

# Auroville Today

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ILLUSTRATION BY AUREVAN

## Auroville's writers

Seven years have passed since *Auroville Today* ran a selection of writing by Aurovilians, reflecting the fact that original writing by Aurovilians does not get the same attention in the community as do the visual arts or theatre or crafts. Why this is so is unclear. Perhaps there are just fewer writers than artists. Perhaps writers, by their nature, tend to be less good at, or less comfortable about, projecting themselves. Perhaps what they are writing about is perceived as either too little connected to the immediacies of our lives here or, conversely, too modest for our soaring ideals. Perhaps, temperamentally, Aurovilians tend to be 'hands-on' rather than 'words' people (which might account for some of our perennial problems with communication).

Whatever the explanation, it's clearly time that we revisited our literary landscape. Seven years ago, we went for breadth rather than depth. This time we are running longer extracts and even some complete pieces to give a deeper insight into the sensibilities and preoccupations of different writers. We also extend our canvas to include writing from as far back as 1978. Regrettably, we have decided to omit good writing in languages other than English as the vast majority of our readership is English-speaking.

As to that old chestnut, "Is there a distinctive Auroville style or sensibility?" it's far from obvious. What is common to many of the writings here is a certain preoccupation with Auroville, Aurovilians or our neighbours, an intensity of gaze and feeling (coupled with humour) which is often expressed as a need to go beyond present limits, and an originality and amplitude of perspective which owes much to the discoveries of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

Interestingly, while Aurovilians may have a muted interest in their own writers, others are beginning to take notice. Some of the selections here will be included in *Writings from Auroville*, an anthology of Aurovilian writing edited by Akash Kapur, to be published by Penguin in 2010.

Keeping to the 'home-grown' theme, the selections in this issue are interspersed with artwork produced over the past five years by students from the Pyramids art centre.

## Nothing Depends on Frogs...

**T**he city will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger Forces. Nothing depends on human beings – neither the planning nor the execution, nothing! That is why one can laugh.

*The Mother. September, 1969*

It is a difficult time, a miraculous time. Anything can happen because something's got to happen. There is a sense of seeking, or of something more concrete – a pushing against (not even a door) but a Wall, a Wall that seems always to have been there, the most solid, durable thing in the Universe, that great blank Wall forever separating us from... We don't even know what is on the other side, or if it's really a question of "sides" at all. We only know that the Wall has to go, and now, in this year, 1980, perhaps even this month, the month of June, or on this very day, a grey, windy Tuesday, the seventeenth. Now.

The wall has got to go, and now, so we keep on pushing. We don't know what else to do. There should be something to do, or say, or express in some way, in silence, in waves of colour and form, or at least seen... But no. There's nothing. Nothing but the Wall and the blind need to keep pushing against it.

I saw it in the dining room the other evening. I saw it in several eyes and bodies, in the sudden almost trance-like immobility striking randomly here and there, sudden motionless silence falling in between the mass of food and talk. I saw it in myself, how, suddenly, between thoughts, with a mouth full of soup and a spoon poised for more, I was suddenly doing nothing but staring at the Wall, all my life and energy focused purely and stupidly on nothing but pushing, pushing against that Wall.

And I couldn't help but be impressed. Not so much with myself – oh, a little with myself – but with the quality of the bodies gathered together here in Auroville. They know how

to endure, these bodies. It is perhaps all they know, but still it is a kind of genius. The idiot-savants of endurance, obstinate as mules. Year after year, they just sit here, pushing at the Wall, silent and immobile, if with slightly bulging eyes. The mind and emotions play through them, they jump up and act out their various puppet theatres, but eventually their true calling and genius overtakes them, and they sit back down again, in front of the Wall, where it seems they've been sitting for Eternity with no obvious result, but they sit right back down again and... push.

I looked around the room again and yes, it was still true: there we were, Mother's mule team, in silence and immobility and with slightly bulging eyes-pushing. There was indeed a kind of dumb magnificence, a wonderful, understated humility about the scene. The Mules of the Future.

And then, there by the fishpond, where the children like to sit (and how mules give birth to shooting stars is a subject for another day), I saw a frog upon a stone. He seemed to have been sitting there for a long time. Absolutely immobile, in a kind of greyish-green trance, silent, and with slightly bulging eyes. As if he, too, were facing the Wall, and... pushing, pushing. And ready to sit there and push for all Eternity, come what may.

It was one of those moments when the Universe turns inside out, and one can laugh. And I did laugh, breaking my own trance, and the trance of some of my neighbors as well, who looked at me, not reproachfully, but as if to say: "What's so funny? Don't you see the Wall? What's so funny about the Wall?"

But I didn't see the Wall. I only saw the frog, intent, passionate, poised like a divine warrior in front of his invisible Wall. And I could laugh. Nothing depends on human beings, or on frogs, either... It is why one can laugh.

*Dennis Bailey (Namas)  
(Auroville Review, June 1980)*



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PAINTING BY PRIYAMVADA

## Domestic birds

The parrot lies  
back-broken with a dagger  
as if the wound inflicted  
with the penknife  
is not enough.  
The poor parrot, alas,  
cannot predict its own future.

And then the sparrows, poor things,  
so fond of freedom  
and of airy flights,  
are pounded into virility drugs  
and devoured by the decrepit tigers.

Why, they say  
that the crow fledglings  
are smuggled to far-off lands  
to serve the buffaloes there  
as lice removers.

These are the gloomy tales  
of domestic birds.  
Whither are we bound,  
O brethren of the Atman?

In former days, the women  
were but an array of hollow glamour,  
a display of carnivals and pageants.  
And the epic heroines  
were delicate things  
pictured as graceful swans,  
jasmynes, daisies,  
tender stalks of palm,  
necklaces of pearls  
and moonlight laughter  
of melting silver,  
pearly doves fluttering  
in golden towers,  
a procession of stars,  
and lilies born of lightning –  
all, decorated dolls.

Love birds, you billed and cooed  
in the palm-leaf books of yore.  
Whose hand is it that  
squeezed and crushed you?  
And who broke your backbones  
and put you in golden chains?  
Come, make your final utterance.

Meenakshi (Auroville Review, 1982)



SKETCH BY ANADI

## Counting Clouds

“The true seeing,” says Shen Hui, “is when there is no seeing,” and I, doing my job, quote him for reassurance as I climb the second ladder to read the wind-speed on the anemometer. This is a gadget that looks like an army version of a children’s toy; it comprises four cups that spin horizontally, the revolutions being marked by a counter. Spinning round they have a tendency to offer from a distance the illusion of being able to change direction, clockwise to anti-clockwise to clockwise again, over and over, and there is nothing you can do about it except wait until it changes to the direction which reason tells you is true and then quickly look away....

To find the speed of the wind you note the number on the counter, wait three minutes, note it again, take away the number first thought of, multiply by two and there you are: kilometres per hour. But you cannot just stand there and wait and watch the numbers turn over or you would quickly drop into a deep trance and fall off the ladder, so these three minutes are used for judging the visibility, noting the direction of the wind and counting the clouds. Here is where meteorology approaches metaphysics. Recognizing that nothing is perfect the clarity of the air is never considered to be 100%. By day-to-day standards 99 is perfect and 98 is close. Here most days are at least 97. They are metaphysical at the other end also, 90 being pretty hopeless, hand-in-front-of-the-face pea soup. Ignoring the haze, seeing the sun shining on the waves, I put down 98, eager for my summer 99.... Twenty-five seconds have gone by....

In Wales, where I grew up, I do not suppose they have had a 99 since they stopped painting themselves blue. It rains a lot in Wales – on the average about 366 days a year. When the occasional cloudless day appeared we used to feel uneasy. We used to think that God could look right down at us and see all the wicked things we were doing.... Fifty-five seconds....

The wind vane seems steady on nor’ nor’ west but just as I am about to mark it down it slinks across the arrow and sits comfortably on nor’ nor’ east.... “Listen,” I murmur, “I can’t wait all day for you to make your wind up. I’ve got clouds to count. Are you coming nor’ nor’ west or nor’ nor’ east?”... One minute twenty....

A bird comes down close and perches on a palmyra, a tree-pie it is, a member of the crow family, a lower-class bird if ever there was one or so the book says, but looking now as elegant as an eighteenth-century dancing master in his brown and white and black with a tail he is obviously proud of. He stands looking at me with his mouth open and I understand what troubles him. Are you a high man or a low bird he seems to want to know (climbed from apes or fallen from angels?)

I speak to him, quoting as much as I can remember of the Conference of the Birds. “Now then, O Birds, where have you come from and what are you doing here? What is your name? O you who are destitute of everything, where is your home? What do they call you in the world?”

He seems astonished by what he hears, and as he waggles his head in Tamil encouragement I risk another sentence: “What can be done with a feeble handful of dust like you?”

But that was a mistake. With a squawk he is gone....

My God! My three minutes! How long have I been hovering up here conversing with birds? If I put down this figure it would come to....let’s see. This, minus that, so much, two times, carry one.... Rather excessive perhaps. If I put that down they would be out looking for cyclones.... I contemplate the whirring cups, calculate, and fake it to come out to eight kilometres an hour, about usual for this time of year.... The arrow still swings back and forth, from one side to the other, so I put down North.... and then climb down to the roof and to my favourite instrument.

My favourite instrument is a crystal ball; all the better equipped met. stations have one. A beautiful thing it is of clear glass that focuses the rays of the sun and burns a mark on a blue card so that a record is made of hours of sunshine. So far it has not turned milky on me with intimations of the future but I never give up hope. I smooth my hand over it and wipe away the dew, look deep into the glass: there I am inside again, upside down as usual, the sky inverted and brightened by the small white spark. I look up. White it is, enormous, and suddenly it sends out immense ejaculations of light across the sky, and the whole world is changed with all things sure.

“Though an angel from heaven would say otherwise,” said Jacob Boehme, “yet would I not believe it, much less understand it, for I would always doubt. But when the sun goes up in my spirit, then I am certain.”

When the sun goes up in the spirit it leaves its mark, burning, as if focused by a crystal, and leaves no thing unchanged, all things being changed instantaneously into the unchangeable. “The spirit who is there in a man,” the Rishis say, “and the spirit who is there in the sun, it is the one spirit and there is no other.”

Let me tell you, the spirit rising in me like the sun, how we count the clouds.... imagine the sky divided into eight segments as if it were a celestial orange. Now pretend that you can move the clouds around so that they all fit together without any untidy blue gaps; if they filled, say, three segments of the sky then the total cloud-cover would be three. If three quarters of the sky was covered the six; if one quarter two. If all, then eight. (Actually nine exists but that is only for mystics: you mark it nine when the sky is obscured so that the clouds cannot be seen!). Then all are classified into three categories, high, medium and low and their names – which are latin and lovely enough to be set to music – are converted into symbols.... I understand well enough the need for the system – and I go along with it quite willingly, holding up my counting fingers as I scan the sky....

The high clouds turn over pulling up beneath them high sailing birds, five of them, white vultures, Pharaoh’s chickens. Cloud-white, confident in their high manoeuvre. The birds circle, circle, then move on into open sky

leaving the clouds to their self-exploration. The clouds sort themselves out, turning over, falling away. Some come lower with their message: if you are very still you can hear it. It is the same message as that which comes at night from distant stars, the same which causes the birds to sing before sun-up; the same that guides the salmon, that nourishes the larva, that beckons the air-borne seed.

The Navajos, rain-dancers all of them, understood it well. They used to sing:

*“The voice of the thunder  
Within the dark cloud  
Again and again  
It sounds –  
The voice that beautifies the land. ...”*

O Lord! (I am content here, that is the trouble, smooth and well-fed, and criticism does not come as easily as it used to.) O Lord! Do you want the world so changed that the clouds with their wisdom would feel unwelcome? This three-billion-year-old miracle, these ten thousand flourishing things, this inevitable day-to-day glory, how much does it have to do with my human noise, with these fiery statements of resolution, with our struggle and our dog-tail revolution, with our vain endeavour?

This city – it is already there isn’t it? Real, resplendent, illumined like an early morning lotus, the sun rising in its spirit; unimagined must be its wonders, nothing to do with brick and metal and everlasting fabrications. For we cannot build this city: it can only become manifest. And when it comes we shall find that joy is its mortar, glory is its scaffolding, love its only environment.

The trouble is that with all the dreams we have it is difficult to accept the fact that we can not take credit for it. But the dreams are of something else, reflections in the eye of reason or desire, and whatever it is that they show us it is not joy, it is not glory, it is not love; it is not the spirit rising in the sun, it is not the bright new day with all things possible and with all things sure – immaculate white birds and miraculous white clouds and the immense infinity of a new white sky.

Living at the same time as Jacob Boehme was a remarkable man named John Lightfoot who became famous when, as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University he made the following announcement: “Heaven and Earth, Centre and Circumference were made in the same instance of time, and clouds full of water and man was created by the Trinity on the 26th October, 4004 B.C. at 9 o’clock in the morning.” In time for church, one supposes. And he still lives, Mr. Lightfoot, he lives, in spite of our laughter, he lives. We act as if we live in a rational world, a world put together by celestial mechanics and engineering angels. We imagine that all that was and all that is and all that will be is perfectly understandable to the human mind. Forced to accept the miraculous we try to force it into the schedule of man-made events with figures and plans and reports on progress. We will build a city like this, we say....

(From ‘Counting Clouds’ by Navoditte,  
From The Golden Bridge, 1978)



## Dancing in Byzantium

Only a few weeks before, a small group of friends had gathered to send me off, in the Forecomers kitchen, into the early hours of the morning. When all the motorbikes had finally started up, shattering the forest silence, and left, I packed and locked my last belongings into my sailing bag, placed it on the back of my cycle, and with a last look around at the familiar Peepal tree that sheltered the kitchen and guest house, cycled out through the twin granite pillars turning right on the bullock-cart path, and the old smuggler's route short-cut to Pondy.

It was a chiaroscuro ride in the early faint grey red light of dawn, past canyons and fields, and the darkness of the palm tree and coconut groves. Draped silhouettes of human figures could be seen squatting in the fields or standing by the temple in the middle of the village by the dried-up river bed. The village was already stirring, the first tea-shops and stalls were already opened, faintly illuminated by the glare of hissing kerosene lamps. After twenty minutes I had reached the main Madras-Pondy road where the bullock carts creaked lumbering with their loads of their freshly cut wood, and the occasional bus or painted truck loaded with trunks from the forests of Kerala, bombed by, all horns and no brakes, on the last leg of their journey into town. With the gaudy colours, part of dawn's magic show, appearing on the walls of the houses, I finally made it into Pondy. Leaving my bicycle in front of the Maison D'Auroville, I hailed a rickshaw for the bus-stand where I arrived with ten minutes to spare for the last early morning express bus that would take three and a half hours to reach Madras.

The contrast could not have more complete when barely twenty-four hours later, after a three and a half hour evening flight that rode the monsoon ranges, to Bombay, and a seven hour stopover, my Air France flight began its descent in winter darkness over Paris. It's strange, but it usually takes you longer to get to your point of embarkation in India, whether by bus, train, taxi, rickshaw or cycle, or a combination of all of the above than it takes you to fly half-way across the world.

The grey dark sky and the emptiness of the airport after the chaos and colours of India, struck me as a symbol of Europe at the end of the twentieth century. My youngest sister whom I hadn't seen in three years, was waiting for me on the other side of the customs, dressed in red and black, the colours of anarchism, with freshly hennaed hair. I was glad to see her, and we lingered for over an hour at the airport café counter, catching up on each other's news, over demis, croissants and café au lait, before catching the shuttle to the station and the train to the Gare de Lyon. I was back.

The Gare de Lyon, with its imposing nineteenth century clock tower, stands out as one approaches it down the Rue de Lyon from the Place de la Bastille, dominating the early morning darkness like a latter day version of the Tour St. Jacques at Chatelet, starting point in the Middle Ages of the pilgrims' route to Compostella. It was the starting point of my first overland trip to India as well and with its Belle Epoque restaurant and bar, decorated with murals of the destinations its network used to serve, it has always evoked in me the romance of travelling, of setting out, of unknown destinations and pilgrimages begun. Its decor still reflects that nineteenth century attitude that saw travelling as an art, an experience to be cultivated and refined upon, an act for initiates. *'Les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls, qui partent pour partir,'* wrote Baudelaire. We are addicted, like a nineteenth century *hashishin*, to those poignant moments of departure. We are always leaving, everything changes and nothing we have known will last. It is the journey alone that lasts in whatever form.

Sophie was waiting for me at the other side of the customs at the Geneva station, at the top of the stairwell, her gazelle-like feature looking frail and hesitant, and dressed in a turquoise sweater and black overcoat and dress. We were to drive to her sister's apartment nearby who was away for the weekend – where we were to leisurely catch up on our stories of the last four months over steak and spinach and a bottle of Châteaufort du Pape. That afternoon, we drove down to the lake with its fountain and paddle-steamers I remembered from my childhood, and returning, we sat out on the terrace of the café in front of the Beaux Arts where she had

studied in the late sixties. Geneva was in many ways her city and she was showing me her sights. Durrell was right when he said one comes to love a city where one has loved a woman. Annecy and Geneva will remain for me as part of Sophie's geography.

The seven months I was to spend with her in Europe return to me now as a suite of images, of streets and places where we walked, of situations, fragments of conversations, remembered dreams, train stations – The Gare de Lyon and Geneva's Cornavin – the housing complex where we moved into and lived, after three weeks at Isabelle's in Annecy, the sound of the Arab children playing in the courtyard. Hospital corridors, her vials of Temesta and Natulan by her bed in her white room, her small precious objects, her stone statuette of Ganesh, and her ivory one of Krishna, the tapestry of Krishna and the Gopis on the wall, her collection of sea-shells, and the postcards of India on the wall. Her framed photo of Mother, a couple of small potted cactuses, the mailbox at the bottom of the stairwell, which we would open in the afternoon on our walks back from town hopefully looking for a letter from India amidst the flyers from the supermarket, announcing their latest bargain discounts on meat. The crêperies and cafés beneath the arcades of old Annecy where we would sit and talk, our walks by the lake with its gutted-out and boarded up hotel, the convent where she went and lodged for ten years – one of her worst memories – and which was a three minute walk from where we lived. It was as if she had come back across a broken bridge, without knowing it, to face her past.

In the early hours over pre-dawn darkness, over coffee and croissants at the Geneva train station, she tells me of a dream where she was up in the Blue Hills of South India. The atmosphere was autumnal with falling leaves, and the place looked like it was being closed up. She gathered a sort of mango fruit from the ground and noticed Satprem, the French writer whose books had set many people out on their quest, walking over to a car with three people in it. Then, from a distance he turns, looks at her and smiles. Travelling with a friend in the mid-seventies, she had come across a book of Satprem's in a boarding house by a lake in Sumatra which was to lead them to South India, and a first brief one-day visit to Auroville.

"J'aimerais que ça aille si vite que j'ai envie de tout casser."

Another night, she wakes up exhausted from a dream where she was in a tractor ploughing a field all night, which was her body.

We discussed different approaches to healing cancer; she had opted for chemotherapy and radiation which she combined with a raw food diet. She didn't feel confident enough to rely on alternative approaches such as visualization, although she did incorporate some of its elements as outlined by the Simontons. In her approach, her struggle, she was being forced, she felt, to evolve a new relationship to her body which she had mistreated and neglected too long. As if her soul's intransigence refused its earthly counterpart which then at last rebelled.

Once reminiscing about smoking opium with a doctor friend and a group of people for days on end in a farm house in Brittany, remembered with a vague silk-like delicacy, she was to say,

"Sur la terre je ne crois en rien des mécanismes humains, je crois en quelque chose d'ailleurs."

And then about her troubled relationships with men, "J'aime les hommes pour leurs défauts."

There was something of the Romantic Refusal of imperfection in her as well as a fas-



cination, even a dangerous one with the broken beauty it entails. In a café outside of the Rodin Museum whose work she adored, she was to say as the evening rush-hour traffic swirled outside, "Par gout de perfection, je n'ai rien entamé dans ma vie, rien fait. Il n'y a que l'art et l'amour dans la vie qui comptent: et la beauté, c'est l'amour. Tout le reste est laid."

She was dealing a lot with her childhood memories, her need and search for affection and attention. The youngest of three sisters who were still working out their complex relationships to each other, she remembered a tyrannical grandmother who brooded, chain-smoking gauloises in her room in a country house in the Jura, but who had taken a liking to Sophie. Her father trying to strangle her mother on the staircase. Her mother who was raped – with Sophie in her womb – by retreating German soldiers during the war, and who put her out on the doorstep with her suitcase at the age of five, sending her off to a convent boarding school for ten years without ever coming to visit her. At times, without knowing it she would break down, particularly before leaving on a trip, much in the same way as her mother had done at the same age. Her sisters felt that Sophie had always been demanding and self-absorbed. Her sense of detail, almost preciousness, came out in her memories of a small white mouse under the table by her high chair on the red carpeted floor of a plush luxurious hotel. Touching her heart once, she said:

"C'est dur comme du bois là-dedans, il faut que ça s'ouvre. J'ai tout le temps dedans un grand chagrin d'amour."

(From *Dancing in Byzantium. A novella in four tones. Unpublished. By Roger Harris*)

### Auroville Sequence

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;  
Of thoughts and hopes and a strange gentle joy,  
Vaguely caught, like twilight dancing on  
leaves,  
of another forgotten day  
(Though recalled, where memory is joy,  
and foreknowledge of Love to come.)

And a sense that we are One.  
That when we strive to hold, we break;  
Falling upon the barren canyon rocks.  
And then, releasing All, we are One again;  
And laughter lights our eyes;  
And joy does fill our breasts;  
As if by an unseen hand caressed,  
As if by some great presence blessed.

Roger Harris



## Made in India, Auroville

**L**ysiane lived in one of the big huts with white shutter windows. While she prepared a hot drink with lemongrass from her garden, Jean-René gave her news about Philippe, married and father of two children, her parents, Quebec and himself. O-Pti-Zoizo had gone bankrupt. So he took up journalism again, founded a magazine with some friends and worked as a freelance journalist left right and centre. He was planning to write a series of articles on India. This was therefore the main purpose of his visit.

- Et toi ? he asked. You've grown in beauty. You did well to take up theatre again. It really suits you.

- I know, she nodded in agreement, serving him ginger biscuits. I gave up theatre twice to do yoga. Surely an old leftover moral hang-up. And then you see... "All life is yoga," as Sri Aurobindo wrote. Theatre included.

They sat near the hut's entrance in cane armchairs, a low table between them. The shutters were open wide onto the garden. Lysiane remembered the nights spent in smoky cafés, discussing, talking and constructing projects. Before working at O-Pti-Zoizo Jean-René managed an alternative art centre where young artists turned up, such as Lysiane. They were very close and could have been lovers if she hadn't planned to leave for India. She refused to give herself to him, "as girls get too attached," she declared.

She asked:

- How do you like the lemongrass?

- Bon. Pas mal.

Lysiane laughed.

- A bit too "vegetarian" maybe?

Jean-René asked if he could smoke a Charminar.

- On the condition that you offer me one.

- You smoke?

- Non. It's a fantasy, replied Lysiane in a tone both quiet and playful, which Jean-René didn't recognize.

He handed her the pack of cigarettes and held out his lighter to her lips. She leaned forward, lit her cigarette and raised such happy eyes to his that he too felt overcome by joy.

Lysiane left her chair to sit on the entrance's low wall. Jean-René examined her from head to toe as if he had never seen her before. She had become more beautiful, yes, but not only physically. He was scared. Scared of not living up to the mark, no longer being worthy, or having lost her even more. Lysiane turned around.

- Tu es encore amoureux de moi, you're still in love with me? she asked him gently.

- Je ne sais pas, I don't know, he answered.

She smiled, and he smiled too. The immense affection they had for one another was as strong as ever.

- Actors who play love scenes together very often fall in love, said Lysiane, turning her face away. They identify with their characters, open up to a certain kind of vibration and don't know how to get out of it afterwards. They declare themselves in love. It happened to a number of Aurovilians who do theatre. It already happened to Raoul. He played a scene with me. He came to find me afterwards, feeling uncomfortable, especially because he has a girlfriend. He didn't understand. It makes you reflect on what it means to be in love, non ?

Jean-René nodded his head:

- You don't believe in it at all, he said.

- Oh, ça existe ! One day I fell in love at first sight, un coup de foudre. Well, I think it was falling in love. I saw, or rather, I felt a huge wave passing through me and the man standing in front of me. We were together, united by a tremendous current. I went home distraught. I didn't know what to do about it. I went for a walk and... I decided to let the wave pass, to dwindle. I could have chosen to catch it and let myself be taken by it.

She stopped to extinguish the cigarette she wasn't able to smoke.

- I'm trying to understand how it works, how a human being moves within this cosmos. I want to know how it works.

- Have you already been in love? asked Jean-René ironically.

Lysiane wasn't bothered by the irony.

- In fact, I fall in love easily, she answered, tying up her long brown hair in a bun. I could have very easily fallen in love with you.

She made her way back to the armchair.

- Très amoureuse ? Yes, once I was, and obviously with someone who wasn't in love with me. Long, painful and complicated. You're right, I have no talent for love stories.

- And so?

- Alors? One afternoon I was walking to the beach, taken by that *masala* of desires, feelings... I was in love, quoi. And suddenly from deep in my body emerged an enormous laughter, much bigger than me. And I was once again free as the sky. Afterwards it started again, but... I already believed less in it. It was the beginning of liberation!

She stretched.

- I don't like being in love, I suffocate. It's not love. I always knew it wasn't that. One has to be free to love. Libre. Otherwise we cling, we hang on.

Jean-René observed her, sceptical.

- Human beings, explained Lysiane, nourish themselves with vertical and horizontal energy. If they depend too much on certain sources of horizontal energy, they are not free.

- There's a truth to be found in the man-woman relationship, insisted Jean-René. Otherwise why would we have men and women?

- I don't know yet, replied Lysiane, who clearly didn't want to talk about it. We give a lot of importance to sex, because we live in a very physical consciousness, but in other states of consciousness sex doesn't even exist.

Then wanting to put an end to a conversation she believed useless, she concluded:

- There are a thousand ways to be, a thousand paths to follow.

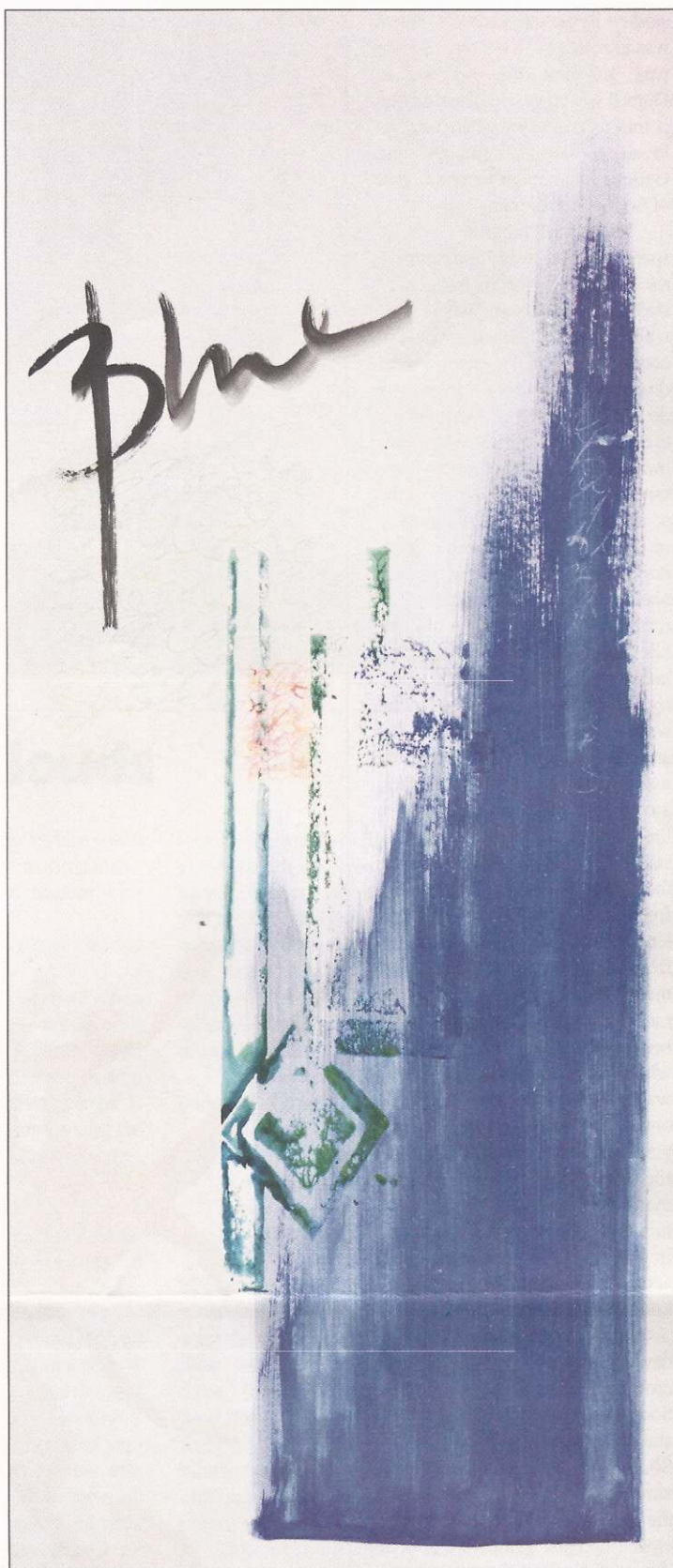
- Well, I like women, tobacco and beer, affirmed Jean-René, smiling.

- I don't see any problem with that. If you feel good about it, I really don't see why you want to complicate your life. Besides, this is the reason you came back to India: women, tobacco and beer. Right?

Lysiane got up and removed the cups and plates.

- Now, dormons! I like sleeping. To each his own vice!

She took out two mosquito nets from the cupboard. As they hung them up, she said:



PAINTING BY SHRISHTI

- You're more stubborn than a mule, but you should be careful. India, the country they call "Mother India," loves mules like you.

\*

The next morning Jean-René, still jet-lagged, woke up late. The music playing at full blast from the village had awakened him in the wee hours, but he went back to sleep. He found Lysiane in the garden cleaning her lemon tree, which was full of nesting red ants.

- These ants, she complained, when they bite, they leave with a piece of your flesh. Ferocious! There are other kinds, tiny red ones that bite your eyelids and lips at night. The next day you're all swollen. They're the worst. Non! The worst are scorpion-ants, but you find them less often. They're black and have a little turned-up tail like that of a scorpion. When they bite it hurts badly, and the pain lasts for a long time. The others, the big and small black ones, aren't that mean. Oh! I forgot the really small red ones! Almost invisible! And then the white ants. They're not actually ants but termites. They can eat up your whole hut in no time!

- Charming country! concluded the Quebecer. Tamils make me think of ants. Maybe it's their camouflage!

The comparison amused Lysiane. She confided to Jean-René that she had difficulty organizing the large-scale destruction of ants except for the devourers, because she couldn't help but think that the gods acted the same way with human beings. The young woman abandoned her work to have breakfast with her friend. She brought back a pot of tea from the kitchen with several slices of fresh bread and guava jam.

- It's luxurious now, she stressed. Everyday we have something delicious to put on our bread.

- How is it going on the financial level? Who pays for the jam? asked the journalist.

The Aurovilian answered proudly that the guava jam was made in Auroville with Auroville-grown guavas. And in the same breath:

- We have a collective economic system which almost everyone participates in, in one way or another.

Lysiane hesitated and then swallowed a gulp of tea.

--When we have nothing or very little, she started again, it's easy to share. But the more money there is, the harder it seems to get. It should be the opposite, but... There's a bit more money in Auroville nowadays, and already the pressure is felt on the individualist system's side. Unity is a beautiful ideal, but as long as it's not lived out as reality it doesn't hold forth for long, le bel idéal.

(From *Made in India, Auroville*. By Monique Patenaude. First published 2004)

## Between seasons

### Hidden

Stepping from slumber  
that never deepened  
for the flare of a match,  
a cigarette and some steps  
into the blackened yard,  
to meet with distant stars  
and the sleep-worn wonder  
of the collared dog.

From a cove in tree shade  
shoring the night's black  
lake  
a lamp-lit window  
marks my remote life,  
with somewhere in drawers  
true gifts from far lands  
and worlds brought down  
in one being.

### Architecting

(1)

On the clear spot  
among forking stems  
clouded with green  
we have raised the four  
corners of the house.

Parallel pillar  
topless cube.

An early cut  
of the imagination  
in what was never taught  
to fork and be green

waiting for a roof.

(2)

I kept myself  
one wall of air  
because I like air

another wall  
got movement stilled  
by a paint brush.

I set a window,  
absence within sills,  
to the use of light

defining space  
on too keen an edge  
to fool around with.

A labyrinth  
of one room only.

Then I put flowers.

From *Between Seasons* by  
Lloyd Hofman. 2008)



## Moonstones

I've asked a lot of people, but nobody had seen it, and yet, it was so very, very clear. There was that moment of suspense when the heavy boots first touched the surface of the moon and when, for the first time in man's history, the television cameras swept over the moon-escape. I saw it with my friends as clearly as I saw the astronauts who were physically present on the moon, and maybe as distinctly as those who monitored the transmissions, but the sheer impossibility of it combined with all the propaganda blocked it out of everybody's, literally everybody's view. Nobody even noticed that Armstrong's voice trailed off for a moment and that he swallowed audibly. Then he continued as if nothing had happened. Well trained, those men, even emotionally!

Now, if you have a video recording of that first moon landing or can borrow one from somewhere, I would advise you to have another look at it, but in slow motion, second by second, especially right after the sequence when Armstrong puts his foot down and utters those immortal words, "A small step..." Just as the cameras are turned up to scan the terrain for an initial inventory, you can see, on the horizon, just between those two boulders slightly to the left, a shape. Of course, if you're prejudiced about the moon and the universe, your rigid mind would register just another boulder or some nondescript object, but for me and my friends as well as for the astronauts who were there, it was neither a boulder nor some amorphous shape, nor any mysterious presence, but a man. I could hear from Armstrong's voice that he bloody well saw a man there, a living man, moving around slowly on the moon, picking things up and examining closely what he found.

If you replay those first few minutes of man's arrival on the moon, you'll also notice that Armstrong and Aldrin glance in that direction several times, but once you are aware of it, you will also notice that the cameras carefully avoid focusing there: when they happen to move towards those 'boulders', something or someone shuts them off or turns them in another direction with a jerk. Understandably; for it would be a bit too much for almost the whole of mankind to handle if they saw a man in a bush shirt walking around the moon, dressed in ordinary shoes with not even a space helmet! All the philosophers and theologians as well as the scientists would pack their bags if such a thing were true. But, from the expression on Armstrong's face as seen in several close-ups, you can read that it's true enough, and you can even see it, but only if you know; for otherwise you would interpret the subtle signs differently.

You can see that he even knows who it is, who got there before him. There is something in the smile on his face that almost everybody mistakes for the joy of sheer adventure and conquest, which would of course be natural. But if you look closely you can see something else there as well, a hint of amusement, as if someone had just told a good joke but one wasn't allowed to laugh. Really, you must replay this tape and you'll see it right away.

Recording these facts is somewhat unsettling, a bit annoying for both the author and the reader, since most of the information is classified. I have been allowed, actually encouraged, to present as many of the facts as may be useful for the further progress of humanity in its conquest of space, but none which might enable other institutions or countries to imitate the feat – or rather, only as much as will stimulate others to attempt to achieve the same feat, without giving away the methodology involved; it is left up to them to discover it for themselves.

It is under these severe constraints that I write. The man whom was seen strolling around on the moon was none other than our beloved Professor, Dr. K. T. Chakravarti. A man of real flesh and blood, forty-four years old, strong, healthy, lean, intelligent and with a good sense of humour and a thorough training in many fields; in short, as well-rounded a human being as you'd ever find. Professor Chakravarti was in training with Armstrong

and his colleagues for a while, but then, during a mid-point check, he was rejected and Armstrong was chosen instead. India, of course, would have been pleased to have one of its sons be the first man on the moon but, though it wasn't said, it was clear that certain political preferences in the collective American ego were all that was needed to disqualify Dr. Chakravarti who, as an all-rounder, would no doubt outshine Armstrong. Our professor's merits do not stop with his human accomplishments, for he has trained himself not only in the gross physical sciences but also in the subtle physical sciences. 'Physicist' is for him an ironical label by which he understands the inner laws of physics rather than the law of physical physics as such. He has always worked on both levels, and when he was in training for the moon shot, he continued to develop his subtle physical being too. So when he was disqualified from the competition, he simply said, "I bet I'll get there before you!" The astronauts and their trainers smiled, of course, for they understood only that Dr. Chakravarti would now join the Indian endeavour to reach the moon.

As he did, but differently from what they understood! Armstrong smiled too, but seeing that Chakravarti wasn't just joking, they laid a bet, of \$10,000. They went their ways and the people in NASA didn't hear from Dr. Chakravarti again. Nor did we. For a while we knew only that he had withdrawn into some remote area of India and that he was surrounded by some well-known yogis from other parts of India, all of whom were great scientists of the inner subtle physics. What exactly they did together, one can only guess, and we do try because as his students we have been trained to be on the lookout for links between the gross and the subtle physical. If we know what is possible in this field, we also know its limitations. We know that India

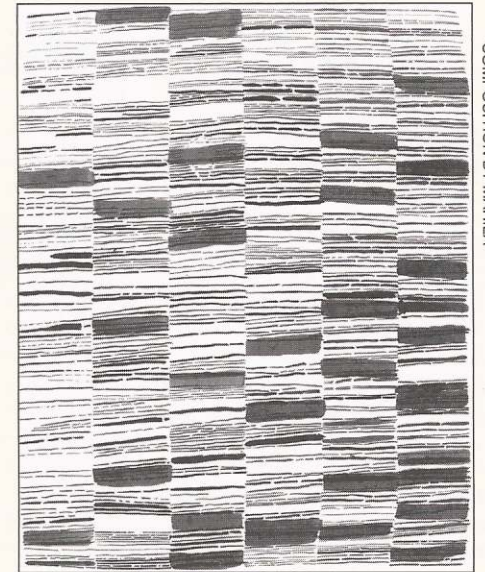
has possessed the knowledge of bodiless travel for ages and ages, achieving in fact quite some proficiency therein, but the problem has always been to get the body to go along, to establish a truly physical link between the two physics. That enigma was the subject of their study, at the same time that Armstrong and his crew were going through their training in space shuttle and rocket traffic, in moon geography and moon geology, in computer science and a host of other fields with which one has to be acquainted if one would move out of the earth's atmosphere.

Dr. Chakravarti and his colleagues were faced with innumerable problems in their own fields but they must have managed quite well because the body transfer was dense enough to be seen even on television: his shape outlined against the black horizon appeared as dense as the physical boulders lying around. He could even make physical movements with his body, not the least of which was to pick up, hold, and examine moonstones. The problem was not so much in getting there as in getting back, and not so much in getting the Doctor back, but in getting him back with the moonstones. But, they did it: right then and there, on the moon, he successfully transferred the moonstone – from the gross to the subtle-physical – after all, it is a matter of vibrations – and then he came back to earth, long before Armstrong and his clumsy machine returned, for travel in the subtle-physical is instantaneous – with the stones. His colleagues investigated and examined these and only when the Government agencies, affected by a certain jealousy, demanded that they turn them over 'for official research purposes', as they said, did the stones disintegrate in their hands.

*Ruud Lohman (early 1980s, previously unpublished)*



ART BY AUREVAN



COMPOSITION BY MAHILA

### Line

In the end  
it really doesn't matter  
what's said  
daubed  
or played.

We all have our excuses.

But who escaped?  
Who got across the line?

### Milliseconds

He burned almost everything:  
the quick stuff,  
the slog,  
the cleverness of coffee mornings.

Finally he'd understood the old man  
with the Nikon and the busted beret  
stalking the Parisian streets:

"a few milliseconds in a lifetime".

### The true note

Most of the time  
it's like stabbing a blunt,  
nicotined finger at the dark.

But when it comes, ah,  
you're of the grain,  
inviolable.

### Everything

His was a certain vagueness  
as he loitered on corners,  
waited too long for the bus.

They laughed, nudged him aside.

All the while  
he was catching their pieces,  
trying to bind them  
(he almost knew how)  
into everything.

*Alan*



## Letter from Pondicherry: the disappearing beach

When I was growing up in Pondicherry, a former French colony on the south-east coast of India, I would go with my family every Sunday to the beach. Everything about the beach seemed perfect back then: warm waters, yellow sand, swaying coconut trees, and lines of soft white surf that stretched across a green-blue horizon. It was like something from a postcard.

Pondicherry didn't get too many tourists in those days; the beach was mostly empty. But now the tour buses drive up and down the coast, filled with pink men and women in white hats searching for a strip of sun and sand. The Pondicherry government advertises the city, on roadside billboards and in magazine spreads, as an idyllic retreat where 'time stands still'.

But time does not stand still. The beach as I once knew it does not exist any more. It began to die in the late 1980s, when the government built a new port to the south of Pondicherry. Politicians promised that the port would bring in investment and spur economic development. Who could argue with that? Within a few years, however, as even a cursory environmental assessment would have predicted, the yellow sand started disappearing, carried away by new currents that swept around the port, starved of replenishment when natural sand flows were blocked. Today the beach I used to visit with my family is gone.

Beaches are fragile ecosystems; what starts on one stretch continues along another. Over the years, the erosion has crept up the coast, eating away at the shoreline beyond Pondicherry, swallowing the homes and boats of fishermen. Villagers have been evacuated and livelihoods have been destroyed. The sandbars that used to absorb the shock of waves far out in the ocean have been flattened. In 2004, when the tsunami hit this stretch of the coast, there was nothing to stop the surge of water. Hundreds of villagers lost their lives, and thousands more their homes.

The latest victim of this man-made ecological disaster is the village of Chinnamudaliarchavadi, about ten kilometres north of Pondicherry. A few months ago, in an effort to halt the erosion, the government threw tons of rocks into the ocean just south of the village, and built three huge piers that were supposed to block the sand from flowing away. Although India has strict laws governing construction along the coast, the piers were built without environmental permission. The ecological consequences were simply overlooked. And so, as with the port that killed the Pondicherry beach, the piers have intensified the process of erosion. Over just a few months, Chinnamudaliarchavadi's beach has virtually disappeared; today the village perches precariously over the advancing waters, slowly slipping away.

On a day of grey skies and summer heat, I visit the beach. I know it well. I live about twenty minutes away. On the morning of the tsunami, I rushed here from my home, not understanding quite what had happened. It was only when I saw a dead boy on the sand, with distressed villagers gathered around him, and then noticed a coast-guard plane buzzing overhead, searching for survivors, that I began to understand something of the scale of the disaster.

Today the village has a similar air of crisis. At least thirty metres of beach have been lost in just a few months. The narrow band of sand that remains drops quickly into the ocean, like a cliff, a sign of rapid erosion. Men and women walk up and down what is left of the beach, a vacant, perhaps incredulous, look in their eyes. The sea is crowded with empty boats. They used to lie on the sand, but now the fishermen have to row out to their craft in flimsy catamarans.

Outside a thatched hut, close to the ocean, M. Valli, a single mother of two teenage boys, tells me that every night at high tide the waters advance into her hut, seeping into the single room where she tries to sleep with her sons. 'At night, the sound of waves is like an earthquake,' she says, in Tamil, her fingers pulling at her purple sari. 'My children want to move away, they want to go somewhere else. But where can I go?'

Valli lost nearly everything she owned in the tsunami. She almost lost her children, too. They were rescued by an autorickshaw driver who managed to pull them to safety before they were swept out to sea. For weeks after that, while the family camped in a ruined house, the children vomited and coughed blood. The headmaster at their school asked them to leave for six months, until they had recovered. When they returned, there was no place for them at the school. Now, aged thirteen and fifteen,

they go fishing with their uncles.

Valli says several villagers have already lost their homes to the erosion. Last week, the electricity pole in front of her hut fell into the ocean. After the tsunami, the village was crowded with government welfare officers and representatives of international NGOs. They all promised help; they promised her a new home. Nothing came of those promises. In front of her hut, men are erecting a fence of palm-tree logs. Even as they work, the waters crash right through.

Outside Valli's hut, on the beach, there is a pile of discarded tyres. They were brought to the beach by a local organization that believed they would help to prevent the erosion; they were to be sunk out at sea, where they were supposed to collect sand. Now the tyres are abandoned; some have fallen off the sand cliff and will soon be swept away.

I walk along the beach, on the hot sand, until I reach one of the piers. Long and thin, it stretches into the ocean, like some menacing reptilian claw. The beach is chewed away here. I can see the hard red sediment that was once compressed several layers below the surface; centuries of beach have been away in a matter of months. The roots of coconut and palm trees poke through the sediment; some of these trees have already been uprooted.

In the distance, I can see the town of Pondicherry, its sea wall a dark blur through the heat waves. I can't see the port from where I'm standing, but I know that the Pondicherry government is talking about building a new and bigger one, just south of the existing site. Local environmentalists have warned that a new port risks destroying a hundred-mile stretch of the coast. But the government is insistent: India is developing, modernizing, and Pondicherry can't be left behind.

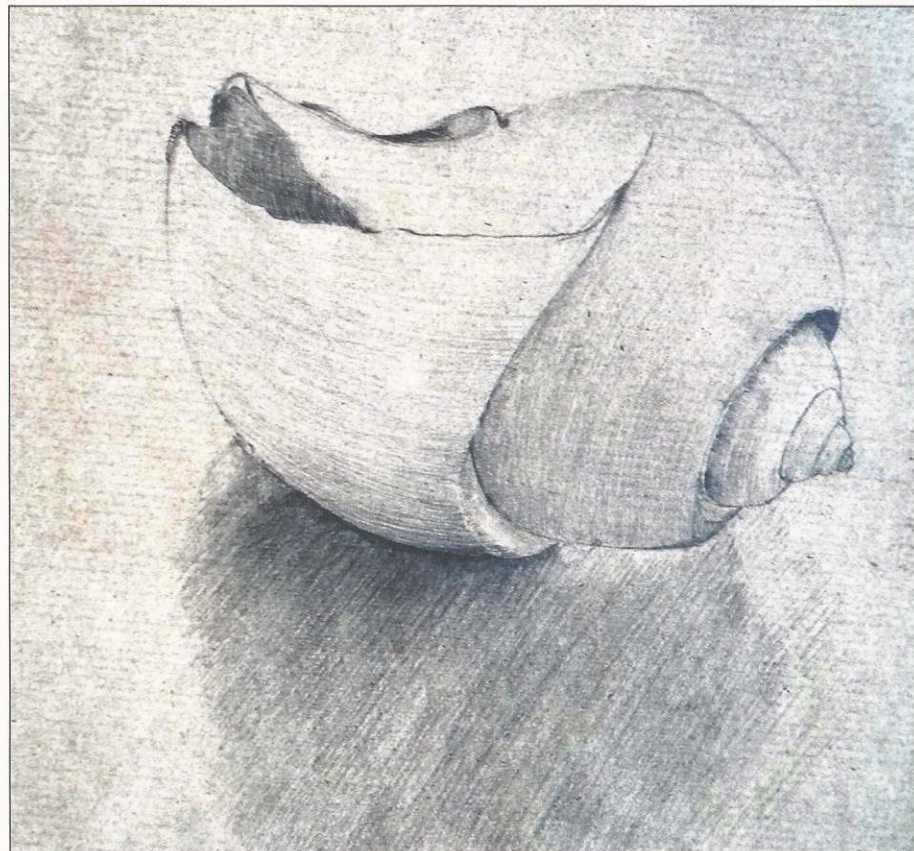
Before I leave the village, Valli invites me inside her hut. She seems to think I may be able to help her get a new home. I try to convince her otherwise, but she doesn't listen. The hut is small — no more than five metres by five metres — with torn thatched walls, and a low thatched roof interwoven with plastic bags to keep the rain out. There is a blackened kerosene stove in the corner of the room; a cardboard calendar with a picture of a deity hangs from the wall. It's midday, but her boys are asleep, lying on the cracked concrete floor. They each have a single pillow, no mattress.

Valli has nothing. And the future holds nothing for her. I ask how she makes a living and she says she used to buy fish from the fishermen and resell them in the market. But now, since the beach has been eroded, there are hardly any fish. She says her friends are suffering as well, but at least they have husbands to help. I don't want to ask about her absent husband, but she tells me anyway. She says they had another son. He went out one day into the ocean. It was a clear day, not at all stormy. But they never saw him again; they just found his empty boat. Her husband was destroyed by the loss of their son. They had to send him to an institution. 'Now I am all alone,' she says, and starts to cry. 'This is all I have, and this, too, I'm losing.'

In the dwindling sand outside Valli's hut, a woman in a green sari sits on her haunches. She asks: 'What will you do to help us? Everyone comes here and talks, and asks us questions. What will you do?' She gestures towards the disappearing beach. 'If this continues,' she says, 'we're all going to die.'

Akash Kapoor

A version of this article was published in *Granta* 101 (2008)



SKETCH BY SHRISHITI

## Grace Notes #1: Desire

What a long night sweltering around the turn of time, rolling out through curvatures, slipping inside silent overtures of spring, well hidden in the ramparts of darkness, where it is said the great mystery passed, and in passing, let fall a kernel of gold in the rice field, faster than the eyes could catch, it fell windswept with a desire no one could name yet, and yet in the great hallways priests gathered indignant, and muttering legislators were called to designate a name, a title deed, a covenant of authority upon something they knew not how to describe, but because time was running out of its ounce of breath, the night thickening fast, urgency changed to despair, for no miracle it seemed could save the moment, no magic memory that could unleash time from its hollow seed, oh no, all was caught in a fracas of warring refrains, songs of freedom and intimidation, hand in hand with Grace, but then, such was its blessing, such its irresistible kernel of desire, borne swift upon the fleet-wind of the heart, soft and waverly, too wide and too vast yet to know, a desire rocking the wind with bright sprinklings of rose, twilight to day, without a name or calling, it lived on, ballooning inside the mind serendipitously, hiding away its smile from anxious eyes, ever so graciously, in between the mundane rivers of day, this quiet and nameless wanderer, mysterious anchor, a grace never to be exchanged on the exchequer's ledger, a desire exculpate, incarnate of all enigmas the earth is made of, endlessly cascading down the waterfall of daylight, Grace finally a lace of water sparkling forever, rippling over heads, diving inside ears, rushing through the eyes, washing away the scum inside, till the mouth is left full, tasting of fresh, sweet fountains, the throat soft with a new born song, the heart gentle, the limbs singing, and the spine carrying its river from ocean to ocean, wave upon wave, till night finally consents to roll off its edge and slide into the hinge of dawn, waiting softly for the first bird call: no one will ever know what it took to get here, to stand before this slender rose-lip of sunrise, its first flush of gold rising with a flight of birds and then, like a triumph, the sun — a desire so sweet it makes the earth flower day after day, causelessly, even as it caused your birth one sudden morning: perhaps you knew it, or were asked, but even if you were, could you have refused the earth's desire as she lay dreaming your coming under the stars, willing the night to turn right around so that you could finally awaken and look at last upon the sky, with that long awaited caress of your eyes, a massive illumination lifting from your heart and a stillness supreme from where your soul released transilient, hand in dreaming hand with Grace...

Anu (2009)



PAINTING BY MAHILA



# Windarra Farm

In Australian aboriginal, 'Windarra' means 'A place to live where I can express my soul.' For eleven years in Windarra Farm, Friederike has been trying to live up to its meaning.

Driving up past *Ganesh Bakery* and *Saracon*, and then bumping over a cattle grid, I immediately feel as if I am entering an 'old' Auroville. A feeling of spaciousness and calm greets me as I walk slowly down the path between an avenue of flowering trees and rosella fields. Two ammas greet me. Like a Biblical scene, they are winnowing dusty brown sesame seeds through a big sieve. Sacks and piles of seeds fill the storage room behind them. The tool room has an abundance of ancient tools as well as a western spade, lovingly polished, looking well-used. "I brought that from Germany years ago," said Friederike. "Once the Tamils got used to it they loved working with it."

Over a glass of guava juice in the keet-roofed kitchen, Friederike shares her story. "I knew on my first visit to Auroville in 1986 that this is the place I wanted to be. My partner and I came in 1987 and we stayed in various places, the longest in a capsule in 'Horizon'. I loved the simple life. I worked in the Matrimandir Nursery and went everywhere by bicycle and never felt happier. But after a year, I used to have the same dream every night that I was a bird, flying to my home and the forests in Germany. Although all was perfect for me here and I totally felt content with my growth in yoga, the simple life style and the work close to nature, I needed to go back to Germany."

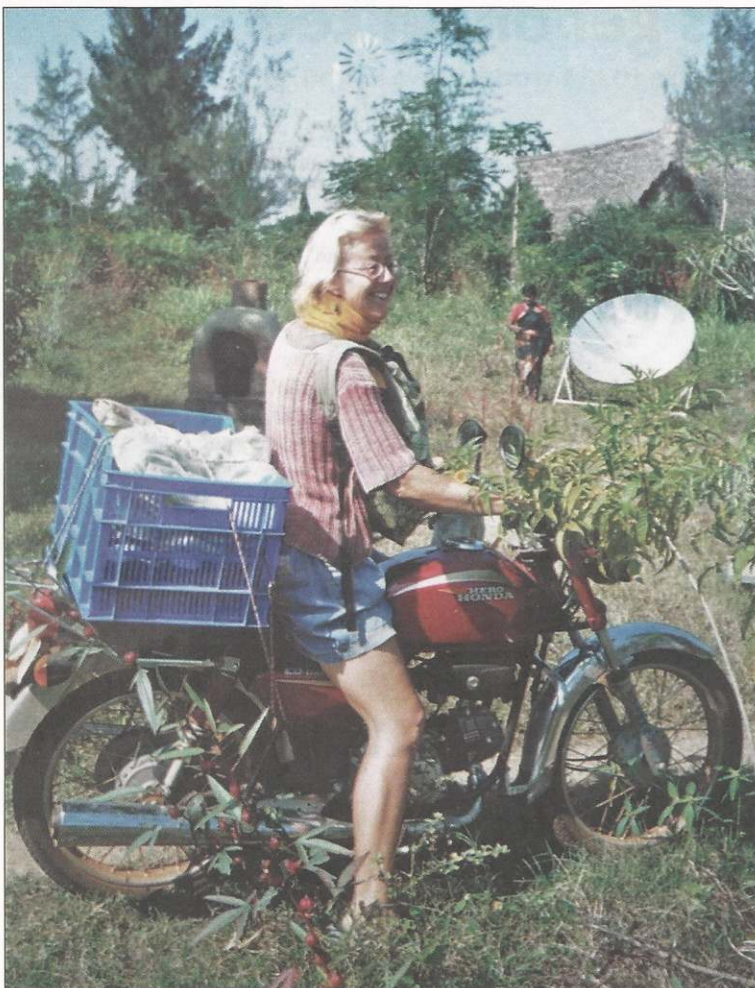
It took Friederike seven years to finish all that needed to be completed before she was ready to return. The year was 1996 and she and her husband now

the soil, seeing things grow and being in contact with nature together with the Tamilians.

"When my husband and I separated in 1998, I decided to start a farm community. I met David and Karen, two Australian newcomers who had a similar interest, and Pratibha, an Indian woman from Kerala. Soon the four of us were allocated the stewardship of 22 acres of farmland between Kottakarai and Alankuppam. We shared the work. One looked after cows, another after administration, one after infrastructure and I cared for the chicken house and the vegetable garden. We worked hard, planting trees, installing a windmill, building storerooms, sheds, a chicken coop and capsules for us to live in. But living this challenging life proved very difficult and after half a year the Australians left. Pratibha left two years later." Friederike stayed on. "I enjoyed the simple life every day, waking up early morning, milking the cows, bringing the children to school, working in the gardens and seeing everything grow."

Yet she too had thoughts of giving up. "Sometimes things were unbearable. Here I was with two little girls aged four and seven, inexperienced in farming and life in the tropics, and in charge of 22 acres of land. But I always had this trust that the Divine would lead me on and show the way, and that helped to sustain me. I am still here, 11 years later."

Friederike became the moving force behind the farm. Slowly her vision of the farm took shape. "I always wanted to run a mixed organic farm to grow food



Friederike at Windarra

heartbreaking." Eventually Friederike got funding for a wire fence around the land. "It took me three years, but it made all the difference."

In those years, many people joined Windarra but then passed on. "I learned not to wait for new people to come, but to do what I could myself with the help of the employees and volunteers. I became strong - I had to, otherwise I could not have stayed." Tamil Aurovilian Kumar joined in 2001 but left in 2008. Indra, a newcomer, joined in 2007. "She supervises the ammas, helps me to understand the Tamil way of thinking and inspires us to create a good relationship with the local people and improve their lives." Windarra also attracts students from the American Living Routes programme, and Civil Workers and volunteers from the German Weltwärts organisation. "They have been enormously helpful, not only in the work, but also to stay connected to the ideals of Auroville - aspiring to the highest goals, and at the same time ready to face the daily realities by doing the work on the land."

With the growth of Auroville, the pressure on the farmers to increase production is increasing. "I often felt criticized," Friederike admits. "People saw untilled fields, but they didn't see the work done in the orchard and the vegetable gardens. And they did not realize that all that work was mostly done by a woman on her own, who has also to deal with the recurring crisis of broken pumps, failing irrigation systems, leaking roofs and setbacks like the rains coming at the wrong time or not coming at all. An assessment of all the Auroville farms is being made and

three farm specialists have been giving helpful suggestions to improve production. The lowest fields at Windarra will soon be farmed by my colleague Moorthy who will grow rice. The introduction of Food Link, which coordinates supply and demand through its distribution centre, has also helped to improve our efficiency."

Reflecting on the deeper meaning of her life in Windarra, Friederike has come to realise that farming is her tool to do yoga. "Every morning before starting to work I sit quietly to centre myself and connect, and with this tuning-in things would soon fall apart. I discovered that by facing the difficulties of farming I am facing the difficulties in myself. I have developed trust and faith, strength and perseverance." And she admits, "Sometimes I think it may have made me a little hard."

She sees the need to bring her sides of 'doing' and 'being' into balance. "The farm is mostly about 'doing'. I'm enjoying 'being' when I'm involved with waterwork (Aqua Wellness) at *Quiet*. That gives calm and peace. I also do Compassionate Communication in a weekly group where I find an opportunity to express the other side of myself in a supporting and accepting atmosphere."

And the future? "The pioneering phase of Windarra is over. I hope that many young Aurovilians will come and spend time at Windarra and learn about farming and enjoy the beauty of this place. I dream that all the energy which we have put in will soon blossom and Windarra show its full potential of abundance and beauty."

Dianna



Windarra's free-range chickens lay chemical-free eggs.

had two daughters. "In seven years a lot had changed," she continues. "Things were not as tranquil as before as Auroville was beginning to grow. We stayed for two years in a Newcomer house and as a trained geriatric nurse I took care of Lieske, an old Aurovilian lady. Then one day Jeff asked me to take care of the vegetable garden in Discipline Farm. I took it up enthusiastically. That year I learned a lot and made many mistakes, like planting seeds too early which were all washed away by the monsoon. But I realized that I loved working with my hands in

for Auroville. I wanted to grow rain-fed crops in order to not be dependant on ground water and technology, grow a diversity of crops and have some animals. And I wished to inspire and educate the local villagers to reconnect to their old knowledge."

Those first years alone were focused on the daunting task of protecting the land from erosion and cattle. "In the beginning I followed the advice to grow live fences with thorny shrubs and trees. But they proved to be useless against cows, goats and people. A herd of cows ruined our first crops in one night. It was

## Windarra's produce

Windarra has large vegetable gardens; orchards with guava, mango, citrus, cashew and sour sop trees; rosella, tennai, and sesame fields; a forest with timber, oil-seed and work trees; and a small field of sunflowers. There is a chicken yard and two bullocks to plough the fields.

Windarra sells its products through *FoodLink* as well as through the Farmer's Market. Every morning people from nearby communities come to get vegetables and eggs. Surplus fruit and rosella is made into jam, and sold through *FoodLink*.

New developments at Windarra are the spirulina farm run by Hendrik and the mushroom project of Anbu, while Moorthy will soon start growing rice.



At Windarra, all ploughing is still done the traditional way.

## In brief

### Award for Excellence



To commemorate its Silver Jubilee year, The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Ladies Organisation selected 25 exceptional Indian women from various fields such as Creativity in the Arts, Business and Entrepreneurship, Professional, Public and Social Service for their "Women of Excellence Awards". On April 28th, 2009, these outstanding women were acknowledged in a glittering ceremony in Delhi presided over by the Chief Minister, Ms Sheila Dikshit.

Dr. Kamla Tewari of the Auroville Health Centre received the prestigious Award for Excellence for Social Service for her 59 years of 'welfare work in the medical field', first in the Indian Army and then in Auroville.

### Community discount shop at Pour Tous

Pour Tous Aspiration has started a 'self-supporting unit' which does not require any community budget. It will function as a 'community discount shop' where products are offered at a price lower than anywhere else. To achieve this, the margin on all non-processed products from Auroville's Farms such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, and rice will be scrapped. The margin on other products will be reduced. The experiment will be closely monitored to see the impact on the financial stability. The final aim is to run a unit that has the right balance between being a self-supporting unit while offering the best possible prices.

### Home-made films

The Auroville Film Festival 2009 is looking for Aurovilian-made (including newcomers and enthusiastic guests) films and videos of any format - mobile phone, animated cartoon, home video - to screen in the Festival. The Festival will run during September. To submit your film, contact Marco. (marcoavc@auroville.org.in).

### Passings

Smt. Yasho Rajya Lakshmi, wife of senior Congress leader, former Maharaja of Kashmir and Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation Dr. Karan Singh, passed away in New Delhi on May 24 after a prolonged illness.



André Viozat, 66, one of the early Aurovilians who later became independent from Auroville and started his own business

Auroelectronics in Pondicherry, was found murdered in his farmhouse on May 27.

An interview with André appeared in the October 2008 issue of *Auroville Today*.





# The Newcomers get organized

"We need to make our activities visible to the world," says Raghu, an Indian Newcomer from the Netherlands.

"When I became a Newcomer last November, I was surprised there was no handbook or information package for Newcomers," says Raghu Kolli, an Indian newcomer from the Netherlands who had been visiting Auroville on and off since 1990. Raghu, a professor of business and a design management consultant, returned to India permanently in 2008 and settled in Auroville. "I didn't know the other Newcomers, what they were doing, or where to find them. Each of us was individually trying to find our way around Auroville which is a complex place. Many people and activities are not visible in everyday life. It was frustrating, so I decided to do something about it." Raghu made a proposal for a 'Newcomer Programme' which received positive feedback from many Aurovilians and Newcomers.

"About the time I was discussing my proposal, Shivaya and Suzie were also thinking of doing something for Newcomers and so we put our ideas together," says Raghu. "Over the years, various people had attempted different things for Newcomers, but nobody had ever sat down and analyzed their needs before. And it is quite a complicated situation."

Raghu explains. "There are now about 140 Newcomers. There is not much opportunity for bonding as there are no occasions to meet together and the first year can involve many pressures including finding work, often moving from one house to another, and trying to find your way around Auroville."

"Newcomers are a very mixed and varied bunch. There are returning Aurovilians, partners of Aurovilians, children of Aurovilians, people who have lived or worked here for a long time as guests or volunteers and who have finally decided to become Aurovillian. Then there are the young Europeans who want to explore different ways of

life, young Indian professionals, middle aged people opening a new chapter in their lives, couples with children, young aspiring Tamilians and, of course, a few lost souls.

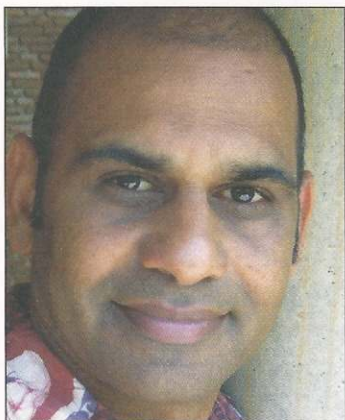
"Some people are very clear about what they want to do and dive into their work right away and don't get to explore many areas of Auroville or meet people. Some others explore various work places and communities and continue to move from one area to another. Even then, it is hard to get an overview of what is going on in the community."

"So I feel it is necessary to have a broad understanding of various activities and get to know a cross-section of people across the community. Without this, it will be difficult to take part in the community discussions and communicate with others in later years."

"We started the Newcomer Programme in January this year and the first event was held in the Town Hall and hosted by the Working Committee,

L'Avenir, and FAMC. Carel, Raman, Toby and Otto talked to us about their work and it was very interesting for everyone. Our second reception was held at Saracon, and was hosted by Wellpaper, Svaram, KOFPU and Saracon. Orly told us about how her partner Danny and she had set up Wellpaper; Chandresh spoke of his early struggles as a Newcomer, and gave us a history of the place. Aurelio's team entertained us with music, and Anandi served us a great organic dinner. It was a memorable and inspiring evening. The next event was hosted at Pitchandikulam forest with Joss giving us a tour and showing us the remarkable projects in ecology and training at the Pitchandikulam Bio-Resource Centre. Our most recent event was a visit to Savitri Bhavan which emphasized the spiritual aspects of Auroville. It was well received and over 50 Newcomers attended this session."

"It is a special experience to see all the



Raghu Kolli



Shraddhavan (second from left) discussing Savitri with Newcomers at Savitri Bhavan

Newcomers gather together. Everyone is so different and it gives a feel of the new energy. What surprised us most was the number of young Tamil women and men who come to the events. That may be because we send SMS information by mobile phones to those who do not have email. About half of the attendees are Tamil Newcomers, who are very attentive and take part in the small-group discussions."

Raghu explains how in their group discussion on issues facing Newcomers, housing and work are the two critical issues that came up. "Since then," says Raghu, "we announce to newcomers any work openings at the Auroville units, and also try to find work if a Newcomer requests it. Housing is a much more complex problem and we have not been able to address it yet. This is a topic for another meeting."

The group plans to host about 10 to 15 events in 2009 that will expose Newcomers to various areas and activities of Auroville – farms and forests, health and healing, crafts and industry, governance, spirituality, architecture, village action, waste management etc.

"When guests come here, all they see and experience are the guest houses, restaurants, boutiques and a few cultural events, and healing courses. But there is amazing work being done in

the farms and forests, there are many inspiring village development projects going on, there are beautiful products being made, and fascinating experiments like the new Pour Tous Distribution scheme.

"From what I have seen since last year," observes Raghu, "we are not giving out the right message and we seem to be attracting mostly tourists. The Auroville website needs a complete revamp with up-to-date content. We need more publications like *The Auroville Experience* and *The Auroville Architecture* book. They are impressive and give a lot of good information. Auroville Radio is also doing a great job of broadcasting current happenings."

"We need to fund these vital media groups, and encourage all units and projects to showcase their activities to the world. We have such a wealth of diversity and activities in such a small community, and we need many more talented and skilled people in various areas."

"By showing the world what we do here, we will inspire and attract the kind of people who will want to take part in our activities and help us realize the vision."

In conversation with Dianna

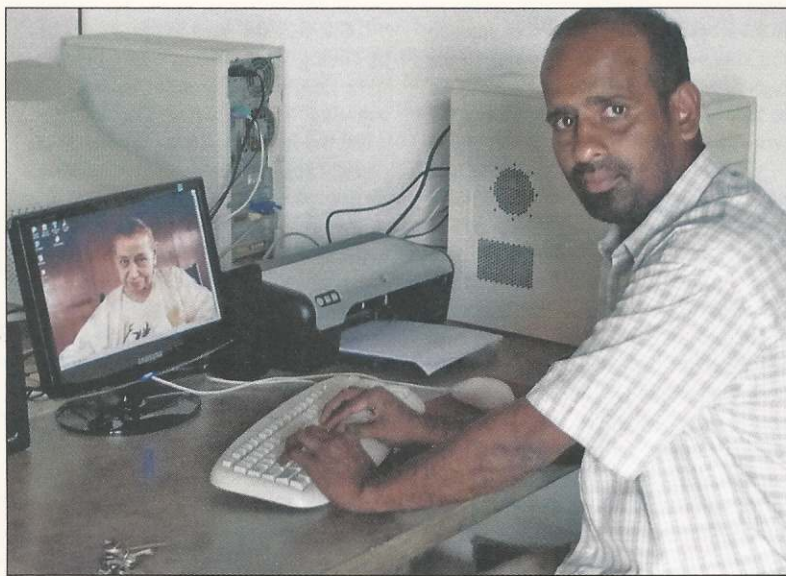
## SECURITY

# Security in Auroville: an issue of concern

The General Meeting of March 24th had unusual attendees. The Superintendent (SP), the Deputy Superintendent, the Inspector and two Sub-Inspectors of Police shared their thoughts on how Auroville could improve its internal security set-up and strengthen its relations with the police and with the neighbouring villages.

"This was the first time such high-ranking officers came to Auroville for a meeting with the collective," says Ramesh, the 38-year old Tamil Aurovillian who heads Auroville's Security Service. "We have an increasing interaction with the police. They always accompany VVIP's who visit the Matrimandir, such as recently the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri Surjit Singh Barnala. And we visit them whenever we have a problem in Auroville – which are plentiful."

Security in Auroville hasn't really improved over the last years. "We are maintaining statistics about all issues we are involved with, in the area from the East Coast Road to the National Highway from Tindivanaman to Pondicherry," says Ramesh. "In the calendar year 2008 we dealt with 28 thefts; 5 burglaries; 1 case of chain-snatching; 12 cases where ladies were harassed on the roads; 8 cases where people were beaten up; 5 cases of aggressions without physical attack; 2 fights involving Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians; 11 'nuisance' cases where non-Aurovilians created problems for Auroville residents; and 3



Ramesh, coordinator of the Auroville Security Service

fire incidents, one of which was started wilfully by a person from outside Auroville. On top of this, we were also involved with the after-effects of 25 traffic accidents." He clarifies that the Auroville Security Service only deals with issues affecting Aurovilians, Newcomers and guests of Auroville, not with happenings in the villages.

The statistics have convinced the police that Auroville's security situation is a matter of concern. "They are willing to help us improve our security set-up," says Ramesh. He explains: "At present we have 25 people working full-time for security in Auroville. Eleven of them are guards we hire from the G4 Security Services organization. The others are people we

employ ourselves, such as the five guards at the check post at the Visitors' Centre and the people who guard the roads in daytime. But this is not enough. We want to create a team of Security Volunteers consisting of Aurovilians, similar to Village Vigilance Committees or Friends of Police groups that exist elsewhere in Tamil Nadu. The SP is very supportive of this idea and has agreed to issue identity cards to make the work for the volunteers easier. The police are also willing to provide basic training."

The Mother, as early as 1966, said that security in Auroville should be ensured by 'a battalion of guards made up of athletes and gymnasts'. "This is more or less our intention," says Ramesh. "The Security

Volunteers group is intended to be a rapid-response team. The group will staff the security office 24/7 from where it will organize assistance in emergencies. Volunteers will rush to the spot whenever there are accidents, robberies, burglaries or disputes, such as over land or assets of Auroville. They will also help get medical aid or an ambulance, organize fire-fighting and even provide an escort when requested. They will provide the quiet presence necessary for people to feel safe in Auroville."

An issue to be addressed, says Ramesh, is informing guests of Auroville about safety. "The majority of the thefts," he says, "have been reported by guests who have been carelessly leaving their valuables lying around."

Guests are sometimes also victims of harassments, particularly when they are inappropriately dressed for Indian sensibilities. "People are sometimes pestered on the road by youngsters on motorbikes who engage in 'eve-teasing'." Eve-teasing is an Indian euphemism for sexual harassment or molestation of women, ranging from sexually coloured remarks to outright groping. "The guests have to be warned about eve-teasing and advised to wear appropriate clothing."

To increase road safety, G4 guards are posted at various road crossings. Also more solar street lighting needs to be put in place. The next step, says Ramesh, is to address the problem of access. "At present, there are 16 access points into Auroville. We should reduce that number and work out an access system on the lines of the suggestions made by the Secretary of the

Auroville Foundation two years ago, to have check posts and guards at every access point," he says.

The Auroville security team is also increasingly getting involved with settling demands for compensation, for example after a road accident. "Sometimes victims of a minor traffic accident caused by an Aurovillian ask outrageous amounts as settlement, and resort to aggression and bullying tactics to get it," says Ramesh. "We plan to publish a document 'What to do in case of an accident'. We advise the people to report an accident to the police and get a Certificate of Damage from them and inform their insurance company. But Aurovilians do not like to go to the police, as it takes a lot of time and many do not speak Tamil. This opens the door to bullying. Moreover, the victims do not like to wait for the insurance company to pay, and also believe that the compensation they can get by pressurising the Aurovillian will be more than what they would get from the insurance company."

Ramesh says that bullying tactics to get compensation have become more common recently, not only in road accident issues but also when trying to settle other disputes. "Every time an Aurovillian gives in, we weaken our position," he says. "But making a complaint is the only way to counter aggression. If we show that we are not afraid and will bring issues to the police, this kind of pressurising will stop. Auroville as a community must send the message that it looks after its security and that criminals, and trouble-makers will be brought to the police."

Carel



# Challenging times for the Auroville Archives

**R**etired General Krishna Tewari established the Auroville Archives almost 20 years ago in temporary accommodation and he has been working there ever since. Why are the Archives so important and what are the challenges it faces?

**Auroville Today: Why does Auroville need an archive?**

Krishna: The Mother called Auroville a 'living laboratory'. As in any other laboratory experiment, it is important we keep a record of all that goes on. What we have gone through in the past 40 years is amazing. If we keep a true record we can learn from our past mistakes and we can begin to grasp the deeper dimension of what is happening here rather than just looking at things superficially.

**How comprehensive is the material that the Archives have at present?**

We have a lot of documentation concerning what The Mother said about why Auroville has been created. For me, this is the most important material that we have. If, for example, we keep highlighting what The Mother said about there being no personal possessions in Auroville, that everything belongs to the Divine, never again can a group claim in the Supreme Court that Auroville belongs to them. Then we have a lot on the planning of the township and on the functioning of various work groups. We also have important information from the Auroville International Centres. On my table now I have two new files – one on the controversy created by Peter Heehs' latest book, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, and another one on the background to and the enactment of the Auroville Foundation Act.

**Do you believe that someone who wants to understand the deeper dimension of Auroville could do**

**this if they studied the documents in the Archives?**

Yes, but it would need a real study and take time. Also, there may still be a lot of missing information. For example, Roger Anger shared some of his important historical material with me, but I don't know if it is all. Part of the problem we have in Auroville is that various working groups and individuals don't keep records and, when they do, they don't preserve them. This is why I started the Archives in 1991. But while I regularly put out appeals for materials the response is not always encouraging. People are too preoccupied with other things.

**But isn't the difficulty of getting material due to many Aurovilians not being interested in history? They would rather focus upon the future.**

Yes, but we must know about the past if we are not to encounter problems in the future. We can't just live day-to-day. I think we are not prepared to face certain things in our past. Keeping a true record can be painful of course, it means admitting mistakes and failures, but we are all human and ultimately it doesn't matter if it helps us understand the past better.

Take, for example, Navajata, the Chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS). At one time I was close to him – while I was still in service I had invited him to Kashmir to speak to the officers about The Mother and spirituality and he impressed everybody. This was one side of him. But he took a wrong turn when the SAS claimed ownership of Auroville. So all this information should be there in the Archives to enable researchers to see the truer picture, to understand that everything is not simply black or white.

I feel the present world crisis has a purpose behind it. Among other things, it is helping the truth to come out regarding certain issues. It is time that the truth about certain things came out

in Auroville also, and the Archives can play an important part in this.

**But surely one of the problems is that people's memories are defective. If no records were kept at the time, how can you expect people to remember what happened many years later?**

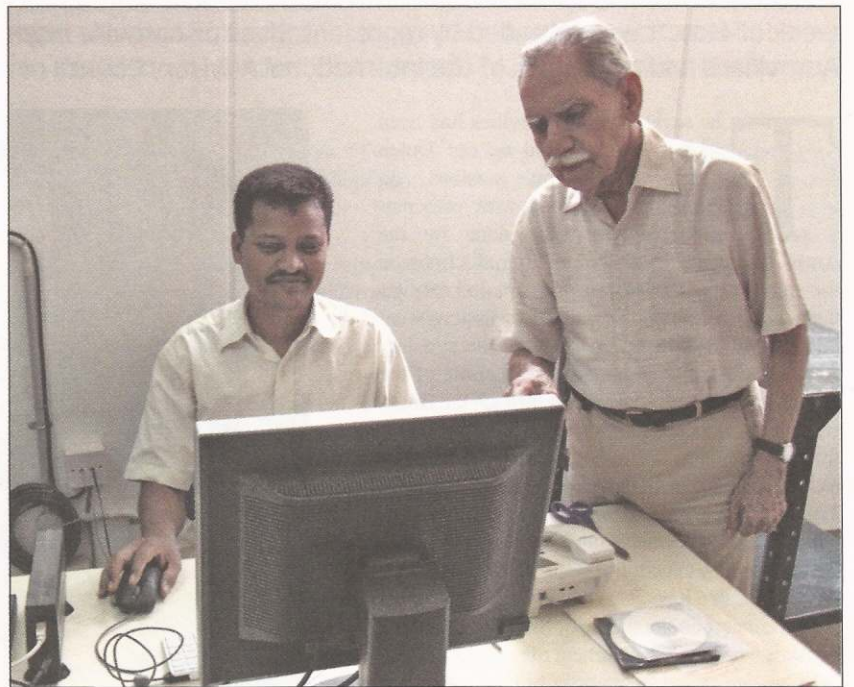
True. Sometimes you get misguided by the ego. You say, "I did this, I did that" whereas the reality may have been more complicated.

**How successful is the Archives in preserving the material that it has?**

The enemies of paper are humidity, heat, dust and insects, and we have an abundance of all of them in Auroville. Firstly, we have to carefully and systematically preserve what we have from mishandling and the natural enemies of paper. Next we are gradually copying paper documents on to CDs but we still have much more to do and we don't have either the money or the manpower. Thambidurai and Iyyappan are my valuable assistants but we need more people to help with the routine work of conservation and the conversion of material and we don't get any volunteers coming forward. Maybe this interview will make a difference!

Now we also have a very restricted storage area. I have been shunted out of my old office in what I call the 'dungeons' of Bharat Nivas (they were actually the ducting corridors for the power cables and air-conditioning system of the building) and although I was promised another room it's been occupied by someone else.

Then there is the power problem. All of the material in the Archives has to be kept under carefully-controlled conditions regarding temperature and



Krishna Tewari (right) with Thambidurai

humidity. But even though we have frequent power breakdowns the management of Bharat Nivas won't start the generator because they don't have the money to run it.

The real problem is people are too involved in their own projects; they don't understand the importance of the Archives.

**What would you like to happen next with the Archives?**

We need a new building, a permanent place with all the required facilities. I've already presented a proposal with a design but nothing worthwhile is happening. Nobody seems interested. Even our Governing Board and Foundation office do not show much enthusiasm for this vital need. That's why I am appealing for wider support not only for our ongoing work but also for the materialising of this new project.

**You sound very pessimistic.**

Through the last forty years Auroville has been through many ups and downs. Now, I believe, we are in the deepest part of a dip. However, I feel the overall movement is always ultimately upward. I believe, for example, that we are becoming more and more conscious that the way we do things is not correct, that we should organize ourselves in such a way as to make ourselves more presentable to the outside world.

As to the deeper picture, I remember asking Nolini many years ago why people were behaving so badly in this place which The Mother had created. He smiled and said, "Wait and see". So I am not pessimistic as I am convinced there is a purpose behind all this.

*From an interview by Alan  
For more information contact  
avarchives@auroville.org.in*

## HEALTH

**“W**atsu, or 'Water Shiatsu' is the mother of all aquatic bodywork; it is Shiatsu in water,”

says Dariya, a certified Watsu and Waterdance practitioner in Auroville. "There is stretching, mobilization and working on points, all done to the rhythm of one's breath." Watsu, unlike other aquatic bodywork techniques such as Aquawellness, Waterdance, and Healing Dance, is done only on the surface of the water. The other are done both on the surface and underwater.

Dariya, whose name in Sanskrit and Persian means 'ocean' or 'big river', is from Slovenia. In Auroville, she worked as a greenbelter planting trees and as a dance teacher at the Kindergarten and was a member of the Auroville Dance Lab. Her involvement with water came after receiving aquatic bodywork sessions from the late Gioia Erni. "I remember the first time. It was like 'Wow! This is it!'" Two years later she signed up for her first course. "The learning went very fast for me. It was something I had been looking for something to which I could give myself fully." 'Waterwork' became a full-time work.

Aquatic bodywork was introduced in Auroville in the 1990s after the construction of a warm water pool at the Quiet Healing Centre. In the beginning there were few therapists and clients. Gradually more Aurovilians and guests became interested, both to receive treatments as well as to learn the techniques. Until now, over 300 people have participated in more than 30 courses at the Quiet Healing Centre. "The pool usage is stretched to its limits. There are eight certified Watsu practitioners in Auroville," says Dariya, "and all depend on this one warm water pool to offer sessions or courses!"

Aquatic bodywork differs from regular bodywork due to the unique qualities of the medium. Dariya explains: "Here, the water is almost at body temperature (34 – 35 Celsius),

## Wellness through water



Dariya and Daniel offering a Watsu and Healing Dance session to a guest.

so the sense of 'out and in' is taken away and all kinds of phenomena begin to occur.

She explains how the client or the 'receiver' is passive and relaxed, and is moved according to his or her capabilities. "Being held in a kind of embrace in warm water, where one experiences a state of weightlessness, works not just on the physical body but also on the emotional, psychological and spiritual levels, and people have all kinds of experiences. And sometimes it gets very interesting. I will not forget someone from the Ashram who said – 'Ah, now I know what the Mother meant about transformation of the body and the cells and about the psychic!'"

"Sometimes you are holding a complete stranger in your arms but it feels so natural because the water takes all conditioning away – connotations of sexuality, touch, all get erased. And it just feels very natural to nurture. I remem-

ber having an intense session with a Healing Dance therapist – it felt like a big mother was holding me, and he is a man!"

In the summer of 2004, Dariya met her partner and fellow practitioner, Daniel, at an aquatic course in Europe. By the end of the year, Daniel had moved to Auroville and the couple were offering their first Liquid Flow course in Auroville.

"At that time there were not many people holding courses here. The Swiss Watsu teacher Gianni de Stefani would visit once a year to teach on behalf of the Worldwide Watsu organisation. But too many people wanted to learn. So we came up with a sequence which we call Liquid Flow, and share that now mainly within Auroville. It uses techniques from Aquawellness and Watsu."

The couple look like water creatures themselves; sleek and streamlined, with an air of

wholesome vitality about them. Both have international licenses to practice, but not to teach. "The reason is financial," explains Daniel, who has been practising Watsu and Water Dance for 14 years. "It is expensive to get certified as a teacher and the courses are offered only in the West," says Dariya. "The plan is that one of us will get the international teacher certification so that we can improvise more and teach different courses."

Last year, Dariya explored a different water modality called Prenatal Journey. "Water brings many issues to the surface. Even when it is done for relaxation and pleasure, or for healing as in physiotherapy, inner issues come up. Prenatal Journey is to accompany the receiver through issues that come from the time of being in the womb. Using basic movements, the receiver is put into a deep state of relaxation and then, from a sitting position, the verbal part of the session begins. It is process work in warm water." However, Dariya has not been able to offer Prenatal Journey in Auroville. "It is difficult here because the pool is not set up for privacy."

This is one of the limitations that has spurred Dariya along with Daniel and two other Aurovilian Watsu practitioners to come up with a proposal for Aquatica, a dedicated aquatic bodywork and therapy centre. "We have got site permission close to the proposed Health Park near the Arka community, and are now looking for funds, we welcome support from all those called by this idea."

"Amongst us Watsu practitioners, we joke that if the members of Auroville working groups, would come and receive a Watsu session before each meeting, we would have more open, loving and trusting people. Then there might be less mental arguments, and possibly more flow with solutions to our problems."

"In fact, we dream that everyone should have this experience!"

Priya Sundaravalli



# Auroville International looks forward

The annual meeting of the Auroville International (AVI) Centres took place at Conference Centre Venwoude, at Lage Vuursche, The Netherlands in the first week of May. It was attended by representatives of Auroville International Canada, USA, Spain, France, England, Germany, The Netherlands, and by Aurovilians and a member of the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation.

The seven days of activities had been rigorously organized by our Dutch hosts. Information sessions on Auroville alternated with presentations of the work done by the Auroville International Centres, introductions on the significance of Sanskrit mantras, and meditations on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Discussions were intense and often went on late into the evening. Aurovilians Aloka and Joan guided some of the participants through 'Awareness through the Body' sessions, which were appreciated as a timely gift from Auroville to a world desperately in need of techniques for self-understanding and observation. There was a well-organized trip to Amsterdam which included a visit to the Van Gogh Museum. All enjoyed an evening of puppetry presented by Puppet Theatre Koekla. And Nadaka and Gopika gave a concert on the theme of Shantakaram – the Sanskrit word for 'embodiment of peace'.

One day called 'Connectivity Day' was open to the public and it filled the room to capacity. Over 80 attendees were shown the latest videos 'Vannakkam Auroville/Welcome to Auroville'. Auroville Radio provided a live video link between Loes Keyzers and Linda-Grace Mosselman in Venwoude and Shraddhavan, Deepti and Margarita in Auroville on the theme 'How can the Dream become reality?' concentrating on today's priorities. Lastly, International Advisory Council (IAC) member Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi gave a speech on contemporary capitalism and its painful transition into a post-industrial phase.

The sessions on Auroville included a presentation on the arts in Auroville with a request to the AVI centres to organize exhibitions to promote the work of Auroville's artists and photographers. A video was shown about New Creation Bilingual School and its success over the last few years. Vani spoke about the work done at Sadhana Forest and Shivaya updated the audience on work in the International Zone. The work at the new Health Centre at Kailash was explained, as well as Auroville's work for village dental projects, for which an American dentist donated \$16,000. Videos on the Inuksuk and the visit of HH the Dalai Lama were screened as well as presentations on the Realization housing project.



PHOTO COURTESY WIM

The participants of the Auroville International meeting. Seated in front, (from left to right): Anuradha, Devasmita, Satyakam, Dianne, Vani, Loes, Linda. Middle row: (from left to right): Francine, Sonia, Ursula Ernst, Shivaya, Kamala, Friederike, Wendy, Mia, Christian, Martin. Back row: (from left to right): Helmut, Anil (behind Sonia), Wim (behind Fanou), Fanou, Isa, Jet, Alfonso, Tekeste, Adri, Jan, Julian, Bryan.

were completed first, bringing a sense of unity?

Mia suggested we should lean more towards a living dialogue as an alternative to pavilions as the need for education in the world is of the utmost priority. "We should look towards the future, not the past. True, the Inuksuk monument is magnificent, but it does not inspire me to think of the future, which is something Mother emphasized all the time." Someone suggested that instead of elaborate pavilions, building spiritual symbols such as the Inuksuk monument would be more appropriate

destiny more or less overtly, so too each nation has a psychic being which is its true being and moulds its destiny from behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountain-head of all that is beautiful, noble, great and generous in the life of the country." In response to this suggestion, AVI USA said that it has plans to organize a seminar on Searching for the Soul of America next year.

The second is that all AVI Centres investigate the possibilities of helping to complete the Unity Pavilion complex, which is central to the development of the International Zone. This complex provides a space in the International Zone which everybody can use until their own National Pavilions are in place. The Unity Pavilion will also have the Hall of Peace where the Peace Table of Asia will be housed. For completing the Unity Pavilion complex, Rs 60 Lakhs (Euros 92,000, US dollars 120,000) is required.

The third request to the AVI Centres is to start identifying government and non-governmental organisations in their country which would be willing to participate in the financing of the pavilion of their country. Also, as big amounts of funding will be required for the development of Auroville – for building houses, infrastructure and institutions – each Auroville International Centre was invited to set-up a task force to identify government and/or non-governmental organisations in their country that are willing to help and sponsor the development of Auroville.

Lastly, the Centres were asked to contact universities and institutes of higher learning in their country to invite them to send their students to Auroville for internship and to initiate student-exchange programmes.

The representatives of the European AVI Centres agreed to collaborate in fund-raising for the creation of a European Plaza in the International

Zone. In October 2009, a meeting on this topic will take place in Berlin, organized by AVI Germany.

Auroville is not just that little speck of land in South India but a universal project of the Divine and we must try to enlarge our vision to include the rest of the world. The idea of human unity and international understanding has been close to me from my early days. In 1968 I was actively involved with the support of liberation movements, especially in Africa. So today the idea of closer connections of Auroville and AVI with people and institutions from African and South American countries is something I support very much. I find it also very uplifting to see Auroville's growing involvement with regional activities and its stronger emphasis on co-evolutionary approaches towards the surrounding villages. In future, Auroville International could play a crucial role in supporting these outreach activities.

*Friederike Werner,  
Secretary AVI International*

In order to effectively respond to these proposals a higher level of professionalism will be required both inside and outside of Auroville. Martin Littlewood was appointed Executive Director and will act as part of a new Executive Committee to make AVI more effective and timely in its decision-making. Martin recently put together a new AVI brochure for dissemination throughout Auroville for visitors who want to work for Auroville back in their home countries. AVI will be reaching out to India and Africa in its coming meetings to empower and diversify participation. A redesigned AVI website, by Martijn Boomsma, is online at [www.auroville-international.org](http://www.auroville-international.org)

Finally, it was time for laurels. On behalf of the AVI Centres Wim, the Dutch AVI chairman, expressed deep appreciation to Mia Berden, who had just celebrated her 95th birthday, for all her work over the years and presented her with an Auroville-made silk stole. Wim also thanked Jan Lohman for his many years of quiet devotion and presented him with mint coins celebrating Sri Aurobindo's anniversary. Julian Lines, who was recently appointed to the IAC and was re-elected as Chair of Auroville International, remembered Ruud Lohman and thanked Jan for his family's service to Auroville. An outdoor bonfire with toasts and laughter ended a very intense week with a deep appreciation of all the hard work put in by our Dutch hosts. It was a happy ending to a very successful AVI meeting.

*Dianna*



PHOTO COURTESY WIM

Aerial view of Conference Centre Venwoude

Luigi, the Fundraising and Networking Coordinator of L'Avenir d'Auroville, gave an overview of latest developments in Auroville. He spoke about the urgent necessity to protect the lands included in the Master Plan and the need to create housing for the increasing number of people who wish to join Auroville. A major part of his presentation and ensuing discussion centred on Auroville's International Zone; are the Centres ready to actively participate in its development? This question was countered with the question 'Is the Master Plan of the Zone sufficiently developed so that the pavilions can be built?'. "Suppose we have the money," said Wim from AVI The Netherlands, "Can you show us where the Dutch pavilion can be built?" There was no answer to this question and a lively discussion followed. Some centres mentioned their frustration that in the past their proposal for a pavilion had been rejected. Others questioned why each country would want its 'own' pavilion. Is this in accordance with The Mother's ideas? Is it an approach which leads to division? Should we aim at a more collective approach? Would it help if the Unity Pavilion

and inspiring. Opinion was also divided on the different geometrical forms for the various pavilions as determined by the late Roger Anger (a square for Europe, a circle for Africa, a triangle for Asia, a hexagon for the Americas, and a mixture of a hexagon and a triangle for Oceania).

These discussions also pointed to a change of focus for the Auroville International Centres themselves. In the early years, providing information on Auroville was a major task. But today information is extensively available on the Internet. Auroville has entered a new phase in its development now that the Matrimandir is ready, and for these reasons the Working Committee and L'Avenir d'Auroville had jointly proposed to the Centres to concentrate now on four other activities which are very much in line with AVI's previous and current efforts.

The first is to start study groups – or strengthen the groups if they already exist – to study the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and determine in which way one's country has contributed to the evolution of humanity. As The Mother said, "Just as each individual has a psychic being which is his true self and which governs his

We want the city built as soon as possible! The earth needs change and this is our mission, to create a place that is different. The earth needs many cities with a soul and in this time of global change we have a responsibility. I sometimes think of the thousands of potential Aurovilians out there who are waiting for us to build the city. Sometimes I feel that Aurovilians are quite happy in their backyard and are not enthusiastic about enlarging, or even building their city. We owe it to the world; it is our responsibility. We are not doing it for ourselves but for the Earth and the next generations.

*Wim van Megen,  
Chairman AVI The Netherlands*



# "A very enriching experience"

In June, the previous Working Committee, the main liaison between the residents and the Governing Board, held its last meeting after more than two years in office. What were the challenges, the achievements, the failures? What were the most important things they learned, both collectively and individually? Auroville Today spoke to six of the members (Raman, the seventh, had decided not to continue beyond March 30, when the original tenure of the Working Committee expired).

**Auroville Today:** In one of your first meetings you specified a number of initiatives you wished to take. One of these was clarifying what constitutes a valid decision of the Residents Assembly (RA). Did you succeed in doing this?

**Carel:** Very much so. We drew up a proposal for a method of decision-making which was endorsed by the Residents Assembly in a referendum in August 2007. Among other things, this specified that at least 10% of registered residents should participate in voting and that a proposal had to receive a minimum of 50% of votes cast for it to be passed. The new policy also enabled people to vote from their homes, thus preventing a few individuals dominating the process through meetings. The community also agreed to set up a Residents Assembly Service to supervise the whole process.

Recently, however, when a list of options was presented to the RA concerning how to choose a new Working Committee and Council, the winning option received less than 50% of the votes. Yet it was adopted. Why was the new decision-making procedure not followed?

**Sanjeev:** There were some very vocal people who wanted to push a particular option. They were aware of the proper procedure but, as happens often in Auroville, the correct process was less important to them than their own wishes. After a certain point we thought there was no point in quarrelling about it, so we went along with it.

Is this representative of one of the problems that you faced? That you came up with proposals or recommendations that were then ignored or modified?

**Carel:** A major focus for this Working Committee was to ensure that all working groups in Auroville operate with community-approved mandates that specify their accountability to the RA and the terms of office of their members. We have partially succeeded, but there are still many groups that function on their own, though they take decisions that affect the community or individuals. Our attempt was also not helped by the fact that the Governing Board, for reasons that were valid at the time, created a few major Auroville working groups, such as the Funds and Assets Management Committee and L'Avenir d'Auroville, as subcommittees of the Governing Board without specifying their accountability to the RA. Even though the groups do report to the community, this affects our self-management

**Hemant:** Some of our proposals for new mandates or changes in existing mandates were stalled in other working groups. In Auroville we have an amorphous power structure, each group has its own dynamic, and to get a new proposal through this maze of groups as well as the community you have to believe very strongly in it and have great perseverance.

**Sanjeev:** One of the big challenges Auroville faces is the structure of the Foundation Act. According to this Act, certain decisions concerning the running of the community fall under the purview of the Governing Board. This is a direct challenge to Auroville and its internal processes.

How did this Working Committee deal with this challenge?

**Sanjeev:** We thought that the only way to strengthen Auroville vis-a-vis the government component of the Foundation is to unite ourselves. If

individuals and the working groups cooperate, there is nobody who can stand against us but if we are fighting among ourselves, we only invite outsiders to interfere. So we invited a group of people representing different strands of Auroville society to come together to see if we could agree upon a plan of action. This group met once a month for 6-7 months but eventually it collapsed because people only wanted to talk about their own concerns.

**Hemant:** In Auroville only a crisis unites. We didn't want to wait for a crisis, we wanted to create a safe space where outstanding issues could be dealt with so we would emerge more united. Although our initiative didn't yield the results we had hoped, we did create some kind of a coming together. One of our objectives as a Working Committee was also to set up an advisory group to broaden our circle of seven members and this larger representative group could have been such a body.

tions but the individual or group concerned often ignored them. I think this is the main problem we faced. It's a big handicap for Auroville because it encourages some people to do what they like as they know there is no authority which can enforce anything against them.

This suggests that your experience of doing this work has been very frustrating.

**Sanjeev:** These situations are not cropping up all the time. Our day-to-day work is bureaucratic – approving nominations for executives, giving small permissions etc. – because the Foundation refers to the Working committee for every little thing. To do this work well you need a wide consciousness and to be very scrupulous as a wrong decision can make life miserable for an individual. I think on this day-to-day level this was a good, effective Working Committee.

get criticism, and this Working Committee has done something good, I can show you a list of things!

**Dhanapal, your particular responsibility in this Working Committee was the relationship with the villages. Was any progress made here?**

**Dhanapal:** Over the last two years we have established a good relationship with all the leaders of the local villages. However, when I joined the Working Committee I wanted to set up Development Councils in eight neighbouring villages so that Auroville and the villages could develop together through sharing knowledge, finances and resources. This is very important but I didn't succeed: only one Development Council has been set up so far. Getting all the headmen, panchayat and political leaders to agree for a joint adventure is not that easy, but I blame myself for not putting enough effort into this; over the past two years, my mind

Secretary will remain unpredictable and we have to find ways of dealing with whoever sits in that chair. That's one of the big tasks of any Working Committee. I would say we have been quite successful in keeping a balance. There were no disastrous confrontations. When we disagreed with him we stated our points of disagreement clearly and when we agreed with him we supported him equally strongly – and it's not as if there were no points of agreement. The first year was a difficult one as we had to understand each other's personalities and ways of working but by the end there was a good atmosphere in our interactions with him.

**Carel:** We also strengthened our contacts with members of the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council. What we see as a handicap of the present Governing Board structure is that members come here for one or two meetings a year, they discuss two hours with the community, two hours among themselves, and then they go home. This doesn't work. To truly understand this place the members have to come here more often and for a longer period of time, just as the members of the Advisory Council are doing. We have proposed that individual Board members would relate to certain aspects of Auroville and spend more time here in order to increase their understanding and participation. For we can't go on thinking Auroville is only us; the Secretary and the Governing Board are also part and parcel of it and we have to find ways to integrate them.

**Hemant:** The reason why we wanted the present Governing Board and International Advisory Council to continue for a second term is that these people have gone through a process of understanding Auroville and a second term will allow them to make use of this knowledge. An important aspect of our work was to involve these bodies in our issues and I think we have been fairly successful in doing this.

What has been the most satisfying part of this experience for you?

**Angela:** We were not only fully committed but also enthusiastic about the work, and this made it a great experience for me. I came to every meeting with enthusiasm and joy because I loved to work with these people.

**Hemant:** It has been a very enriching experience – I've gained a huge amount of knowledge.

**Carel:** It was never a matter of one person dominating and the others giving way. We complemented and enriched each other and when we had differences we always tried to climb up to a higher level of understanding. This was a very good process.

**Sanjeev:** We worked as a team and even though certain issues took a long time to resolve, even people like Carel learned to be patient!

**Dhanapal:** Watching people like Carel and Sanjeev at work has given me a good foundation for how I want to be in the future. They were very knowledgeable and when they felt they were right they would go ahead, even if people opposed them. This is something I can learn from.

**Hilde:** What made it a very positive experience for me was that nobody was sitting round this table trying to promote their own project. Everybody was here for Auroville. This made it a very joyful working space.

From an interview by Alan



The outgoing Working Committee. From left to right (sitting) Angela, Dhanapal and Hilde; (standing) Sanjeev, Hemant and Carel

**Sanjeev:** Seven members cannot represent the diversity of Auroville. When a major decision has to be taken other perspectives have to be included so we can stand united.

Division comes when people seek personal solutions by bypassing the community and going straight to the Secretary or Chairman of the Governing Board.

Don't people do this because they feel there is no possibility of having their grievances redressed in the present set-up?

**Sanjeev:** The main reason why people want to bypass the Residents Assembly is they want to do things in their way and they align themselves with those given power by the government as a way of achieving this. In my view, this is the major problem.

**Carel:** However, if the planning group, for example, doesn't allow you to build a house, where can you go? There's nowhere at present. That is why we talked about setting up an appeal body. But we didn't manage to manifest it.

Isn't one of the reasons why some people oppose such 'apex' groups is they fear these groups will have too much power?

**Carel:** Actually we in the Working Committee didn't have the power to implement anything. When there were conflicts, we spent a lot of time and energy coming up with recommenda-

How did you deal with the diversity of perspectives and personalities in this Working Committee?

**Hilde:** I think the fact that we met three times a week meant we had to work through our differences. Although we differed at times, there was a willingness to look at the differences, to accept each other's viewpoint and try to come up with a solution. We realized that if we could not solve something here it wouldn't happen anywhere else. We also knew there were interests ready to take advantage of any disharmony between us.

**Angela:** This Working Committee had a high level of professionalism and people with specific skills. But it also had people who could keep the balance, who could preserve a certain atmosphere through joking and keeping things light. I think this helped the group grow together in its diversity.

**Dhanapal:** I was also in the previous Working Committee. There, when people had clashes, they sometimes ended up leaving the group. However, this group stuck together. We had our differences, but everybody was always thinking about the larger needs of Auroville. At the same time, we were not prepared to be a dummy Working Committee which said 'yes' to everybody. We were willing to touch difficult issues – if an individual or group was not behaving correctly we said so – and some people didn't like us very much because of this. I didn't mind. I know if you want to do something good for Auroville you will

have been more on Auroville challenges than on the villages.

One of the big issues you haven't mentioned yet is your relationship with the present Secretary. To what extent have you managed to get him to understand your perspective on Auroville matters and to work with you as an equal partner?

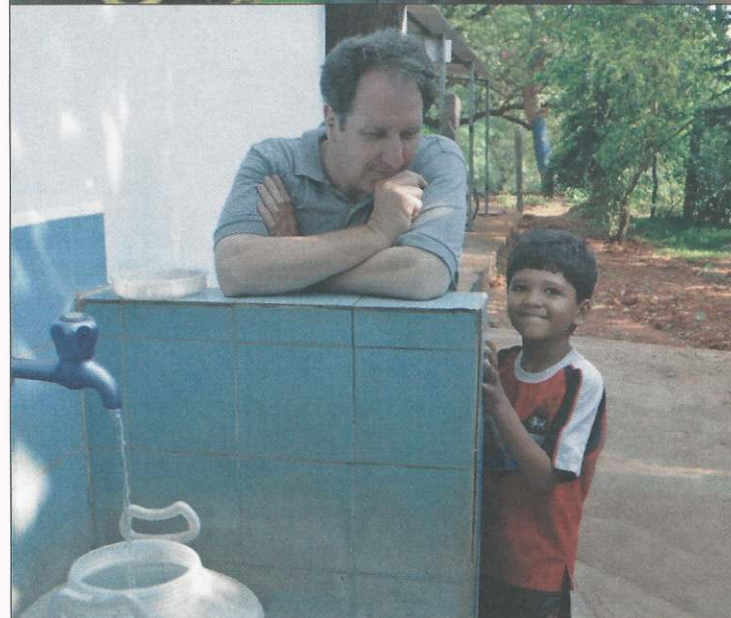
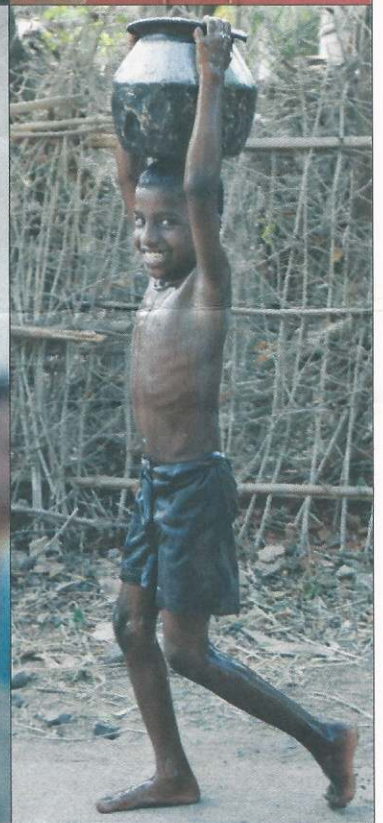
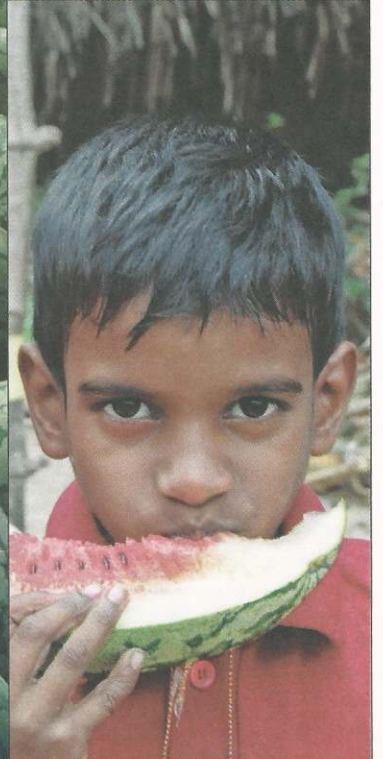
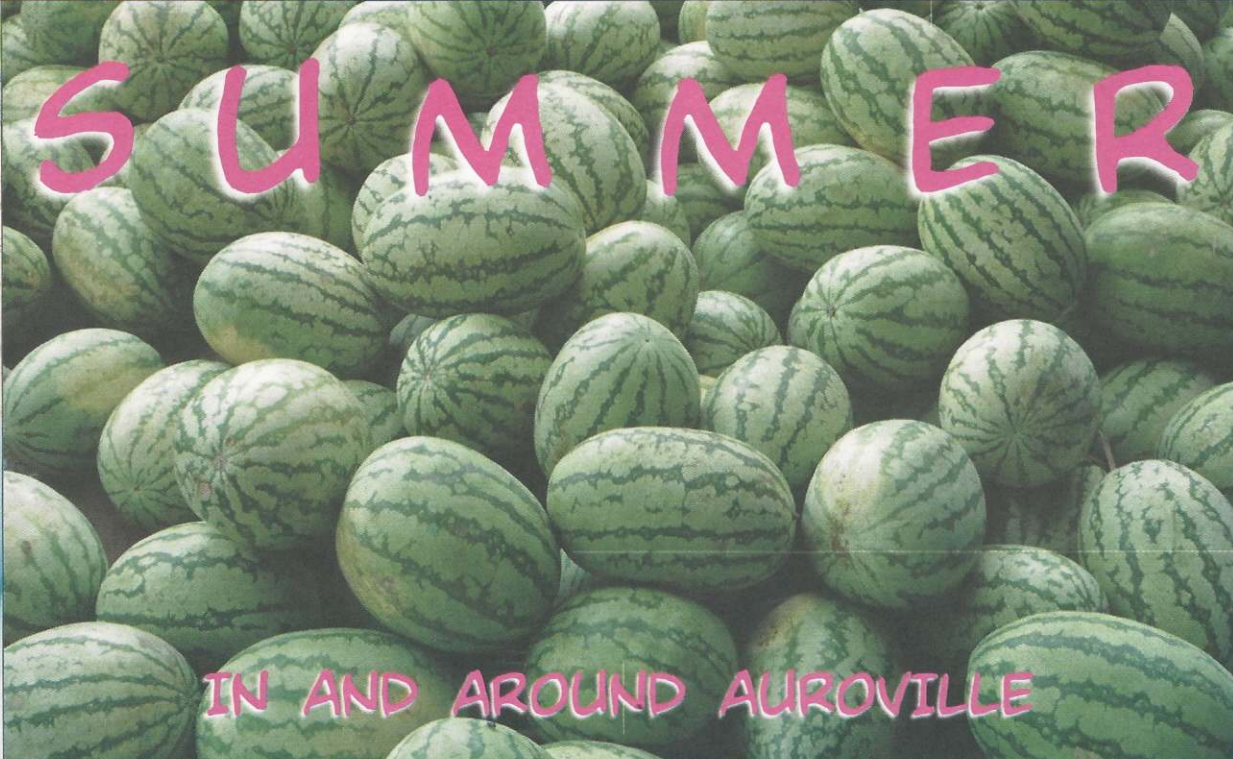
**Carel:** I don't think we have been very successful in this. This Secretary holds a very definite opinion that he is at the helm of the Auroville Foundation, that he is steering it. This view is not shared in Auroville. We felt we couldn't work with him as equal partners as he didn't accept our full participation in decision-making. I think if we had had a different relationship with the Secretary we could have done much more as a group.

We also had differences with him concerning whether the Auroville Foundation is a government entity or an autonomous institution. Finally we obtained a legal opinion from one of India's most respected lawyers which clarified that the Auroville Foundation is an autonomous institution.

**Dhanapal:** Some Aurovilians said we were hand-in-glove with the Secretary, that we were selling Auroville to the government, but this was not so. We never gave up our position if we felt it was right one. However, we had to find a way to work with him for the future of Auroville.

**Hemant:** I think the office of the





Sven Ulsa was one of Auroville Today's early staff-photographers who contributed many memorable images in our issues of the 90s. Since then, he has been successful with his views of India in the 'Joy Postcards' series which sell throughout India. Currently he is the main participant in an exhibition on Pondicherry now on in Malaysia and Singapore. Sven's other interests include social work. He also spent many years as a member of the Entry Group, as well as translating, being involved with Village Action. He loves Auroville. He can be contacted at:  
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