

Auroville Today

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The Inuksuk inauguration on Auroville's birthday, February 28, 2009. The Pavilion of Tibetan Culture is in the background.

An Inuksuk in the International Zone

There's a new addition to the International Zone. Standing four metres high and weighing forty tons it has an unmistakable presence. The best time to see it is early morning, as the sky begins to lighten. Walk out behind the newly completed Tibetan Pavilion and there, in the open field, you glimpse something that, from a distance, is reminiscent of Stonehenge. Walk closer and you will see that the massive unworked slabs of granite balanced on top of each other represent a human figure. Now, in this solitary corner of the International Zone, there is presence.

In fact, this four-metre high installation is an 'Inuksuk'. The Inuit, the early inhabitants of the northern part of Canada, Alaska and Greenland, were the first to create Inuksuks. These monuments of unworked stone were erected as navigational aids, to indicate a good place for fishing or hunting, or as a memorial for a beloved person. The underlying meaning is "Someone was here" or "You are on the right path". Inuksuks can take many forms but as Inuksuk in the Inuit language means "one who acts as a human being", or "in the likeness of a human", it often has a human resemblance.

Inuksuks are found in the northern polar regions. So how did one end up in Auroville's International Zone? Monique Patenaude, one of the driving forces behind the project, takes up the story.

"There are very few of us Canadians in Auroville – twenty five at the last count. Every five years or so we come together, mostly when people from AVI Canada visit Auroville, to discuss our contribution to the International Zone. Generally we don't get very far, but at every meeting François Grenier and I would say that we should start with something which recalls the first peoples who inhabited Canada. After all, they have been there far longer than the descendants of the Europeans and we feel they know something about that land that we don't know.

"In 2003 I was going to Canada for a visit and Jossie, who taught in Transition School, asked me if I could get something made by the Inuit for her sand-box: she already had at least one object from

all the other nations of the world. So when I reached Montreal I started looking in boutiques for Inuit art. It was difficult to find something appropriate – the artworks were very expensive and the reproductions badly-made – but finally I found small Inuit sculptures in stone that represented a human being. I thought these were exactly what she needed.

"I bought four and I had them in my purse when, a few days later, I went to a meeting of AVI Canada. There, once again, we discussed how Canada could participate in the International Zone. We didn't have enough money to build a pavilion, so what could we do? I took out my little sculptures and suggested we could do something based on this. Everybody was very enthusiastic.

"Next year Christian Feuillette, the present president of AVI Canada, came to Auroville and we had a meeting of the Canadians. Christian announced that AVI Canada had a project to build an Inuksuk and that François and I would organize it. Christian chose a place behind the Tibetan Pavilion along with Helmut and Peter Anderschitz, who were in charge of International Zone planning at the time.

"I made drawings, François made measurements; we thought that, with the assistance of Ramalingam and his granite workshop, everything would be finished fast. However, when we sent our first concept to AVI Canada they rejected it because it was too abstract; it didn't look enough like a human being.

"It took us some time to get started again. Then I drew Inuksuks that more clearly resembled human beings. Now we also decided to use unworked stone, which is how the traditional Inuksuks are made. Finding the granite stones was not easy, but finally we had them ready in Ramalingam's workshop.

"However, meanwhile there had been changes in the plans for the International Zone and it was no longer clear that we could install the Inuksuk on the original site. There were so many delays and discussions. For a long time we even thought of erecting the Inuksuk outside the International Zone. Finally I insisted that we be given a location. A few

weeks ago we got the approval to place it at the very spot chosen by Christian five years ago!

"We had not erected the full Inuksuk before the final installation, so we didn't quite know what to expect, but the transport of the stones and the installation went very harmoniously. I had not wanted anything too realistic but something that would have a certain expression. I think it has this. Also, the orientation is important. The AVI people asked us to turn it towards the Matrimandir which, in its present position, also means it is turned to the rising sun. I like that.

"We will inaugurate the Inuksuk on the afternoon of 28th February. We wanted to do it with Inuits but this is not possible. However, a few days ago I had a telephonic conversation with a young Inuit woman from Canada. She had just met two members of AVI Canada and had seen many photographs of our Inuksuk. She told me that it is a child and she really likes it. This makes me happy.

"Moreover, a few years ago some of us met William Commanda. He is not an Inuit but one of the great spiritual chiefs and a respected elder of the Algonquin people. He was ninety four years old then, a beautiful person, very sincere and very simple. He created the "Circle of All Nations", which seeks to foster racial and cultural harmony and respect for nature. In fact, the project of Auroville and the message he gives from the First Nation have many points in common.

"Recently we told him that AVI Canada and the Canadian Aurovilians were making an Inuksuk in order to underline the importance of the first inhabitants of Canada and we asked him for a message for the inauguration. William Commanda is Keeper and interpreter of three Algonquin Wampum Shell Belts. These intricately patterned belts record prophecies, history, treaties and agreements, and he sent us a message which was first inscribed on one in the late 1400s. (See box) He also asked a friend of his who is an Innu – another of the first inhabitants – to visit Auroville and read this message at the inauguration in his own language."

From an interview by Alan

A Circle of All Nations – A Vision of Peace

The Vision of North American
Algonquin Elder William Commanda

These difficult times we live in were foreseen by spiritual visionaries across the world. My ancestors warned us about this time and the choices we would have to make in the Seven Fires Prophecy, which was inscribed in the sacred wampum shell in the late 1400s. The Prophecy holds a vision for a future where we:

- honour our relationship and responsibility to Mother Earth and all creation
- celebrate our individual gifts and diversity and still recognize and respect our place within a circle of all nations

The steps to this future are few:

- first we look within, so we know ourselves first and best.
- we recognize, acknowledge and forgive ourselves, our shortcomings and any failure to achieve our best potential
- we forgive others for any hardship and pain they may have caused us and our communities. We trust that this energy will transform them spiritually
- we recognize that our thoughts, words and actions affect ourselves, Mother Earth and all creation. And we embrace peace mindfully
- we listen to our minds but we trust our hearts above all.

It is of crucial importance that the people of the world:

- respond immediately to the plight of the many oppressed by exploitation, social injustice, racism
- animate the human capacity for forgiveness, compassion, love and reconciliation
- create a global synergy to ensure the improvement of the lives of all

This Path will lead us to love, sharing, respect, responsibility, compassion, healing, reconciliation, equality and justice.

We shall then light The Eighth Fire together and become

A Circle of All Nations – A Culture of Peace

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Managing the Auroville economy

The challenges are enormous but the outlook is positive.

In November 2008, Auroville's 14-member Budget Coordination Committee (BCC), came into existence. Its main task is to promote strategies to come up with ways of implementing the directions of The Mother concerning the Auroville economy and to stimulate a sustainable economic development. The BCC is responsible for creating an annual Auroville Foundation budget, for monitoring all income and expenditure of the Auroville Unity Fund, and for managing the City Service Budget. Three of the BCC's members, Divya, Otto and Ulli, talk about the BCC's achievements in its first four months and the challenges of Auroville's economy.

The City Services

Ulli: We started with reviewing the budgets of the existing City Services. They had remained unchanged for the past two years. We split into small groups to evaluate and assess the various sub-budgets and review requests for enhancements. Then we analyzed the income and balanced the expenditure against it. We calculated that an average increase by about 12-15% is possible, based on the assumption – which may be a bit doubtful – that our income will rise. This budget was presented to the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) and was approved by them in February this year.

Otto: The second work was to see to what extent we could tap into our accumulated reserves to finance one-time expenditure of the City Services, so that they can improve their productivity and reduce their costs. We agreed to keep the equivalent of two months running expenditure as a buffer for emergencies (about one crore), and make the rest available for one-time capital expenditures.

Ulli: We are a bit doubtful if our commercial units will be able to contribute the increased amounts, in view of the global recession. Their contributions are calculated on the basis of the profits of the previous financial year, and this may cause problems as some units have not kept reserves.

Divya: But the contribution from profits of the commercial units counts for about one third of our total income. Other sources of income are the contributions from services, projects and guests. These incomes are less affected by the recession. Our overall income has been steadily increasing, despite the global crises and the difficulty for our commercial units.

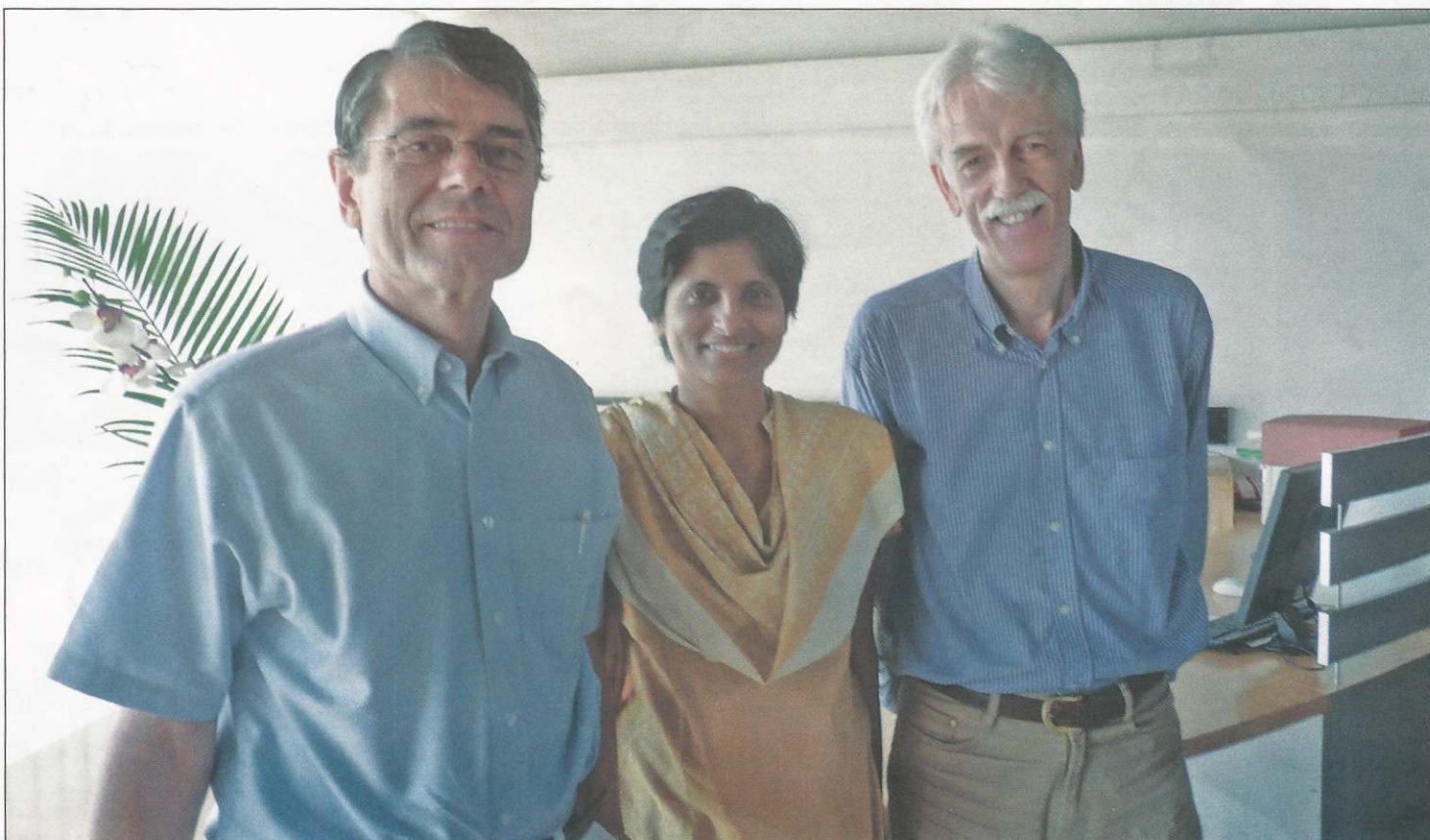
Ulli: We have also calculated that this year we will only be able to support 50 additional maintenances. Most of these have already been requisitioned by a few services, mainly the education sector.

Divya: We also discussed how we can ensure that each unit operates in the best possible way. We believe it would be useful if there would be a group of professionals who can study and evaluate each service unit on productivity, efficiency, and their contribution to the community. Then we can talk about 'planned growth' and decide how to help such a unit to improve and what contributions from the community are required to do so. The Farm Group did this three years ago, and that was very helpful.

Aurovilian maintenance

Divya: One of the increased budgets is for the maintenance for people working in the Auroville Services. They will get an increase of Rs 1,000. Half of it will be paid into a person's 'kind' account, half of it will be made available in kind for the lunch and dinner. There will be no additional cash payment. In this way, Auroville will take fully care of a person's maintenance on all levels with a minimum of cash exchange. The in-kind component now includes a free-lunch and a free dinner at the Solar Kitchen or other places, free health and dental care, free education for children, provision of children's maintenance, subsidized electricity and free access to cultural activities. Those working part-time will now also be entitled to either a free lunch or a free dinner. We calculated that the total expenditure per person comes to Rs 9,000 – 10,000 a month.

Ulli: There are issues to be ironed out. In line with Mother's statements on Auroville, we are creating a system with a growing number of 'in-kind' entitlements for Aurovilians. The biggest problem is how to manage this. Our present com-



Ulli, Divya, and Otto

puter-based system is reaching its limits and a new system has to be designed to handle all the different entitlements.

Otto: Essentially, the 'kind' account is there to ensure that a person is maintained by the community. But we have become a bit more flexible than in the past, when the 'kind' account could only be used to get goods from Pour Tous and pay for meals at the Solar Kitchen. We now allow it, for instance, to be used to pay for expenses such as school fees for children who attend outside schools.

Divya: One of the problems at present is that we have a dual system. There are those who work in the City Services and who are maintained by Auroville through the cash and kind system. And there are the people who are self-supporting or who are working for Auroville's commercial activities. These people are not included in the system. But we believe that the basis for every-

strate that his economic needs will be taken care of either by him or herself or by an Auroville unit. The condition remains that the Newcomer has to find work that benefits the community.

Otto: The difficulty is that we have been given a certain dimension by Mother to allow people to do the work they really feel like doing. We can't force people to do something in Auroville simply because it corresponds to their education or previous work experience as they may want to do something completely different. We need an active group to guide the Newcomer and show the places where work is available. The Human Resource Team will have to take this up. There is a lot of work to be done here.

Challenges: higher education and housing

Divya: While we are confident that we now can take care of all the Aurovilians on the level of subsistence, we are still stuck on two major issues: to pay for the higher education of the

Ulli: The housing situation is the second major challenge. We do not have a vision, let alone a strategy about how to provide houses to a growing community. We are able to maintain our houses at the present level but we can't finance a healthy growth. The costs of creating housing have rapidly increased, while the matching funds have not. Fifteen years ago it was viable to save and bring the money from the West and build. Today, the costs have gone up so much that a young person will find it almost impossible to come here having saved enough to build a house.

Divya: Our present growth rate is far below that of the population around. When we analyze it, we find that a lot of growth is happening because former employees become Aurovilians or children of Aurovilians turn 18. Today there are about a 120 new housing units being created. The Entry Service says that a 150 people are looking for a place. If you ask the project holders, they will tell you that these people do not have the money to contribute towards a housing unit. Some of these projects may have trouble getting completed due to lack of funds.

Ulli: We have to review the policy of the past where you have to bring in the money you have made and donate it to Auroville for a house. The costs of building a house or apartment are now in the order of 15-28 lakhs (US\$ 35,000 – 65,000). We have noted an increasing trend that people who have that kind of money do not all feel comfortable about putting it into Auroville in the present conditions, which is that you make a donation and can't get it back if you leave Auroville. There are many reasons why someone might leave: a problem with the visa; the education of the children; or simply because the Auroville experiment no longer works for that person. Today people come and explore and quite a few leave again because they do not find a way to create a sustainable economic situation for themselves.

Otto: We have often discussed how we could finance housing but we haven't yet found a viable solution. Last year the Government gave a grant to build an apartment complex for temporary residences. That's very promising. But how do you get people to leave such apartments if they don't have a place to go to?

Ulli: We'll have to look into two issues. Can we evolve a policy that allows people who leave Auroville to get the money back they provided for 'their' house? And how do we raise funds for building more houses?

The outlook: positive

Divya: Notwithstanding these great challenges, we have a positive outlook. The balance sheets of the last 10 years show growth. We have many strong areas with growth potential, and we have a very diverse and highly skilled pool of human resources. That is a solid base which holds a lot of promise.

In conversation with Carel

The Auroville Unity Fund

The management of the Auroville Unity Fund is overseen by a 14-member Budget Coordination Committee (BCC), whose specific function is to create an all-Auroville budget. It also supervises the utilization of Auroville's income and budgets in such a way as to ensure that all income is applied towards the objectives of Auroville in an effective and transparent manner. The daily management of the Auroville Unity Fund is in the hands of five executives.

The Fund:

1. receives all donations and grants to the Auroville Foundation, both foreign and Indian, irrespective for what specific Auroville activity or project.
2. receives all surplus income of Auroville's commercial units and fixed deposits.
3. issues appropriate receipts for the income of Auroville including the tax exempt receipts for donations received under the various tax exemptions granted to Auroville Foundation.
4. channels all income, contributions and donations to the respective unit, project and budget accounts.
5. ensures that the utilization of funds is in accordance with donors' specifications.
6. ensures that accounts and supporting documentation are properly maintained.
7. creates a comprehensive overview of Auroville's income and expenditure.

body should be the same, that the basic maintenance for every Aurovilian should be covered by Auroville. Those who have personal resources or work in commercial units should also be maintained by Auroville in the same way as those who work for City Services. We are working on that.

Joining Auroville

Ulli: A few weeks ago we had a meeting with a group of people about the present entry situation. The members of the present Entry Service threw in the towel some months ago as they felt unable to extend their "welcome mandate" because a growing number of the Newcomers immediately become a financial burden on the community. We agreed to modify the rule that Newcomers should be self-supporting during their one-year Newcomer period. The proposed change in the condition now is that a Newcomer must demon-

Auroville children outside of Auroville, and to provide for housing. An Aurovilian will never be able to make any substantial savings from his or her maintenance to pay for the higher education of his or her children outside Auroville. Education has become very expensive. A high school in India charges between Rs 3 to Rs 5 lakhs a year (US \$6,000 – \$10,000); colleges and universities charge less, between Rs 50,000 and Rs 100,000 per year (US \$1,000 – \$2,000). In the USA, depending on the university, it is between US \$10,000 – \$35,000 a year. There is no way any Aurovilian can make that money in Auroville. The parents either have to go outside Auroville and earn, or the child has to get a study grant – which is not so easy to get – or take a study loan, and then he or she will need to work for many years outside to pay it back.

Statement from the Board of Services

On February 21, 2009, the Board of Services Support Team, a non-official group of five people who work in various City Services, issued a public complaint about "the inequalities, injustices and frustrations that Auroville's present economic system is generating in a large number of people, especially amongst those working in the City Service". Excerpts:

Auroville's economy today is channelled through two parallel systems: one for the services and one for the commercial sector – and there are substantial differences between the two in terms of maintenances, policies and regulations. Over the years a big gap has been created between these two sectors. We believe that this needs to be addressed and positive steps taken to correct it. The following is a description of the differences:

Auroville Maintenances

The various components of the personal maintenances are strongly regulated for the City Services, with defined upper limits and percentages of what is made available in kind and in cash. This is compulsory for everyone working in City Services. Rarely are exceptions made. In the commercial sector, in contrast, unit holders don't have any upper limit to what they can access from their units. An attempt made around two years ago by the then Economy Group to start a discussion with the Board of Commerce (ABC) about setting up guidelines and upper limits to the maintenances of commercial unit executives was turned down by the ABC as they preferred no regulations.

Personal Expenses

It is common practice that the expenses of executives of commercial units for motor-

bikes, cars, travel, telephones, watchmen, and repairs or extensions of a house are entered into the accounts as expenses of the unit. This facility is not available to those working in City Services. Sometimes, certain expenses can be covered in part from specific collective budgets allocated by the Central Fund but everybody knows the constraints of these budgets and the bureaucratic proceedings needed to obtain any individual help. The usual way for someone working in the City Services to meet an extraordinary expense is to request a loan from the Financial Services which is then to be repaid from the cash part of the personal maintenance. The repayment of these loans is often difficult under the limitations of the present maintenance system.

Policies

Over time more and more attempts have been made to regulate and quantify the activities of the City Services, particularly in terms of finances and the availability of funds needed. In contrast, in the commercial sector we find that many important aspects (i.e. personal maintenances and personal expenses) are not being regulated.

The present dual system has created a big disparity within Auroville in consumption levels, standards and styles of life, and even in values and mind sets. This situation is unhealthy, affects Auroville as a whole, and particularly the Aurovilians working in the City Services. Many Aurovilians who have for

years given their time and energy to work in this area have found the disparity so discouraging that they have chosen to stop working for any of the City Services.

Create one system

We believe that as one of the ultimate goals of Auroville is to create ONE spiritual community we need to discover and define strategies to arrive progressively at ONE economic system in Auroville FOR ALL addressing and reducing the present inequalities. As Aurovilians working in the City Services, we want to stress that we have not found enough receptivity for these concerns in our current working groups which in the last years have postponed any serious reflection on these matters.

It is not the intention of this statement to point the finger at anyone or any group in particular, or to create an atmosphere of confrontation in the discussion of these matters. All the same, we cannot continue in silence. All of us have collaborated in creating this situation actively or passively and we believe that it is also with the involvement and support of all that we will find the appropriate ways and means to move forward and come out of this situation. The Budget Coordination Committee has been preparing the overall Auroville budget for this year. It provides a ready framework for the review of these issues.

*Board of Services Support Team
Anand, Isha, Joseba, Juergen, Nicole*

Distribution of maintenances

As per the population statistics of November 2008, published in *Auroville Today* issue # 238, December 2008, Auroville has 1587 permanent residents.

The Budget Coordination Committee has no data on the income situation of 845 residents. It has data on 742 residents, 415 of which are working in the City Services. Of these, 238 receive a full-time maintenance of Rs 5,000/month; 177 people receive a part-time maintenance of less than Rs 5,000/month because they are working part-time. It is not known how these people supplement this part-time income.

The Budget Coordination Committee also maintains data on the maintenances of 327 other people working for some commercial units, projects and guesthouses. These data show that 17 people take a maintenance of more than 10,000/month – 13 are working for projects, 3 for commercial units, and 1 in a guest house. On average people working for these commercial units get Rs. 1,754 more than people working in the City Services. But the Budget Coordination Committee has no information about perks.

Source: City Services

Services in Auroville supported from the City Services budget

Administration

Archives
Aurotraduction
Blue Light (comp. service)
Entry Service
Financial Service
Human Resources Team
News & Notes
Post Office
Residents Assembly Service
Residents Service
Vehicle Registration

Children & Youth

Apprenticeships
Children's Maintenance
Children's Nutrition
Kailash (youth settlement)
Youth Centre

City Planning

Socio-Economic Survey
L'Avenir (town planning)

Culture & Sport

Archaeology
Aspiration Sports
Aurofilm
Auroville Artists
Bharat Nivas Auditorium
Celebrations
Centre for Indian Culture
Certitude Sports Ground
CRCP (publications)
House of Mother's Agenda
International Zone
Visiting Artists
Library
Laboratory of Evolution
Multimedia Centre
Music Library
New Creation Sports
Pitanga (cultural centre)
Pony Farm
Savitri Bhavan
SAWCHU
Unity Pavilion
Video Library
La Piscine (swimming pool)

Farms & Forests

Farms
Foodlink
Forest Care

Education

AV School Board
Deepnam
Dehashakthi Sports
Future School
Kindergarten
Last School
Lilamayi Crèche
Nandanam Crèche
Transition School
Administration
Auroville Language Lab
Research

Governance

AV Council
Budget Coordination Committee
FAMC
Working Committee

Health

Dental Centre
Health Care, Misc.
Health Centre
Health Fund
Integrated Animal Care
Kailash Clinic

Housing

Earth Institute
House Repair

Land Management

Land Resource Management

Matrimandir

Matrimandir

Outreach

Auroville International
AV Guest Service
AV Today
Information Centre
Outreach Media

Projects

Project Coordination

Prosperity Services

Free Store
Nandini
Pour Tous Distribution Centre
Puncture Service

Roads & Transport

Roads & Cycle Paths
Transport Service

Security

Administration
Checkposts
G4 Security
Repos Beach

Social Services

Bridging & Maternity Fund
Farewell Fund
Miscellaneous
Personal Support Fund

Utilities

Electrical Subsidy
Waste Management

Village Education & Development

ADCERRA
Arulvazhi School
Bommaiarpalayam
Deepam
Evening School
Health Centre
Ilaigarkal School
Isaiaabalam
Kuilapalayam School
New Creation School
New Era School
Thamarai
Udavi School

Not listed

Self-supporting services such as Electrical, Solar and Telephone Service

OPEN FORUM

To interfere or not, that is the question!

To outsiders, Auroville seems to be unstructured, anarchic, and sometimes torn by opposing viewpoints. There are many possible solutions which could be offered that could help Auroville outwardly offset all this, but if adopted the result would be the creation of a society or city similar to everywhere else in the world. Gone would be the uniqueness envisaged by The Mother for Auroville, and the appropriateness of its Charter.

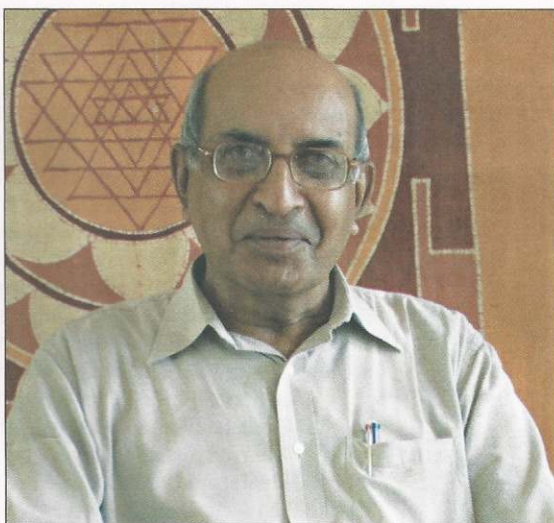
Auroville is a city of the future. If the achievement of outer perfection is a solution for the state of the world, then why – having pursued approaches and lines of thought towards such an end for the past several hundred years – has the surrounding world become no better, and the same or new problems persist? The very state of the world today is proof that no outer improvement or perfection can be the solution. That is why Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future... and why Auroville must boldly spring towards future realizations by living an entirely different life, a more spiritually-based life. Those future realizations can only be realised by being free to explore new ways.

The Mother founded Auroville to be fundamentally different, to be free to explore new ways of being and living together, to make mistakes, to be inefficient, to be disorganized or even be anarchic if necessary, as might be expected of a collective home for a seemingly ill-

matched mix of human beings from around the world.

For these latter challenges Auroville has to be free to find its own ways, because nothing like it has ever happened in the world before. Specifically, Auroville has to be free from being pushed or led down the same old paths as before, with the eventual likelihood of simply replicating – at best perhaps in an improved manner – what has already been done elsewhere.

As The Mother put it... *We are for a new creation, entirely*



Krishan Myer

new, carrying in it all the unforeseen, all risks, all hazards, – a true adventure of which the goal is sure victory, but of which the way is unknown, and has to be traced step by step in the unexplored. It is something that has never been in the present universe and will never be in the same manner. If that interests you, well, embark. What will happen tomorrow, I do not know. You must leave behind whatever has been designed, whatever has been built up. And then, march on into the unknown. Come what may!

From these words it is clear why Mother wrote, sometime around 1970, *"To hand over the management of Auroville to any country or any group however big it may be is an absolute impossibility"*. This is why when the Auroville Foundation Act was being drafted, such care was taken to try to give full administrative autonomy to the residents of Auroville, so they would be free of external interference, free to explore and research among themselves in ways unimaginable to the vast majority of humanity.

This was the intention of the Act, but as with all Acts it has been subject to individual interpretation. Those inspired by and in sympathy with the high ideals set before Auroville can easily understand its purpose, and relate to the project in an appropriate manner. But others are different; most of them can only understand Auroville through their own perspective and at the level on which they live their own lives. They simply cannot understand the project at its highest level. They are ready to take "next steps", but not ready for something radically different from what exists. In 1966 The Mother said: *For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville has no reason to exist.* And so they try to direct Auroville along the only lines that they are familiar with themselves, have been trained for, and have experience in.

To these people one feels like saying, "Please don't stifle

Auroville; please don't try to direct or control its destiny; please don't interfere in something you do not understand. Let Auroville find its own way of being, because it is going to be different from anything you are familiar with, from anything you can imagine. It is unique; nothing like it has ever happened before in the history of the world. Just trust that something positive is happening here, that Auroville is on track, that behind its apparent failings, its internal differences, its occasional anarchy and other problems, there is a sincere attempt towards a new and future life, a life which is sensed and foreseen by the Aurovilians, even if not by the rest of humanity."

The fact is, something is quietly happening here which none of us can fully understand, because it is The Divine Mother Herself who is directing Auroville, carrying the project forward towards its goals, and using Auroville's "willing servitors of the Divine" – its inhabitants – to achieve her purpose, and something new for the whole world.

The Aurovilians accept and realise this, hence their commitment to the project, their deep faith in it, and their readiness to keep on pressing forward despite apparently insurmountable difficulties. As for the rest of the world, most of them will not understand or believe in Auroville until it succeeds. As Sri Aurobindo put it in his epic poem *Savitri*:

*A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done*

Krishan Myer

Returning to Auroville: Jivatma and Jeremy

Jivatma: "My cultural roots are in Auroville"

"It's been a long day!" says Jivatma as she walks in and flops down on a bright yellow couch in the common living space in *Existence* community. She still looks peachy fresh and aglow, "I've just finished setting up my new massage room," she explains. Jivatma offers therapeutic massage at the Center Guest House to Aurovilians and guests.

For 24 year-old Jivatma, or 'Jivi' as her friends call her, a lot has happened since she left Future School five years ago. She has travelled the world, participated in several international youth gatherings, travelled with the *Voice of Youth* Tour as part of their film crew, and more recently went through massage school and is now a licensed massage therapist. She also met the love of her life, and is now married. She and her husband, Jeremy, have returned to Auroville and made their home in the little community of *Existence* where Jivatma grew up.

"I've always had a love for massage," she explains. "As a child, any time I fell or hurt myself, my mother would tell me to put my hands on the spot and shine love and healing energy on it. That stayed with me and really shaped my relationship to the human body." She remembers at five years old, massaging her mother and friends. "It was like a hobby; my hands were always on somebody's feet or back!"

Serious interest in bodywork came when Jivatma was attending a dance workshop with Melissa Michaels in Colorado, USA. "That was when I realized how much I loved feeling connected to my body, and I wanted to share this feeling of wellbeing with others." Jivatma began thinking seriously about being trained in massage therapy.

When Jivatma returned to Auroville, she signed up for several courses offered by Aurovilians. "I started out with Umberto's workshop on traditional Ayurvedic massage, and something clicked." She went on to take other courses including another Ayurvedic course by Kalyani. "These workshops gave me a great base and I practiced a lot on my friends for several months after that."

Soon it was time for Jivatma to leave Auroville again. She was part of the *Voice of Youth* group, a non-profit organization started by Jeremy. "We travelled through India, New Zealand, and finally went back to the States where we lived for a year. It was during this time that we got engaged and planned our wedding for the following summer in New Mexico, where most of Jeremy's family lives."

During this time, Jivatma was on the look-out for massage schools where she could be trained. "But I found nothing suitable for me. And then, just before returning to Auroville that winter, Jeremy and I made a trip to Hawaii; he had always wanted to show me the place where he had grown up.

"Hawaii was pure magic for me! Something about the island got my heart hooked. It was beyond the beautiful beaches and pristine nature; it was like a homecoming for my soul!"

And there in Maui, she also found her school. "It was an instantaneous connection, I felt it as soon as I walked in – and the programme was just what I was looking for!" The couple made a decision; whatever it would take, Jivatma would do her training there. Shortly after their wedding, they moved to Maui and Jivatma enrolled in the programme.

Soon the next obstacle came: money... "It was going to cost quite a bit, but with some effort and the gracious support of friends and family we made it happen," says Jivatma. "While I went to school five days a week and worked on the weekends, Jeremy worked full time to sustain our needs. It wasn't easy but somehow we managed!"

"Having grown up in Auroville, the realm of finances and economic logistics of the Western world were quite challenging to me. I had no experience with bills or bank accounts... here you don't really have to deal with them at all."

But on all other levels, Jivatma believes that Auroville had prepared her very well for life outside. "Growing up in Auroville I found was a great advantage; it equipped me in a way no other place could have – it gave me a real open-mindedness to different cultures, different people, and different ways of living. Even the familiarity with languages; for example, I am fluent in five languages... And then, Auroville gives you a very good sense of community life."

Did she miss Auroville? "Oh, yes! Throughout my travels I missed Auroville, my family, my



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friends and the way of life... It wasn't until we settled in Hawaii that I felt a sense of 'home'. The Islands are very similar to Auroville in many ways; the warmth and connection with people, a healthy lifestyle amidst beautiful nature and a feeling of ease and grace no matter how busy and crazy life gets.

"What is interesting is looking at your culture from a distance; you get a completely different perspective and things that you never understood before begin to make sense. My cultural roots are here. Obviously I also have strong ties to The Mother, Sri Aurobindo, the concept of Auroville and even Hinduism. Yet it was only when I left Auroville that I could see that all these elements are an essential part of me."

Now that she is in Auroville and contributing how does it feel? "It feels great to have a tool with which I can engage and be of service to the community! But it still remains a challenge to try and make a living though!"

About massage therapy itself, Jivatma points out that it is not just about applying pressure on parts of the body. "It is more subtle than it looks. You are dealing with energies; trying to unblock and release them and letting them flow. The real work is in bringing awareness to one's touch. One can learn many techniques but what I have found is that it is most important to be present; to tap into intuition, to let go of the mind, and allow the body to feel and communicate on a deeper level. I am finding that I continually learn so many new things – and not just about how to give a good massage, but about myself!"

Does this mean Jivatma is back for good? "Auroville will always be home and it will always have a special place in my heart. But I feel I still have a lot to experience and learn from the world!"

Priya Sundaravalli

Jeremy: "I felt some calling; some presence..."

Jeremy has his own links to Auroville that go way back before meeting Jivatma. "Seyril Schochen was my godmother and she was very connected to Auroville, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I remember when I was 4-5 years old, she would come back from Auroville and tell us about her experiences, and often she brought us Indian comic books. It was my first kind of connection with India. My mom and dad were also following Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

"Every time our birthdays came, Seyril would donate on behalf of us to the Matrimandir. And every year my brothers, sisters and I would receive postcards from kids in Auroville writing to thank us. That for me was the beginning.

"When I was six, Seyril gave some gold coins to my family, so that we could all visit Auroville. Those coins got stolen so we couldn't come. Finally in 1993, when I was 13, my family made the long trip here. That was my first physical experience of Auroville.

"For me personally, that trip changed my life. It was a big shift coming from Hawaii. We were here for three months and I remember as I was leaving, I had such a strong connection to Auroville that I told my parents that when I graduated from 8th grade, I was coming back to live and go to school in Auroville. I was determined."

What motivated the youngster were not the friends he made in Auroville, but something else. "Not to sound 'fu-fu' but I felt some calling; some presence..." The following year, when his parents began looking for a high school for Jeremy, he reminded them of his wish to return to Auroville. "Being the kind of parents they are, they supported my wish."

Jeremy worked that entire summer, saved up

money and took off by himself for Auroville. "I had made some connections and ended up stayed with Bill and Tine in Aurogreen." He was only fourteen.

"That period was something of a vision quest or a rite of passage; and it wasn't easy. Being an outsider, there were a lot of challenges, especially coming into the tight social group of youngsters." Staying with an Aurovillian couple that had no children didn't particularly help. "The couple I lived with were beautiful people, but I felt like they didn't understand what I as a teenager was going through." Jeremy made a few good friends and found relief spending time in nature and the Matrimandir gardens.

The fourteen-year old lasted six months. "That was enough on my own, and then I went through a state of depression. I think my soul wanted to be here and for this conflicting adolescent, trying to fit in, and trying to understand, and getting bashed up by the whole youth scene, it was too much."

Jeremy remembers how for a whole month he completely retreated and didn't go anywhere. "I came so close to packing up and leaving, but somehow stuck it out. When I did leave Auroville, I felt somewhat defeated but somehow also enriched. There were many who were very supportive."

In the years that followed, Jeremy kept contact with Auroville through people who visited the States from Auroville. Fast-forward ten years... "I was 24 and going through a confused time – I didn't know where my life was heading. In response to my struggle, my mother asked me what I would do if I had only one year to live. My answer was... I'd travel around the world; I would go back to Auroville! It was that powerful."

Jeremy returned. "In some way it was like a homecoming. I remember two friends picking me up at the airport and as soon as we entered Auroville I became emotional. I asked the taxi to stop and put my hand in the red Auroville earth and offered a prayer of gratitude that I had returned safely. It was the day before The Mother's birthday. It was a beautiful healing. I came back as an adult with a lot of gifts to share."

On that visit, Jeremy held a Capoeira workshop [see box], gave a music concert, and was part of *The Wyrd Sisters*, the community's theatre group production that season. "I felt really received by Auroville."

The highlight of that trip was meeting Jivatma. "Shortly after we met she got invited to a dance programme in the states that allowed her to come and visit for a few months. Then the *Voice of Youth* tour happened. And now, five years later, we're married, we've travelled all over the world, have had many beautiful adventures together and we both call Auroville our home.

"To look back to when I was 13, if I'd have known then that I'd be here now, that this would be our life and I'd be connected to Auroville like this, I wouldn't have imagined it. It's incredible. Of course, this is the romantic version of the whole thing."

Priya Sundaravalli

Capoeira in Auroville



Jeremy executing a capoeira move within the roda or circle. To the left is his teacher, Mestre Cafuringa.

The kids in Auroville seem to love it. It has caught on like wild fire; there is a regular group playing it in the Certitude Sports grounds. It has even become part of Dehashakti sports. It is *capoeira*, the Afro-Brazilian art form that combines elements of dance, martial arts, acrobatics, music and personal expression. And the one who was responsible for bringing *capoeira* to Auroville five years ago is Jeremy.

"When I first started teaching in Auroville no one really knew about *Capoeira*, it was a humble beginning. In the last two years more people have come to Auroville who have some experience with *Capoeira*. There are many different styles and ways of perceiving and playing *Capoeira*, so it seems like a natural fit for the city of human unity. Because it deals with the 'Vital' in a big way, through *capoeira* we are able to be creative with energies that are normally destructive. It also touches on core issues within yourself and humanity – probably because its origins are in struggle and in the fight for freedom.

"Metaphorically, *Capoeira* represents our own struggle of liberating our body and mind. It is about being present and aware of yourself, listening to your body and expressing yourself while maintaining contact with another person. This is easier said than done. Seemingly very physical *Capoeira* also has a deep spiritual and ritual aspect that takes many years to understand.

Capoeira is played in a circle called a *roda*, with partners exchanging movements of attack and defence in a constant flow. During the game or *jogo*, the *capoeiristas* explore their strength and weaknesses, confronting their lack of knowledge, fears, and fatigue in an enjoyable, challenging, and constant process of self-improvement. The speed and attitude of the *jogo* are determined by many different rhythms of a one-string bow-shaped instrument, the *berimbau*, which is considered the symbol of *Capoeira*. The music is important for the development of good rhythm, timing and concentration. Listening to it the *capoeiristas* transport themselves to another level of consciousness and expand their perceptions of time, space, and movements.

"*Capoeira* offers an incredible workout; while building flexibility, strength, and endurance. Most of all, it's about having fun, feeling free and expressing oneself through this graceful, beautiful and powerful art form."

As told to Priya Sundaravalli

Mother's call could wait no longer

Dhanalakshmi talks about her journey from the Indian Civil Services to a new life at Savitri Bhavan.

"I come from a very middle class family in Madurai and my husband and I broke conventions when we decided it was time for us to move to Pondicherry to first live in the Ashram, and then to Auroville. I knew what my family's reaction would be so I did not tell them that I was leaving my secure, well-paid job of 23 years in the Civil Service. It was only when my brother rang my office and was told I was no longer there that they discovered my plans. 'Are you mad?' he asked. 'What about the children – they need a good education. How can you be so irresponsible?' I could not give him any answer as I could not speak to any of them about Mother's compelling call and my response to it. Even after all these years they are still angry with me. Once a year, I go and visit my mother – that is all that is left of my old life.

"My husband and I had founded the Sri Aurobindo centres in Madurai and other towns in Tamil Nadu; our house in Madurai was used as a centre, and still is. For years we had been coming to the Ashram once a month and in 2003 we decided we could wait no longer. The call was too strong.

"We came to the Ashram and spent five very happy years there. I loved my work caring for the flowers at the Samadhi and later at the Residential Care Home for the elderly Ashramites. I always felt Mother was supporting me. I felt Her in each and every action. It was as if She was in the air, as if I was breathing Her in and out. For the first time, I learnt to ride a bicycle – it was a great and significant achievement for me. I am sure Mother made me do it as I had always been terrified of cycling.

"The first year in the Ashram was difficult for my husband, Sriramulu, as he could not get a transfer from his job, so he had to commute. This involved him using three buses for travelling 150 kilometres every day. But Mother cared for us and after one year he was able to get a transfer to the Revenue Department in Vanur, only 10 kilometres away.

"He has always been very supportive of my devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and he calls his particular way the path of Karma Yoga. He works for the State Government in the Revenue Department for village administration. Because of his many years of



Dhanalakshmi

experience with local government he is very knowledgeable about dealing with land records. He has been a big asset to the Ashram indirectly in these matters, and now he is helping Auroville. He just works in his own way by responding to requests for help with 'Let's see. I'll look into the matter.' This is the way he does Mother's work. He would like to retire from his job and involve himself more with this valuable work, but as I only get a pension of 3,000 rupees a month he has to keep working as we have to educate our two sons.

"Our oldest boy Krishna is 19 and is studying at Thiruvannamalai Engineering College and comes home most weekends. He never visits the Hindu temples now but loves Auroville, and his favourite treat is getting pizza from the Bakery for his breakfast before going to Matrimandir. Mother said that the parent should guide the child until he is 18, then after that he can be on his own. I have followed Her advice and now he can choose for himself. Aravind, our younger boy, is now 11 and goes to school in Pondicherry. He has to go in a rickshaw every day which is expensive for us, but we feel this is the best education for him.

"When I now look back on my own childhood I can see that spirituality has always attracted me. I remember when I was a young girl I loved to go and sit in the Rama temple on a Saturday afternoon, often alone, and enjoy the atmosphere and especially the *prasada*. I remember how I used to like to walk through a burial ground on my way home from school and feel the peaceful atmosphere, whereas my friends were frightened to come with me. Maybe the fact that I went to a very *pukka* Hindu private school which emphasised discipline and high thinking contributed to my turn of mind. It is as if the seeds of my present life were sown many years ago.

"We have been here in Auroville as a family since last February and have had no real difficulties except for the usual one of housing, but after a while a friend offered us her apartment for a year in Petite Ferme so we are very fortunate. People have been very loving and respectful towards us. I worked at first grass cutting in Matrimandir gardens, but after a few weeks my skin began turning very dark and I got blisters on my arms from the hot sun so I had to give it up.

"I now work at Savitri Bhavan helping Shradhdhavan. This is the perfect environment for me. The very place lives and breathes the atmosphere of Savitri. I can feel it in the air.

"My husband and I work with Varadharajan to create a space where devotees from other Tamil Nadu Sri Aurobindo centres can come to Auroville and spend time with us. We sometimes invite a group of Aurovilians to join us and last year 15 ladies from the *Mirra Women's group* spent a weekend with us. We feel it is important to inspire and sustain people from other centres who are less fortunate than ourselves who are blessed to live here.

"I am perfectly happy to be here. I can feel how Mother has poured Her love on our family. Do I have any ambition at all? Not really, except for a childish one to go up in an aeroplane and see how the world looks from above."

Dianna

Kolams for the planet

Rajaveni from Vêrité journeys to Germany as a cultural ambassador.

This January, Rajaveni had her photos in all the local newspapers in Bremerhaven, Germany. Looking beautiful and exotic in her sari, Rajaveni was shown lighting incense, offering a flower and performing an opening puja. The visitors at the Kunsthalle Modern Art Gallery were spellbound. She had brought some large silk hand painted *kolams* and this was the first time they had been presented in this way. *Kolams* by their very nature are individual, very temporary expressions of ancient South Indian traditions. They are drawn by women on the ground in front of their homes at dawn, usually in white rice powder, but on special religious days in fabulous colours and intricate designs. It is an act of contemplation and concentration, a time of focus before the busy day starts. As the day progresses the rice grains are eaten by ants and walked over, but that is irrelevant as the Goddess dawn has been greeted and honoured. "It gives the women great satisfaction and pride to draw these ancient patterns," says Rajaveni who wants to preserve and encourage the tradition.

It all started for Rajaveni when Anne Schmeikes, a German lady in her late fifties from Bremerhaven, came to Auroville in 2005. She immediately realised that her dreams of human unity resonated with those of Auroville's. Anne was a teacher of politics and economics in a German UNESCO school and she used to read Mother's Auroville Charter to her students. She was always moved by the way it inspired them. Anne had always been aware that the materialistic way of life of contemporary Europe was alienating many young people. Eventually she found an almost magical way of approaching and involving them through music and dance.

"Music touches young people like nothing else," Anne enthusiastically explained. "Teenagers love break-dancing and hip-hop music with its dynamic movements that can be performed by anyone. The kids who live on the streets learn to do the movements and put their energy into its endless variations and even organize competitions to see who can do the wildest movements. Its soul food."

When Anne came to Auroville in 2005 and gave a workshop in break dancing to the Auroville kids, they had a great time dancing on the Solar Kitchen roof. She also organized a gospel choir.

She was also very inspired by the work of Mohanam Cultural Centre and that is where she met Rajaveni and was introduced to *kolams*. "I immediately recognized their simplicity and uni-

versal attraction. I deliberately chose a gallery of Modern Art in Germany to exhibit them as I feel very strongly that art and music should not be only for the elite. By letting people see the ancient beauty and wisdom of the *kolams* I hope eyes can be opened to see the universality and not the differences of cultures and races which is plaguing our countries."

Rajaveni told us about her experiences in Germany. "The weather in November was very cold but my heart was always very warm when I saw people's response. I gave *kolam* workshops in schools every day for 20 days and the teachers would tell me what an effect it had on the children. Hyperactive kindergarten kids who could not concentrate for five minutes would sit engrossed for 40 minutes drawing their *kolam* on the floor. Teenagers who were rebellious and assertive sprawled on the floor engrossed in the intricate patterns. It was as if it was a glimpse into another world for them – another way of seeing the universe.

"They were fascinated when I explained that certain special days, like puberty, marriage, or a housewarming, had special *kolams*. The astrological connection and the fact there were no *kolams* drawn on new moon day interested them, as did the materials that could be used on each day. Sunday, for example, is the day of the sun and wheat is used; Thursday is Jupiter and that day we use chickpeas.

"It was a remarkable experience to see how these young German children and teenagers responded to *kolams*. They were so different from anything they had experienced, yet their simplicity attracted them on a deep level. This is such a simple way to transcend the cultural and racial differences that are tearing society apart.

"My dream now is take the experience of *kolam* drawing to other countries so more and more people can experience the satisfaction of making them, especially children and teenagers. It is also important to keep the tradition alive and give work to Tamil women here in



Rajaveni shows a young kindergartener in Germany how to make *kolams*

Auroville. Six women are now employed in Mohanam embroidering *kolam* patterns on cushions, hangings and T shirts. Any profits

will go towards funding a Women's House in Mohanam."

Dianna

A FRIEND REVISITS

In gratitude

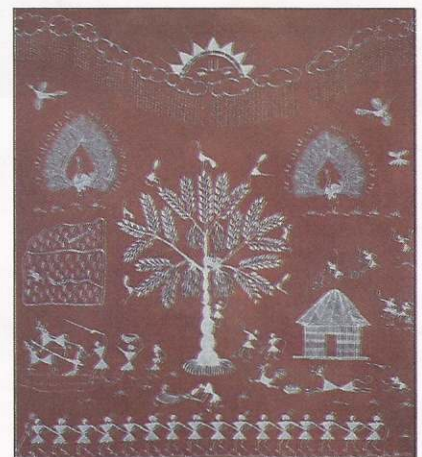
Going around in Auroville, I ask myself how can it be that everything in Auroville is singing, scintillating and vibrating: the trees, the birds, the animals, the sun rays refracting in the branches, even the red earth is glowing with warmth and life. How is it possible that its people have suddenly become more beautiful, so that I have constantly to restrain myself from telling them how much I love them.

Where does all this magic and charm come from? Is it the dream that has partially come true, or is it the Presence that is palpable everywhere? People keep telling me how happy and light they feel as soon as they set foot on that red soil. I felt and got the contagion of their happiness whenever I joined them meditating, chanting, dancing or listening under a bright or sunlit sky. We all felt: "Here at last is something different and supremely worthwhile."

And what does it take to attain all this bliss? A simple living surrounded by trees and birds and sparkling stars... a few mats on the floors... and a handful of people with goodwill and an open heart. And already you belong, give, receive and participate in shaping a new and more liveable and lovable world.

My stay is nearing its end. Gratitude and a prayer are slowly rising. Gratitude that Auroville exists, and the prayer that it may be protected and may continue to blossom and to inspire for many years to come.

An Auroville friend



The Warli mural at Athiti Griha

Meeting the challenge of the global crisis

For some of Auroville's commercial units, the global economic crisis may mean the end of an experiment. Others are confident that they will pull through.

“We are at the crossroads of something that has never happened before,” says Paul. We are sitting in the laboratory of *Maroma*, surrounded by bottles with aromatic concentrates and other raw materials for *Maroma's* incense sticks, body care products, candles, ambient perfumes, oils, pot-pourris and other scented articles. Laura and Paul, who have been running *Maroma* for more than 30 years and who have turned the company from a small unit into one with markets all over the world and a subsidiary in the USA, reflect on how the global crisis may affect Auroville business and how they should rise to the challenges.

Maroma's response to the global crisis will be to invest more, modify the products and diversify the product range. “Our answer is to try to increase our turnover,” says Laura. “In a period of crisis, many people have the tendency to freeze and be scared. That’s the wrong attitude, it brings you nowhere. Some say ‘Mother will provide.’ That is a good expectation but while Mother provides vision and intuition, we have to rise to the challenge. We have to be creative and perceive where we can cut back and what can be developed and find products that can work in the market. People want to see something beautiful and spend less – that is the challenge for Auroville’s commercial units. That is much more



Laura and Paul at *Maroma*

difficult than in a booming economy. You need to be open and optimistic.”

Do they expect many of Auroville’s 120 commercial units to follow this approach? “We

can only hope,” says Paul. “It is common knowledge that few of Auroville’s 120 commercial units have been able to create substantial surpluses for Auroville. Many units have only succeeded in maintaining the unit executive, pay for the wages of the employees and make minor contributions to Auroville. We have often expressed our dissatisfaction with the lack of growth. We would like the Auroville commercial units to make a quantum leap and become substantial contributors to the Auroville economy. But in the present times we fear that some of these units, particularly those depending on sales from a very small market, may get into problems. The demand for their products may decrease, and if they have not built-up sufficient reserves, the unit will suffer and may even go bankrupt.”

In this context Paul warns about another problem of Auroville’s commercial units. “More and more business executives are ageing. It would be nice to see some promising youth come forward and say ‘We want to participate’. Some executives worry that when they reach 65 and above, they won’t have an income or pension. These issues are yet to be looked into by Auroville.”

Maroma, however, expects to pull through. “We are confident,” says Paul. “People are thinking twice about buying an expensive household appliance, but we are talking about a packet of incense with a market rate of US \$2.50 which is not a price at which people will stop purchasing. But the market will not absorb a price increase to offset the increase of our expenses. We will work to introduce new products that sell well, such as natural soaps, so that the level of our future contributions to Auroville may not be affected.”

In conversation with Carel

Is there a slowing down?

The global recession may take its toll on Auroville’s commercial units. But Angad, the executive of *Mantra*, one of Auroville’s pottery units, believes that other ills affect Auroville much more.

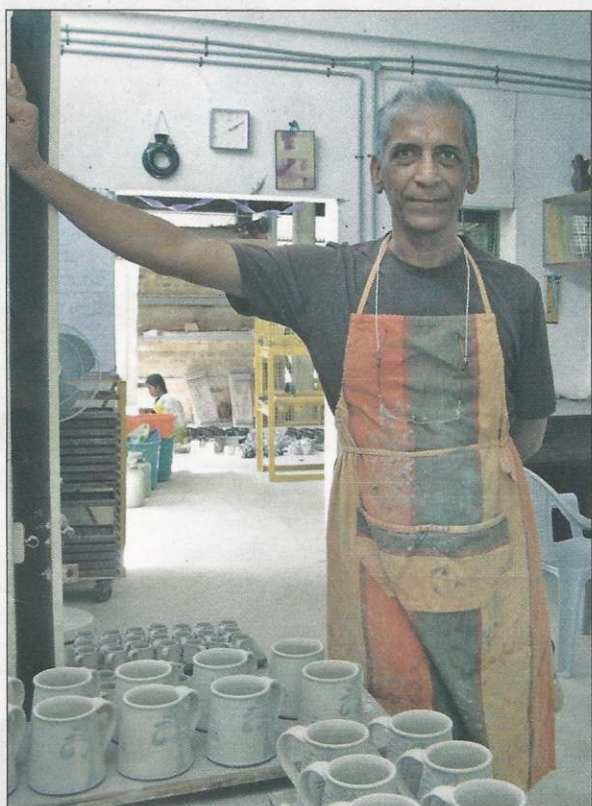
“It is quite possible that some Auroville units will be affected by the recession,” says Angad. “We at *Mantra* are certainly facing difficulties – our whole-sale buyers are having problems and that affects us.” For *Mantra*, the saving grace has been the investment it made a few years ago in participating in building a boutique at the Visitors’ Centre with a few other commercial units. “This retail outlet is a great success; we have no middlemen and only modest sales costs. It has become our second highest income generator,” says Angad. Yet, there is evidence that sales at the Visitors’ Centre Boutique are also down. “We’ll probably make the same turnover as last year, but that is taking into account a price increase we introduced in April 2008 because of the rising fuel prices. In other words, we are selling less, but as fuel prices have meanwhile gone down and labour costs are up, we are getting about the same net income.”

Angad, though not overtly concerned about the decrease in turnover – “I have a very strong faith in the future as I have experienced that each time there was a true need, the solution would come,” he says – is nevertheless developing strategies for survival. One is to start direct sales via the Internet. Another one is to diversify, for example into murals and mosaics for pavements. “We have just started in this market and we’ve discovered a huge demand,” he says, and explains, “We have only a small production and a large number of customers from the upper echelons of society, and these people do have money and are buying – so I am not particularly worried.”

The units’ contributions

Asked if he expects a change in the contribution the commercial units are making to Auroville, Angad replies in the negative. “Today, by and large, units are contributing voluntarily – the rule of contributing 33% of the profits as unspecified donation to Auroville is often ignored; many units give substantially more, in the order of 40% - 50%, while the rest is largely ploughed back into the unit.” Yet, he is visibly irked by the question. “Why is it,” he asks, “that for the health of the Auroville economy we only look at Auroville’s commercial units? Why do so many able-bodied adults, who all have the skill and capacity to survive anywhere in the world, all of a sudden when

they arrive in Auroville, lose their capacity to earn and contribute and now come to depend on Auroville while outside of Auroville they would manage to support themselves? Mother said that everyone should work at least five hours every day including Sundays. Is that perhaps being taken too literally? For no service, leave alone a commercial unit, can be run in that way. You can’t discharge any responsibility in Auroville properly in five hours a day. But this five-hours-a-



Angad at *Mantra*

day story seems to have become inscribed in sacred stone! Why are so many services not open in the afternoons or only at times that other people work? I think the wrong mindset has been created: that it does not matter to be inefficient or not to worry about what you are doing with your time. I am not saying everyone has to produce and make money. But to go to the opposite is something I have difficulty in swallowing.”

Angad considers that all Auroville adults should contribute, regardless of age or wealth. “All people, nobody excluded, should give the same amount of energy they would if they had to survive in outside society. Of course, there are shining exceptions and there are people who work very dedicatedly and put in many hours. But many Aurovilians could do much better and put much more energy into Auroville. I believe that the

Angad Vohra has been a potter since 1976. He started *Mantra* in 1994. *Mantra* makes high fired stoneware (pots, plates, lamp holders, candle holders, aroma diffusers and bathroom sets) using gas-fired natural draft kilns. Pots and plates are made on kick wheels and the clay is prepared by hand. Generating employment in good working conditions is a priority, along with making high-quality products. Production novelties are *Mantra's* fibre lined kiln with nitride bonded silicon carbide kiln shelves which allow for a denser stack and a considerable heat saving. Due to all-round improvements in skills and material management, *Mantra's* dinner plates have become thinner and lighter. Other novelties are the lustre glazes and the hand cut and hand stamped tiles, and products made from cane, teakwood and pottery such as trays, coasters and framed mirrors.

deficit of our economy is precisely that quantum of energy that is missing from those people. Aurovilians need to introspect seriously regarding their own output for the community. No one else can do this.”

The Auroville employees

Talking about working full-time, Angad mentions that *Mantra's* employees work much more. “They often take work home in the evenings. We then buy from them what they have produced. This has substantially increased our production, as well as their income. It is a win-win situation.” He sees them as family. “Many have been working for *Mantra* for years. I try to deal with them in accordance with one of the adages of The Mother, ‘to give according to capacity and to take according to need’. We have been helping them with houses and with loans or even with donations whenever we could and we felt there was a true need. In fact, I believe that some of my employees qualify to become Aurovilian by their sustained commitment to Auroville through their work and inner attitude. But this, sadly, is not the view of the members of the Entry Service. They judged that they do not know enough about Auroville because they couldn’t speak English! And these people were born inside Auroville!” He is indignant. “People do not realize that one of the major setbacks of Auroville is that too few non-local Aurovilians speak decent Tamil. That is a huge barrier to our progress. Out of respect for where we are I have made Tamil the mandatory language in our workshop. These are other issues that need to be seriously addressed.”

The housing shortage

Angad, it appears, has many other issues. “Discontent is the first step to progress,” he says lightly. A major one is his concern about the present housing policy where people are not allowed to build by themselves but have to join housing developments which offer marginal living spaces at huge costs. “This is stifling our development,” he says. “Our system is responsible. It needs to change.”

Carel

OPINION

Lost in translation

Because of the need for a legalised framework that governments and other funding agencies can relate to, Auroville has gradually translated itself, its complex life and its numerous, very diverse activities, into a number of trusts and similar legal umbrellas, each one with the required Executives, Managers, Accountants, and what not.

In consequence, we are more and more being moulded into a rigidified maze of countless compartments and boxes in which the real, living Auroville is rapidly disappearing, broken into bits and pieces that seem separated from each other, having lost most of the flexibility, fluidity, immediate inter-connectedness and sense of oneness that characterize a living organism.

This kind of bureaucratized ‘organisation’ attracts to Auroville the kind of people who thrive in a legalistic maze wherever they find one, expert as they are at using it for their own power-games, with all the appearances of legality and honesty. Activities quite naturally born as services and informally growing as part of a community’s life and function within Auroville, may suddenly be hijacked by those that the community had entrusted to run them, and these services be transformed into profit-oriented, practically private businesses, legally independent fortresses that the community has no say anymore about, and watches helplessly as they develop in a cancer-like manner.

The most frightening part of this negative transformation is that the Working Groups supposed to protect the true Auroville-to-be, in their conclusions and recommendations consider only the ‘assets’ involved and the ‘financial potential’ of the place.

In the meantime, we go from office to office, desperately trying to find the right door, the right desk, and a real person to speak with, instead of the cold, distant bureaucrats that most of your fellow Aurovilians seem to have been turned into by some evil spell.

Yes, we do need a legalised framework to translate what Auroville is outwardly, into terms the outside world can understand; but the real Auroville, the one most of us did come for, must not get lost in the translation.

Bhaga

Puppet Theatre *Koekla* (*Koekla* means puppet in Russian) is a gem of Dutch-Russian puppet theatre. It is a completely integral art form as it combines the figures of the puppets with music, story-telling and costume design in a miniature fantasy setting. Christina Boukova, who came from Russia, and her husband Gilian, from Holland, explained how they brought this fantastical art to Auroville. "With great difficulty," Christina began. "Outside Russia, puppetry is only known through Punch and Judy shows, so no one takes it seriously. In Russia, especially before Communism, it was a very highly regarded and elaborate theatre form which could involve 20 or 30 people in putting on one show. Nowadays it is smaller, but on Saturdays and Sundays many parents still take their children to see traditional and experimental puppet shows in big theatres. Both my parents were in the Russian theatre and when I was born my mother was working in the theatre so I have been involved in it all my life."

Auroville had never seen anything like it. It was a concentrated jewel of story telling, weaving in and out of a lush set of velvet and sequined Russian interiors. Christina, a beautiful young Russian woman in a black dress and cap, obviously a trained actress, manipulated the puppets with her deft hands. Sometimes she stood in full view, sometimes hidden behind a miniature castle or an intricate house with animated puppet cats sitting at each window. The attention to detail in her movements was meticulous. The slightest gesture of *Little Moek*, the boy hero, or the fat king, who had lost his daughter, was caught by her quick movements. She told the story and spoke the character's dialogue with a warm Russian accent which beautifully wove the whole thing together. Fast changing music with an eastern flavour added to the lively pace, as did the subtle shifts of lighting. The small set beautifully focused the mind towards a state of delicate magic. It was simple, yet intricate and fantastic.

Gilian, Christina's husband, has a background in sculpture and painting which is evident in the beauty and imagination of the sets. There are four revolving sets which can be turned to reveal different scenes. They are constructed from papier maché and lovingly painted and decorated in great detail. Gilian operates the music and the light-

Puppet Theatre Koekla

Little Moek was given 16th performance in two months, the last one at Cinema Paradiso. Most of the audience has seen it before, but were so charmed they had come again, children, women, and even a sprinkling of men.



Christina Boukova tells the story of *Little Moek*

ing which is intricate and very precise as it has to synchronize with the tiny movements of the puppets, which in the case of cats and dogs, for example, can be very small. "Thank goodness I now have my own equipment," he said. "I brought an electric drill, two saws, a sound mixer and lots of other necessary equipment. Before we had to depend on the vagaries of Indian equipment and electricity but now I feel more in control. We shipped it here in a 250 kilo cargo box but it was a nightmare trying to get it through customs in Chennai. Eventually we had to get a letter from the Secretary of Auroville and it took one month of high anxiety before we were able to get hold of it."

Christina's father, Riju, has lived in Aspiration, Auroville, for the last 15 years and translates Sri Aurobindo's works into Russian. "We came to visit him 10 years ago and since then we have been devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We wanted to present our shows here for the Auroville children, but were not sure how to go about it. We asked Stichting de Zaaier, a Dutch charity, for help and advice but nobody seemed to know, or be very interested in us. I suppose they get many applica-

tions for all sorts of weird and wonderful projects and ours must have sounded like one of these. The trouble is that in English, 'puppets', sound rather trivial. In German the word has more authority; *figuren theatre*. After many unsuccessful applications and requests we finally said; "Let's go for it ourselves." We worked hard for a couple of years to save money then brought our show to Auroville at our own expense. Over the last five years we have done performances in schools out of a very large black box which we carried around with us.

"It could not have happened without the enthusiasm of Helena, who was working at Transition School. Helena said she would volunteer to be our link with Auroville and has worked incredibly hard to establish venues for our show. Without her we would never have known how to make connections. Auroville can be a big and very confusing place without a good personal contact.

"When people saw our first show, *Goldilocks*

and the *Three Bears* in 2005 they asked us when we could come back with a bigger new performance. I told them that all our performances are big, so how can we possibly bring them here? Eventually Sanjeev from SAIER realized our potential and decided to support us in the future. He saw the joy we brought to the children and the potentiality for learning through our medium. Transition School prepared educational material of our show to prepare the children who were wonderfully responsive. Our present show is called *Little Moek* and is the story of a boy who is looking for happiness. The teacher gave the children a project to make them think about what makes them happy, and they took it home to ask their parents what they thought about happiness. We got an amazing response."

"In the future we want to work in Holland, and come to Auroville every year. Everything is changing so much in the world now it is difficult to make definite plans, but we are very happy with the way our shows are developing. Our agent tells us we are fully booked for 2009 so we are satisfied. We were offered regular paid work in Bombay and Delhi by the Dutch Embassy, but we wanted to concentrate on Auroville. Also our seven year old daughter, Dariya, loves going to school here for three months every year.

"One of our highlights was giving a show of *Little Moek* in the Ashram and seeing how the Ashram children responded to it. They put us up in a beautiful home stay and when we went up on the roof to see the full moon I felt great joy as we had accomplished what we had set out to do - 16 performances in Auroville and one in the Ashram. We would like to give a show at the AVI Meeting which will be held in Holland this May. It would be wonderful for us to combine our home country Holland with entertaining Aurovilians from all over the world."

Dianma

Music of the Middle Ages



Auroville was given an unexpected surprise by Évelyne Moser who gave a concert of Western medieval and renaissance music. Above: Évelyne playing the fiddle.

PHOTO GIORGIO

SPORTS

Auroville's second marathon

On February 17th at 5:30 in the morning the early riser or bedraggled returnee from a night out may have noticed unusual goings on in the darkness at Certitude's sports ground.

Approximately 400 people gathered in the puddles of light shed by makeshift lamps, stretching and yawning, talking quietly amongst themselves in little groups. What on earth was happening here?

This was the starting point for Auroville's second marathon run. Those doing the full 42.195 kilometres were equipped with little torches; the run would take some four hours and it would be too hot to start later in the day.

Most of the runners were from different parts of India but there were 82 Aurovilians and several Ashramites among them, including Simi-ben, who ran the quarter event. She's 80 years old and didn't feel up to the full 42 kilometres.

"Marathon running is an extreme sport," explains Chandresh, the organiser of the event and a long time runner himself. "Few people realise that you can get seriously hurt without even being aware of it."

Chandresh was behind the first event and was disappointed at the lack of interest Auroville's units showed in helping out. So he put his own money into organising it. Now the event looks like becoming a permanent feature in Auroville's annual calendar.



A lone marathoner on the Auroville trail

PHOTO RAMESH

"I'd never organised a run before, I was a trainer. So given last year's experience we decided to introduce an entrance fee and register all the runners. There was also a lot of support from volunteers in Auroville, manning first aid and water stations. There were also three doctors and an ambulance on standby as well as four taxis. The dangers of dehydration are real. But there was a lot of goodwill and interest generated in this run. Though we still fell short of the budget, I'm confident next year's event will be even more of a success."

Among the runners was Frederick who ran a half marathon. We asked him how the whole thing first came about. "Well, at the time of the tsunami, Jothi came up with the idea of doing a run from Kanyakumari up along the coast to raise assistance for the victims. For various reasons this did not happen. So we decided to hold it in Auroville anyway, as part of the 40th birthday celebrations, and also as a way to involve

Auroville in India, and India in Auroville. Events like this are very participatory. And fun!"

Are sportsmen a distinct species?

"Very much so," says Frederick. "And particularly in this sort of endurance event. For one thing it's not really competitive like, say, football or tennis, it's not about being the first to cross the finishing line. There's a feeling of comradeship in this kind of event which involves transcending your own physical barriers, going beyond the point where you say 'I can't do this anymore' and finding that this is just a belief in your own limits, that in fact a lot more is possible."

Most of the runners came from different clubs scattered throughout the South and as one of the participants and co-organizers, Balaji said: "Most of us did our personal best on this run. The clean air, the beautiful surroundings, we loved it!"

And so did a lot of Aurovilians. The energy and goodwill shows that this event seems to have inspired everyone, even those only peripherally involved or aware of it. A frequent 'overheard' is "I'm starting to train. Next year I'll do it!"

Hero

In brief

The Mother and Flowers

A photograph exhibition showing beautiful and rare photographs of *The Mother and Her work with Flowers* was held at Savitri Bhavan. The exhibition also contained a section on the history of the 'Blessing Packet', the story of how the flower book was started and some exquisite examples of painted and embroidered flowers by artists of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Roads in progress

L'avenir d'Auroville and the Road Service have embarked on an ambitious road-building programme. One road, from the Solar kitchen towards the Vikas radial, will be made with inter-joining paver blocks. Another road, from Kailash Clinic towards the Matrimandir up to the paver's block stretch, will be made with stabilized earth blocks.

The Presence of Supermind

in a changing world was the title of a three-day seminar held at SAWCHU. Speakers drawn from Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram made presentations on the power of money, the ascending scale of 'substance', and whether mind is opening to an onward trajectory of future possibilities.

Horse tournament

The National Junior Championship (Cross Country) and National Championship South Zone (Jumping, Dressage, Tent Pegging) took place from the 23rd of January to the 3rd of February in Brihaspati, Auroville, organized by the team of the Red Earth Riding School. 72 horses from the major riding schools in South India were competing in this event. In the Cross Country National Event for Young Riders, 19 horses participated. A special highlight was the free dressage test with music on Sunday evening in which horses and riders excelled in beauty, elegance, and skill.

Scholarship Fund

A Scholarship Fund has been created to support studies and training of Auroville youth outside Auroville beyond the financial reach of parents. The managers of the fund are looking for locations where Auroville students could be received or guided or hosted for some time to help them pursue studies or vocational and arts training. Those who can help or give contacts are requested to contact lucasdl@auroville.org.in

Matrimandir solar plant revived

After almost 10 years of service, nearly all of the 484 solar panels of Matrimandir's 36kW solar power plant were replaced last year under warranty. Now, with a generous donation, 240 new batteries have been bought making the power plant again operational to power the lights and fountains of the Matrimandir.

Alain Resnais retrospective

The Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas, hosted a three-day French film festival featuring a retrospective of 9 films of French cineaste Alain Resnais. The festival was made possible with help from the Embassy of France in New Delhi.

"What's that - knowing which - everything can be known?"

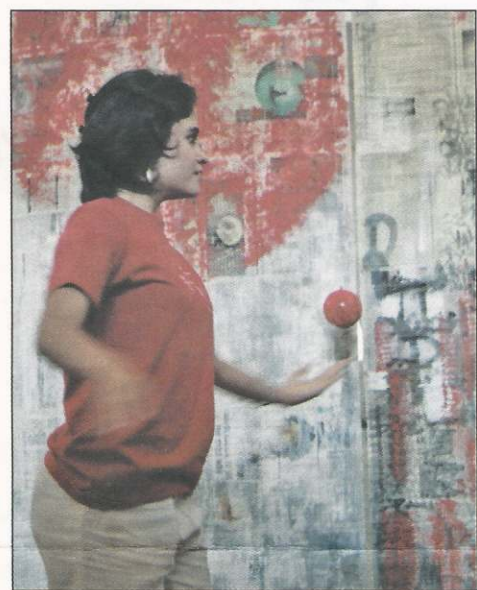
It is palpable already in the leafy parking lot – the atmosphere of the Pyramids Arts Centre in the Last School campus. Silence and serenity. The snub-nosed sphinx still rests askew. She is painted a dull gold now, but her smile is as enigmatic as ever.

It is over five years since the Pyramids hosted its last art show by students. But this time it is different; it is not a retrospective of works of all its current students, but a focused presentation by its four core pupils, the adventurous teenagers of Last School who had embarked on a bold 'no-certificate' education inspired five years ago by The Mother.

Their installation titled 'Passage' (read in French), was an expression of where their long journey through Auroville's experimental high school has brought them to.

As one walks down the pebbled pathway, the intent gets clearer. Square arrangements of madder-stained stones welcome you in. And inside, the works hit you with their energy, the physicality of the primary colours, and a calm, and something else.... indefinable.

From the floor up, from the ceiling down, suspended sheets of images and newsprint with motifs rolled on, mirrors on mirrors reflecting the world back in fragments, spinning crystals



Carpe Diem

The concept of Time is a big discussion in my life: to define it, explain its properties and materialize that idea. Presently, my conclusion is that time is what separates us from everything else: it separates me from what I am, from what I was, from what I will be, and from the fact that I will become the dust that you will too!

It is a fundamental law – even a necessity that restrains absolute chaos – for without this law everything would be a conglomeration of past, present, and future; an anarchic unity.

In a way, this is the manner I approach most circumstances. I see the present as the thing to focus on. I learn from the past and do not expect too much of the future. For we can never know for certain what is to happen next. I started out with the words 'Love' and 'Dream' but then discovered what interested me more was 'Time and Dream' – for dreams transcend time and you enter an unlimited space of infinite possibilities. In a way, they are contradictory: one limitless and free; the other bound and structured.

With this idea, I tried to create my work. Something systematic and logical for Time; and, something light and layered for Dream.

Anadi
19 years



ALL PHOTOS SUSANA

splitting, breaking up the sun into a million hues, white boxes pasted with human eyes, spirals turning in the breeze, columns of little people painted red, orange, yellow, floating up into light, and words – an endless calligraphy of words painted on the floor and running across the walls. It is a veritable kaleidoscope of expression and incredibly alive.

Sound of Silence

I began exploring two ideas – 'Silence' and 'Sound'.

Silence meant for me not absence of Being but fullness and the very space of all. Something which contained power yet was intangible.

Sound was its manifest expression.

With silence came introspection; the rising above immediate surroundings, petty concerns, slowing down and turning the eye within; recognizing one's fears and limitations and choosing to step beyond them.

To pull out the experience from within, to give it expression, is what I associate with sound.

The experience preparing for the exhibition was to find my way of being suddenly extended to include more subtleties, more rhythms, more plays of light, shade and colour.

Suddenly the phrase 'sound of silence' spoke deeply to me.

I have a sense of making a first step into a 'passage' of endless discovery.

Shrishti
18 years



Essence – Nonsense

The basis of my work in a single word is 'change'. Individual change – collective change – transformation.

'Red' the colour of material manifestation, embodies this energy. It is fire, it is intensity.

Mystically, it is the colour of Union. Red is the soil of Auroville, and it holds that concentration of

power I am looking for. I also explore 'Word': as essence and nonsense; meaning and absence of meaning. While working on newspapers, modern mediums of mass produced words, a babble of information and data representative of our society, a need arose to find again that sacredness and spirit of 'Word' as pure symbol of ideas and experience.

And complementing 'Word' is 'Regard' or 'Gaze': an ephemeral yet powerful look – contained in a moment but leaving its imprint for a lifetime.

These are the main threads that led me on my journey – 'Passage'.

Smiti
18 years



colleague; a light touch and he is off.

Shakespearean delivery; a rich strong voice filling the space, speaking of eternity, of dreamers of dreams... and he too passes the baton to the third.

From between hanging scrolls of leaf-prints, she stands statuesque in blue, like a sculpture from Konarak. With graceful gestures of Odissi and strong beats stamping out rhythms, she warps and wefts, weaving through the paper curtains of leaf and nature prints.

Finally the fourth in red, a spark of intensity, picks up and gathers us all into the last space where she leads in circles spinning and chanting ancient mantras of Shwetaketu, a kindred spirit of another time and place... *What's that – knowing which – everything – can be known.* Slowly the others join in and together with all of us, in that sacred circle, the chant intensifies: *What's that – knowing which – everything – can be known.*

Priya Sundaravalli



An Intimation of a lurking Joy

I've reached a very interesting moment in my work and outside it: I see beauty all around me – all the time. I cannot stay angry or upset very long. Or even afraid... When I am afraid of whatever it be, I can step back and observe it. And if it still scares me, I look around, wherever I am, and I see shapes, patterns, colours, light, forms which I delight in. And I wonder how can I ever be miserable, fearful, full of hate or frustrated if I can see these daily and rejoice? I see I have been oblivious to this beauty a very long time (in the solitude of the Himalayas I'd notice it, but lose the eye for it soon after I came back); in time I will discover a lot more...

But for the moment, what this journey – working on this exhibition, the circumstances that made me surpass my limits, made me explore colour – has offered me is a new way of perceiving my surrounding which fills me with incredible joy.

This joy does not seem to blind me to the horrors of this world, the horrors man inflicts upon man, but brings me hope, endless hope that we can go farther still, that we can surmount all difficulties.

For otherwise, why would there be so much beauty in the world?

Aurevan
18 years



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