

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Master Plan and new Governing Board .....1

"Pleased to meet you" ....2, 3  
Interviews with some new members of the Governing Board, and a talk

Open Page .....4, 5  
The present state of Auroville: four viewpoints

Lakshmi goes to school ....6  
A visit from a temple elephant

Brief News Page .....7

Stories of Light .....8

## NEW GOVERNING BOARD MEETS

Auroville has a new Governing Board. The Board visited Auroville over the weekend of the 14th-15th August to hold their meeting, to meet work groups, visit schools and generally interact with the community. Two of the new members also gave talks under the aegis of the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity.

The members are:

**Dr. Kireet Joshi**, Chairman of the Governing Board as well as the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation. He was Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in the Ashram and, in 1976, was made special adviser to the Government on Education. He has played a key part in the protection and development of Auroville. (See our June issue for a more detailed profile)

**Dr. D.P. Chattopadhyaya**. The foremost philosopher in India today, he is, among other things, the author of a comparative study of Sri Aurobindo and Karl Marx. He has been Union Minister of Health and Commerce and Governor of Rajasthan. At present he is Chairman of the Centre of Studies of Civilisations and Chief Editor of 50 volumes entitled *History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture*.

**Dr. L.M.Singhvi**, one of the luminaries of jurisprudence and law, scholar of Indology, Political Science, International Affairs and staunch defender of Sanskrit in the Indian curriculum. He is one of the most senior advocates of the Supreme Court of India and is currently a member of the Raja Sabha. Until recently he was the Indian High Commissioner to the U.K. where he was instrumental in getting twenty statues of Sri Aurobindo installed, including one in King's College,

# Master Plan Ratified

An important step has been taken towards consolidating the basis for the development of the city

On 28th July, an overwhelming majority at a Residents' Assembly ratified a first phase Master Plan—or land use plan—for Auroville. A task force of Aurovilians will present the document to the authorities at the local and district levels. The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan document (which also refers briefly to Partnership Plans for the immediate and the larger bioregion) will now be submitted to the Governing Board for their formal ratification. Once this is given it becomes an official document and the relevant authorities can be approached to prevent land speculation and unwanted development.

The Master Plan document, which does not go into any great detail regarding development strategies but delineates three separate planning areas, has been worked on intensively, and it has also benefitted from the advice of professional town planners.

## Interesting aspects of the new plan

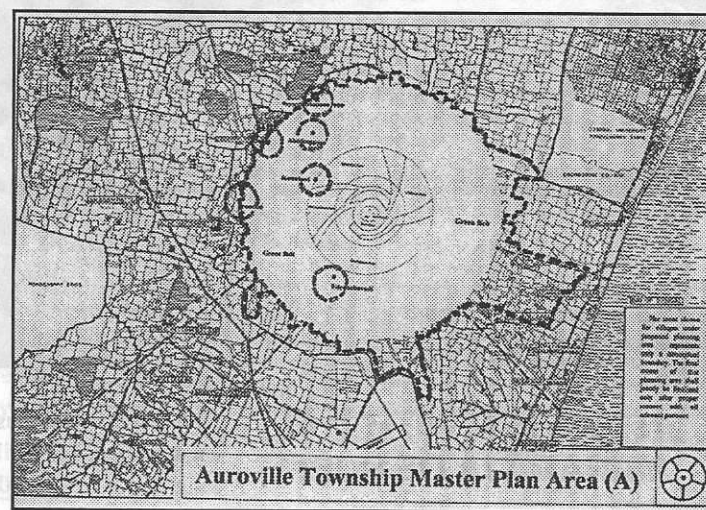
The new master plan has a number of interesting aspects. For example, for the first time the Green Belt is defined in terms of ground realities—ie actual plot boundaries—rather than by a perfect circle drawn upon a map. There is also a reference to Partnership Plans for the larger bioregion, whereby Auroville offers to collaborate

with the villagers and Government planning authorities to manage optimally the economic and environmental resources of the larger region in terms of sustainable development. This is innovative as town plans do not normally consider this larger dimension. It is also interesting to learn that, over the past 31

years, Auroville has created assets valued at over Rs 500 crores (US \$115 million), and that the projected infrastructural development of the township over the next ten years is estimated at Rs.200 crores (US \$47 million).

## Achievements and further explorations

Because this is not a detailed study there are still many issues to be worked out. These include exploring with the five villages located within the Auroville township area how they would like to develop, and exactly what role Auroville will—or can—play in the development of the larger bioregion.



## THE GOVERNING BOARD ON THE MASTER PLAN

The Governing Board at its meeting on 14th August appreciated the concept of the Master Plan of Auroville. But they felt that they needed to consult eminent town-planning authorities at the state and national levels before formally approving of the Master Plan.

The Governing Board however recognized the urgent need of protecting the Auroville area against unwanted development. They laid down that active steps be taken to

(continued on page 5)



Members of the Governing Board at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. From left: Dr. Kireet Joshi, Dr. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Dr. L.M.Singhvi, Dr. Subhash Kashyap, Mr. D.P.Singh, Shri Gajapati Maharaja Dibyasingha Deb of Puri, Jyoti Madhok. Not in the picture is Mr. Roger Anger.

Cambridge, where Sri Aurobindo had studied.

**Dr. Subhash Kashyap** held the post of Cabinet Secretary to the Government of India and for 37 years was Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha. He is one of the foremost interpreters of Constitutional Law and has written a number of books on political thought, constitutional law and parliamentary procedures, and on education. Until recently he was editor of the magazine *Politics*, and currently is President of the National Foundation of Awakening.

**Shri Gajapati Maharaja Dibyasingha Deb** of

Puri, descendant of the Maharajas of Puri who are traditionally the servants of Sri Krishna, who is enshrined in the famous temple of Jagannath. A student of Law and Political Science his main focus is spirituality. He is very active in his native Orissa in supporting efforts to bring about a spiritual reawakening.

**Roger Anger**, Chief Architect of Auroville, appointed by the Mother.

**Jyoti Madhok**, sister of an Aurovillian and a great friend and supporter of Auroville in Delhi for over 25 years.

**Mr. D.P.Singh**, I.A.S. officer, in charge of the UNESCO division in the Department of Education of the Ministry for Human Resource Development, Government of India. He is the official representative from the Department of Education to the Governing Board.

(Mr. Sasish Karma, Director of Finance in the Ministry of Human Resource Development, also attended the meeting as a special invitee in the absence of the Financial Adviser from the Ministry of Human Resource Development.)

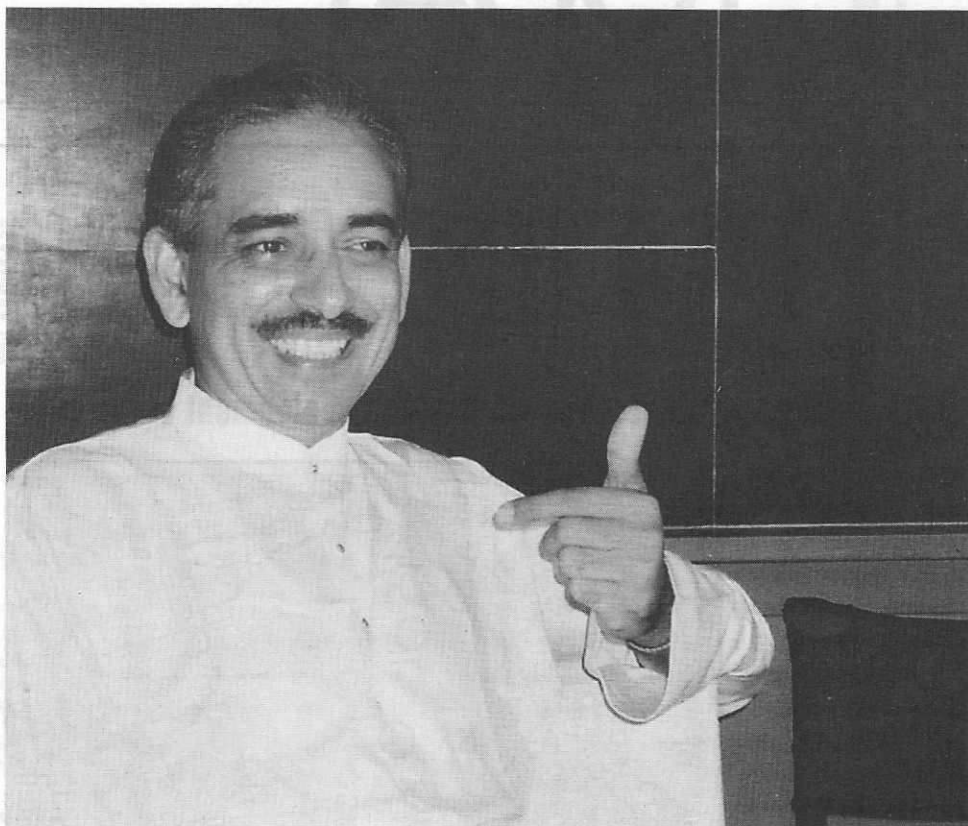
(More on pages 2 and 3)

PHOTO: CAREL



# "Pleased to meet you"

## Interviews with some members of the new Governing Board



### INTERVIEW WITH THE MAHARAJA OF PURI

**Auroville Today:** While we have had Dr. Karan Singh, a Yuvaraj (Crown Prince), as Chairman, you are the first Maharaja to serve on the Governing Board. Could you say a few words about monarchy as it existed in Orissa?

**The Maharaja:** The present state of Orissa once formed a much larger empire, Kalinga, which stretched along the Coromandel coast. But by tradition, the king was not so much a ruler as a servant of the

Divine. Puri is famous for the temple of Lord Jagannath and as a pilgrimage spot. And the king is a servitor of the temple. So much so that as a mark of his servitude, every year, during Ratha-Jatra, the Chariot-Festival of Orissa, the king sweeps the chariot of the Lord. The ancient Maharajas of Orissa formally proclaimed in their ordinances that the Lord is the ruler and that we are all his servants. While this concept is alien to the Western mind, it is obvious to the Indian mind. Lord Jagannath is the lord of the whole universe. The word Jagannath is a conjunction of two words: "Jagat" meaning the entire

creation (past, present and future) and "Nath" meaning Lord. So if someone who is the ruler of the entire universe, and you house him in a temple in an empire, would you then not regard him as the ruler of that empire?

In Orissa, as elsewhere in India, it is not a case of the divine right of kingship, but the divine duty of kingship. India is the country where the Divine was glorified. Whether it was the king or the peasant, the ideal was to have communion with that Godhead, with the Supreme, each in his or her own activity: the king at his seat of administration, the farmer in his field, the housewife at her household duties. This was the great heritage of our ancient culture and this was represented in the kingship. The king, at the apex of the social structure, was the first servitor of the Lord and had to set an example to the people by his actions.

**"I have taken it as my duty to the Lord to serve wherever there is any religious or spiritual endeavour."**

**AVT:** This is your first visit to Auroville. What are your impressions?

**The Maharaja:** I knew nothing about Auroville. I had very little acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo's writings but none with the Mother's. Then one day, to my utter surprise, I got this notification from the Government of India to serve on the Governing Board of Auroville. I mentioned my predicament to the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Kireet Joshi, over the phone, and he said he would come to Bhubaneswar specifically to explain to me what Auroville was all about. And I must say that what Dr. Joshi gave to me to understand and the picture I mentally

conceived of Auroville was in fact what I have witnessed here. I am seeing what I expected, an experiment. An experiment that has perhaps never been attempted before, and an experiment which, if successful, can perhaps save humanity. Since my notification, I have read whatever I could find on Auroville. And in the course of my reading, it dawned upon me that this is what humanity has been looking for. This is the only experiment in the world that holds a complete and absolute solution to all of mankind's problems. There is no other alternative. We either evolve or perish and Auroville could play a crucial role in this context.

**AVT:** What role do you envisage playing in the Governing Board?

**The Maharaja:** I assumed my duty as an order from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And my role is what my role has always been—serving the Lord. Spirituality is an important aspect of society, but I feel it has been neglected in the modern age due to the force of materialism. So, I have taken it as my duty to the Lord to serve wherever there is any religious or spiritual endeavour.

If Auroville is focussed only upon town planning, or building an ideal environment for living, then I am not interested. But if your aspirations, if your efforts, are centred towards building the ideal human being that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted, then I am interested in serving you.

*Interview by Roger*

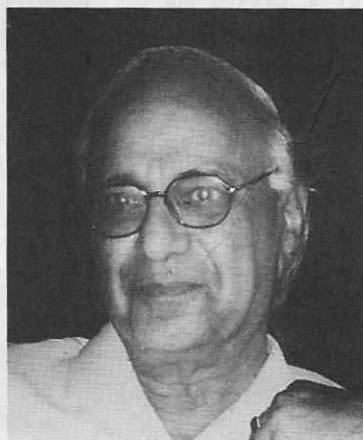
### INTERVIEW WITH DR. SUBHASH KASHYAP

**Auroville Today:** You have written about Sri Aurobindo. What aspect of his work is of particular interest to you?

**Dr. Kashyap:** "I first encountered Sri Aurobindo's writings as an undergraduate nearly 50 years ago. Later, I studied *The Life Divine* as a Ph.D. student when studying the political thought of Nietzsche and his influence on contemporary thought. At the beginning my interest in Sri Aurobindo was academic, more on an intellectual, philosophical plane. Actually, I don't know if, over the years, this has changed because I'm not a practitioner of integral yoga. But I have been influenced by Sri Aurobindo's writings. For example, I've been crusading for many years for some fundamental, systemic changes to take place in the Indian polity, and my ideas in this matter come very close to Sri Aurobindo's as he expressed them in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*."

**AVT:** How did you come onto the Governing Board?

**Dr. Kashyap:** Unfortunately, I was not



asked. When a copy of the notification from the Government came to me my initial reaction was to say "no" because, as a matter of principle, I think you should be asked in advance if you wish to take up a work. But because Kireet-bhai was the Chairman of the

Board I just couldn't refuse!

**AVT:** This is the second time you have visited Auroville. What were your impressions?

**Dr. Kashyap:** It's a miracle the way that Auroville has developed. It needs to be known more widely. What you have achieved here—for example, in turning barren land into green pastures—is relevant not only to India but to the whole world. But you can also become an inspiration in other fields. If Auroville can evolve a new form of governance and society it can be a model for the world. But it has to be based upon spiritualizing the material, materializing the spiritual, and then transcending both into a higher unity. I think that is the biggest challenge.

*(continued on page 3, col.4)*

### DR. D.P.CHATTOPADHYAYA

**"My** role in the Governing Board is very incidental to what I have been doing in my very humble way for the last few decades - to understand the seminal works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. I have read books of Sri Aurobindo since boyhood, and every time I read them they disclose many hidden layers of their meaning

I come here as a member of the Governing Board, but this description of my role is not very attractive to me. I am just one of you now, striving to assist in the realisation of something which Mother willed. And when great persons will something, to execute it is extremely difficult. What she willed, if I understand it correctly, is integration. Integration of humans with humans, of races with races, of humans with living environment, of the human with the divine.

This land is not a geological territory; it is imbued with a spirit of its own. Sri Aurobindo used to speak of a nation soul. Every bit of territory has its soul. The people who have decided to leave behind the glitter of the modern world and gather here in Auroville are the chosen few of a dispersed chosen race, destined to be divine—maybe in a hundred years, or to recall Mother, maybe a thousand years. If we as members of the Governing Board can do anything to help, we will not so much be helping you as serving a great, vast cause with which destiny has associated us."

*(On the evening of 15th August, Professor Chattopadhyaya gave a talk entitled 'Sri Aurobindo and the Curve of Polity'. His thesis was that "Sri Aurobindo's theory of the relation between mind, society and the state, and its future dissolution is an integral vision of the ascending forms of human unification leading to what he called 'spiritual anarchism'".)*





## The decline of discourse

### The progressive compartmentalization of Auroville

One sign of a healthy society is a healthy level of discourse, debate and discussion among its members. One of the trends in Auroville today, I believe, is a decline in community-wide discussion on issues of common interest. An important factor here is that various individuals and groups no longer choose to inhabit the public domain. This, among other things, implies putting reports of their activities in the *Auroville News* or the AVNet and attending general meetings. Instead, they prefer to conduct their business and make their decisions behind closed doors and without reference to the larger community.

Partly, no doubt, this is a consequence of the increasing size, complexity and specialization of Auroville society; partly it is due to the crudity of our communication process where personal attacks and character assassination continue to be tolerated. But it also stems from other factors. From a feeling on the part of some individuals and groups, for example, that it is pointless and time-wasting to discuss issues with people who don't have sufficient knowledge to understand what is going on; from a fear that other individuals or groups are trying to control them for their own purposes; from the belief that Auroville

is no longer a coherent community... so to whom should one refer?

None of these points can be dismissed out of hand. What needs to be borne in mind, however, is the effect of this withdrawal of key groups and individuals from the larger process. For it creates a vacuum which is rapidly filled up by rumours, half-truths and accusations, fostering a general sense of insecurity on all sides which merely builds the dividing walls higher. The progressive compartmentalization of Auroville, the fact that we know less and less about what is happening in more and more areas, and that we rarely sit down any longer to discuss controversial matters with Aurovilians of radically different persuasions, reduces the area of our daily discourse and subtly narrows our thinking. By remaining apart, we're losing the possibility of surprising and inspiring each other, and this used to be one of our great motors for change.

There are other reasons why the area of public discourse in Auroville is being narrowed down. One particularly potent one is the fear felt by some non-Indian Aurovilians that they will receive Quit Notices if they express themselves in a manner which can be construed as anti-government or as disloyal to India. Another, related, reason is the diffi-

culty of raising certain issues in a community where national chauvinism and the legacies of colonialism continue to exert a surprising influence.

Of course, barring exceptions like the process being followed at present for ratification of the Land Use Plan, Auroville has never been an open communication society; there have always been groups and individuals who have chosen not to communicate with others just as there have always been constraints—some genuine, some self-imposed—upon what can be expressed in the public sphere. What is particularly worrying now is the extent to which the decision not to communicate seems based upon the feeling

that others lack the right consciousness or understanding of what Auroville is really about. For this reinforces the tendency of an individual or group to consider only one view, to define the true Auroville in narrower and narrower terms, and to ignore or seek to eliminate all challenges to this viewpoint.

To talk, to discourse, does not necessarily mean to agree. But it does imply a basic respect for others, and a willingness to concede that each of us, at times, may only possess a fragment of the truth and that we need help to grasp the full picture. In this sense, any threat to the expression of a diversity of viewpoints is a threat to us all.

Alan

## Where is the City of Joy?

### Let's take time to create moments of celebration...

I find Auroville a little tense these days. So many expectations, so much work, so little support and a lot of fear. There is so much to do. Like someone said at a meeting the other day, "It is better to take the first step. Don't try to see the whole picture. Just look at what can be done today." But somehow, I often lower my expectations, because I have been disappointed before—I am more cautious, perhaps, more realistic (whatever that means). Because realism in the pursuit of a dream is like a stone around your neck—you want to reach higher, swim further, but you feel like you're swimming against the current. The sense of progress can be seen more in our attempts at building, at planting trees, creating structures. Many people say this is the first phase—we are still in the first phase. Putting down our roots. Creating infrastructure.

We artists are ready to make our leaps—in music and art new shapes, new forms, new sounds are happening. It is perhaps in our inter-personal relationships that many of us are still stuck in the mud. We can't unglue ourselves from our egos. We are not a "detached" people. We are passionate, bloody argumentative, unreasonable, unsophisticated—dreamers. We love to look at sunsets and hear the laughter of children. We run out to watch the setting sun paint the sky rose and violet. We are affected by the full moon and the vast sky of stars. Sometimes we feel small, alone and afraid.

Afraid of what? Am I afraid of this century passing me by? Afraid of getting older. Afraid I made the wrong choice to come to this small, small place on the map, this

remote corner of the world. I have nagging doubts of the "what am I doing here" variety. Underneath the disagreements over aesthetics and the power struggles is the vulnerability of being insecure in our destiny. I try to keep my connection to Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I place their images everywhere for inspiration, for love. There is a need to know I am loved for what I am doing. What I am attempting to do.

How to cope?

Some things seem obvious. When we get together and share our fears, they become less scary. When you get more 'thank you's and encouragement for doing good, you work more happily, more securely. When you are not continually being judged for your failures, but encouraged for your successes, you progress. Not only the adults, but also the children. We are so busy building a city, some of us forget the very necessary role of parent, one who helps the child build character through kindness, but also through right action, clear thinking, honesty, generosity. Not as principles to be spoken of and put away, but as something you live.

There are a few who take time to create moments of celebration. Everyone should be participating. Creating moments of joy, of good spirits and goodwill. People need time to let go of roles, and simply be together. We are a community of labels—workers, supervisors, managers—but this can also get pretty isolating. We create our own isolation, instead of community. Spontaneous celebrations, saying thanks for work well done—smiling. Aren't we happy to be here together?

Jill

## Welcome!

There have been a number of community-wide happenings and calls for new initiatives recently. There was an open forum on the Auroville economy. There were meetings and seminars around the drawing up of a Master Plan to secure the land, and feedback has been solicited from the whole community on a proposal from the Representatives Group for a new decision-making process. Underlying these topics is the question of what kind of community we are living in and how we would like it to develop. Are we agreed upon our goals? Are we satisfied with our progress so far? Or do we see ourselves as a society that has not yet created the structures needed to manifest our ideals? What should we be concentrating upon, and what practical steps can take us closer to our ideal?

Four of our regular writers give their own points of view on these pages, and with these contributions we wish to initiate an open discussion in *Auroville Today*, on Auroville's present situation and the future pathways we may wish to take. We welcome your participation, be it from within Auroville or from outside, in our future issues!

## The Citizen Factor

### Wanted: volunteers for civic duty!

Rumours breed in a vacuum, therefore the need for information sharing between key working groups and the community at large is essential. This sharing of information can help break down barriers of distrust and prejudice that presently exist, link our semi-independent working groups, and help foster a sense of participation and involvement by concerned members of the community in all aspects of its affairs. Communication, consultation and participation are key elements to help unblock or focus our collective energy. The lack of information sharing by certain working groups only helps create the impression that they are self-appointed conclaves with hidden agendas, no mandate, and, it goes without saying, no interest in being answerable to the community at large. If trust and responsibility are invested in those in charge of our different areas of activities, and with it a large degree of freedom and lack of interference, this trust must be reciprocated by a certain degree of transparency and clarity, and at least a willingness to communicate with the rest of the community.

As the population of Auroville grows we are faced with the challenge of coming up with new ways of consultation in our decision making process, as for many, large meetings are felt to have become impractical forums for the discussion of an issue. Although democracy is disparaged by some in the community, I nonetheless feel that the

consultative element of it is essential, particularly in the early parts of our decision making process. A healthy, even exhaustive, debate should be held, and even rage, on any controversial topic so that all points of view be given the chance to express themselves and be taken into account, before the wisest decision is hopefully agreed upon, not just by a few, but even—and why not?—a majority. It is the idea and not its proponent that counts; however, in our fora of discussion—ranging from semi-representative working groups to general meetings—issues frequently become personalised and charged with a reactive emotional atmosphere, hardly conducive to reflection or informed debate.

The present idea of a representative body based primarily on working group representation (the Reps Group) is a concept which, except for certain groups with specific areas of focus such as the F.A.M.C., I find somewhat artificial. In order to refine our process of consultation, debate should take many forms—referendums, surveys, smaller discussion groups, on-line discussions etc. It is up to us to be creative and original here so that the chance is given for all voices to be heard, which is something that would not normally happen in a general meeting, unless it carried on for two weeks. In the interests of a participatory polity and decision-making process that works, I would suggest the creation of an annual, or bi-annual, "voluntary citizen's roster"—and I use the word "cit-

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# Random thoughts of an insomniac

There is simply no time to rest on our laurels and appreciate ourselves...

It is 11 p.m. on a Saturday night and I can't sleep. No, I am not out partying in the full moon as some of my friends are. I am tired and have been wanting to sleep for the last three hours but I still feel stressed... and my mind is on overdrive ruminating over all the issues that I have got involved in.

Apart from my responsibilities at Auroville Today and the Village Action Group, I had volunteered to help out the Development and Planning Groups in seeking protection for the land of Auroville. And before I knew it, I was caught amidst a flurry of faxes, telephone calls, innumerable letters and lists, trying to organize a high-level seminar in Auroville. This week I have clocked nine to ten hours of work every day.

I have put in the same hours of work or even more in the West without getting stressed. But there I used to be ensconced in an air-conditioned office, guzzling the caffeine out of cokes to drive me on. Here, the heat, the humidity, and the fact you are always expected to do the yoga which, to me, often translates into remaining patient and good-willed towards others, stresses me out.

This is one of the factors that distinguish Auroville from the ordinary world. Being an Aurovilian is a full-time job. The day does

not start at 8 a.m and end at 5 p.m. Even on my lunch-breaks or over dinner at the Coffeeshop (which I am forced to frequent as I do not have the time to pick up groceries at Pour Tous), I get into discussions with friends as to what needs to be done for Auroville. Links are made, contacts established and another project for Auroville materializes.

I think it is because we are aware of how much work needs to be done to build the city, that we are not a society that is prone towards celebration. There is simply no time to rest on our laurels and appreciate ourselves. There is simply too much to be done, both at the inner and outer level. The dream of Auroville drives us on... relentlessly.

I prow around my apartment and chance upon Savitra's book, *Sun-word Rising*, about the early years in Auroville, lying forgotten on my bookshelf. I had picked it up from somewhere but had never read it. And now I leaf through it, looking for inspiration. I read about his first meeting with the Mother and tears well up in my eyes. She is such a living Force that the sacrifice She demands we all cheerfully offer.

And Auroville... another Auroville is recreated for me in those words of long ago. An Auroville that was more collective in

action and spirit. A place where Aurovilians cheerfully underwent physical hardships and even beatings and incarceration by the SAS and police to manifest Her Dream. Why did Savitra and so many others leave Auroville, after having gone through so much for it, I wonder.

Many others that Savitra mentions are of course still here. And this gives rise to another sobering thought: so much has changed in the outer manifestation of Auroville, but at the inner level? After all these years, after all that Aurovilians have been through, they still get enmeshed in petty quarrels and inter-personal conflicts. It took billions of years for Homo Sapiens to evolve. Will it take that long for the new race to make its appearance?

It is in this sense perhaps, Auroville truly belongs to nobody in particular. One's achievements, one's efforts in manifesting the City of the Future are not recorded, or if recorded, they are not remembered. We are here today and gone tomorrow. But the Dream continues to attract and allure others to work for its manifestation. Perhaps that is what Auroville is all about: a constant striving for ideals beyond one's reach... Somehow the thought comforts me, and I finally fall asleep dreaming of this crazy place that I have chosen as my home... Bindu

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zen" in the sense of "inhabitant of a city".

A "citizen" of Auroville would be one who chooses to be constructively involved in our public affairs and committed to our evolving and experimental process of self-governance. Not everyone who resides here is always, or necessarily so inclined. Such a citizen's roster would in itself constitute a representative body of the larger community. The category of "citizen" would be like volunteering for civic duty, and would involve a commitment by an individual for a given period of time during which he is available to be called upon to be part of working bodies, to attend key meetings, to be appointed or nominated to task forces or sub-groups, or to be part of a pool of chairpersons, note-takers etc. Such a group would constitute a *de facto* quorum of the Resident's Assembly. Non-attendance of a meeting could not be used as an excuse to question its outcome but would rather imply tacit acceptance, thereby eliminating the old ploy of sabotaging a process by boycott. Dissenting views would have to be on the record. Perhaps such an exercise would give us a roster of three hundred Aurovilians in any given year (and it could be updated on an annual basis) committed to a supple, exploratory approach to evolving appropriate and experimental forms of decision-making for the outer organisation of our evolving township.

Roger

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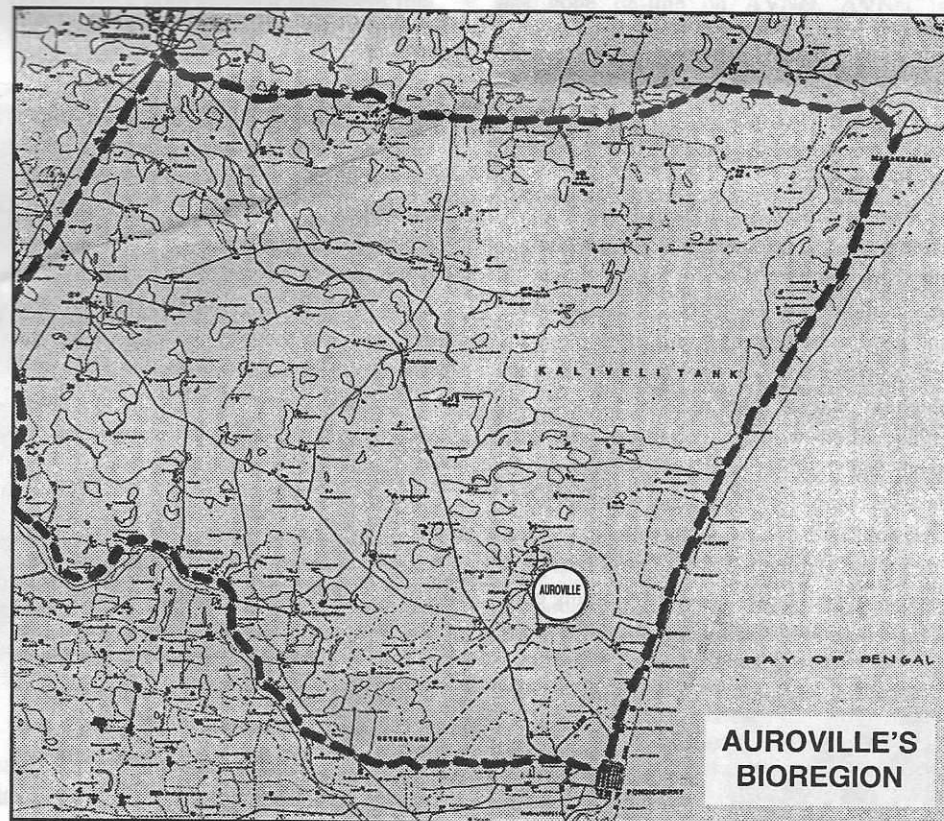
Yet certain things have already been achieved. For in the process of drawing up the Master Plan, Aurovilians with very different perspectives have learned to work together at last. We have taken another step towards assuming some responsibility for what happens in the bioregion, and the community has been called upon to reconsider its present and future relationship to its immutable physical base—the land.

## Extracts from the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan document

• With support from various governmental and non-governmental organizations in India and abroad, Auroville engages in a wide range of activities and development programmes, including education, health care, village development, reforestation, natural resources management, housing development, both within and outside the Township Area. In many of these fields Auroville has won national and international recognition.

To consolidate and strengthen this ongoing work, the following is proposed:

• The implementation of the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan, covering an area of about 20 sq. km. in which all lands are to be secured by the Auroville Foundation for its orderly development. This Master Plan is a refinement of the original plan of February 1968 approved by the Mother. Auroville has already created the basic infrastructure, and developed an adequate organisational framework and management capacity, including municipal services, for the implementation of this Master Plan. The activities proposed in this plan are estimated to generate direct and indirect employ-



ment opportunities for 25,000 people in the next 10 years.

• At a second planning level, Auroville, given the expertise and experience it has gained over three decades, offers to collaborate with Government planning authorities in order to formulate an Extended Area Partnership Plan. This extended area covers additionally about 40 sq. km. which includes existing village settlements within and around the Auroville Universal Township area. Mechanisms to ensure people's participation in a joint planning process have already been put into place by various Auroville groups working in these villages.

• At a third planning level, Auroville offers to collaborate with Government planning authorities in order to formulate a Bioregional Partnership Plan covering the 800 sq. km. bioregion that will be directly and indirectly influenced by the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan. Efforts by various Auroville groups are underway to identify the challenges and developmental needs of the region and to bring them to the notice of the resident population and official agencies.

• At each level, the Plans aim to ensure the healthy development of human settlements and optimal management of natural resources in the entire bioregion...

• The aim of this Master Plan is to develop Auroville taking the following objectives into consideration:

• ensuring a harmonious growth of the area in order to provide for a healthy socio-economic development of human settlements in the whole bio-region;

• promoting material researches in all fields of renewable energy and appropriate technology, using local skills and cost-effective methods of construction;

• providing a satisfying framework within which a diversity of cultural and social expressions can take place; creating replicable development models that are relevant for other parts of India and the world.

(continued from page 1)

purchase the remaining 245 acres in the inner city, and to that end they promised to try and secure an immediate assistance of Rs 60 million from the Government of India. The Governing Board also suggested that strategic segments of land in the Green Belt be identified for acquisition. If feasible, these areas could be protected by the application of existing environment laws, or they could be notified by the Government of India for purchase. The Governing Board assured the representatives of the task force that the process of notification could be completed in a short period of time. Other ways of protecting the Auroville area from unwanted development were also explored.



# Lakshmi goes to school

Interview with NIBHA NAMBOODIRI,  
the only female mahout in Kerala

On one cool evening towards the middle of July, riding along the roads of Auroville at dusk, you might have come across a huge, somewhat unexpected, shape lumbering down the road. Too big for a bullock, not quite an overlaid hay wagon, and definitely not a horse! What in the world is it? you might have asked, slamming on your brakes. Well, it was Laxmi, the elephant who belongs to the Ganesh temple in Pondicherry, coming to spend the night in Auroville. The clear sound of brass bells tied around her swaying belly announced her arrival in our township.

What was a temple elephant doing in Auroville? It all started when Tency and Hilde, spending their summer holidays in Kerala, visited their friends, the Namboodiri family, in Trissur. While there they saw a copy of *A Manual for Elephant Training*, a handbook written by the Namboodiri's daughter Nibha, who is the first trained female mahout (handler) in Kerala. They started wondering if Nibha could come to Auroville some time and bring an elephant to visit some of the schools. After many e-mails back and forth between Tency and Nibha, Laxmi and her mahouts converged at Auroville. Laxmi must have enjoyed the special nature outing, away from the fumes and crowds of Pondicherry, because on arrival she almost immediately lay down to go to sleep following her 12 kilometer walk. This is something Nibha says elephants do not usually do in new places, where frequently they will sleep standing up.

Early the next morning around thirty, mostly young, Aurovilians witnessed Laxmi being washed, decorated and fed. She seemed to be in a good mood, spraying her public with water and mud, crushing and munching her coconut leaves, and blessing a random child. Then she marched off to the Kindergarten, where an excited crowd was waiting for her. Most of the kids enjoyed their elephant ride, although some clearly were overwhelmed by the sheer size of Laxmi. After a banana snack she walked off to Transition school where the previous day Nibha had given an introduction about ele-

phants. On her way back to Pondicherry, Laxmi had a refreshing bath at the Maroma incense factory, where she sprayed and blessed her audience.

Nibha's interest in elephants and their mahouts began four years ago when she was working with an organisation in Coimbatore called Zoo Outreach which specializes in zoo welfare. They assigned her to coordinate a training programme—the first of its kind—for the mahouts of Kerala. The training of mahouts, which was traditionally an oral one passed on from father to son within the same family, was on the decline, and a rise in the incidence of elephant mortality, torture, and poor handling had led to the need to institute a formal training course. Two three-month training courses were held, using an elephant loaned by the Forestry Department. Nibha was one of the eleven students to attend the first one. It took her a while to gain acceptance by her fellow mahouts, as their society is quite a closed one and is plagued by both machismo and alcoholism. "They constantly tried to challenge my knowledge by asking me to ride a big male elephant, or looked at my feet to see whether I had scars or callouses, which are a sign of experience." But eventually she won their confidence as they sensed her interest both in their work as well as in their working conditions, which she feels are in urgent need of improvement.

She says that although in India a lot of groups exist to improve the lot of elephants, very little has been done for their mahouts. "I feel mahouts are as important as elephants and need to be seen as a unit. If an elephant walks 30 km a day, so does the mahout; if an elephant starves, the mahout doesn't eat either. Their working conditions are very harsh and they get paid only 35 rupees per day (less than US \$1) for what is in fact a 24-hour job, as they always have to have their eye on the elephant. Things could change if they were paid better and their working conditions were improved. Right now I have set

According to a 1998 report from the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre in Bangalore, the total number of elephants in India is 25,000. In Kerala alone their number ranges from a minimum of 3865 to a maximum of 6630, according to Dr. Arun Venkataraman, Senior Research Scientist of the above Institute.

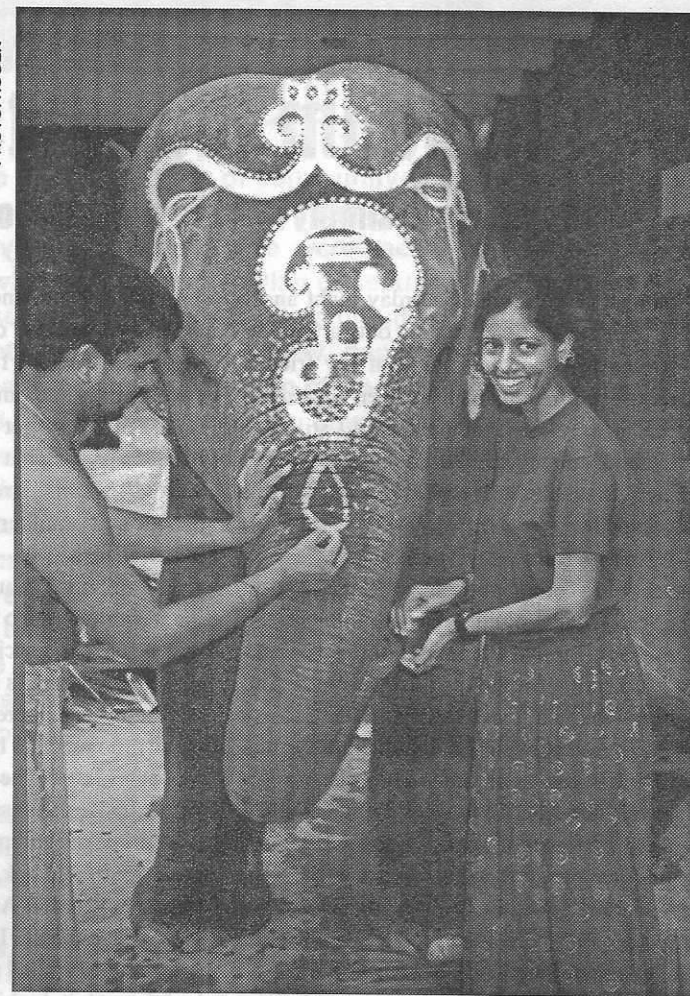
up a welfare organization in Trissur, dedicated to addressing the problems of elephant handlers, and this November we will be giving our first cash reward for the Best Mahout of the year."

In India the elephant symbolizes the incarnation of the Ganesha, who has long been one of the most popular gods in the South.

India has a total population of about 25,000 elephants (see box). There are about six hundred mahouts in Kerala alone, which has perhaps three quarters of all the domestic elephants in the country. To privately own an elephant used to be considered something of a status symbol, "like owning a Mercedes Benz", and in some ways it still is. Until the 1980s elephants were frequently used in teak plantation work, but logging has decreased considerably since then and the main activity of elephants today is that of participating in local festivals for which their owners hire them out.

An elephant eats about 250 kg of green fodder per day and their staple food in Kerala is coconut leaves. Their favourite food, the fishtail palm, is nowadays largely unavailable except in groves in the Northern part of the state, since it is not regarded as having much agricultural value. Mahouts like to get free fodder for their elephants by showing up in front of people's houses, but people in Kerala are careful about distributing their leaves as there is almost one privately owned elephant for every second street in some towns.

"Elephants can be very dangerous". Having read about it but never experienced it, Nibha was shocked to see a sweet and docile elephant turn wild and throw its mahout into the river when



Nibha, the female mahout, with elephant Lakshmi

some sudden noise shocked it during its bath. "Because of their poor eyesight, elephants become easily frightened by objects, like a piece of paper or a balloon flying by." She also experienced elephants remembering events and places. "One elephant visited our garden several times, and one day, when she was not allowed to enter by her mahout, she opened the gate and let herself in." Elephants can pound their trunk on the ground when they are happy, and they enjoy swimming—they are good swimmers and even go swimming in the ocean. Pulling down branches or entire trees—which some people consider acts of wanton destruction—are in fact stretching exercises. They are also quite intelligent: "I know an elephant from the Mudumalai forest camp who, along with two other elephants, clogged their bells with mud before surprising a vegetable stall owner who fled, letting them feast to their heart's content. They also have a taste for liquor and are 'famous' for raiding illicit liquor breweries in the hill areas, chasing away the people, destroying the camp, and of course, consuming the local product."

Nibha feels that Laxmi—although very sweet—is in fact already quite spoilt. "She is a typical temple elephant who is constantly being fed by people. This should not be allowed, as elephants need to be taught manners at an early age. People don't like it when mahouts are perceived as being strict with their elephants but for the elephant's welfare it is necessary to instill discipline from an early age. Laxmi, for instance, misbehaved this morning by grabbing food from onlookers while she was being washed and decorated before going to the kindergarten."

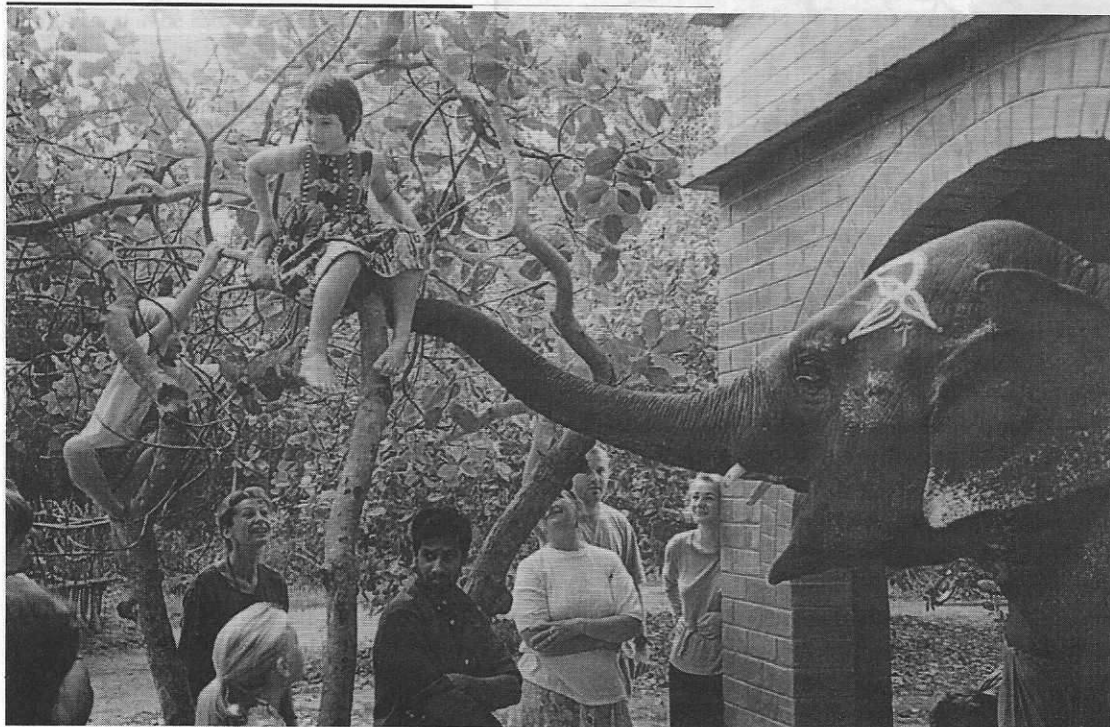
Laxmi nonetheless seemed happy with her day in the country, as she jingled past Surrender and the Auroville Today tower a few hours later on her way back to Pondy.

Based on an interview by Roger and Tineke

For more information, please write to:

Elephant SOS

SPCA Ayanthole- Elephant wing  
'Kousthubam', P.O. Elthuruth  
Trissur, Kerala 608.611





## CULTURAL EVENTS

## Baroque music played

Playing on original instruments—plus an electronic harpsichord—the American baroque ensemble Sarasa delighted an Auroville audience with a performance of music from Bach, Händel, Telemann, Geminiani and other lesser-known baroque composers.

## Odissi dance danced

There was a widely appreciat-

ed lecture and demonstration on Odissi dance by the Orissa Dance Academy from Bhubaneswar at the end of July. The accomplished dancers enthralled the audience with their graceful renditions of dance on traditional themes.

## Loot performed

*Loot*, the famous English comedy by Joe Orton, was performed at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium by an amateur

Pondicherry theatre group called Natak. This group, whose director is a Police official from Pondicherry, brought their set design pieces to the Auditorium in a Police van, along with many enthusiastic supporters.

## Stories told

Cathy Spagnoli, a storyteller from the USA, visited Auroville and entertained us with stories from Korea, India, and the U.S.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Savitri Bhavan opened

In a simple ceremony attended by a host of Savitri lovers from Auroville, the Ashram, and elsewhere in India and abroad, the first building of the Savitri Bhavan complex was inaugurated on Sunday August 8, 1999, by Nirodbaran. Nirod planted a sapling of "Supramental Sun" (*Anthocephalus indicus*) in the garden, then at the main entrance he cut the ribbon—actually a jasmine-garland—to allow the assembled company of well-wishers to enter. After a tour of the building, which comprises a multipurpose hall, archival storage room and office, Nirod lit a traditional Indian ceremonial lamp before giving a brief address on his relationship with Sri Aurobindo and his role as scribe in the later stages of the composition of *Savitri*.

## Damanhur

Two residents of the Damanhur Federation of Communities, gave a well-received slide show and video presentation

about their community. Damanhur is located in the foothills of North Italy. It is an intentional community which is internationally-renowned for spiritual and social research.

## Solar Bowl

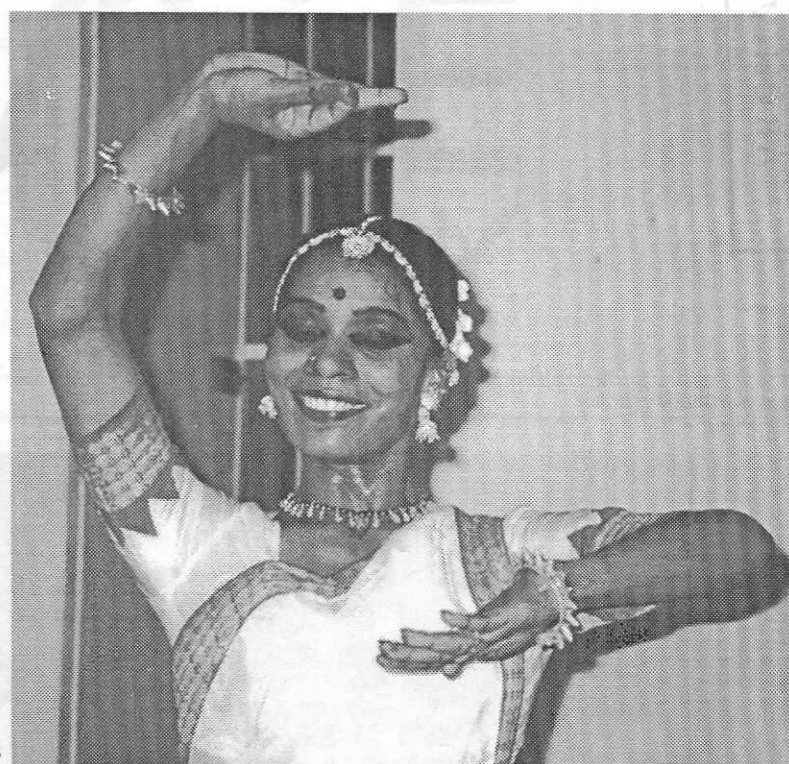
Sylvie Rousseau, a solar consultant based in Belgium who lived in Auroville for many years, presented a paper on the nearly completed Solar Bowl to the International Solar Energy Society in Jerusalem in July. The project was very much appreciated.

## A quality product

The latest thing in recycling over here is Eco-Femme, 100% pure cotton re-usable menstrual pads. A quality product, designed by Kathy of Adventure, it has already found a market abroad with 1,000 shipped to the UK. "Eco-Femme," which comes in bright colours, is a bold feminist statement that is soon to hit the shelves at the Pour Tous store.

## Kanchana performing at Pitanga Hall

PHOTO: EUGENIA



## Kanchana dances Odissi

A commanding step on the wooden floorboard of Pitanga opens the performance. Anklets jingle, and soon the audience is mesmerized by the ancient yet ever new movements of Odissi dance. This performance, however, is special, only for friends. For the dancer is 'our' Kanchana, known in Auroville as the soft-spoken and

shy girl from Kottakarai village who, with the incessant support of Ursula, learned dance from Paulo, Joy and Anu, and now studies at the famous Nrityagram dance school near Bangalore. Kanchana, now in her fourth year of study, has become part of the Nrityagram core group and performs extensively in India and abroad.

## AVNews on AVNet

*Auroville News*, the community's cycle-delivered cyclo-styled weekly communiqué, has gone on-line on AVNet. AVNet is Auroville's intranet and is accessible to all subscribers of AuroNet! Now one can lap up the community's news, concerns and gossip which are being updated daily. But most readers still swear allegiance to the old version tossed onto their doorsteps every Saturday.

## International Advisory Council

Dr. Kireet Joshi, Ms. Mary King and Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, members of the International Advisory Council, met in Auroville in July. They used their visit to discuss economic issues with the community at an open

forum.

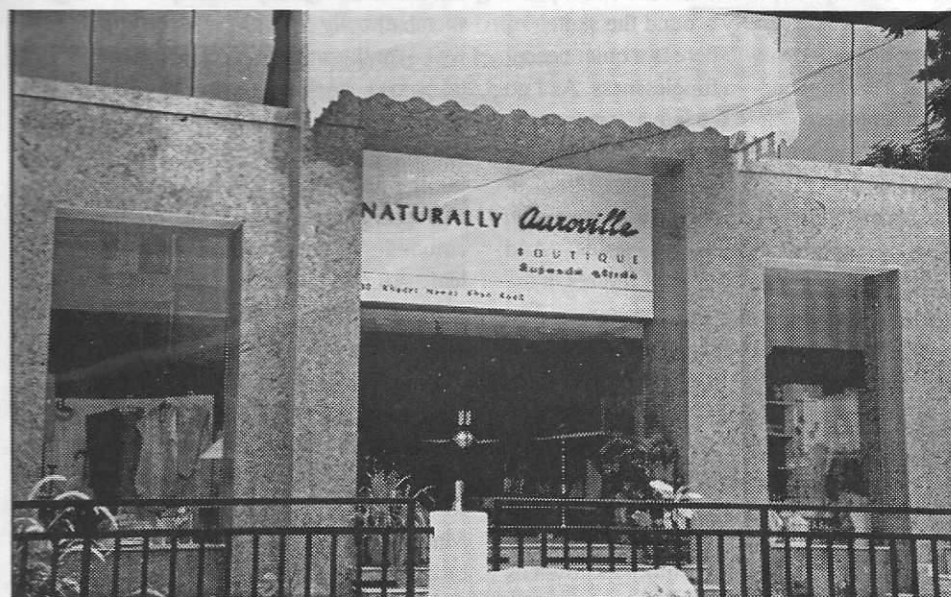
## Book release

*The Fate of Tibet*, a book on Tibet by Aurovilian Claude Arpi, was released by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on August 6th at the India International Centre in Delhi.

## PASSINGS

**Patricia**, an Aurovilian of French origin, passed away peacefully in France after a long illness.

**Mr. Justice Nigam**, Administrator of Auroville in the 1980s, died at his home in Lucknow on 18th August. He was 91 years old.



## Naturally Auroville Boutique opened

A new shop in Madras selling Auroville products, called Naturally Auroville Boutique, was inaugurated on August 15th. The address is 30, Khader Nawaz Khan Road, Nungambakkam, Chennai.

## A LETTER

Dear friends,

In response to your articles in a recent issue [July 1999] concerning Auroville schools, I would like to express my satisfaction with the different educational centres my daughter attended in Auroville: the Transformation creche, the Kindergarten and Transition school.

We were very lucky as, when Anais was born in 1985, all these structures were being set up, and it was to our great astonishment and joy that, only a few months after leaving the Kindergarten, she suddenly began

reading. At the end of her seven years in Transition she decided to pursue her studies at the French lycée in Pondy. She, along with a fellow classmate, successfully passed the entry tests for the level of troisième which corresponds to the level of her age group.

For myself it was truly a confirmation of Auroville teaching. If I am asked "Then why did she leave Auroville?" I would answer that she wants to see something else and to have another experience.

Josette, Auroville

## Subscription Information

Subscription rates for 12 issues of *AUROVILLE TODAY* are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 60, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount\*) either to one of the Auroville International centres below (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. **Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'.** You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. *Please do not send postal money orders or cash.* Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

## The following Auroville International centres will accept subscriptions:

• **Germany:** (N.B. new address!) AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Danziger Str. 121, D-10407 Berlin; tel. (0)30-42803150, fax (0)30-92091376; e-mail: wjsavid@aol.com  
• **France:** AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris; tel/fax: (33)-1.40364367, email: avifrance@compuserve.com • **The Netherlands:** AVI Nederland, c/o Wim de Jong, Zwanewater 51, 2715 BH Zoetermeer; tel. (31)-79.3210671; email: wimdejong@gironet.nl • **U.K.:** AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO18 8SP; tel. (44)-1243.574099; fax: (44)-1243. 576792 email: aviuk@compuserve.com • **U.S.A (1):** AVI USA, P.O. Box 877, Santa Cruz CA 95061; tel. (1)-831 425 5620; email: aviusa@aol.com • **U.S.A (2):** Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: (1)914.679.5358, fax: 5853; email: avinfo@aol.com

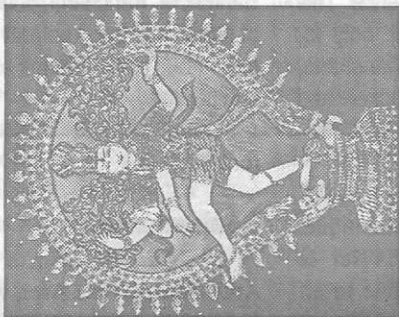
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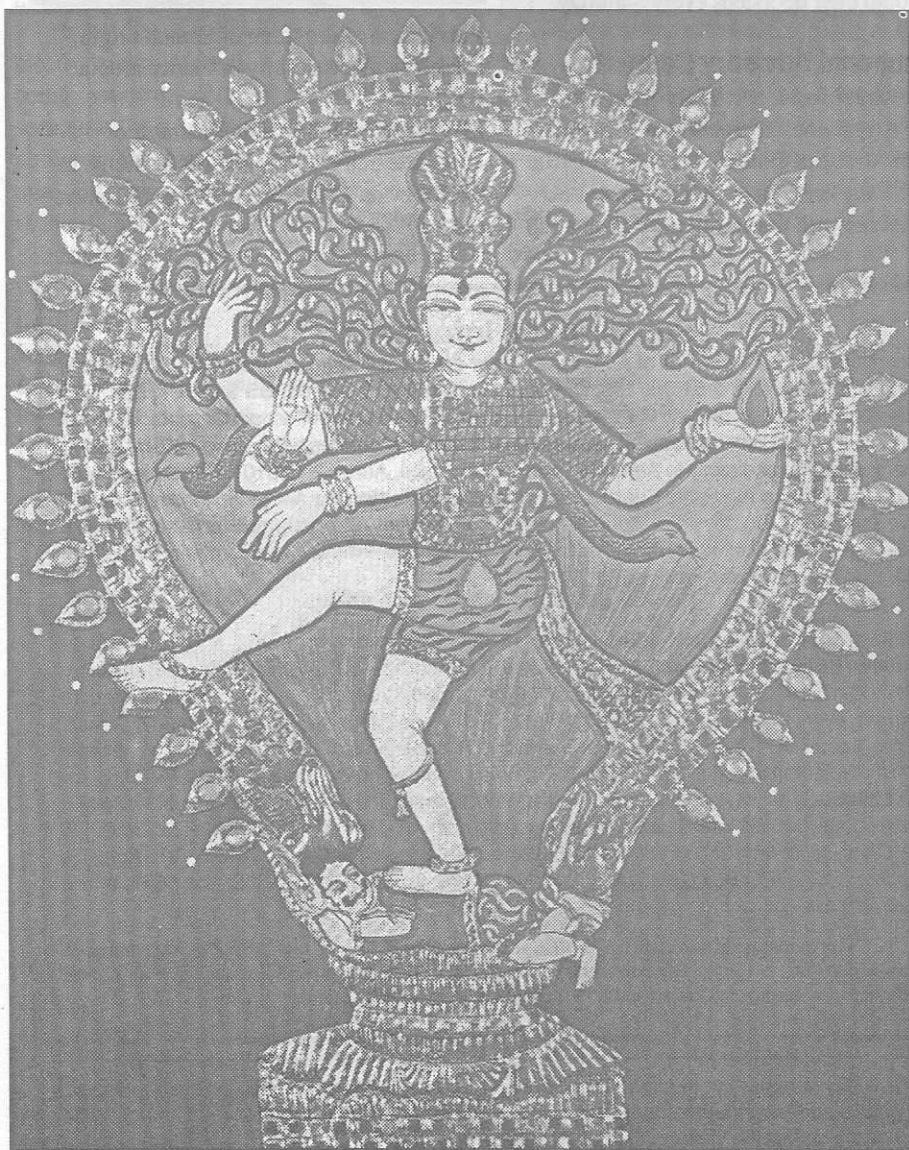
AUROVILLE  
TODAY

A.T. Tower, Surrender, Auroville 605101, India



## IN THIS ISSUE:

- MASTER PLAN RATIFIED
- THE NEW GOVERNING BOARD
- OPEN PAGE
- ELEPHANT LAKSHMI VISITS SCHOOL

September 1999  
Number 128AUROVILLE ARCHIVES  
C/D KRISHNA T.  
BHARAT NIVAS  
AUROVILLE

Thanjavur painting: front page of the Petals of time 2000 calendar

## Stories of Light

KEEPING THE THANJAVUR TRADITION ALIVE

Jocelyn's house in Ravena has become the Janaka Art Studio, where a master craftsman and his students create the traditional gem-studded Thanjavur paintings. Jocelyn has just seen a Calendar with reproductions of Thanjavur paintings, "Petals of Time 2000" through the Press. Jill went to see her at the studio to find out more.



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

The young lady sitting on the terrace is working on her canvas. She concentrates on the board, keeping it on her lap as she dips her brush into the white paste and applies it carefully around the sketch of the figure of Krishna. There is a quiet peacefulness to the scene—a timelessness. As I go from room to room in the late afternoon, the paintings that are finished and hanging on the walls seem to come alive. They are luminescent, sparkling with colour—deep blues, rich reds, gorgeous greens and golds. And because they are embossed, the figures in the scenes appear to float out of the canvas. The whole effect is captivating and magical.

"We're interested in the experience of doing the painting. It's not a question of expressing ourselves, because it's an anonymous art form, but of searching for the Divine." Jocelyn (commonly known as "Big Jocelyn") is talking to me about her latest venture—Thanjavur paintings. Her house in Ravena has now become the Janaka Art Studio, and she is working with Master Ganesan, a Brahmin artist who studied in Thanjavur and is the head of an art school in Pondicherry which teaches traditional Indian art forms, and which is partially supported by UNESCO to maintain traditional art. And then there are also five students from the surrounding villages who are financially supported while they are working. They will exhibit their work in Pitanga in January.

Thanjavur painting goes back 1,000 years to the construction of the Bragadeeswara Temple by Raja Raja Chola. The artistic tradition was initially based on the Shiva Puranas, but in the 16th century King Serfoji of Maratha—who had fled to the south when his land was invaded—brought Krishna and the gods of the north, and included them in the paintings in his temples and palaces.

"The paintings are done on wooden

boards," says Jocelyn. "First we make a sketch. No two paintings can be the same, so you have to go inside yourself to do the painting. You can find the sacred themes in the archives—and you make a tracing, or sketch directly from the other painting. Then we cover the wood with canvas and coat it. It takes one week to prepare the canvas. We use zinc oxide paste for the embossing, as well as for sizing the canvas. This is done by mixing zinc oxide with tamarind paste and tree gum. Then we carve, on top of the embossing. The next step is to apply the gold leaf. After the gilding, the background is painted. I take great care in applying the gems."

"It all started when I sent two Tamil ladies to the art school in Pondicherry. Then Master Ganesan started coming to the Matrimandir on Sundays, and we started to talk about teaching Thanjavur painting in Auroville. One of the results is that now we are in the process of printing a beautiful calendar with reproductions of Thanjavur paintings, called "Petals of Time 2000", the proceeds of which will go to the Maintenance Fund. It is time that Auroville put out a calendar which says more about us than just our external life. This art work can be a point of unity for us, joining us to Tamil Nadu, India and the world, wherever people are interested in South Indian art and mythology. It's all a gift from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and now we are giving something back. It's the feeling of living in a field of Grace."

Jocelyn is pleased at her current venture into the world of arts and crafts, with which she is familiar, having worked in this field since 1969.

"These are stories of light," Jocelyn concludes. "It's what we were meant to do here: understanding the past and applying it to the future. And in a small way, we are helping to keep the tradition alive."

Jill