

Auroville Today

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PHOTO COURTESY LISBETH

Third graders of Transition school with their 350 action poster

"You have to help people love nature"

How aware are Aurovilians of environmental issues? Which programmes already exist to increase environmental awareness and what is planned for the future? We spoke to four Aurovilians who are working hard to increase environmental awareness in the community.

How much awareness is there in Auroville of the importance of the U.N. Copenhagen Climate Change Conference which is happening this December?

Tewa: I think that while there is some awareness, many Aurovilians are still not very aware of the global reality, of the magnitude of what the world is facing regarding climate change.

Isn't this odd? After all, Auroville is probably best known internationally for its environmental work and people assume that Aurovilians are environmentally-conscious.

Lisbeth: We ride on our greenwork reputation, but there have been big changes. Take the children, for example. When I started teaching geography and environmental education classes in Auroville thirty years ago, the kids went to school on their horses, they had classes in the Nursery with Narad, they harvested the ragi crop with Johnny, and in the monsoon we walked the canyons to follow the torrential water flows to the sea. Nature education was part and parcel of life in those days. Now Auroville has become much more urban. Many of the wild places have disappeared or are not really known any more and not all the kids seem to like to be in nature.

Appie: I take children out to Nature Camps every year. When we first started running them, the kids were happy just to be out in nature. Now that's not enough. Specially, the older kids get bored; they want to go shopping, they miss their Coca-Cola.

Tewa: But adults also need to think about the examples we are setting the children. Auroville is part of the global Eco-Village Network but I won-

der how on earth we got included as we do not fulfil many of the guidelines of an eco-village. There are so many ways we could model more environmentally-friendly practices, for example riding bicycles, reducing waste, eating more locally-grown foods, using only safe, organic pesticides such as neem oil...the list goes on. It is also important to talk with the children about why we are doing these things and to help them to understand the environmental issues we face.

This makes the need for environmental education all the more urgent. So what is happening on this front in the schools?

Lisbeth: I work mainly at Transition School where nature education is very much part of the curriculum. I teach Social Studies projects which include Environmental Studies. We have all kinds of projects and field-trips. For instance, we look at what we're wearing at the moment, which leads us on to discuss sweat-shops in China. We go to Pour Tous to see what is on the shelves, then we try to find out where it comes from and at what environmental cost.

We get expert help and guidance from many resource people, like Rajamanikan and Olga from Ecoservice and SOMA, Joss from Pitchandikulam, and Prashant, Aurofilio, Regina and Johnny.

Over the years we've visited Auroville's alternative energy companies. We've been to the new Pondicherry Harbour and our beaches to study beach erosion; we've done trips to the local Suguna chicken broiler farms to find out where the neatly packed meat actually comes from; and the students have been taken to some areas in Pondicherry to learn about small initiatives for solid waste management and collection.

Regina and I have taken the students to the nearby Pondicherry garbage dump a few times.

We prepare these trips very carefully. First of all we go to Success Forest and learn about the afforestation and plans for this area, and we have a picnic there. Then we cycle to the dump. We see the gypsy village, the wastewater ponds, the garbage dumping and burning, the sand-mining and the new airport extension. And in the background is Auroville's skyline of forest, windmills and the Matrimandir.

You stand there, in the middle of this burning, overwhelming horrible stench and very little needs to be said: the contrast really hits you. One group called this a 'trip to hell' and we had some parents complaining. But other parents thanked us for opening their and their children's eyes to what was happening.

Over at Udavi School, Eric is also doing a very good environmental programme. He even

takes the students up to the Himalayas. Environmental trips are also organized in New Creation and Future School.

Appie: The summer camps are also a very important part of environmental education. We take four groups a year, which is about 160 kids, plus around 15-20 adults, to the Auroville Nature Camp in the Western Ghats. We go for nature walks but the children are also expected to help build up the camp, which some of them resent. On the walks some kids just swish down seedlings out of habit, but I am amazed by others, like the ones from Udavi School, who are much more positive. They walk very slowly and carefully; they are interested in everything because they have been taught environmental education.

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PHOTO COURTESY LISBETH

'Time is running out' campaign on International Peace Day.

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Tewa: And then, of course, there are the environmental courses run by Convergence in Evergreen as well as the weekly Sadhana Forest environmental film showings, which are very popular with adults and children. As to environmental outreach programmes, there is the great work being done at the Botanical Gardens – they host many schoolchildren and Women's Groups – and Joss at Pitchandikulam Forest and Nadakuppam.

So a lot is happening in terms of environmental education in Auroville.

Tewa: Yes, but much more could be done, particularly for the adults. This is one of the reasons we would like to start a Green Centre in Auroville. The idea is to create a better understanding of what is already happening here in terms of environmental initiatives, and initiate action in order to promote resource sharing and to try to fill the gaps. It's difficult because few people are involved in environmental awareness work at present. If there was a central place where visitors, Newcomers and Aurovilians could learn about the green initiatives in Auroville and how they could get involved, we are sure we could increase this pool.

Isabelle: I see the need for a coordination centre because I am involved with the Auroville farms and I'm aware of how many problems are created because of lack of coordination between the farms. Some years ago, Foodlink was created and this has helped with central collection and distribution, but much more could be done.

For example, new crops are tried but the experience is not documented so people forget or don't know what happened. Then, if someone wants to start a new farm, the only way he or she can find out which crops are worth growing is by visiting all the farmers

individually.

The Green Centre could document these experiments. It could also give information about the farms to visitors and guests, so that the farmers themselves don't get overburdened. And it can be a place where only organic or fair trade products can be sold and explained.

I also see the Green Centre as a place where we can promote ecological solutions as well as keeping up with the most recent ecological initiatives in the world so we can feed these in to the Auroville experience. Other ideas include a green movie night in central Auroville. We will be screening eco-movies, then follow them up with discussions and the signing of relevant petitions.

Lisbeth: Another idea is to have a regular 'green' column in the News and Notes and on AVNet and Aurowiki which will give environmental tips, information about interesting websites etc. It will also mention upcoming campaigns. Past campaigns in Auroville have included activities on Earth Day and

International Peace Day, and the 350 Action Day (350 parts per million of CO2 in our atmosphere is now considered the limit to prevent catastrophic global warming).

Tewa: And then, on 12th December, the Farmers Market, renamed the Auroville Market, will restart at the Solar Kitchen. The topic on the information boards at this first Market will be climate change, to coincide with the Copenhagen Conference. Each week thereafter we will have information on different topics, including water, plastic, waste etc. So in Auroville we will be trying to keep people aware of the larger picture.

Is Auroville close to a tipping-point concerning environmental awareness?

Lisbeth: I think something is happening, it's bubbling under the surface; when you come together with Aurovilians at environmental events, it's there. I see these young Aurovilians who have studied abroad and now come back with the energy to change things.

But is this enough? Such events tend to attract those Aurovilians who are already concerned about environmental issues, but there are many others who seem unconcerned. How do you make contact with them?

Lisbeth: We have to keep on hammering away with awareness campaigns and publications, but in a nice way: it has to be done with a smile. If you get militant in Auroville, it doesn't work. Of course, people will never protect nature if they don't love nature, so this is where education comes in. You have to help people love nature.

Appie: It also depends on how much people are personally impacted. The beach erosion is a good example. It's been happening for years in Pondicherry, but Quiet community only got involved when they saw their



From Left: Tewa, Lisbeth, Isabelle, Appie

own beach disappearing, and the beach communities further north, which are so far unaffected, don't seem concerned. Things have to be bad before people get involved.

Tewa: What is it about us that it needs to get so bad before we wake up? We love our comforts so much, I think our desire for comfort is the single thing that's brought the world to the state in which it is in. I sometimes wonder how to get the sense of urgency across to Aurovilians with a smile. I feel we have to get real.

Lisbeth: There's no excuse any more for us in Auroville to ignore what is happening. So many influences are seeping in from outside – the uncontrolled development, the destruction of greenwork etc. – it's right in our faces now. It's happening very fast, so it's urgent we have to find a new paradigm, a new way of dealing with it, before it overwhelms and engulfs us.

Tewa: There's a need for a huge leap now, a quantum shift, both in Auroville and the larger world. If Auroville was really a sustainable community, then Marti and Luigi who are representing Auroville at Copenhagen would have something to talk about. We need to become a model before we tell others what to do, and there's still a lot of work to be done there.

Are you optimistic?

Lisbeth: You have to be. However it looks as if Copenhagen will not result in binding agreements but at best some vague statements. Meanwhile the Kyoto Protocol is running out in 2012 and it is predicted that one billion people will soon be starving and one billion are threatened by rising in sea-levels. India is losing a quarter of its land to desertification. These are huge problems that need to be dealt with globally.

Tewa: Yes! I was very happy to hear that a Climate Camp will be happening in Delhi during the Copenhagen Conference. Perhaps India is waking up.

Isabelle: I think it's very important that we find out what's happening in India, because we always hear what America or Europe are doing environmentally and that gives the feeling that the developed world knows better. But a lot of things are happening in India. We talk about Copenhagen, but we don't know what is happening on our own doorstep.

From an interview by Alan

For more information see:
www.350.org; www.whatshappening-withtheclimate.org; and
www.avaaz.org

UNESCO

UNESCO's Executive Board passes resolution on Auroville

In October this year the Executive Board of UNESCO passed a resolution on Auroville inviting its Member States to actively participate in Auroville's development by contributing a permanent or temporary exhibition in the International Zone.

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling General Conference resolutions 14 C/Resolution 4.36 (1966), 15 C/Resolution 4.02 (1968), 16 C/Resolution 3.323 (1970) and 22 C/Resolution 11.19 (1983) as well as Executive Board decision 177 EX/Decision 70, 182 EX/71 – page 6 (August 2007),
2. Noting the commitment of UNESCO and its Member States to provide support to the Auroville experiment and participate in Auroville's development as an International Cultural Township,
3. Noting that the Charter of Auroville declares that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular but to humanity as a whole,
4. Appreciating the broad range of activities undertaken by UNESCO Member States in promoting Auroville's development as the living embodiment of a unique experiment in human unity,
5. Recognizing the value of such civilizing experiences as an invaluable and integral part of the commonly shared human experience,
6. Conscious that the Auroville township is conceived and designed in form of a spiral galaxy, divided into four zones radiating outwards from Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, and are respectively designated as the Residential, the Cultural, the Industrial and the International Zone,
7. Also recognizing that the International Zone is planned to house permanent exhibits from each Member State showcasing its unique genius in the realm of cultural and social ideals and its development in diverse spheres of national endeavour,
8. Invites UNESCO Member States to actively participate in Auroville's development by contributing a permanent or temporary exhibition in the International Zone, as an expression of its commitment to the ideal of human unity that Auroville represents.

LETTER

Dear Auroville Today team,

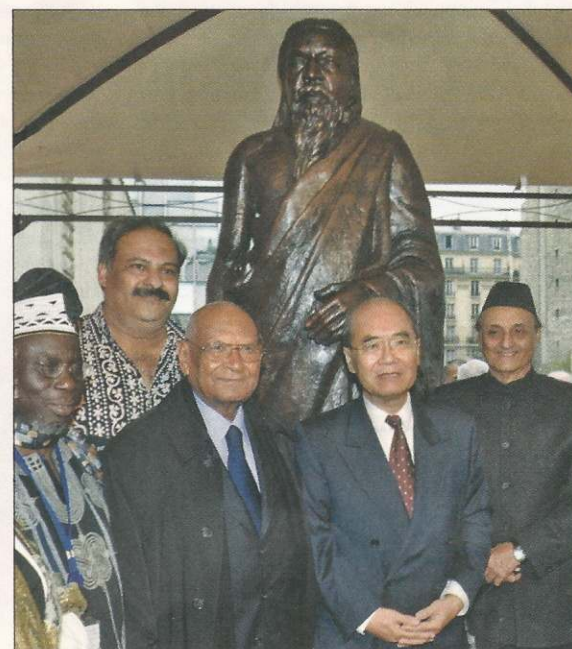
I have read with interest your report on "Sri Aurobindo's statue unveiled at UNESCO" in Auroville Today of October 2009. Your report depended upon your interview with Lalit Verma, who was not in the loop in regard to the moves made to get the statue installed within the campus of UNESCO headquarters in Paris. This is borne out by his statement "Nobody knows how this came about". As a result, your report creates the impression that Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO, Ms Bhaswati Mukherjee, was the prime mover of the development. As India's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, she is the person on the spot to coordinate the logistics of the event but not its prime mover.

The fact is that the ball was set rolling by our Chairman, Dr Karan Singh, when he wrote to Mr Arjun Singh, then Minister of Human Resource Development India, on 10th March 2008. In his letter, Dr Karan Singh wrote that he had been "in touch with Dr Kapila Vatsyayan" regarding "an interesting proposal for installing a statue of Sri Aurobindo in the UNESCO complex in Paris". Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, who is India's representative on the UNESCO Executive Board, advised that India should "formally present the proposal for discussion" at the forthcoming Executive Board meeting. As a result, Dr Karan Singh wrote to Minister Arjun Singh who instructed India's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO to act. Thereafter, Dr Vatsyayan followed it up as a member of the Executive Board. She was, no doubt, assisted in it by India's Permanent Delegate.

Lalit Verma says that "many people at some point in time helped to get this realised". He is right but then he singles out Bhaswati Mukherjee for special mention. That tends to distort the picture. I am sure neither Dr Karan Singh nor Dr Kapila Vatsyayan crave to be mentioned for this development. However, I felt that I should set the picture right.

Ajoy Bagchi

Member, Governing Board, Auroville Foundation



At the inauguration of Sri Aurobindo's statue, from left to right: His Excellency Mr. Yai, Ambassador and permanent representative of Benin; chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board; Lalit Verma, President Aurodhana, Pondicherry; Mr Koichuro Matsuura, Director General, UNESCO; and Dr. Karan Singh, President ICCR and Chairman Auroville Foundation.

PHOTO COURTESY LALIT

Experiments with community transport

Auroville Community Transport (ACT) is based in SaraCon, Kottakarai. Taj, one of its executives, explains the need for ACT and talks about its teething problems and hopes for the future.

“Several of us felt there was a need for a regular and reliable bus service for Aurovilians. The traffic on the East Coast Road has become very dangerous. After the deaths of two Aurovilians in road accidents in the last four years, we felt some form of safe and efficient community transport had to be provided. We had noticed that taxi use for Pondy trips had increased over the past few years, especially during the guest season, while the SAIER bus service was only incidentally available for community transport.

“So we started ACT in February last year. Due to the inevitable teething troubles we missed out on much of the tourist season. But by now we have developed a very reliable bus service with two buses and three drivers. The service is full-time; this year only Pongal and Deepavali were days off,” says Taj with a sense of pride.

“Finances, of course, are a problem. We get no funding from Auroville. ACT’s income comes from the pre-paid bus tickets and from individual donations. We fill the deficit from our own pockets. The present deficit is around Rs 3,000 a month, quite an achievement as ACT is an expensive service. We have given ourselves a 3-year period to prove the necessity of ACT; then we will approach Auroville for any deficit funding. After all, public transport in every country in the world is subsidized; there is no reason why it would be different for Auroville.”

The ACT organizing team consists of Chandresh, Taj and Hari.



The Auroville Community Transport team: Hari (back row 2nd from the right), Taj (front row 2nd from right) and Chandresh (front row 3rd from right).

“Hari oversees the operations of the buses in the Service Area assisted by a team of drivers and a mechanic. Anand from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram does the accounts.

“Our most important service is for the Matrimandir concentration. We leave every morning at 7.45 am from the Service Area for Pondicherry. We are back at Matrimandir at 8.30, then at 11.10 go again to Pondicherry and return at 12 noon. These trips are open to residents and guests of Auroville, and are conditional on the Matrimandir

being open, which means not on rainy days. Then, each afternoon, we run from Vêrité to Pondicherry and back. On average, the bus is now used at 40% of its capacity. Our most successful run is on Friday night, from the Solar Kitchen to Sadhana Forest, to enjoy dinner and the evening film. We are also offering special trips such as for the summer camp, or for sports events or to go to Thiruvannamalai for the full moon walk around Arunachala mountain.”

Future plans? “We are now contemplating Sunday trips to Auroville

beach communities, and possibly a thrice weekly morning trip between the residential zone and Kuilapalayam and Aspiration. We would also like to run a regular monthly trip to Chennai, and weekend trips to interesting places like Gingee, Mamallapuram, the Sattanur Dam or the Chidambaram temple.

“ACT is still in its pioneering days,” says Taj with an enthusiastic smile. “We answer to the need for regular and safe transport. It is up to the Aurovilians to make use of it.”

Dianna

PHOTO COURTESY TAJ

In brief

Entry Service re-starts

The Entry Service resumed work on November 2nd, after almost a year of an interim group taking care of urgent work only. In collaboration with other Aurovilians the new Service has also started to organise five-day ‘Orientation to Auroville’ programmes to help future Newcomers find their way.

Malaria

Three people in Auroville while on a visit to Orissa, have contracted malaria, a disease which is relatively new to Auroville and Pondicherry. The government has sent its Health Inspectors to Auroville to spray chemicals in order to contain the spread of infected mosquitoes.

Voluntary Service

The Guest Service, recalling that from the very beginning voluntary work and service have been central to Auroville’s ethos and existence, calls on guests to contribute their time and energy in vital areas of Auroville and so make voluntary work a central part of their ‘Auroville Experience’. The Guest Service is organising this for short-term visitors, while AVIS (Auroville Volunteering, Internships & Studies programmes) is doing the same for long-time visitors. This participation is considered essential if Auroville is not to become another tourist hotspot or ‘spiritual’ resort.

Integrated Animal Care Centre

Integrated Animal Care, founded in 2005 to care for animals by providing sterilization, anti-rabies vaccination, medical care, adoption of unwanted puppies and education outreach, has at long last found a permanent place near Siddhartha Forest.

Integral sustainability

L’Avenir d’Auroville has approved an ‘Auroville Integral Sustainability Framework Exercise’ led by Alon and Batel. The aim is to prepare a five-year sustainable and Integrated Detailed Development Plan using regular and coordinated input from different activities of the community. In all 22 ‘sector planning teams’ will deal with aspects of physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, and natural environment.

ID-cards for journalists

OutreachMedia, the press-liaison group of Auroville, will provide ID-cards to journalists who are authorised to do film or interviews in Auroville. This is considered necessary to avoid misuse of Auroville’s goodwill, energy and image.

World Youth Event 2010

A world youth event called Anima Mundi will be held in Auroville in March 2010. Anima Mundi is Latin for the cosmic breath, the world soul, the life force, the spirit of nature. 25 to 30 youth from around the world in addition to youth from Auroville will participate. For more info write to: nikolai@auroville.org.in

Missing donor

In our report on the Auroville International meeting in Holland in the June-July issue, we mentioned that the Auroville Dental Clinic had been promised a donation by an American dentist of US \$ 16,000 for village dental projects. Repeated enquiries, however, have failed to discover the donor. Anyone with information please contact aurodentalcentre@auroville.org.in

INTERNATIONAL ZONE

Mapping the Divine Manifestation

Recently there was a discussion in the AVI-group The Netherlands about a Dutch pavilion. During this, Jan Lohman wondered how it was possible to think of such a pavilion as long as it is not clear what the International Zone should be. With this in mind he wrote down some ideas that came to him and worked them out later. Here he presents the result of his musings on the International Zone.

The Mother said that all countries should be representing features of their country in the International Zone. What did she really mean by that? There are so many countries and the political situation is so unclear that countries that exist today will be gone tomorrow and new countries will be created. What did the Mother mean by ‘countries’?

She insisted that we have to go into the soul of each country. So it is not the political material unit that is important, but the soul. In this context a country is a formation by a group of people with a common interest and background. In the political situation at any moment the existing countries do not always represent these groups.

The soul is the central point. By going into the soul people can discover their own uniqueness and their place in the whole comity of countries. When I try to find the soul of my country, Holland, I discern at least two levels: one more exterior that is characteristic of the Dutch mind, and one underlying level that we have in common with surrounding countries. On that level I am aware of being part of a greater cultural zone which I shall call the Western European culture. That culture was formed after the fall of the Roman Empire, after the invasion of all those Germanic people from the Far East: Franks, Alemans, Vandals, Goths and Visigoths, Huns, Longobards etc. All

these people were bound together into one empire, with one religion: Christianity.

These people had one thing in common; they were earthbound, more interested in terrestrial and material things than in spirituality. This disposition has greatly influenced Western Christianity, which has been dubbed ‘the Germanisation of Christendom’. In this they were different from Christians in the Levant where this religion came from, and even more different from other eastern people like Indians.

Seeing this I began to wonder if it was the intention of the divine spirit in his manifestation to create great cultural blocks, each with its own interest and particularity that they had to work out in order to prepare this world for the divine descent. As a bundle of white light, falling upon a prism, is broken into different colours, each with its own vibration, so the divine will to manifest, touching the earth, invoked – from inside or from above – in the different races around the world the will to work out one particular facet of the divine, each according to its own character and situation. Thus, in the course of history, blocks of different cultures were created around the globe: India, with the emphasis on the development of spirituality; Western Europe based on the analysis and development of Matter, Egypt with its focus on the occult and Greece on the preeminence of mind, etc. It would be interesting to research this in detail and to make a map of the actual divine manifestation.

This ‘map’ will look different from the political map of the world for example, the USA and Canada, would be part of the Western European culture. If America would be represented, then it is rather by the cultures of the Indians or the pre-Colombian cultures of Aztecs, Mayas and Incas. The number of cultures will correspond with the number of facets of the divine manifestation to be worked out.

The overall vision in this ‘map’ can lead to better understanding and international cooperation. The feeling of being part of a worldwide movement will improve human understanding. This will also become a stimulus for people who, due to political circumstances, have lost the contact with their original culture. I am thinking in particular of Central and West Africa. All these cultures together are preparing the earth for the divine manifestation.

Seeing this it is logical that the International Zone will be organized according to this ‘map’ of divine manifestation. But what will be the place of the different nations and their pavilions?

Everyone will represent in the first place one’s own country by which one is formed and through which one is part of the whole block. Each country will work for the same object, but each will contribute in its own style. It is the individual who will contribute to the totality its colour and balance. So national pavilions will be very useful, though always within the context of the cultural block.

Every culture has, apart from its particularity, also its own black spot, the

shadow side of its particularity, which becomes evident as soon as it is separated from the total divine manifestation, but which is also necessary to intensify the concentration on its particularity. India, for example, neglected the material life so much that it came to be regarded as an illusion; Western Europe was so immersed in its interest in matter that God, soul and spirit faded away from its consciousness and were looked upon as fantasies of the mind.

But even if this regression is an indispensable phase in the preparation for the divine manifestation, in the end the black spot must be healed. The shadow shall disappear as soon as the link with the overall view of the divine manifestation has been re-established. The many becomes the one again, the ‘White will be restored’.

This can best be done in Auroville, as it is the place created by the Mother for trying to manifest human unity. Cultures can be studied anywhere, but Auroville is the place destined to unite people into a greater context and thus be instrumental in the formation of an actual human unity. The Auroville International centres can play an important intermediary role in it. In this perspective Auroville’s Charter: ‘Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole’ and ‘Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future’ will be understood in a deeper and more realistic way; Auroville will truly be the city the earth needs.

Jan Lohman
AVI The Netherlands
[see obituary Page 7]

The Play of Painting

For the past few years about 250 people a week, most of them children, have been participating in a research project which uses painting as a means of self-discovery. Now the Sri Aurobindo Institute for Educational Research (SAIER) has published a book by Claire Le Touzé, *Looking at Children's Paintings in a New Light* (there is also a French version) which documents this fascinating work. *Auroville Today* spoke to Claire about the project.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother were very clear about what constitutes true 'education'. "Each human being is a self-developing soul and the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacity and to grow freely as an organic being..." wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*. "True education must reveal what is already present in the developing beings and make it blossom", wrote Mother.

From the early days of education in Auroville, attempts have been made to put this profound approach into practice in Auroville schools. Some of the early attempts were too 'stratospheric', out of touch, with the reality of that pioneering period. Today, things are changing. In spite of the pressure of exams and alien syllabuses which vitiate the child-centred approach in some schools, more and more educational initiatives based upon the "self-developing soul" are beginning to be widely adopted.

One example is the Awareness through the Body programme, run by Aloka and Joan. Another is The Learning Community experiment, featured in our last issue. And yet another is the 'Play of Painting', which uses painting as a means of self-discovery and expression.

Claire who, along with Sandrine and Nathalie, comprises the core team, had been teaching painting to children for many years. One of the things she noticed was that when children were free to choose their own subjects, certain images and figures recurred. She couldn't understand why this happened or what they meant until, in 2003, she met Petrouchka who recognised these images as signs of 'The Formulation'.

The Formulation

'The Formulation' is a set of universal patterns in children's paintings discovered by Arno Stern. Stern, who was self-educated, discovered through 50 years of work with



PHOTO NATHALIE

Mahana painting

The archaic manifestations or first traces made by a little child are not, Stern emphasised, clumsy or 'unfinished': "they come from the organic memory of the child." He explains that the body has an 'organic' memory

of its development in the womb and is expressing it through these figures. The next stage, the 'primary figures', is also born out of an inner necessity. Later, the child notices a similarity between those figures and certain objects in his or her environment. So the third phase begins with 'picture-objects', born from the intention of representing 'real' things. However, traces of the primary figures remain in the

'picture-objects'. The final phase, the 'essential figures', is reached by older children or adults. "The essential figures," explains Stern, "are a pure ema-

self-confidence.

Play of Painting is not 'art'

"Play of Painting is not 'art'," Claire emphasises, "because there is no intention to present something to somebody else. The process of expressing the organic memory of the body is transformative. It brings great joy and a sense of expansion of the being, which Stern called 'plusêtre' ('being more')."

Claire describes her own experience in an Auroville studio. "I'd been painting since I was a child. In the first sessions of the Play of Painting I drew in my own style, but at a certain point I couldn't anymore. Something else came through me that I had never done before and it was so joyful, so liberating, like surrender to the natural flow of life. Now I feel I can be more myself and I can allow an inner guidance to manifest. So then I understood why the children are so happy and concentrated when they are doing the Play of Painting."

Conditions for organic expression

Claire stresses that this doesn't 'just happen': that Stern specified that certain conditions have to be in place for the full 'organic expression' to take place, conditions which are not yet completely fulfilled in the Auroville ateliers. "The three essential conditions are a fully trained practitioner who can recognize the universal signs and different stages of The Formulation; a closed space where outside influences are eliminated or minimised, with the 'table-palette' [a long table on which 18 different paint colours are arranged] at the centre; and a group of people of mixed ages." Why the mixture? "The group dynamic is very important. The small children who are doing the archaic figures or primary figures pour them out naturally, and this gives a lot of inspiration to the older ones who may be a little more blocked. On the other hand, the older children and adults will be much more skilled on the technical side and this will be a very good example for the small ones."

What, then, is the role of the trained practitioner or 'guide', as Claire terms it, in this process? The guide's essential role is to support in every way the child's inner and outer explorations, as a servant. The guide knows the Formulation and is careful not to judge the child's work in any way. A negative statement can make

the child fearful of failure, but even praise is to be avoided as this may cause the child to try to please rather than to 'be' herself. For the same reason, the child's work is not put on public display or taken home. Instead, the guide will keep all of it in a special folder for research and archives.

The role of the parents

The guide's role is also to reassure the parents, "opening a small secret door and introducing a new way of 'seeing' in order for them to

So these workshops are mini-laboratories where the children experience weekly this balance between the individual and the collective without rivalry and competition. These are very powerful ways of living our ideals of human unity and unity in diversity.

"Moreover, in Auroville freedom and joy are considered the two necessary elements not only for individual growth but also for the development of a collective consciousness leading to 'effective human unity'. And freedom and joy are the essence of these workshops."

Future research

Claire's research project, which was funded by the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Educational Research, has now concluded with the publication of the book. What are her plans? "It's not yet clear where our funding will come from in the future. But my wish is to be able to continue to offer this service free to Aurovillian children and adults. We have three ateliers now, at the Kindergarten, Nandanam and Udavi School. For the first time in the history of the Play of Painting a building has been designed specifically for that purpose by Nathalie and Francois in Udavi School and this is three-quarters completed.

"My work so far has been mainly with younger children - this was the focus of the research project - but now I have sessions which bring together younger and older children and adults, as Stern advises. This will be a whole new area of discovery. So, in the future, Sandrine and I would like to have a work space outside schools where everyone, adults and children, can freely come to enjoy this wonderful activity."



PHOTO NATHALIE

Claire at the 'table palette'

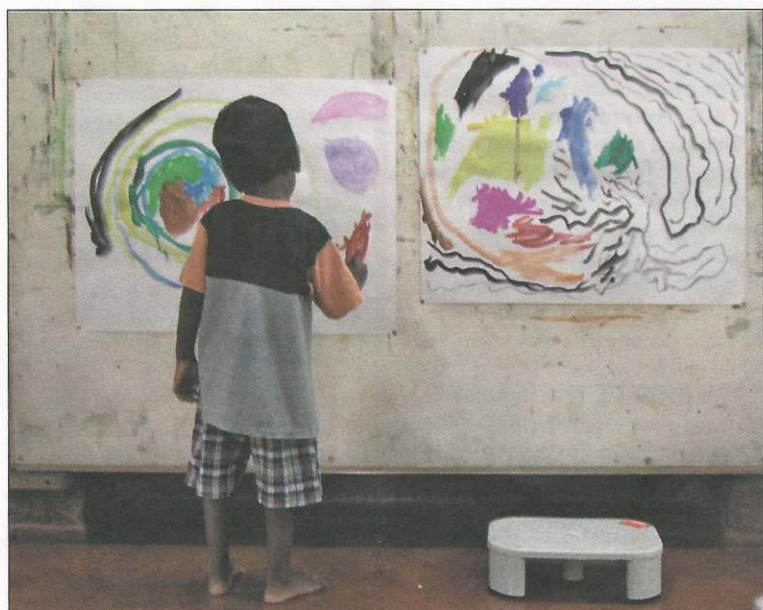


PHOTO NATHALIE

Chandradev expressing himself

children exactly what Claire had also noted: that certain images tend to recur. What he also observed in the paintings of thousand of people of different ages, nationalities and cultures is that these recurring images tend to evolve through four phases or stages. These he labelled 'archaic manifestations', 'primary figures', 'picture-objects' and 'essential figures'.

nation of the organism. Through the possibility of this manifestation, the human being reaches a new dimension."

Throughout the process, the child is free to experiment. He or she can add many sheets of paper if the child wants to make huge paintings. This freedom to discover endless possibilities in oneself also increases



PHOTO MARIE HELENE

Nathalie (right) and student at work

become respectful accomplices." So, once a year, the parents are invited to see their child's paintings without the child being present, but only with the child's permission if he or she is more than seven years old. Many parents are astonished by what they see.

Stern emphasised that the Play of Painting is not a therapy, but that it can prevent the need for therapy later in life. But how does this work relate to the larger purpose of Auroville? "In two ways," says Claire. "Firstly, through the Play of Painting the children begin to feel that behind all the outer differences there is the same inner being; that they belong together because these universal signs appear in everybody's work. So they are more willing to accept the other as he or she is. At the same time, they find their own unique way of being. For example, one child may be very precise and take a lot of time to do one painting, while another child may complete 4-5 paintings in one session."

"The other area of research described in the book, which is different from the 'Play of Painting' as created by Arno Stern, is 'Painting through Concentration'. This was inspired by Marguerite Smithwhite, who was connected with Auroville and the Ashram for many years. Each concentration has a particular purpose in awakening and sensitizing the child to subtle aspects of its being, particularly the inner soul or 'psychic being'. Now I want to more deeply explore this part of the work."

Alan

Looking at children's paintings in a new light by Claire Le Touzé. Published by SAIER, 2009. For info: aurovillepress@auroville.org.in

For more information about the Play of Painting, see Arno Stern's website: www.arnostern.com or contact jeudepeindre@auroville.org.in

Schauberger Vortices for wastewater treatment

Wastewater treatment has been in the forefront of research done by Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research, CSR. After having successfully introduced the sustainable DEWATS system (DEcentralized Wastewater Treatment System), CSR is now experimenting with another promising device, a Vortex.

Just behind the main building of CSR one finds a cascade of ferro-cement basins, fed by amber-green water from two vertical acrylic cylinders. On closer inspection, one sees a vortex spiralling at the centre of the tubes. It is a Vortex in action.

"You surely know what a vortex is," says Lars Kostedde, CSR's water engineer. "We are all familiar with the conical geometry of snail shells, the spiral patterns of stellar galaxies or the funnel shape of cyclones. All form classic vortex spirals. Closer at home you see vortices when you drain the water out of bath tub or when you empty a bottle by shaking it; the water spirals."

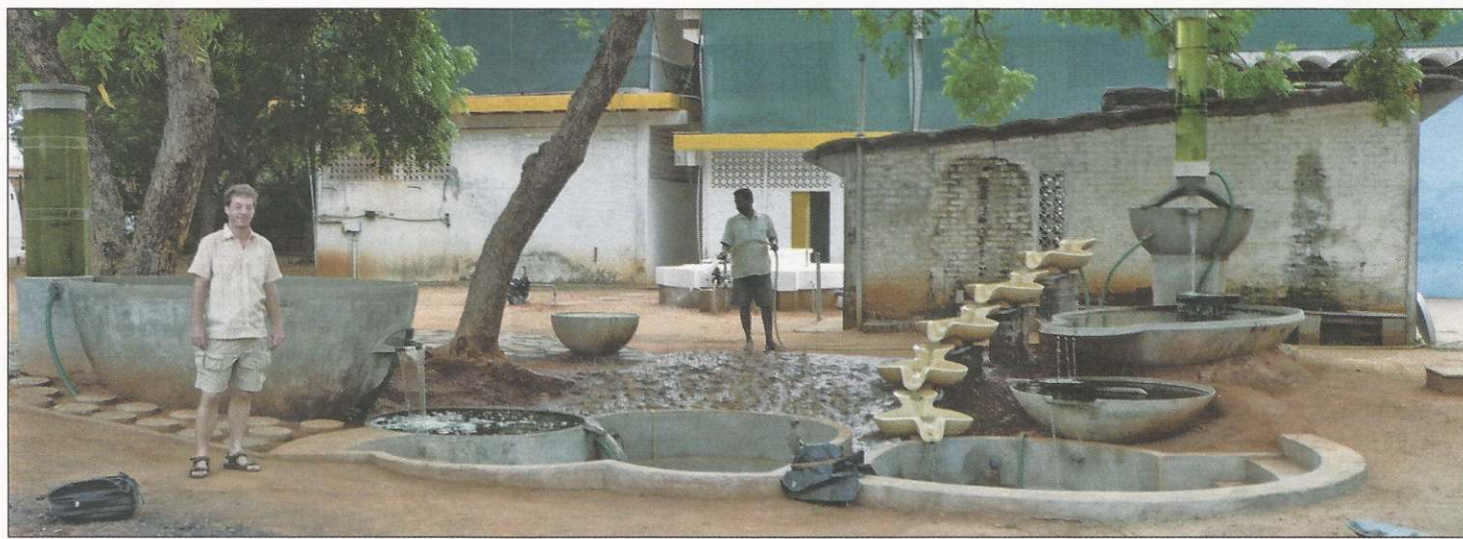
Lars comes from Germany, where he studied water science. While looking for a job after submitting his thesis at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, he chanced upon Auroville. "I was delighted to see Auroville's experiments in alternative methods of waste water treatment," he says. Lars joined CSR as a volunteer.

"It worked very well, and towards the end I was offered a position as water engineer." It's a work that involves a lot of calculation, data gathering and coming up with the final designs for wastewater treatment plants. Lars designs these systems for individual homes and communities, as well as industrial units.

"It took the genius of the Austrian forest warden and researcher Viktor Schauburger to discover that vortices in water lead to self-purification," says Lars. He explains the process. "The centre of the vortex is an air funnel which forms an open tube from the top to the outlet below, so that air can



A vortex at the centre of the acrylic cylinder



Lars Kostedde with the Vortex trial system at CSR

flow either up or down. The vortex generates two kinds of forces: one acts centripetally, moving substances towards the centre; and the other is centrifugal, pushing substances to the outside.

"Schauberger found that these forces could be re-created by designing special flow forms and spiral shaped tubes. Today, his invention has been integrated into traditional wastewater treatment systems to separate liquids and solids, and into drinking water distribution pipelines where it has a quality-improving effect.

"We decided to experiment with the Vortex to improve Auroville's wastewater treatment systems. In collaboration with Jean-François from Coin de Terre, who earlier had worked with Aquadyn, we have further adapted the vortex design with ferro-cement components here at CSR.

"Currently many treatment plants in Auroville use a 'planted filter' – also called a 'root-zone filter' – for treating wastewater. You find them in many communities and behind the Town Hall. These filters have their advantages

because they doesn't require electricity but the disadvantage is that they require a lot of space and frequent maintenance. Some places in Auroville do not have the space for such a large planted filter system and it is there that we have installed the Vortex. There are several vortex systems in Auroville in operation now – among them the Centre Guesthouse, Mitra Youth Hostel and the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. The treated water from the anaerobic filter is pumped through the Vortex before it gets stored underground or in surface water ponds. The vortex system is very effective in eliminating odours.

"Citadines, the new residential complex, has now shown interest in using a second-generation Vortex system which will incorporate a 'nanobubbles venturi' system. The Vortex eliminates odours, but the colour of the water is still grey or green. The nanobubbles system is supposed to make the water clear and colourless."

While experiments are in full swing, a systematic testing of the treated water is the next important step. "We plan to do two tests,"

says Lars. "One will be chemical and biological analysis done by Auroville's Environmental Monitoring Service. The other will be to test the vitality of the water with the copper-chloride crystallisation process used at Aquadyn. This should reveal the energy patterns of the water." Both tests are planned for the near future.

The Vortex system requires electrical energy to operate. "Ideally the system should work on solar energy," says Lars, "but we decided against it as solar pumps are still very expensive and the electricity consumption of the Vortex system is minimal." When there is a power cut, the system shuts down but reboots automatically when the power comes back.

Lars sees a wide application for vortices in Auroville. "For example, by integrating them in the landscape so they become a kind of water sculpture," he says. "The aesthetic side of a water treatment system can then be very pleasing."

In conversation with Carel

Cold-pressed oil in the Nicobars

At the request of Auroville ecologist Rauf Ali, Aureka has developed a press that will produce coconut milk in large quantities for use in the Nicobar Islands. This will substantially increase the income of the local population.

For Rauf Ali, the 2004 tsunami was personal – four of his colleagues got washed away by the killer wave. "That morning they were camped at the southern end of Great Nicobar, tagging sea turtles. Aceh on Sumatra, where the quake originated, is only 150 km away."

Rauf's connection with the Andamans and Nicobar goes back 21 years, first through Pondicherry University, then through the Andaman & Nicobar Island Environmental Team (ANET), and more recently through FERAL, the Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning of which he is one of the trustees. "The islands are part of the Mergui archipelago off the Burmese coast," he says breaking into an impromptu geography lesson. "It is composed of four main island groups – the Andaman group, Car Nicobar, Nancourie and Great Nicobar.

"The Andaman Islands did not get hit by the tsunami – there were only about 9 deaths, mostly due to falling masonry from the earthquake. Only Little Andaman had a few hundred deaths. The biggest toll was in the Nicobar, where an estimated 7,000 tribals and at least the same number of non-tribals died. Of these, 9,000 must have been on Car Nicobar alone.

"But the relief operation was a mess. A lot of the cash aid got stuck in the Andamans. Everyone suddenly became very rich there – all the petty shopkeepers overnight turned UNICEF consultants. And things that were meant for Nicobar either were stolen or ended up being sold in the market."

That was when a cheque arrived in the mail with a note attached, "I trust you – develop something for the tribals." It was from Paul Deegan, the well-known adventurer and mountaineer. "In 2003, I had taken Paul and his team on an expedition to the Car Nicobar," explains Rauf. "When he heard about the tsunami, he had written about his experiences in the Nicobar for the Geographical magazine, and used his fees to help the islanders."

More than 70% of the area of Car Nicobar is covered by coconut. The livelihood and socio-economic status of the people is almost entirely dependent on this crop, but it is grown and harvested in a very basic manner. "Traditionally, virgin coconut oil is made for household use, and copra is exported. The value of virgin coconut oil is about three times that of ordinary coconut oil. But the Nicobarese never exported coconut oil because their traditional method of extraction is elaborate and time-consuming. They gather the coconut which has

fallen naturally – no climbing trees to get them! The coconut is grated on the thorny stem of a local plant; milk is squeezed out, and then placed in semi shade for 24 hours. In the end, it separates into three layers – the top layer is virgin coconut oil which they use for their cooking, the middle is water, and the bottom is a sludge... And if you fry this sludge, you get B grade cooking oil – strong smelling and yellow.



Rasu (left) of Aureka and Rauf with the Deegan Press

"When they use copra, the process is even more cumbersome. They use two planks with very fine holes drilled in it; they put the copra on one plank and then place the other plank on top and the whole family sits on it for a week! So it is very tedious to make even a litre of oil.

"We from FERAL decided on a project to improve their socio-economic status. The idea came to use this donation to develop a coconut oil press to extract virgin coconut oil which then can be sold directly to businesses, ensuring that all profits flow into the hands of the people who need it most. We developed a prototype and then approached every agency, but nobody was interested in funding just a few machines. Finally, we went to the Science and Society Division of the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Government of India, which sanctioned a 2-year project 'Establishing small scale coconut



From left: The traditional way of grating coconut; sedimentation process of extra-virgin coconut oil



extraction units at the Nicobar Islands'. The project became operational in April 2008.

"We also wanted to provide commercial coconut graters to the Nicobarese, which grate a coconut in about 45 seconds instead of the usual 8 minutes, but this was not appreciated. Grating is a community activity, all the women sit together, they gossip, they have a good time. The electric grater makes so much noise that they can't talk to each other. So they said, 'We are very happy with the presses, but don't give us graters.'"

The final model of the 'Deegan Press' was developed by Rasu at Aureka. It is a simple cylinder with fine holes drilled into the walls. Fresh shredded coconut is placed in the cavity into which a piston driven by a hydraulic press exerts a 20 tonne pressure. This causes the oil to get pressed out. "This is organic extra-virgin cold-pressed coconut oil," explains Rauf. He is confident that it will fetch a price four times that of conventionally-produced coconut oil. Eight presses have now been manufactured. Six have been shipped to Car Nicobar, where a youth group called DOSTI which has representatives from each of the 15 villages in Car Nicobar, will take charge of them. "They will conduct training camps on how to use these machines, and they will own the machines."

Another two machines have already been independently ordered. One machine will go to Middle Andaman and one will remain in Auroville's beach community Eternity, where Ana has successfully experimented with the machine. "For the future development of the project the forest development corporation in Little Andaman has expressed interest in the project. They plan to take over the supply of the machines, the marketing of the oil and everything else."

The Deegan Press is in process of being patented, a so-called 'creative commons patent' which means that anybody can make and use the press. "The only condition will be that if they make any modification for commercial purposes, they have to make those modifications available to the public within a year. The best way to do that is to publish the modifications on the website."

The project hasn't particularly increased Rauf's status in the Andamans. "I am not very popular with the coconut dealers right now," he laughs. "A lot of their income will now flow into the hands of the Nicobarese."

Priya Sundaravalli

"Auroville will give hope to humanity."

Outgoing chairman of Auroville International France, Satyakam, speaks about his life, the role of the Auroville International centres and his forthcoming move to Auroville.

"We are on the point of leaving for Orissa," says Satyakam amiably when I meet him in his French-style heritage home in Pondicherry. Satyakam, chairman of Auroville International France, is one of the organisers of the next meeting of the Auroville International centres which will take place in Auroville in February 2010. "At the last AVI meeting in The Netherlands, my wife Devasmita proposed that each time Auroville International meets in Auroville, the members would also go out and present Auroville in one of the states of India, and at the same time do a bit of sightseeing. This proposal was warmly accepted. Orissa was decided as the venue for the meeting in February."

Satyakam and Devasmita have been actively working for Auroville since the mid 1980s. But their connection dates back even earlier. Satyakam's interest was roused in the early seventies.

"I have always described myself as a person of multiple identities," says Satyakam. "I was born in Madagascar in an African environment; I am a French national and French educated, but I am of Gujarati origin. And I am married to an Indian. So the question of identity was confusing; I didn't really know who I was. Madagascar, being an island, has a very insular character. The Indian community was always considered as 'other' by the natives, even though our forefathers had settled there over a hundred years ago. So I felt the need to have an exposure to my Indian identity as well as to my French cultural roots."

Satyakam, at the time called Salim Karim, was also interested in yoga and Indian philosophy. Knowing this, one of his friends gave him twelve Bulletins of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. "What a revelation that was! For the first time, I came to know about Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the existence of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram!" He decided to leave Madagascar and have the Darshan of The Mother. At the age of 21, venturing for the first time out of Madagascar, Satyakam took a boat to Bombay.

But when he reached Bombay in November 1973, he learned that The Mother had left her body. "That was a blow. A friend of mine who received me in Mumbai told me to come with him to Gujarat as there was no longer any hurry to get to Pondicherry." A few months later Satyakam cycled

from Pune to Pondicherry where he learned about Auroville for the first time.

"I felt drawn immediately. I stayed in Far Beach (now Sri Ma) where another person from Madagascar, the painter TopTen, was living. After a



Satyakam

few weeks I moved to Utility."

Though he felt fully accepted, Satyakam decided to leave for France. "The move to Auroville was too early. Also I had no financial means to sustain myself." The first years in France, Satyakam worked as a sales clerk. "Then I was able to buy the shop where I worked, and slowly developed it."

"In the beginning I traded in antiques, handicrafts and musical instruments from India. And then I began specialising in ladies garments, developing an original brand called Enjoy." This work brought him into regular contact with India and with Auroville and the Ashram. In 1984, Satyakam met Devasmita who was living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Two years later, they got married, and in 1989 their daughter Shobhana was born.

"In the meantime, the political situation in Madagascar had changed. There had been a revolution in 1972, which ended the island's economic relationship with France. Instead, it evolved closer relations with China and North Korea. The system

changed completely. This was very difficult for my parents, so they decided to leave Madagascar and live with us in France."

In the mid eighties, Devasmita and Satyakam were invited to join AVI France. "They were in search of people to help as active members. Over time this involvement became more intense and we became part of the Board." The work, he explains, involves informing the French public about Auroville's goal, activities, difficulties and progress. But there is definitely more to it. "AVI France is also a place of thoughts and exchange of ideas about Auroville with active members of Auroville and with AVI members in other countries, with whom close friendships and fraternal connections have been built. We all share in Auroville's developments intimately. For example, we were all quite frustrated about Auroville's slow development. We felt the city wasn't getting built fast enough. We discussed this many times in AVI France and with the Housing Group in Auroville - why is there the blockage? But now, all of a sudden, this block has disappeared, and many houses and apartments have started coming up. That's a positive development."

Eventually Satyakam became chairman of AVI France. This responsibility, however, will soon end, as Satyakam and Devasmita have decided to move permanently to Auroville.

"We are now only staying in Pondicherry for family reasons," says Satyakam. "We have already a house in New Creation." He explains, "Initially we wanted to build a house in the 'White Town' or Ville Blanche of Pondicherry as Devasmita's parents live in Pondy and our daughter was studying in the Ashram School. We wanted to build a French house in the heritage style, but couldn't get land. Around the same time André Tardeil invited us to build a house in New Creation. After a long hesitation, we agreed. The moment we started building in Auroville, a piece of land became available in Pondy, so we decided to buy it and also build a house there. But the moment we came to Auroville, we will live in New Creation."

Reflecting about the work of Auroville International, Satyakam dwells on a specific area of Auroville International's interest, the development of Auroville's International Zone and the creation of the National Pavilions. "There is a lot of discussion going on about this topic. All the European Auroville International centres are in favour of the European plaza idea. We are confident that it can be done."

"This topic is high on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of Auroville International in Auroville. We need to get feedback from the community and get a clear understanding from L'Avenir d'Auroville about the available land and the architectural parameters. With the latest resolution of the UNESCO's Executive Board [see page 2, eds.] which invites the member states to build a pavilion of their country in Auroville's International Zone, fundraising can start. As we will be leaving France for Auroville very soon, the job of contacting the French Government and the European Commission will fall on our successors. But doubtless, from within Auroville, we will continue to be involved."

He then reflects on the role of Auroville in the world. "I have travelled extensively in India and in many places of the world. One can see clearly that this world is not on the right path. Today we face the collapse of the monetary system, the exhaustion of fossil resources on which all our energetic needs are based, ecological disasters, climate change, and wars for the control of energy resources and, soon, we can expect, about water. Also there is a steep rise of all kinds of fundamentalism and nationalism which are other big threats. Each country has developed its own system and is having its own terrible contradictions. All these are human-made problems and conflicts."

"More than fifty years ago, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother had foreseen the difficulties which our planet would be confronted with, and Mother expressed the need to build an ideal city which should be one of the responses to these difficulties, and be a place which gives hope to humanity. It is the only city where the rise of consciousness is central to its existence. Here we have the freedom to build an experimental city respectful of the environment and a place of sharing and unity."

"Auroville has gone through different phases. Forty years have passed with a very slow growth of its population. We cannot keep on staying comfortably in our village surrounded by a forest, when the Earth is in danger. We have been called here for a higher goal. There is now an urgent need to move forward to build the city and attract people of goodwill and competence from around the world who are waiting for the opportunity to come and work in Auroville."

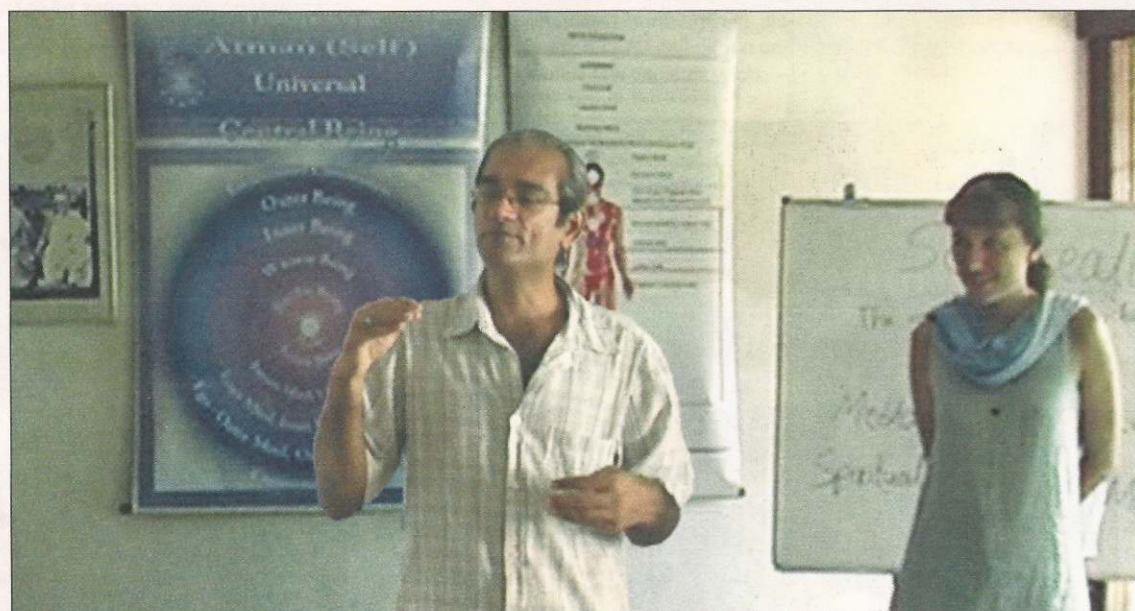
"Devasmita and I consider it a great privilege to be part of this adventure. We are looking forward to becoming practically and physically involved in Auroville's development."

In conversation with Carel

For more info on Enjoy visit www.enjoy-fashion.fr

Offering Inner Work Workshops

Ashesh Joshi speaks about his life in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville, where he now works for the Matrimandir Access Group and offers workshops on Integral Yoga.



Ashesh with Vera at one of the Inner Work workshops

I was born in Baroda in 1966, then brought up in Ahmedabad by deeply religious Brahmin parents. As a child I always felt restless and could never involve myself with school work, but I loved reading. When I became a teenager and left school I was aimless, feeling that I was searching for something beyond the material life. I began to visit ashrams and attend traditional yoga classes and read different philosophies. Eventually, the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother found me and their vision of life touched me very deeply. For over a year I immersed myself in intense reading of their works.

For various reasons, I could only accept the Mother mentally, even though I could understand that her wisdom was unparalleled and embraced all aspects of life. But I could never understand why people addressed her as 'Sweet Mother.' One day, while I was reading one of her books, I glanced at her photograph on my desk and felt a movement there, as if she was looking at me. Then I felt a gentle flow of pulsating vibrations coming from her face and entering my chest, going deeper and deeper, creating a ticklish joy within. I could feel her eyes looking through my eyes and her lips smiling through my lips. I felt that she was emanating waves of Divine Love and Grace that were settling in my heart. Then I knew why she was called 'Sweet Mother.'

I eventually came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at the age of twenty, much to the disappointment of my parents. They somehow felt that the Mother, this Western woman, had 'stolen' their child. However, when my parents came to take me back, my

mother had a series of visions which convinced her of the Mother's divinity; and so they gladly let me stay.

I stayed in the Ashram for eighteen years. It was an unimaginably rich experience. Circumstances there press you inwards and it can sometimes feel very uncomfortable and challenging, but then you grow and that makes life very interesting. I worked in the Ashram dining room for six years and later did software design and helped as a guide in the Ashram Museum.

Three years ago I experienced a strong pull from the outside world. I

prayed to the Mother to guide me and arrange circumstances so that I could follow my inner truth. Then I met Vera, a Russian woman, who was working in the Ashram, and a year later we married in a Hindu ceremony in my old family home in Ahmedabad, which pleased my parents enormously.

Vera and I visited Auroville many times. We fell in love with it and decided to come and live here. We both started working at the Matrimandir; Vera in the Maintenance Team and I in the Access Group which facilitates visits to the Matrimandir. I love receiving visi-

tors and trying to explain Matrimandir to them, though it was often a humbling experience and I was aware of the tremendous responsibility. Being in constant proximity to that glorious building made me very happy. I also gave introductory talks at the Visitors Centre and learned to deal with crowds and to "think on my feet."

It was during these talks that I noticed that many people, especially the young, find it difficult to connect to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. No introduction was offered as to the raison d'être of Auroville.

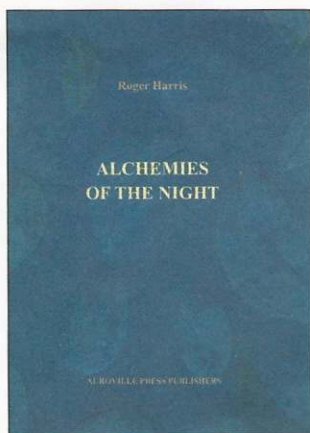
In 2007, I was asked to give talks on Integral Yoga at the Unity Pavilion. The visitors' responses led me to create a series of 'Inner Work Workshops' as I like to call them. I see them as a sort of trigger to direct people in their individual searches, so that they can choose the door by which they could enter the world of Integral Yoga. Shradhdhavan at Savitri Bhavan immediately responded to my request for a room to give lectures.

I am now doing the 14th week and about 12 to 15 guests attend each workshop, with a scattering of supportive Aurovilians. I begin by asking each person what they know of Integral Yoga so I can adapt each talk to them. I use a variety of materials, including charts, powerpoint presentations and films. I try to create a thread running through each presentation, such as "The Psychic Being" and "Aspiration and Surrender." At the end I use visualizations which the participants often find quite powerful. I plan to make short film clips showing different approaches to the yoga. This will take a lot of research, but it is something I love to do.

We are now creating a website - www.integralyoga-Auroville.com - for which my years of graphic design are coming in useful. My 20 years of studying Sri Aurobindo and The Mother gives me the basis to make compilations. In future I would like to do two or three day workshops with richer and fuller offerings. These programmes will continue as long as the inner vision and aspiration is there and is supported by Auroville. One day Auroville will present itself as a 'World University' and I see these programmes as my small offering towards this.

In conversation with Dianna

Alchemies of the Night by Roger Harris



The Auroville poems are the best known. They are high-toned, incantatory, reminding us of the larger dimensions of this dusty plateau in south India:

*This is our home
Born not of earth,
Though part of earth,
But the sky.
Of ethereal wind-swept whisperings
And a race that borders night...*

And then there are the songs of the open road. This is the edgy world of roadside night cafes, of the misfits, the marginalized and the rebels.

*Some men hit the road for love
Some men for a wrong,
And some men that lonesome highway
Is where they sing their song.*

The open road is a hard and unforgiving place. However, it is also a place of revelation, of visions not granted to those who choose the safeties of the daily round:

*And there is a song on the highway Lord
That has no human tune,
A song heard seldom but by a few
Under the cold new moon.
A song of terror a song of hope
A song of freedom dire,
That gives to those who will not tire
Lost eyes of gypsy fire.*

And then there are Roger's more intimate poems, many of which are catalysed by the memories of his beloved Sophie, who died in 1987. At first reading, the predominant feeling in these poems is one of loss and of desolation, of a melancholic lyricism:

*I'm staring at the altar
Of our last embrace
And everywhere I go
I always see your face.*

Yet even in the darkest of these poems there are hints of something else: of a way through, beyond, the darkness and grief:

*But tonight we will ride,
We will cross the great divide
We will let our dreams decide
We will let our dreams decide.*

As in the road poems, the anguish, the loss, opens the way to something else.

*As through my midnight darkness
Angel voices glide.*

In Roger's poetry, the night seems at times to be a dark night of the soul, deepening the vessel and preparing it for a spiritual dawn. But it is also the realm of mystic fire, alchemy, transformation; of Dionysian ecstasies. In his earlier poems the influence seems to be predominantly Celtic-mystical, mediated through poets like Yeats and Robert Graves. But India seemed to have deepened Roger's understanding of the mystical marriage of darkness and light, of violence and love.

*O dark and holy mother,
Who dances through Bengal,
A rapture is your presence
Compelling is your call.
Your laughter harsh and vehement
With joy cuts through our cares,
Your eyes shot with frenzy
In maddest pity stare...*



Roger signs a copy of his book for Nele at the Pavilion for Tibetan Culture.

It's dangerous to try to read too much into the ordering of the poems: not all the poems in this collection are dated, so it is impossible to ascertain the full chronology.

However, it is tempting to read the final poems as representing a new kind of poise. For example, one of the final poems, *Untitled III*, breathes an assurance, a largeness of vision wedded to psychic sweetness, which is almost Aurobindonian.

*Inheritors of love's sweetness
We shall bear the Gods' delight,
As sun-white footsteps greet us
On a verge of inner sight.*

And in *Auroville*, the final poem of the collection, the sense of longing and of loss inherent in many of the Sophie poems is now replaced by an awareness

*That when we strive to hold we break
Falling upon the barren canyon rocks,
Until, releasing all, we are one again,*

*As laughter lights or eyes
And joy does fill our breast,
As if by an unseen hand caressed
As if by some great presence blessed.*

The poet Robert Graves, a major influence upon Roger, believed that poets had a high mission: to "safeguard our poetic intuitions against the encroachments of mechanized, insensate, inhumane, abstract rationality." In this, he associated himself with an honourable tradition, stretching back via Yeats, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Blake to the seer-poets of antiquity, the 'maddened ones' to whom the gods spoke. To read Roger is to be reminded of this tradition, of those who sing the 'high notes', recalling us to the great verities – love, fate, death...and what lies beyond.

Alan
Alchemies of the Night. Published by Auroville Press, 2009. Available in Auroville bookshops, Rs 110, and from Auroville.com

POPULATION STATISTICS

Population inching up

| Comparative overview by nationality | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Nationality | Aug. 04 | Nov. 05 | Nov. 06 | Nov. 07 | Nov. 08 | Nov. 09 |
| Indian | 686 | 736 | 760 | 799 | 876 | 918 |
| French | 300 | 261 | 279 | 290 | 303 | 323 |
| German | 245 | 226 | 232 | 226 | 228 | 242 |
| Italian | 82 | 85 | 89 | 93 | 100 | 111 |
| Dutch | 84 | 77 | 75 | 83 | 78 | 81 |
| American | 62 | 61 | 65 | 67 | 70 | 80 |
| Swiss | 42 | 42 | 50 | 53 | 52 | 53 |
| Russian | 36 | 40 | 41 | 45 | 46 | 52 |
| British | 53 | 50 | 51 | 45 | 49 | 47 |
| Spanish | 32 | 30 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 36 |
| Korean | 25 | 20 | 25 | 19 | 24 | 31 |
| Israeli | 13 | 16 | 21 | 28 | 23 | 27 |
| Swedish | 14 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 24 |
| Canadian | 25 | 23 | 23 | 24 | 23 | 23 |
| Belgian | 24 | 17 | 19 | 19 | 18 | 19 |
| Ukrainian | 17 | 15 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 15 |
| Australian | 13 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 13 |
| Austrian | 7 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| Argentinian | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Sloven | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| Hungarian | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| South African | 2 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Tibetan | 3 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Ethiopian | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Japanese | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Nepali | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Sri Lankan | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Belorussian | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Brazilian | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Danish | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Taiwan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Bulgarian | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Colombian | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Iceland | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Irish | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Latvian | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Algerian | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Kazakh | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Lithuanian | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| New Zealander | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Thai | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Moldovian | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Norwegian | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Portuguese | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Finnish | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 1803 | 1783 | 1865 | 1935 | 2044 | 2184 |

Perhaps the most significant statistic is that the Auroville population is inching up to the 2200 mark. By November 1st, 2009, the numbers had reached 2184, a growth of 6.8% as compared to 5.3% a year ago.

There are now 45 nations represented, with Taiwan and China being the new entrants, while Finland is no longer represented. The largest increase, as in the previous years, has been in the Indian population: 42.

The Indians now account for 42% of Auroville's population, similar as last year.

Auroville population adults and minors by gender

| | Aug. 04 | Nov. 05 | Nov. 06 | Nov. 07 | Nov. 08 | Nov. 09 |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Adults | 1390 | 1370 | 1464 | 1489 | 1587 | 1704 |
| males | 741 | 728 | 786 | 788 | 836 | 890 |
| females | 649 | 642 | 678 | 701 | 751 | 814 |
| Minors (< 18 years) | 413 | 413 | 401 | 451 | 458 | 480 |
| males | 221 | 220 | 215 | 233 | 243 | 262 |
| females | 192 | 193 | 186 | 218 | 215 | 218 |
| Total | 1803 | 1783 | 1865 | 1936 | 2045 | 2184 |

The French and Germans remain at second and third place at 15% and 11% respectively. The population of Italian, American, Russian, Korean and Swedish nationals shows a steady increase, while the British are still not back

to their 2005 level. Most other nationalities recorded relatively unchanged figures.

The male/female ratio of 48% females to 52% males is virtually unchanged from last year. The ratio is similar for adults and minors.

PASSING



Jan Lohman

Jan Lohman

Dutch Auroville International member Jan Lohman left his body on November 3rd. He was 81 years old. Jan was hospitalised after suffering a minor accident. Instead of agreeing to being operated, he stated that it was his time to go. He soon left his body, fully conscious, surrounded by his family.

Jan, who was a nephew of late Aurovilian Ruud Lohman, came from a strict Roman Catholic background. In his youth he joined the Benedictine order, but he soon realised that his calling was elsewhere. Through the subsequent years he painstakingly disentangled himself from the dogmas with which he had grown up and managed to come to openness required to receive Sri Aurobindo's message.

Jan was an active member of Auroville International The Netherlands for many years. He was also the board member of Stichting Aurofonds, a foundation that since the eighties has been publishing books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Netherlands. For Auroville Today, Jan maintained the index of all published articles. He also did translations of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's works and wrote articles on aspects of Auroville, such as on the International Zone (see page 3). He was especially devoted to *Savitri*. In Auroville, which he visited yearly, he supported in particular the Matrimandir, the Unity Pavilion and Aikiyam School.

During the meeting of Auroville International in the Netherlands this year, Jan was publicly lauded and thanked for all his services to Auroville and Auroville International.

Jan left all his estate to be used for projects in Auroville.

For three days in October, Elliot's Beach in Chennai saw ten teams from all over India playing *Ultimate* by day and night on flood-lit fields. At the end of the tournament, the coveted *SOTG* or the 'Spirit of the Game' award was presented to the Auroville Ultimate team.

Coren, the team's captain, and a newcomer from the USA, explains: "The Spirit of the Game award is given to the team that best embodies the ideals of the game. After every match, each team evaluates the opposing team's performance and spirit – how well they understood the game, how much respect and fairness they played with and how that spirit felt compared to their own."

Ultimate is a non-contact team sport played with a 175 gram flying plastic disc, similar to a frisbee. Attributed to high school students David Leiwant and Joel Silver, the game was born in 1969 in a school parking of New Jersey, USA. The object of the sport is to score points by passing the disc to a player in the opposite end zone, as in American football. Originally called *Ultimate Frisbee*, the sport was renamed *Ultimate* because 'Frisbee' is the trademark for the line of discs. There are more than 4.9 million players in the US alone.

"*Ultimate* is a sport of the future, and fits very well in Auroville," says Coren. "For one, both men and women play side by side. Plus there are no referees in the game. Each player takes up that responsibility and a foul gets called by the players themselves. So the quality of sportsmanship of a team and fair play is valued more than winning."

"For the most part it works," says Coren. He recalls his experience playing *Ultimate* at university in the US: "There were always some

The Ultimate sport experience



The Auroville Ultimate team

teams who were more aggressive – getting angry at themselves, or angry at their own team members or at other players. But they stood out... Or if there was one player who was particularly aggressive, you could feel that person's presence. It was like a red flag on the field. It was like – whoa! – you're taking it far too seriously!"

Ultimate was first introduced in Auroville seven years ago at Deepanam School. Aurevan,

then 13-years old remembers. "A French guest brought the game to us. He was a friend of one of the kids' parents and started teaching us all kinds of things – there was juggling, and *Ultimate*. When he left, he presented us this beautiful disc with a dog on it which we kept playing with for a long time – until the disc, the only good one, had broken as we had stepped on it so many times!"

In March this year, *Ultimate* got reintroduced to Auroville by an American guest named Mark. "It slowly grew over the summer," says Coren, "and it was going to the tournament that galvanized us as a team. Earlier, we were playing once a week, but now we meet more often, and the game really feels anchored."

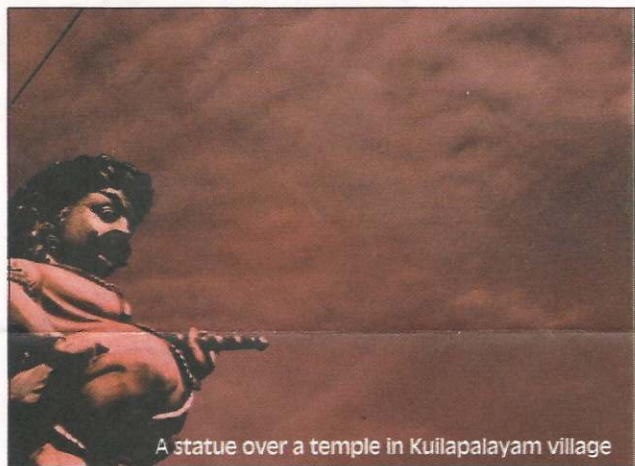
Coren believes that playing *Ultimate* gives people a chance to practise the principles of Auroville. He explains: "In Auroville, every one is aspiring towards human unity. And in the game, we're a team of old and young, guests, and newcomers and Aurovilians, Indian and Non-Indian, men and women – it's a whole range of people. And to be in a diverse group and feeling that we can move beyond the atmosphere of competition is very liberating."

"Auroville can be quite a challenging place to live on many levels," he says. "And I feel it is very important to maintain a balance between sincere aspiration for a new way of living, and reminding ourselves to not take it all too seriously. And then to cultivate those activities and experiences which are just about joy."

Saturday eve Certitude Sports grounds: it is close to dusk and the light is fading fast. Fluorescent green cones mark the boundaries of the large playing field. Joyful cries are heard as runners criss-cross the red expanse chasing after a dusty white disc. It is the Auroville Ultimates in their last stretch of this week's game.

Excerpts from Auroville Radio and in conversation with Priya Sundaravalli

REFLECTIONS



A statue over a temple in Kuilapalayam village

Psychic Gibbons

A newcomer looks at life in Auroville.

The first impressions of living this divine realization were quite bland to be honest. For the untrained eye, one cannot really distinguish the difference in intention between tourists with dreadlocks hanging out at any Manali/Goa café, versus those similar-looking blokes lurking about the entry road to Auroville. Alas, it seemed to be just another collage of Shiva t-shirts, branded by a huddle of masses that not too long ago wore the Che Guevara equivalent, prior to their first psychedelically-induced spiritual epiphany. Endless opportunities for spending divine cash, cafeterias, boutiques, a cyber café with rates three times higher than normal, surely this must have been some sort of infestation.

So approaching the Visitors Centre bookshop, the plan now was to buy a nice collection of the Master's works, and go read them under a tree somewhere. If one is urged to spend, one might as well do so in an appropriate direction. Surprisingly, the rather poorly-versed lady behind the counter had to check in some computer log, to search for what I had requested, as if selling something Sri Aurobindo wrote was a rare event. Not to mention that the first three compilations I inquired for were met with a polite "Saari sir, no *staak*. Book *ille*", shaking her head apologetically.

The city for a never-aging youth had not one copy of "The Gita for the Youth", a beautifully-compiled selection of the Master's essays on the Gita. It was a book that I read years ago, the one that drew me to Auroville in the first place. Round the corner at the boutiques, all conceivable products to bathe, smell good, look cool, feel hip and jazz up any aspect of life were pouring off the shelves. Somehow hand-made trinkets with eco this and sustainability that catchwords were deemed more

essential to furthering human unity, in this radical place where money would no longer be sovereign lord.

Knowing that there must be something more to the scene than what I initially inferred, I decided to stay, probe further, and dig deeper. After all, I had come already deciding to stay, and a little commercial startle was not about to waver resolve. Next on the agenda was finding a place to stay. This should have been easy enough. Obviously a place that seeks vibrant enthusiastic youthful energy has plenty of hostel-type accommodation facilities. After all we come as volunteers, and render service.

More grim news hurled forth when I learned that since this particular youth was technically not a student, being given residence in the few existing hostels was disallowed. The only alternative lodging was at one of the dozens of guesthouses, all of which had exorbitant rent tariffs on a daily basis, double or triple their Ashram-related equivalents in Pondicherry; unfeasible especially to one planning on staying the long haul. As usual an interesting twist of fate granted the possibility for an 'under the counter' deal with an Aurovilian, offering to rent out her out-house at a price marginally less than average guest facility rates. Fair enough, like they say, beggars can't be choosers.

Over and above this rather expensive monthly rental, it was soon brought to my notice that a monthly guest contribution also had to be coughed up, for somebody has to pay for all the free facilities everywhere. Things were starting to get a little strained now, for having just gotten into professional life prior to this, there were not that many personal assets to fall back on.

What with administrative facilities in one direction, groceries in a diametrically-opposite one, office somewhere else off course, Auroville planning was evidently discriminatory towards those without personalized vehicles. In those initial days of ideological bliss, before I was run off the roads a couple of times by intolerant truckers, cycling became the thing. Soon though, it had to be a motorcycle, which involved rental as well as fuel. At this point, Dad had to be intimidated for further support, but things were wearing thin. The entry process was initiated, and a scrutinizing interview as to ones intentions and reasons for arriving on the scene took place with some level of ease. Thereafter newcomer status was accorded after six months or so. By the end of which, of course, I was flat broke, having used up every last penny scraped together through city living. Here, in this city the future needs, where money is no longer sovereign lord.

It has since been over a year and a half now and this scribble is just the tip of the iceberg of serious conflicting observations. Every conversation initiated to address this situation is inevitably met with the same heaving sighs of unfortunate helplessness because, after all, it is all just one big experiment, right? And what I obviously do not understand owing to my inexperience is that everything takes time...and those who came "at the beginning" had it far worse. Sure. But that really is no excuse for setting up a system where it is virtually impossible for people of goodwill to come forward and participate and contribute.

What can be noticed is that the structure currently in place targets and enables the influx of a very specific profile of person while those who simply cannot afford to invest so much, monetarily, at an early stage of life and have no inflated personal assets to donate are inevitably marginalized, if not obstructed all together. I have much to be grateful for because, by some stroke of luck, not only can my family afford this endeavour of mine, but their three generation long relationship with the Pondicherry Ashram helps them understand why a person like me would want to be here in the first place.

Others may not be so lucky. Spare a thought here in this pseudo-cashless society, let's cut back on trying to make money off potential newcomers to Auroville, and embrace them for the energy they have to offer, for the new ideas, perspectives, vibrations and love they may bring.

Ranjeet

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Winter monsoon arrives on time



A refreshing soak for a girl and her pony in a pond in Auroville's greenbelt.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs 2,000 equivalent
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