

# AUROVILLE TODAY

November 1993, Number Fifty-Eight

WITH THIS ISSUE of AUROVILLE TODAY we complete five years of our existence. As an editorial team we are not exactly celebratory—we are far too aware of how often we've fallen short of our expressed aims and ideals—but we thought we would mark the moment by writing about our experiences over these five years, and by focussing briefly on the history of Auroville newspapers as a prelude to trying to answer the critical question: What is the true purpose of an Auroville newspaper?

This is also an issue in which, perhaps appropriately, we cast our net wide, for we include, among other things, an introduction to the controversial topic of non-resident 'Friends of Auroville', an article on an Auroville poet, the experiences and reflections of two globe-trotting Aurovilians, and, in anticipation of the Dalai Lama's forthcoming visit to Auroville in December, an interview with a Tibetan monk who recently attended a course in the community.



PHOTO IRENO

*A study in concentration: Rolf sculpting a head during 'Je t'aime'—a week-long art happening*

## Information or inspiration?

### A LOOK AT SOME AUROVILLE NEWSPAPERS THROUGH THE YEARS

Does a community newspaper have any role in Auroville? Sri Aurobindo and Mother made clear what they thought about conventional journalism when they named the newspaper room in the Ashram, 'the Room of Falsehood'. In 1970, however, Mother did give her blessings to an Auroville journal—the *Gazette Aurovilienne*—clarifying that "We would wish that the Gazette be the messenger of the future and of the progress to be realized for humanity". The *Gazette*—which subsequently became something of an 'official' record for Mother's messages for Auroville, was never a genuine Auroville newspaper as it was published by the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. Although the *Gazette* is long gone, the discussion about the role of a newspaper in Auroville continues, so much so that every new publication tends to feel that it has to justify its existence.

What, then, are the difficulties of being involved in such work in Auroville? One of the major ones is in deciding what should be the focus or scope of an Auroville newspaper. Should it aim to give a comprehensive picture of the community as it is at present 'warts and all', or should it focus upon those initiatives which seem to 'call the future'? Is the overall aim to inform or to inspire? Should the concentration be upon the personal achievements and ex-

periences or upon the larger movements that underlie surface manifestations? Should it concentrate upon Auroville's 'uniqueness', or try to relate what is happening here to larger movements in the world? Should such a newspaper be primarily for the residents or for the extended family in all parts of the world? And if it is for the extended family, how far does one need to 'code' or translate the material to make it more available to those who miss much of the context?

Actually, most of these oppositions are false—there is no reason why a good newspaper cannot both inspire and inform, and they all evade essential questions. One of these, for example, concerns our ability to understand what is really happening in

**"One cannot speak really in depth about Auroville without automatically touching upon something that goes far beyond Auroville's immediate range..."**

Satprem

Auroville; for without this insight discussions about where to put the focus are inevitably rather hollow and academic. Another one concerns to what extent the medium of a weekly or monthly journal is able to capture and communicate the subtlety and plasticity of the Auroville process. A third questionable assumption is that we can always clearly delimit an 'Auroville' issue. For, as Satprem pointed out in a letter to "my comrades in Auroville" in 1977, "One cannot speak really in depth about Auroville without automatically touching upon something that goes far beyond Auroville's immediate range, and ends by englobing in one movement numberless battles, currents, conscious centers throughout the world, which all move towards the same goal and are so many small flames guided by one unique beacon."

Nevertheless, various Auroville publications have surfaced over the years and each have, in their different ways, reflected some of the tendencies figured above, often as a result of the circumstances out of which they were born. The *Auroville Notes*, for example, began in December, 1975, out of a need to keep the widely spread communities of Auroville in touch with one another at a crucial moment in Auroville's struggle with the Sri Aurobindo Society. Inevitably, then, the major contents of this weekly tended to be reports of the frequent

all-Auroville 'Pour Tous' meetings which at that time were the main forum for communication in the community.

By the Winter of 1977, however, a number of people felt that the 'Notes' were becoming inadequate as a means of communicating what was happening, and the *Auroville Review* was born. Savitra explained in the editorial of *Auroville Review* No. 0:

"...as the (Pour Tous) meetings themselves began to pass from the more well-ordered, cut-and-dry discussions of our daily affairs into the liquid, intensely moving (sometimes volcanic) process of our present metamorphosis, it became increasingly more impossible to reduce the experience into flat weekly installments. What was alive in the meeting became flat in the print; and as the meetings penetrated deeper into our lives, taking us into unforeseen countries, some darker than we would have expected...the transcription into pure 'news' became absurd. Something Else was going on...And so the need to find a corresponding means of expression was in the air; and so we met in mid-October while the monsoon made rivers of our roads, to work towards a vehicle that would be more real inside Auroville and more meaningful outside—something capable of catching a certain rhythm over a wider expanse of time. Trying to describe the river in segments, you lose precisely the thing which is the river—the flow."

This shift from mere reportage to a need to communicate the 'feel' of something requires, of course, that a journalist be willing to immerse himself in that 'flow', to be

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a full participant in the process. And this, in turn, implies that a newspaper can become both the 'vibration' of and an active agent for change, a catalyst in the process. The danger of immersion, however, is of a loss of perspective, and the danger of seeing oneself as an agent of something is the temptation to wield the newspaper as a weapon of dogma. Many years later, the *Auroville Review* was to steer dangerously close to these rocks...

In the Spring of 1978, however, it was all much simpler, the editor of *Auroville Review* no 1 explaining:

"We want simply to convey something of Auroville, something that comes from our life here. We don't just want to play with words and weave brilliant verbal canvases... We want a new world. We want something else. And that is the need for this 'Review'."

The *Auroville Review* during this period was primarily written for internal consumption. At the same time, however, Joseph and Muriel Spanier felt a need for another kind of publication which would be more directed towards the outside—for "the world is now ready to learn of Auroville, and Auroville has a great deal to offer the world"—and the *Auroville Voice* was born.

On hindsight, in spite of the very real physical and psychological difficulties that prevailed in Auroville during this time, the period 1977-81 was something of a Golden Age of communication in Auroville. For the community was still small enough, and homogeneous enough, to

meet together regularly, and no less than three publications—the *Auroville Notes*, *Auroville Review* and *Auroville Voice*—were providing high-quality descriptions of and commentary on the unfolding community process. In fact, these three organs of communication fulfilled a crucial role in linking together the members of the community, and the community with its supporters outside, at a time when it was fighting for its existence.

In 1981, the *Auroville Voice* ceased publication, and for the next four years the *Auroville Notes* (which later transposed into the *Auroville News*) and the *Auroville Review* were the sole organs of communication. While the 'Notes' became increasingly a record of various meetings, and a vehicle for sharing opinions, the 'Review' touched upon many topics, including the 'Auroville process', dentistry, theatre, diet etc.

By the mid 1980's, however, the 'Review' team had become more and more identified with a particular orientation—which saw Auroville slipping downhill, and called for it to 'cleanse' itself by eradicating certain tendencies while rededicating itself to its *raison d'être*, Mother's 'Agenda'—and more and more Aurovilians no longer felt fully represented by it.

Some, out of frustration, sought another forum to express their views, and the result was the publication, between September 1985 and July 1986, of four magazines—*Invisible Ships*, *The Mind's Eye*, *Other Worlds* and *Silent Summer*. Even though their very small print made these publications somewhat reader unfriendly, they were of a high quality. They included (naturally!) meditations on what was going

wrong in Auroville, well-researched articles on pesticides and the environment, interviews with J.R.D. Tata and the Dalai Lama, punk art cartoons, and the incomparable back page poetic adventures of 'W.R.' Above all, these magazines restored a certain sense of quality and intellectual rigour in the Auroville communication process, and reminded us that, while things were far from well with Auroville, the solution required a comprehensive action and vision rather than a withdrawal into 'purism'.

After *Silent Summer*, which appeared in July 1986, this particular editorial team also fell silent. But the need for a safety-valve, an alternative forum to the *Auroville Review*, remained, and a new magazine—*Flame*—was prepared for publication in late 1988. For a variety of reasons it never saw the light of day, yet its editorial provides glimpses of a perspective which, while severely critical of the failings of the community, nevertheless looked forward to something of an artistic and intellectual renaissance:

"Instead of dreams, instead of real dialogue, we haggle like fishmongers and lobby for positions, or what we think are positions of power. The creative spirit in Auroville is bound and gagged; not wanting to take risks, not wanting to make mistakes, we settle for mediocre uniformity. Yet we believe this is a passing phase that is on its way out, we are like a way-lost army, stranded by the Bosphorus, looking for a bridge, as we struggle towards Byzantium, the splendid city of our soul, to be born!... And yet this bridge can be built, is being built, for we are at a turning point, a

crossroads, a nexus of energies, a new junction of the spiral of growth..."

It was partly out of the ashes of *Flame*, and partly out of a response to a need felt by the Auroville International centres for more information from Auroville, that *Auroville Today* was born in November, 1988.

Ultimately, every Auroville magazine or newsletter has had to identify its particular focus and to grapple, consciously or unconsciously, with the question of its real purpose in the context of the evolution of the community. None have succeeded in fully articulating this. Yet Sally Walton, writing in the *Auroville Voice* of Fall 1977 perhaps comes close:

"Communication about Auroville must be beyond the statistics of how many's or dreams for future materialization—for the note we sound will call those who resonate to it—and unclear or misleading notes will only continue the cacophony."

Communication, then, is about embodying that vibration, the true Auroville note that, like Ariadne's thread, trembles and weaves its way through the seemingly accidental maze of our activities and thoughts, often manifesting where it is least expected. And just as this note cannot be mimicked and manufactured, so, to detect it, to be able to recognize it in others, it must be vibrating in us too. In a profound sense, then, journalism—and, for that matter, every other activity in Auroville—is essentially about evoking that note through reconnecting with its source deep within ourselves and within others. Because THAT's where true communication begins... —Alan

## WHO ARE THE "Friends of Auroville"?

### RESEARCHING INTO THE QUESTION OF SEMI-RESIDENT STATUS

AUROVILLE would not be what it is today if its many friends and well-wishers all over the world had not helped in every conceivable way; by generously giving time, energy or money to one or many of Auroville's projects; by generously hosting and helping Aurovilians when they were outside Auroville; by, while not living in Auroville, dedicating their lives to the realization of the same aims and ideals Auroville stands for. Aurovilians, obviously, are not found in Auroville alone...

Some of these long-standing friends of Auroville come regularly to visit, and a few of them meanwhile had houses built for them, where they can stay whenever they visit. The houses are being taken care of by Aurovilians while they are away during the remaining part of the year.

Starting a few years ago, more and more people—old and new friends—showed a keen interest in building a temporary residence in or around Auroville. The demand became such that in January 1991 a group of Aurovilians created a special category, 'Friends of Auroville'. This was for people who are in sympathy with the ideals of Auroville, but are not able to become full residents. A set of guidelines was developed to allow such people to build a residence in or around Auroville for occasional use, to buy land for this if required, and to facilitate and clarify the relationship between Auroville and the 'Friend' applying for permission to be part of Auroville in this way. On the basis of these guidelines, a

number of applications were discussed by the Entry Group and sanctioned if found suitable; however without making the applicants sign any agreement.

Unfortunately, creating a special category of 'Friends' and applying guidelines does not seem to have brought clarity around this development. Already the name of the category 'Friends of Auroville' is an unhappy one, as it creates confusion amongst all those friends of Auroville who have no intention to build a temporary house. The names of "Friends" have been published in the *Auroville News*, and among them are people well-known to Auroville and others less well-known; there are Indian business-people from big cities; there are people who live in the West; people who may eventually become newcomers; and people who live in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or elsewhere in Pondicherry. What they have in common is that they do not live here; they have money to spend; they seem to have goodwill and the wish to abide by the guidelines and Auroville's ideals. But... is this enough?

So far a number of 'Friends' have acquired plots of land, sometimes in their own names (relating it to Auroville by giving power of attorney), otherwise by channelling money through Auroville Fund. Some plots were bought years ago, fenced and then left unused. Some Aurovilians living at Auromodèle, where several plots of land have been purchased by 'Friends', look at it positively. They

argue that it is good for Auroville to encourage this development in order to prevent speculation in the surrounding lands not yet owned by Auroville. The logic here is that it is better to have parts of Auroville inhabited by 'Friends' than for those parts to fall into the hands of speculators. The logic is particularly valid in areas where prices are already sky-rocketing, like the beach area.

The logic may be valid, but the reality teaches a different lesson. 'Friends' who have built in that area built large houses that need presence and a lot of maintenance. Is it really appropriate to have a luxurious suburb of villas at Auroville's entrance? And wouldn't such a suburb, parts of which would be empty for a major part of the year, frustrate Auroville's relation with the surrounding villages? A more immediate problem is that many Aurovilians are not adequately housed—and the housing shortage within Auroville remains critical. Houses for people not residing in Auroville would create an imbalance that many would find hard to accept.

There is another problem. A disparity has been created between the acceptance of a 'Friend' and the admission of a Newcomer. A person who wants to become Aurovilian passes through a trial process for one year, during which both the community and the newcomer can come to know each other. Only after that is he or she accepted as Aurovilian. But a 'Friend' is accepted as such after only one meeting with the Entry Group. What is to be done later on if the

'Friend' does not harmonize with Auroville?

The guidelines and policy for 'Friends of Auroville' have been questioned by the Housing Development Group. They presented, along with a letter dated 14.4.93, a new draft for guidelines to the Working Committee, in which they propose that the type of accommodation available for Friends of Auroville normally be part of a housing or apartment complex, rather than an individual house. Funding for the accommodation should be channelled through the Auroville Fund.

This idea was taken up by Alain Grandcolas, himself a friend of Auroville from the beginning and an active fund raiser for Matrimandir, who, as a frequent visitor to Auroville over the years, is tired of staying in guest-houses. He himself has presently opted for an apartment in a collective housing project under construction in Samasti. He is in favour of promoting the 'purchase' of apartments by non-residents of Auroville who would help generate extra funding for more housing facilities for Aurovilians or newcomers. In this way, Auroville's infrastructure would benefit and population growth would be stimulated. Regulations would however have to be detailed and a tight supervision would be necessary to ensure that the apartments of the friends are looked after during their absence by being made available to newcomers or Aurovilians who are waiting for the construction of their own house to be completed, and that revenues in the form of rent etc. are used to maintain the apartments. Also certain restrictions would be necessary to prevent people using the space as a weekend house (if they live in Pondy), or letting it be used by friends or relatives who have no connection with Auroville.

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## Anu: Confronting the edge

As questing experimentalism pervades and underlies Anu's personal search that brought her to Auroville, where she has lived since 1982, and gave birth to her artistic expression both in experimental dance and poetry over the last eight years. In her dance an eclectic approach fuses the traditional and modern, revivifying the former while adding grace and poise to the latter. Cross-cultural as well as contemporary, her outlook is very much defined by her experience of Auroville, which she sees as both a testing ground as well as a place of constant unfolding, a place that starts a 'position ahead' beyond our classical cultural borderlines. "Auroville includes being Indian because that's what you are, but at the same time it has nothing to do with it—it can only start afterwards. Auroville is the one place in the world where you are asked to start unencumbered, which obviously demands both a change of attitude, as well as consciousness."

Rooted and confirmed in her Indian-ness without being confined by it—"not belonging to only one history" as she puts it in one of her poems—her approach to her roots is not one of blind adherence, but of testing confrontation followed by acceptance, even surrender. Her poems, influenced by her readings of the Vedic Hymns to the God Of Fire, seek the interconnectedness and inner

core of resonance behind life's apparent randomness.

Anu grew up in Allahabad and Benares and she recalls a humorous event that sums up her tense tango with tradition. "Being Bengali, the Durga Puja is a very important religious festival and as long as my grandfather was alive we used to hold it in our household. But after his death we'd visit a temple where the puja was done for five consecutive days. I was about 14 at the time and during one of the puja days the priest forgot to give me some offering flowers. I decided not to go back the next day—which was the most important day being the Day of Rama's invocation of the Shakti—and this of course caused a great drama in the family. Finally, my Mother told me to take my aunt who was visiting Benares at the time, to the Kasi-Vishwath, a Shiva temple instead. I went and after hours of standing in queue we found ourselves in the sanctum sanctorum. I had by then decided I was an atheist and the last thing I was going to do was to prostrate myself in front of the lingam. However before I knew it the woman behind me in her impatience to make her offering literally bowled me over and I found myself prostrated in front of the Lingam covered in Ganga water and flowers! I was of course furious, but when I went outside, I felt, as if in a sort of divine conspiracy, everything was laughing at me and all I could do was surrender!"

She then enrolled in Calcutta University where she studied comparative literature, and in 1979 visited Auroville for the first time—which she had first read about in the *Junior Statesman* when she was still in high school. "I was about 15 at the time and the article had photos of the excavation of Matrimandir and I remember thinking it sounds like a dream and yet it's happening. I hope it still exists when I grow up!"

She then came out to Auroville for two months. "I wasn't expecting anything but my first impressions were of a tremendous joy, a tremendous energy that was very cleansing, and a sense of homecoming." She worked at Matrimandir and in the nursery—her first job was cleaning out the five lotus ponds—and this in itself was like a revelation. "I had never done physical work before and was able to break this inherited notion I had as regards the limits of what a woman could do, or even try to do."

She returned to Calcutta where she started working on her Masters in Modern and Renaissance poetry at Jadavpur



PHOTO ROGER

### FIRE

Cast these dreams  
into the fire  
watch them burn—  
then rise,  
not toward resurrection  
but such perfection  
death cannot touch.

University but her heart was no longer in it. "Although Sri Aurobindo had founded the College, no-one was interested in him or even knew about him. They were teaching Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra from a Marxist point of view! Suddenly it all became rather irrelevant." She drifted away and found jobs teaching in a school and working for All-India Radio, where she hosted a weekly jazz programme, "which was when I discovered John Coltrane and Liszt!", and finally made enough money to return to Auroville.

Her return was characterized by an eagerness to get going, and learn the right attitude, "This was very insistent." She started working at Matrimandir again, graduating to the beam team on the structure after having worked for months casting beams in the workshop. "Matrimandir was a tremendous school. It's where I learned dance. Going up the scaffolding in the beginning I was scared out of my mind—but I felt I had to do it in order to break a fear inside of my body—I didn't know how to use my body: How do you balance yourself, thirty metres up, while you're passing a six foot steel pipe? How do you breathe? How do you shift your balance and weight? Eventually it became natural. There was this sense of trust and lightness when you were up there, and I never had this feeling of being treated as a woman—on the team the only thing that counted was whether you were a person who could do it or couldn't. There were moments where you felt the whole team was one body. The way the exchange was flowing was like ballet. Working on Matrimandir in the Eighties remains one of my most precious memories."

It was around this time that Anu started studying Bharat Natyam dance with Krishna Kumar and within a few years, with the encouragement of her husband, Pierre Legrand, a French artist, she made her first forays into experimentalism. A performance in Auroville of Stravinski's 'Tango' was followed a year later by a dance experiment that combined Bharat Natyam with ancient Greek music, classical and contemporary Western music. Watching a Martha Graham video for the first time was a revelation as to how much modern dance was structurally influenced by classical Indian dance.

Although dance is a fairly recent development in Anu's artistic quest, she has written poems for over twenty years. Her recently published first collection of poetry "Mobile Hour", contains poems written recently to be part of an Auroville exhibition "Resonances" that also included Pierre's sculptures and paintings and Holger's music, as well as poems written previously. Her poems are characterized by a buoyant abstract quality of Affirmation—influenced by her readings of the Veda—that seeks to pluck behind life's pale charade of tired grotesqueness and seeming randomness, a lute-like chord of living light.

Far from being isolated from Auroville's struggles by her art, a section of the book entitled "Frel" was sparked off by her recent experience on the Working Committee. "I was at one of our meetings and the words had become noise, then sound which I followed until it hit an edge of rich silence. I returned home and for the next few months I'd sit down every evening at 8 p.m. and write. "Words lead back into a Silence that is the core, the unseen arena of our action."

And it is her sense and search for inner freedom that influences her outlook on Auroville. "If I look at the Charter it is a very unreasonable, a very radical document. However, these last ten years we have progressively conformed to outer expectations. We want to be recognized. Now we have the Foundation which is apparently a framework which helps us to exist, but instead of trying to find ways of fitting into the Indian legal system of things, we ought to be trying to find ways to make the experiment valid. Auroville is a testing ground for new possibilities, a place where the future is moving in and pulling the present towards it—but if we are going to let ourselves be boxed in by the present legal structures and systems, then we will regress, because it's contrary to what's asked of us, which is to change and to be conscious participants in that change. It is The Mother we really need and the more this need grows in us, the more the Dream will become manifest. It is not a question of learning how to deal with structures, but of learning how to create out of freedom, of discovering that inner source where freedom is born. Freedom has to do with confronting the edge, the unknown which is what Auroville is about."

Mobile Hour

Poems of Anuradha Majumdar Legrand  
Available from the author,  
Auromodele, Auroville, 605101.

Roger

### IMAGES

At the frontline  
the witness stands  
confronting his soul—  
the images speak of dream and  
destruction  
and the long destiny of the world.

We fluctuate—  
but this hour will not leave us.  
Let the wide current  
break open the stone wind  
and the pulse of the earth  
flow out in freedom.

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Again, the idea brings up questions. Would the supervision of such apartments be the responsibility of a special group, or of the community in which the apartment is located? What would happen to the Aurovilian or newcomer staying in the apartment when the 'owner' wants to use it, which would probably be during the peak season? Already some experiences have shown that a house that is not owned but temporarily inhabited is not easy to keep in good repair. Several communities have decided to have such a facility for this reason. Still, the idea is taking root, and in fact it has been already implemented in isolated instances for years. In Vikas, collective housing is planned in which certain apartments can be used by 'donors' who are helping to fund the project and will be allowed to make temporary use of an apartment.

Meanwhile, the status of 'Friends of Auroville' seems to be in limbo. The old guidelines have been challenged and new ones may take some time to evolve. For Auroville is presently beginning to see the need to put its own house in order, and perhaps this is the first priority before the status of "Friend of Auroville" can be further defined. It may well be that some fairly challenging changes will have to be initiated before Auroville can truly welcome all those who wish to be connected with Auroville in one way or another. For Auroville's welcome to new people is—and perhaps always was—an ambivalent one. As ever, the community faces the material challenge of creating living spaces for new people and the psychological challenge of leaving room for experimentation without losing touch with its spirit.

Carel and Annemarie

When we reach inside  
it is jasmine—  
fragrant like a quiet night  
contemplating the white interiors  
of dawn.

When sound is released  
we become world—  
echoing through the dense surround  
the soft milk of the universe.

We infiltrate on the deep fringes of light  
like many births of interchange—  
till we are young and jasmine  
pure of will and dreamed intent.

Anu  
(The Frel Sequence, no. 9)



## WHAT'S IN A NUMBER?

It is five years ago that the first issue of AUROVILLE TODAY appeared. To be precise: it was on 17 November, 1988. Since then, 407 articles and interviews have been printed; the number of Aurovilians featured or interviewed is 180, plus 64 other people. At present 477 people all over the world have taken out a subscription to this magazine, in a total of 23 different countries. In Auroville there are 77 subscribers, in the rest of India another 97; in Germany, 76; in the U.K., 20. In the USA there are 72 subscribers.

Eight Aurovilians were on the original editorial team; six of them still are, and dedicatedly so, although most of us have other responsibilities as well. We've had about 450 editorial meetings so far, we drank something like 4,500 cups of coffee during those gatherings; in our mailing sessions we've mailed out (sigh!) approx. 35,000 copies and affixed 90,000 stamps...

## The Middle Way

"I do not believe in advertisements except for books and patent medicines", wrote Sri Aurobindo. And that was one parameter explicitly agreed upon by the *Auroville Today* team five years ago: the magazine requested by Auroville International should give objective and in-depth information on all aspects of Auroville, and not deteriorate either into advertising Auroville or into a fund raising periodical, mentioning all those beautiful projects that so badly need to be supported; on the other hand, it should also not drift away in endless descriptions of the dreams and visions of various Aurovilians.

The middle way, then. Have we succeeded these last five years? The answer, of course, lies in the middle too.

The fact that it is in issue no. 58 that these five-year reflections are published shows that we have almost succeeded in being a true monthly. The lapses indicate times when it was really difficult to find inspiration to write about this small speck on earth—somewhere in the middle of nowhere, it seemed. But the fact that there are 58 issues also shows that we were indeed able to focus on this experiment in the transformation of the individual and collective consciousness.

Granted, not all our issues have been thoroughbreds; and our fellow Aurovilians, always ready to point out the gaps in the magazine, have frequently and freely commented: the magazine was too much 'new age', with too many articles on ecology, biosphere, greenwork; too much attention on Tibet; and, most difficult to rectify, too little expression of the true purpose for which we all came here, the spiritual side of Auroville. "*Auroville Today* loses itself in the superficialities of

daily life without touching the realities behind"

This observation, seemingly correct, ignores however that Sri Aurobindo's yoga, insofar as we are consciously or unconsciously doing it, is the most invisible of yogas. It does not express itself in group meditations, collective bhajan singing or any other of the conventional expressions of spiritual life. It is done in and through everyone's daily activities—and whether an act is being done consciously as an offering to the Divine or completely oblivious of the purpose of why one is here, is hardly subject for mention in a monthly newsletter.

We can only point out to those making this objection that the work of publishing and sending out this magazine is definitely done in a spirit of individual and collective *tapasya*. Equality and equanimity are enforced through ego-crushing experiences in editorial meetings where gaps and lapses or lack of logic in each one's article are mercilessly commented upon; not to mention the comments on one's 'innovative' use of the English language which, for those for whom it is not their mother tongue, is more often than not in accordance with the Oxford dictionary. Courage is required to write about situations that are of interest to the outside world but which are also part of Auroville's dirty laundry. Faithfulness to the ideal and perseverance are needed to publish even when the temperature is high, there seems to be little to say, and everything seems to prove that one could use one's time in a better way.

Finally, there is the love and respect which has grown for the fellow team members who, with me, have endured the battle, and who, between peals of laughter and deeply felt frustrations, have managed to stick together to make *Auroville Today*.

Carel

## Sticking with the family

When people find out that I am a member of *Auroville Today's* editorial team, they ask me, "Oh, do you write too?" I usually don't know quite what to say, and mumble something like, "Yes, well, I sometimes contribute a small article." Because that is what it feels like to me. After five years of being a member of the team, I still have to struggle to put some words down on paper. Of course I read a book on how to write and I practiced all the exercises for some time, without much result. Maybe it is my laziness, or the convenient excuse of having too many other things to do. I feel I do make up for it by putting lots of 'Virgo' neatness into the monthly mailing sessions, and checking all the issues before they go to the post office. Quite often stamps are lacking, too many have been put, or too few.

But when I do go out to interview someone or research a certain topic, I get so excited about the subject that for weeks I keep talking about it. And wondering why I don't do it more often.

At times I want to quit. But the feeling of being part of a (nice) family stops me from doing so. I would miss our extensive weekly discussions which sometimes lead to very interesting topics for a future issue, and sometimes lead to nothing at all. I would miss our jokes and gossip. Not to speak of the never-ending cups of tea and coffee.

So I keep on going to our weekly meetings, once in a while putting my fingers to the computer keyboard to produce—with lots of effort—a piece of writing, all along hoping that one day I'll become a journalist.

Tineke

# FIVE

## Communicating a vibration...

What should an Auroville newspaper try to do? Recently, we asked this question of a number of Aurovilians, all of whom are deeply interested in the topic of communication as it relates to Auroville. Yanne is one of our team members and, together with Croquette, was the founding editor of *Auroville Aujourd'hui*; Tim edits *Connections*, the in-house journal of 'Aurelec'; Marti is a writer who, together with Forrest, is responsible for the environmental education project, 'A Child and a Tree'; and Alain was for many years the coordinator of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research.

AVT: What do you think are the most important functions of an Auroville newspaper?

Tim: To provide varied news about Auroville.

Marti: News, yes, but it's also important to have in-depth articles that go beneath the surface and explore issues fully. And we shouldn't be afraid to write about our problems because presenting our problems, and the way we try to solve them, gives people outside Auroville a sense of where we are as a community; and it helps them relate to us as real people with real difficulties.

Alain: It's extremely difficult to define the proper formula for how an Auroville newspaper should function. In Auroville so far we've seen two extremes. On the one hand, the 'Auroville Review'—in its last stages at least—became very ideological and totally isolated from the community as a whole. On the other hand, the 'Auroville News' is a mere catalogue of news and views, without organization or apparent direction. Ideally, I think an Auroville newspaper, while communicating news and opinions, should be able to communicate a certain vibration which is the real Auroville. What is also very important, in terms of the present global crisis, is that it should help Mother's work by clarifying what Mother was doing and what she indicated should happen.

Yanne: Having lived outside Auroville for the past year, I've become very aware that many people 'out there' have similar needs and problems to ours here, but that if in our newspaper we only talk about our problems in a narrow and parochial way, they cannot make the connection. An Auroville newspaper should present our problems and challenges as the problems and challenges of the world. Also, an Auroville newspaper should have the courage to analyse and criticize our society here, without losing the sense of the ideal.

Croquette: An Auroville newspaper needs to give two kinds of information about Auroville. Firstly, it should explain the ideal, the dream. Secondly, it should expose the present difficulties and contradictions. This tension, this relation between the ideal and our failures to live the ideal, is the Auroville of today and this is what you must try to capture.

Tim: Another very important function of an Auroville newspaper is to make Auroville understandable on the human level. That's why the personal profiles and interviews are so important, because they present important issues through the way they affect individual lives.

Marti: They also help me, as an Aurovillian, to get to know and appreciate other Aurovilians. In this sense, another very important function of an Auroville newspaper, an internal rather than an external function, is to unify—to bring people in



the community together so that we can feel we are all one body, in spite of our surface differences. There's also something else. What strikes me when I return to Auroville is the number of amazing people there are here, doing amazing things. Yet Aurovilians seem to have a very low sense of self-esteem. So another function of a newspaper like *Auroville Today* would be to present and appreciate the exciting things that people are doing and so restore to them, and to us as a community, a sense of pride and self-respect.

Alain: I believe that the only chance we have to move towards the real Auroville is to call and act from the best part of ourselves. But that spirit seems to be lacking in our collective meetings at present. However, when I read a personal portrait in which someone speaks of their ideals and dreams, it helps me understand that person better—I'm often taken by surprise—and it helps keep that spirit alive.

What we need in Auroville at present is to recreate a sense of confidence and a willingness to keep moving forward; for Auroville, as Mother emphasised, is—above all—a place for experimentation and progress. An Auroville newspaper can play an important role by encouraging and documenting this movement.

Marti: One of the unique things about an Auroville newspaper like *Auroville Today* is that you can pitch things at a higher level than is possible for an ordinary newspaper. For example, in addition to the ordinary news, you can raise very questions like: What is the purpose of life? What is our path and karma? How are we involved in the process of planetary evolution? This gives you possibilities and a range not available to a newspaper like *Le Monde* or *The Washington Post*.

It has often been said that Aurovilians are not good at communicating with each other. Why is this? Is there a certain distrust of language, a feeling that it is inadequate for expressing our perceptions and for creating a real unity between us?

Alain: There's a truth in this. I've always had the feeling that the community could be



# YEARS

## Labour Pains

Considering the fact that nearly every endeavour in *Auroville Today*, big or small, involves coping with a demoralizing number of obstacles of all kinds, I consider it a miracle that *Auroville Today* has actually

those days we did not yet have a battery back-up system to keep the machine running when the power failed—something that used to happen several times a day. When there was a power failure, we would start a generator. This meant going into an airless overheated generator room to laboriously start the noisy thing, not knowing whether the power would return soon or after some hours. Returning to the computer sweaty and smelling of kerosene, I would sometimes find that the power had already come back—only to be cut off again as soon as I had switched off the generator! This was a test of one's equanimity (equanimity being the first psychological condition for the integral yoga) that I did not quite pass. In the end I dropped computer typing for some years until one day I started learning the basics of computerized page-layout. One very important difference was that the computer was connected to a new invention: the UPS (Uninterrupted Power Supply), a prototype of the backup power system currently in use all over Auroville. It performed well—till one day it exploded with a sharp bang and the heavy smell of burnt rubber...

In September '88, a group of us started to meet and prepare the first articles for *Auroville Today*. The time was ripe. I typed the articles on computer and one evening the layout of the first issue was ready. That is to say, it was ready *inside* the computer—but to get the coveted first laser printouts, one had to go to Fraternity where the one and only laser printer was housed at the time. And this was when I started realizing

that writing articles and arranging them on the computer were innocent fun compared to getting them printed out. The trips to the laser printer in Fraternity turned out to be real obstacle courses with a succession of mishaps: power-cuts (no UPS there yet!), shortage of petrol/kerosene needed to run the generator, paper shortage, corrupted floppy disks, lost keys, paper jams in the printer, muddy roads, etc. The obstacles seemed so frequent that it made me wonder if there was some occult resistance to the appearance of each issue. Once an issue had gone to the press, problems would continue there, in an unending variety. Oh equanimity!

About two years ago *Auroville Today* finally acquired its own office space, with a laser printer, in the new upstairs office of CSR. Until then, the *Auroville Today* 'office' had been dispersed all over Auroville. An old steel cupboard full with back issues and files stood in an unused building at Samridhi waiting for better times (big ants got in there, made nests and soiled a number of documents); the weekly meetings were held in Dana or in Kottakarai, and the computer was housed in Fraternity under a leaky roof, waiting for the new office to get ready...

But now the funny thing. Quite a few times I've had the feeling that *Auroville Today* is leading its own life... It simply uses us poor humble team members as instruments to put itself together and to be born every month. It shows on the computer, when an article does not quite want to fit on the page. I've learned to understand the message: "Look a bit closer, perhaps it needs some more editing work, perhaps you've overlooked something." And then it fits—the omission was discovered ("Ah, yes, that was the reason...")—and the article fills the frame, to the last word.

So, I finally understood. Don't blame us, don't praise us. We are just tools.

Annemarie

## Take Five

**A**FTER five years of *Auroville Today*, what is there to show for it? Well, there are about sixty issues to thumb through, although, for those of us who were involved in the publishing, it seems as though there were about sixty thousand issues we had to work upon to make it happen. We have never even been able to describe the events surrounding the very first issue which, after it was printed and distributed, had to be completely recalled.

Any group who sets out to try to communicate something of the experience and the experiment is inevitably doomed to a certain degree of frustration. The local vocal critics are one thing, but more devastating is the inner critic who wonders why you are wasting your time trying to do the impossible and obviously not succeeding so well. There's not much to be self-congratulatory about.

Looking back, however, there is another point to consider, and that is the overwhelming impact of the people that we have encountered. For every article required sharing something of oneself, and entering the world of someone else in the process of gaining information or insights. The next step was then to place the resultant article before the *Auroville Today* team for a process of analysis and discussion. This process could take on a life of its own, taking us far beyond the article itself, and giving us ideas for further articles and even future issues.

Actually, the great individual reward of working intensely and regularly with a committed group is immeasurable—I am tempted to say: "Let's do another five!"

Bill



appeared almost every single month during the last five years.

From the beginning, it has been my task, among other things, to make a final page-layout on computer and then to get the art-work ready to be printed by offset at Auroville Press. I learned to type, on a computer, about ten years ago here in Auroville. I took on some typing work. In

## Communicating a vibration... (contd.)

united in a different way than through just doing things together—although this is important—and that language as we know it is only one of the tools we have that make us aware that we are not really separated. Definitely, what Mother meant by communication was a sense of unity at a very high level. So we should keep in mind that communication, as we normally employ it, involves the use of very crude tools.

Yanne: At the same time, language is one of the most important tools that we have at present to communicate with, so we should work upon refining it rather than throwing it over for something far, far beyond us.

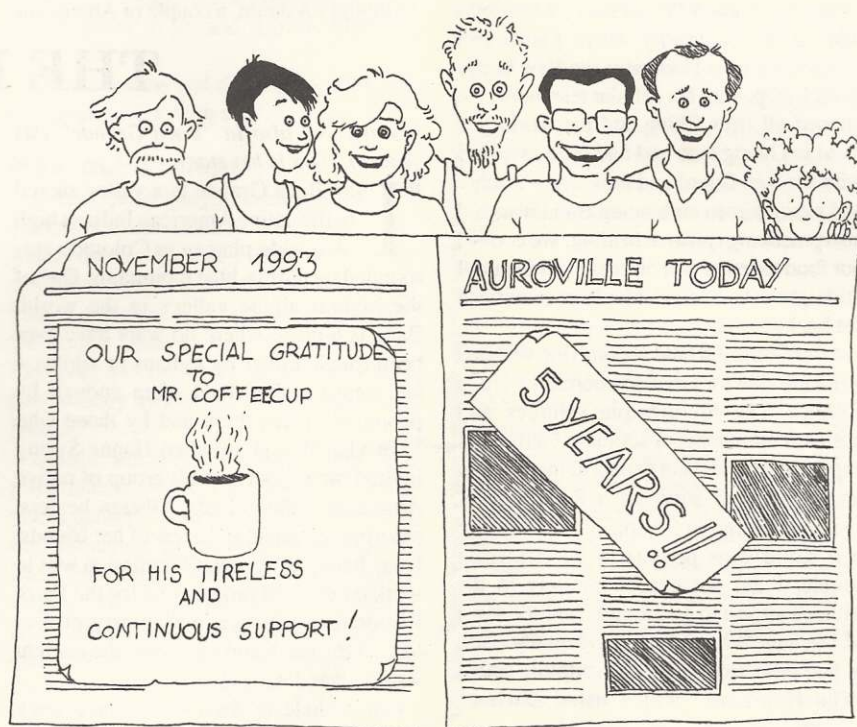
Alain: It's also worth remembering that Mother named the newspaper room in the Ashram 'Falsehood'—so working on a newspaper you are working with a very heavy karma.

Yanne: As a member of the *Auroville Today* team from the beginning, I've been very critical at times of what I felt were our shortcomings—that we present too rosy a view, that we devote too much space to environmental issues etc. But reading *Auroville Today* in France the last year I've completely changed my mind, because I suddenly realized that *Auroville Today* is both full of news and full of the spirit of Auroville. I still feel that, as a team, we need to work much harder and be more serious about the great responsibility that we have. But the fact that, after five years, with all our different backgrounds and orientations we remained united as a team, that nobody

stepped out, shows that at least we have achieved something, that we are in movement...

Interview by Alan

Cartoons by Laura Lombardi



## Of Mud and Meetings

**A**s *Auroville Today* celebrates its fifth birthday, and the team smiles proudly at five years of existence, I feel a little like the short straw, or the little sister who sits quietly listening to the tales of wonder and woe that form the reminiscences of a long-lived family. This is not my 5th year, only my first. I cannot play the game of catch-up, but I can draw on my own experiences of this past year to

offer a few humble images of the way it was for me.

Tuesday morning: meeting day. The red mud of the road to Samridhi; a bullock cart gets stuck at a sharp turn... There is a lot of discussion and advice on how to get it out.

The gathering of the team: talking, tea, reading articles, talking...

Someone new listens a lot. The voices create rhythms which become familiar. This intertwining around a big kitchen table is something basic—when I was a child it used to be my favourite spot to do homework. A place where people live—not an office—where we can communicate on a human scale.

"What's on the table?" This means, "what's new", "what's happening", "what's available?" Everyone reads everything. Patience, patience. What about the deadline? But... We are waiting and waiting—it's almost there, everything's nearly there. Ahh! We've got it.

What's in the air for the next issue? Perennial topics, favourites of one or the other team member (oh no Roger, not crop circles again!). With some humour, please.

Bill's quiet jests, Roger's raucous replies, Alan's questions, Annemarie's advice, Alan trying to keep us on track... It flows. Usually.

Do we get stuck?

Occasionally.

Then everyone jumps up and helps to push the bullock cart out of the mud.

Jill



## THE BUS INTO SNAKE MOUTH

ONE OF our editorial team, Bill, left us this summer to check out part of the planet and visit his father. When he got back, we prevailed on him for some kind of report. That was probably a mistake but here is the edited result!

**"SNAKE MOUTH"** in bold black Chinese characters on the windshield of the bus definitely warmed my heart. Those two characters I had carefully noted from my Chinese map because that would be my last destination in China. From there I would catch a boat to Hong Kong. The bus conductor, a teenage boy, looked shocked to see me on his bus, but I called up a pattern practice from a twenty-six-year-old lesson of "Beginning Chinese" and said "I want to go to..." filling in "Snake Mouth". He immediately brightened up and we were on our way. The bus had a couple of cracked windows and broken seats and bounced along the straight roads of an endless grid between factories and flats. The grey day with a few rain showers did not add anything to the dismal buildings and cluttered streets. This is the Special Economic Zone of Guangdong Province. Most people looked over-worked. I hadn't planned to come here but when the biogas course I'd been invited for was postponed for the third time, I didn't want to leave Hong Kong without setting foot in the People's Republic. The Government Travel Service (CTS) arranges all sorts of tours for the thousands of tourists visiting China but these are expensive. I decided to go it alone and walked from the last train station in the New Territories of Hong Kong over the metal bridge spanning a ditch of muddy water and barbed wire.

Once out on the street of Shenzhen, one billion or so Chinese didn't seem to notice that I had arrived and were extremely busy doing their thing. My thing was to take a bus to "Splendid China". "Splendid China" claims to be the largest miniature scenic spot in the world (30 hectares) where 70 of the "epitomes of China's famous sceneries and historic sites" are miniaturized at the scale of 15:1. "One will get a good idea of the ancient civilized country with a history of five thousand years and travel over numerous famous rivers and mountains all over China only in one day", says the pamphlet. How much of an idea one gets of the five thousand year history is questionable but I did enjoy an ice cream called Ping Pong. The Great Wall of China in miniature loses some of its impressiveness. The Potala of Tibet loses all of it!

Toward evening I left Splendid China and wandered in the streets to find a hotel for the night. Was I alone in China? I stopped and hitched up my shoulder bag and looked around at the people. I 'knew' them all; workers, business people, young mothers, students. Not a great cosmic insight but another reassurance emotionally, psychologically, on the ground, in the street that dispelled those fears and apprehensions that come no matter what. I had made a step into China not knowing if I really could and how I would survive without really knowing the language, the culture, and on a shoe-string budget. I now felt better about China, and about myself. I stumbled on a very nice hotel, they gave me a discount rate and I slept ever so well.

You can read so much today about China and I had with me an interview of the American scientist and government advisor on energy policy, Amory Lovins. He said 76

percent of China's energy needs are met by coal and if they keep it up, it will cause a disaster for the planet (*Newsweek*, 15/2/93, p. 50). He suggested piping gas from Siberia to solve the problem. Looking out the bus window as we passed factory after factory, I didn't know if it would. India has a similar problem and I kept thinking how close it is to China—just over the Himalayas, a few minutes by plane. How about a Peace Trees Project for Indian and Chinese youth to re-plant the Himalayan Forests that have been lost? Restore the earth energies and use biogas?... The bus stopped.

More people were getting off, something of an urban centre began to appear. I thought of my journey ahead which would cover another 40,000 km before coming back home to Auroville. But isn't it to be at home in Auroville to be at home everywhere? In a Santa Rosa, California, electronic shop, the man in front of me had "Auroville, India" listed as the first Peace Trees Project on the back of his T-shirt. Yes he knew Kumar, Narayanswami and Ramalingam from Auroville in the Sonoma County Project! One of my brother's business partners knew Aurelec. Someone told me that nowadays if you know ten people you know everybody in the world because of the exponential increase in communication. I was not ready for the old lady in a Madras sari climbing down the Glacier Point Trail in Yosemite National Park, and she wanted to know where we learned 'Vanakkam'. My roommate at the University where I stayed in Hong Kong after I landed in the New World Hostel, slept with his cellular telephone. He phoned all over China and the world. He lived in Guangzhou and had been involved with the Red Guard and now was a teacher and businessman embracing Buddhism and also practicing spiritual healing. We cooked our food together and discussed China until midnight with satellite television playing in the background.

After China, I would re-join Tine who had left Auroville for Germany before I went to China. The picturesque villages and postcard mountains of southern Germany I expected, but I did not expect to meet Tine's uncle who had survived a Russian concentration camp in Siberia. The shadow of two world wars persists in its effects on people. I did not expect the way to the Munich airport to go through the little town of Dachau. Why did we accidentally park, in San Francisco, next to a sculpture called "The Holocaust" which listed Dachau?

What was this trip into the beauty of nature and the horror of man?

In Munich I saw "Blue Planet", a short documentary projected on a giant screen with quadraphonic sound in an intense, dramatic presentation of the planet from the perspective of space and the early astronauts who were overwhelmed by the beauty of this blue planet dawning over the lunar landscape. From Los Angeles, Tine and I would travel north by land eventually all the way to the Gulf Islands of Canada. We travelled up the San Andreas Fault, the edge that slips and makes California quake and freeways fall down. In the "Blue Planet" we saw it happen and travelled the fault line in computer simulated images. However, California did not fall off into the sea while we were there, soaking in the volcanic hot water that seeps to the surface at Big Sur in Esalen on the coastal cliffs.

Further North is Mount Shasta, part of a chain of volcanos that adorn the Pacific Northwest. Crater Lake is a jewel lake filling the sunken cone of an ancient volcano. At a crossroads, an old man at the gas station advised us to see Crater Lake because he said "It might be the only chance in your life and it's worth it." We decided to go and he was right. We also went to AUM, the all USA meeting, which had chosen one of the better parts of Los Angeles to gather an unusual collection of people associated with what is sometimes called the "work". At the meeting, we had a trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a couple of Americans

## THE BACA

Marti was also in "Baca Grande" this summer. Here is her story.

The Baca Grande is a valley sacred to the native American Indians high on a wide plateau in Colorado surrounded by purple-blue mountains. One of the highest alpine valleys in the world, Baca is a place where no wars have ever been fought either by Indians or whites. I had heard it described often enough by people who live there and by those who have visited, and so when Hanne Strong invited me to join a small group of native American Indian chiefs, Tibetan healers, environmentalists and a few of her friends, I was happy to accept. Our mission was to work on the first programme for the Earth Restoration Alliance, a planetary project to heal the earth and to restore the ancient wisdoms and natural laws.

Our prelude to Baca was a three week intensive Peace Trees Programme in

whom the Mother had sent from Pondicherry to go out and get Auroville started, a Russian healer, a few of us from Auroville, a Lithuanian piano player, AVI USA representatives, Sri Aurobindo Association, Foundation for World Education, East-West Cultural Centre, Auromere, California Institute of Integral Studies, Sri Aurobindo Learning Center and others. Sessions included "Close encounters of a cellular kind", Qi Gong and other options as presented by the participants. One evening was devoted to Auroville with slides and discussion.

When we flew from Seattle to Colorado, in spite of the crowd gathered to meet the Pope, we were whisked off to Baca Grande, the 250,000 acre "Refuge for World Truths" to attend the fourth annual Global Village Network Conference (see article below). About thirty chosen ones just fit in to the Savitri Solar Dome, part of the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, for some remarkable encounters with the work: "New education for a New World". Two members of the Institute for Evolutionary Research were present and the work of Satprem was discussed. "What Satprem has recorded in his book *Evolution II* is for all of us to do ourselves as the age of gurus and more 'teachings' is over," remarked the speaker.

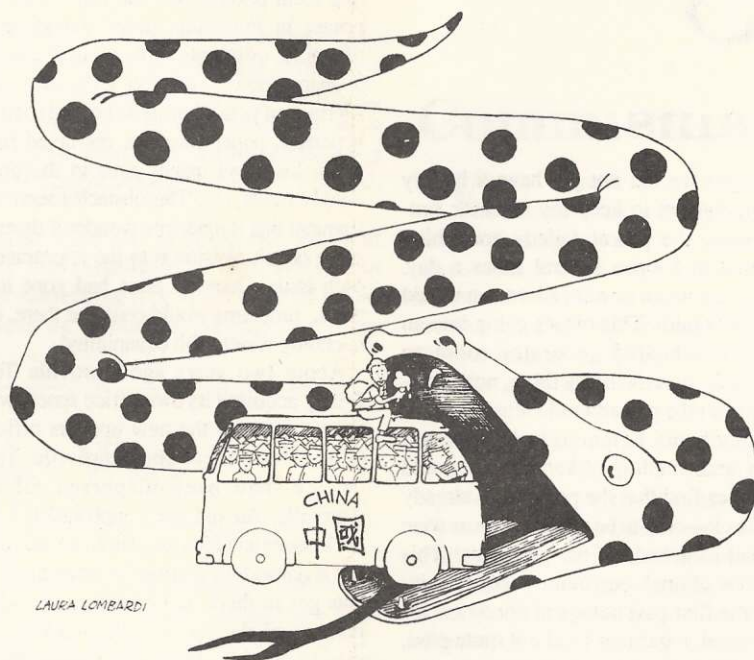
Of many special places, one was the temperate rain forest on the Olympic Peninsula where three meters of rain falls annually. Dense vegetation of mosses and ferns and massive trees make the forest a kind of living temple. Sailing in the Gulf Islands off Vancouver is another indescribable experience. We saw dolphins, seals and otters—even a baby eagle stretching in the nest preparing for the moment to dive from the tall tree on the cliff above the sea...

But I haven't got there yet. The bus is just coming into Snake Mouth. Gradually all the passengers are getting off until I'm the only one left. Snake Mouth turns out to be a very big industrial port and I begin to wonder if I will end up anywhere near the boat terminal I have to find. The conductor notices my anxiety as I shift my seat next to the door pulling my bag with me. "Sit and wait" he says in Chinese. Eventually after several turns through the city the bus stops at the port where I need to go. The conductor smiles: "Dzai jian" (see you again).

Bill

Sonoma County, California. I worked as a staff member and my son Taja was one of 18 youth delegates from 7 countries. We planted trees, built salmon ladders, did fish rescue and stream restoration in silent old growth Redwood forests. Some of the trees were 1500 to 2000 years old. In addition to earth restoration, we worked with Danaan Parry on conflict resolution. I helped to facilitate a workshop called Essential Peace Making where deep gender issues were raised to try to generate better understanding between men and women.

As soon as the Sonoma County Peace Trees was finished, Taja and I boarded a bus in San Francisco. We reached the beautiful Baca Valley 38 hours later. Even though I arrived tired and exhausted at Hanne's house, I couldn't help feeling totally exhilarated in this mountain atmosphere. Baca is nestled close to an impressive



LAURA LOMBARDI



mountain that reaches 14,000 feet. It has a special peaceful quality to it.

Over the past several decades, Baca has become home to spiritual groups from all over the world. Baca is home to Hanne Strong and the Manitou Foundation. This foundation for planetary regeneration is based on the "natural laws" as defined by indigenous people, deep ecologists, environmentalists, spiritual leaders and those who simply live close to the earth. Baca is also home to Seyril Schocken who lived in Auroville for many years, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, and Savitri Solar Village, a project site yet to be developed. There's also a Japanese Buddhist retreat, a Tibetan Medicine center and a Carmelite retreat house.

One of the first things that I sensed is that Baca has a very strong force field and requires concentration and purity of heart and spirit. It is not unlike Auroville in that forces concentrate and come to a head for personal and collective evolution.

Many events occurred during those ten days in Baca—Vision quests and sweat lodges, with White Rainbow and Alvin Manitopies, and working in the mountains with Tibetan Buddhist botanists, (many of the same plants that grow in Tibet grow on Baca's mountain slopes). There was also a wonderful concert by musician Paul Winter whose work on whales, wolves and dolphins is known the world over.

But perhaps the highlights of our period in Baca were the many hours sitting in the teepee with Leon Shenandoah, chief of the six Iroquois Nations, and listening to his teachings on the natural laws and hearing native American prophecies about the future of our fragile planet. Leon is one of the most respected and influential Indian chiefs in America. Leon spoke about the importance of giving thanks to the creator. He talked about respecting Mother Nature, about giving to her and caring for her like our own mother.

After Hanne's seminar, I went to Seyril's to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday and the end of the Global Village Network Conference which had begun a few days before. There I met Bill, Tine and Satprem's editor,

Luc Venet. The meeting with Luc was very strong. Luc described the experience of being in Satprem's presence as one that causes all of one's imperfections to rise to the surface. He described Satprem as "a living mass of fire"

During Seyril's conference, I spoke about the Earth Restoration Alliance in India and some sacred aspects of the Vedic Traditions. Auroville has been chosen as one of the dozen pilot projects sites for the Earth Restoration Alliance, a plan that emerged as a result of the Earth Summit in Rio last year. The project in Auroville will be administered by the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre. This programme will enable youth to become knowledgeable and committed stewards of the earth by providing practical training and deep ecology. Auroville is an ideal site for such a programme because of our long history in reafforestation, appropriate technology, community and village action, experimental education, and the aim of the eventual transformation of consciousness. In Auroville the plan is to receive two groups of trainees over the first two years for practical in-field training. A curriculum manual in book form based on the natural laws and the Indian Vedic traditions will be our contribution to the planetary programme.

Hanne Strong's vision is to employ youth in earth restoration work all over the world and to teach them the natural laws and sacred aspects of nature. Obviously, indigenous people throughout the world will play a special role in this project, because we can learn much from their simple but profound wisdoms.

When it was time to leave Baca, both Taja and I had made a deep connection with it. In some ways Baca feels like a sister community to Auroville: it is a place where some of the planetary struggles of the world are being fought on a visible plane. It also felt good to be among people with so much knowledge, good sense, wisdom and dedication to sacred values and the earth.

Marti

## News—Brief News—Brief News—News

### Piano recital

At a time when most Cultural Pavilions in Auroville have not passed beyond the level of their first stones, the Italian community has taken a remarkable initiative: it has organized a series of cultural events, sponsored by the Italian Cultural Centre linked to the Italian Embassy in New Delhi. The first event was a well-attended piano recital by Antonio Sardi de Letto, who played works of Bach, Busoni, Liszt and Schumann, followed by an impromptu 'encore' consisting of Brahms' Variation on a Theme of Paganini.

### Next AVI Meeting

The next meeting of the Auroville International Centres will be held in Huize Schoonoord in Ubbergen near Nijmegen, The Netherlands, from May 12 to 16, 1994. More details can be obtained from: AVI Nederland, Uiterweg 255 ark, 1431 RA Aalsmeer. Tel: 02977-27883.

### Transition

Muriel Spanier, a long-time friend and supporter of Auroville, passed away in Boulder, Colorado in early October. She and her husband, Joseph, published the

Auroville Voice in the late seventies and early eighties. They also worked as distributors of Auroville handicrafts at their own expense to try and help the 'Dream' come true.

The sweetness and dedication of Muriel continues to live with us.

### New publication

A small book has just been published by Auroville Press, titled *Awaken your Body*, which contains a series of physical exercises developed by Ursula and her group. "Some exercises may appear familiar, and we do not claim to have invented any of them; our aim is rather to help to develop a deeper body awareness through a new approach."

Ursula worked for a long time as a physiotherapist in Switzerland. The exercises combine the four principles of breathing, stretching, isometrics and relaxation. Each exercise is illustrated and described step by step. The book is available from the Auroville International Centres, the Boutique d'Auroville and from the Auroville Press. There is an English as well as a German edition.

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## Letters

### A critique

Coming across the article "Gardeners of the Unknown" (in *Auroville Today* no. 56), I put myself in the shoes of a potential reader and asked myself what sort of picture I might get from such an article, if I knew nothing about Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, regarding their vision or the aim of Auroville.

One might believe, upon reading this article, that the ideal of Auroville, "placed so high that it is unattainable", is, in short, "make love not war" in a more or less paradisaical place—as the great hope for the future is presented through the luminous image of a radiant 'old' Aurovilian who carries in his arm his daughter's son: "A third generation of human clay offering itself to the transformation!"

Apart from the fact that if we, on the path of this yoga by some detour or other happen to get children, it is simply our business to look after them as part of our karma yoga experience, and exclusively their business, later on, to choose whether to offer themselves or not to the transformation (this yoga is not for everybody, as Sri Aurobindo often said); to make—sentimentally—an aim out of this (when there exist so many other communities in the world otherwise inspired, or not at all inspired but dedicated to this), is nothing but the eternal human abdication:

*As long as intellect's outward-gazing sight  
Serves earthly interest and creature joys,  
An incurable littleness pursues his days.  
Ever since consciousness was born on  
earth,  
Life is the same in insect, ape and man,  
Its stuff unchanged, its way the common  
route.*

(Savitri, II, 5, 461-475)

In a passage of Savitri, Death, the great enchanter, placing before Savitri all possible temptations to deflect her from her purpose, to make her give up, offers her:

*Daughters of thy own shape in heart and  
mind,  
Fair hero sons and sweetness undisturbed ...*

(Savitri, X, 3, 572-3)

And the Mother commented: "Oh, he is base, base with vulgarity. See that joy! Oh! ... How vulgar that being is! Can there really be people who are tempted by this? I think Sri Aurobindo deliberately made this Death very vulgar to discourage all the illusionists and Nirvanists. ... 'Let there be no more cruelty in the world, ... let there be no injustice, let there be no more suffering because of people's wickedness', there is something one can dedicate oneself to. But

producing daughters and sons... There are millions and millions who do that, so do it again? No, truly that's not what one is born for." (*Mother's Agenda*, July 7th, 1965)

"There are", said Sri Aurobindo, "those who want to go into the yoga with their families ... (laughter) ... Going to heaven with the family may be possible, but not into yoga." (*Evening Talks I*, 193)

To the yoga of transformation we can offer only ourselves. But in order to detect in ourselves and offer all the big and little 'spells' with which Death chains us up, so that the roots of suffering and of the eternal human frustration may be touched by the solar vibration of the New Thing, we must first have said 'enough!' to the Old, and no longer fool ourselves.

There is already enough of the Impostor in the world without giving him a foothold in Auroville, praising him with false poetry. A place created for those who truly want Something Else can easily take on the appearance of a Farce (a Club Méditerranée with a socio-ecological orientation?) when what should be the propelling force is in this way relegated to a purely ornamental role. What's the point of deceiving ourselves for love of the human or worldly? In this yoga, first and foremost, one should not be afraid of becoming unpopular...

Paola de Paolis (Auroville)

### Praise

Dear editorial team,

Congratulations on the fifth anniversary of *Auroville Today*, which I'm aware is coming up shortly.

I have nothing but praise for what you've achieved, your steadiness and regularity, your balanced approach to the issues you deal with, and the constantly interesting and relevant variety of topics you have covered.

Certainly, on a literary level you have done something for everyone interested in Auroville, both resident and outside. But I think you've also done something else: you've stayed together and stuck to the job you undertook! (I think I'm right in saying that 100% of the original team that started *Auroville Today* are still involved.)

That's really nice, and says a lot for the way you work together as a team. Could it also be suggested, bearing in mind the multiplicity of nationalities you represent, that it's a tentative indication that Unity in Diversity is not impossible?!

Anyway, well done, and keep up the good work!

Sincerely,  
Tim (Auroville)

### How To Subscribe

The contribution for the next 12 issues of *Auroville Today* in India is Rs. 150, for other countries Rs. 750, Can. \$ 30, French F. 150, DM 47, It. Lira 35,500, D.Gl. 52, US \$ 25, U.K. £ 14. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. **Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund**, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

#### Addresses of Auroville International centres:

AVI Deutschland, c/o M. Soerensen, Bleicherstrasse 60, 28203 Bremen, Germany.  
AVI España, c/o Arjun and Anandi, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain.  
AVI France c/o Sotyakom Karim, 14, rue du Colonel Grancey, 94500 Champigny Sur Marne, France.  
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AVI USA, c/o Jack Alexander, P.O.Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA

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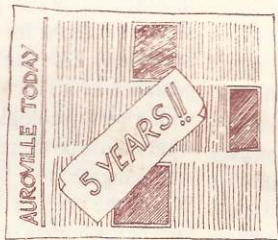
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In this issue (8 pages):  
Auroville Today: the past five years; Friends of Auroville; portrait of a poet etc.

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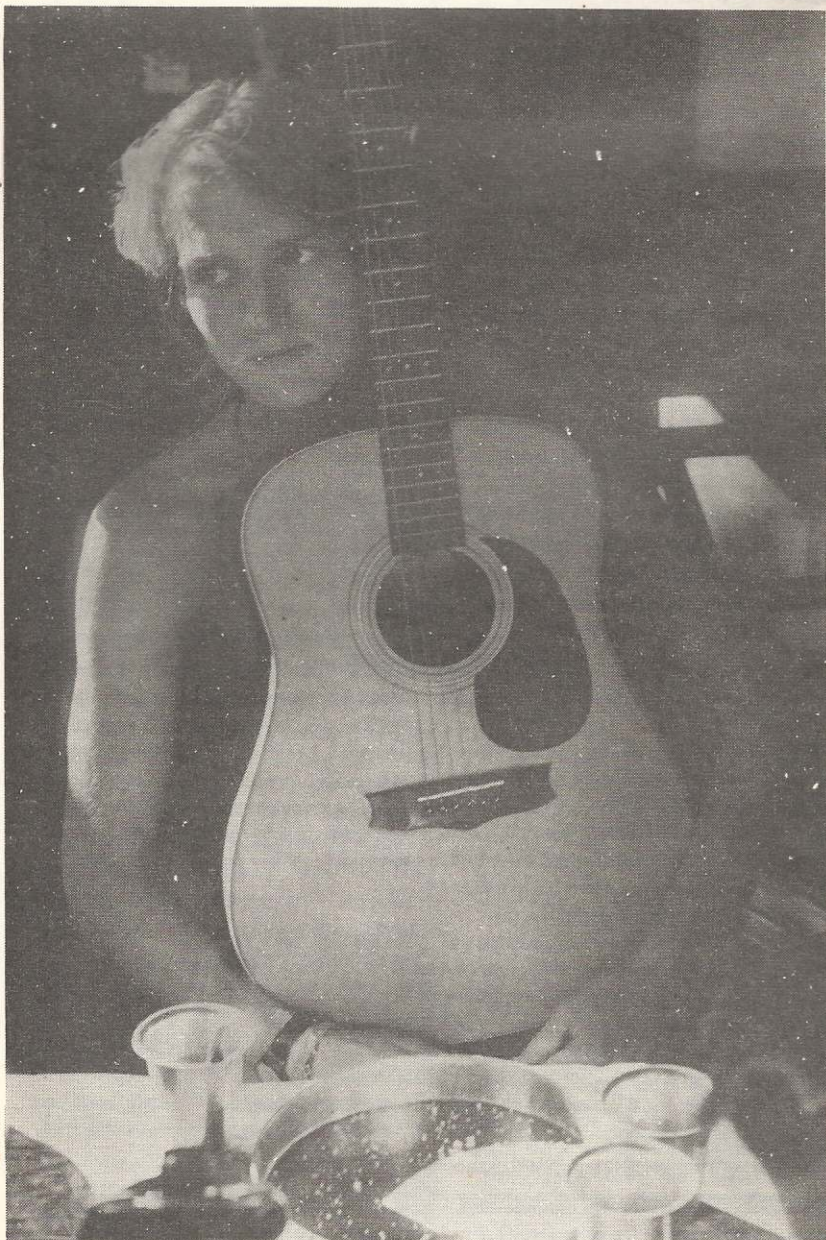


PHOTO IRENO

Stefan enjoying a quiet moment during 'Je t'aime'

## PASSING THROUGH

# "Auroville could be a blueprint for the future Tibet"

Recently, the Centre for Scientific Research ran a workshop for Tibetans living in India on the theme of a sustainable future for the world. Among the participants was Geshe Damdul Namgyal from Drepung Monastery ('Geshe' denotes a learned monk, roughly equivalent to a Doctor of Divinity in the West). Geshe-la, as he is called, was born in India in 1959, soon after his parents had fled from Tibet. He became a monk when he was 18, and recently completed his Geshe studies. In a few months, he will be going to the United States to pursue postgraduate studies. *Auroville Today* spoke to him at the end of the workshop.

**AVT: From a Buddhist point of view, what is the cause of man's destruction of its environment?**

Geshe-la: We say it is due to ignorance. But 'ignorance' means more than an absence of knowledge. It's a specific mind-set which sees everything as separate and existing in its own right. When this perception is applied to the self, it gives rise to desire or attachment, and so to selfishness. And this leads to exploitation of others, and of the environment.

For a Buddhist, however, everything is interdependent—nothing can exist independently of everything else. This perception of interdependence, coupled with the Buddhist respect for all life forms, automatically means that Buddhists care for the environment. And this means the total fabric of the environment as elements like water and air, because they support all life, have to be respected too.

**These insights are crucial for the survival of the planet. How can you communicate them to people who do not share your religion?**

The Dalai Lama said that religion is like a luxury, which can only be practised by a few, while spirituality is something everyone shares. The basic spiritual qualities are compassion and love, and everyone has traces of these qualities, however mixed with other things, and so can enhance and refine them. We can work on

the spiritual level with everyone—irrespective of their beliefs—by reminding them of this and of what is common to us all; that we are all part of humanity.

**If you return to Tibet, you will face enormous problems relating to the devastation of your environment and the imposition of a very different mind-set from Buddhism effected over the past 33 years. How will you translate these Buddhist insights you have mentioned into practical measures?**

We have to be very skilful. At one level, enhancing the awareness of the need for love and compassion is a help; but, in certain cases, laws would also be a very good way to protect our principles. The Dalai Lama said that, in free Tibet, those who will hold power—like the politicians and industrialists—would be motivated not by power itself but by love and compassion. But to make sure this happens we need some other bodies in the system to act as checks and balances.

**Is this why the Dalai Lama spoke of the need for Tibetans to experiment with a democratic system of government for Tibetans?**

Yes. Actually, we were very shocked when he said that he would withdraw from politics when we return to Tibet, and that we had to experiment with a more democratic system, because the danger of the misuse of power by others who do not have compassion and wisdom is very great—even in a democratic system. Of course, while the Dalai Lama is with us, the Tibetan people will always look to him for the final decision, but when he is gone, and if there is not another Dalai Lama, it will be very difficult for us if we are not prepared. So by getting us to explore and to come up with our own forms of democracy—because there are really no successful examples in the world at present—he is trying to train us for that time.

**Finally, what effect has this week's workshop on sustainability had upon you?**

Although as a Buddhist I already had an innate sense of respect for the environment, this workshop really gave me a sense of direction and sharpened my practical understanding of the interdependence of all, and how not to harm others. In a way, it's taught me how to practise non-violence in actual life.

In this context, it's very important that you Aurovilians document all the work in afforestation, renewable energy and alternative building technology that you are doing here. Because I have a hope that in these things Auroville could really be a good blueprint for the future Tibet...

Interview by Alan on  
11.7.93

Geshe Damdul Namgyal

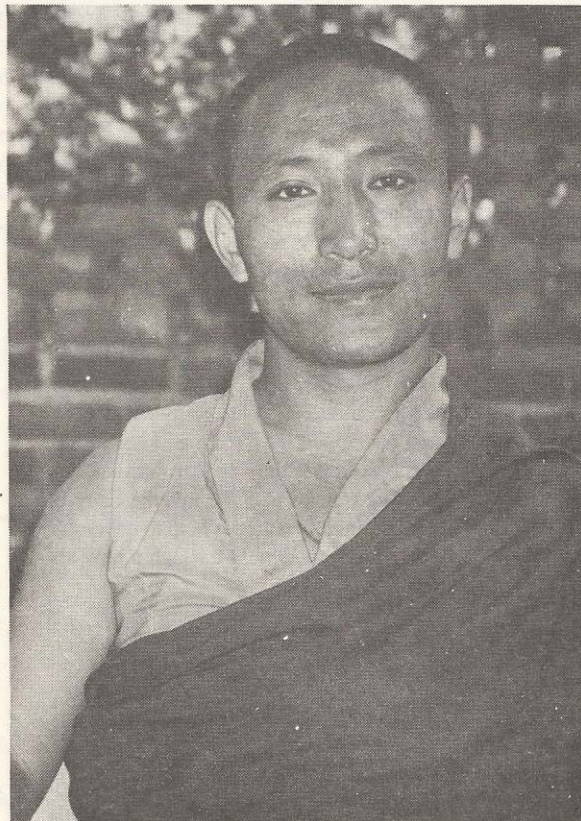


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