

# Auroville Today

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## The Unknown Aurovilian

"The Unknown Aurovilian." It sounds rather like 'The Unknown Soldier', one of those unfortunates who died anonymously for his country. But many Aurovilians actually prefer to remain low-key, choosing to concentrate quietly upon their work rather than to inhabit a larger stage.

In fact, these Aurovilians may well be the backbone of Auroville. For they are the ones who hold the focus and anchor a particular energy, year in, year out, while others are whirled about in a maelstrom of ideas and enthusiasms.

Auroville Today has not done full justice to this 'other' Auroville. We've interviewed many individuals over the years but, appearing as they do in isolation, these profiles hardly give a sense of the extent and depth of this quieter Auroville. On the contrary, we've tended to return again and again to the same familiar faces. Partly, of course, this is because many of the 'unknown' Aurovilians prefer to remain exactly that, unknown, unquoted. Yet we have also been seduced, perhaps, by the belief that 'news' is only the 'important' issues—our organizational and economic crises, our challenging relationship with the villages etc.—rather than the equally-important, but less dramatic, struggle to lay down the physical and psychological building-blocks of our society.

In this issue we make a start at remedying this.



Mutual backrubbing – another way to meet.

## Pursuing silence and light

Gloria talks about architectural inspiration and her work and life in Auroville

**"F**or me, it's the poetry of architecture that is fascinating," says Gloria. "Luis Kahn describes it as something between Silence and Light. I find this poetic definition captures the essence of architecture." Kahn, she explains, was the renowned 20th century architect for whom the study of architecture was the study of human beings, their highest aspirations and the most profound truths. "It's about how to listen to space and the material."

The petite Aurovilian lights up as she talks about the subject of architecture. For her, it is like music, poetry or the arts. "Like them, it too comes from a creative intuition that is so subtle. It's when you understand this that you truly begin to experience the joy of designing."

Gloria has been working together with her architect husband Piero for over four decades. It is a work partnership that has been very successful. "Because," she adds, "our concept of architecture is inspired by the same sources."

There have been a few occasions when Gloria has worked solo. It is in this handful of individual houses in Auroville that one can appreciate Gloria's singular voice, which is that of an intangible refinement. These are structures

that seem embracing, offering care and a quiet retreat.

"Harmony and beauty: two things I myself need around me," she says. "These are the qualities I try to achieve in my work." She prefers to use stabilized earth blocks, a material that demands much more work and detailed planning, to the more conventional bricks and mortar. She feels it is worth the effort because of the fine visual quality they achieve by their precise outlines.

Her design inspirations come both from the site where the building is to be located and the need expressed by the client. "Occasionally the client is the inspiration," says Gloria. "I experienced this with Rika's house in Certitude. She is a fine lady with artistic qualities, and she became the inspiration... One tries to manifest this in space."

When designing homes, Gloria tries to achieve a sense of containment and protection from outside. Her own house, which she designed with Piero, is inward-looking with the outer boxy walls protecting the private space within. "Both Piero and I do not believe in dense apartment-style housing," she says. "We feel that each one of us needs our individual space. We feel this is necessary for the sadhana, for

Auroville, and for the Yoga..."

It is this same philosophy that comes through in her (and their) work. "The Yoga itself calls for minimalism; that's what allows one to be as true and as essential as possible. In that sense, one has to get rid of superfluous things..."

Gloria has been living in Auroville since 1968. "We missed the inauguration by a week because of a mistake in our visa application," she says. She and Piero came from Italy with the intention of staying only one year, "but once you have met Mother, you remain stuck. You postpone and postpone and postpone... and then you see that you've stayed!"

"What both Piero and I found incredibly attractive was what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said about the special relationship between spirituality, matter and practical life. "For us, this was very important because we believe that architecture too has a spiritual side; and for an architect to be able to express this aspiration of human beings through matter is very special."

"Compared to other architects, we are considered very slow in completing projects," she says. "But it is through this freedom to take time, to finalize details, to do things a certain way, that

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•Coming soon: The Auroville Experience, a selection of the most informative articles of 202 issues Auroville Today page 4

•The Matrimandir will be ready this year  
•Matrimandir musings  
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## Pursuing silence and light

PHOTO PIERO



Gloria

*continued from page 1*

we reach the quality we aim for; something that we feel is quite challenging with Government-funded projects." She explains how, once such a proposal is submitted, changes cannot be made to the design. "Even if a better

idea comes along later, you cannot use it. And then only a short time is given for construction because of the very tight budget that has to be spent within the specified time. In consequence, the final result suffers."

When asked what she has

learnt over her years in Auroville, she replies, "detachment and surrender."

"Auroville is very difficult. There has always been fighting and conflicts. So one must be able to discern when you have to surrender and accept human nature and then step back. In Auroville you continually learn this."

What she finds 'dangerous' in Auroville is when people believe that only their ideas are the truth. It is for this reason she says, that she has stopped attending community meetings. "Before, I used to go regularly. Now I find that they take so much energy;

and I feel it's better for me to utilize that energy to find that 'something' inside."

But it is difficult—the work Mother has given us is extremely difficult... yet it is beautiful!"

Priya Sundaravalli

### Rika's House, Certitude

From the dirt road, a harmonious brick façade presents itself. Unobtrusive and low, the house emerges out of the earth rising towards the East. Three layers of horizontally stacked and staggered walls draw the eye upward. Two square diamond windows embellish either end. The house opens onto a private area away from the road. The interior reveals a modest space, airy, cool and full of light. Subtle details have been incorporated into its design. Skylights let in light and the wind funnel between the bedroom, bathroom and the garden circulates cool moist air.

A few architectural tricks create illusions evoking a sense of endlessness, depth and perspective. A visual continuity is achieved by the use of low walls between living spaces, by openings and trellises in the brick walls, and by a partial glimpse through doors to adjoining spaces. A Japanese Zen quality pervades the house: a high square tub in the bathroom with its large stone platform shelf covered by loose pebbles; a gently undulating minimalist garden with its scatter of rocks and a lone stone lantern.



PHOTO PIERO

## To be free, you need to know your limits

Françoise and Mary have taught at Transition School for over twenty years, where they have helped create a unique educational environment for children between the ages of 6-14. Here they talk about what motivates and inspires them.

Françoise first read about Auroville in a UNESCO magazine of 1968. "I loved what I read—Mother sounded so free, so unconventional. And when I read about Auroville I thought, that's the place where I want to go." When she finally decided the moment was right, she visited the Auroville International office in Paris. "This lady asked me, 'Why do you want to go to Auroville?' I told her, 'I just want to be there'. Then she said, 'Nobody will smile at you and if you have no money you'll never be able to make it'. That was great! It meant I arrived here with absolutely no expectations!"

Mary first heard about Auroville in the early 1970s from her then husband, Dilip, who had studied in the Ashram School. When they left the U.S. in 1972 they intended to come straight here, but it actually took them another twelve years. "What kept us out of Auroville so long were largely our worries about the standard of education for our children." In 1984 they finally arrived.

Françoise also had young children. "I wanted something different for them from my own very academic education," says Françoise. "I wanted them to be able to enjoy a more holistic education. When Françoise arrived at Center School with her two children, the teacher airily informed her that she was just off to the Post Office. 'So you look after them while I'm away.' 'She just left me there with thirty kids!' Mary's immersion experience was only slightly less abrupt. "When I told Frederick I would like to help the little kids with sports, I had no idea what I was getting into. It was a real challenge. A couple of times I

remember telling myself, 'I'm going to do it, I'm going to go through this'."

So Françoise and Mary began their teaching careers in true Auroville fashion—abruptly, and

rooms. "For some people they had no place because this was the new education. But blackboards are really useful. It's like the Auroville Charter says. You don't start every time from scratch but you take what

dren themselves say they need a certain amount of order, they need quiet, and they don't want others taking their materials without permission."

And if somebody contravenes these agreements? "The kids usually want to be tougher on offenders than we do!" Mary notes that with her older (13 year old) students she even draws up a contract which she also signs. "A couple of years ago one of the conditions they laid down for me was that I couldn't have any favourites!" If there is a conflict in class, all other activities are suspended until the problem is solved.

Françoise admits that building relationships in the classroom did not come easily to her. "I had to work hard on the organizational level first. Only when I felt secure there could I go on to be freer with the children."

It's an art. You have to be able to hold your class, to feel what they need at any moment, to know that you can do this activity for six minutes but that eight will be too long. It's like a big Body Awareness class."

Mary points out that one of the main goals is that the students learn how to learn. "So when they ask a question and I tell them I don't know the answer and we go and look it up together, it's very powerful. They see us learning alongside them."

"I don't know that I came to the school with any expectations beyond being useful, but what I've really loved and grown with so much is this joy of learning. I'm learning things all the time, and I think that joy goes into the kids, they pick up my enthusiasm."

And what about their lives outside the school? Lately, Françoise and Mary are rarely, if ever, seen at General Meetings. Are they uninterested in wider community issues? "When I first came I was very interested," says Françoise, pointing out that both she and Mary have been members of the Reps. Group, Maintenance Group and the Entry Group. "But, at a certain point, I thought I've been given this job in the school, and to do it well I have to put all my concentration and energy there. So I dropped all the rest."

Françoise explains that the teachers agreed that when they arrive at Transition every morning they should try to empty themselves of everything to do with their home lives, community politics etc., so that they can concentrate fully on the children. "It's so important," adds Mary, "because we have teachers with different ideas and we don't want to start having discussions at school which may create tensions between us."

"It's not that I'm uninterested in these other things," continues Mary. "Actually, by nature I'm quite a politically-inclined person." But when she went to a couple of general meetings, she came away feeling discouraged. "As a community we have to find a different way of working. People have so many different interpretations of what we should be doing. That's fine, but we have to learn to respect each other's interpretation."

Is this what the children are learning at school? Mary nods. "This is one of our major tasks in the classroom. We have a lot of ground-rules for discussions, like everybody's entitled to their opinion. But we ask that everybody should have a little something to back up that opinion!"

"It will be interesting to see how the children carry on these lessons," concludes Françoise. "I hope one day they will show us a new way."

From an interview by Alan



Françoise and Mary

with little guidance.

In 1985, the older children from Center School transferred to the new Transition School. Françoise went with them, Mary joined shortly after. Françoise remembers it as a very interesting experience because the teachers helped decide the layout and design of the new classrooms; they even got to choose the furniture. "What a difference! That monsoon, for the first time, we could keep on teaching. At Center School we'd had to stop during the monsoon because it was so dark—we had no electricity—and the rain came in."

The shift to Transition was not without its challenges. Françoise remembers the teachers having discussions about whether or not there should be blackboards in the class-

is good from the past."

The blackboards were duly installed.

Now, twenty years on, what have Mary and Françoise learned about teaching? "In order to be free, you have to know your limits," says Mary. "My students know how far they can go in terms of their behaviour, but within that structure there's a lot of freedom to choose, for example, what they want to study."

Françoise notes that the teachers don't want to be authoritarian with the students. "We want to bring a vibration of harmony, unity and respect for each other into the classroom." Practically, what does this mean? Mary explains that with a new class she will begin by making agreements with them about how to behave in the classroom. "The chil-



# From villager to international traveler

Rajaveni has joined Auroville, traveled abroad, and is now teaching creative dance

It's hard to believe Rajaveni was a 'typical village girl', as she describes herself, before coming to work in the community of Verité 15 years ago.

It's apparent her language and coordination skills are an inherent part of her character, as she deals with multiple queries from foreign university students, juggles phone calls, and consults kitchen staff about menus and food ordering.

She finally sweeps up her yellow saree and drops into a chair, confessing she has little time to spare from the demands of being Verité's kitchen manager and guest coordinator for the busy visitors' season.

Rajaveni grew up in the nearby village of Allankuppam, and first came to work in Verité forest. "I was expected to work, then marry," she says. "I studied only to the 2nd standard, and didn't even know how to

sign my name. Auroville was totally different for me."

Rajaveni progressed through jobs such as construction, laundry and kitchen work, and was gradually

Rajaveni works with groups of university students that stay in Verité, teaching them about Tamil culture and language. She also teaches expressive dancing on weekends in Sanjeevannagar village's

PHOTO LESLEY



Rajaveni

Mohanam Cultural Centre—an Auroville initiative that provides creative extra-curricular activities for children. "They do some classical dance, but they only learn step, step," she says. "I give them exercises so they can connect with each other, with their bodies. They're shy at home, but I encourage them to be energetic, to free up."

Three years ago, Rajaveni decided to join Auroville. "My family was thinking about my marriage," she says. "I said I

wanted an independent life—that I wanted to live in Auroville. My brother said: 'Okay, have your freedom and go to Auroville.'"

Rajaveni made many friends in Auroville, and some encouraged her

to travel abroad via exchange programmes. In 2004, she was excited to go to an International Youth Camp in Boulder, Colorado, where she participated in creative dance workshops and other activities. "That exchange was really fantastic and totally different for me," she says. "I learnt many things and brought them back to Auroville, Verité and Mohanam".

This trip also enabled her to visit a handicapped person's centre, which inspired her to work in this field. "My dream is to work with handicapped children or old people, but teaching the children in Mohanam is close to this ideal."

Rajaveni's determination and strength of character shine through her eyes. These qualities drive all her commitments, including two hours of English study every morning, and participation in singing and dancing classes with an Aurovilian women's group.

"It was a gift that I came to Auroville," she says. "It shows a beautiful way to grow and be educated for a peaceful life and for working together. I've grown very much in Auroville, which is a new light for me. Mother helped me a lot and is always guiding my way."

Lesley

## A gulp of fresh air

'Infinite 3' are three young Aurovilians who are enlivening exhibitions through imaginative use of space and materials

As I approach Kala Kendra gallery it's pouring with rain. I notice a broad, muddy ridge of red soil leading up to the front door. Intrigued, I follow it inside. It crosses the lobby and climbs the stairs, acquiring a fringe of gold paint. What on earth...?

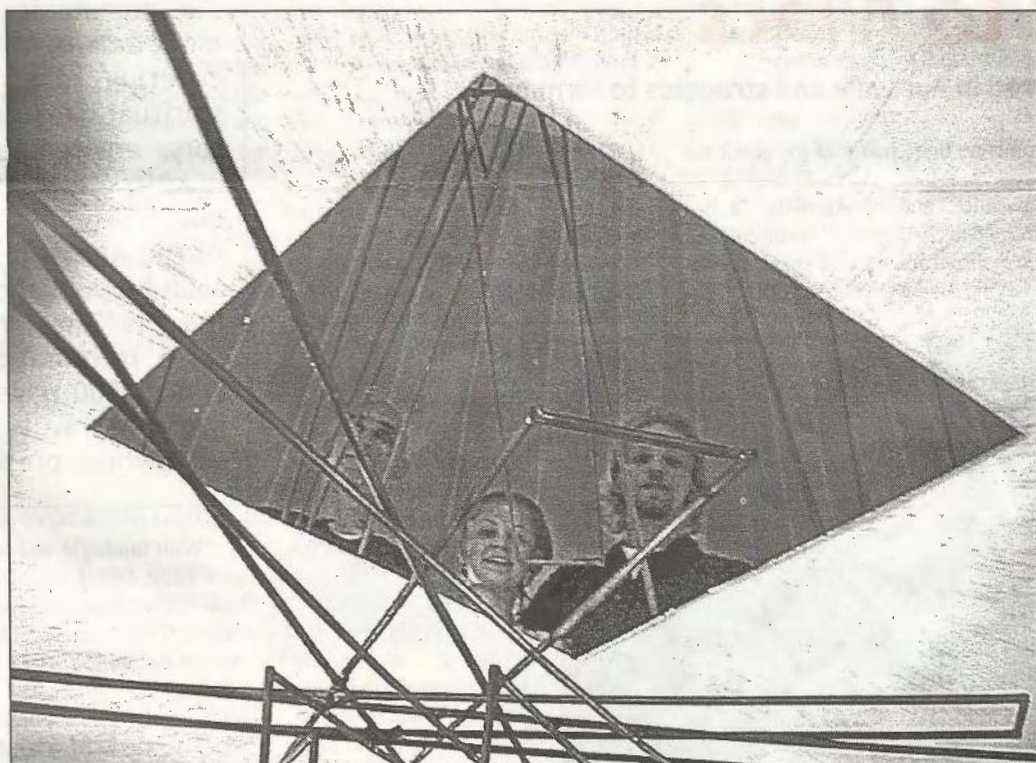
In fact, this is one of the 'installations' created by young Aurovilians Aron, Jonah and Shona to accompany a recent exhibition in Kala Kendra. "It all started low-key," says Aron. "The three of us had a dinner together, the idea came up and we thought we'd give it a try." They talked to Dharmesh, who coordinates activities at Kala Kendra art gallery, and he invited them to do installations for the next eight exhibitions there. He even allowed them to decide upon how to display the exhibitors' work.

So far 'Infinite 3' ("because the unity of the three of us gives infinite possibilities"), have created installations for three exhibitions. For Firooza's paintings the installations included the ridge of red soil but also glasses of coloured liquid placed in strategic locations, stainless-steel trays containing coagulated oil paints, and a round bed of sand in which, off-centre, a granite grinding-stone had been placed.

What are they trying to do? "We try to enhance, to bring an extra quality to the artist's work, by making people look at it in a different way," says Jonah. Shona explains that some of their installations, like the soaring curved shapes accompanying the calligraphic exhibition in the Tibetan Pavilion, are actually quite fragile. "You will knock them over if you walk about unconsciously. So one of our purposes is to make people aware of where they are in space, to become more conscious of their bodies as well as of the building where the exhibition is taking place."

"In India we're overloaded with strong images," says Jonah, "so people tend to shut off. We want to help them really see again. So we don't simply hang paintings or photos flat on walls but we display them in open spaces, or in relationship to an installation, or we put them at an unfamiliar elevation so the viewer is forced to give them more attention."

The process Infinite 3 follow is interesting. Initially they speak to the exhibitor and look through his or her work to get some preliminary ideas. Then, for Marco's photographic exhibition, they decided that each of them would bring two 'materials' from which the installations would be created. Shona brought turmeric powder and red pigment, Aron eucalyptus poles and goldfish in bowls, and Jonah five sacks of charcoal and chetries. "Then we work in silence," says Aron, "and this is very interesting. We communicate, connect, through the doing. It's total improvisation."



The Infinite 3 reflected in their own creation

"There's no play of egos," says Jonah, "and nothing is discarded. We keep building upon each other's ideas, and this makes the outcome much richer."

A lot of work goes into creating the installations but then they are dismantled. Is this satisfying? "I enjoy it like this," says Shona. "Something lives for a time, then we break it down and we're faced with the challenge of coming up with something absolutely different." Jonah explains how they worked very hard to make the sand circle in Firooza's exhibition perfectly smooth. But, within a few days, people had written their names on it and animals had walked across it. "So we have to learn to accept we've created something perfect in our eyes but then to let it go, let it evolve naturally..."

Look at that!" he says suddenly, noticing a spider's web hanging within a cascade of steel rods, "We could never do something so beautiful."

"Sometimes," says Aron, "I think we've compromised, we haven't pushed to our limits, because we have to respect the exhibitor." "It's the only way we can build trust," says Jonah.

So how do the exhibitors respond to their input? "I was so impressed by their initial energy and ideas that I gave them a carte blanche," says Firooza. "They really brought new ideas. And the energy...when the current failed and it was pitch

black, they just kept on working."

And the future? "Kala Kendra is where we've started flying, but not where we want to stop," says Aron. "We want to go further, not only to collaborate with Auroville artists and architects but to go into the local villages and the larger India." Jonah points out that Kala Kendra has offered them a rare opportunity: the gallery pays for the materials they use. "Ideally, though, we'd like to get paid for outside work so we'd be free to create whatever we want, wherever we want, inside Auroville."

A foretaste of their work was provided, over a year ago, when Aurovilians woke up one morning to find a section of a road painted blue. More recently, they erected some red lanterns near the eucalyptus grove. "It was an amazing experience," says Jonah. "People drove by, then stopped, came back and looked. They asked us, 'What's special about today?' 'Nothing special,' we said, 'we're just bringing beauty.' People are really touched by this. It's like a gulp of fresh air."

"If we are more and more able to manifest things like this," says Aron, "it unblocks, it opens up doors. When you go to the Chamber, you make an effort to centre yourself. But what if you could bring that awareness everywhere? That's what we want to do. To help celebrate the amazing place that Auroville is."

Alan

## In brief

### A Prayer for Peace

His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent a message to Auroville expressing his happiness that on the last day of the year a mandala of light and prayers for peace was offered at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in Auroville.

### New Year celebrations

The Matrimandir was open to visitors and Aurovilians for the New Year's Eve. The New Year's bonfire was followed by a special dance offering by Ramli Ibrahim and his dancers, with Adithya Archana. In the evening the Auroville jazz trio Three Raags together with the Charminar jazz collective from Hyderabad gave a concert at Kalabhumi.

### Health Fund policy revised

Auroville's Health Fund, the collective self-insurance which started 4 years ago, announced as the main change that henceforth the expenses covered by the Health Fund will be limited to Rs. 2,50,000 per person per year. Previously, there was no limit. The Health Fund envisages an increase of health care costs as more Aurovilians enter middle and senior stages of life, and as traffic increases.

### Transition School expansion

Transition primary school, which opened in 1984 with about 45 students and now has 135 students from 20 different countries, announced that it intends to expand to 200 students, the maximum number it can accommodate, in order to provide the individual attention each child requires. As the children's population has increased rapidly, and as class sizes should not exceed 20 students, more classrooms are required. An estimated Rs. 23,00,000 (€ 44,000) will be needed. For more info contact Lyle@auroville.org.in

### Nandanam Kindergarten

To meet a shortage of funds for building an extra class-room needed by July 2006, Nandanam teachers and parents organized two Food Festivals, raising Rs 50,000. An amount of Rs 4 lakhs (approximately € 8,000) is still required. For more info contact Matilde at nandanam@auroville.or.in

### Bad press

Auroville attracts more and more attention from the press, both local and abroad. Some papers have printed un-researched and slanderous articles with allegations that are based on hearsay or deliberate falsehoods. In meetings between the Working Committee, members of the Governing Board and the Acting Secretary, Auroville Foundation, it has been decided that, as a matter of principle, such articles will not be replied to.

### Friends of Dogs report

A group of Aurovilians and friends have come together to care for abandoned village dogs. Since Ann passed away in June of 2005 the concept of Integrated Animal Care based on vaccinations, sterilizations, medical care, feeding and awareness education has been left floating. Anti-rabies vaccinations and sterilizations have started once again, though on a very small scale. More info: integrated\_animal\_care@yahoo.co.in.



# Studies, sambar and the supramental

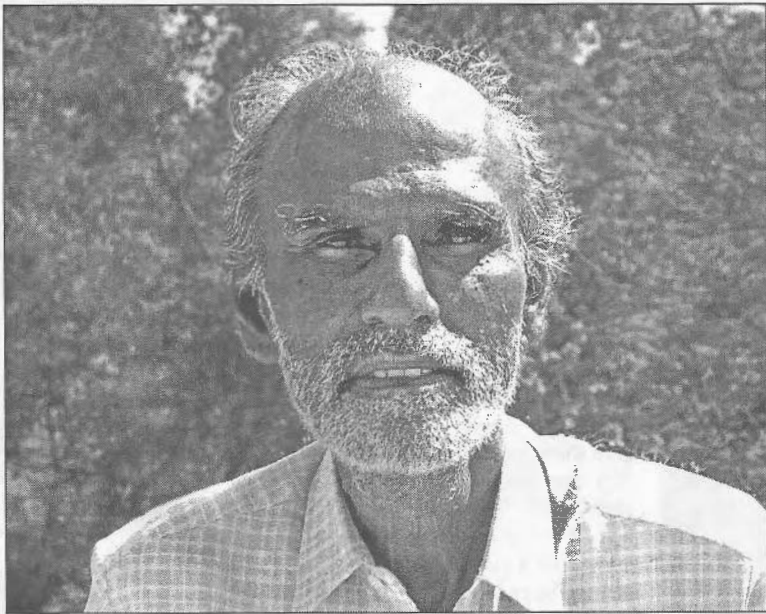
Somasundaram's rich life has traversed academia, farming, and the quest for divine consciousness

**S**omasundaram's name is scribbled in my diary. I'm taking my lunch in the Solar Kitchen straight after an Auroville Today meeting, having just been commissioned by the paper to find and interview him.

When a sprightly, elderly man sits down next to me and flashes me a beaming smile, I know instantly this is the person I'm looking for. The forces of synchronicity are alive and well in Auroville. He graciously agrees to my interview request, and we make a time to meet in his home at Buddha Garden farm.

Somasundaram tells me he was drawn to Sri Aurobindo's teachings via his formal studies in biology and education at three different universities in south India. After a degree in biology, he was studying for his masters in education when he came across Aurobindo's educational philosophy. He was so inspired, he wrote a PhD in the early '70s: *The Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and its Validity in Modern Education*.

But Somasundaram's route to Auroville was more circuitous. He spent 27 years working in a teacher training college in Madurai, and helping his wife raise three sons. He received a grant to buy the complete works of Sri Aurobindo, and read his way through this formidable pile of books. He first visited the Ashram and Auroville in 1980, and taught for a few months in one of the schools. He con-



Somasundaram

tinued to visit for the next 12 years, and in 1991, he finally retired from his college duties and decided to come and live in Auroville permanently. "I asked my family to come here, but they didn't like it," he says. "They come for darshan, and to visit me."

Somasundaram spent most of the '90s teaching biology and Tamil language in Auroville's senior schools. He's proud of the fact that his students did well in exams, but doesn't support the exam-oriented focus of most education in India.

He lived in Aspiration and enjoyed

contributing to the community. "People liked me very much! Because I speak Tamil and I'm qualified I move with them freely. I'm a good cook and they like my dishes, especially sambar!"

In 2000, his doctor advised him to do more physical work, and he took up service work in the rose garden at Matrimandir. "I'm very attracted to the Matrimandir, and go there and meditate. Mother said the crystal represents the divine consciousness. I want to unite myself with the divine consciousness... I pray for it."

PHOTO LESLEY

After 13 years in Aspiration, Somasundaram decided he needed another change, and he was drawn by the opportunity to live in the Buddha Garden farm and work with Priya Vincent. "She's the queen of Buddha Garden! She likes me because I speak Tamil and can speak with the apprentices. Aspiration felt sorry [to lose me]. They said—you're 71! Can you do such hard work?!"

Somasundaram works early mornings in the garden along with 20 apprentices and volunteers from around the world, and talks to them about Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's philosophy. He also contributes his cooking knowledge. "Breakfast [for the farm workers] wasn't good when I arrived and I was asked to change it. I take breaks and give instructions to the cook."

Not one to waste time, Somasundaram spends the rest of his day organizing educational opportunities for Aurovilians and villagers alike. He spends any spare time reading the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

"I want to live in the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother," he says, "and try to realize those ideals. Everyone can realize divine consciousness, otherwise, what is the point of going and sitting in front of the crystal? It should descend on you."

Does he feel it's descended on him?

"Not in a perceptible way, but it has its influence on me. It controls my thoughts. It affects my well being, my personal life..."

Lesley

## From milk to Macs

Charlie talks about how he arrived in Auroville and struggles to farm here

**"M**y job is to bring the farm back to life." Charlie

grins. This 54-year old American national built Aurogreen from scratch, then battled through its collapse, and now, in an uphill struggle, is trying to bring it back to its former glory. With more time on his hands, he developed a passion for Mac computers and today is Auroville's Mac expert, helping Aurovilians solve their computer problems. "It's satisfying work, but I am frustrated because Aurogreen, situated as it is on the outskirts of Auroville, can't get good internet connections."

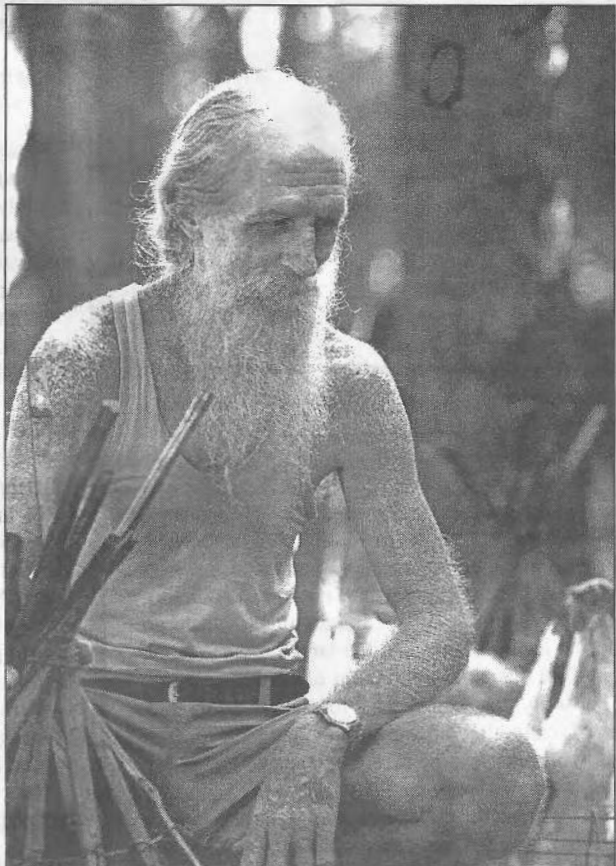
Charlie's story starts on Long Island near New York City. He was 18 years old and just out of a Christian military boarding school. The experience gave him a lasting dislike for both religion and the military. It was the end of the 1960s, and youth from Paris to Berkeley were in turmoil. "I had been brought-up in a conservative, super-Christian family, and my parents feared that I might join the agitation. Without asking me, they decided to send me far from America, to India. That country wasn't the 'in' thing for me, but my father offered me 500 bucks with the ticket and I thought 'what the heck, if I don't like it I'll be back'," says Charlie.

He went to Jaipur, where distant relatives of his stepmother enrolled him in a Jesuit-run school. Charlie dropped out within the month. "But

someone there had told me about the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Centre of Education and of Auroville, and I decided to check it out." He discovered the Ashram library and spent months studying Sri Aurobindo's works. "I got

level' there was hardly anything: we knew only about Auroville's Charter and some of Mother's ideals of what Auroville was to become. Everything was unformed, and that gave one an indescribable feeling of freedom. The stark sun, the physical hardships, it all didn't matter. We, the few Aurovilians, worked the land in daytime, and in the evenings talked about the imminent supramentalisation—which, of course, would happen within the decade!"

PHOTO CORRIAN



Charlie

really taken by it. I also had a few Darshans of The Mother, but I was not particularly touched by her. I'm probably more philosophically inclined," he reflects.

It soon became obvious that the Ashram school was not Charlie's future. But Auroville exerted a strong attraction. "It was a desert and I like deserts, I like emptiness. There was nothing on the land. Even at the 'idea-

the desert. Aurogreen had two very deep wells, drilled by the Indian Central Ground Water Board to investigate the area's hydrology. The 500 metre well yielded sulphurous smelling water and was soon capped. But the other one, 390 metres deep, was used for the farm since electricity, as per the policy of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB), was provided free of charge to farms.

Charlie had found his place. But his parents despaired, considering Auroville worse than anything that might have happened at home. "They sent me an ultimatum: return or we cancel support. I chose the latter, and this ended all contacts with my family for more than 15 years. Soon I was broke, but it didn't matter. My next meal was always provided."

From Forecomers, the place where he had landed, Charlie moved to a few empty fields on the other side of Auroville. He baptised them 'Aurogreen'—invoking the dream of the early Aurovilians of greening

"With hindsight and looking at it holistically, I think it was a mistake to draw water from that depth," says Charlie. "The area should have been used for forestation and dry land farming. But we were tempted to start irrigated orchards, grow animal feed products, have chickens, a large dairy, and produce eggs, milk and Auroville's first cheese." Charlie also discovered his fundraising talents and bought about 30 acres. Aurogreen expanded. The farm became a running concern.

But then the TNEB decided on a policy change. While private farms continued to enjoy exemption from electricity fees, farms belonging to institutions such as the Auroville Foundation were now charged the highest tariff. To minimize electricity consumption, Charlie installed drip irrigation systems and solar powered pumps. But the pumps yielded too little; competition with local farmers increased, and financial reserves ran out. The TNEB refused to change its decision.

Then the dreaded moment came: the TNEB connection had to be cut off. It was one of the most difficult decisions in Charlie's life. "I don't like letting living things die. But there was no choice. I turned off the water. The orchards died. I fired people, many of whom had been working for me for years. I sold most of my cows—the good ones, of course, as I could not

send the old and weak ones to be slaughtered. Economically, that didn't make sense. But emotionally, for me, it did."

Charlie switched to dry land orchards and planted mangoes, jackfruits and chickoo trees. The saplings are now young trees, but they will take another 10 to 15 years to mature. Today the farm sells eggs, cow grass and other animal feed products. "It's a boring business," says Charlie. "But the farm survives, if only just."

In January this year the TNEB reversed its decision and now once again provides free electricity to all farms. For Charlie, however, there is no going back. "I don't intend to make use of it now that the irrigated farm has gone," he says. "Also, on a more holistic level, I think that using as much power and water as we did in the past was a mistake that should not be repeated."

Asked to look back on 36 years of life in Auroville, Charlie reflects that many Aurovilians, himself included, tend to get absorbed by practical work, forgetting ideals. "I am happy that some Aurovilians keep reminding us of them. Even if I think that proposals such as the Unity Fund or the new Pour Tous Distribution Centre may be flawed, I'll still support them. For they try to manifest some of the ideals for which we came."

Carel

## Coming soon: The Auroville Experience

In 1998 we made a selection of articles from ten years of Auroville Today and published it as 'The Auroville Adventure'. It was a resounding success.

Now we have compiled a selection of the best and most informative articles from our past 202 issues. This unique overview of our community development between 1988-2005, covering topics like the spiritual background, history, environment, organization, arts and crafts, education, outreach and life in Auroville will very soon be published in book form as 'The Auroville Experience'.

More information about this handsome book of almost 300 pages, including numerous colour photographs, will be published in our next issue. Meanwhile, prepare a space on your bookshelf!

The Auroville Experience





**M**y daughter Olga was only eight. One morning, when I was preparing to go to work, she said 'Mama, you are Shakti.' I was surprised and asked her what she meant. She replied that it was written on my forehead. I smiled, and then forgot about it.

Three years later I came to Auroville. I went to the Entry Group. Someone asked me if I had a Sanskrit name. I said no, my name is Tania. But I had hardly stepped outside when the name 'Shakti' struck me like a bolt from the blue. I phoned my daughter, who was still in the Ukraine. She immediately confirmed that she had called me Shakti so many years earlier. And I understood that something in my life was changing and that I was being blessed though this name. It was like an initiation for coming to Auroville.

I had grown up in Uzghorod, in the former USSR, a small mountain town on the border of Hungary and Slovakia. We led a basic type of life, but with a beautiful exchange of people who all lived in similar conditions. It was a bit like a community. I had studied accounts at the local university. I got married early, and my daughter Olga was born.

But something, unconsciously perhaps, was looking for deeper things. Then my brother Vladimir, who was studying Sanskrit at the Leningrad University, showed me some translated works of Sri Aurobindo. This had been done illegally. The translations had been copied by hand or on old typewriters, and were circulated as sacred and very precious documents.

They opened a door deep down in me. Somebody had given answers to basic questions of life. Then, one day in 1988, the paper of the communist youth union, the Komsomolskaya Pravda, published an article about Auroville. It became my dream. How could I get there? We couldn't even go over the nearby border to Hungary. So I sat with my friends and talked about how this place would be...everybody at 7 a.m.

## 'Mama, you are Shakti'

Shakti joined Auroville in 1994 and worked for the Visa Service and the Solar Café. Here she tells of her story and shares her perspectives on what it means to belong to the Auroville community.



Shakti in her studio.

would go to the Matrimandir, wearing white clothes, and meditate, and people would only speak about beauty and live in peace ... and we were dreaming like that for hours.

Meanwhile Vladimir went to Pune University in India to get his diploma. We did not hear from him for over a year. Then, one day, I suddenly got his phone call: I am in Auroville, you can come! I was too stunned to speak. At the time, my life was in turmoil. I had separated, and this and other issues had brought me to a point of desperation. I was willing to die. I had prayed to The Mother to please let me go ... and then it happened! She took me in her arms and all the barriers suddenly gave way—I got a visa, obtained a ticket and flew down.

Entering Auroville felt like entering a vibrating presence. For months I stayed indoors, getting used to that vibration, the climate and all those Indians and other foreigners. They did not wear white clothes, but there was often an unusual depth to the people I met—the Russians first, of course, as I hardly spoke English. The experience was overwhelming, and it became clear that Auroville was my path.

I returned to the Ukraine to collect my daughter and move to Auroville permanently. Though Olga had at first been frightened of joining me—the snakes and all that—she now was determined to go, as I had often written to her how beautiful Auroville was and about the birds and the flowers and the friendly peo-

ple. But I had not anticipated the resistance I would meet back in the Ukraine from people who did not want me to go. In fact, if it had not been for Olga's persistence, I might not have returned to Auroville. But she pulled and pushed me to come to Auroville—even if all I could carry with me was a single towel and her bag of toys.

I've been living in Auroville now for about 12 years. And I am slowly beginning to understand what it means to belong to the Auroville community. This is no longer an abstract concept, but a strong reality—though perhaps more on an energetic than on a physical level. We all are small parts of one mechanism which is finding its way. It is like the cells of a body. If everything is in

place, the body is healthy. If some part is ill, all the other cells have to give energy to the sick part, so that the body can become healthy once again. Everything has its place, even mistakes, for how else can we discover what is true?

Coming to Auroville without financial means has also given me a special take on everything the Mother has said about a community without money exchange. I deeply believe in the ideal and was initially thinking that it should be implemented immediately. I joined the sharing experiment known as 'the circles', but it collapsed. I believe it collapsed because too few people chose to participate.

This, I believe, is also the defect in the proposed Pour Tous Distribution Centre pilot project. Too few people have yet proposed joining. And once again, it is an experiment where those without money will be the guinea pigs. Those who have money of their own can stand aside—or, if they join, know that their participation won't really affect their lives. It is not so much about finance, it is about spirit. Mother's ideals apply to the entire Auroville society, not only for those who live on a community maintenance.

The solution does not lie in a centralised authority. I came from that society and know it doesn't work. Instead, we have to find our common values and unite on that level to build Auroville towards the ideals. In a recent seminar I learned that 70% of the people in any society will never speak out in public, but will criticise the 30% that takes the decisions. In Auroville it is the same.

I think that we need to hire specialists, or find suitable people amongst ourselves, who are willing to do surveys to find out how people are actually living and what their ideals and their fears are, so that we can discover our shared values. Where is the common ground from where we can hear each other? To bring that out will heal and unite the community.

*In conversation with Carel*

## Le Morgan

The new Town Hall cafeteria, with the evocative name 'Le Morgan', is run by cuisinier Jean-Marc from France

**J**ean-Marc was a history teacher before coming to Auroville. He taught adults at a Training Centre in France until he realized that he was not meant to be a teacher. Along with his friend Odile, he travelled to India. By chance, they came to Pondicherry and discovered The Mother's Samadhi. Deeply touched, they came to live in Aspiration community in Auroville twelve years ago. Amongst other activities, his main focus is presently at Le Morgan, the new cafeteria by the Town Hall.

Does the name Le Morgan ring a bell? You may have heard about Morgan le Fay, the famous fairy queen and sorceress in King Arthur's legend? Well, in Celtic myths, Morgan also means 'the one born from the sea', and in Brittany it means 'merman'. As Jean-Marc comes from Brittany and the dishes he loves to serve contain seafood, the restaurant is named Le Morgan, like the merman who inspired him.

Having worked at the Visitors' Centre Cafeteria for five years, Jean-Marc was chosen to manage the new eatery at the Town Hall. "The Town Hall Cafeteria is a good opportunity for me to start my own work. I am very happy with the team." Presently there are twelve

people working there. Their day begins at seven in the morning, and ends late in the evening. Although the cafe is not yet ready to receive huge crowds, the coordination of the team goes smoothly. "We need a little more time to adjust," he says. "No advertisement has been made for dinner, yet we serve food to about eighty to a hundred people daily." He is happy that many Aurovilians as well as guests come to eat here.

"We have three main aims here at Le Morgan: to cook tasty dishes at low cost; to maintain a good stress-free working atmosphere; and to be self-sufficient. "We don't want to be a profit-oriented unit," he says. Future plans include an extension of the downstairs terrace and "we would love to have music to enhance the charming atmosphere of Le Morgan."

About the cuisine, he has this to say: "We don't have regular dishes here. My philosophy is to cook according to what is available." Every day he comes up with new ideas. "I never did any training in cooking, therefore my knowledge is not complete; but as I was working as a helper in different kinds of French restaurants, I learnt along



Jean-Marc in front of the emblem of Le Morgan.

the way and have slowly made it to the top!"

Although he cooks vegetarian dishes or chicken, his specialty is fish. "Half of our customers come for the fish," he remarks. "There is a wide variety of seafood in India though Pondicherry unfortunately offers only a limited variety." His

aim is to explore the different kinds of local fish, like the *sankara*, *silla*, *konduva*, and *parai*. He hopes that Le Morgan which is a dream come true for him, will allow his cooking talents to unfold.

"Every country brings a different flavour to its food. I cook Lebanese, Moroccan, and French

dishes and I try to give all of them an originality by adding a personal touch. The secret of all cooks is the love they put into their cooking," he says with a smile. "Sometimes your dish does not come out the way you would have wanted it to, but that's part of the game."

Jean-Marc has other passions as well. "Besides cooking, I love gardening," he says. "By working in the garden I get a lot of strength from the earth." On over 50 square metres of land behind his home in Aspiration, Jean-Marc has created a beautiful garden. "Gardening is like cooking for me; I don't think, I do, and by doing one enters into a space where intuition takes the lead."

Jean-Marc recounts an experience. "I remember one time when my mind was preoccupied with problems. I prayed to Ma Durga and I made an agreement with her: if she would help me with my obstacles, I would place her statue in the garden. Soon after, my situation cleared up and I placed her statue at the root of a Banyan tree. Now many people come to perform pujas around it, and the villagers have adopted the place completely."

*Ancolie*



# The Matrimandir will be ready this year

John Harper of the Matrimandir team shows the progress of the work

**"I**t is certainly the intention that the Matrimandir will be ready by the end of this year," John Harper, originally from Canada, has spent a life-time working at the Matrimandir. He carefully expresses the prevailing hope: that after 33 years, the construction of the Matrimandir will finally be concluded. "We'll have to stay focussed, for there is a lot happening. Barring an unforeseen event, the Matrimandir, including the meditation chambers in the twelve petals and the garden infrastructure, is scheduled to be ready by December 2006."

The tour of the site starts with a walk around the structure. John points at the fresh white Kemperol which now covers about three quarters of the skin. "The waterproofing is expected to be completed by the end of April and all the discs will be in place by the end of the year," he says. "The disc team, the scaffolding team and the Kemperol team are chasing each other in a kind of exquisite dance, and it all works quite harmoniously."

The work at the four entrances, the golden shields and the four-petalled discs above each doorway, is progressing as well. Each disc will have its own geometrical shape representing that particular aspect of The Mother—a hexagon for Maheswari; a square for Mahakali; a circle for Mahalakshmi; and a triangle for Mahasaraswati.

We move to the petals. Black stains—signs of mould—mar the surface of the red Agra stone. "Agra stone belongs to a desert climate," says John. "It needs exposure to the sun to be fungus-free. The humidity and the rains here create the problem." The team plans to use high-pressure water jets to clean the surface, and then treat it with a water-repelling silicone-based anti-fungal material. "Experiments with a German project have shown that, treated in this way, the stone stays clean for approximately 4-5 years," he explains.

Inside the petals, work on the meditation rooms and their connecting corridors is in full swing. "Peace and Equality are fully finished; in Sincerity only the air-conditioning remains to be installed," says John. "We have yet to choose the precise type and size of the air-conditioning units for the remaining rooms." All the other research for the petals is complete: the exact shades of colour for the walls have been picked; the design of the shield for each room is done.

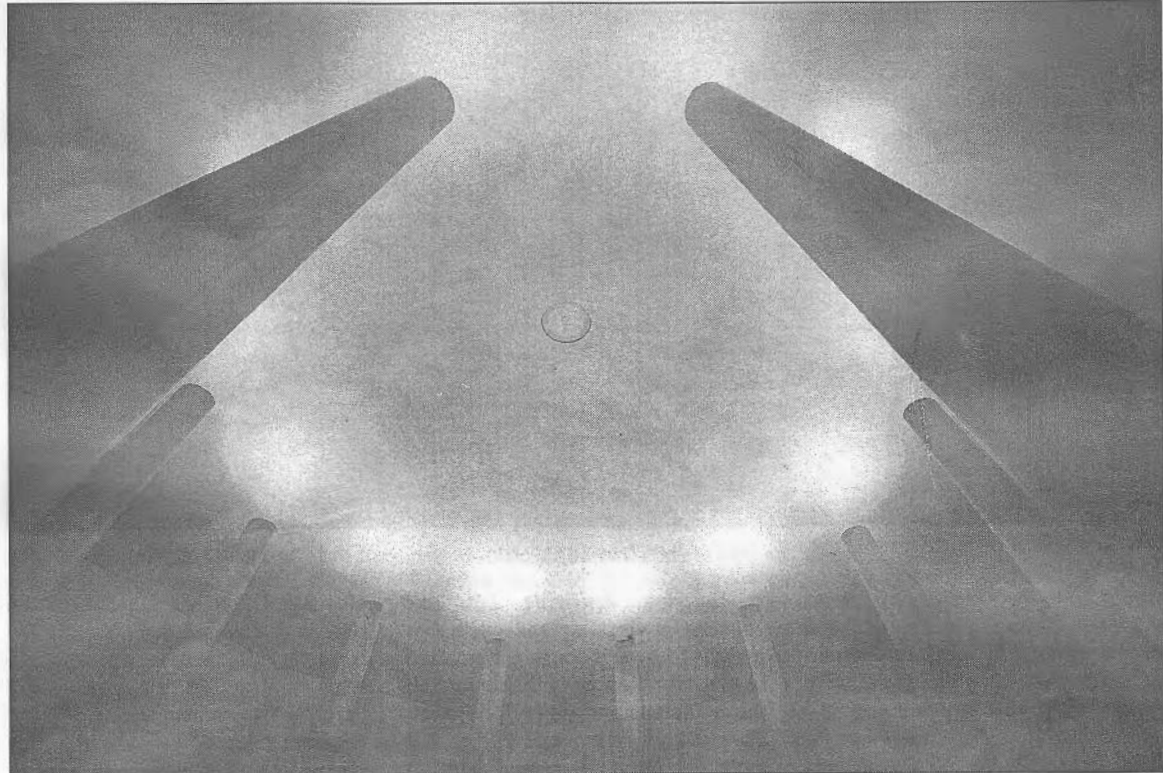
The pond under the Matrimandir is almost ready. "In the centre of the pool will be a sculpted marble cone supporting a crystal. This is being made in the marble workshop. It will receive the ray of light that has passed through the crystal in the Chamber," says John. For the time being, a blue tarpaulin sheet protects the surface. Above the pond, work on the Mother's symbol in white marble con-

import diamond-clear glass from Germany, or use one of the Indian varieties."

The other major work is the inner skin of the Matrimandir. After years of experimenting with different materials, such as fibre-glass reinforced plastic, coloured glass and cloth, the decision has been made to go for a flame-retardant translucent fibre-glass fabric. "This fabric will be fixed into the

ray on the crystal will be as natural as possible. The ordinary mirrors that were used before created a slightly greenish tint to the light." The crane, custom-made in Germany is to arrive shortly. "It is probably the only completely stainless steel crane in the world," says John. Designed to be 10 metres long in its collapsed form, the crane will have the capability to be raised up hydraulically and then tele-

PHOTO IRENO



The modified ceiling of the Chamber, for this photo illuminated by the lamps in the top of each pillar. Only the central opening has remained for the sunbeam, the artificial light and the cooled air.

tinues. "It is the last major job for the marble section. Apart from this, and fixing the discs to the bottom of the structure, the area below the Matrimandir is virtually ready," says John.

We move into the Matrimandir. There, two major works still remain to be completed: the ramps and the inner skin. "For the floor boards of the ramps, we have opted for lightweight honeycomb aluminium panels. They will be covered with an industrial-grade heavy-duty carpet," explains John. The glass parapet design is being developed in consultation with an expert from the Impact Safety Glass firm in Bangalore, the company which supplied the glass doors and parapets for the 12 meditation rooms inside the petals. "There are a lot of options in the glass world," says John. "We are still deciding on the final glass parapet design and whether to

white powder-coated aluminium triangles," explains John. "The work promises to be immense as each triangle has a different dimension."

Within the Inner Chamber, work is complete. Eight of the nine openings in the ceiling have been closed. Only the central one has remained, for the sunbeam and the artificial lighting on the crystal as well as for the cool air from the new air conditioning system which has been installed in the north and south pillars. Gone, also, are the huge cotton sheets covering the carpet. Instead small cloth mats have been made available.

The top of the Matrimandir awaits the installation of the heliostat and a crane for cleaning the discs. "Both will hardly be visible from the gardens," says John. "A company in Hyderabad is manufacturing super-transparent mirrors from diamond-clear glass for the heliostat, so that the

scope 20 metres outwards. The operator will clean the discs from a gondola at its tip.

The main work on the gardens is to establish the infrastructure. All the pathways radiating from the Matrimandir are being paved with granite and red Agra stone. Also the installation of the water infrastructure for the gardens has begun. An Indian company is to install about 8 kilometres of HDPE pipes. "The whole thing is going to be controlled by a computerised weather station," says John. "The computer will know if it is hot and sunny or raining, and accordingly adjust the timings for watering by automatic pumps."

Walking back to the office, John shares his own feelings about the work. "It is wonderful to see it moving at this speed, all the facets dancing together in harmony."

Carel

## Matrimandir musings

Following a guided tour of the Matrimandir, 15 year olds from Future School share their thoughts

I am not Aurovilian, and I don't know too much about the ideology of The Mother. But the Matrimandir means a lot for me because it represents what humans can do when they put all their efforts together to reach a dream. If we cannot reach perfection at least we can build it!

Ramona

The Matrimandir is constantly experimenting and changing, but one place I like and I hope it won't change is the petal with the Blue light. I am not sure what that specific petal's name is, but I really like the blue and the quiet AC. The other thing I found interesting was the top. It gives a very good view of Auroville, and made me realize how very, very green Auroville really is.

David

After 7 years, I am in the Matrimandir again. I remember the last time—it was 1997. I was 8 years old, holding my father's hand and climbing up the steps with him. Now I am 15, and I climb the steps alone with no hand to hold mine. My father has passed away this summer... I step into the chamber—into the peace, the calm and the quiet vibration. My pain leaves me; something heals.

Aurora

Arriving at the Matrimandir always makes me feel as if I'm alone and somehow all my problems seem to disappear.

Leela

Before going to the Matrimandir I felt really tired. I even told Ashwin that I was not coming. But I thought that it would be too late to say that so I went anyway. On the top of Matrimandir, I had the feeling of being in heaven. It was just like flying in the air.

Vinay

For me the chamber is a place where I can gather my thoughts and see what is important. The plain and smooth white of the chamber always affects my mood and my train of thought. If I went in with a sad mood, I usually come out with a more understanding view of my sadness. The Matrimandir is a symbol of the lotus they say; to me, it is mostly a place where I can centre my thoughts.

Guyuri

finally be constructed?—there is, as yet, no consensus. One Matrimandir executive favours an ongoing discussion with the wider community; other people felt that the decision should come 'naturally', as an expression of the special energy and commitment of those involved in the work. "What we need to cultivate," said Gilles, "is a spirit of openness, collaboration and a willingness to work in matter: only by working with matter can we progress. We want a dialogue with nature."

Perhaps the best news of the morning came from Narad who said that large and beautiful trees will be planted to the west of Matrimandir. So the concern of some people that trees on the oval will be relegated to designer accoutrements has been slightly allayed.

Alan

## "We want a dialogue with nature"

On January 14th a community seminar on the Matrimandir Gardens was held.

Gilles began by giving a brief history of how the Gardens' concept evolved in Mother's lifetime. He pointed out that the essential features have remained unchanged since the 'Rosewood model' was presented to the community in February, 1972. Alain Grandcolas said that, in his view, when Mother talked about the gardens being constructed "in the Japanese manner" She was referring to a particular type of Japanese garden. This was the Zen garden which, in its simplicity and timelessness, is designed not so much to evoke beauty as a spirit of contemplation.

Now he believes Mother is asking us to create a new kind of garden—a place where one can experience different states of consciousness. How to do this? "The gardens will evolve as the Aurovilians evolve, as they become more able to catch a

particular vibration and bring it down."

As to the danger that a garden infrastructure once established will be difficult to modify, he explained that "there will be no crystallization if we continually reach for higher levels while avoiding the sense of personal proprietorship." However, common parameters have been laid down in order to unify the designs.

Today, each of the 13 gardens (the 12 gardens surrounding the Matrimandir plus the Garden of Unity) is being worked on at the design stage, and two prototypes are already on the ground. Meanwhile, a sophisticated irrigation system has been bought to optimise water usage. On the same line, Narad has brought back three samples of drought and disease-resistant grass from the U.S. These are already growing furiously.

As to the big question—how to decide which garden designs will



PHOTO CAREL

The garden work seen from the top of the Matrimandir looking West.



# Tools for the future?

Visiting consultants offer ways to plan Auroville's development

"My objective is to make people aware of the major societal transformation that we are going to live through," writes Michel Saloff-Coste. An internationally-recognized management consultant, he first visited Auroville over a year ago and became fascinated by its ideals and the process through which it attempts to materialize them. Recently he returned with his professional associate, Karine, to offer two workshops to Aurovilians.

The first one, 'Find Your Genius', was based upon his belief that each one's genius, or unique personality, is their direct connection to the Divine. However, in 'spiritual' communities there is a strong tendency to confuse 'genius' with 'ego' and to attempt to abolish both. The workshop was designed to allow participants to recognise their genius and to show how "it can be cultivated and employed in everyday life".

The second workshop grew out of his observation that managing diversity in Auroville is one of the biggest challenges. Consequently, in 'Tools for the Future of Auroville' he offered four ways of thinking about and planning the future.

These included the 'deep inter-

view', a way of sampling a cross-section of the community to discover their perceptions and aspirations. There was also SWOT analysis, a well-known strategy for evaluating a business or community through examining its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

The participants had a swipe at SWOTting Auroville and came up with the following:

Strengths = diversity of viewpoints and rootedness in experience

Weaknesses = insufficient skills and resources, too much bureaucracy and lack of collective strength

Opportunities = integral development, applied research, experimentation

Threats = lack of cultural diversity, deviation from the vision, too slow a growth in population

Perhaps the most interesting tools Michel and Karine presented, however, were 'The Evolution Grid' and 'The Value Map'.

The Evolution Grid is a way of assessing where a particular culture stands in terms of four major phases in the evolution of humanity. Michel defined these phases as hunter/gathering; agricultural; industrial; and creation/communication. Each phase has a distinctive mode of thought and style of governance. For example, hunter/gatherers are animists who are

organized through the tribe, while the industrial era saw the triumph of democracy and rationalism. At present we are moving into the communication age where the organizing principle is networking and the mode of thought is holistic.

Michel's perception was that the idea of Auroville being a laboratory where so much is in process, unfinished, positions it squarely in the fourth stage of evolution.

The Value Map is a way of assessing both the values of individuals and of the collective as a whole. 'Values' here do not relate to 'good' or 'bad' but to primary motivations, to where individuals and societies put their energy.

The value map has four phases which clearly complement the Evolution Grid. Phase one represents the basic values of survival, self-interest; the predominant leadership model is authoritarian. Phase two is about belonging—to families, institutions etc. The characteristic leadership pattern here is paternalistic. Phase three is all about self-development, equality of opportunity and independent initiative; leadership is provided by the manager/facilitator. Phase four is the consciousness of interdependence, of a global order, and the most successful leadership will be provided by the visionaries (according to Michel, no

successful model of phase four governance as yet exists anywhere in the world).

Before the Aurovilians could start preening themselves on their visionary status, Michel pointed out that most individuals' values are not absolutely fixed. They can change rapidly, according to circumstance: for example, most people revert to phase one in moments of crisis. Nevertheless, one can map the predominant values of individuals in a group and this can be invaluable in anticipating and dealing with problems.

Michel pointed out that if a group has only one person in the 'survival' mode, that individual will tend to pull all the others down to that level as the most primitive values are so strong. However, if the group understands this, they can try to find ways in which the 'survivalist' feels less threatened and, therefore, able to move into another value phase.

In terms of planning Auroville's future, Michel suggested that we use key texts, like The Charter, in order to derive the key values, and then survey the community to see how it could incorporate more those values more fully into its governance and behaviour.

Sounds easy....

Aian

## ENVIRONMENT

# Offset your carbon emissions

Plant a few trees for every air-trip

Auroville's Green Group proposes a deal. Air-travellers are invited to offset their contribution to air pollution by paying for planting tree saplings. Your air miles don't buy you flight coupons or gadgets; just the joy of greening the environment. The more you fly, the more you pay, and the more trees get planted.

A crazy idea? "Not at all, it makes a lot of sense!" says Jos who, together with Natasha and Kali, initiated the project. "Each plane burns kerosene and emits greenhouse gases, which affect the environment. Trees absorb greenhouse gases, so planting saplings that will become trees in the future, helps to make a difference."

Natasha reels off the figures. "A return flight from Chennai to New York puts out over 3 tonnes of carbon dioxide. This roughly means that five trees per passenger are needed to offset the emissions." A return trip to Europe, it appears, demands three trees per passenger. Jos admits that the calculations may vary according to the technique used, but downplays the importance of exact calculations. "What matters is that we become aware of our contribution to the earth's warming, so that we can make a conscious choice to do something about it." The team is yet to publish figures on how many trees have to be planted to balance the effects of driving a motor bike or car, but, says Kali "the programme also welcomes contributions from those who use two or four wheelers."

A really conscious eco-traveller would ask what kind of saplings are going to be planted and where. The Green Group has anticipated these questions. The saplings are not ordinary: they belong to the 42 Rare, Endangered and Threatened (RET) varieties of the 266 species of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF). They will replace the non-

native 'work' trees (Acacia auriculiformis) which, because of their drought resistance and fast growth, were once the trees of choice to reforest Auroville. But their short life-span of less than 20 years means that they have to be replaced by new trees.

The contributions will be used to cut the old trees, to search for RET specimens in the few remnant TDEF patches—usually snake-infested sacred groves around old temples, to collect the seeds, germinate them in nurseries in Auroville, and plant and nurture the saplings in the forests. "At fifty rupees a sapling we believe we are providing an excellent deal," says Jos.

The aim of the Green Group is to propagate 25,000 seedlings in the various nurseries so as to have a 'genetically viable population of off-spring that can self-propagate'. A five trees per return-trip from India to the U.S., Aurovilians would have to make 5,000 air trips. Admitting that this is not realistic, the Green Group encourages visitors to Auroville to join the programme. It goes without saying that the programme is not restricted to trips to or from Auroville. It can also include any other air-travel. For example, those who attend the Auroville International meeting in South Africa this March, can contribute three trees per return trip from Europe or India.

The Green Group's list of enthusiastic supporters is topped by Aurovilian Klara of Auromodèle who contributed retroactively for all the flights she has ever taken since coming to Auroville. A commendable example! Who's next?

Priya Sundaravalli

Auroville travel agencies such as the Travel Shop and Yatranova, have endorsed the project, and provide information to customers. Information is also available at the Visitors' Centre and at Auroville's guest houses.



A closely knit team—Natasha, Kali, and Jos. "For Rs. 50 per seedling, a rare TDEF species can be planted on your behalf".

## CULTURE

# A Story Teller's Night

On January 15th the Swedish theatre group "Teater Sagohuset" surprised more than a hundred Aurovilians and guests in the Bharat Nivas auditorium with a rare Nordic treat in the midst of our subtropical South Indian winter.

One would have thought that it takes more than two people and longer than an hour to play "Edda from Creation to Ragnarök"; the Edda being the main text of Norse mythology.

But with a simple yet beautiful and versatile stage setup, the two bards Jan Eric with his harp, drum and flute and Margareta with her enchanting voice, half enacted, half told almost everything from utter nothingness to Creation right up to the end—Ragnarök: the burning of a world of "dreams and folly", of love

and lies.

Minute by minute the audience became more and more enthralled by the richness of the story and the mystical atmosphere created by the two actors, who, in the skaldic tradition, didn't forget the humorous side of life and legend.

For every betrayal in the story a candle on the stage was extinguished until the universe was no longer able to support its creation and had to collapse. No more giants, gods, master-smiths, tricksters, humans, dwarfs and enchantment. Back to nothingness—and to a new world.

At the end of the play one could imagine how in the olden days people huddled around a fire while a story teller (or two) plied their imagination to make them leave the world of frosty winters.

Chris

## In brief

### All Life is Yoga seminar

Under the title 'All life is Yoga' a three-day seminar took place in the SAWCHU hall in Bharat Nivas. Speakers, and on the third day participants, gave their perspectives on individual and collective life, education, art and culture, psychology, business and management and the Auroville path—in the light of yoga.

### Acting award

Ten-year old Ayesha Kapoor won the Special Jury award in the '12th Annual Hero Honda STAR Screen Awards' for her acting debut in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film "Black", playing a blind, deaf and mute girl. The film took most of the awards, including those for screenplay, cinematography, sound and background score. Rani Mukherji won the Best Actress and Amitabh Bachchan the Best Actor award for their roles.

### Bio-architecture

Two Italian professors of the Italian National Association of Bio Architecture gave presentations on the principles of Bio Architecture and its use in large-scale residential projects in Italy and Europe; the use of wood in building structures of residential areas; and an introduction to health problems caused by artificially created electrical and electromagnetic fields.

### WISP 2006

The second Auroville Winter Integral Studies Program (WISP) has started a range of courses, classes, and lectures around the theme of transformation and integral learning. About 40 Aurovilians as well as a few close friends are contributing with a diverse range of offerings.

### Auroville Vision 2012

The organisers of Auroville Vision 2012 continued their work on New Years Day trying to identify the fundamental questions with regard to our internal organization and communication needs, and on January 15th, with an interactive dialogue on 'The City and the Bioregion'.

### Lecture on Jung and Sri Aurobindo

Dr. Richard Stein from the Jungian Institute, San Francisco, USA, gave a conference on Dr. Carl Gustav Jung and Sri Aurobindo at the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity, Bharat Nivas.

### Pottery exhibition

Rakhee Kane Jadeja's pottery was on show at the Golden Bridge Pottery, in Pondicherry before being presented at the Sarjan Art Gallery in Vadodara.

### Global Consciousness Project

A presentation by Dr. Roger Nelson of the Global Consciousness Project at Princeton University, took place at the new hall of the Savitri Bhavan.

### Musical Offering

Visitors from the Vox Mundi Project led by Silvia Nakkach gave a musical offering at SAWCHU, sharing the essential spirit of Vox Mundi with musical contributions from around the world including India, Africa, South America and Ireland. Special guest Paulo from Brazil offered a dance presentation.



# An apprenticeship in Japanese pottery

Habitat Centre in New Delhi presents the 'Elements', a major international pottery show in the month of February. Of the 18 ceramic artists invited from around the world, Ange is the sole representative from Auroville. A preview of her works happened recently at Forest Pottery, her home and studio at the Samridhi community in Auroville's greenbelt.

Round platters, oval bowls, square flaring flatware—the works are large, open and 'receiving'. They were created after an arduous 4-month apprenticeship with Japanese pottery master Shibata sensei, an experience Ange describes as 'excruciating'.

"It was easily the most difficult time of my entire life," she says. "I was angry and frustrated most of the time, and I was pushed to my limits emotionally." In the typical Zen mode of master-pupil dynamics, her

sensei made her do every kind of job but what she had come for—to learn and be taught Japanese pottery techniques. "I was made to tend the vegetable garden, chop wood for the anagama [kiln], prepare clay for my

teacher or wash ashes to prepare his glazes... clean the studio and the toilets." Not once was she allowed to lay her hands on clay to make something. "The frustration of having to watch quietly from the side broke

something inside me. My ego was destroyed."

Ange returned to Auroville shaken by the experience and in her own words, "thirsting just to touch clay." As soon as she landed here in September, she threw herself into the work with a desperate intensity. "Suddenly I felt I had to do everything. My master had done." She found herself creating forms similar to his, and even attempting to duplicate the glaze recipes made of ash. "Of course we don't have Japanese wood here in Auroville so I experimented with the forest woods."

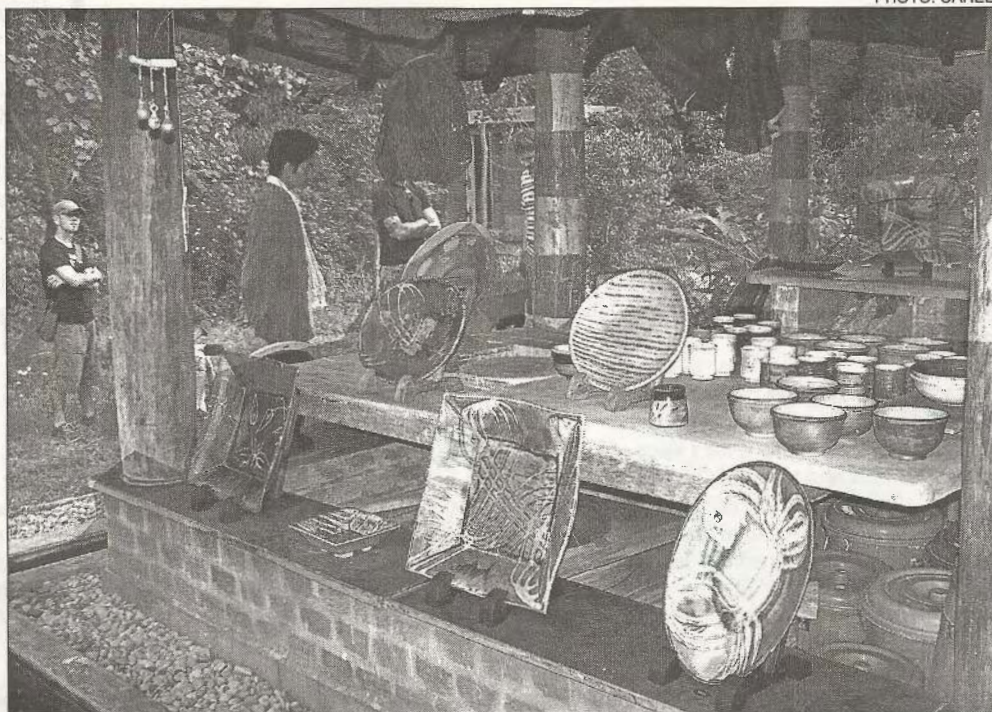
After four months of intense work with the last firing done the night before the preview, Ange confesses to feeling "a little more settled and quiet". She looks back on the experi-

ence philosophically: "I now realize what my master had done. This was the only way one truly learns," she observes sagely. "Nothing can be taught; no easy recipe handed down freely. Knowledge has to be 'stolen' and made one's own, and this is what my teacher intended me to do..." It is this she feels, that keeps the classical pottery tradition of Japan alive and vibrant.

Indeed Ange seems to have hit upon a singular expression. Despite their massive size, the pieces have a certain delicacy; a light visual quality that hints at an airy receptivity... She has also managed to perfect three ash glazes using local forest woods: each unique in colour, texture and effect.

From the substantial body of work she has created, only ten pieces will travel to Delhi. The rest will remain here in Auroville. These works are not just decorative, though they stand on Kenji's softly burnished wood stands. One can also visualize them overflowing with warm steaming foods at communal meals.

Priya Sundaravalli



Round platters, oval bowls and square flaring flatware are some of Ange's works.

## OUTREACH

# Children's Views

How does a child see the world? How do children from different parts of the world observe similar objects? The Swiss association Devimage, led by Guy Piacento and Circe Luginbuhl, has started the "Children's View" project in an attempt to find answers. They are asking children between 7 and 10 years old in different parts of the world to make photographs about three topics: water, the environment and human relations.

should be included as part of India.

"It's a fascinating project," says Circe. "In all the Asian countries I have visited, the response was enthusiastic. None of these children had ever held a camera in their hands. We first give them a brief introduction to photography, to its history and how it is being used today. Then we show them how the camera works. And then the fun starts." Working in small groups the children share a camera and decide jointly what pictures to take.

ences with the children." She tells how Swiss children took pictures of the crystal clear waters of Lake Lemman, while children in Malaysia had taken photos of a polluted lake in their environment. "The Malayan children suddenly realised how beautiful their lake could be if there was no pollution," says Circe. "We'd hoped that that would happen, that we would be doing some environmental education through pictures."

Also pictures of games played in other parts of the world aroused great interest, and more than once Circe was asked to explain the rules. "The contacts with the children, without exception, beautiful and heart warming," she says. "I only regretted that I could not leave the cameras behind, as the children had so much fun with them. Perhaps we can do that in the future, when Devimage has more financial means."

The children are also asked to write a small caption to the pictures, or something more general about each of the three topics. Circe takes care of the translation into English. In time these texts, together with the brief interviews with some of the children, will accompany the photo exhibition. The official presentation is planned for May this year in the Geneva Town Hall. Afterwards, a coffee-table book with the best photos will be published. To test the waters, Circe plans to do a first presentation in Auroville in February.

Carel

For more information contact [www.devimage.org](http://www.devimage.org)



Circe teaches Auroville children to use a camera in the Amphitheatre.

Guy travelled to Senegal and other countries in Africa. Circe contacted orphanages, primary schools and non-governmental organisations in Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and India. As both Guy and Circe had lived in Auroville in the 1980s, they decided that Auroville children

"If you have 20 children, easily 2000 pictures are produced," says Circe. "We then select 100 pictures—at least one per child—and mix them with pictures on the same topic taken by children elsewhere in the world. Then we project the pictures on a wall and analyze and discuss the differ-

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Antithesis of Yoga

The Antithesis of Yoga is a nonfictional novel of the life of Aurovillian author Jocelyn, and her first 20 years of wonderful and terrible life in the future "City of God." The characters and drama in this 450-page book are as living and gripping as in any fictional novel. Jocelyn's writing is extraordinarily smooth, vivid, interesting, and balanced. Her excellent writing helps one overlook the occasional error in punctuation or grammar missed in copy-editing.

Among the events of the story, the author relates the history of the conflict between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society during the late 70s and early 80s. She describes the conflict of a "neutral," one who did not take sides in the conflict, but who in turn was considered an enemy by both sides. Her perspective seems fairly objective. At least, it points out faults on both sides, and presents a first-hand account of the plight of the neutrals. The story is told only partly through historical commentary on the situation; it is told primarily through historical incidents, through the life experiences of individuals taking part in the drama, and through letters that at the time were circulated in Auroville by Victor, a central character in the drama who bears a striking resemblance to Satprem.

Most of the many characters in the book are painted by Jocelyn in living colours. The places in which the story takes place—the barren clay and canyons of Auroville's early days, the lush forests of its later days, the streets of Pondicherry, the Ashram, the villages of India, the California coast—all become vibrant, tangible, and real under the author's pen. The events of the story take on an immediacy and the tension or peace, intimacy



or hate of real encounters. Jocelyn gives a dynamic feel for the drama which has taken place in Auroville, both its darkest turns and its brightest promises, and it is done without pulling punches, without bitterness, and with both gratitude and hope.

The author's personal ordeal, has clearly done much soul-searching and reflection to make sense of it all, and in this wonderful book she conveys to the reader her insights and hard-won wisdom and understanding. For those interested in learning about the history of Auroville, and who would like to be entertained with fascinating people and stories while doing so, this is a great book. Indeed, it is essential reading for those who want a first-hand account of the tumultuous years of Auroville's early development.

Larry Seidlitz

Available from the author ([Jocelyn@auroville.org.in](mailto:Jocelyn@auroville.org.in)), Vak Bookstore, Pondicherry, India, and the shop, Pondicherry, Woodstock, NY, USA ([info@pondi.biz](mailto:info@pondi.biz)).

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