

Auroville Today

MARCH 2002, No.158

MAIN THEME: Young Perspectives

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| ■ Anandamayi | ■ Martanda | ■ Saroja |
| ■ Bala | ■ Muniandi | ■ Savitri |
| ■ Emmanuelle | ■ Sarasu | ■ Selvi |



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CARTOON: SAVITRI, COUTESY LUMIERE

**YOUNG
OUTRAGEOUS
UNITED
TRIBAL
HOPELESS
CRISIS
ENTERS
NEW
TIMESPACE
ELSE
REALITY
????**

The term "youth" carries many connotations. It denotes hope for a future that may turn out to be different, yet is often also equated with irresponsibility, revolt and revelry. In this issue some young Aurovilians give their unvarnished perspectives about growing up here and how they view Auroville at present. They do not claim to represent the views of Auroville's youth in general, for like the adults, the Auroville youth is an amalgam of individuals with widely divergent opinions.



Unclassified

Emmanuelle, the youngest editor of Auroville Today, who put the cover story for this issue together, shares her experience.

Sitting on a branch, atop a mango tree peopled with birds and squirrels. Biting into the green, unripe fruit, on which we apply salt and red chilly powder...A moment later jumping down, throwing the mango kernel over our shoulder, and running, barefeet, through the open fields, under the bright sun, the wind blowing in our hair...

I grew up in Auroville. Having spent here my childhood, adolescence, and now having become a young adult, I am still here...

As I arrived as a child, with my mother, coming to live in Auroville was not a conscious choice I made, or a decision I took, it just happened...

I can not compare the experience of spending my childhood in Auroville with any other, as that's the only one I've had... yet I know that it was a special experience!

As a child in Auroville, you are free, you are independent, you can discover this world you are growing up in with wide eyed wonder...and you are protected...You are not exposed to the harsh realities of the 'outside world', which could turn even a child's clear eyed view to a hard, disillusioned stare...

Then you grow up, enter adolescence, and become aware that you are living in an environment, which is, to a certain degree, enclosed...The

fact that you have not been exposed enough to the functionings of 'modern society', that is the outside, makes you a little insecure, a little afraid of not being able to manage 'out there'...

You want to break free, discover new horizons, in the process, you break a few rules (which are not necessarily written rules), you are judged, become stigmatised...But that too passes...

I studied in Auroville, attending Transition School, and then Last School where I discontinued my studies at the age of fifteen. After that, I continued studying a few subjects, while experimenting with different jobs, trying to find the field I was most interested in, could learn the most from, in which I could really give the best of myself. That took a very long time...many years, during which I saw my lack of formal education as a great handicap, the lack of guidance the youth could receive in Auroville, as a big drawback to the society in general. I felt a little weighed down, lacked self assurance, didn't feel adequate to go out into the world and be able to make it...

Adolescence, a stage when one is still struggling to find one's identity, form one's opinions, widen one's world view...is not always an easy experience to live through in Auroville...Then, after quite some years of sporadic efforts at studying, trying to find a direction to move towards,

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The innocence of youth

Spending time sitting and speaking with three young Aurovilian women, Saroja, Selvi and Sarasu, impressed upon me the innocence of youth. Refreshingly honest and full of aspiration, each shared their thoughts and feelings on living and growing-up within Auroville.

My first visit was with 23 year-old Selvi at her home in Aspiration. A young mother, she lives with her husband Arumugam and spends the morning looking after her 2 year-old daughter Sandhya and the afternoons working in the Boutique.



Selvi

"I remember in my childhood looking at the tall trees and I was so scared that they would hit the sky and one day the sky would just fall down. I would always ask my Appa (father) to cut them down, just in case!"

"As a child I always wanted to be part of community life - some of my friends were in boarding at New Creation, but

my parents were strict and made me stay at home. Of course now I realise it is important to be with your family until at least age 16 or 17 because you pick up a lot of good habits; after all they are the ones who gave me life and taught me to be kind to people.

"Looking back, my family have always had an important role in

my life, especially my uncle Radha, who would come round everyday and check that we had done our homework and taken a shower - he was so supportive, more like a friend.

"I have been married for 5 years - I met my husband at Last School where we were studying together, and despite my parents advice to concentrate on my studies, I told them that I really wanted to get married and eventually they came round, although I sometimes feel I could have studied more.

"I enjoy working in the Boutique in the afternoons, because I really like the customers - I talk to people of so many different nationalities everyday. Living in Auroville is really great - it is like travelling to many different places with so many different cultures and people. In the summertime it is much quieter, so I spend those 4-5 months teaching English and sometimes a science class to most of the staff at the Boutique. One day I would like to be a teacher and I am interested in getting involved in teacher-training in one of the Auroville schools.

"I often feel we should participate more in the community somehow - not just at the bonfire or at a meeting. I know that many Tamil people often don't participate much because they feel their English is poor and for many who are uneducated, it can be frustrating. I would feel happy if more Indians got involved - maybe

in setting up their own units. But it's hard, since they don't have the facility to go abroad and earn money like most foreigners here.

"If I could do anything at all in Auroville, first I would finish the Matrimandir and make it all really pukka, then I would make a college. After finishing After School or Last School, there is nowhere to go. Foreigners can send their children to Kodaikanal, but there is nothing for the young people here, who can't afford to go outside. And it should be recognised by the government. You know I don't have any certificates from school and I can't go and work outside as a teacher.

"Something else - I would ban all vehicles except cycles - I don't like all this pollution.

"If I would give advice to young girls from the village, I would tell them to study more and not to depend on others. It's important for each one to make a stand, to get involved in something, maybe to be a nurse or an accountant. In the villages, girls are too dependent on their husbands, always staying at home.

"I always pray to Mother and Sri Aurobindo for any help I need, everyday putting flowers and lighting incense for them. Whenever I am upset or sad, I think about them - it is one of my dreams to meet with them and all the Gods one day!"

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"Are we wanted here?"

Minh, who works at Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER), speaks up for youth who come to Auroville from the outside and the challenges they face

Practically speaking, many Aurovilians swiftly identify themselves with "a youth that never ages". But there are actually only 125 Aurovilians aged 15-25 today. This age group amounts to 8% of today's city of the future, a historical bottom line. There is not enough Auroville youth. Auroville youth were born here or came following their parents.

At some time many feel an irresistible pull to go and see the world, and then make their own conscious choice about coming back or not. As a matter of fact, most of them do come back or want to come back. Secondary education in Auroville is still in development and will not be certification-oriented. Also the tertiary level is inexistent. So many youth leave at this stage, eager to experience the world and acquire knowledge and skills that are not readily available here. However, this aspiration works the other way round too - outside youth want to come here. Teenagers from the Americas, Europe and Asia email SAIER enquiring about schooling in Auroville for a year. With proper parental and internal Auroville arrange-

ments, a few of them actually managed to reach here last year. They are dynamic youth, interested in the ideals of Auroville, who get involved here as youth usually do in their own countries: they help take care of our younger kids in nature activities, arts, crafts, sports... i.e. the sphere of non-formal education. Although we don't have any university, the largest youth group in Auroville is university students and long-term youth volunteers from outside - there were around 200 of them here last year. Within a broad diversity of countries of origin and subjects, four important groups stand out: Auroville is being built by Indian architects, American environmentalists, German technicians and engineers and French sociologists and agronomists. Another youth group, which has emerged since the past couple of years, is the overseas volunteers. There are 15 of them right now, young professionals sent by NGOs from France, Germany, Australia, and UK on volunteering contracts with Auroville units and services. They serve for one or two years in education, health, social work, research and development of appropriate technologies, ecological farming, water management, forestry, etc.. The Student Office (study@auroville.org.in) was set-up in mid-2000 to help them find work placements, sort out practical arrangements, and enhance higher education in general. Before these youth leave, this Student Office collects their feedback about their experience in Auroville. In a nutshell, they say that as a community we have a lot to improve in the way

we welcome them. But except during the hottest summer months, there is an acute lack of affordable accommodation. Student hostels and low-rent housing for long-term stays are badly needed. For students without scholarships neither wealthy families, an experience in Auroville is a financial burden, as well as a professional risk. The young people attracted by the Charter and the ideals of Auroville find it hard on the material side (no budget accommodation, high cost of living. For instance, a keet capsule with common toilets (say bucket) in the Auroville forest is more expensive than a nice house outside a nearby village. In a township dedicated to the search for human unity and harmony, they are surprised by our money-minded attitudes. Nevertheless, the experience in Auroville stands out as one of significant growth at various levels. At the end, after the usual ups and down, many young people express they would consider coming back permanently in the future. But having had to spend so much money, and given that the community is not able to cover people's needs, they do not see it happening before 5-10 years of work and savings. To conclude, Aurovilians would readily do their best for the Auroville youth. However, the 15-25 age group is composed mostly by outside youth (teenagers, students and very long-term volunteers). Even though they are not biologically our own, we have not yet realised that they carry a high aspiration, that they are too the youth that Auroville and the Earth need. So we need to change our attitude towards them, and to make more efforts to wel-

come them too: Auroville would not go very far without them, and so badly do we need a bit more... lightness, opti-

mism, positive energy. Can't we see they are part of us?

Minh

MATRIMANDIR

Sending people up the wall

Over the years the white marble walls of the Matrimandir Chamber had lost their lustre. Although the air-conditioning system for the room is fitted with filters, the fine marble dust from the marble laying and polishing work on the first and second level, combined with 'ordinary grey dust', managed to get inside, covering everything, including the walls. Each evening, a cleaning crew vacuums the covers of the white woollen carpet, the cushion covers get washed periodically, and the crystal gets cleaned once a week, but tackling the cleaning of the high walls (8.65 meter) and ceiling (15.20 meter) is a different story. It took many years to find a company in India which could manufacture custom-designed light weight aluminium scaffolding, high enough to reach not only the top of the high walls, but also the ceiling. A company in Chennai produced it and finally in late 2001 it arrived. Before actually using it, it was stored in small pieces on top of the chamber roof, in the space below the outside wall. Then piece-by-piece it was brought into the Chamber through the main

entrance door and in a matter of just four hours it was assembled, like a Lego set. When the first cleaning day came, all the people who had signed up for this work either got sick or found themselves busy with other commitments. Walter and Divakar, who were coordinating the work, did not know what to do. But that very morning some German guests showed up, looking for work. In the evening it turned out that there was an all-German cleaning crew! For about ten days at 10 pm, after the Chamber crew had finished their work, they climbed the scaffolding with their wet and dry cloths and washed the walls. They also used this opportunity to change the light bulbs, which are hidden in the top of the 12 columns, and which are only lit during Chamber clean up. One of the people described the work as following: "Although I was actually quite tired in the evenings, I could not wait to climb the scaffolding. I experienced such joy and happiness, it really was physically very refreshing!" When you go now into the Chamber the original lustre of the beautiful white Carrara marble

ASTROLOGY

You'll live in interesting times

"From Auroville's birthday February 28th, 2002 onwards the Divine Mother will directly take charge of Auroville," predicts astrologer Toth.

Toth is an uncommon figure. Known as 'the man with the bowler hat,' this Frenchman is a regular visitor. Many Aurovilians, aware that he is a gifted astrologer, gladly take advantage of his free consultations. But, busy though he is with individuals' horoscopes, his main interest is in studying Auroville's development. Says he: "This year, some amazing conjunctions are going to happen, and they will greatly influence Auroville's future. You are in for 'interesting times'". Auroville was born on the 28th of February at 10.30 a.m. under the sign of Pisces. The birth chart shows that there are three master influences: Neptune, which in Toth's system of astrology represents the Divine Mother; Pluto, which represents the inconscience, the ignorance and the obscurity; and Uranus, which stands for the Supramental. "It is because of these master influences that I say that Auroville is truly The Mother's city.

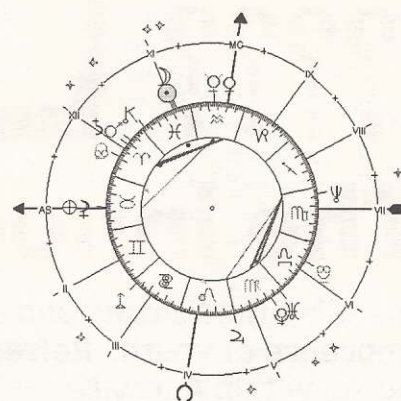


Toth

For all those who have read Mother's Agenda know to what tremendous extent The Mother, who was incorporating the Supramental force, was confronting the ignorance and inconscience," says Toth. "Neptune, for me," he continues, "is the most beautiful planet. But its great influence has, nearly from the date of Auroville's birth, been mitigated by Pluto, who has been responsible for the slow growth and development of Auroville and for the difficulties and delays in manifesting anything that comes close to Auroville's ideals. "Uranus represents the cosmic - you could even say galactic - influence, what I consider the Supramental to be. It is therefore no accident that the city of Auroville is planned as a spiral galaxy with a divine centre. It is a symbol. At the same time it indicates that Auroville will have the possibility to create something transcendental, Supramental as was envisaged by The Mother. "The presence of Uranus has another consequence, which is that Auroville

just cannot be governed in any of the ordinary ways, be it through democracy or anything else. It indicates that Auroville is a city that can only be directed by highly-evolved people, by sages, spiritual beings of a high degree, who should motivate and stimulate. They should not be governors who tell the people what they have to do. They should be intermediaries, who will 'inspire' the people and be open to receive the intuition. "The fourth important planetary influence of Auroville's birth chart comes from Venus. Venus is the force that helps to realise destiny, and her way of helping is through the development of Love. This implies that it is Love what should direct the city. Venus is at the same time the master of the ascendant, which means that it is also a power of love at the physical level, which finds its expression in physical beauty. It is for that that the city has to be in harmony with its environment, and at the same time, novel in the ways of its material expression and abundant in the expression of physical beauty. "But a lot is going to change soon, and I promise you that the year 2002 will be extraordinary. Exactly on February 28th, 2002, Neptune will be in the mid-heaven of Auroville's chart. This means that the Divine Mother will take direct charge of the development

of Auroville. This will show in all its aspects. Auroville will begin to be established in its perfect purity. This year the Truth will come forward. Also, the time for change in the way the city is to be managed has finally arrived. Another form of internal government, the one which I call the guidance by sages, is at hand. You may not be able to find your intuitively guided people immediately, but I guarantee you that they are bound to come. The community can do no better than to invoke their presence. "This change of internal management, indicated by Uranus, started in 1998 when Dr. Kireet Joshi became Chairman of the International Advisory Council and Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. In that year, Uranus came to be in the mid-heaven of Auroville's chart. This shows the importance of Kireet. "Also in 2002, Pluto leaves the seventh house, the house of relationships. As a consequence, Auroville will become more open. It will welcome those who need to come, and ways will be found to keep out those who only wish to join Auroville to improve their economic circumstances. Due to the retrogression of Pluto in the months of July and August, a bit of retardation may be expected in these months, but by autumn 2002 these



Birth chart of Auroville

problems should be over. "We can also expect more clarity. Since 1998, Venus and Mercury reinforce each other: they are together, which means that love and intelligence have joined, and they are in direct opposition with Pluto. This means that the moment of clarity has arrived and that the Aurovilians will come to see clearly what no longer has a place and what needs to be transformed. "At the same time that Neptune enters the mid-heaven of Auroville's chart, Venus will be in conjunction with it - a unique occurrence. Neptune is as it were the higher octave of Venus. It means that in 2002 the power of the Divine Mother, the Supreme Love, will open the heart chakra of all Aurovilians, and this will most definitely have a great influence on the relationships between Aurovilians and between Auroville and the outside. In short, 2002 will mark the inauguration of the true Auroville."

In conversation with Carel.

Building with the Gods...

What do the *pujas* (sacred ceremonies) performed during construction in Tamil Nadu mean?

Around Auroville, often when new building work is started, a special *puja* (religious ceremony) is performed. The building of the guesthouse in the International Zone by a group of American students was no exception.

At the building site nine foundation stones were prayed to, four half lemons were covered in red powder, thrown in the four directions, a coconut was broken and the whole event displayed the normal vigour of a south Indian ritual.

Even though these *pujas* are commonplace, and have found their way, albeit in a different form, into building in Auroville, many of us are not aware of the ritual meanings conveyed, or of the long tradition behind *vastu* – or Divine Architecture – which informs the different versions of the *pujas* performed when building work commence. Trying to make sense of this tradition, its meanings and origins, have proved a complicated task. There are many different versions, both of practices and their explanations. Many Aurovilians have had some kind of *puja* performed when they started building their houses, some have put crystals in the foundation and it seems common that an attempt is made to ritualise/spiritualise the inauguration in order to invest more in it than just bricks. Indeed people everywhere have always tried to integrate the physical need for a place of dwelling with the spiritual quest for trying to control and utilize the natural and cosmic forces.

"*Vastu*" in Sanskrit means to dwell and *vastu* architecture is concerned with the principles for the construction of buildings suitable for human beings to live happily, peacefully and achieve prosperity. In other words, attaining a harmonious bal-

ance between material and spiritual needs, reminding man of the Divine reality. The practice of *vastu* has its roots in Sanskrit texts of which the South Indian *Mayamata* is well known. It deals with the science of architecture, civil engineering and sculpture under the common title of



Puja materials for the foundation ceremony of Creativity

vastu-shastra or *vastu shilpa*. *Vastu* principles are based on a combination of mathematics, geomagnetic, philosophical and metaphysical considerations and as all sciences originating from the *Vedas* it bases its observations on the science of time i.e. astrology. Before the construction of a house the Deities and astrological positions are taken into

account. As the first *vastu* is the earth itself the site is very important and used to be selected carefully and according to the caste of the future inhabitants. Following this there would be *pujas* for examining the site, for taking possession of it, for measuring it and for laying the foundation and commencing work. All these rituals serve to invoke the gods and planets, warding off negative energies and to please the *vastu purusha*, the spirit or god of dwellings.

The application of *vastu* principles is a Pan-Indian phenomenon, but there are great regional variations. Various explanations for the *pujas* exist, but the different versions all emphasise the importance placed on grasping the Divine, synthesizing matter and spirit. Raman, an Aurovilian architect, explains how in Tamil Nadu the knowledge of *vastu* principles used to be

orally transmitted to masons through singing. He emphasises that despite the continuation of some elements of *vastu*, adherence to the tradition has been impoverished over the years as the practice of oral transmission has been replaced by a more superficial literary approach. He feels that the essence of *vastu* – *vastu* as energy manifest in the bridge between the

inner and outer universe – has given way to adherence based on fear. In Tamil Nadu the god of the house is Sanishwar who resides in the North East, and is the same in essence as the *vastu purusha*. Nowadays the elaborate process of selecting the spot has been abandoned, and consulting an astrologer is the first step. After a date has been set the first *puja* is for Sanishwar who is to be treated with awe, as he is potent and can doom the dwelling if upset. The second *puja*, Raman explains, is for the goddess Lakshmi, the harbinger of wealth and fortune and it is performed when the entrance is to be fitted. The entrance serves as a check-post for evils, filters the aura of the people passing through it, and lets them into the house pure. In many Tamil houses the entrance is very elaborate and it is not uncommon for up to 35% of the cost of the house to be spent on the entrance. Often it is low, reminding the people entering to bend down to the Deity. When building work is finished the most elaborate *puja* is performed. It is often headed by a brahmin priest and serves as a housewarming. The ritual is performed as a marriage function between the house owner and the house, and food is given to everyone attending. Finally the owner will reward the main architect with *tatcanar*, a blessing packet symbolising future prosperity and a smooth transaction into the new dwelling.

The main three *pujas* described, which in different versions can be observed in our neighbourhood, are contemporary variants rooted in a long tradition. They symbolise our human need to synthesize our inner and outer worlds – the spirit and matter we are part and parcel of.

Janne

AUROVILLE AND TIBET

Cycling for peace

Tibetan cyclists pass through Auroville

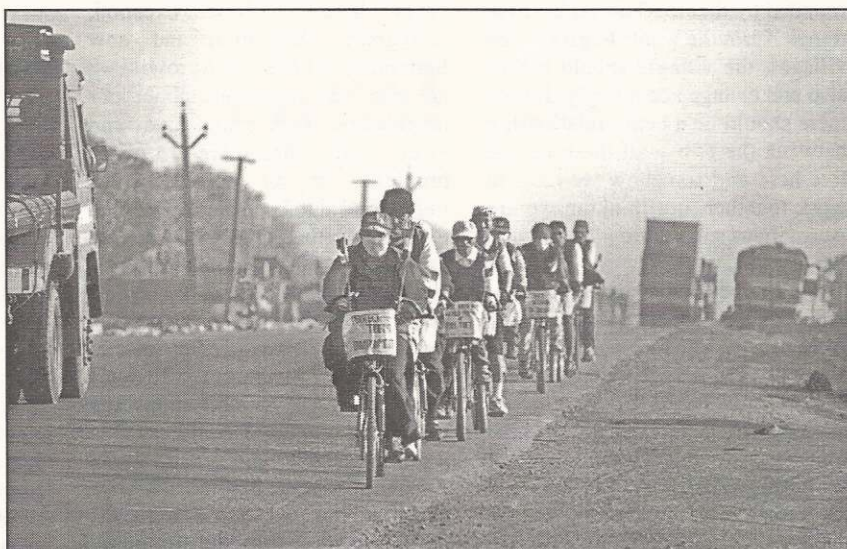
On a sunny, slightly windy February afternoon in the Solar Café, amidst the young skateboarders practising their jumps, the usual suspects reading newspapers while nursing cappuccinos, and assorted guests scribbling in notebooks, Tibetan Aurovilians Kelsang and Dolma, could be seen talking off to the side to a group of four rather fit-looking Tibetans. They were part of a larger party of ten cyclists and seven back up personnel that had just bicycled into Auroville from the outskirts of Chennai.

The cyclists included two nuns in robes who had been imprisoned by the Chinese, a former hunger striker who had gone without food for 49 days, two traditional Tibetan Tanka painters, teachers and students, and the back-up personnel two nurses, a cook and a cameraman, who travelled ahead of the party in a van. Their journey – A Free Tibet and World Peace cycle rally had started in Calcutta on December 26th and would proceed through the Cauvery Delta to Kanyakumari – the Southern tip of India and back up to Mumbai where they planned to arrive on March 10th: the 43rd anniversary of the ill-fated 1959 Lhasa uprising that led to the Dalai Lama's flight into exile in India followed by 110,000 fellow Tibetans fleeing Chinese repression.

Duktsering, a teacher of science at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, spoke to Auroville Today about the inception and inspiration behind the rally:

"The reason I have joined this rally is that I have learned in the fifteen years that I have been teaching in the Tibetan community that the younger generation needs the fire and the insight for doing something for Tibet. I think the rally has a good objective as it is a rally for World peace as well as a protest against environmental exploitation and the ongoing human rights violations in Tibet. We must tell the world how the people are suffering in Tibet. Of our group the two nuns are particularly determined to do something for the cause of Tibet. Also, by meeting different people I can learn about myself and others as well as about India."

The group had been averaging over a hundred kilometres a day and staying in schools and hostels, temple shelters, or setting up tents near petrol bunks. The response to date has been extremely positive. Truck drivers passing them on the highways wave and give them the thumbs-up sign, they have been



On the road: cycling for peace

asked to give talks in schools, and chance encounters have provided them with unexpected help. In Andhra Pradesh Tibetan sweater sellers provided them with mosquito nets, an encounter with an elderly gentleman on the marina in Madras where they were waiting to be interviewed by local TV, led to their all being provided for free with cycling helmets as he was the manager of a company that makes them. They were asked to give a talk on Republic day at a Catholic school near Madras where they had been given hospitality. Duktsering recalls "I gave a five minute talk on Tibet

that was translated by the principal to the two thousand students and when I finished they all applauded and wanted to ask questions. Although most people know of his Holiness the Dalai Lama, a lot of people don't know about Tibet, and some even thought it was in India!" After a brief overnight stay in the guest quarters of the Tibetan pavilion they were off down our red dirt roads early the next day, Tibetan and Indian flags fluttering on their handlebars: twenty seven hundred kilometres left to go.

Roger

In brief

Matrimandir construction anniversary

On 21-2-1972, on Mother's 94th birthday, the construction of the Matrimandir began. The Mother gave the following message:

"Let Auroville be the symbol of a progressive Unity. And the best way to realize this is a unity of aspiration towards the Divine Perfection in work and in feeling, in a consecration of the entire life."

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the laying of the Foundation Stone and The Mother's 124th birthday, there was a collective concentration at the Banyan Tree. The model of the Matrimandir gardens made by Roger Anger and drawings of the gardens made by Paolo Tommasi were also shown.

Governing Board meeting

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation met in Auroville on February 15th-16th. Nearly all members were present. The main topics discussed were how to protect the lands in the Auroville area against speculators and unwanted development; the difficulties in achieving progress at Matrimandir; the status of the request to the Government of India for a grant to give new impetus to research and experimentation in the development of Auroville; the lack of a proper internal organization for Auroville; and the Auroville economy and the lack of progress to manifest a 'no-exchange of money' economy.

Indian-European cities conference

A conference sponsored by the European Community, "City Networking for a Sustainable Future and Human Unity" took place from February 25th to 28th. Participants representing 32 European cities, 23 Indian cities and Sri Lanka and Bangla Desh participated. More in the next issue of AVToday.

Foundation stones in International Zone

The foundation ceremony for the Russian Pavilion was held on February 27th, 2002, the foundation ceremony for the Unity Pavilion one day later on February 28th, 2002.

Residents Service

The Visa Service and the work of the Master List coordinator have merged into the Auroville Residents Service, which will maintain a detailed data base on all Auroville residents.

'Towards a Divine Anarchy'

A proposal for a new internal organization entitled 'Towards a Divine Anarchy', four drafts of which have circulated in the community for feedback since May 2001, failed to achieve consensus. New proposals are being drafted.

Auroville Health Fund

More than 800 people have so far agreed to participate in the experiment of an internal co-operative health insurance system that started February 1, 2002.

Sowing new seeds

Annadana, a seed exchange network in Auroville is preparing 50,000 packets of of traditionally-grown non-hybrid vegetable seeds to send to Afghanistan.

"We just have to learn..."

Anandamayi was born in Auroville, attended Kindergarten, Transition, Mirramukhi, then Last School, where, being today 20 years old, she is still studying part time. In 1998, for the first time, she went out of India and stayed in the US for 7 months, studying in a high school.

At present, she teaches singing to the youngest class in Kindergarten (2-3 year olds), is learning archeology with Popo, sings with the Auroville choir and is involved in theatre.

"The biggest challenge of growing up in Auroville comes mostly from the fact that we have so much freedom here, and so we have to be a lot more disciplined to be able to do something constructive. It asks for a lot more to study in Auroville than it does anywhere else, where you have a fixed programme. It is much easier out there, I think. Here it's really about self-imposed discipline, at least in Last School, and that's one of the reasons I stayed there. Here I get to study the subjects that interest me.

"Having a diploma doesn't interest me... In the fields I'm interested in - singing, theatre (I've been greatly influenced by my parents, who are both artists) and archeology - I don't think I need a diploma in order to manage out in the wider world, if I ever have to.

"A lot people are of the opinion that

people like us who have grown up in Auroville have to leave, to see Auroville from a different perspective. It may be true. It's interesting to see all these young people coming back. Perhaps they needed to go out to have another experience and maybe they had to go through that but I didn't. I didn't feel the need to get out of Auroville. Somebody offered me the experience and I took it, but I already knew how special Auroville was without having to go out.

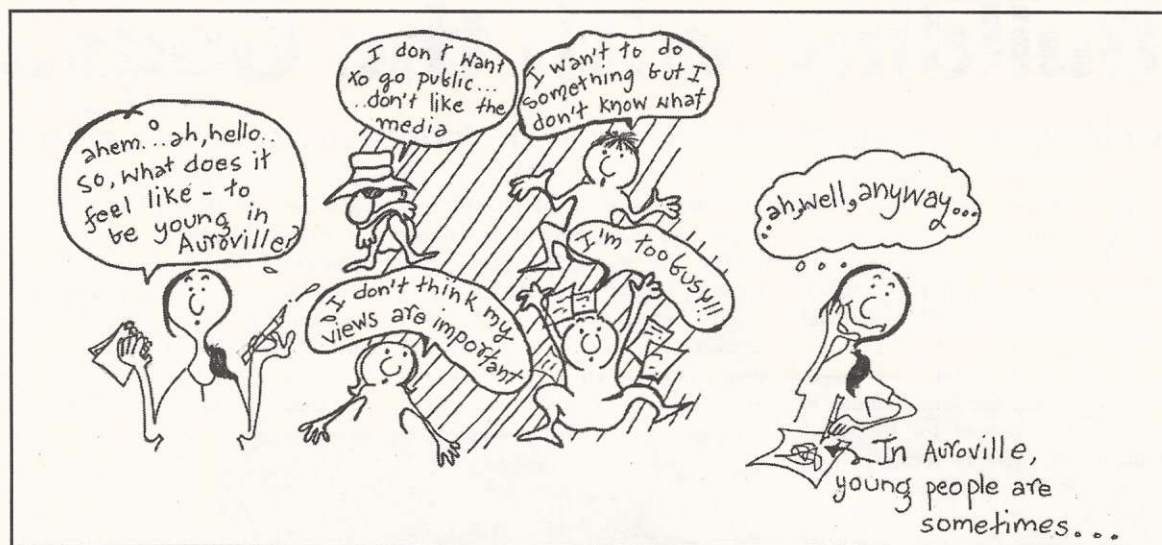
"I think education is one of the main reasons why many of the young people leave: there is no university level education in Auroville. Maybe we have to work towards a higher education program here. Already, with Super School, and Kireet Joshi's talks on philosophy, things are changing. But everything here takes time... I am happy doing part-time studies, I don't plan to stop studying in order to work, I think I will continue to do both.

"I think there are many opportunities to learn different things in Auroville, that is why I'm still around. I think I still have a lot to learn from people here in the fields of theatre, singing and archaeology. I don't know, maybe it's just easier for me. A lot of young people say that here they are bored. I am here and I haven't had the chance to be bored, I find so much to do. I think they don't have the same interests

and training for a lot of what they are interested in is not available here.

"People say Auroville at present is not much different from anywhere else in the world - I feel a lot of the Auroville experience, the work being done here, is on the individual level, so all the progress is inner. In some ways, what we're doing here is not different from what's happening anywhere else in the world, but the whole idea is still different - the fact that people have come to Auroville because something is different, and they want to try it out, participate. We've gone through tough, shaky times, there are a lot of problems, even at present there are conflicts between Aurovilians, or problems with the Government, but we'll go through it, because it's meant to be. It's a passage - it all happens for us to move forward faster. Any society has its ups and downs. We're not so much different, we just have to learn...

Anandamayi in conversation with Emmanuelle

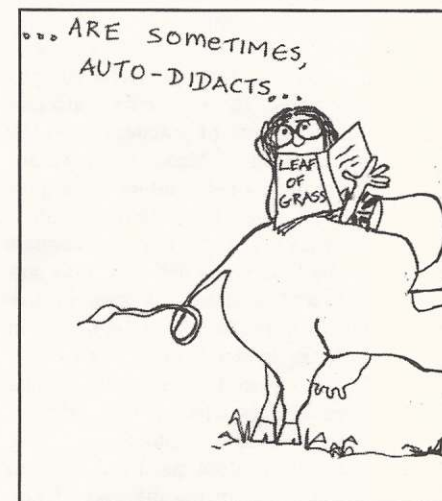


Unclassified

So today, I am still here... mostly due to the circumstances, it is true. Now, there is the world I want to travel, to discover... There is so much to see, to learn, to try to understand... Yet

I realised that the experiences I had, growing up and living in Auroville, had contributed to making me the 'young adult' I had become. I didn't see the fact that I, as an individual, could not be classified (culturally, socially, professionally etc.) as a handicap any longer, but as a great freedom. The fact that I didn't fit in any category actually opened up many doors, - which it is still, of course, up to me to walk through. I saw the struggles I had gone through as an adolescent (lack of assurance, of guidance, of limits...) not any more as drawbacks, but as stepping stones. I saw the opinions I had formed on a large scale of diverse subjects, not as a proof of my lack of focus, but as the result of a broad outlook I had unconsciously been cultivating. I saw all the years I had spent in uncertainty, drifting from job to job, interest to interest, as very constructive, as it was during those years that I had become, in spite of myself, an 'autodidact'.

So today, I am still here... mostly due to the circumstances, it is true. Now, there is the world I want to travel, to discover... There is so much to see, to learn, to try to understand... Yet



Auroville will remain the home I come back to, my base...
Emmanuelle

The innocence of youth

Sarasu is 25 and a teacher of the 3-4 year old age group at Deepanam school. She is married to Elumalai who looks after the Auroville Bakery. An avid basketball player, she often participates in tournaments with young groups from Pondicherry. We spoke about what it meant to be an Aurovillian and the relationship between Auroville and the village.



Sarasu

"Being an Aurovillian I am sure there is a role for me to play - although I'm not sure that I'm playing it right now. I know that coming from the village and being part of Auroville, I should be different - more supportive, more open, almost wider. Often I call 'Mother, Mother' automatically, but I don't feel it is right only to look to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother only when I have a problem. Through their lives and teachings, many times I question myself, and am more conscious about myself - particularly if I am troubling somebody. Every Friday and Tuesday I always perform a puja at home - I never skip this, for it is a time when I can be really quiet as I wash the Gods' statues and lay out flowers and incense. It is a time when I feel

very special to myself and I am fresher - I don't know how to explain it exactly, it's just a very different feeling.

"I hope Auroville will always be conscious about the local villages, because it has been established surrounded by them. Whatever positive things Auroville wants to give to the villages, the villages should realise also and change accordingly. I think there should be a better relationship between the two - all these people live here and somehow we have to work together, not thinking we are Aurovilians and we are villagers, no, not like that.

"I also hope that everyone is conscious about what the dream of Auroville is. The message should be conveyed properly to all the peoples here. I know it is difficult to organise access to the inner chamber to the Matrimandir, but I don't feel it should be restricted. I always ask my father if he has been - but he simply says no and that he will, one day. He has been working with Auroville for many years now, in fact since his youth, but I don't know if he really feels free to go there.

"I think it is also important for people to respect the way life is in India - it will reduce a lot of problems between Auroville and the villages I am sure. When western people come here, they should also respect how we dress-up and how we behave. I know life is more independent here - I am very free compared to being in the village; if I want to make a move to anything, I can simply push myself and become that.

"In the village, there is a feeling of respect created with all the things you should not do and yes it is very

difficult to come out of that. I think you need to have a lot of courage to be different. Here, however, we are very influenced by the western way of thinking, questioning, often asking 'why not?'.

"I have lived in 4 different communities here - New Creation, Aurogreen, Aspiration and now Fraternity, but I feel in Auroville we are not very conscious about our neighbours, both immediate and local. Only when there are major problems or an agreement or improvement to be made do we seem to come together, otherwise we seem to exist alone. I don't know how much collectiveness is really here. I know we are having all these problems with housing - many people have a lot of space but still don't want the land to be built upon. If I was in the village, I could say this was my property and sell it, but in Auroville money has mostly been given and donated for the land and I feel too many people here are simply being possessive, since space should be given to people without houses. The truth is that nothing really belongs to us.

"I will always be ready to help fulfil the dream of Auroville the Mother had for us and hope things always go on the right path. I know I will help in whatever way I can and that I am very lucky to be borne here."

Having studied dance for nearly 20 years, Saroja is now 28 and lives in Protection with her husband Mani and their small son. We spoke about her dancing and her hopes for the future.

"I am proud to be a classical Indian



Saroja

dancer performing Bharat Natyam, you can make other people happy by dancing. I love performing and teaching children to dance, but I don't feel that there is much opportunity here to relate to dancing. Often I teach children for a short time in the afternoons when they are tired after being at school all day.

"I would like to teach more - perhaps full-time trainings. It is my aim to teach whatever it is that I have learnt. I am so thankful to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for creating Auroville - I feel that it really is a gift to be living in Auroville.

"After studying at Transition and then After School, I studied at Kalak Shetra, the well-known dance college in Madras. I am sure that if I was still living in the village, I would not even be able to speak English like this, leave alone having had the opportunity to learn to dance in the way I have.

"I don't know but somehow I feel my deepest wish is to always be in Auroville, I just feel so happy here. It is good to know and share stories with different people from different worlds and countries. Even the village is improving so much, whatever we do here in Auroville, they are also trying to do. For example,

before they didn't really give importance to studies, but now many parents support their children going to school. And now the whole village is becoming full of real buildings and not just keet roofing. Girls are still too shy in the villages. Auroville children are on the other hand not very shy - they don't hide and if they want to talk about something, they just talk!

"But I do feel that the village could teach Auroville more about respecting one another.

"Something that concerns me is our young people - many are following a bad way, including getting involved with drinking and smoking. I feel that whoever is taking care of these young people, their parents or guardians should speak with them and try to understand what is happening. Maybe they are not feeling fulfilled enough with what they are doing - perhaps if there were better study opportunities, or if they became more involved with sports or music, this could help. I do think that the community should play a bigger role in supporting the education of these young people, so that they don't feel directionless.

"In Auroville, if you are brave, you can do whatever it is that you want to do and you don't have to depend on others. I think it is important to be independent, especially for girls - who should try not to be behind somebody else, but stand strongly in the front. I just have to say that I am so happy being in Auroville and it is part of my dream that all my family and friends can experience what Auroville is and be happy here too."

Priya Mahtani

"It's good to try out different things"

Bala, born in the village of Kuityapalayam grew up in Auroville. "I joined Auroville on my own accord, as a young boy, even though one side of my family never wanted to join. Even before I joined, I always felt I was an Aurovilian. Today, I don't have much contact with the village and my relatives there, it is Auroville that is really my home.

"I studied in New Creation, in Udavi and in After School. Then I went to study in England, at the Pestalozzi Childrens village for two years. It wasn't only about studying. We told people about India and its culture. We worked in a handicapped peoples' home. It was a good learning experience.

"When I came back from England, I

taught computer in Transition school for a year. Then I left to Italy, for the summer and when I came back, there were serious problems in the village, so I was forced to leave again for five months. After that, I still haven't settled into taken a regular job yet.

"That doesn't stop me from being busy though. I help different people out, in whatever they are involved in. I am also very much in sports. I play football, I am in the Auroville Cricket team, the basketball team... Sports is a great way to get to know people and to keep fit. I am also continuing to study computer and Spanish, mostly learning on my own. I am really interested in learning more about computers, and progressing further.

"Right now, though, I really don't know which direction I am going to

take, what I really want to do in the future. But I know I would like to work with nature. Because I'm interested in working for the environment, finding solutions, it could be in waste-management, or afforestation.... I feel as a community member, I should do something for the community. But I have to now try to find a regular job.

"When you are young, it's so hard, you don't know who you are and it's difficult to get to know yourself. And your interests also change. I think it's good to try out different things in life. I still have the time. I am only twenty three years old.

"In Auroville, it's very difficult on the financial level. It's difficult for young people to manage with the maintenances they get. Money is a

problem. Then, like anywhere else in the world, there are those who have their personal financial means, it's for the others that it is difficult.

"I like the idea of the ideal of Human Unity, and people coming from all around the world to live together. But I think, somehow, Aurovilians often tend to see and talk mostly about the positive aspects of Auroville but there are many problems. Yet often people don't like to talk about them, or don't even want to see them.

"There are many things in Auroville that I could criticise, and disagree with, but I feel that first I have to work on myself, correct myself before I can say anything, judge anybody or anything. Today, I feel Auroville is a little bit stagnant. I mean, a lot of things are happening

on the surface, otherwise, it has become, in many ways, just like anywhere else. People just do their own thing... Somehow it seems like we're not moving towards our aim...but we will. There are many who are still really positive and keep the spirit alive.

"In the future, I would like to travel, and work in other places and countries, just to have the experience of the outside world, to experience life out there. Yet I am sure I will always come back here, if I ever leave.

Auroville is somehow a very special place you know...even if you are out, you always want to come back, there is something pulling you back."

Bala, in conversation with Emmanuelle

The Dark Sun

"I was born in Auroville on 22nd December 1977. I was brought up amongst the trees and played with pebbles around the Matrimandir in the earlier days.... My name is Martanda, the dark Sun...

"There was a time when I actually did walk through houses eating 'meen korumbu', running through fields, playing with marbles under the tamarind trees, swimming with the lilies in the 'kolam', growing up with the days in a village and swearing

away in a language new to me. Today, I am very fortunate to remember the Tamil language, along with the different habits and ways of the south Indian village.

"I have studied in the Auroville schools... At one point, I was in the Lycée at Pondicherry for a year; I also did my 12th standard through the National Open School correspondence course from Delhi.

"The challenges I had to face growing up in Auroville, I ignore it...I did not know how to compare myself with an outside world...using my own capacities of a young adult today, I would think that what I have gone through, has only made me a better person...

"Today, I live in Kottakarai. I am a trainee, learning to handle and work with metal. Auroville is my home. I believe that to do nothing but work here is essential. Right now, to my small vision or rather tiny point of view, I

think that we have been given this body, making us people and with this lump of matter we can only improve it...

"I believe it is terribly obvious what is happening to us all and what has to come...nothing is served on a tray...someone has to cook and serve it...and then of course eat it...and then digest it...and then, so on...we are still cooking...

"It helps to know that we are living the dream of a person, who luckily, thankfully, gracefully, was an evolved being...again, we may be living another persons dreams...all I can say, is that I live here and want to live here...I would not say I am spiritually evolved enough to follow every word of the mother, I can only say that I would touch her feet anytime, anywhere...

"Day in and day out, Auroville is making its way! Auroville is changing of course, we look back...and can say that it is changing...we look forward and it will continue to change..."

Martanda

Muni speaks out

"When you are young, you are always judged and labeled in Auroville for it is a small community. When you grow up, you change, you might have different ideas, but the label remains.

"Auroville has changed a lot. Today, I feel Auroville is not really different from the outside. Today, everything revolves around money. Growing up we didn't think in those terms, but now, we are forced to. In fostering a sense of community and human unity Auroville is a long way off. But there is still definitely a chance..."

"And all these structures! Auroville is meant to be an experimental city. But right now not many real experiments are being done. Now there's so little trust between people and almost a fear to be yourself.

"In the past, nothing was assured, but Auroville used to make you feel really secure. Now I don't feel the security. That's because we are now open to a lot of things that we should have been opened to but in a controlled way. And we don't know how to deal with the problems that come up. For example, there are no professionally skilled people to deal with conflict or violence. How can we set an example for the outside if we can't handle even our own problems?

"I know there is some reason why we are going through all those difficulties. It's part of our own growth and that doesn't put me off. It really doesn't. I think there is definitely a big scope for you know the change here if we want and if we dare to go into it

"I think we should have a revolution here. A real one. Just say enough is enough and start again. Stop all construction and stop development and politics and everything and start from the beginning. You know one year of nothing, when we can start to reflect and see where we are going. We have to get Auroville's priorities right...

"Auroville will always be home for me...But the home I will return to if I leave won't be what it has become today, I will be coming back to my memory of home, what it was....I will always be in some way related to Auroville if I am here or out."

Muniandi



Fragile! Handle with care!

On a hot August morning 1979, curious Aurovilians gathered in one of the straw huts of Aspiration to watch a baby girl being born. After a couple of days, the parents thought it might be a cool idea to call her something; why not Savitri?! And that's how I arrived in this beautiful land, a naked little girl running about the huts, playing with just about anything for dolls were not available in those days.

Growing up in Auroville was very special. Many children had ponies and we would gather and go riding throughout the land with a feeling of ultimate, unlimited freedom. There were very few fences and we could go everywhere... These were the days when joy was found in simplicity, for material comfort and artificial entertainment were non-existent. That was the magic of my childhood. School was a great learning experience. When I was a small child, someone told me that school was a fantastic tool to develop and broaden the mind as sports develops and broadens the capacities of the body. So, I was a good student and elders had great expectations from a "child

of the future".

But, as every adolescent, I went through this phase when one has to become something but does not know what yet and waits for the day when one KNOWS.

That's when I became classified as a "waste case"! In most cultures, it is expected from young people to find a profession, a family and a house as most essential things in life. Auroville was created as an experimental place to find new and truer values in life, which made my adolescence all the more difficult, sometimes very frustrating and sometimes very enlightening...

How does one know how the Divine has planned to use us in his Work? It is a very delicate problem to handle: 'Fragile! Handle with Care.' The answer only comes with a complete and thorough surrender to His Will. This is one of the most precious lessons, growing up here, has taught me. Another one is that no one except the Divine himself and only Him can judge me and help me discover the Truth.

This is what gave me the strength and courage to try and become myself despite all external judgments, which

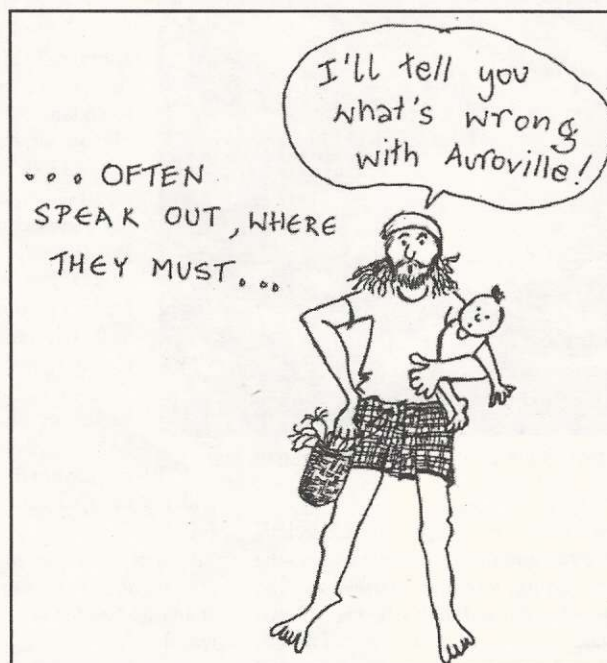
can often be flattering or discouraging and even depressing at moments, but false most of the time. How boring it is to hide in all these artificial and mental constructions we have built to fill the void of the unanswered question! Life is an extraordinary and infinite learning process.

What a Grace and a Joy to be a part of it. I believe that Auroville will have reached its perfection the day when all Aurovilians will stop pretending and start manifesting the Truth of their beings. On this day, Love, Peace

and Harmony will flow for Unity will be, Falsehood will have nothing left to hold onto and a New Life will begin...

Who ever said something about Aurovilians lacking work?!

Savitri



Anybody for mountain climbing in Auroville?

With the help of friends from France, two climbing walls were built in Auroville.

It was a good example of quick materialisation: a utopian idea became reality in less than two years. Auroville is now the proud possessor of two climbing walls, one indoors at Transition School, the other a semi-natural outdoor one nearby 'La Ferme', Auroville's cheese factory close to the Aspiration community. Aurovilians, both young and old, can now be trained to master different levels of mountain climbing skills.

The idea to create climbing walls in the flat Auroville area is, for most people, far-out. Not so for two French couples and their sons, who have been visiting Auroville regularly over the last few years. Francine and Denis and their son Florian, together with Françoise and André and their son Antoine, all hailing from the Alsace region in France and self-proclaimed climbing addicts, decided to finance and equip two climbing walls in Auroville.

"I realised one day that most Aurovilians have some morphologic elements in common: they are tall, thin, and elegant," says Denis. "We saw a lot of young people climbing trees, jumping from one tree to

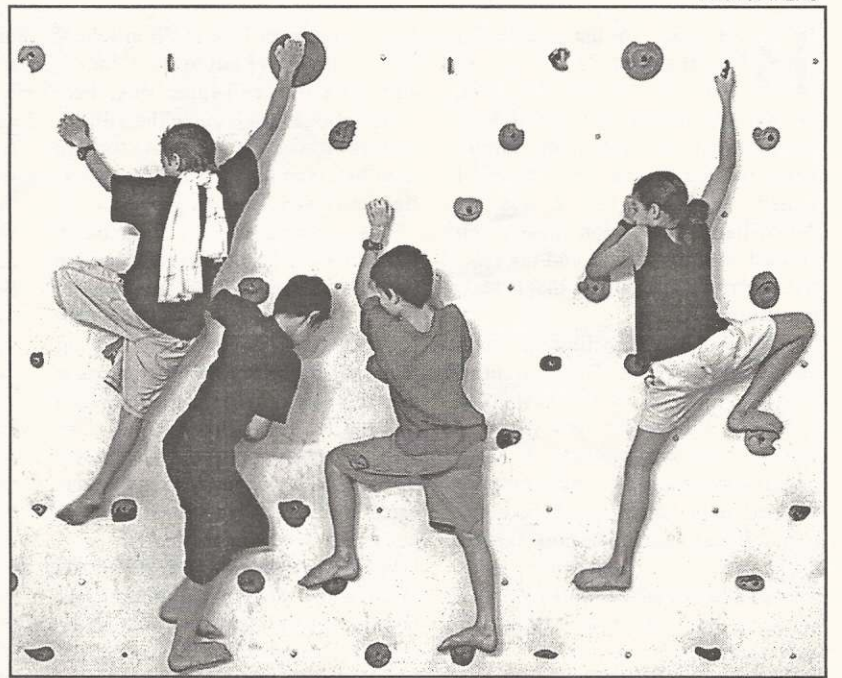
another, monkey-like, moving freely in nature. That is not only a great advantage for doing hatha yoga and sports, such as Tai Chi, but also for climbing. As we all are mountaineers and adore climbing, what was more natural than offering something of our own hobbies, our skills combined with a part of the needed materials and money, to Auroville?"

Gradually, the idea took shape. Cecilia coordinated the communication and did the leg-work in Auroville. As usual, consultations took some time but then all of a sudden things came together in an almost miraculous way. La Ferme is situated next to a deep canyon where, two years ago, granite stone dams had been built to prevent soil erosion and water running off into the sea. It was then decided to transform one of the so-called wing-walls, the canyon walls next to the dams, into a ten-meter high outdoor climbing wall of natural stones. Olivier was willing to design and build the wall. At around the same time Juan and Aloka judged that one of the five metre high inside walls of their body-awareness classroom in Transition primary school was also

eminently suitable to become a climbing wall.

Locations being decided, it was up to the French enthusiasts to find the finances for the work and for the required parts and requisites. Support in France for the necessary and mostly expensive materials (like safety-pins, lines, ropes etc.) came almost for free from main dealers, while the firm of André Muller and company provided technical expertise for the construction of the climbing walls. And so the climbing walls materialised.

Can we now expect Aurovilians to challenge the austere Himalayan peaks? That is not really the point, it appears. The point is rather that climbing develops essential traits of character: it develops courage, resourcefulness, cunning, strength, ability, mastery over fears and power of endurance in a situation of inherent risk. Another point is that climbing develops the consciousness of belonging to a group. For climbing, to a far greater degree than other sports, is teamwork, with each member both supporting and being supported by the



Climbing the wall in Transition

group's achievement at every stage. The first thing climbing teaches is how to save the other. It requires detailed knowledge of the use of the rope, the anchor and the carabiner (a metal loop or ring that can be snapped into an anchor and through which the rope may be passed). It also requires a well-trained body: hands are used for balance, feet for support. The body weight is maintained as directly over the feet as possible, the climber remaining as upright as the wall or rock will per-

mit. A climbing rhythm will develop slowly. It is not easily mastered but when achieved, becomes the mark of the truly fine climber.

The satisfaction then is not only the "conquest" of a peak but also the physical and spiritual satisfactions brought about through intense personal effort, concentration, ever-increasing proficiency, and contact with natural grandeur. The Auroville climbing walls offer the way up.

Marijke

AUROVILLE AND INDIA

"Please sit, they are chanting to the Gods"

Aurovilians and villagers come together at a festival in the Shiva temple at Irumbai

Small clusters of children – some dark skinned, some blonde – were launching lit earthen lamps on lotus leaves from the steps of the Irumbai temple pond, as I approached down the coconut-palm fringed road at dusk. Elsewhere on the steps, a small group of Aurovilians and villagers were quietly soaking wicks and filling the earthen oil lamps that another Aurovillian was lighting, precariously straddled on the upper reaches of the outer temple wall.

Bundles of bananas hung from an arch of banana stalks at the temple's Southern entrance, with a garlanded stone Ganesha presiding, beneath a gnarled neem tree, to the side. Outside, as well as within the small temple's courtyard, colourful petal-strewn chalk "kolam" designs of floral and animal motifs decorated the pavement. And as village women sat in small groups stringing garlands for the Gods, dozens of people wandered around examining, or paying tribute to the temple's various niches and

shrines to Ganesha, Murugan, Koil Amma (Goddess of the Kuil bird—a local variant of Saraswati), the planets, and Shiva in his form of the lord of Fire. Inside the temple the incense hung thick midst soot and smoke stained walls as people sat or prayed to the famous lingam of legend that exploded in answer to Kaduvelli Siddha's prayer to Lord Shiva for a sign attesting to his purity of intent after he had reattached a dancer's anklet at a public performance hosted

on sturdy shoulders and carried out of the temple into the courtyard. The idols were then taken in slow procession around the outside of the temple walls, the bearers swaying rhythmically as they moved. At the East entrance the procession paused briefly as the light of the rising moon lit the low lying clouds clustered on the horizon.

Back in the temple compound the statues were placed at the far end of the now crowded courtyard facing the dais with its illumined AUM symbol. While I was talking to Srimoyi, who had danced the role of the temptress in the Auroville play of the Kaduvelli Siddha legend a few years back, a temple attendant gestured to us "Please sit, they are chanting to the Gods" pointing to the statues behind us. On the facing dais, two Brahmins from Pondicherry then chanted slokas from the Yajur Veda for half an hour, followed by an Ashram student who recited hymns to Lord Shiva. The magical evening continued with an inspired one-hour performance of Bharatnatyam dancing by Saroja and Lakshmi Prabha from Auroville, followed by a recitation by Srimati Sivadi of the Tevaram, a seventh century Tamil poem composed by Thiru Jnanasambandar in praise of Irumbai temple.

Roger



Saroja and Lakshmi Prabha in the Shiva temple in Irumbai

by the local king.

Suddenly a troupe of musicians entered and in a crescendo of sounds: drumming, a temple clarinet and the ringing of ritual bells, the sari-draped statues of Lord Shiva and Parvati, placed on a palanquin, were hoisted

ENVIRONMENT

"No more pesticides" progress

The campaign against chemical pesticides continues

A few months ago, Rita, Njal, Boris and a few other long-suffering and determined Aurovilians decided to create awareness amongst the villagers about the deadly effects of chemical pesticides that are sprayed on cashews and other crops. Their initiative coincided with the publication of two articles, based on research studies in Kerala, on the dangerous effects of chemical pesticides. (See AVT # 153).

Today, with the help of the organizational network of the Auroville Village Action Group, a group of Aurovilians have distributed 6000 leaflets in 60 villages, and given talks in 8 villages that were attended by people from about 45 villages. They also made posters that were displayed in rural schools, youth clubs, women's clubs, on temple walls, street trees and at the Auroville Health Centre. A video "Rational use of pesticides," made in Tamil and in English, was widely screened for both Aurovilians and the villagers. Through cable TV, this video was also broadcast directly into village homes. At the main Auroville Health Centre at present, the video is played continuously for out-patients waiting to consult a doctor. This educational campaign seeks to make villagers aware about both the health and environment effects of spraying

chemical pesticides and the tragedy that happened in Kerala. As an alternative to chemical pesticides, the group seeks to promote neem oil as a safe botanical pesticide. Their most recent initiative in this direction has been to start Neem Spray Trial Plots near the Solar Kitchen. At this public spot, they distribute neem oil and also give information to passing farmers and villagers about alternatives to chemical pesticides. The group tells them, "No illusions, please. Neem oil cannot control all kinds of pests. Nor can chemical pesticides. But neem oil is not harmful to health like chemical pesticides are. It is preventive in its purpose and action. It discourages the growth and spread of plant-eating insects. Beneficial insects are not much affected (as they are not eating the plants)." They also tell them about natural pests such as weaver ants that feed on the larvae of plant-eating insects and other traditional methods of pest control.

The group intends to keep up its educational campaign till the spraying season for cashews is in full swing, in about a month's time. They hope that Aurovilians will cooperate in their efforts to spread awareness to make the bioregion of Auroville safe and healthy, free from the serious health hazards of poisonous pesticides. *From the Auroville News*

Chekhov wows Auroville

Comedy at Bharat Nivas

Would Aurovilians take to Chekhov? In theory, it wasn't an obvious match. What could the poet of bourgeois ennui and cultural disintegration possibly have to say to the inhabitants of the City of Dawn? Yet within five minutes of the start of the double Chekhov bill at Bharat Nivas in mid February the audience was roaring with laughter.

True, this was not the Chekhov of Uncle Vanya and The Cherry Orchard. In fact, Chekhov described the two short plays put on by Aurovilians as "jests". The characterization is sketchy, the plots – if one can call them that – are thin. "A Jubilee" focusses upon the psychological disintegration of a self-important bank owner as first his employee, then his wife and finally a woman off the street progressively tighten the screws upon his sanity. The story line of the "The Proposal" is even simpler: a father, his daughter



Left to right: Srinivasan, Srimoyi, Otto and Liliani in 'A Jubilee'

and her prospective suitor spend much of the time arguing, interspersed by brief, fragile reconciliations. "Champagne! Bring the champagne!" shouts the desperate father as the newly betrothed couple launch into yet another quarrel.

In other words, this is much closer to

farce than social analysis or metaphysical despair, so there's a real danger that the actors will go over the top by simply playing it for laughs. That this doesn't happen is a comment upon Ellen's deft direction as well as upon the maturity of the acting. Srinivasan's Hirin, the put-

upon 'pen-pusher', strikes just the right note at the beginning of "A Jubilee". With his hacking cough, nervous abacus and shabby felt boots, this is a man under pressure, not just a comic type. Similarly the disintegration of Otto's Shipoochin, the bank manager, is beautifully weighted as one assault follows another upon his sanity, while the self-absorption of Tatiana, Shipoochin's wife, is caught wonderfully by Srimoyi as she flutters around the stage breathlessly relating her uninteresting adventures. But it is Liliana who brings real depth and presence to the comedy through her superb portrayal of the Babushkaesque Merchootkina, the limpet-like supplicant who finally delivers the coup de grace to the last vestiges of Shipoochin's sanity.

"The Proposal" is a more compact

and structurally stronger play. It is also a marvellous vehicle for Otto to display his impressive talent as a comic actor. His Lomov – the suitor – is a wonderful mixture of debilitating physical tics, shyness and aggression, while Srimoyi as the resolute Natalia and Marco as her increasingly confused father – "I give you my blessing, and so forth. Only leave me alone!" – are very effective foils.

"Only leave me alone!" In the end Chekhov is always Chekhov so we should not be surprised to find, even in these slight pieces, some of his abiding concerns – the ways in which individuals are isolated, or isolate themselves from each other, through narrowly pursuing their own preoccupations, and their continued but ill-fated attempts to attain stability and comfort by remaking the world in their image.

Perhaps there are lessons to be learned here, even for Aurovilians...

Alan

Speaking in Tongues

Anu, dancer and choreographer, describes the creative process behind a recent dance piece, "Speaking Tongues"

There were three of us in this experiment, bringing to the overall work our combined complexities of dance languages, imagination and character. Grace brought to it a rich repertoire of ballet, modern and African dance movements. Kanchana gave it her flawless Odissi and her openness to experiment. Their individual potentials gave me a wonderful resource base to which I added my own movement tendencies that have grown out of the combined polarities of Bharata Natyam and Tai Chi.

Just as the human voice can speak all languages, so also the

human body can 'speak' all movement. Since we had been invited to create a work for a festival on movement research in Bangalore, it felt like a good occasion to experiment. As a choreographer I wanted to find a way to combine the different vocabularies of movement, stylizations, mood and expression, or to push them to their own limit

till they were obliged to change in a way that would feel spontaneous, effortless, without jarring edges, moving from one to the other in continuous transitions of movement. There were moments when the form was obvious. The next moment it had gone or shifted or morphed into another character. The idea was not to reject or be afraid of anything, but to embrace everything as given possibilities to play with. So, I included elements of traditional abhinaya and simple mime as well. The important thing with this work was not so much the importance of forms, but their complex co-existence and unity.

In Auroville, we enjoy or are challenged by this 'common ground' all the time, so what better excuse...?

Speaking in Tongues developed first as solo experiences for the two dancers, combined with unexpected encounters that challenged their curiosity or sense of self, bringing them closer and closer to an acceptance of one another as each one connected with her own inner center. For these 'encounters' I encouraged them to find their own expressions, so that

their impulse in reaction or counterpoint would draw from their personal sensibilities and body language and make it natural to their personalities.

The title for this work originated from a piece by Sheila Chandra called 'Speaking in Tongues # IV'. It is a complex yet compact experiment with Indian rhythm patterns, scattered with quick, sharp changes. It includes unexpected stops, sudden traffic sounds, a sarangi wail, shifts in mood, even words that sounded like an advertisement jingle, except that they said: I've got to get to somewhere deep in my soul, surrendered. I proposed this to Grace for her solo, a challenge she welcomed where the choreography used the energy, speed and dynamics of modern dance in coalition with

Bharatanatyam lines and structures and mood.

Odissi sets an entirely different room temperature: its way to enter, to slip in out of contemporary structures, its fluid energy, subtle mood and free cadence was very interesting to explore. For this piece with Kanchana we chose an extract from Keith Jarrett's Köln Concert which she liked very much, to explore the different sensibilities echoing each other, opening and harmonizing, in simultaneous contact.

For the last part, Grace wanted to try something from Talvin Singh's music

to be danced by both of them. We chose the famous Gayatri Mantra with an electronic rock and roll flavour, like a prayer rushing through the chaos of the world. This CD is called OK. That's exactly the feeling I wanted to have here – two different people who had finally found their center and it was perfectly okay and comfortable and interesting to share the world. Their 'encounters' had moved from open hostility, doubt, and condescension, to friendliness, acceptance and trust.

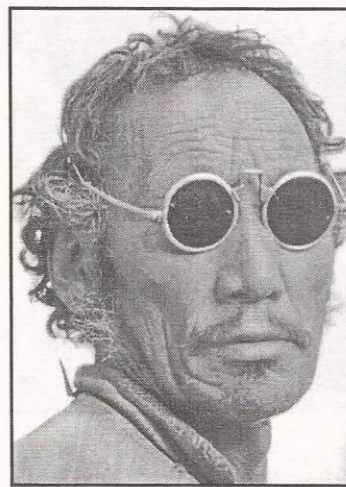
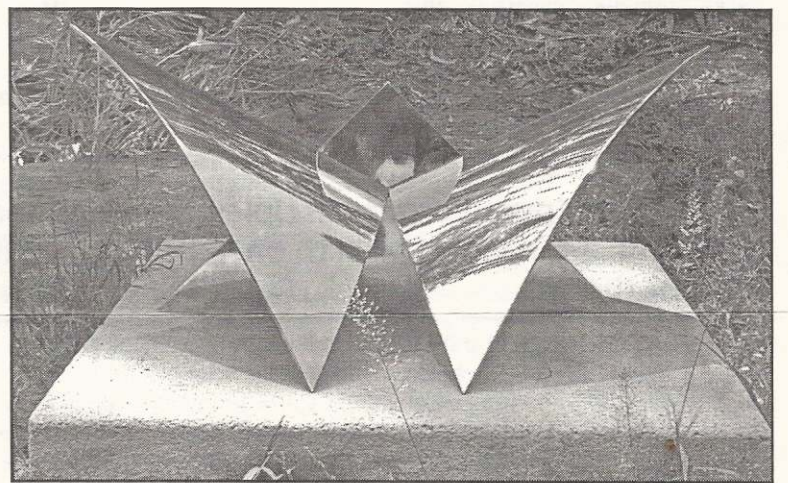
One last element was the light, done by Jean and the use of shadows to create an additional layer to movement. We used the shadow of the body that was figurative but we treated it in abstract ways. The idea for this came from watching the Bharat Nivas Auditorium technicians' crew for years, as they went about their business of moving, changing and focusing spots for performances during the set-up stage and the unexpected play of shadows it would conjure. We decided to use this as another element or layer of the overall movement.

I'm grateful I had a chance to create this work with all of them. It was intense, demanding, fun and tough. It's usually like that when you speak in tongues.

Anu

Birthday week

The birthday week was full of cultural events.



Exhibitions

Cornelis's sculpture exhibition 'Beyond Steel and Stone' was held in Sve Dam (top); a photo exhibition 'A Long Look Homeward' with photos from the Tibet Museum, Dharamsala was held in the Pavilion of Tibetan culture (directly above); Firooza's exhibition 'Dreamscapes' in the Tibetan Pavilion showed her paintings on silk; Hufreesh (left) celebrated her first painting exhibition in the Centre of Indian Culture; and 'Nature Collages' by Erika (bottom left) was presented in Newlands.

Film Festival

Films directed by French director Alain Corneau were shown during a 5-day film festival in Bharat Nivas.

Mother's twelve qualities

The Auroville adult and children choirs performed "The Mother's symbol part I, The Twelve Qualities", a composition for mixed chorus and small orchestra by Aurovillian composer Pushkar.

The Hula Group and Astad Deboo

The martial art performers of Manipur 'The Hula Group and Astad Deboo' gave a dance performance in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas.

In memoriam Gioia

In the evening of February 11th, Gioia Miazzo, who joined Auroville in September 1991, passed away in a hospital in Pondicherry. Gioia had



PHOTO: MARLENKA

met with a cycle accident in the Greenbelt a few days earlier, and was brought to the hospital where she remained in a coma till her death. She is survived by her three children Antonio, Maria and Nicola.

Not so long ago I went with Gioia to the Himalayas and we camped for 3 weeks. Amidst mountains that

touched the stars and cheerful Tibetans, we shared a little tent. During that short but intense period, I gained a profound respect for her.

Gioia was a jewel with many facets. Fun-loving, free, but deeply serious about inner perfection of body, mind and spirit, she always charted a difficult but courageous path.

Gioia was a healer (watsu, tai chi), a mother who dearly loved her kids, a spiritual artist (mandalas), an interpreter (she spoke 4 languages well and used her skills to help others), a seeker (always looking for the deeper spiritual quest), a conflict resolution mediator (having served in the Executive Council), a hard worker (devoting time to Quiet and to Auroville), and a

good friend to many. Gioia was also deeply committed to helping our youth and really believed in them. She helped in many ways to encourage their creativity.

In essence, she was a gift to all of us. May she rest in our thoughts as her soul embarks on a new adventure.

Marti

"The moment has come"

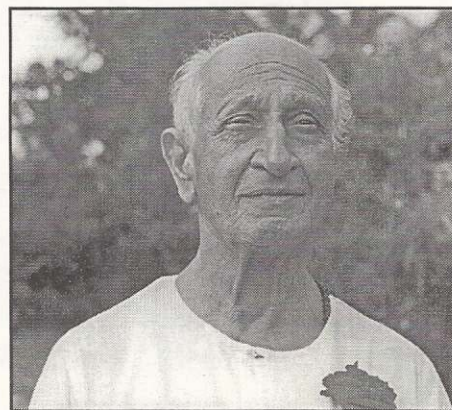
Memories of Udar

Udar Pinto left his body on Friday, December 7, 2001. Some time before that the Auroville Today team interviewed him in his house in Pondicherry. His eyesight was failing, he found it difficult to walk, but as he shared his memories of Sri Aurobindo and Mother it was impossible not to be touched by the flame of his devotion. Udar received his name (meaning 'noble, sincere, generous') from Sri Aurobindo himself. Mother appointed him one of her secretaries and often sent him, as her emissary, to Delhi. In 1972 he toured the U.S. under the sponsorship of the Indian Government in observance of Sri Aurobindo's Birth Centenary. In 1973 he returned to raise funds for Auroville, giving talks in both the US and Canada.

Sri Aurobindo

"I had full access to Sri Aurobindo's room at any time as I was in charge of polishing his furniture. Initially, Sri Aurobindo had horrible furniture – it was made out of boxwood, painted green. When one devotee learned this, he told Mother 'Make the best furniture for him, and I will pay.' Mother gave me this task. I decided

to make it out of first-class teak and rosewood, and to buy this from a



friend who owned a timber yard in Cuddalore. Mother decided to come with me to make the purchase. When I had bought what was needed, Mother pointed to a huge tree in the corner of the yard and said, 'That tree has been complaining to me that nobody looks at it. It says it wants to come to me. So buy it, Udar!' I did, and many years later, when I built Mother's room on top of Sri Aurobindo's room, all the furniture and panelling came from that one tree.

Often I used to be polishing the furniture when Sri Aurobindo was dictating 'Savitri' to Nirodbaran. Sri Aurobindo had a beautiful voice – he spoke English so perfectly you couldn't believe he was an Indian.

I was by his side when he passed away. And I am convinced, after observing it, that his death was fully conscious, chosen by him.

When Mother came, she stood there like a statue, like a goddess, without a sign on her face. Then she turned to me and said, 'You take charge of all the arrangements and come to me for instructions.' It was soon afterwards that I had my first argument with her. She wanted me to build two chambers in the Samadhi – the resting place of Sri Aurobindo's body – one above, one below. I asked her why the chamber on top? She didn't explain. She ordered me to do it.

The Mother

Mother didn't talk to me about Auroville, but I was involved with it a few times. For example, Mother asked me to be the Master of Ceremonies for the Inauguration because she wanted somebody there through whom her Force could act. One day, prior to this, she called me. She wanted every country to accept the Charter of Auroville and to send a representative to the Inauguration ceremony. But all the communist countries, led by Russia, refused to participate, because they could not accept the line in the Charter about 'willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness'. She told me, 'I want you to go to the Consul-General of Russia and speak to him about this.' 'What shall I say?' I asked. 'Don't think of anything clever because you'll make a mess of it. I'll put in your mouth what you have to say.'

So I went and met him. He told me, 'We like the idea of Auroville very much, but can't accept that line because we don't believe in God.' So I said, 'Let's see what you can accept. Do you believe in progress?' 'Yes, of course.' 'But progress towards what?' 'Just progress.' 'What about progress towards perfection?' He liked that one very much. 'This could be a new slogan for the Communist Party!' So then I said, 'What about progress towards ultimate perfection?' 'These are just big empty words.' 'Well, what is the meaning of zero or infinity? They have no meaning, but they are essential for mathematics.' 'Alright,' he said, 'I'll accept ultimate perfection.' 'But that is the divine,' I said. 'Is that so?' he answered. 'Then we'll accept it.'

One morning She came down and told me, 'Udar, I had a wonderful vision last night.' She told me to take notes and then she described it: she called it the 'Temple of the Soul'. Then she told me to go away and make a drawing of it. When I brought it back, she told me, 'You've got it exactly.' Then she gave it to Roger Anger to work upon. This was the beginning of Matrimandir.

It's not always easy to predict who will open to Mother's Force. When China attacked India, our army ran for their lives. There was nothing to stop the Chinese forces advancing deep into India. Mother was furious and kept repeating, 'They must go away'. But then, to everybody's surprise, they turned round and went back. When I asked Mother what had happened, she said, 'They were more open to me than the Indians'. Another time Mother said of India that she will go down and down. It's only when she has reached the bottom that she will come up. And it's the common people who will bring her up, not the politicians or intellectuals, because the common people believe in The Mother.

Some people do not call Mother because they are afraid that another being will impersonate her. I asked her once, 'How will I know if it is you?' 'If you call me in all sincerity,' She replied, 'you can be sure that I will come, for there is no falsehood which can pass through the veil of sincerity'.

I told Her that to ensure the transformation She must come and do it herself. I asked Her if She would come if She had already left Her body. 'If I am called,' She replied. I told Her I was always ready to call Her and She said, 'Yes, I know that, but it has to be at the right time and at the right place.'

Since then I've been waiting to know when is the right time and the right place. Now, at last, I feel that the moment has come.

Edited by Alan

Mary Helen: A Tribute

Mary Helen Eggenberger, disciple of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, left this beautiful and hallowed earth on February 7, 2002, a day before her 58th birthday.

Mary Helen read about Mother and Sri Aurobindo when she was just out of her teens and, as a young woman at the age of 22, she sent her photo to Mother and received Her blessings to come and live in the ashram. She travelled on her own to India, taking with her a few belongings and leaving everything else to meet Mother in August of 1966. She returned to the Ashram in 1968 for the inauguration of Auroville and worked for some months in the Auroville Information and Design office opposite the Ashram main complex. After returning to the U.S. for a few years she once again came to the Ashram in 1971 later moving to Auroville with Mother's blessings where she worked in the Matrimandir Gardens for 10 years, collecting and studying numerous plant species that she helped collect and propagate. She participated in every plant collecting expedition to find new plants for the Matrimandir Gardens, more than 85 of which Mother gave spiritual significances. She also began one of Auroville's first journals, Progress, chronicling the development of the pioneer communities in those early years.

She was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer in 1998 and underwent extensive exploratory surgery. The cancer was so widespread, however, that no removal was possible surgically. She was given three

weeks to live. Determined, as the Mother's child, to conquer this disease on the life plane or proceed as far as possible towards its elimination with her guru's ever-present help, she concentrated her work on the body's



cells, calling in the Light while exploring both traditional therapies and a host of alternative protocols.

Mary Helen's life was one of beauty, harmony, refinement and order. It was a joy and a constant lesson to see how beautifully she arranged physical things, such as clothes, furniture, art work, etc. Her flower arrangements were sensitive and soaring examples of the expression of beauty. Music and ballet were also great loves and she was among the original members of the first Auroville choir. She was a living example of Mother's dictum:

"Not to take care of material things which one uses is a sign of inconscience and ignorance."

You have no right to use any material object whatsoever if you do not take care of it.

You must take care of it not because you are attached to it, but because it manifests something of the Divine Consciousness."

She knew the Ashram to be her spiritual home and considered the Patels, Lilou, Maniben, Pushpa and Jayantibhai her closest family but cherished her friendships with many Ashramites and Aurovilians. Among her most treasured memories were the times when Udar took her to Mother's room and especially the many times when he took Chali as a baby and sat her on Mother's lap. Her calm and gentle demeanor, her sweet and warm disposition, her generosity and good will towards all masked a warrior soul on the path of the Integral Yoga.

She devoted her last few years to an immersion in Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, Savitri, working with me intensively on a dictionary of words and terms in Savitri, entitled *Lexicon of an Infinite Mind*, and reading the poem aloud each night before sleep. She is survived by her husband, Narad, her sister, Sue Bailey, her daughter, Chali, and two grandchildren, Aaron and Dylan.

In 1972 Mother wrote to her: "I am with you, fear not." Narad

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