

AUROVILLE TODAY

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An Unfinished Canvas

This issue of *Auroville Today* touches on a sensitive area of life in Auroville: its art, artists and culture. Is there such a thing as an Auroville culture? What are those artists on the world's last edges trying to express in their work?

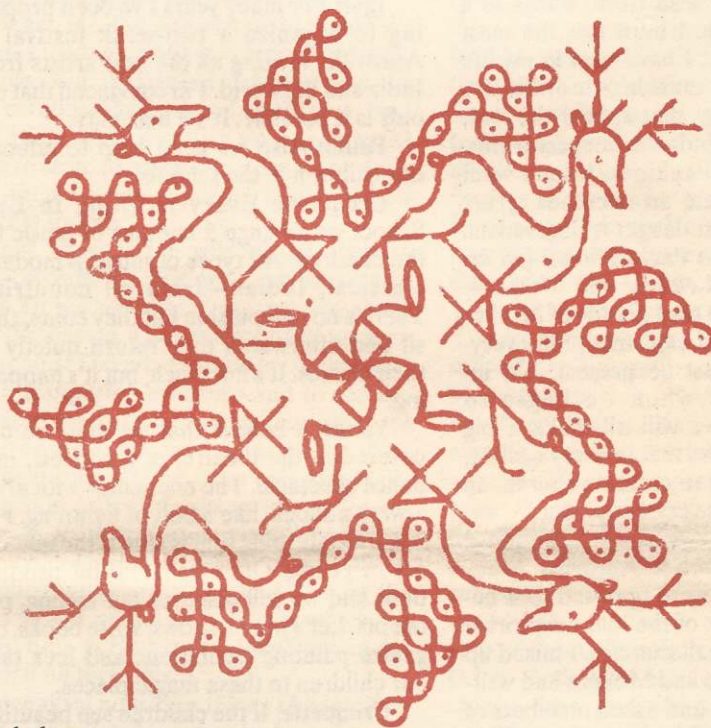
What is their common point? Is it possible to express the ineffable, that which has brought us all here to this desert land where everything remains to be done, a land which in itself is a master piece of beauty and harmony? [Let us salute in passing all those pioneering landscape artists who have turned our landscape into a green oasis, all those who, like painters or sculptors, have worked the earth and channelled the forces of nature to transcribe their aspirations. Let us salute the unlicensed architects who have created minor masterpieces of inventiveness and originality and all those whose humble work is filled with as much ardour and inspiration as that of any artist.] And is there anything more difficult, more delicate, than the attempt to express the ineffable, that unquenchable thirst for something else, that irresistible need to breathe another air, that steadfastness in resisting all attacks—and to continue on a way fraught with ambushes, where truth is manifold, and where one cannot rely on any dogma? Only the experience of Mother and Sri Aurobindo gives us the strength to resist all passing doubts.

How to express this urge towards something else, our need of unending progress? How to express the promise of a new man and how, whether with brushes, words or musical notes, or with the body's movements does one connect with and become a channel for this evolution?

It seems to me that Auroville is like an enormous studio where each Aurovilian is trying to find the right colour; a concert hall where the instruments are constantly being tuned to play an as yet unwritten piece; a theatre where the actors are acting out a play of which they don't know the text, where dancers improvise an unknown choreography; a blank page in whose folds is hidden the secret of a new way of being, another man. —Yanne

The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga.

Mother, "Bulletin", Feb. 1961.



Stag kolam.

(Women in Tamil villages draw kolams every morning in front of doorways)

Yanne: When I was very young, I chose to do theatre, and only theatre. But Auroville has given me the possibility of expressing myself in a larger way and discovering other means of expression. It is as if life here is a large theatre where I can play all the rôles. In fact, AV has given me the possibility of integrating life and art.

Igor: I was a musician before coming to Auroville, but I was interpreting the music of others. I wished to express in music certain of my aspirations which were related to the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Here I can do this.

What is the challenge of Auroville for an artist?

Igor: I've had to fight a real battle, because I need to work with very costly instruments and when I arrived here there was nothing, no facilities. When one composes electronic music or wants to make films it requires much expensive equipment and I don't know of any other society where one can spend money endlessly without being able to earn it. To earn money is not the final aim, but for me now it is a necessity. I am able to make music for Aurovilians only because of financial resources outside Auroville. Because, if we are honest, you cannot live and make music on Rs.600 a month! If we are to have an artistic renaissance in Auroville, we need a stable financial base.

Croquette: For me the question is not to know if one can give, but whether one wants to give. Is there a collective desire in Auroville to give the creative intelligence of the artist the opportunity to express itself?

It's essential that Aurovilians want to live in an artistic environment.

Rolf: Yet creativity is such a powerful thing that if you have the means or not, you do it. You create.

Yanne: And we should not only welcome people here who can generate money. Subsidies, for example, create an official culture, a conventional art. For me, art must be subversive.

Paulo: Auroville for me is a concentration of the world process. The challenge for us here is to take one of those threads and pull it in another direction.

Alan: I think that one of the challenges for the artist here is that he's always working with something that's so obviously unfinished; our achievements are always so far short of our ideal. So the work here is process—trying something, falling down, trying something else. But there's still a certain demand from some Aurovilians for perfect finished products. They don't want to see the rough edges. We need to be able to respect and enjoy art as process.

Croquette: Yes. If we are to have a culture in Auroville, we must accept that those who offer something can make mistakes! If an artist cannot make a mistake, he cannot progress.

Igor: Another problem is the diversity of the people here. Auroville makes it difficult for the artist to communicate because people's backgrounds and points of reference are not the same.

Roger: You are a part of this patchwork and you bring a richness to this evolving Aurovilian culture from what you are.

(contd. on page 2)

"C'est un bouillon de culture!"

Auroville artists discuss culture in Auroville

In *Auroville Today*, no. 2, Yanne posed a question: Is Auroville a cultural desert? Recently, we brought together some Auroville artists to try to answer the question and to talk about the challenges and opportunities they encounter here. Igor is a composer and musician, Rolf an artist and designer, Paulo a dancer, Croquette an actor and producer, Yanne an actress and a writer, Roger and Alan came for the coffee.

Auroville Today: I think we should begin by trying to define the word 'culture'.

Paulo: Culture is all forms of artistic expression.

Yanne: Every act of life is a cultural act if it is raised to the level of art. Art is the expression in matter of a vision, a divine intuition.

Igor: For me, culture is an act of concentration upon ourselves. Our first task is to cultivate in ourselves all the levels of our being—physical, mental, vital and higher planes—to cultivate the particular nature we have inherited.

Roger: I don't think culture is necessarily limited to 'art'. Culture is to do with the shared experiences of everyday life, what we identify with and what defines us. Twenty one years of Auroville has created

a rich mixture of experiences which are a culture in full process of development.

Alan: So here we have two rather different definitions of culture. One is 'intentional culture'—a conscious attempt to realize an opening, an intuition, in matter. The other is 'unintentional'—the many ways in which a society automatically expresses itself through its language, dress etc. Perhaps we can focus more on the first definition today.

Why has each of you chosen to pursue an artistic activity in Auroville?

Paulo: Dance is something I need to do, where I can concentrate and give the best of myself. I'd be doing it if I was living somewhere else, but it would not be the same as doing it here. I dance with more intensity now.

"Is there a collective desire in Auroville to give the creative intelligence of the artist the opportunity to express itself?"

Igor: And often the public is very critical, even though they lack a cultural background. How can you expect Aurovilians to support experimentation in music if they don't appreciate contemporary music? It's a very complex question.

Croquette: If we have little or no contact with the evolution of art in the world, we lose the possibility of being stimulated by artists who are just as much in touch as we are. And it is in this sense that one talks of a 'cultural desert', because one is isolated.

Yanne: The fact that we are cut off from the world will certainly have the effect that we lose the sense of perfection. One has a tendency to congratulate oneself here. The loss of a sense of perfection is very important because the education of the children depends upon the standard we set.

Igor: Something that gets under my skin is the tendency to wish to do things in a 'spiritual' way here. I must say, the most spiritual things that I have seen in my life have always been outside Auroville. It's often in those things that appear the least spiritual that one finds the deepest truths, the most dazzling intuitions. I don't want Auroville to become an unctuous syrup. For me, the greatest danger is dogmatism. Recently I talked to Paulo Tomasi [an architect who worked closely with Mother—Eds.] He wanted to take photos of Mother but she refused and explained, "In everything you do I must be present, but invisible". I think when we begin to understand this, we will all make a big progress. One knows that in every society, there is a tendency to create a church, an official art; and it is very dangerous.

Croquette: Some years ago, I produced *Le Malade Imaginaire* in Auroville. Many people at the time were opposed to it because it was a work of the 'old unspiritual world'. I made a small exercise. I mixed up what Sri Aurobindo and Molière had written about medicine and asked members of the cast to distinguish between the authors of the texts; nobody was able to do it. I believe that writers, painters, musicians who have crossed the centuries carry a certain truth which often we have not yet uncovered.

Is an identifiable Auroville culture evolving?

Roger: I don't think that Auroville is a cultural desert. Here we are cut off from the distraction of Western culture so that we can concentrate more easily on the essentials. There's a very rich seed-bed here that, at a certain moment, will flower. I'm

waiting for the day when we use our own experiences in Auroville in our self-expression, when we seize our symbols out of the life we're living here.

Rolf: I think something is happening. We work for years here without going out, but when we go out, it's possible to recognize Auroville art at once. In the Madras exhibition a few years ago, [the first exhibition of Auroville fine arts held outside the community—Eds.] you could sense it was a unity.

Croquette: When we made tours with *Theatre d'Expression*, people recognized that we were different.

Can we do more to encourage a flowering of culture in Auroville?

Croquette: I think Auroville should become an international centre on the artistic level.

Igor: For many years I've been proposing to organize a two-week festival in Auroville, inviting all the best artists from India and the world. I'm convinced that not only is it possible. It's a necessity.

Paulo: Also we need help to educate our children in the schools.

Croquette: Every morning in Last School we arrange 5 minutes of music for the children. All types of music—modern, classical, Indian—from all countries. There's no compulsion but they come, they sit and afterwards they return quietly to their classes. It's not much, but it's happening.

Yanne: I believe that art must be discovered in the theatre, in a concert, in a dance spectacle. The encounter with art is always a shock, like a bolt of lightning. For me, the only thing that is true is the gift, the act of giving. Offer us beautiful productions and we will discover our calling, our talents. Let's put on shows, write books, organize painting exhibitions and let's take our children to these magic places.

Croquette: If the children see beautiful performances, which are truthful and not dogmatic, they are capable of a magnificent enthusiasm. They can't explain it, but they feel they are participating in something extraordinary.

Auroville Today: Is Auroville, then, a 'cultural desert'?

Croquette: Not at all. Rather, it's a cultural soup!

Roger: A desert is also a place where there's a beautiful view of the horizon and the stars!

Participating interviewers:
Alan, Yanne.

Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Roger, Yanne. (Bill, Tineke, Carel joined the temporary exodus) Photographer: Susan. Desktop Publishing: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.

Dès Aujourd'hui: Auroville Aujourd'hui!

IT'S THERE! Tell your French friends that *Auroville Aujourd'hui* will appear at the end of June. Take out a subscription, for yourself or for your friends. You can send your contribution (same rate as for *Auroville Today*) to the Auroville International centre in your country, or directly to Auroville Trust. *Auroville Aujourd'hui* will come out four times a year and will contain articles published in *Auroville Today* as well as other articles.

Vous voulez suivre l'aventure d'Auroville de près, lisez *Auroville Aujourd'hui*. Vous voulez offrir un cadeau - offrez *Auroville Aujourd'hui*, un journal d'Auroville.

Yanne

*Please see the "To receive Auroville Today" - box elsewhere in this issue.

AUROVILLE SHRUTI: Nadaka Seeks The Original Sound.

Nadaka came to Auroville in 1978. Among other things, he is an innovative musician. Having studied the veena and sarod for some years, he returned to playing the acoustic guitar, discovering, over a period of two years, a new way of tuning it that enables him to approach the sound of Indian music.

Recently, he gave a concert in Madras, accompanied by his Carnatic music ensemble. In the concert, which was well reviewed in The Hindu, three different styles could be distinguished: Hindustani court music, traditional popular Carnatic music and western music with new-age jazz influences. His latest project was composing the music for Rom Whitaker's film Croc Boy, a film about nature and animals which was previewed recently at a Moscow children's film festival, and which will be released soon in India.

It's the beginning of May, and we're listening to a recording of the Madras concert. The sound of an overhead fan can be heard as Nadaka leads us gently into his music - humming, tapping out the rhythms, distinguishing the different sounds of acoustic guitar, ghatam, koonakal violin, mridangan tablas and Stephano's saxophone. He explains, "It is a modal form of music. We keep to a modal base from which each instrument then unfolds like an ethereal serpent. At its core it's mainly improvisation. One forgets oneself, one lets the instrument take off, and it can almost become a spiritual experience if one can follow it."

"When I was a kid, I thought music was more important than anything else. But when I came to Auroville I dropped all of that. Because back then the most important thing was to plant trees. I remember the joy I'd feel in just watching a blade of ragi grow. And anyway at that time we had no equipment, no tape recorders. Occasionally we would listen to Mother or Sunil's music on these really old machines, but still the vibration would come across, and it was exactly the quality of music that I was looking for. That which cannot be expressed in sound, and which had nothing to do with technical means but which relates to silence.

How did you get involved in music?

Five years after coming to Auroville I picked up a guitar again. My fingers had forgotten nothing but I was playing mechanically. So I started studying singing from scratch and spent three months with an extraordinary Sufi musician. It was quite funny. I had brought my guitar along and in a gentle way he informed me that if I wanted to play music with my guitar I MIGHT AS WELL STOP IMMEDIATELY! I was of course disappointed, but carried on and began to learn beating rhythms on a table. That was the way he shattered my illusions concerning instruments. Three months later he asked me to do a concert with him and I was surprised. I asked him, "With what instrument?" And he answered, "But with a guitar of course!" It was unbelievable - he had totally broken me down and then he started praising the guitar. I learnt a lot with him. This obsession with having all the latest equipment is very western. I'm convinced that one can make great music with a simple string and a piece of bamboo. Simplicity helps you in your search for something different.

What does being an artist mean for you?

I don't quite understand. I don't feel myself an artist any more than someone who plants trees or repairs motorbikes the best he can. What have we come to Auroville for, other than to do the best we can? To go beyond oneself? So whether it's music or anything else, it's the same thing. One could say that we are all trying to be artists here. Everyone has to choose his instrument. In music, when one has reached a good level or if one has had a bit of success, one is always faced with the risk of becoming a professional. I don't like professionals. I prefer to remain an amateur in the deeper sense of the word - to love what one's doing. Of course I keep up with all the latest developments and when I'm getting ready for a concert, I become particularly concentrated. But usually I grant myself the liberty to be involved

and interested in a variety of different things.

What draws you to Carnatic music?

I generally identify myself with classicism, but what is extraordinary about Carnatic music is the rhythms and ragas. In western music one works with twelve precise tones in an octave. In Indian music, however, one enjoys playing with 24 different tones. And what's more, they can be doubled at will. There are even fabulous mathematical principles behind it all. In a certain way the West invented harmony by sacrificing liberty.

The quality of a performer is not only that of being an acrobat or a virtuoso, but lies in being able to bring and communicate something else, otherwise one has lost the



- Nadaka

true essence of music. Frequently this quality is present in what we sometimes call primitive or indigenous music. I'd like to tell you a story. The musicians I play with are three brothers who live in an apartment house in a simple area of Madras. Whenever we're rehearsing, they're never very concerned with the acoustic quality as one is continually submerged within the street noise from outside. It was Pongal, the rehearsal wasn't going well, and I was getting depressed when suddenly, from far away, we heard a nasal blaring noise of loudspeakers broadcasting film music coming closer. Slowly the procession advanced and some guy was singing as he climbed up on a rickshaw. Before I any time to react, the musicians started accompanying him. They were beaming as they played the street music. I was amazed. By the time the procession had passed we went back to our own music and suddenly it was like a miracle. Music is nourished by life itself. When music becomes too sophisticated it becomes a music that is dead. One cannot cheat with acoustic instruments.

What are you looking for in your music?

The only thing that interests me in music is the divine vibration. Music helps me to develop my consciousness. I don't say that what I play is divine, but there are different levels in music as with consciousness and it's best to know exactly where you're at.

contd. from page 2

What I'm looking to touch is what lies deepest in me. It can be funny, light, sweet, or a rhythm, but it is something true, at least I hope so. And when one is able to touch that, to reach that - and I can tell you it is not obvious, it is without pretensions - well... one is happy, one is content, one feels "glorious"!

Art is an instrument of the soul, then?

There is no way to differentiate between music, yoga, why one is in Auroville, and even one's life. When people ask me what the goal of my life is, it makes me angry. I send everyone packing. But to you I'll say that the only thing that interests me in life is to participate - even if only in a small way - in the movement of evolution.

Interviewer: Yanne.

A NAKED POETRY

An interview with Meenakshi

Meenakshi is a well-known Tamil poet who lives in Auroville. Trained as a social worker, she chose Auroville as a field of research for her doctorate. However, "Somebody" had other ideas! She arrived "coincidentally", on February 21st, 1976 - Mother's birthday - and the first Aurovilian she met was, "coincidentally", her future husband. Within two days she was fully involved in village action work. Today, she runs a popular evening school for the villagers and is a rich source of information and wisdom about the villages and Tamil culture in general.

As a young child, Meenakshi was already playing with words, rewriting traditional songs for the amusement of friends. When she was 17, a magazine accepted one of her poems for publication. "It was called *The Dew-Flower* (this flower is in Auroville called *Transformation*) and my professor refused to accept it as a poem because it had no obvious metre. But the editor of the magazine felt it had a link with the very ancient Sangam poetry of the Tamils, so he published it."

Two years later, she published her first collection - *Neringi*, or *Thorn Flower*. "They were the poems of an agitated teenager, in revolt against things and looking for a new world. But even in these first poems, the human element was already important."

The poems in *Burning Buds*, her next collection, were more intense, starker. "They are mainly about social issues - about women, children, war." It was a time of social activism for Meenakshi. She walked all over Tamil Nadu with other activists, stopping at each village and asking them to talk about their problems. "And the problems of the villages in India are mainly the problems of the women." In one of these poems, Meenakshi describes the women labouring on building sites. *We are the princesses of this country. But in place of a crown, we wear a ragged cloth. We carry heavy chettis and we learn to walk up ladders that have few rungs. The sun pierces our torn garments.*

Soon after coming to Auroville, a further collection of Meenakshi's poems was published. "I was changing. I had just been to the West for the first time, and there I was looked upon not as a proud Tamil, but merely as an Asian. And for years, the Chinese had been the great enemy. But I went to their restaurants and discovered it was just like my mother's food - the only thing missing was the sound of her bangles! So all this began to widen me, to universalize my themes. I dealt less with local issues." Has Auroville accelerated this process? "Very much so. Here we live continually in an international dimension, among different cultures and languages. Yet we share much. For example, I was looking at Anna-Maria's paintings and I was struck by one of a bamboo. It reminded me of something. 'What is this?', I asked her. 'This is a bamboo reaching for the future', she said. And then I remembered. This is exactly what I'd written in a poem ten years ago! And this 'coincidence' has happened a number of times with the work of other Aurovilian artists."

Are we sharing a common 'language'? "Yes. It's something collective, which one person may pick up in one way, another in a different way. Until last year, I thought of myself as an Auroville poet, but now I don't claim any more that it's 'my poem'. I just capture something in words that others receive in other ways. I'm also much quieter, more peaceful within now. Before I would be caught up in a particular issue,



Meenakshi in front of granite pillar - photo: Alan

or I would write for a particular audience. Now my poetry is a naked poetry. It comes direct from something deep within. I no longer think about who I'm writing for."

What are the sources of Meenakshi's poems today? "Many things. Nature, people. But particularly Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Often, when I read them, I get to a point when I get an intense image. I have to stop, to assimilate it for a few days, and then I write a poem. This is a new process for me."

What, then, is the role of the artist in Auroville? "To reveal the divinity in man. To see beyond the present - to give a new dimension, a new reality, to things seen in dreams. The artist should try to preserve the transfiguring moments and to see the connections between everything here - to link computers and chappatis! But Auroville needs to be more collectively organized in order to assist artists and to encourage them to communicate. When artists come together, when they have an audience, they are stimulated. But at the moment - if artists want to put on an exhibition or performance, they have to arrange it all themselves."

Meenakshi no longer thinks of herself as being a Tamil, or even an Indian, poet. Nevertheless, the Tamil language remains her medium. What are the qualities of Tamil and how is it used in traditional Tamil poetry?

"Tamil poetry is difficult to translate into a western language. This is partly because the Tamil language is very refined and precise, and often there are no Western equivalents for some words. For example, in the West you say there is a 'bud' and then a 'flower'. But in Tamil there are seven different words describing the stages by which a bud becomes a flower. For example, *podu* means a flower which is about to open, and ready to pluck. *Pu* is a flower which is in its fullest stage. When you offer flowers to a god, you offer *podu*, never *pu*. Similarly, the leaf of every tree has a different name, describing its characteristics.

STONE

The black stone
Welded to the Thiruvakkarai hillock
Was transformed into a long pillar,
Travelled in a bullock-cart,
And alighted in front of the house.

It bowed to me
"VANAKKAM".
Oh, but on the side of its head
An injury.

O, 'Protection' and 'Unselfishness',
You green creepers,
Embrace the stone.
Surround it with love and care!

From: 'Poems from the City of Dawn'
(A forthcoming collection by Meenakshi)

Tamil poetry is also difficult to translate because it refers to an inner world as well as an outer. Everything is symbolic, sometimes possessing many levels of meaning. In one of my poems, I describe myself as waiting like a *tumbal flower*. Now this flower is tiny, it's white, it's offered to Shiva. It's also loved by children, because it has a honey taste. And, in addition, it's a medicine. So all these associations are simultaneously present in my image. Most western poetry has a very personal note. But in Indian poetry, even the personal always has something to do with the universal."

Finally, what about the situation in the villages that surround us here? Are they still a living culture producing a living art? Meenakshi explains that we must first understand that Indian culture has two aspects. There are the folk and the classical aspects. The folk aspect links Earth and Man; the classical culture links Man and the Divine. In the villages, it is a folk culture and this is still very much alive. Their dances, their kolams (*designs outside doorways - eds.*) represent what is happening around them, their daily interests and concerns. And these interests and concerns change little over the years. "Recently", says Meenakshi, "I came across a very old song from a neighbouring village. I knew it was old because it contained no Sanskrit words. A lover says sorrowfully to his girl, *I want to see a beautiful flower in your hair, but you come carrying a bundle of firewood. I want to see a flower, but you come bearing tamarind on your head.*"

And Auroville culture? Is it classical or folk? "It's more classical, because we aspire for the Divine, while the village is more down to earth. Yet there's no clash, rather a harmony and a certain blending. Perhaps the true Auroville culture will span the two and yet be something quite different."

Interview by Alan

* chetti = large dish in which cement, bricks etc. are carried.

"There are the folk and the classical aspects. The folk aspect links Earth and Man; the classical culture links Man and the Divine."



Clay horses by a village temple.

Auroville International Meeting

Last month, Auroville International France decided not to host the Auroville International meeting, which was to be held in Annecy. Consequently, the next Auroville International meeting will be held in the Netherlands on June 23, 24 and 25.

The meeting will be held in 'Zonnewende', Hoogersmilde, and those interested to join are requested to contact AVI The Netherlands, Uiterweg 255 ARK, 1431 RA Aalsmeer (tel: 02977-27883) for details.

At an extraordinary General Assembly of Auroville International France, held in Paris on the 25th of April, members of the Association voted to change its name to *Agenda International France*, "in anticipation of a widening of its activities".

We wish them well in their work, while looking forward to the formation of a new Auroville International centre in France.

Eds.

Town Planning Update - Town Planning Update - Town Planning Update

Introduction

The town planning debate, aspects of which we presented in issue 2 of *Auroville Today*, has intensified during the past two months. In response to widespread interest and concern, two one-day seminars on the topic were held. The purpose was to elicit information regarding the present status of town planning, to clarify concerns and reservations about the process and orientation of the Town Planning Group, and to see if there could be general agreement on the way to proceed. The atmosphere was concentrated and, at times, highly charged. What emerged was some clarification of the function and contents of the Album (a suggested development plan for Auroville for the years 1988-95, to be submitted to the Indian Government for provisional funding) and certain differences in approach to town plan-

ning in Auroville. In simple terms, these may be summarized as the difference between those who see the 'Galaxy' model, approved by Mother, as a dynamic and visionary expression of Auroville's future, and those who feel that the model should be adapted to take account of the realities of Auroville's present situation - physical, economic and social - and that the future town should be an example of appropriate and sustainable development for India and the world.

The seminars were followed by a period of intense activity and further meetings, out of which emerged a modified album and a preliminary environmental impact study. *Auroville Today* interviewed two of the participants. We also provide brief resums of the album and the impact study.

Alan, Roger.

"Town Planning and the Galaxy Concept, 21 Years After"

Parallel to the process that went into the production of the album that went to Delhi, a group of Aurovilians - architects, environmentalists and others - met in an attempt to gather, collect, and synthesize the data bank of experience we have accumulated over the last 21 years. The result of their meetings is a report entitled: *Town Planning and the Galaxy Concept 21 Years After* - a preliminary environmental impact statement that outlines the important areas in which in-depth studies need to be undertaken as a prelude to building the city. These include local topography, village culture and relations, water supply, sewage, transportation and appropriate building techniques. The report stresses the need for a phased, flexible and self-sustaining approach to the growth of the city, and proposes guidelines and appropriate

development policies that would facilitate the emergence of a "consensus of quality", based on clear communication between members of the planning group and the rest of the community at large.

The study states, "Our dreams must provide answers to the challenges of our time" and proposes that:

- the town, among other things, should address global concerns like energy shortages, depleting resources, exploding population, exploitation of man and nature, pollution etc;
- 2) take into consideration the interest of the local villagers as being our own;
- 3) encourage the predominant use of local materials and skills, and appropriate technology;
- 4) integrate topographical features in the design of the town.

Auroville Today interviewed Ed, who does afforestation work at Forecomers and who is one of the participants in the process that led up to the formulation of "Town Planning and the Galaxy Concept 21 Years After".

Auroville Today: What should be taken into consideration in our town plan?

Ed: Topography is very important. For instance, you don't put a cement factory on your best agricultural land. Areas have to be appropriate to the development that is planned for them. In Auroville we have lots of canyons and eroded land, lots of degraded land and very little fertile land. All this has to be taken into regard when we implement a town plan. At the same time we could secure the land from speculation and put a limit on the urban sprawl of Pondicherry. A greenbelt in this area would provide recreation for people and help act as a gene pool for the region. Another extremely important thing to consider is the local people. How will they fit into Auroville? How will they relate to us? Policies need to be worked out and many questions answered.

Are we ready to begin building the city?

I think there is a time for everything. The time for the city to descend in matter has not yet fully arrived. Maybe that moment is rapidly approaching now. And perhaps the last 21 years have been the preparation for this moment. If we had begun Auroville immediately according to the original plan, and accomplished it within 5 to 10 years we would have probably made a colossal disaster of the area. But now, having been here and having understood the climatic changes and the topography, as well as learning how to deal with the people of the area, we are in a better position to think about laying the proper foundations of the city. I'm looking forward to an environment where people are tuned into the land they walk on,

that they can feel and know the land they walk on.

What was the difference between your point of view and that of the present town planning group in the recent town planning sessions?

The main difference between the two approaches was one of the process of unfolding. We have some guidelines, Mother has given us precepts to follow but we don't specifically know what Auroville will become. The album represents to us a plan which at this point has too much definition and leaves too little to the adventure. It's like, "Here is the box with Auroville inside; all you do is unpack it". So in our approach to town planning we should have as much latitude as possible for the translating of the ideal into matter.

There is this idea that Auroville is already there and will descend into matter. It is already there on the causal plane and we should help it descend. The difference of approach is, firstly, of a question of timing and, secondly, of how the city will manifest. In the end, the two ideals might very well coincide. Everything we do here should not damage but help the environment. Everything we do here should be a solution to a problem and not a new problem. In a way the difference of the two approaches - which are both necessary - could be compared to the triangles of Sri Aurobindo's symbol. The ascending triangle is matter, is the land aspiring to the vision, opening itself up for the descent of the ideal. The descending triangle is the ideal coming into matter; the square is the integration of the two.

Auroville Development Scheme 1988-95

('The Album')

The album begins with Mother's *A Dream* and the *Charter of Auroville*. It gives an overview of the 'four zones' of the city (Residential, International, Industrial and Cultural), describing the defining characteristics of each zone, and identifies the 'Crown' as connecting the zones. The growth and present situation of Auroville is outlined, Matrimandir is presented, and the introductory section ends with listing the essential criteria for the conscious development of Auroville. These include:

- addressing global concerns, like the energy shortage, pollution etc;
- seeing the development of the surrounding villages as being of primary importance;
- promoting research in the field of alternative technology;
- integrating topographical features into the design of the city;
- allowing harmonious growth and change;
- retaining the human scale and blending with the surroundings.

The Development Plan is then divided into 2 phases. Phase 1 covers the period from 1988-90. This phase includes projects for constructing the 'Crown' and four main access roads, acquiring 96 acres of land for consolidation, beginning the installation of essential services, initiating construction of a residential building of 43 apartments, and constructing a newcomers' housing complex.

Luigi is a member of the town planning group 'Aurofuture', which has been coordinating work on the album. Here he talks briefly about the process, the challenges and his hopes for the future.

Auroville Today: What was the process? How was the album drawn up?

Luigi: We approached the different working groups and invited them to submit projects in their own area of expertise which they considered necessary for the first phase of the town. We tried to be as inclusive as possible; we didn't tell them that they had to fit into a certain frame. Also, we took into account differing approaches to town planning and tried to incorporate them. In this sense, the album is a combination of the input of Roger (Anger) and the input of the reality of today.

At a certain moment, the community became much more involved in the town planning process. There were 2 seminars and a series of meetings on the topic, all of which were well attended. How did you interpret the mood of the community?

There was a call for those with different approaches to work together and for a broad vision in the way we approach town planning in Auroville.

What were the differences in approach?

Somebody defined the difference as being represented by Sri Aurobindo's symbol where the ascending aspiration of the earth meets the descending inspiration from above. We were associated more with the latter approach, others with the former. There were other slight differences between us concerning our experiences of urbanism in the West. Some were reacting against the past mistakes, while others wanted to overcome the phase of rejection and move into a phase of solutions. But in fact, the most intense and interesting part of the town planning process began when a small group of the most involved Aurovilians - architects

The second phase of the Development Plan covers 1990-95. It includes:

constructing the Matrimandir Ring Road and 4 radial roads to the Crown; acquiring 507 acres of land; major work on the electrical, telecommunication and water infrastructure; the completion of housing complexes begun in phase 1; a radically expanded 'Pour Tous' service; a multi-system primary health care scheme; a new information and reception centre; research and development of organic farming; an experimental village; research into alternative technology; consolidating the Green Belt; a forest research centre; vastly extended sports and physical education facilities; various SAIER projects, including a video production centre and an experimental school building; initiating the completion of the Bharat Nivas complex; constructing a technical training centre.

The final project is the ambitious Centre of Research for Human Unity (CIRHU), which comprises, among other things, 3 conference halls, an exhibition hall, laboratories and other study facilities, a cafeteria and administrative quarters.

The total estimated cost of all the projects in the 2 phases of development - 1988-95 - is 56,60 crores (approx. U.S.\$ 38 million).

The development scheme has been studied by the government-Planning Commission, who have now requested more detailed information about each project.

and environmentalists - came together in a series of meetings. Then we began going deeper into our specific differences - over the road plan and the high-rise buildings for example - and at a certain point there was an unforgettable moment. A moment of grace. Because suddenly we laid our plans on the table, one over the other, and we discovered that there wasn't so much difference! And then, very fast, we began working through the points of disagreement, eliminating them. It was a moment when we felt a deep connection between the dream and matter, each triangle of Sri Aurobindo's symbol being in its right place.

Of course, we couldn't keep it up, and we failed to agree finally on whether to include some conceptual indications for the future in the album. But I'll never forget the deep joy of that moment.

What have you learnt from this recent intensive process?

That we must all become 'practical dreamers'. As somebody put it, "Our dreams must provide answers to the challenges of our time". Also, that urban growth in Auroville must result from a growth in the consciousness of Auroville's inhabitants. And there is a new Auroville coming, which is not just the Auroville of big projects. It's an inner Auroville where there is no room for separate truths, for exclusivism. It is this force that will call the material realisation.

Town planning in Auroville is a delicate and difficult work. It must look towards the future, but at the same time it must keep a strong contact with the present reality. Auroville is stronger, steadier now than it was years ago. I think we're ready for the next step.



painting by Rolf

LIGHT, LIGHT, MORE LIGHT

It's the 23rd April. A hot, windy Sunday. And Rolf, an Aurovilian artist, has invited everybody to see his latest paintings before he exhibits them in Germany...

Just arriving at Rolf's house is already an experience. You skid through cashew topes, you pass through the Altecs compound, you bear left and suddenly... you're in a Daliesque landscape of sinuous curves and fluid forms, undulations of pale light in the April morning.

Light, plasticity, interpenetration. These are the leitmotifs of Rolf's latest work. After periods of classicism, of automatic painting, of symbolism and geometric forms, his latest paintings shimmer and explode with light, a light which suffuses the texture of objects, burning through them and dissolving their boundaries. In *Himmel und Erde* (Heaven/Sky, Earth), for example, traces of light arc across the canvas like multi-colored subatomic particles and in *Play of Forces*, Sri Aurobindo's symbol is surrounded by vortices which shimmer and expand, linking everything in a rhythmic dance of luminous energy.

Van Gogh is a major influence in the latest work, but it is Van Gogh interpreted and modified by a particular sensibility. In *The Spirit Of Van Gogh Returns To His Room In Arles*, the line and colouring is similar to the Dutch master's, but the concept comes from somewhere else. And in Rolf's *Vase With Flowers*, the colours have velocity and lightness unlike van Gogh's denser, deeper palette.

Are we seeing, then, the beginnings of a distinct Aurovilian style of art? "Yes", says Rolf, and defines some of its characteristics. "It expresses a strong aspiration for the light, and of the experience of flow-

ing into a central source of light. And it has great purity of colour."

What, then, is the function of the artist in Auroville? "To see the new world and to express it. To break the wall of appearances and to show things as they really are. Above all, to give the viewer the experience of touching something else, an essence of being which reminds them of whom they really are." He points to a slow-burning mandala of a painting entitled *The Light Of Sri Aurobindo*. "Here I think I've succeeded in this. If you concentrate on the centre, the paint begins to lose its texture, to become luminous. And suddenly everything is moving, everything is burning with essential fire."

Another important function of the Auroville artist is to communicate Auroville to the world. Rolf remembers, "Mother was asked in the early years, 'How will Auroville become known?' She replied, 'Through art'. And I see it happening. In Germany last year, people were struck by the light in my paintings. It touched their souls. And then they look for a signature and see 'Rolf, Auroville'. So they begin to wonder about this place..."

And the future? "I'm finishing a phase of my work now. All my different phases have been a preparation for the next step, for the 'something else' we haven't reached yet. But I've learned in Auroville that we are fundamentally such a unity that we can only take the next step when we are all ready to take it. In this sense, we are all doing the same work, albeit in different ways."

Alan

Overpassing lines that please the outward eyes
But hide the sight of that which lives within
Sculpture and painting concentrated sense
Upon an inner vision's motionless verge,
Revealed a figure of the invisible,
Unveiled all Nature's meaning in a form,
Or caught into a body the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo,
Savitri, Book 4, 2, 60-66

Two letters...

Shifting the centre

I would like to put in its proper perspective the story about the shifting of Matrimandir centre, published in your February issue. (Number Four, "Looking Back"). I had to wait for 18 years to hear about it.

This is how it happened: The Matrimandir is situated at the top of the triangle which it makes with the banyan tree and the urn. It has four pillars which determine the two axes East-West and North-South.

The foundation stone was laid on 21.2.1971 in the middle of that triangle, near the East-West path. It was not on the future site of the Matrimandir, because the land where the Matrimandir would be located was not yet Auroville's property on that day. The purchase agreement was signed mid-March and Aurovilians started digging the next day as narrated by Savitri.

A batch of 15 to 20 people was coming from Aspiration before breakfast, a similar batch of people from the centre area was digging in the morning, and half of them in the afternoon. According to the existing drawings, the centre of Matrimandir had been roughly located, and Aurovilians were digging a hole which was meant to be 14 metres deep and 50 metres in diameter.

Later on, when the final drawings of the Matrimandir gardens were being finalized by our "Papa Richardet", someone suggested that the East-West axis could be the axis of the rising sun on a specific date. According to the original drawing, it was some day in March. To the Mother five dates were proposed: February 21st, 28th, March 29th, April 4th and 24th. March 29th was the closest date to the original drawing. The Mother indicated April 4th, anniversary date of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry, as being the day when the sun should rise exactly in the East-West axis.

That was how, one fateful day, Kalya and myself arrived once again with the theodolite, taking measurements among the Aurovilians digging a hole at the place where a fire had been lit on the opening ceremony day, i.e. on February 21st, 1971.

By chance, the location of the new centre had not been dug as yet, which allowed us to mark this point with precision - as well as the four cardinal points, 25 metres away from this centre. This we did in order to mark on the soil the exact 50 m. diameter circle to be dug.

Once this had been done, we informed - after verifying that our five marks were correct - the digging team about the final location. At that time, they had probably removed about 300 cubic metres of soil, of the total 15.000 cubic metres still to be removed. Their hole was within the final excavation programme, therefore no effort had been vain, but the centre of their hole was too much Northwards (or Southwards?)

Maybe we left a little hurriedly, without proper explanation. Not too late to do it.

Alain Grandcolas
Bombay, April 4th, 1989

Akhenaton

La lecture de l'article que Gilbert a écrit sur Akhenaton (Auroville Today de ce mois d'Avril) m'a rappelé de tels souvenirs que je voudrais te les faire partager.

En réponse à une question que je lui avais posée (à propos d'Akhenaton), Mère avait clairement laissé entendre qu'elle avait été "la reine Tii, mère d'Akhenaton... révélation qu'elle a - me semble-t-il - fait aussi à Satprem dans l'Agenda.

Mais ce qui est plus intéressant, c'est qu'elle avait ajouté que "la révolution d'Akhenaton avait eu pour but de révéler aux hommes de cette époque (c'était la première fois dans cette région du monde) l'unicité du Divin et de sa manifestation. Cette tentative, avait précisé Mère, avait été prématurée - les esprits n'étaient pas mûrs pour cela - mais elle "devait" être exprimée pour continuer à vivre sur le plan mental.

Tanmaya, Sri Aurobindo Ashram

References: L'Agenda de Mère, Vol. VI, p. 116, 117 and Vol. VIII, p. 146, 147.



Rolf

IN LOCAL PARLANCE

'AVLISH': A Dialect in the Making?

I have a theory that words are like objects. Sculpted by human use down the centuries, or washed by the millennial waters of the Ganges, they can take on all the qualities of delicate, smooth and polished stone. Rough-handled and misused they can be broken and thrown away; tarnished and abused they can be reduced to the grimy equivalents of a ten paisa coin.

A dialect can be defined as a way a community or a region uses language, and the words or idioms it chooses to use—whether inherited, borrowed or coined—can provide interesting glimpses into the make-up, character and shared concerns of that community.

In Auroville a hardy pioneering sapling of exotic origin has taken root in the rich cross-cultural compost heap of its linguistic diversity. Its scarlet flowers (Superbia Babelis/Pride of Babel) are known to bloom in the hottest, most inclement months, perhaps as a testimony to the spirit of endurance, stubbornness and perseverance it exemplifies. Let us take a look at this dialect, which we shall, for convenience sake, call 'Avlish' (pronounce *A'vl-ish*) and see what insights it can give us as regards the preoccupations of the argumentative, colourful, disparate, strong-willed and perennially feuding tribe, whose members still use it in their attempt to communicate amongst themselves.

Many languages, or perhaps we should say the remains of many languages, can be heard in the tribal township of Auroville—English, French, German, Hindi, Tamil, Italian, Dutch, to name a few—and Avlish affects them all, particularly through the phenomenon of idiomatic word borrowing. However, it is a variety of English, to

Auroville youth means something that is extreme and excessive, but in a positive sense, and has little to do with a previous generation's connotations of street fighting and left-wing splinter groups. *Dool* as in *dool cool man* (with which it rhymes) might at first glance seem to be an abbreviation of *Deluxe*, but actually is a Tamil word, meaning *pukkah*, or first class. *Pukkah* is, of course, common coin. Of Hindi origin, it means 'good', 'genuine' or 'first rate'.

Cool is in common use, not only amongst Auroville youth. It denotes approval and respect. Coolness is a state of being we all aspire for, particularly in the summer months; the psychological qualities of level headedness, unflapability, discretion and impeccable composure in times of stress are all qualities which are sought after, yet rare in Auroville. The coolest nationality in Auroville? Probably the unflappable Dutch.

Let's quave is youth slang for 'let's get going', 'let's hit the road'; *dude* means a person, as in *rad cool dude*—where *rad* is of course an abbreviation of *radical*. In youth parlance, *yahoo land* has been known to refer to the land of wild horses. In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver, on his fourth voyage, visits the land of the Houyhnhms—a land ruled by horses who live by reason, and populated by Yahoos, the rather coarse brutish humans who are their slaves. Both horses and Yahoos abound in Auroville, but creatures ruled by reason and wisdom—although rumoured to exist somewhere—remain to this day as rare as unicorns.

Let's take a look at some other words

Rad cool dudes in Yahoo land; Meeting wallahs and greenbeltois Ai yo yo, rumba custom!

the chagrin of some, that has unavoidably become the local lingua franca. There are exceptions of course. French prevails, or at least used to prevail, in Aspiration Kitchen, in 'Aurofuture', and in the salons of Dana. German sets the rude and rowdy tone in Certitude and in certain outlying communities, Italian has been known to dominate on the scaffolding of Matrimandir. Tamil is, of course, heard everywhere, but few master its complexities. It is a language that makes Welsh or Basque seem simple in comparison. The name of a ten hut hamlet, for example, can stretch in ten syllables across a huge highway sign.

The English that is settled for in Auroville in a sort of transcultural compromise, is a basic down to earth one, shorn of such luxuries and irritants as over-concern with grammar or precision, and pruned down to an essential word-hoard (to resurrect a good old saxon compound) of one to two thousand words. This is supplemented with borrowings and body language from other cultures. People like you to get to the point quickly in Auroville and the result (except in meetings) is a sort of staccato frontier minimalism, where homeric anecdotes are reduced to their bare essentials. Let us take a look at some of the quirks and colloquialisms of our local parlance, and start with the slang of the youthful video generation.

Refreshingly unjaded and optimistic, they have a variety of near synonyms, denoting enthusiastic approval and praise. Terms in common use at 'Last School' include *awesome!*, *deluxe!* and *radical!*, all deriving from 80's California valley girl slang. The word *radical* when used by

and expressions common in different pockets of Auroville. India is known to do strange things to your sense of time and self, and for many Aurovilians time stopped suddenly upon arrival in India. Haight-Ashbury and the Boulevard St. Michel still remain important reference points for many who came here in the late sixties. This can at times produce a generation gap of sorts. For instance, the student who rides to school on horseback, hooked into his walkman, to attend computer class, might well have a bearded father ensconced in the deeper tribal reaches of the greenbelt, who still uses expressions such as *far-out!* as a reaction to a piece of good news. A complicated situation, such as trying to obtain a stamp for one's visa at Fort St. George, is considered a *hassle*. Negotiating with the local *panchayat* (literally 'council of five': village council—eds.) or chasing cows, goats and tree fellers can be something of a *trip*. *Flipping out* as in *Ça m'a fait flipper* is something that can happen to anyone, but usually it remains limited to brief, if daily, flare-ups.

But let us shift our attention to some of the words in common use throughout the township. A number of these are of Tamil origin. *Seri*, meaning 'O.K.' and its opposite *seri ille* are common on all work sites. So is the phrase *rumba custom*, which means 'very difficult'. *Vundi* is a catch-all word referring mainly to vehicles of all sorts ranging from vintage studebakers (still to be seen in S. India) to bullock carts, Suzukis, Mopeds and beat-up bicycles. *Nalaki*, meaning 'tomorrow', may be used as an excuse for postponement of future realisations. When it comes to body lan-

"Et au fond, nous voulons... nous savons qu'il faut une langue non pas artificiellement nouvelle, mais quelque chose d'assez souple pour pouvoir s'adapter aux besoins d'une conscience nouvelle, et cette langue sortira probablement comme cela, par élimination d'habitudes, d'un ensemble d'anciennes langues."

L'Agenda de Mère, Vol.8, 1967, p.58.

guage, the typical Eastern way of head shaking (that amiable sideways nod of the head, a movement which indicates anything from approval to a clear 'yes') is common to all speakers of Avlish and can lead to embarrassing or at least ambiguous situations on visits of Westerners back home. A small boy is frequently addressed with the word *tambi*, Tamil for 'little brother'. A Tamil word known by everyone is *nella* (good, nice). A field is called a *tope*. Other Indian words such as *wallah* pop up in conversation. Throughout India you have a variety of *wallahs* (persons employed in a certain job) including *rickshaw wallahs*, *shoeshine wallahs*, etc. In Auroville you have *meeting wallahs*.

Avlish encompasses a variety of French that, if ever brought to the ears of the august members of the *Académie Française*, might well induce collective fits of apoplexy. The waters of English have seeped beneath the foundations of its Bastilles of purity. Meetings used to be a topic of conversation and a source of public entertainment in Auroville. They furnished expressions like, "Le meeting était *boring* et *heavy* et COMPLETEMENT *off*"; "J'étais *flabbergaste* parce qu'il a dit"; "C'est vachement *loose* au niveau des vibrations". *Loose*, in common use all around, is the opposite of *pukkah*, and usually applies to an individual or group of individuals considered 'untogether'. On Matrimandir you can hear other examples like, "Il faut *driller* des trous et *chipper* les murs".

Some words enjoy bouts of sudden popularity, only to drop rapidly out of circulation. One such word is *consensus*, meaning an agreement shared by many or all. Although in vogue for about a year and a half, the experience it hoped to describe proved as rare and fleeting as visions of the grail for Arthur's pure and wandering knights. Once, however, it was briefly achieved, after months of virulent and ex-

haustive debate and *brain-storming*. At that momentous turning point, an elated gallic orator took to the floor, only to be betrayed by this perfidious saxon compound. As his friends looked on aghast, he was swept away by the storm-tide of his rhetoric and kept extolling the weeks of intense *brain-washing* that had led up to this historic decision!

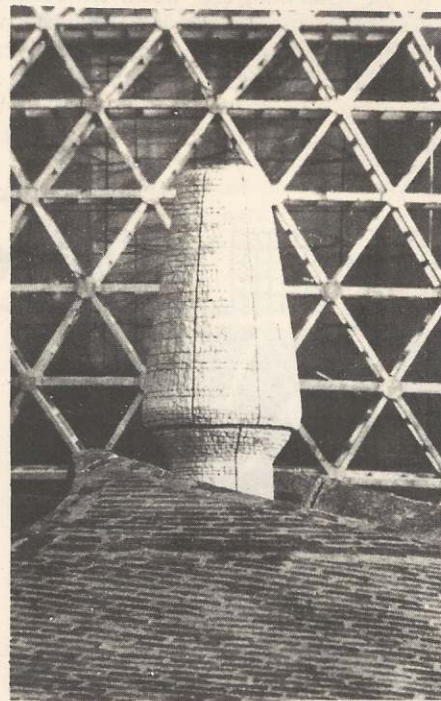
Native French speakers have the highest number of casualties when it comes to the tiger traps of English pronunciation. Thanks in large part to the Normans it is estimated that there are over 70,000 words of French origin in the English language. Many of these are written exactly as in French, but alas, forged by the hammer and anvil of saxon stress, they are pronounced differently. Ce qui est *stressant*, quoi!

Other innovations on Queen's English abound. When a German asks you to *borrow* him a hundred rupees, he's asking for a loan, and a blond danubian damsel's "Will you remember me..." has less to do with protestations of romantic angst than with the fact that we've run out of coffee, and she's telling you to add it to the shopping list.

As I have illustrated already, Avlish has to do with the basic English spoken in Auroville, as well as the borrowings from English and Indian languages that enter the remnants of Aurovilians' native tongues. It has also to do with accent. An Aurovillian student recently visited her brother who was studying for a year in America. When he met her at the airport, her first remark was, "But you've lost your Auroville accent!" Auroville accent? My guess is that it is an eclectic one, mid-atlantic with Australian undertones and a touch of Tamil musicality. No doubt, as Avlish evolves in the years to come, it will become more and more defined.

Roger

Editors' note: We welcome corrections and additions from our readers regarding 'Avlish'. These could form the basis of a future article.



Ils se sont divisés dans la construction, alors maintenant ils se sont rassemblés pour s'unir dans la construction. Voilà: une tour de Babel à rebours!

Mother. (Quoted from Satprem's book *Mother or the New Species*, p. 552)

Have we lost faith in our own beauty?



Painting by Vincent.

Vincent is perhaps the most promising and talented of our young artists. He came to Auroville at the age of 18 in 1983, having completed his compulsory studies in France, choosing Auroville and the rural back-drop of South India, instead of the medieval streets and the visual and sensory overhead of post-modern Europe, as the stage for his self-discovery and artistic initiation.

Although he was drawing in a surrealist style at the age of 14 in France, it wasn't until he came to Auroville that he began to paint under the guidance of his friend Rolf - "Just like an apprentice five hundred years ago. If I had remained in France, I would still most probably be an art student. Here I had the chance to learn in a more personal initiatory way which suited me. Also the undefinable atmosphere of India is an advantage in that it contains an almost medieval sensation of another dimension of time - a combination of the sacred and the timeless." Being far from the West has its advantages: "It's like the return to a primitive source of art - far from the influences of the phantasmagoric modern world. Out of a sense of contrast one learns to appreciate things more, particularly nature and matter. In the West we have become blasé."

Vincent's style, like his personality, is eclectic, combining a variety of influences that range from the medieval masters - Leonardo and Van Eyck - to Moreau, Modigliani, Andrew Wyeth and modern photorealism. "I've been surprised by the fact that I have always been able to find the

books I needed as well as other sources for my inspiration within Auroville", says Vincent. His oil paintings on wood and canvas range in style and subject matter from delicate abstract inner landscapes to works of transfigured realism. His portraits of women, like the *Portrait of Marpessa*, represent a feminine beauty that is noble, hieratic and distant - qualities Vincent admires in works like Gustave Moreau's *Salome* and in the slender, elongated women of Modigliani. A recent trip to Europe helped Vincent discover a new style. His *A White Background with Unearthly Flowers*, for example, in its sparing technique, has an abstract Zen quality to it. He explains, "There are a number of forms of inspiration in my work. One is that of the modern world of sensuality and sophistication. Here, Auroville's influence comes out through the richness and profuseness of colours, for instance, and the spiritual aspect." And, "For realism to become art, it is necessary that the fantastic, hidden in the depths of matter, of life, should be revealed."

Vincent's layered use of colours, based on a technique of glazing, creates an effect of transparency. His *Chinese Mists* uses a combination of earthly sixteenth century Venetian colours: subdued sand yellows, crimsons and deep purple on a dark brown base. In his *Portrait of Marpessa* the same colour combinations on a dark brown background give a mysterious depth to the woman.

In his works of transfigured realism, light seems to emanate from within. In *Sitting Bull*, which took him two years to finish, light rises upwards from the figure of a sitting bull on a fiery orange earth, breaking up into a variety of warm colours in the sky. "The connection between heaven and earth comes out in my paintings through a use of ascending and immanent light." [Art transfigures reality. I still remember the look of amazement on the village carpenter's face as he stared at this painting for minutes on end, one afternoon, having never seen a bullock in quite that light before!]

Auroville is not an easy place for artists to create. Self expression is not high on the list of our collective priorities, nor is the isolation that it demands always encouraged. The practical day-to-day demands of life here take up much more time than elsewhere, and it could be easy for an artist to postpone his assignments with his or her muse. According to Vincent, "Here motivation is self-generated. It is not imposed on you from the outside. It demands a personal discipline. One isn't obliged to sell and there are no constraints of style. In such a situation one either be-

comes lazy and stagnates, or one touches that joy of having the freedom to create from and within oneself. I like the solitude one can have in Auroville as it permits you to touch something that is calm, vast and tranquil, and frequently I'm surprised - inspiration has an impersonal side to it - by finding myself surrendering to something which goes beyond my own imagination and aesthetic affinities, something that I had neither thought nor willed."

For Vincent there can be no separation of art from life in Auroville. "In Auroville you can give your life the magical unfolding quality of art. I try to touch this in my paint-

ings, but would like to embody it as well. However", he adds, "Auroville can be aesthetically frustrating. Aurovilians are by nature dreamers, but over the years, due to a loss of faith and disillusionment, some have lost their sense of magic and wonder. For instance, ugly buildings are built that reflect a spirit of practical realism that prevails and dominates in Auroville. We feel the need to prove that we are responsible and respectable to the outside. We are too much concerned with our own image. Have we lost faith in our own beauty?"

Interview by Roger

PUSHING WATER UPHILL

Have you ever tried to push water uphill? I can't claim to have attempted exactly that, but on a unique day last year I think I had a similar experience.

A mason was on his last day's work at my house. Before he finished I needed to have a stone slab (which lay at the house) machine cut precisely to size. It was meant to be a cover for a drain, so I wanted it fitted (without cementing it in) without any gap against the wall of the house so that 'poochies' (Tamil word for insects - eds.) couldn't gain access below the slab.

I went specially early to Aurelec to borrow a Jeep to transport the slab but found (Problem 1) it had already been taken out unexpectedly on an emergency job. Later I managed to collect the slab using a van, and took it down to Pondy to the only place I thought could cut it. On arrival I was told (Problem 2) that they could not cut such stone; instead they recommended I take it to Pierre (our building constructor-eds). On reaching Pierre's office I was told (Problem 3) that Pierre wasn't there, but could be found at the Atmarati stores building off North Boulevard. On the way there, by luck I saw Pierre, who told me (Problem 4) that the electric stone cutting saw was no longer in Pondy and had been taken back to Auroville. He kindly offered to ring Auroville to arrange everything, but on reaching his beach office (Problem 5) we found the phones weren't working. No matter: I knew where I could now find the stone cutter, so armed with a chit from Pierre I headed back the 8 kms to Auroville; dropped the stone slab off at Aurelec; and then went on to collect the stone cutter. But (Problem 6) he didn't have the saw with him. That, he told me, was another 3 kms away at a site near Certitude. So off we went. Finally we located the saw, but (Problem 7) it had no blade with it! To get a blade we had to go another 4 or 5 kms, half way round the Green Belt, to Pierre's house. Having collected the blade we then went another 2-3 kms on rough roads round the remainder of the Green Belt to arrive back at Aurelec.

Things seemed to be looking up; but my optimism proved premature. The stone cutter now discovered (Problem 8) that there was no plug on the lead of the electric saw. After more hunting around, and more effort, finally we found a spare plug and fitted it. Then he began the first of 4 planned cuts to provide clean precise edges to the slab. Half way through the first cut (Problem 9) the saw's electric motor burned out! I could hardly believe it; but the operator told me he could also do precise cutting by hand using a hardened steel chisel. I agreed to this; but he then told me (Problem 10) that his cutting chisel etc. was back at the house where I had picked him up. Back we went and collected everything. On return it was decided that he would just finish cutting the one edge by hand, so at least the slab could be 'fitted' against the wall of the building. When he had finished the cut it didn't look good; but much more serious was the fact that (Problem 11) he had somehow lost the line and the second half of the cut was at a noticeable angle to the first half. We decided to re-cut, taking off a further 1 cm to get a correct straight edge. When he had finished this it didn't look as neat as if it had been saw-cut, but I had no choice but to rush it up as it was to Certitude, 3 kms away. The stone cutter, however, first insisted that he had to be dropped back at his place of work, involving yet another 2 kms detour.

Finally I triumphantly presented the slab to the mason, and then stood back to watch as he placed it against the wall where it was to fit. All that effort and perseverance, and all those kilometres (over 35) at last seemed to have been worthwhile. But the final unseen and unimagined blow (Problem 12) was yet to come. We found - after all that - that the wall of the building wasn't straight! Whereupon I gave up.

On reflection, I feel that only the Divine, with his infinite sense of humour, could have organized such a day and such an incredible culmination!

Tim

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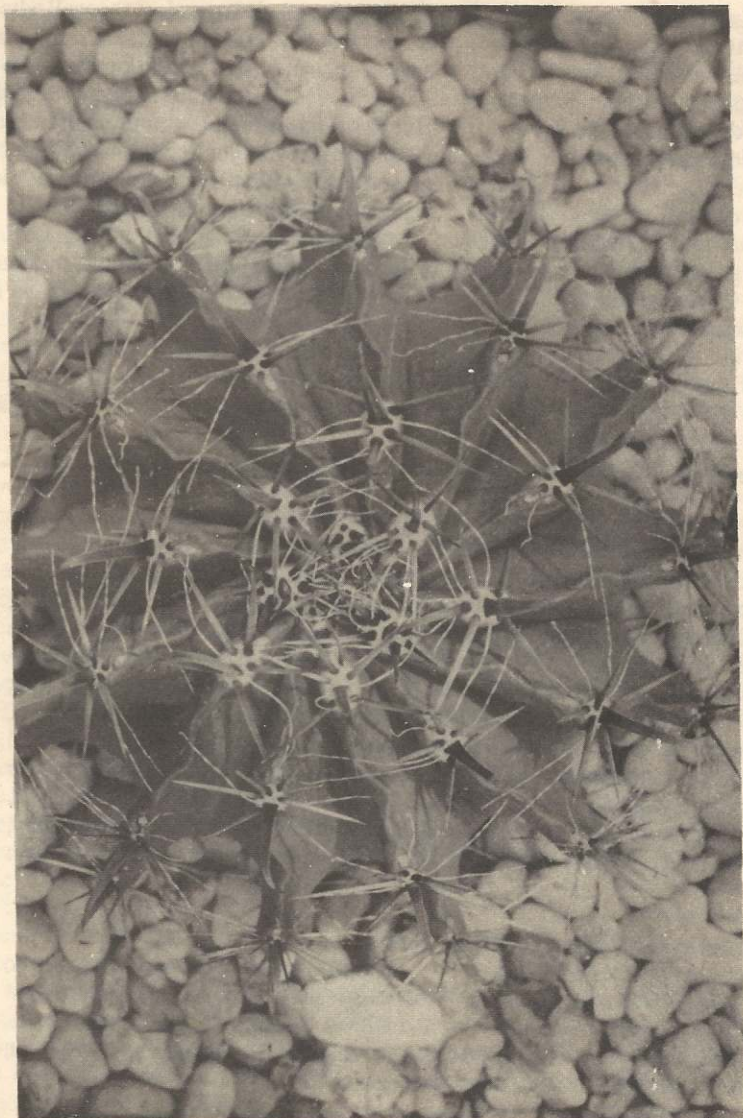
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Inside: AV culture; town planning update; cheese making; etc.



Nature's art

"It's a living being, it responds!"

Cheese-making in La Ferme

La Ferme ('The Farm') is a small community. Although it lies next to Aspiration and—until recently—was connected to it by a perilous footbridge across a canyon, it has its own distinct history and atmosphere. Recently, this wild and rather bedraggled oasis became the site for a new venture—a cheese production unit, managed by Giovanni and run by Michael and Olivier. The Auroville Today gourmet, his nose twitching, bravely volunteered to investigate further.

Auroville Today: Tell us something about "La Ferme".

Michael: It's about 10 acres in size. Jim de Vries started here about 15 years ago. In those days it was known to be the experimental farm. Jim was very much into plants from a vedic point of view. He was learning from the vedas which plants should be planted together and about their different vibrations. He was into the mysticism of plants. But he was also very scientific—he knew a lot about nutrition and specialized agriculture. He began this algae production.

Annemarie: I remember trying to feed the dried algae, which were supposed to be very nutritious, to the people in Centre Kitchen. We tried to sneak it into the soup, but nobody liked it!

Michael: When Jim left, after about 5 years, a lot of people lived here sporadically. The place became run down—it was never really a farm again. It was always a bit separate from Aspiration. There were some basic ideological differences. The people who lived here were more connected with Fertile and Pitchandikulam.

And who is here now?

Michael: Selvam, his family, Olivier, myself and Sven. We have three workers and a gorkha watchman.

How did you come here?

Michael: I was doing dance sessions with the children in "New Creation". It was Monica's group and, since she knew we were looking for a place, she suggested we come here. We looked—and didn't really like it. My dream was to live in the Fertile area—the romance and quiet of the green-belt. Here it was run down, the village was around... but there was water here, a kind of house, and the possibility of work with the cheese. So we came, to try it for a year or less.

Olivier: We thought we'd just reinforce a door, make a small capsule, fix a small tap for a shower. But without our knowing it, something happened. The single brick wall became double, we made a septic tank, a house, a kitchen. Suddenly everything became more permanent!

I feel a very harmonious atmosphere here. Have you consciously worked upon changing the atmosphere?

Michael: Yes. We meditated, we observed the plants and what happened to our bodies. At first it was unbearable. There was something very harsh and crude here. We were both sick. So the challenge was to change this, to make it beautiful, harmonious. We've only been here 5 months, but something is changing.

Was the cheese unit operating when you came?

Olivier: No. The building was finished, but they were looking for buffaloes. It started about two and a half months after we arrived. At the moment it's still small-scale. We have three buffaloes, a cow and recently we got a calf.

What's the process of making cheese?

Olivier: For mozzarella we begin by putting rennet in the milk. This makes the milk curdle in half to one hour. Then we dip small pieces of the curdled milk in boiling water for a few seconds. The curd immediately coagulates. Then we take it out, press it in a cloth and form it in small 'buns'. Afterwards, we leave it standing in salt water for a few hours, to give it taste. Finally we pack it in plastic bags and label it.

That's a very fast process! How long does it keep?

Michael: Out of the fridge, one day maximum. With refrigeration it can be kept for a week. After that it begins to ferment, but it can still be used for cooking.

You also make hard cheese?

Olivier: Yes. We call it "Lofabu" (partial anagram of "buffalo"—eds.). It happened by accident. At first we made too much mozzarella, so what was returned we recooked and hung up in muslin bags. After two weeks we had a very mild edible cheese.

Michael: This lofabu has been fun, a whole field of experimentation. After it's been hanging for a day or two, we take our fungus culture—a piece of smelly cheese—and dab it on the outside. This will give it a distinct flavour and prevent other fungi attacking it. Then we wait for a rind to form. This is critical. If it doesn't form properly, the cheese is vulnerable to attack. We have observed and experimented for months now with different methods. It's a living thing. Cheese is a living being, it responds.

Is it affected by your mood when you are making it?

Michael: Definitely. It's very obvious, very graphic. But it's like that with everything you handle—your work, the food you cook, everything. It's a mirror.

Olivier: If you listen to life, you always get feedback, whatever you are doing.

How many sales points do you have?

Olivier: Four in Pondicherry, and the Bharat Nivas Store in Auroville. And people also come here to buy.

Are there plans to expand production?

Michael: There is a project for 12 animals, with biogas, a boiler, an irrigation system for cow grass etc. It's a big investment. At the moment, we're happy to grow organically, not to go full speed into it. Because we're not only making cheese. It's a focus for our lives, but not the only one.

What else are you doing?

Michael: Our other activities are more a perceiving than a doing. We have regular meditations, we have our regular sessions in Transition and Isaiambalam—working with people through the medium of the body. That takes up the rest of our energy. We try to be as fresh as possible for these occasions, which requires much energy on the one hand and quietude on the other. These are the two poles we are constantly trying to balance. I think everybody in Auroville will identify with the statement that it's necessary to give oneself intensely to any process and, at the same time, not to be identified with it, not to be dependent upon it. It's the same for making cheese, for dancing, for cooking, for dealing with workers. If you are restless, everything is restless. If you are playful, everything is playful.

Geographically, you are almost an island here, the first community on one of the routes from Pondicherry. Do you feel that "La Ferme" is a transition point, a bridge of some kind between Auroville and Pondicherry?

Michael: Yes. We have to be a bit out of Auroville so as not to be involved with this Auroville-Pondicherry discrepancy, which does not exist for us. It's a place where people from Pondicherry may be able to make the first step, to experience Auroville in a safe way.

Interview by Alan.