

# Auroville Today

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## "Everybody who has grown up here feels a strong connection to the Auroville spirit"

For those adults who don't have teenagers of their own or who lack regular contact with Auroville teenagers, the youth of this community are something of an enigma. Glimpsed briefly on the roads or from across a crowded Solar Café, it is all too easy to stereotype them, both for better or worse. But what are they really like? What are their preoccupations and their goals? What do they find to celebrate about this place and what frustrates them? And what is the nature of their relationship to Auroville?

To find out more, Auroville Today spoke to two classes of 18 – 20 year olds at Future School. Some had joined Auroville relatively recently, but almost half of them were born in Auroville.

All these students will graduate next year. When asked what they will do next, all reply that they plan to leave Auroville for a longer or shorter period, the most popular option being to pursue further academic studies in Europe. Anandi explains, "I want to go to university abroad and deepen my knowledge of music." Why abroad? "Because over there you can meet and interact with many young people who share your interest."

But is this the only reason why the students want to leave Auroville and go abroad? "No," says Nisha, "Most of my life I've lived in Auroville so I have a curiosity about how it is outside. It's not that I feel I lack something here, but I want to step out of the box for a bit, just to see what else is out there. I don't want to miss out on something." "I think that once you have experienced what is outside," adds Vasanthi, "you can make a conscious choice about whether you want to be in Auroville or not."

"I think my major reason to go abroad," says Emanuele, "is to challenge myself, to see if I can live on my own for the first time." Sushant agrees. "I want to see how the world will challenge me. I want to discover what I'm good at and how I can cope socially with being in a much larger group. When I spent a year out of Auroville at Kodaikanal School I learned to play the guitar. It made me realize you can discover a lot of new things in yourself if you step out of your comfort zone." "Auroville is a beautiful place," adds Amba, "but it is also a small bubble: we are not always aware of what is happening outside of our bubble. I think if you go out and learn something in Europe or America and bring it back, it creates a stronger connection with the outside world; it brings something extra to Auroville."

So those Aurovilians who argue that providing



From left: Sushant, Vasanthi, Amba, Anandi and Teresa

a first-class university education in Auroville would prevent an exodus of the young are probably wrong. Nevertheless, a few of these students would consider this option if it was available. "Probably I would stay in Auroville if there was higher education here," says Nitzan. "I've lived in other countries, like Israel and the U.S., so I don't lack this experience. The educational approach I've been looking for I've found in Future School and Auroville in general. Education here is more authentic." Vika agrees. "I'm very comfortable and familiar with the way things are taught in Future School and if there would be a higher level taught by the same people I would definitely stay on."

In fact, all of them admit that they will miss certain things here. "This is home," says Nisha, "it's like a big family here. When I come to school in the morning I see ten people on the road that I say 'hi' to. You kind of know everybody and you're comfortable with everybody." "In the West," says Nitzan, "you're surrounded by so many more distractions that you have a tendency to lose yourself in them. Here there are a lot of different opportunities in terms of doing sports or arts without having to pay for them. You can just go up to somebody and say you're interested in learning something and they will help you. This is one of the most beautiful things about this place."

Teresa agrees, and she adds, "When I go for holidays to Europe and see the youth there I realize they are growing up in a completely different environment: what we have in Auroville is unique." Anandi explains, "The Western world is easily manipulated by consumerism and appearances, but when I realize I am being pulled into that world I can step back: I recognise it's not me." "People abroad tend to get caught up in the superficiality of materialistic needs," says Vasanthi. "In Auroville we can step away from that."

It sounds as if Auroville is something of a paradise, an ideal society. Is there no downside for the youth?

"Educationally there's a wide range of possibilities here but they're not really established or developed enough and they lack depth," says Anandi.

"The main downside for me," says Emanuele, "is that because everybody knows you, if you make the tiniest mistake everybody will learn about it and judge you. Making mistakes is human, but some people keep bashing on us instead of looking at their own mistakes," Sushant adds, "One *faux pas* or mistake can lead to a long-lasting label and from then on some names are consistently brought up as the 'wrongdoers' for all youthful indiscretions. At the same time, I realize the way we behave in a group can be loud and disruptive; for example, when we come to the Solar Café." "I think some people who judge us may have done similar

things," says Vasanthi. "They may unintentionally project their mistakes onto us."

Vika wonders, "Are the youth and adults two completely different entities? Aren't we meant to learn from one another?"

"Often we find ourselves not knowing where to go," adds Sushant. "We really try to find places where we can be ourselves without disturbing the neighbours." But what about the Youth Centre and the youth community of Kailash? Aren't these places where the youth can organize themselves and be themselves?

Sushant replies, "Kailash is a place where people live and not a place to hang out, which leaves us the Youth Centre." Nisha considers that "something new has to come."

Some adults seem have a poor image of the youth in Auroville because they fail to live up to their expectations. "I guess the young people, like anybody else in Auroville, are confronted by this force which pushes us to confront ourselves," says Rolf, one of their teachers. "The youth is working with these issues but they are judged on basically three or four external elements. A lot of other things they are and do may not always be properly valued. Judgments do not help us to connect and build trust."

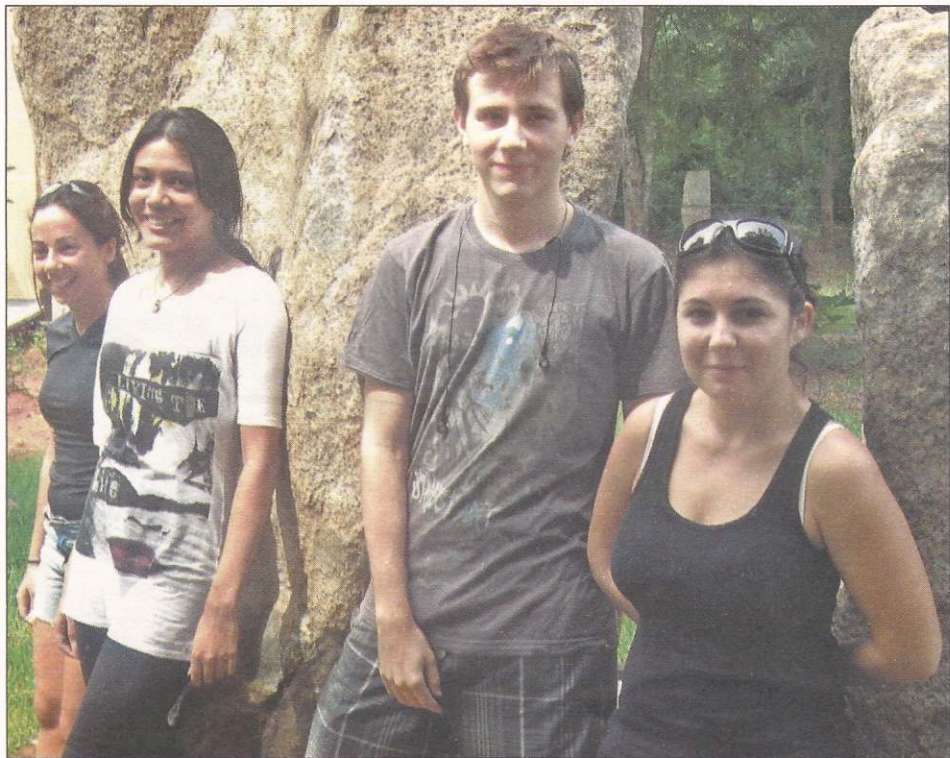
Of course, tensions and conflicts between youth and adults are common to many societies. But unlike most societies, Auroville has high ideals. Does this exacerbate the tensions here and make them more difficult to resolve?

Teresa replies, "We don't feel that there is a substantial conflict between the youth and the adults. We try to respect each other's needs and talk about a conflict when it arises so that we can find a compromise."

But do they believe that some adults have problems with the youth in Auroville because they think they are not 'spiritual' enough, that they don't know enough about the spiritual dimension of Auroville?

"It depends what you mean by spirituality," says Vasanthi. "Maybe we cannot quote Mother

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From left: Nitzan, Nisha, Emanuele and Vika.

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## Losing faith in faith?

**Apathy, despair, disconnection and frustration...is this really what the youth of Auroville are feeling? According to Carissa Devine, it is.**

Carissa J. Devine, a Fulbright-Nehru Research Scholar from the USA, is a graduate from Lebanon Valley College (LVC) in Religion and Philosophy. She recently returned home to the US after spending nine months living in Auroville's Youth Community, Kailash, while studying at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) in Pondicherry. The full title of her Fulbright-Nehru research project is *'The Birth of the Aurovilian Tradition: Capturing the Nexus of Text and Interpretation.'*

The title of the chapter on youth, recently published under the auspices of SACAR, is somewhat disparaging: *'Losing Faith in Faith'*. The contents do, however, reflect the unique pressures on Auroville youth. I spoke with Jean-François, who has worked closely with the younger generation of Auroville for many years, and Mishi, a teacher at Future School.

"You know there are certain tensions for the youth in Auroville. This can and does lead to issues from time to time," says Jean-François. "Even though Auroville is supposed to be a unity of cultures there are still some things that Indian Aurovilians can do that foreign Aurovilians can't, and vice versa." He goes on to explain that, for example, a local youngster has no problems taking up employment anywhere in India, whereas a foreigner is not allowed to work outside Auroville because of his Aurovilian status. On the other hand, a foreigner can go and work anywhere in Europe, potentially gaining more exposure and higher earnings, whereas a local youngster has to go through a rigorous bureaucratic process which is not always successful.

"There is extra pressure for local young Aurovilians because of the educational system in Auroville," he adds. "In India, if a youngster wishes to get a good job it is crucial that they have recognised certification. That's why most

of the Tamilians study either at Aikiyam and then Future School, or they travel to Pondicherry. Another of the main pressures on the kids here is that of keeping up the 'reputation' which Auroville has projected around the globe." One can't help but sympathize with the youngsters on this score.

Carissa had written, "In an interview regarding the youth's awareness of the underlying philosophical principles of Auroville, one of the individuals deeply involved in Future School remarked that this topic becomes, 'tricky with a lot of the teenagers because they hear, unfortunately, a lot of the adults saying, 'Mother said...' In Auroville we should...' And then what they see people doing is very different. And of course they see the hypocrisy, no?' It is no surprise, then, that bringing up such ideas for class discussion or mere conversation and reflection is met with a 'rolling of the eyes.'"

Both Jean-François and Mishi are surprised. "I have no idea whom she spoke to at the school," says Mishi. "However, it's true that the kids feel that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are used as an agenda to push things in a lot of ways," says Jean-François. "There is also an expectation that the youth should be angels, that they should be conscious just because they were born here, that they shouldn't party or make loud noise. The reality is that those who condemn them were also young once, many in the free era of the sixties. So, maybe there is room for a little more understanding."

Jean-François says that before 2000 the young and adults used to party together. "The problem is that now that the older generation is

generally not present at the parties, their imagination leads them to fantasize about what the kids are getting up to ... this comes from their own youthful experiences no doubt! The reality is, however, that the level of responsibility amongst the youngsters is quite high, it's quite decent."

He points out that the youth of Auroville are, on the whole, more mature than their counterparts in the West. They are better at participating when it comes to routine chores in their communities and it is rare to hear of any major disturbances. The youth are more critical, more challenging and more adaptable, especially in relation to their short and long term future than their counterparts elsewhere. This means that "those who are fortunate enough to travel adapt quickly and tend to do well," says Jean-François.

Carissa also wrote:

*Sadly, many young people in Auroville believe that their voices are silenced, that they do not stand a chance at really having a say in Auroville's decisions simply because they are not on the side of those who hold the power to make decisions. At the Residents Assembly Service's meeting with the youth, preparing for a City Planning Workshop, this frustration was voiced candidly. One of the individuals that attended, who has lived in Auroville since he was a small boy, commented, 'The old won't let go, they won't let the youth make their mistakes ...'. Another individual, who was born in Auroville, and was present at this meeting, stated, 'You can't sit in meetings if you don't have money. With money, you can sit in, suggest projects, give money to help manifest those projects, etc. It's unfair. Yet, to make money is taboo'.*

Jean-François says that the youth of Auroville feel neglected when it comes to development. "But there tends to be a lot of complaining. In actual fact the youth in Auroville have a proportionally larger spending power than in most places. You only need to look at the mobile phones and bikes to see this. Also, I've not yet seen the Auroville youth produce a written project. This is something that is required for anyone when they are looking for funding. I would say that it's either because they are not 100% sure of their projects or that some self-esteem or drive is missing. They would like everything to be handed to them. In that respect they are quite lazy. A few do manage but these are the ones who get out of the group and go it alone. 16-21 is a hard time for any youth and some are still influenced by the elder ones.

"What I have noticed, though, is that the new generation, those who are currently in that age group, are the kids to look out for, the ones to initiate change. These kids seem to have reached the acceptable mix required for unity. They are integrating the best of both East and West cultures, all by themselves. Because of this I hope to see my dream of the elimination of that special 'Tamil Aurovilian' caste," he says.

One wonders how the next generation of young Aurovilians will develop. However, you only need to look at what the current generation of young adults in Auroville are doing to see that the majority of those who left Auroville for some time, be it for studies or work experience, came back. These youngsters are now pioneering new communities and starting businesses and service units, and they are doing it with the true Aurovilian spirit. None of them seem to have lost the faith.

*Louise*

An abstract of Carissa's paper was first published in New Race: A Journal of Integral Studies, volume XI, issue 3 of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR), Pondicherry.

## The Auroville Volunteers, Internships and Study programme

**"Self-knowledge, growth, world of possibilities, surpassing myself, love vibration". "Very rich experience, in a new social, economic context". "I think Auroville is a university of the life"... These are some words of volunteers and students when asked to define their experience in Auroville.**

"The Auroville Volunteers, Internships and Study programme - AVIS in short - was created in 2002 to help individuals find a place and coordinate several university student exchange groups," says Dominique, who together with Shivaya, is responsible for AVIS.

"Auroville holds a strong attraction for students, researchers and professionals. The applicants' interests cover all work areas of Auroville, from eco-construction to rural development, green work, water, renewable energies and health, with a major concern about sustainability. A number of individuals, such as Indian students of architecture or world 'woofers,' contact Auroville units directly; many more go through the Auroville website and email us at study@auroville.org.in to find a work place for voluntary service."

Dominique has done in-depth investigations on the subject. "Two years ago, we analysed several years of AVIS archives to better understand this growing inflow of enthusiastic volunteers, teachers and students from all over the world. The number of foreign applications has increased from 74 in 2004 to 380 in 2009. In 2010 there has been a slowdown from abroad because of the restrictions on visas."

Is Auroville able to meet the expectations of these people? "Auroville has an incredibly rich and creative potential for transmitting and sharing its knowledge and experiments," says Dominique. "It is also a rich area of research. Few people are aware that in the last 25 years, more than 135 academic works, including theses and scientific publications, have been written about Auroville by graduates from 65 universities all over the world. But none of these works are available in Auroville! This means that a huge amount of very relevant information is unavailable to us because of a lack of coordination and awareness."

The function of AVIS is to manage the inflow of students and volunteers, assist them in their search for internships, voluntary services and academic research in Auroville, and give information on educational opportunities. AVIS organizes a 5 days orientation programme for around 15 volunteers every month, and keep records of all internships and voluntary services completed. It is no small work.

"I estimate that in 2009 Auroville hosted approximately 1,000 students, teachers and volunteers, many of them for short periods," says



Dominique at the AVIS desk

Dominique. "An unknown number of them just turn up and find their own place or are found roaming around with no real commitment. There should be a formal registration, with records in a central database, as a tool to monitor them. The AVIS database is not complete, as not all people come through us." The AVIS statistics show that in 2009, it placed 65 students and volunteers out of 368 requests (a success rate of 18 %); for the year 2010 so far, 75 placements were realised out of 185 applications (a success rate of 41 %). An arrangement has been made that the Guest Service deals with volunteers who stay for less

than a month in Auroville, while AVIS takes care of those who apply long in advance and want to stay for longer periods.

AVIS is developing closer contacts with student exchange programmes, such as the Living Routes programme or the programme of the University of Washington. "We are in the process of coordinating our work, resources and schedules," says Dominique. "For in hosting students and volunteers, we all encounter the same problems."

The problem of accommodation inevitably crops up first. "The student residences we have in Auroville are not really suitable to their needs," says Dominique. "A better infrastructure needs to be put in place. It will enable us to be proactive and solicit more partnerships with world educational institutions. One of the projects of AVIS is a campus called 'Cité Universitaire.' It will provide residences, reception facilities, administrative offices and study and work places. A request for a plot of

land in the International Zone is presently submitted to L'Avenir d'Auroville," says Dominique.

"For non-Indians, the visa issue is another difficulty. The majority of the students' applications (72%) come from abroad. AVIS helps them get the appropriate visa: we advise about the recommended type of visa and we ensure that they get a letter of invitation issued by the Working Committee."

Having been involved with AVIS for almost 2 years now, Dominique feels that she would like to see a change of strategy relating to volunteers. "There is at present a 'demand-driven' process: volunteers contact us, and we try to find a place. I wish

we had a more balanced situation, more of an 'offer-driven' one: we search for the people requested by Aurovilians. This can only be achieved in cooperation with the units. That's why we have started to systematically document the opportunities offered by the various Auroville services, units and projects. We are now working on a database of almost three hundred potential workplaces."

Another of Dominique's projects is developing a 'student policy.' "Actually all volunteers are here to learn from Auroville. There should be a 'student charter' containing guidelines, values and practicalities to which a student/volunteer and the hosting unit would commit, clarifying expectations about the material and non-material support. A past student wrote to us, 'I think that Auroville should describe more clearly what is offered and expected. I sometimes met students who were frustrated having to pay the monthly contribution for the stay in the community, while working the full day there. It would be a good idea to offer discounts for accommodation and food to those volunteers who commit for long stays.' Formalizing such a policy would facilitate the grant of a 'student visa' for every applicant and would contribute to make the educational vocation of Auroville more visible."

AVIS does a lot of office work. "We are laying the basis of the organization. It avoids misunderstandings when the expectations on both sides are clarified. When the AVIS team gets trained, it will also develop educational services for accompanying students during their stay. Aurovilians have become sensitive to our efforts and now refer to us more spontaneously." Dominique pauses to reflect. "The only way I can interpret our work is by referring to the Yoga. It is as if the Divine is forcing us to clarify our ways of functioning, to put more consciousness in what we are doing."

*In conversation with Dianna*

### "Everybody who has grown up here feels a strong connection to the Auroville spirit"

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and Sri Aurobindo, but if we are talking about our consciousness of ourselves and of our surroundings and, basically, how we connect to ourselves and to others, then I would say we are quite spiritual."

"I've often been told that as a youth I should know more about Auroville and what Mother and Sri Aurobindo said," says Sushant. "But we do try to understand the notion, the feeling, the general direction, in our attitudes and the way we live." Anandi adds, "I think the most important thing is to get to the root of what Mother meant and be able to make decisions from that perspective."

A recent article by a visiting researcher said that the Auroville youth had "lost faith in the faith", that

they had lost hope in the future of Auroville.

"I wonder who this researcher spoke to!" exclaims Nisha. "The way I see it the youth here are very open, very dynamic, so I think as long as we can keep this openness and don't become rigid Auroville can develop into the future." Vasanthi clarifies, "Auroville is more than just infrastructure; it's also the spirit of the community which lives within us."

"Auroville is not yet perfect," says Anandi, "but here there's an aspiration for a different kind of world. Once you've been in contact with that, going somewhere else is like taking a step back."

"I think all of us feel connected and want to come back," says Amba. "Whenever I am in

Germany I want to return, basically to see the progress which is happening here, even if it's only small. For example, the new roads make me happy. I want to be part of these changes." Sushant agrees. "I want to participate in moving Auroville forward. It's really hard to believe that Auroville might fail. We might not reach the ideal number or build the Galaxy but we'll still reach somewhere."

"It's a process," says Vasanthi. "There might not be the result that everyone expects but the best part is the journey. Everybody who has grown up here can feel a strong connection to the Auroville spirit and I don't think it is possible for us to lose that connection. We will always carry it within us."

*Alan*



## Entering the light

The meditation chambers in the petals were opened on February 21, 2007. Three design elements express the specific quality of each chamber: its colour, its mandala and the mosaic arrangement of the Agra stones on the wall of the corridor leading to the chamber. But change is in the air – literally.

On the 19th of January 1972, The Mother explained to Satprem the specific quality and colour of each of the 12 meditation rooms which architect Roger Anger wanted to create in the Matrimandir's twelve petals. [see box] Someone who enters a chamber should experience its specific quality on all levels – psychic, mental, vital and physical.

Auroville artist Shanta (Chantal Gowa) was responsible for the colours and the mandalas, the focal points, of the chambers. She began the work in 1992. Her first task was to find the right colour, the vibration of which should correspond to the chamber's quality. After various experiments it was decided to use natural pigments and paint the chambers in pure, strong colours. The result, she said at the time, was to create a 'colour bath,' which would give an 'immersion in colour'. Shanta also designed the geometric patterns of each chamber's mandala, which also indicates the chamber's specific quality.

Today, almost four years later, the work on the chambers has entered a new

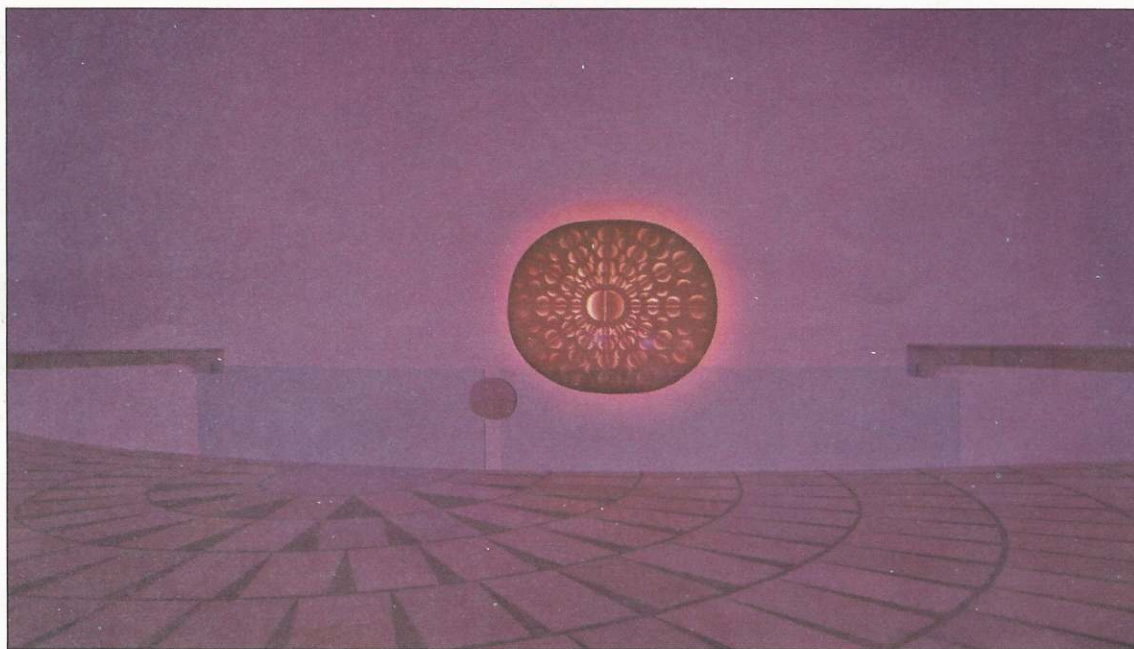


PHOTO: GIORGIO

Experimenting with colour in the Goodness meditation room

phase. "Some damage has occurred in a few of the chambers. Humidity has penetrated some walls and in another room we noticed that cockroaches had started to eat the paint," says Pierre Fourquez, one of the executives of the Matrimandir. "It was necessary to repair the damage. And this made us wonder if we couldn't do something different."

That 'something different' was to experiment with LED lights to obtain the required colour. "We had experimented with LED three years ago," says Shanta. "Roger Anger, Jacqueline and a small group of people were there. We projected LED light on to the coloured walls, but the result wasn't satisfactory and we dropped the idea."

"But as some chambers had now to be repainted, we decided instead on a new experiment," says Pierre. "In the Goodness chamber we removed all the paint using high-pressure water jets. After applying a waterproofing layer,

we then painted the entire room pure white. Then we started to play with LEDs, using green, red and blue modules. With them, we can create any colour we want."

"Goodness has now become our testing chamber," adds Shanta. "Our first experiment to get the reddish violet shade wasn't successful; the colour we got was too light. We then worked with more LED modules and it now seems we are getting what we want. We have also just started to find the other colours."

The result? "It is ethereal, another world," says Pierre. "You enter coloured light, coloured air – a transparent mass which yet you can see and experience," says Shanta. "You no longer enter a room with painted walls, but you enter the colour itself; you go within the membrane of the colour as it were, the walls drop away. The experience is very subtle. Also the white mar-

ble on the floor and the benches on the side take different shades."

"But we've just started," says Pierre. "The experiment will soon be extended to the mandalas – we want to see how they will look when they are lit by coloured LED light. Then we will experiment with LED to light the corridors. It will take some time, but I think we can expect some important changes."

"I am ready to jump in," says Shanta. "I experience the Matrimandir as a place which can evolve, not as a place that has been fixed. And I keep wondering if the change from the gross to the more subtle in the chambers isn't also a sign for us Aurovilians to make the jump to more subtle levels of consciousness. Could this be an indication that the time has come for each of us and for the Auroville collectivity to become lighter and more transparent?"

*In conversation with Carel*

### Quality and colour of each of the 12 meditation rooms

Sincerity (light blue),  
Humility (dark green),  
Gratitude (light green),  
Perseverance (light yellow),  
Aspiration (golden yellow),  
Receptivity (orange),  
Progress (vermillion),  
Courage (pure red),  
Goodness (reddish violet),  
Generosity (pure violet),  
Equality (blue violet),  
Peace (deep blue).

The first eight concern the attitude towards the Divine, and the last four towards humanity, commented The Mother.

## EDUCATION

## The Children's Land

Sadhana Forest, Auroville's frontier outpost settlement, has offered two and half acres to be used as 'The Children's Land'. It is the brain-child of a Portuguese Newcomer couple called Anisha and Tiago. They honed their skills as NGOs with ANIA (Asociacion para la Niñez y su Ambiente) in the Amazon Rain Forest for two years and then in North Africa. They also teach and sing African music, which gives them the chance to burst into song with the children at every possible opportunity.

Friday morning is the time for the kids from Aikyam School at New Creation to learn about digging and planting and caring for nature. They start their session by singing the Children's Song which gets them in the mood for their morning's work. Anisha then asks them what tools they will need and what is going to be planted today. "Mumpty, crowbar, wheelbarrow," shouts one boy and runs off to collect them. "Mango tree and chiku tree," yells another as he grabs a little tree in a plastic container. "Careful," says Tiago. "That little tree is from the Botanical Gardens and is three years old." Carrying their trees and equipment they troop out to the almost barren land covered with small silvery acacia trees.

"Look at that tree we planted last week," says Anisha, pointing to a chewed-looking shrub. "The village cows and goats come and eat them so now we have to make a fence to protect them. It is a big job to circle two and half acres of land but it is absolutely necessary."

"Different schools come out here every morning," explains Anisha. "We receive many kids from the government schools, Auroville schools and the villages around Sadhana Forest. We want to create a place where the children learn to care for trees by actually preparing the ground and making the compost themselves. We want them to feel it is their particular land and eventually they will make the decisions about it for themselves. Under the guidance and with the support of the adults," she adds.

"A previous group made this volcano-style planting she says," pointing to a perfect circle of scooped-out red earth. "The dug-out soil is piled in the centre, and then a hole is dug for the new little tree." "Let's fill it with water now," Tiago shouts and the boys run off to get water from a nearby mud pool. This is much more fun than getting it from a water tower. They stand fascinated as the hole fills up with water, then start digging out the next one. Everything is done very precisely – the measuring, the scooping out of the soil, the patting it hard so it will contain the water. The sense of involvement is immense. "Back to the first one. Let's plant the tree now the water has settled." Reverently the little mango is lowered into its hole, a song is sung to honour it, then the kids choose a name for it and there is much clapping.

To see such enthusiasm and teamwork is a joy. They are not only learning about planting trees but about working, caring and respecting each other. Saskia, one of the accompanying teachers, divides the kids into two teams and asks each one in turn to tell the five ways of good working. She gets an enthusiastic response: "To follow all the steps properly; to do things with quality and care; to work as a team; to finish the work properly; and, lastly, to sing the finishing song as well as we can."

### MAKING A VOLCANO GARDEN

This technique uses a minimum amount of water and is very low maintenance. A circle of one metre diameter is marked on the ground then soil dug out to the depth of about half a metre inside the perimeter. The dug out soil is piled up in the centre of the area, patted hard to prevent it from collapsing, then a deep hole made in the centre so the tree's roots will be encouraged to go downwards. It is then filled with water which is allowed to soak in, and later filled with cow dung and leaves soaked in water, cow urine, human urine and followed by a layer of dry leaves to retain the moisture. It is called a "volcano garden" as it resembles a volcano.



A song is sung to honour the little mango tree

It is noon. A sense of weariness descends as the sun is very hot. When all the tools have been carefully returned to their correct places the boys rush off to the mud waterhole and splash and scream with joy till the bus leaves.

"Every Monday at four p.m. we ride on bicycles to the nearby villages with our volunteers and anyone who likes to join us," explains Tiago. "We are very open to receive everybody who wants to participate in the project. On the weekends our neighbours come to visit us and kids from the Village Action projects at Thamarai and Kottakarai cultural centres.

It is a great and very informal way of making a connection with them and there must be about two hundred children involved now. Sometimes they come with their mothers, which is nice. The village children love to help us take care of the garden, and we play games and get out the drums and dance with them. This is a very happy place and we are grateful to be part of it."

*Dianna*

## In brief

### Residents' gatherings

In consultation with the Residents' Assembly Service, the Auroville Council plans to revive the Residents Gatherings that started a year ago and have since lapsed. These gatherings are meant to ensure the possibility of feedback and discussion on the work and directions of our different working groups.

### Income tax exemptions renewed

The Government of India has renewed the income tax exemptions on donations to Auroville. Indian donors may now claim 100% income tax exemption on donations for scientific research and for social science research. For more information contact the Auroville Working Committee at: [workingcom@auroville.org.in](mailto:workingcom@auroville.org.in)

### Matrimandir gardens

The Auroville Council tries to solve the Matrimandir Garden imbroglio where two groups stand on opposite positions, one holding that late Roger Anger, the other that the community, has the authority to decide. Weekly meetings have started to find a way to agree and develop a policy for the future.

### Auroville Population Register 2010

The Auroville Council, in collaboration with the Human Resources Team and the Residents Service, have started updating the Auroville population records regarding the place of residence and the work activity of all the Aurovilians on the Masterlist. Volunteers will be collecting data during three months.



### Drummer Boy

Auroville's seven-year-old student Keshava kick-started the percussion section "Rhythms of India" playing the tabla at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games 2010 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

### AV-Online store tree planting report

Auroville's Online Store commitment to plant one tree for each order received has resulted in the planting of 2050 seedlings during the last 1½ years.

### Auroville Safety Volunteers

From November 1 onwards the Auroville Safety Volunteers (AVSV), a group of over 60 Aurovilians and Newcomers, will help secure the Auroville area by patrolling along several routes from 6 to 10 pm every day.

### Inform before you dig

The infrastructure services of Auroville have collectively set up an 'Inform Before You Dig' service to ensure that underground water, electricity and telephone lines are installed and mapped in a coordinated manner and are not disrupted by unauthorised diggers.

### AV Marathon 2011

The fourth Auroville Marathon will be held on Sunday, February 13, 2011, with 10 km, Half Marathon and Full Marathon events. For more info contact the Auroville Marathon organising team via [marathon.auroville.com](http://marathon.auroville.com).



# Creativity and reconnection

**B**rother and sister, Balu and Manju have lived in Auroville most of their lives and a number of family members are Aurovillian. Their father is known to many old-time Aurovillians as 'Matrimandir Ramalingam'. He was one of the two children who laid the foundation stone of the Matrimandir and later worked there for over 30 years. Their mother has worked at the Information Centre for over 20 years and their family home is in 'Nursery'.

Due to the family's desire for them to have recognised certifications, plus a desire from both to pursue certain career paths, Manju and Balu spent time studying outside Auroville. So how was that and how, both being under 30 years old, did they manage to create two successful businesses here?

## Manju – Creator of 'Ishta'

Manju studied at Transition school up to 5th Standard and then travelled to Pondicherry daily for three years in order to obtain the necessary certification which would allow her to pursue her studies. She says, though, the Pondicherry State Board Exams were quite rigorous as they relied on the traditional rote method of learning, not leaving any room for interpretation. This was in complete contrast to the way of learning in Auroville, which actually encourages students to question and understand concepts rather than revise parrot-fashion. She ended up repeating 8th Standard, to include Hindi, in Chennai and took the alternative Central Board State Examinations (CBSE) exam which allows for more critical thinking. Following this she went on to study at Kalakshetra School of Dance, Chennai as she is passionate about the traditional Bharatha Nthyam dance. Her love of anything creative veered towards fashion and she successfully completed a 3 year Degree in Fashion and Apparel Design in Bangalore.

In the meantime she met her Aurovillian husband, Selvam. They married after she completed her studies. Then they went to the US for six months to live and work in Arcosanti, Texas, before returning to Auroville to firmly set down their roots. They have two young children.

"Our family's house in Nursery was only two rooms when Balu and I were young. Originally it had a tile roof, but the mangoes kept falling and breaking them so dad put up keet instead," Manju recalls fondly. "It was quite a squeeze in the house. I lived there right up until I got married." Manju says that she had lots of friends while studying at Transition School but later, when she shifted to Pondicherry and then on to college, these friendships somehow lapsed. "It hurt quite a lot actually," she says. "I would come back to Auroville on the weekends and call my friends to keep in touch. But I realised after some time that it was always me who was doing the calling. I began to feel like an outsider. A lot of the kids I grew up with had gone abroad too. Even after I came back to live here with my husband, people who had been here for only a year would ask me where I was from, they had no idea I had grown up here. Only one good friend remained close during that time, that was Blanchefleur. Her mother Paulette was quite strict and I was the only one she was allowed to move around with in the early days. Blanche was quite indianized despite being from the West."

## Starting Ishta

Manju spent a lot of time during holidays helping at Upasana. "Uma helped me a lot and even offered me a job," says Manju, "but, while I felt I should get some experience, I also wanted to have creative freedom. I didn't want to develop someone else's ideas. Those around me encouraged me to do something by myself. That's when I decided to start 'Ishta'." The business started small, with one helper, Kalpana from Irumbai Village, who is still happily working with Manju now. The first outfits were mainly sleeveless cotton tops emblazoned with intricate needlework designs. The garments were made by a local tailor and the embroidery and sari work hand-stitched by Manju and Kalpana. The detail in the decorative work is spectacular. Manju says that this work is more important to her than the shape of the garments.

Manju would take her samples to the Auroville boutiques to sell. Later on, as the popularity of her products grew, her garment sales expanded into Pondicherry. She now has an exclusive range in 'Casablanca' and specializes in clothes for newborns. Her product range has gone from tops to include skirts, laptop bags and shopping and evening bags and they are even experimenting with jewellery. Most of the ideas come

from Manju, but she heartily welcomes volunteers who wish to experiment. Growth in demand meant a growth in staff. The business now runs from rented premises in Irumbai and has 10 employees. Manju is waiting for a suitable setting to develop a workshop in Auroville but adds, "The motivation for the business comes not so much from making money but more from the happiness I get from creating something unique. My husband has been extremely supportive. There was a point in the early days when money was tight and I thought I should give up, but he sat with me and we realised that I needed to recheck the value of the materials I was using to balance the sale price of the finished goods. That's the problem when you're not really focused on profit," she says smiling.

Manju says that despite the business being successful, she has not been very visible. It was at the recent World Bamboo Day Fair that she displayed her latest innovation – shopping bags made from recycled TetraPaks! "So many people came to the stall and asked about the bags and the company that made them," she says, "people I knew well. They thought I was just managing the stall," she chuckles. "When I told them the business was my creation they were really surprised. Lots of them told me that they had been buying my designs for years and never knew it was me who made them.."



The TetraPak bags

## The TetraPak bags

What about the fabulous bags, where did the idea come from? Manju explains that having always been one to try and make something out of nothing, she had seen a stack of the TetraPaks piling up at Eco Service. The only way to dispose of these cartons was to burn them. She began to think that there must be some way they could be recycled, hence the design for the bags. "At first it was hard to get the workers enthusiastic," she says, "as the cartons had to be cut and cleaned. Quite often there were worms inside and they smelt really bad." The bags are beautifully crafted and fully-lined. Each large bag uses around 20



Manju in her workshop

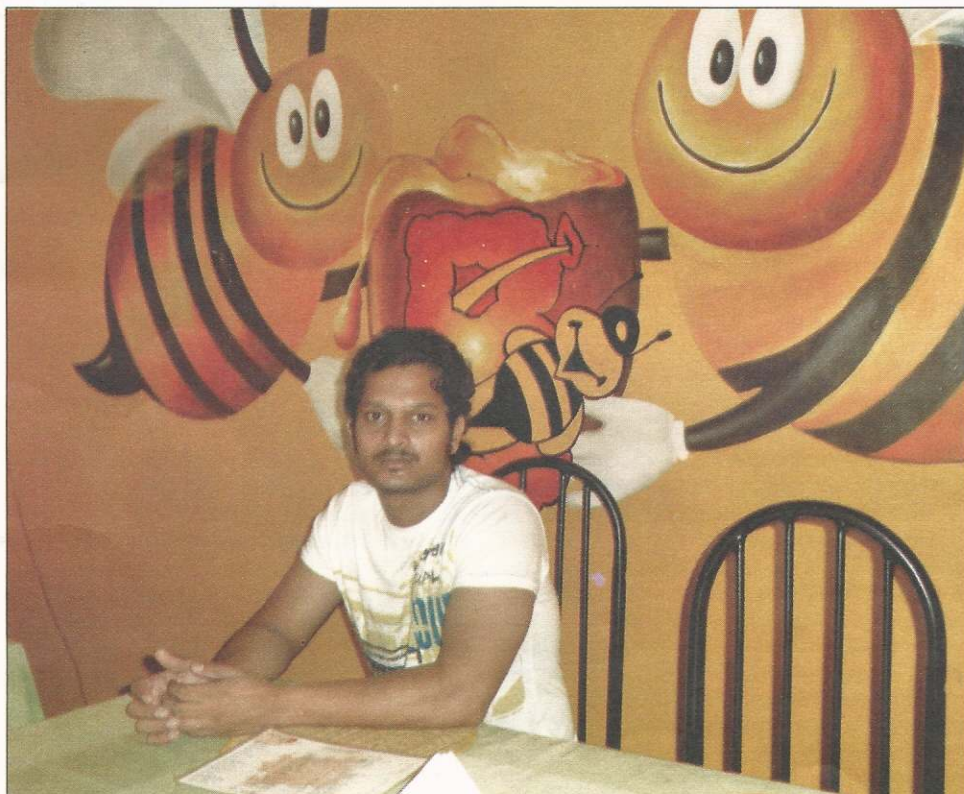
milk or juice cartons. The prototypes took a while to make and were quite expensive, as she had to encourage her family to buy and drink lots of juice and milk. At around Rs. 80 per pack it didn't come cheap. Once the design was finalized she was able to procure the waste cartons by the kilo. "Some people have said that the bags are quite expensive," Manju adds, "but a lot of materials are used and each bag takes quite a while to make, so I feel completely justified. Plus, it's all in a good cause."

So how does the future look for 'Ishta'? Manju explains that the main problem is that most shops take goods on a consignment basis only. She is hoping that she will be able to market her products better so that she can get some bulk orders which, in turn, will free up capital to aid expansion.

## Balu – Honey Bee Restaurant

Walk into the 'Honey Bee' restaurant in Kuilapalayam village and the first things that strike you are the bright yellow walls and amazingly colourful bee murals. It's clean and cool and the tablecloths and fabric place mats add a 'homely' feel. Balu is grinning at the thought of being interviewed. When asked about the murals he proudly says that he painted them himself. The restaurant offers a wide range of culinary treats to suit all palates, from the East to West. Chicken is cooked alfresco on the grill and the garlic butter roti is a dish to die for!

Balu's story is much the same as his sister Manju's when he shares his experience of having spent time studying outside Auroville. From the age of 9-14 years, Balu travelled daily to Pondicherry for school. His days would start early, as he first commuted to Kottakarai to take the bus, and ended late. During this period he lost touch with Auroville as his remaining time was spent catching up with the family and studying. At the



Balu in the Honey Bee restaurant

age of 15 he joined Last School (now New Era Secondary School) in the hope of reconnecting. "It was tough," he says, "For Indians, a recognised educational certificate is really important, it's a necessity if you want to pursue further education or get a job and that's why I had gone to Pondicherry to study. At that time, the schools in Auroville didn't provide any certification. Then, because I had been studying at a Tamil-medium school and lost touch with my friends here I had forgotten most of my English. The kids used to make fun of me and say that I couldn't possibly have grown up in Auroville because I couldn't speak English." Balu explains that he felt really hurt at times as he constantly had to reaffirm his Auroville status. The worst moment, he says, was when he was refused entry to Repos beach by the security person there. In front of his teenage friends he was asked to prove he was Aurovillian.

## The invisible family

"It's been difficult. I mean, my family have been Aurovillian since before I was born. My dad was 12 years old and helping his grandmother, who had a tea stall at the Matrimandir site, when he was called over to help lay the foundation stone along with a young foreign girl. We have so many photos at home of those times, yet no-one has ever asked to see them or to use them even though we've told many they exist. I've felt at times that our family has been quite invisible. My dad really connected with the Mother and if ever he has a problem he goes to the Matrimandir Chamber to ask her advice. He has always been adamant that at least one member of our family should work full-time for her. He worked at Matrimandir for over 30 years. My mother still works at the Information Centre", he says. "She works six days a week and even on our traditional holidays. I feel quite sad that, considering the number of volunteers within Auroville, no one has ever offered to relieve her so she can spend our traditional holidays with the family. Whenever there's a special occasion like Diwali she usually calls us a few times during the day to see what we are doing and what we are eating..." he pauses, "Auroville is not what it was when we grew up as kids. Everyone was kind and helpful then. Now it seems that no one will do something just from the heart, there is always an underlying expectation of something being required in return. I hope that this will change, we need to get back that essence of togetherness."

The restaurant was opened in April this year. Why did Balu think to open a restaurant here?

"Actually, I had been in Chennai for 4 years pursuing my acting career and just felt that I really needed to come back home and reconnect," says Balu, "I didn't have any experience but I just knew that I wanted something that would bring me closer to the people. The restaurant has definitely served that purpose and the response has been great. I'm getting to meet so many Aurovillians now, new and old. I just love being able to sit and talk with them, especially the old-timers. People now recognise me in the street and say 'hi', that's a great relief. I never opened the restaurant to make money, the fact that we break even is a bonus. But, I'm really happy and I feel at this point that I could continue doing this forever. I'm glad to be home!"

Louise



Since the age of 15 I have had a dream which is now revealing itself to me in my life in Auroville. I spent many years reading Sri Aurobindo, waiting, writing and thinking. I always had this feeling that I had a strong connection with him – his lack of compromise appealed to me. I felt I understood his ideas on evolution. My wife Annabelle was the only person I could talk to about this feeling. In Europe people made me feel I was wrong, or even going crazy.

I grew up in France, then travelled to many countries in Asia looking for the place where The Great Adventure could begin. Annabelle and I even lived for a year in New Caledonia where we stayed with the tribes in the hills and on the beach.

I then went to live in London and studied graphics and communications. I became fascinated with computers. Later I even discovered Auroville through the internet!

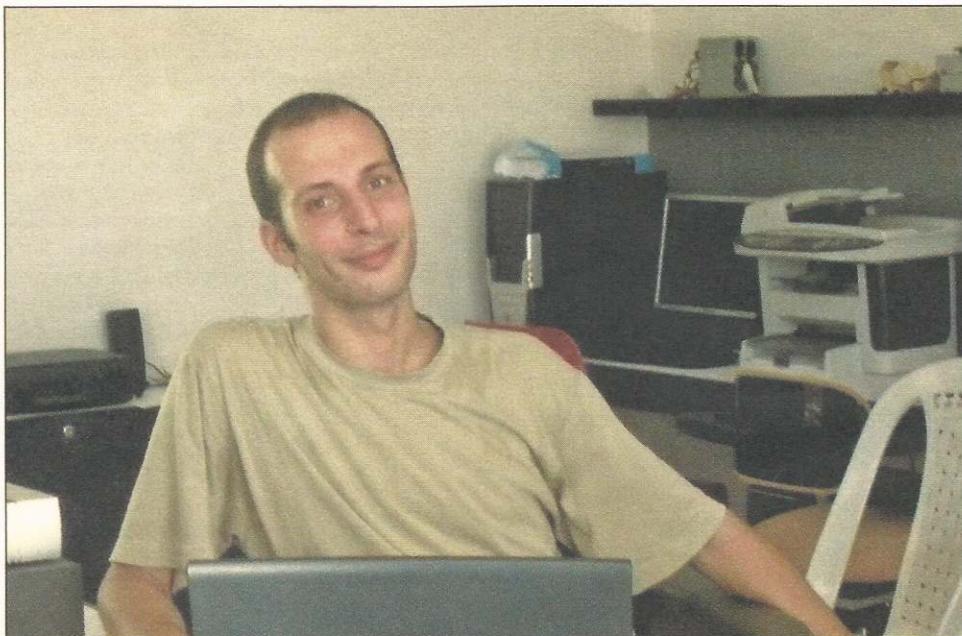
I returned to France and set up my own software company. Three years ago I came across a page on Auroville Radio advertising for a person with my skills. I immediately sent them my resumé and within twenty-four hours they replied by e-mail saying "Come when you like." I was very touched by their response and arrived in Auroville at the end of that month. It all happened so naturally and smoothly.

That was 2008 and I came alone. I came back the next year with my nine year old son who is extremely happy here. I take him to Deepanam School in the mornings on my motorbike and he sings in a loud voice as we ride through the forest. This is the first time he enjoys going to school; in France he always felt stressed by the heavy discipline. As you can imagine, this makes me very happy. My wife will join us when her work contract expires. She is also involved and excited by computers but will probably teach French to the young children when she comes to live here.

When I came to India I immediately felt at home. India was a sort of consolidation of everywhere I had been and everything I had done so far

## Computers are a step in evolution

Uriel speaks about his life and ideals for the future.



Uriel in the Kolam computer centre at Aikyam school

in my life. I love India and I feel a special affinity with Tamil Nadu. When my life settles down a little I hope to learn Tamil as I want to involve the local people in my dream.

We are living in Aspiration which I like as I feel it is a real community. The communal system of living works very well, especially the kitchen where we share the responsibility for the cooking. We always manage to provide good and interesting food on a very low budget. This simplicity combined with efficiency gives me time to do my work which gives me enormous satisfaction and great joy.

I am now the administrator and teacher at the Kolam Computer Centre in Aikyam School in

New Creation community. We offer courses in computing for children from three Auroville schools and the ages range from eight to fifteen years old. We also offer vocational training to adults from Auroville and the surrounding villages. At the request of the Seniors Group we are offering a computer class for seniors, so we are now teaching people from eight to eighty years. I am also involved with Aurovilian websites and computer technology for the library, schools and Auroville radio. So far the funding has come from outside donations and the European Commission.

I believe computer technology is a step in evolution. We are given help with these tools to make certain things, such as the exchange of information,

easier and faster for mankind. In the future these will be superseded by more refined technology and meanwhile it is Auroville's responsibility to its young people to create a healthy attitude towards this new way of communication.

I want to support everyone's access to computers, regardless of age, income or education, and develop open-source software like Linux. Computers should be adapted to the users' needs, not the reverse.

My dream is to create a Media and Communication Centre in Auroville where Aurovilians and students from Tamil Nadu can obtain degrees in computer technology. It would also be a research centre for technicians, researchers and scientists. This would lead to the creation of a Super Computer/Calculator for Auroville, the sort used by large business organisations and research centres like NASA which could be accessed anywhere in Auroville and would be a technological tool for building a city. It would be a very big computer that could provide hi-resolution physics simulations and real-time Auroville mapping system. It is primarily a big educational project. It would be costly – I estimated around 2 crores – but it would bring specialists and students together to help the Auroville development plan and they would bring a lot of expertise and energy.

I have approached L'Avenir and am starting fund raising. The architect's drawings are completed. We could start the project in one year and finalise it within five years. Kolam Computer Centre is a testing place for this, the very first small step.

This is my yoga. It is what I have dreamt of for many years and now it is happening. Everything is absolutely clear for me and I feel it is all unfolding in front of me.

I also do Night Watch at and around the Matrimandir and feel utterly happy to spend the night there in front of the golden globe. I find this a perfect balance to the often hectic life of computers. I have so much energy – I don't know where it comes from. It can only be a gift from Mother.

*In conversation with Dianna*

## "The most important work is an invisible one"

Jo talks about a special service she is offering at the Town Hall

Some weeks ago, those Aurovilians who work in the Town Hall found a card upon their desks. "You are welcome to visit Jo on the roof of the Multimedia Centre for a special time of relaxation with ten minutes massage on a chair. In an instant you will feel great, sparkly and aware of your beautiful being." It was a tempting invitation. Since then, about thirty people have been regularly experiencing the 'ten minute chair'. But who is Jo, and what lies behind this initiative?

Jo and her partner, Taj, came to Auroville three years ago. She had been practising Chinese acupressure for many years in Australia and France. "My real interest, however, has been to study how the mind functions and to find ways of going beyond it. For many years I followed basically Buddhist practices and, later, Vipassana. Eventually I thought I had it all together. I had understood that happiness is simply a matter of letting go of unhappiness."

"But three years ago, when we came to Auroville something happened. We were house-sitting in a place which had all the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, whom I knew nothing about, and I started to read these books. From that moment I considered myself their disciple. Why? Because I realized that what they teach and what they had done so far was beyond what I had thought possible. For example, they spoke about the descent of the divine as a practical way of living. Also, I had always understood and accepted human unity as an inner truth, but I had never before considered it as an outer, practical goal. I understood it now as something that could be worked towards, even though it seemed to me to be a huge challenge, almost an impossibility."

At the same time Jo felt confused and discouraged. Mother had said that Auroville would be the place of a "concrete human unity" but the energy Jo felt in Auroville was the contrary of that. "I felt a lot of fear, suspicion, in people and an impulse to reproduce what they already know, which is the past, and nothing to do with what Mother wanted. It was as if people wanted to protect themselves from the task Mother had given them. But then I saw that if you want to deeply understand something you want to do, you first have to experience the contrary of that. Later, I also understood that deep down in Auroville, at an energetic level, there is a goldmine full of potential for human unity. When you are sincere, when you have faith, there is an integral consciousness here that supports you against all the odds. This enabled me to accept the present situation and accept that this is the place I should be."

Before coming to Auroville, Jo had tended to live a very protected life, "a little bit like a monk's". But this started to become too comfortable from a spiritual point of view and she felt she needed a new challenge. "Auroville was that challenge". At first she was given the opportunity to open a small kitchen at Saracon, Kottakarai, where Taj and some other Aurovilians were working. "When I first visited Saracon I found there was no real relation between the people who worked there, it was mainly male energy, very goal-oriented. So the idea behind providing daily lunches was to create an atmosphere of communication, an occasion when people could be at ease with each other and when friends and visitors could drop in. And it works fantastically; it is absolutely what Saracon needed."

After two years, assured that the kitchen would continue to run well, Jo left and started haircutting at Nandini in the afternoons. "But it wasn't enough. I wanted to do something more, but what? Then I had this idea. I realized that people working in important groups or services in the Town Hall often experience incredible stress. They receive all this negative energy from frustrated Aurovilians but don't know how to create a fountain of positive energy to offset this. They are caught in a closed circle and need healing. As a trained practitioner in the Chinese tradition of acupressure I have experience of working with healing energies, so I decided I would offer a daily massage service at the Town Hall to see if it would help."

Her workplace now is a chair under a tree next to the Town Hall, facing the Matrimandir. Jo explains the procedure. "First of all, I ask the people who come for this service to look at the Matrimandir and open themselves to the energy of that. Then I ask them to close their eyes and be inside their bodies. When I work on them I also close my eyes, so I am in the same space as they are: their space and my space become one. Then, if they have difficulties I can give them inner support. The goal is for the mind to become quiet. Initially, this is difficult for most people, which is why my support is there. But with practice they will be



The ten minute massage

able to access this space themselves even without closing their eyes, and they will be able to be quiet and centred even in the midst of noise, or when confronted with a very difficult task for which they don't feel they have the energy. If they can quieten their mind, they can get all the energy they need in one minute."

Jo said she took up this work primarily because she wanted to do something for human unity, which is her abiding passion. But how does it contribute to human unity? "If a person manages

to quieten their mind, it changes their whole vibration and this vibration is communicated to the people around them: energetically, everything works like this. In this way, they can give inner support to someone who might be upset or agitated. The biggest, most important work you do in your life is an invisible task. The effect of making important decisions or putting up buildings is very small, very slow, compared to the effect, both upon oneself and others, of changing one's own vibration. And this is my work, my service. This is how I take forward my understanding of the teaching of The Mother."

Jo has been offering ten minute massages at the Town Hall for a few months now. Many people come time and again. Has she noticed or have they mentioned any changes within them? Jo explains it is too early for long-term change and explains the process which many of them go through. "For the first one or two sessions they feel very good. They have a feeling of release, of joy. But the joy they are experiencing is actually my joy, because they have not yet done the work for themselves, and the pleasure they feel is primarily an emotional pleasure generated by the mind, whereas what I am offering is something which is true beyond the mind and emotions. So what happens after a few massages is they start to feel bored or uneasy. In fact, this is the mind saying 'Stop doing this, I don't want you to be the master, now this game is no longer interesting'. It can be painful because the work I do is a cleaning work; there is nothing glorious about it. At this point, some people will stop coming. Those who stay with me will be those who have determined to take responsibility for stilling their mind."

This may take longer and it will involve some considerable changes – you cannot do this for real if you do not change your lifestyle – but it will be worth it.

"Achieving an 'actual' human unity is a huge challenge. Will I witness it myself?...I think the only realistic path is to keep working for it. I am 55 years old and I choose to use my time doing something worthwhile which, for me, means cultivating inner light each moment".

*From an interview with Alan*



## Preparing for the miraculous

Aurovillian Georges Van Vrekhem, the well-known author and exponent of Integral Yoga, recently gave four talks in Auroville's Town Hall. Six more talks are planned at Savitri Bhavan in November-December.

“My heart is causing me problems,” Georges says, slightly panting. “This first series of talks at the Town Hall really took it out of me and now I have to take rest. But I want to give the second series of talks, because I like to explain my way of studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and how I try to live according to them.”

We are sitting in his small house, surrounded by hundreds of books. They illustrate the wide range of his interests. “I spend years studying before I embark on writing another book,” he explains. “It has become clear to me that, if you read only Sri Aurobindo, you cannot truly understand him, for you miss the wealth of his references and the depth of his erudition. Who can read profitably, say, *The Renaissance of India* or *The Ideal of Human Unity* without any knowledge of the historical facts and circumstances mentioned in them? The same goes for the writings of The Mother. Their work relates to the whole world, and one has to acquire something of that global spirit to understand them. It was not for nothing that Sri Aurobindo was born in the East and the Mother in the West, he afterwards thoroughly absorbing the Western culture and she the Eastern. Their vision encompassed the world – and many other worlds.”

### Studying Sri Aurobindo

He continues, “I approach the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by studying the times in which they lived, the historical background. For instance, to know the significance of the Mother's relation with the ‘Cosmic Movement’ in Paris and Tlemcen, one has to know that Max Théon's thinking was mainly kabbalistic, and that his wife was an extremely skilful occultist – which is how the Mother, at that time, encountered the ‘archetype’ of the Supramental Being (the subject of one of my talks).”

“It is also necessary to study the wider historical happenings. Take, for example, the statements of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on their work and interventions in the Second World War – ‘the Mother's war,’ as Sri Aurobindo so significantly called it – and about the *asuric* influence behind Hitler and his associates. I wanted to try and find out if this was somewhere corroborated. It led to my studies on Hitlerism and the environment in which it originated. This became the subject of my book *Hitler and His God*, the result of five years of exhausting but rewarding work. It was exhausting, for the study of hundreds of books on the war brought me constantly, for months and even for years, into contact with an extremely negative atmosphere. It was rewarding because, though one cannot physically ‘prove’ Sri Aurobindo's or The Mother's interventions in the war, I was able to show that the historical facts corroborated their statements. They said explicitly that Hitler acted under a demonic influence, – a being The Mother called the Lord of Falsehood, one of the four great *Asuras*. The study also gave me more insight into what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have done for humanity in that period.”

Georges' approach to studying Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is still rather uncommon. “I do not think that much research is being done in this way,” he says. “The knowledge of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has become more or less standardized. Present day commentaries are still very much based on the writings of the first *sadhaks*. These writings are, of course, immensely interesting as direct testimony, but they are also limited, as those *sadhaks* had for the most part only access to Sri Aurobindo's writings published in the *Arya*, and to the The Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*.”

“We have now much more material to study: Sri Aurobindo's *Letters*, the series of articles *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* written in 1950, his *Savitri*, his *Record of Yoga* and *Autobiographical Notes*, his early writings assembled in *Essays Divine and Human* and *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, and so on. There are also the *Questions and Answers* of The Mother and her private conversations in the last years of her avatic Yoga, many of which have been recorded and published as *Mother's Agenda*, and much more. With the wealth of all this material at our disposal, we should explore

the Aurobindonian vision as having a direct impact on an evolving world and as a work in progress rather than as a dogmatic system.”

### Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary

“Sri Aurobindo's activities as a revolutionary, as leading freedom fighter and an extremist in politics belong to his standard biography. But he was even more a revolutionary in spirituality, and this is less realized.”

“You see, when Sri Aurobindo agreed with Paul Richard to publish the monthly magazine *The Arya*, he had studied and put into practice the wisdom of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* and he had reinterpreted the *Vedas* and compared the wisdom of India with the other great wisdom traditions in East and West. But at the time he had also developed his own Integral Yoga based on the scriptures and his own experience.”

“In *The Arya* he not only formulated his own new spirituality but he had also to show why this

writer. This experience, to come into contact with the ‘mind’ of Sri Aurobindo, is sufficient reason to read his words, especially the *mantric* formulations in *Savitri* – not to mention the beauty and grace of every line. Yet Georges has concerns about some of the reasons why *Savitri* is read.

“All important religious movements have their story, their myth,” he says. “Such a story explains to the followers their religion is the only true one, that their God is the only true God, and that their acceptance of that religion is the only right thing to do. It is quite interesting to follow the construction of such stories whether in Christianity – where, for example, Christ was declared to be immaculately conceived and to have resurrected after his crucifixion – in Buddhism, or in any other religion.”

“The Aurobindonian movement does not yet have its myth. However, there are indications that *Savitri* might become the Aurobindonian myth, using the elements of the story which is about

adherents of Satprem as having been written against him. They have treated me for years in a way which was anything but Aurobindonian or Aurovillian, and even now ensure that my books are not for sale in the Auroville bookshops. Another problem I have is with my book *Overman – The Transitional Being Between the Human and the Supramental*, which I rate as one of my most important writings. The book deals with the intermediary being between the human species and the supramental species, which The Mother called in French ‘surhomme’, and which I literally and correctly translated as ‘overman.’ Though the book is completely based on Sri Aurobindo's *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* and the Mother's *Questions and Answers*, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram censored it. Was it because of the term ‘overman’? I was never informed of this decision, nor was I told by whom the decision was made or why, so I have never had the opportunity to defend my case.

“Indeed, one feels very vulnerable as an author, especially as a foreigner who lives in India by the grace of a Residential Permit. When I came here, the Mother herself, with that winged signature of hers, signed my application papers. I am now seventy-five and still have a long list of writing projects. *Vita brevis ...*”

### Auroville

Has Georges, who has been living in Auroville for more than 30 years, any views on Auroville's development? “Auroville is on the right track. In fact, it cannot but be on the right track, for it is the Mother's work. What we see as ‘our’ responsibility is, in the best case, no more than goodwill. She is the only one really responsible, for if it is by the Divine that Auroville has been founded, it is the Divine who will (necessarily must) look after it day by day. Otherwise there would be no reason to be here.”

“Those who come to participate in the Auroville adventure come to do the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This participation is yoga: not a traditional yoga of escape but an Integral Yoga of transformation. This is not a New Age goal of a happy encampment on Earth where all are smiling, dancing and loving, locked in an embrace of fulfilled brotherhood. Neither is this a path that resembles the spirituality of the past. This yoga is a spirituality without ritual.”

“Most Aurovillians are so deeply involved with their daily chores and problems that they often forget the greatness of that which they have chosen, or by which they have been chosen. I believe that in most people here there is what Sri Aurobindo called ‘the God-touch’ and that is what matters. As I said in one of my talks: we here are all seekers on the quest for the Beautiful, the Good and the True. The enterprise, which has built a Matrimandir in its midst, is flourishing against all odds and under extremely difficult circumstances. Being the utopia of all utopias (divinization!), Auroville is still there and growing.”

In conversation with Carel

For audio-recordings of Georges' talks, contact [aurovillerradio@auroville.org.in](mailto:aurovillerradio@auroville.org.in). Video-recordings are available from [sergey@wisdomsplendour.org](mailto:sergey@wisdomsplendour.org)



Georges during one of his talks in the Town Hall

new spirituality was valid and how it related to and differed from the existing religions and philosophies – most of which are still dominating the life and thought of India and, outside India, are usually still regarded as the core of Indian spirituality. Just see how ardently he wrote against all fossilized ‘religions of the book’ in the very first paragraphs of his *Essays on the Gita*, and in so many other places. When reading his writings on those ancient texts, it seems to me that he has the greatest respect for their intrinsic values, which he has applied in his own Yoga, but that he wants them reformulated within the framework of his revolutionary vision.

“Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have often spoken about their own path as ‘a dangerous adventure in the unknown’, which was the topic of another of my talks. They, after all, took it upon themselves to bring humanity to an entirely new level. This involved many steps forwards and quite a few backwards. That ‘adventure in the unknown’ also brought many doubts, and it is no wonder that Sri Aurobindo once wrote to a disciple that no one had had such wrenching doubts as himself. And we know from *The Agenda* a little bit of what The Mother went through in the process of transformation of her body. A ‘dangerous adventure in the unknown’ indeed.”

“When they left their bodies, the next step of the adventure, the result of the descent of the Supramental consciousness, went into full swing. As the Mother said: those who have the eyes will see. She asked for people to develop the capacity of attention, for, as she said, ‘this is the time of the unexpected’ – the effectuation of the Aurobindonian vision towards the transitional species.” I called another of my talks ‘Preparing for the miraculous’ – preparing for this great adventure The Mother invited her children to.

### Savitri

The tendency to develop a dogmatic Aurobindonian system, says Georges, can be seen in the way some people approach *Savitri*.

Of all Sri Aurobindo's works, *Savitri* is the one that is probably most widely read. Its reading was recommended by the Mother herself. A book, she said, is an occult object, for when reading it one comes into contact with the mind of the

godlike figures acting against a mythical background. This was the reason that I showed, in an extensive article, that the Aswapathy in *Savitri* was not the same as the Aswapathy in the *Mahabharata*, but Sri Aurobindo himself communicating the unprecedented phases of his Yoga and explorations of “the world stair,” the gradations of the manifestation. The reality about the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is much more fascinating than any myth.”

### Georges' books

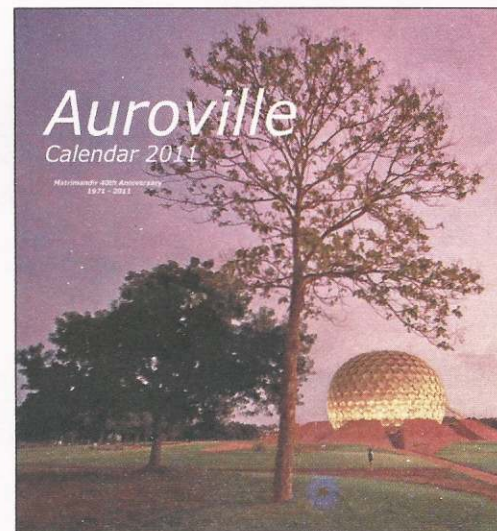
Apart from his translations into Dutch of selections from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and of several books by Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Satprem, Georges has now six books to his credit, with *Beyond Man* having been translated into several languages. A seventh book, *Evolution, Religion, and the Unknown God*, is about to be printed.

“Writing is an uphill battle,” he confesses. “You have no idea how often I have asked Sri Aurobindo and the Mother why I had to do this kind of job. For being an author implies taking stands and that has its consequences. *Beyond Man*, for example, though far from polemical, was at the time of its publication interpreted by

## Auroville calendar 2011

The Auroville Calendar 2011 made by Ireno Guerçi has as its theme *Matrimandir 40th Anniversary: 21 February 1971 – 21 February 2011*. The calendar features selected images of Matrimandir to illustrate the theme of ‘Life around the Park of Unity’ in the Matrimandir Gardens.

It is a wall calendar size 11 x 12 inches or 28 x 30,5 cm. The cost of each calendar, including (air) mail charges, is Rs. 295 for India, Euro 8 for European countries, and US \$10.25 for the U.S.A. and other countries. The calendar can be ordered from [ireno@auroville.org.in](mailto:ireno@auroville.org.in). Visit for full details [http://www.auroville.org/calendar/auroville\\_calendar\\_2011.htm](http://www.auroville.org/calendar/auroville_calendar_2011.htm)





# The hum hum hum vee generation

A new fraternal club has recently evolved in Auroville and its members wave in a slightly superior fashion as they meet and glide by on the road. They are a colourful lot on their green, blue and turquoise bikes, but the jolliest is Giorgio, one of the original Humvee pioneers, seventy four years young and still recovering from a stroke.

He hums by on his daffodil yellow machine, then glides to a gentle swooshing stop. "I love it", he says in his sing song Italian accent. "I feela lika princa on my bika."

Is this an age thing? Do the young not aspire to being carried along like an angel on the breeze? No, they don't, they are still into size mattering and want the ultimate in roaring and rattling and the max possible chrome.

The Humvee was designed and put together by Sukrit and Akash who spent their early years being crashed through potholes and skidding on piles of sand. They are still young and bounce well but are appreciative of the increasing number of older and elderly backsides in Auroville. The Humvee's seat is extremely well-padded and has super plus suspension. Its handlebars are wide and promote a feeling of control and confidence in all terrains, which is very necessary for Auroville's potholed roads.

The name was inspired by its clunky appearance, its bee like humming sound and an electric eco-joke reference to the American Hummer, the gas guzzling military vehicle. Unfortunately it is still very pricey as they are handmade, in batches of ten. Eventually they hope to increase production and that will reduce the cost.

When I first came to Pondicherry 30 thirty years ago I was very impressed when I saw the Aurovilian women who came to shop on their big dusty bikes. I loved the way they athletically swung a bronzed leg over their huge bikes to dismount outside the Ashram. They seemed the ultimate free modern woman, suntanned, strong and confident. They would then zoom off to the market to fill enormous bags with fruit and vegetables which they hooked on to the sides of the bike before roaring-off home.

This was a far cry from the 1960 'mods' and their Lambretta cul-



Giorgio and Jo, members of the humvee club.

ture, though at the time they were thought very daring; or the flashy roaring machines of the older and richer black leather weekend gangs. To me these Aurovilian women were the Real Thing.

So here I am, 30 years later, having graduated from a TVS, through a six month flirtation with a cherry red electric Flamz. I loved my little Flamz but found it too dinky for my slender frame on the Auroville roads. Also, having once being knocked off it by a speeding vehicle, I had lost my road innocence. After thirty years of bike riding,

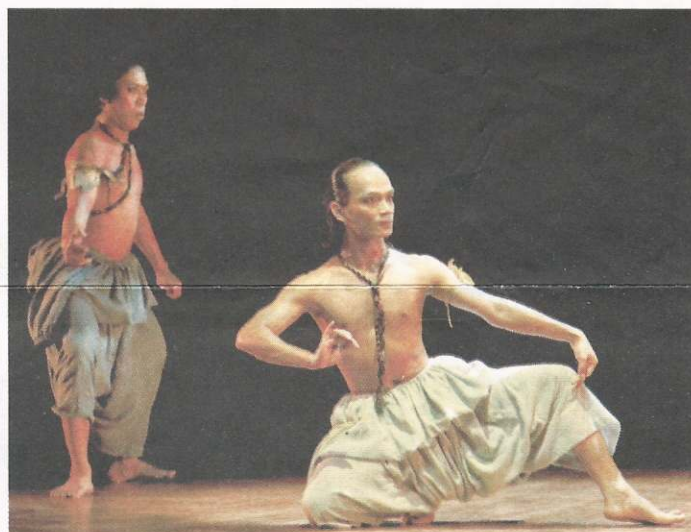
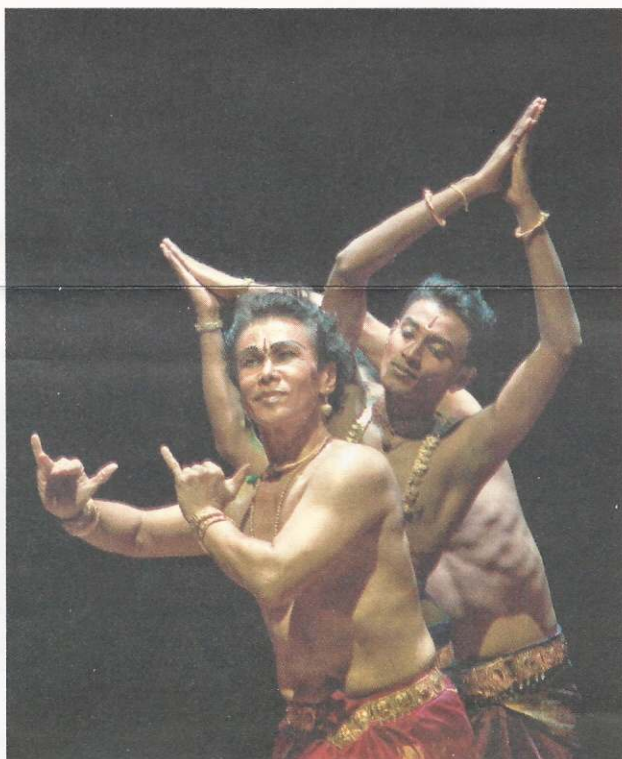
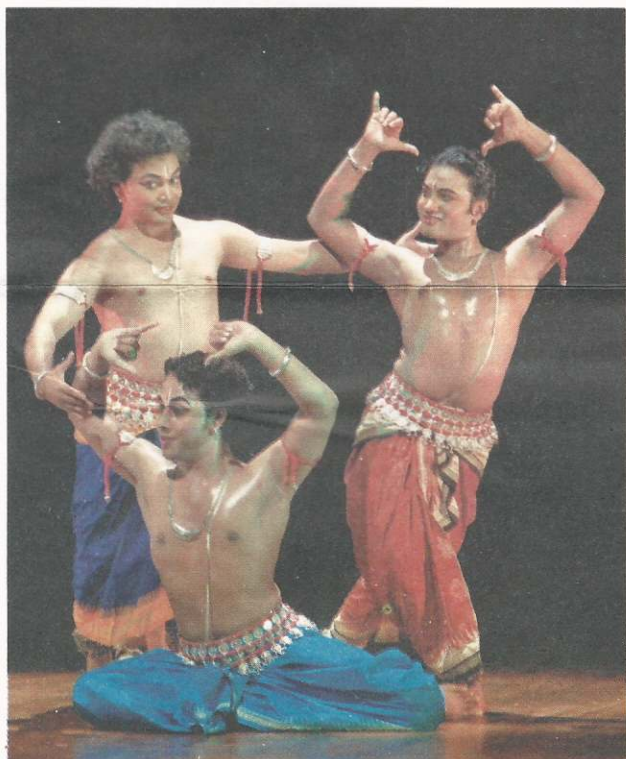
I wanted something more substantial, something with more power and oomph.

Also, the traffic on the East Coast road is getting more dangerous each year. I personally knew four people who have been killed on it. A cute little electric Flamz does not carry much weight down there.

Maybe all we Humveeites can ride together off into the sunset in convoy – proudly and silently. We will leave no fumes or clouds of dust, only a heavenly hum-hum-hum.....

Dianna

## DANCE



PHOTOS: GIORGIO

Auroville was recently treated to an exceptional performance by male dancers in three different dance styles: Odissi by the Rudrakshya Dance Company, India (photo left); Bharatnatyam by the Sutra Dance Theatre, Malaysia (photo middle); and contemporary modern dance by the Dewandaru Dance Company, Indonesia (photo right). The performance was under the artistic direction of Ramli Ibrahim of the Sutra Dance Theatre (front on the middle photo) and made possible with the help of Lalit Verma of the Aurodhan Art Gallery, Pondicherry.

## LETTERS

### Better relations with the villages

I congratulate Auroville Today for the very interesting contents of its September 2010 edition, particularly Pierre Legrand's piece on "Decoding the Galaxy" and the views on the Galaxy, and the "Next Step in Auroville's Development", all of them needing careful thought. But what caught my attention more was the piece, "Better relations with the villagers" by Bhavana. Auroville's relationship with the rural population in its hinterland, to my mind, is as important an issue as the Galaxy and Auroville's future development. There is no gainsaying that a large number of Auroville units have been doing yeoman's work over the past four decades or so among the rural population in many spheres, including education, healthcare, livelihood and empowerment, particularly women's empowerment. The fact that the Integral Sustainability Platform has bent its energies to bettering the relations with the villagers is indicative of the sad fact though that this relationship, which by now should have become a firmer "organic" relationship between the two, leaves much to be desired. However, I am encouraged by the "clear perception" of Auroville's Village Action of

the need for "partnership in development, not charity" between the two as the "only viable approach". My perception is that, while this clear shift in perception is laudable, it is a very difficult task as it calls for a change in the mindset of both the villagers and the Auroville residents. What is involved is a process of social engineering, a process that is inordinately slow to show tangible results. That calls for enormous patience and determination which, I believe, is not in short supply in Auroville.

The present Governing Board is equally concerned over the texture of relationship between Auroville, as a collective and in its individual manifestations, and the villagers. The Governing Board member, Dr Malini Parthasarathy, despite her preoccupations, has voluntarily offered her services in this field. I am sure Auroville Village Action will agree with me that, in this important but difficult task, it would be wise to avail itself of all help from every quarter.

Ajoy Bagchi  
Member, Governing Board Auroville  
Foundation  
October 4, 2010

### Next step in AV's development?

Your article, *The Next Step in Auroville's Development?* in the September 2010 edition contains erroneous information. According to the picture the following sectors did not exist (as 'sectors') before the ISP began: Guests and Newcomers, Food, Mobility, Health, Communication, Water, Horticulture, Culture, and Energy.

According to the Cambridge dictionary a sector is an area in which the economic activity of a country (or in our case Auroville) is divided. So, for example, we may use the phrase: The financial sector of England has collapsed. Note that this is broader than just the Ministry of Finance.

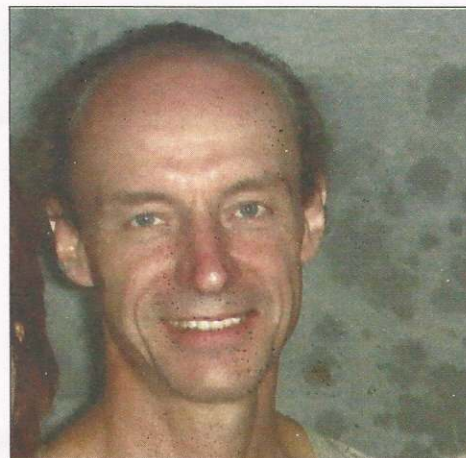
According to this usage, Auroville had both Health and Culture sectors before the ISP. These sectors are named in the City Services report.

Other so-called sectors also existed before the ISP, but perhaps we don't use the nomenclature identified by the ISP. For example, Energy (Electrical Service, Solar Energy Fund), Communication (AV Today, News and Notes, AV Radio), Mobility (Roads and Cycle paths, there is even an accessibility group), and Horticulture and Food, which falls under Farms (Farms and Food link). Guests and Newcomers straddle two different sectors. Guests fall under 'Outreach' (City Services nomenclature) and are addressed by the Guest Facilities Coordination Group, the AV Guest Service, Visitors and Information Center. Newcomers are managed by the Entry Group, which falls under 'Organization' (City Services nomenclature).

My point is not merely pedantic. My concern is that your article makes it appear as if we did not address these major arenas (or sectors), when in fact we did and continue to do so.

Lyle  
Member, Budget Coordination Committee  
September 30, 2010

## PASSING



On October 22nd, Aurovilian Jonny Muller, hailing from Germany and living in Newlands since 2003, fell from a tree and passed away. He was 53 years old.

Before moving to Auroville Jonny was active in AVI Germany's pavilion group. Once in Auroville, he committed himself to the first German volunteers programme, to working as a physiotherapist with handicapped patients, at the Matrimandir, building the Nature Camp, and as an administrator of New Lands during the summer. He was an enthusiastic marathon runner. Jonny's body was cremated at Auroville's Farewell grounds at Adventure on October 27. A brief video on Jonny is available on youtube.com/watch?v=spRkokljcZs



## Remembering Hu Hsu

On the occasion of the centenary year and 101st birth anniversary of Hu Hsu, the Chinese disciple of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, a group of young people from Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram organized an exhibition of his paintings, calligraphy, photographs and collected works in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

**H**u Hsu (pronounce *Hu Shu*) or Hsu Fan-cheng as he is known today, was born in China a hundred years ago, on October 26, 1909. After a brief stint in Germany where he studied Fine Art and Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, and where he translated works of the German philosopher Nietzsche into Chinese, he first came to India to live in Santiniketan where he studied Sanskrit and taught the history of Chinese Buddhism. In 1951, he settled down in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where he painted in the classical Chinese style, practiced calligraphy and translated the major writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother into Chinese. These books were subsequently printed and published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He also wrote a few original books *Confucianism and Chinese Words*. He dedicated each book "To THE DIVINE MOTHER to WHOM the writer remains in permanent gratitude as it is only with HER boundless Compassion and Grace that this book has come into being."

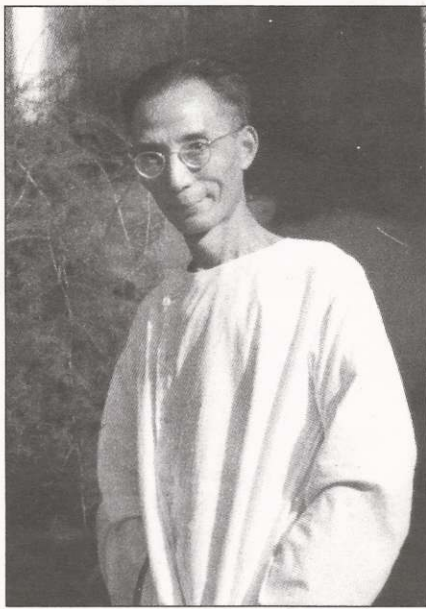
For an exhibition of his paintings in the Ashram, The Mother commented: "Here are the paintings of a scholar who is at once an artist and a yogi..." In a conversation of October 30, 1962, Mother praised Hu Hsu as being a genius who was even coining new Chinese words to better translate Sri Aurobindo. She spoke highly of his translations and mentioned one of his letters in which he wrote "If you want to experience Taoism, come to

live in the Ashram, you will have the REALISATION of Lao-Tseu's philosophy". Mother added: "This man is a sage".

On the day of the foundation ceremony of Auroville, the Auroville Charter was also read out in Chinese, presumably by Hu Hsu, who most probably also translated the Auroville Charter into Chinese. The earth from both the Republic of China (Taiwan) and from the

People's Republic of China (Mainland) was poured in the urn by Ashram youth. Hu Hsu also submitted an article to Nan Yang Siang Pau, a newspaper in Singapore, in which he introduced the project of Auroville to the Chinese-speaking world and proposed that the governments of Malaysia and Singapore consider contributing to the building of a pavilion in Auroville's International Zone where the culture and art achievements of the Chinese civilization could be represented.

In 1978, a few years after Mother had left her body, Hu Hsu returned to China. The Cultural Revolution was over. He went to live in Beijing and became a faculty member of the Institute of World Religions, a department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Here he was known as one of the foremost scholars on Indian spirituality. Often parallels were drawn with the legendary Hsüan-tsang, the Chinese Buddhist monk who traveled to India in the 7th century, lived at Nalanda where he learned and translated the Buddhist sutras, and returned to



Hu Hsu



'Old Plum'.

China with the sacred knowledge of India. Like him, Hu Hsu too returned to China with new sacred knowledge – the ancient pre-Buddhist spiritual knowledge of the Upanishads and the Gita, as also the contemporary spiritual knowledge contained in Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's writings. Hu Hsu became known as Hsu Fan-cheng – 'the one purified by the realization of the Brahman consciousness'.

Today there is a growing interest in Hu Hsu and, through him, in Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's philosophy and vision. His collected works were published in Mainland China in 2006 under the title *Collected Works of Hsu Fan-cheng*. They have been well-received with universities in China beginning courses in Sri Aurobindo philosophy, and students studying Integral Yoga philosophy as part of their doctoral thesis, even though Hu Hsu wrote in classical Chinese which is not easily accessible.

There is also a small but growing number of Chinese speaking seekers who have visited the Ashram and Auroville, some settling down, others spending a few months and hoping to return one

day. In September, a journalist from Taiwan based in New Delhi visited Auroville and made a documentary on Hu Hsu and on Auroville in Mandarin Chinese, so that people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore who speak Chinese will also be able to follow it. The documentary is scheduled to be released by the end of this year.

The growing interest of the Chinese-speaking world can also be seen in Auroville, which now has three residents of Taiwan. Some of Hu Hsu's translations, printed in Pondicherry with The Mother's blessings and lying unused for many years for want of Chinese readers, are now selling in the Visitors Centre of Auroville. "Recent news from China about plans to form a centre to study and further translate Sri Aurobindo into Chinese gives us the feeling," write the organizers of the Auroville exhibition, "that Mother's message given 55 years ago to the then newly-created Sri Aurobindo Philosophical Circle of Hong Kong is now starting to be realized: *Let the eternal Light dawn on the eastern horizon.*"

Based on information provided by Amanda, Eric and Devdip

## PEACE TABLES

### Fundraising for the fourth Peace Table begins

The late George Nakashima had a dream that "sacred peace tables" made of wood fashioned from two 300-year-old Eastern black walnut trees be placed in each of the seven continents as symbols of man's quest for peace.

**G**eorge Katsutoshi Nakashima (May 24, 1905 – June 15, 1990) was a Japanese-American woodworker, architect, and furniture-maker, one of the leading innovators of 20th century furniture design and a father of the American craft movement. His work won him many awards and honours.

In 1984, he had the opportunity to purchase a pair of the largest and finest walnut logs he had ever seen. He decided to use the immense planks to their fullest potential. He dreamt that if Altars for Peace were made from them and placed in each con-

tinental of the world as centres for meditation, prayer and activities for peace, the world would be a better place.

Three of these tables have now been installed. The Peace Table for North America was consecrated as an altar in the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1986. The second table, built to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, was made from the same monumental black walnut tree as the first and blessed at the same Cathedral. After serving as a unifying presence at The Hague Appeal for Peace in May of 1999, it came to reside as the Peace Table for Europe in the newly-renovated Russian Academy of Art in Moscow in 2001.

The Peace Table for Asia was placed in Auroville on 29 February 1996. Auroville held a special meaning for Nakashima as he was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He served them as the on-site architect of the Golconde building in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This Peace Table is presently housed in the Unity Pavilion in the International Zone. Its ultimate destination is the Hall of Peace, a large Hall connected to the Unity Pavilion, designed by architects Piero and Gloria, which is now under construction.

The Nakashima Foundation for Peace has now started fund-raising for designing, building and shipping the Peace Table for Africa to the still unconstructed Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa, where it will be placed in the Peace Room. On October 16, Mira Nakashima-Yarnall, daughter of Georges



The Peace Table for Asia in Auroville at its temporary location



Mira Nakashima-Yarnall and Dr. Naomi Tutu launching the Peace Table for Africa project

Nakashima, and Dr. Naomi Tutu, daughter of South African anti-apartheid activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu, met at Nakashima's home near New Hope, Pennsylvania to launch the project.

Contributions for the Peace Table for Africa can be made at [www.nakashimafoundation.org](http://www.nakashimafoundation.org). For more information regarding the completion of the Hall of Peace in Auroville, please contact [unity@auroville.org](mailto:unity@auroville.org).

PHOTO: RANDALL HAGADORN

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