanier and his long-time partner Eric Hughes, to host regular spiritual gatherings and concerts. It is an entity unto itself, but for those who knew Spanier, it will always be inseparable from his expansive presence and dedication. Devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from all over the world made Matagiri a primary destination not only to visit its archival library, make a pilgrimage to Mother's mountain and meditate in its sacred atmosphere, but to partake of Spanier's charming hospitality, endless storytelling and deep insight.

(An edited version of an article by Cassia Berman)

Hamlet

Hamlet is one of the greatest plays in the English language. For Auroville, with only a handful of competent actors, staging it was a bold and risky undertaking.

The hazards were many. There was the almost insurmountable problem of language. Perhaps half of the audience were not comfortable with the English language; probably 99% were not familiar with Shakespearean English.

Maybe director Jill's decision to have an ongoing explanation of the plot was necessary for the audience's comprehension of a highly complicated and convoluted story. But it was done in such a jerky, off-hand way that it became a distraction.

The main actors, understandably wary of tackling such a mighty project, did their best. They started rehearsals last April and continued for 9 months – a period which, they all agreed, was far too long. Two Hamlets dropped out, as did several of the other characters, including the two boys who were playing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Only girls could be found as replacements, hence the creation of "Rosy" and "Gildy," a silly solution which weakened the play enormously. Horatio, a noble gentleman, became for unknown reasons a clownish act, playing for laughs which was distracting and annoying and Ophelia's Russian accent made her almost incomprehensible.

The character of Hamlet was a well attempted by Drupad, but he did not understand that his constant movements leaked energy from the character; one was crying out for him to find some stillness. The King, played by Charu, was far too nice a character, and lacked the ambition and greed of a murderer. Savitri as Gertrude was energetic and dramatic. Swar as the ghost looked ghostly, but when he spoke it did not sound as if he was from another dimension.

A bright spark was an English guest called Jenny, who played the first gravedigger with high energy in a lively Cockney accent. It is a pity she is not going to stay.

Why does every director think they have to create the New Hamlet? This one was neither a classic nor a creative modern interpretation. Maybe with a superb and experienced cast and a specific reason



Otto as Polonius, Saraswati as Ophelia in a scene from Hamlet

for a new angle, it could have worked. The idea of throwing in references to the Genius Brothers, the Mousetrap and Ophelia being on crack cocaine just does not make sense.

A very bold step was to have background music to the most famous soliloquy in the world, "To be, or not to be." In the last scene of mass slaughter by gunfire, (which definitely did not work), the operatic voice gave it an even more mournful dimension.

Charu spoke of the difficulties of producing such an ambitious project. "I wanted to be involved with the play as it was an opportunity to explore its huge dimensions and magnificent language. But this being Auroville, the whole thing was a compromise. Jill had to take whoever turned up and many had no experience. They also lacked the necessary commitment for such a long rehearsal period. It became a jumble, a clash of elements, never mind personalities.

"I feel we do not learn from our mistakes. The obvious response is to choose plays within our capacity, with a smaller cast and not be afraid of "entertainment." The musical Oliver was a magnificent success. Why do we always feel we have to promote a message? We have a commitment to our audiences, the main and obvious one being to ensure they can understand and hear the words and follow the story, which after all, is the most important thing."

Dianna

In brief

Auroville Mediation Service takes off

A group of 12 Aurovilians who have attended a training course given by professional mediation trainers from Chennai have started to offer mediation. Mediation, a conflict resolution technique where a neutral third party (the mediator) helps the people who have a dispute in identifying their long term interests, exploring options and reaching a binding settlement, is a relatively new technique in Auroville. It can be used by individuals, workgroups, units and any Auroville related activities.

Top honours for Auroville Ikebana

An ikebana creation from Auroville took the top prize in the floral arrangement category at the 27th Annual Flower Show at Pondicherry Botanical gardens. Said one of the judges to Valeria, "Your arrangement is so simple that we don't know why we like it so much." The head of the Botanical gardens has asked Valeria that "the people in Auroville share their beauty with the world around – not just keep it for themselves."

Sangamam Festival

The annual Sangamam festival for Auroville employees and their families, residents, and guests was held on February 10th. It was a great family day-out with food, music, dance, cultural programs, exhibitions, sports and children games.

64 hours to build a house

A team of the Auroville Earth Institute, along with volunteers, has built the caretaker's house of the Realization project in 8 days. The house was pre-cast in the Auroville Earth Institute premises in about 6-7 weeks. All materials were then transported to the site and the house was assembled in about 64 hours by a daily team of 16 paid workers and 10 to 15 volunteers. The house can be dismantled with a minimum loss of materials, transported anywhere and rebuilt.

Electric Biomass Generator

The research team of the Electric Biomass Generator announced that the electric biomass generator prototype is now working smoothly. This device produces electricity and charcoal from wood. The gas generated is used to produce electricity. The power of the device is 10kw. Generators of 100kw or more can now be manufactured using the same concept. The strong points of this process are renewable and non-polluting electric generation; heat production which can supply units such as food-processing; and continuous charcoal production for soil fertilisation.

Passing

Gaje (S. Gajendran) from Slancio died suddenly on March 2nd at the age of 43. He came to Auroville as a small boy,

and received training and worked in the field of electronics, lately with his brother Dhandapani in 'New Waves'. He will sorely be missed in the Auroville sports world, particularly in the basketball team where he was one of the star players. He leaves behind his wife Sudha and their two children, Aurobarathi and Sadhana.



The Auroville look

One thing sadly neglected in the celebration of 40 years of Auroville's achievements is the Auroville look. This is all the more surprising since the Auroville look is much remarked upon by visitors. Many claim they have never seen anything like it anywhere else, which is hardly surprising as it is the unique product of 40 years of intensive evolution.

The Auroville look, or rather looks, is the distinctive way in which members of the species *Aurovilianus aspirans* communicate, or refuse to communicate, with other members of the species. It is essentially non-verbal and consists of a finely calibrated series of facial expressions coupled with extremely subtle movements of the head. These can signify an astonishingly wide range of meanings.

Let's begin with the one that is best known – the dead face. This consists of doing absolutely nothing, of looking at, or rather through, another *Aurovilianus* as if he/she didn't exist. This is a very difficult look to achieve as it requires extreme self-control. Imagine. You have known somebody for almost 40 years, you may even

have been in a close relationship, but at some time something unforgivable has happened – he or she burned your toast once too often or snuck in ahead of you in the Center Kitchen queue in 1978 – and now this individual is standing in front of you, obviously wanting to talk. So what do you do? You gaze ahead, not betraying, by even the faintest change of expression, that you are aware that this blot upon humanity is standing just two feet away.

When this is done well it can be devastating. Recipients of a superb dead face begin to wonder if they are, in fact, still there, and often surreptitiously pinch themselves. Because, who knows, Auroville is a funny old place and they may be having yet another of those out-of-body experiences.

The other Auroville looks are subtle, sometimes exceedingly subtle, variations on the dead face, presumably because *Aurovilianus* needs to harvest all his or her energy for higher matters. A particularly disconcerting variation of the dead face is the dead smile. In this case, you notice someone is smiling at you and, what the hell, you gather up all your resources

and prepare to smile back. But on closer inspection you notice that the wearer of the smile has gone missing – they're not at home. In fact, some of these dead smilers have not been home for many years....

The subtlest variation of the dead face, the *minimalis*, involves a miniscule inclination of the head to one side all the while rigidly retaining a blank expression. This gesture, if one can call it that, can signify a number of things. It can include, "Hey, I thought you'd died years ago," or "I've just come from a riot in Kulilapalayam", or "Do you really want to buy that? It's full of aflatoxins."

Skilled practitioners can even utilise the *minimalis* when approaching each other on motorcycles at a combined speed of 160 kilometres an hour. In this instance the look may signify "There's a serious accident ahead", or "Watch out, there's another idiot driving on the wrong side of the road."

The modified *minimalis*, a slightly increased inclination of the head that is held a split second longer, is reserved for more serious matters. "Are you playing tennis tonight?", "I see you've got a new bike", "Surf's up".

Very occasionally a really flamboyant Aurovilian may, on meeting another, briefly touch their heart centre with their right hand. This gesture, however, is falling out of fashion not only because of the extraordinary energy that needs to be expended but also because of its ambiguity. Because while it may mean, "I'm overwhelmed to see you", increasingly it may also signify, "I'm having problems with my pacemaker".

The Auroville look is not easily mastered. In this sense, it is a good indication of how long someone has lived in Auroville. Newcomers tend to smile and fling their arms around each other at the slightest excuse. After ten years or so, the smile fades to a faint rictus and the arms find more useful applications, like carrying gas bottles. However, it is only after 25 years of rigorous yoga that the facial muscles acquire the necessary degree of rigidity to enable the Auroville look to be held in all weathers and situations.

So isn't it time that we offered this extraordinary achievement to a world sated with melodrama and sensationalism? For, clearly, this is the look the world needs.

Alan



CARTOON: CHANDRATTA

SPORTS

Hosting the National MTB race



Auroville proved to be a challenging terrain for the mountain bikers

How did Auroville become involved? Peter Clarence-Smith, one of a group of Aurovilian cycling enthusiasts who enjoy pushing their bikes, and themselves, to extremes, explains.

"Last December, C. Venkatesan, the founder of a Trust called Schools for India, came up with the idea of a Chennai to Puducherry cycle race along the East Coast Road. A group of us went up and participated, even though most of us had mountain bikes. When we told him it was ridiculous to race mountain bikes on the highway, he asked us to show him a place where we could have a mountain bike race."

So when he next visited Auroville they showed him the canyons in and around Hermitage and he agreed to organize an event there.

"We heard nothing more for months," recalls Peter. "In December I went on his website and saw a news-flash which said that the 8th National Mountain Biking Championship would take place in Puducherry in January,

2008. It seems he'd been in touch with the Puducherry Cycling Association and the Cycling Federation of India (CFI) and persuaded them to hold it here in Hermitage.

"This didn't leave us much time. It took us about 3 or 4 days to trace out a circuit, using a GPS unit and following cattle tracks when we didn't know how to negotiate some areas." The circuit had to be up to international standards, which meant it had to be a minimum of five kilometres long and traversable for the whole distance.

"What was really exciting was when the CFI people, accompanied by a team of officials from the UCI – the *Union Cycliste Internationale*, came to view the course. These are independent professionals who go round the world supervising national and international championships. When the Technical Director saw the course he was absolutely delighted. He said it's the only one of its kind in India and he would even like to hold international events here!"

When the racing started, it was

obvious that some teams, like those from Kerala, Karnataka, Chandigarh and Indian Railways, had received better training and had superior cycles. In fact, there was a big variation in the equipment. Some participants had good mountain bikes, but there were also riders on poorly maintained, single-speed cycles.

"This was sad to see, particularly as the course was tough – the toughest national mountain

bike course yet, we were told. I hadn't actually planned to take part – I'm not a racer – but, somehow, our team was allowed two places in the time trial, and I signed up with André.

"The time trial involved making three circuits of the course. As I was reaching the end of the first circuit I thought, 'I can't go on'. But then some people cheered me on, I got into my rhythm, and I ended up doing three circuits after all."

The final event was the men's cross-country race, five laps in all. Six Aurovilians entered and four finished. Giorgio was even keeping up with the leaders until a puncture forced him to retire.

"Later the Puducherry Sports Minister distributed prizes at a local school. André and I, the Aurovilian organizers, were called up on stage, we were garlanded and given a big cheer. I was even asked to say a few words in Tamil. All in all, it was tremendous for Auroville. We were very much appreciated."

Alan

Auroville Marathon

To celebrate the completion of Auroville's own marathon of 40 years on February 28th 2008, a marathon was held on February 17th. Participants were given the choice to run (or walk) various 'spirals': the quarter spiral of 10.5 km; the half spiral of 21 km; or the full spiral of 42.195 km. Those who chose the full run started early – morning at 5.30 at

were given a torch to prevent us running into the trees." Chandresh had prepared himself for the last 4-5 months with rigorous trainings, an experience he described as 'very helpful'. "We came together every Sunday. For many people it is difficult to train by themselves. But the marathon itself is an individual event: it is you and your body, a test of your determination and willpower."

In all, 180 persons from age group



Full marathon runners at the early morning start

Certitude. The others started later. Those too lazy or unwilling to exert themselves were urged by the organizers "to come out and cheer the runners that pass by your community and play music, shout, wave, or even run with them!"

The spirals had been marked in such a way that the runners would cross as many communities as possible. On the way, security guards, health stations and stalls offering refreshments and massages ensured that no one would feel left behind. The organisation itself was a true community process.

"It was a great experience," said organizer Chandresh Patel in an interview with Auroville Radio. "I ran the full marathon, that is the first 31 kilometres, and the last 11 kilometres I walked. We started when it was still dark and

14 to 72 participated – 25 from Auroville, 25 from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and about the same number from the surrounding villages. Also about 80 runners from Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad joined. And there were quite a few guests. More than 82% completed their run. "The outsiders loved the course – many said it was the best course they'd ever had in India," said Chandresh, who is determined to repeat the experience next year. "I am sure more people will join." To keep up body and spirits, a quarter marathon will be run every first Sunday of each month. Concluded the organizers in their 'thank you' note to the community: Running a marathon is exhilarating, organizing a marathon, bliss."

Carel

PHOTO COURTESY CHANDRESH

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