

Auroville Today

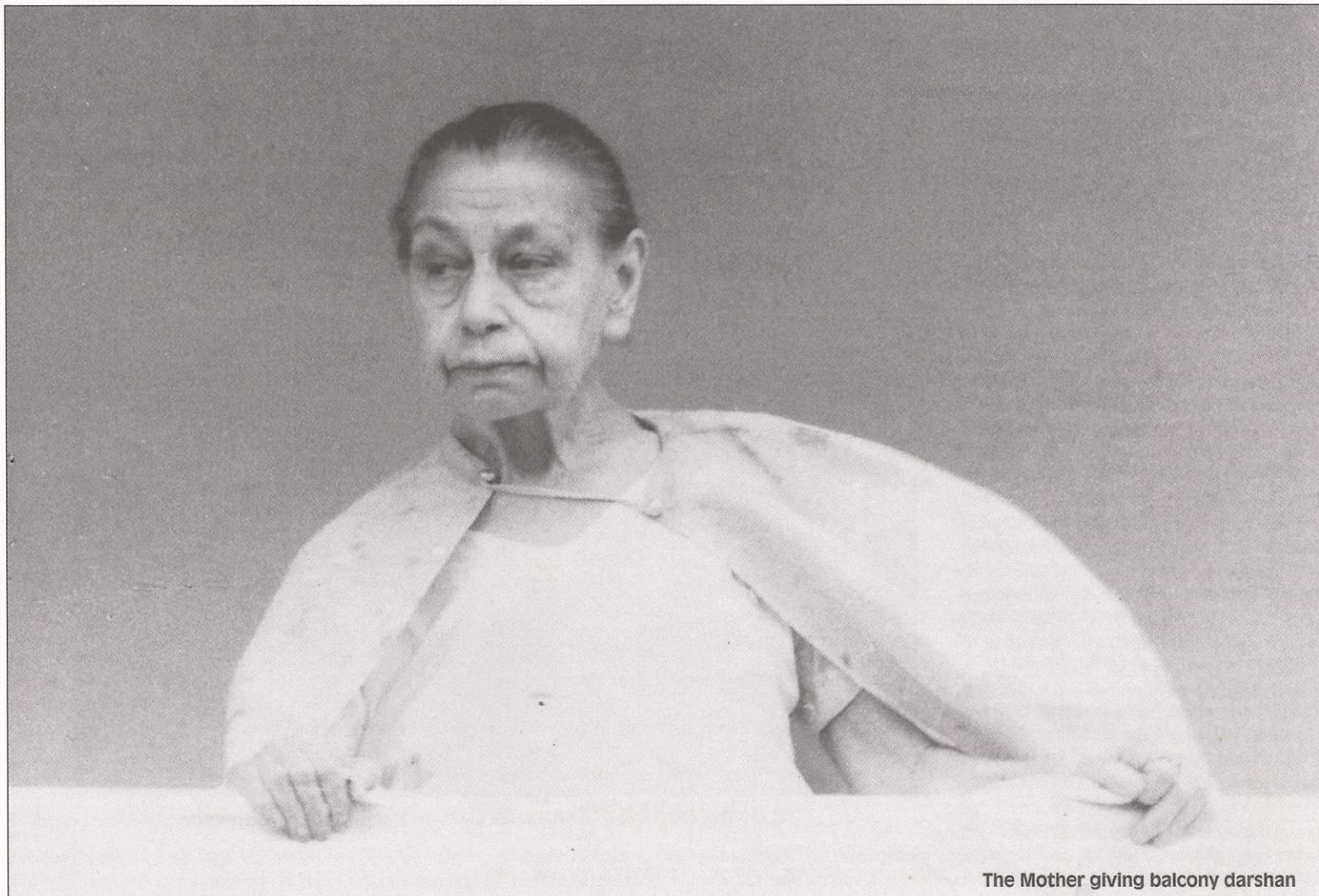
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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Some Aurovilians have described Auroville Today as being relentlessly upbeat in its coverage of the community. And they don't necessarily mean this as a compliment.

However, while it is true that we enjoy celebrating interesting individuals and successful projects, we have not shied away from criticising shortcomings in our community functioning when we felt it was necessary. Such shortcomings can be the result of poor communication or lack of resources. But when we dig deeper, very often we find that the core of the problem is the inability of people who share a certain work or responsibility to work harmoniously together.

Nobody pretended that an "actual human unity" would be easy to achieve, particularly when the Auroville laboratory is made up of such an assortment of individuals and cultures. That's why, in this Auroville birthday issue, we try to shed some light on why unity is so important and how the difficulties can be surmounted, while celebrating (yes, we can't break the habit) one of the more successful examples of people working together in pursuit of a common vision.



The Mother giving balcony darshan

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An Entanglement of Chaotic Unity

The Global Age and the Auroville Experiment.

By Richard Hartz

We have stumbled into the global age, but have yet to develop a global consciousness. Outer change has raced ahead of inner change. As the expansion of modernity collides with the finiteness of the earth, we struggle to reconcile progress with sustainability. Meanwhile the Westernization that went with modernization confronts the resurgence of civilizations that insist on preserving their own distinctive spirit. Though this complicates the problem, the dialogue of cultures could also help us to solve it by pooling our diverse resources in a coordinated effort.

Despite the differences between East and West, leading thinkers in both parts of the world arrived early in the twentieth century at similar diagnoses of the human condition. In Europe, for example, Henri Bergson noted that in humanity's "excessively enlarged body, the spirit remains what it was, too small now to fill it, too feeble to direct it." Reflecting on the machinery under whose weight modern life "groans half-crushed", he concluded that "the mechanism demands a mysticism."¹ In India, Sri Aurobindo saw that man "has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites." Yet he was cautiously optimistic in his view that "the feeling that there is no other solution than the spiritual cannot but grow and become more imperative under the urgency of critical circumstance."²

We live in a time when, as Sri Aurobindo observed almost a hundred years ago, "men and nations are drawn close together and partially united though in an inextricable, confused entanglement of chaotic unity."³ The process creating this entanglement is now called globalization. The word dates from the 1960s, but the drawing together of the human race has been going on for

millennia. For better or worse, it began to accelerate with the joining of the hemispheres at the time of Columbus. By the late nineteenth century this process had entered the phase commonly recognized as globalization, implying a heightened interconnectedness and mutual impact on a worldwide scale, not only economic, but political, social and cultural.

Globalization in this sense has been a manifestation of the expansive dynamics of the modern age. Since the late twentieth century, the dynamics of modernity have shown signs of breaking down. But the consequences of globalization remain and are intensified, justifying the description of our times as the global age.⁴ On the most material level, as we become aware of the limited resources of the earth and the vulnerability of the Gaia system, the core value of expansion is replaced by that of sustainability. Progress itself, so central to modernity, is called into question. But perhaps what is needed is a more integral concept of progress.

This is the potential contribution of Auroville, which was initiated by the Mother as "a collective experiment for the progress of humanity."⁵ A unique long-term field experiment with participants from all over the world, Auroville was set up to explore the possibility of unity in diversity under the conditions of the global age. Its design takes into account all the elements of the complex problem we face today: ecological, economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual. Situated on wasteland reclaimed through extensive afforestation, the experiment's ecological component is most conspicuous in the Green Belt. The industrial, international, residential and cultural zones of the proposed town, first indicated in a sketch made by the Mother as early as 1965 and still gradually taking shape, show a conscious recognition of the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of the world problem. And since the hypothesis being tested in Auroville is that a

viable human unity requires a spiritual foundation, this dimension is visibly symbolized by the Matrimandir with the silence of its luminous meditation chamber at the heart of it all.

The Mother insisted "on the fact that it will be an experiment, it is for making experiments — experiments, research, study."⁶ The experimental nature of Auroville has to be kept in mind if the vicissitudes the project has passed through are to be seen in the right perspective. Experimental science proceeds through a combination of "successful" and "unsuccessful" experiments. Both are considered to be of equal value for the discovery of truth. An experiment is a failure only if nothing useful is learned from it, whether because of poor design, careless execution or shoddy documentation. From this point of view, whatever the apparent successes or failures of the Auroville experiment so far, its inspired conception and the undiminished commitment, passion and integrity of the participants more than forty years after its inauguration ensure that it will continue to be worth observing.

It was to be expected that such an attempt at a dynamic spirituality grappling collectively with the complexities of contemporary life would confront inner and outer difficulties commensurate with the scope of its objective. Sri Aurobindo, at least, would not have been surprised. Anticipating the evolutionary need for such communities, he also foresaw the kinds of problems they were likely to face. "It might be," he wrote, "that, in such a concentration of effort, all the difficulties of the change would present themselves with a concentrated force; for each seeker, carrying in himself the possibilities but also the imperfections of a world that has to be transformed, would bring in not only his capacities but his difficulties and the oppositions of the old nature and, mixed together in the restricted circle of a small and close common life, these might assume a considerably enhanced force of

obstruction which would tend to counterbalance the enhanced power and concentration of the forces making for the evolution."⁷

Sri Aurobindo was speaking from experience. He had encountered this disconcerting phenomenon even before an Ashram grew up around him. In a diary entry in 1913, when as yet only a few young men were staying with him, he observed: "The atmosphere of the house is full of the struggle and the opposition to the dharma of the satyayuga of which the assistants of the satyayuga are the chief instruments owing to their clinging to their egoism and small selfishnesses."⁸ Later, when the Ashram had been established as a "laboratory" for his Yoga, Sri Aurobindo described it as "an epitome of the human nature that has to be changed" and commented: "Wherever humans are obliged to associate closely, what I saw described the other day as 'the astonishing meannesses and caddishnesses inherent in human nature' come quickly out.... But when one tries to do Yoga, one cannot fail to see that in oneself and not only, as most people do, see it in others, and once seen, then? Is it to be got rid of or to be kept? Most people here seem to want to keep it. Or they say it is too strong for them, they can't help it!"⁹

Auroville's aspiration for human unity was not likely to exempt it from similar contradictions. From the beginning, even with the best will, the members of the community struggled to live up to its ideals. One of them asked the Mother: "It seems very difficult to be able to want to achieve any specific aim and at the same time to love everyone. When we begin to want something and try to act with a particular result in mind, immediately we cut ourselves off from everyone who does not agree with that. In practice, how can we do both at the same time?" The Mother seemed momentarily puzzled: "You cut yourself off from people who do not think as you do?... But not a single person thinks as you do!..."

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Can Mother be updated?

How can we know what She intended for Auroville's material development?

Does Auroville have any taboos; in other words, behaviour that is absolutely forbidden because it challenges the fundamental norms or beliefs of this society?

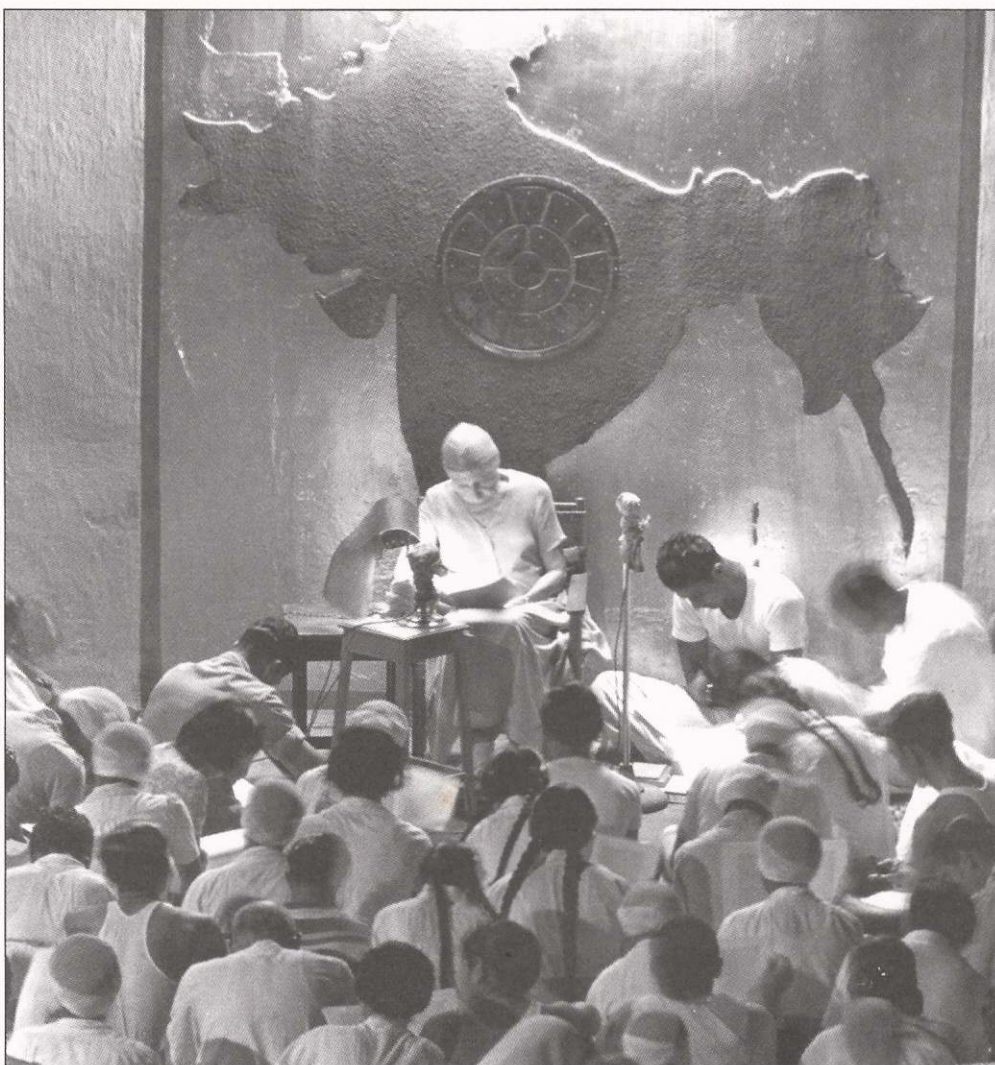
Seemingly no, at least none which do not exist in other civilized societies. However, when it comes to whether Aurovilians can translate some of what Mother said about Auroville in the past into the realities of today, to 'updating' Mother, we enter a grey, controversial area. Here, of course, I am not talking about such fundamental texts as the *Auroville Charter* or *To be A True Aurovilian*. Rather, I am referring to very topical issues like, should there be a large lake around the Matrimandir? Should the opening hours of the Matrimandir be extended? What should we do about the villages in the area planned for the city?

For some Aurovilians, it's clear. Mother saw everything, knew everything. Therefore whatever she said, she said for all time. Our role is simply to surrender and to materialise what she said down to the smallest details. Other Aurovilians, however, note that Mother was always very willing to change her mind if circumstances dictated (the reorientation of the zones as a response to land constraints is a classic example) and that she often stressed the evolutionary nature of the Auroville experience. These Aurovilians believe that changing local or global realities, like the growth of the neighbouring villages or global warming, would definitely have caused her to change or modify some of her indications if she had been physically present today.

But which ones? And how? Ah, there's the rub. Because even some of those Aurovilians who concede that Mother would not have spoken in the same way today would prefer to cling to her original words; for they feel that nobody has the capacity to know what she would have changed, or how.

This is a powerful argument. Yet it's not always clear what Mother herself expected to happen in terms of the detailed physical manifestation of Auroville. It's true that some of her early descriptions were highly detailed – she described the different zones and, among other things, mentioned a port, a gliding club and an Olympic stadium – but was she seeing things that already existed on a higher plane and were simply waiting to be materialised, as when she said that the whole organization of art and sports was "ready to come down and be embodied"? Or was she sometimes throwing out suggestions like seeds, and waiting to see which ones would take root?

Of course, many of them have not taken root or have since been modified, but what does this prove? That the Aurovilians are incapable of manifesting her Auroville? That things intervene to thwart initial plans, as she explained happened with her original scheme for an ideal city near



The Mother teaching a 'Wednesday class' at the Ashram Playground.

Hyderabad? That, through the process of evolution, some of her ideas which had relevance then no longer have value? Or could she simply have been wrong about certain things because at no point was she able to foresee the totality of Auroville's material unfolding?

For some people, the possibility that Mother could not foresee everything is akin to blasphemy. But there are a number of occasions when Mother was clearly surprised by events or by people's behaviour. In fact, Sri Aurobindo made it clear that even an Avatar "does not manifest all the Divine omniscience and omnipotence; he has not come for any such unnecessary display; all that is behind him but not in the front of his consciousness." He also noted that Avatars were perfectly capable of making human mistakes. "When [ordinary people] think of a manifestation of Divinity, they think it must be an extraordinary perfection in doing ordinary human things – an accurate memory, not making mistakes, not undergoing any defeat or failure...All that has nothing to do with manifesting the Divine." At another time he

explained, "The Mother is dealing with the Ignorance in the fields of the Ignorance; she has descended there and is not all above."

In fact, if we examine closely how Mother interacted with people like Satprem, Roger, Paolo and other Aurovilians regarding the material unfolding of the township, we seem to see her moving from poise to poise. Take, for example, *The Agenda* conversation of 17th January, 1970, where she is responding to Paulo's reported 'inspiration' regarding the design of the outer structure and inner chamber of Matrimandir. At one moment she seems to be a direct channel for the Supreme, at another moment she explores ideas with Satprem as with an equal, at other times she does not know what course to recommend ("I tell you, I have seen nothing for the outside [of the Matrimandir], so I don't know").

Of course, when it comes to interpreting her words, one has to take into account the complicated dynamic engendered by whom she is dealing with. Mother related to everybody differently, depending upon their nature and how she felt she

could best work upon them. Sometimes, when dealing with a particular topic, she would say one thing to one person and something quite different to another. Sometimes she would recommend a course of action which later proved to be a failure. This raises the vexed question of precisely what it means when Mother 'approved' or 'blessed' a particular course of action. For some people it is clear: if Mother 'approved' something or wrote 'blessings' at the bottom of a proposal, this is what had to happen. But Mother herself explained that 'blessings' did not necessarily indicate approval of a specific course of action. It merely meant that she would put her force behind something for the spiritual development of a particular individual or of a collective process.

So how can we know what she intended then and what she intends now for Auroville's material development? Ultimately, the only way to know this for sure is to attain to the same consciousness as hers. Failing this, however, (and I assume that most of us do fail in this) there may be other indications. For example, it appears that she gave much more weight to things she had 'seen' in her inner vision. Most notably, this included certain details of the inner chamber of the Matrimandir, but it also included the division of the city into four zones. In fact, once she remarked that as long as the key elements of her vision were manifested, the details "are all the same to me", which is presumably why she was happy to leave such considerations to Roger. Another clear indication of the seriousness with which she treated a proposal is the enthusiasm with which she propagated or received it. For example, Shyamsunder recalls that when Clare sent a letter suggesting that the time had come for Auroville to start functioning without an internal exchange of money and asking Mother to name an account for people who wanted to support this, Mother had never appeared so happy. She tapped Clare's letter saying (in French): "That's it! That's it! Give me a paper and a pen!" And she wrote "Pour Tous. For all".

In the absence of unmistakable clues like this perhaps our wisest method, if we feel we need to 'update' or interpret Mother (and, let's face it, we are doing it all the time), is first to try to understand the spirit or the principle behind some of her proposals. For example, when she talked about Auroville having a railway station and airport, she seemed to be stressing the importance of Auroville's connectivity to the outside world (in contrast to her earlier 'ideal' city near Hyderabad which would have had a wall around it). Other recurring preoccupations include her emphasis upon beauty, upon the need to respect nature, and upon the need to create the optimum material and psychological conditions for the individual to grow in consciousness.

And, of course, she stressed time and again the need for harmony, for people to agree. In this context, it's interesting that while Mother's earlier words about Auroville are filled with plans for specific projects, in the last years her conversations and messages are dominated by concerns about the Aurovilians' less than perfect behaviour. More and more she was called upon to mediate disputes or to issue statements to ensure that the Aurovilians stopped lying, observed basic hygiene or worked harder. In fact, even the conversation cited earlier regarding the design of the chamber concludes with her emphasising the overriding need for Roger and Paulo to find a way of working together. "If they can come to an agreement, the work will go faster. Objections about details have no importance, because one sets out with one idea and one arrives at another...one makes a lot of progress in between."

Is this, then, the key? Does the precise route of a radial, the boundaries of a zone or the specific form or location of a building matter much less to Mother than the spirit of collaboration in which she wanted us to work? Or, to put it another way, isn't she saying that if we do succeed in creating a true fraternity, then such issues will not arise because whatever we do will be intrinsically harmonious, will reflect the 'conscious harmony behind things' which she glimpsed in one of her visions of the ideal Auroville?

In 1972, referring to problems in both the Ashram and Auroville, she summarised the solution like this. "Lack of unity is the cause of all the difficulties...In the end it always boils down to the same thing: a SUBSTANTIAL individual progress is required – a serious and sincere progress – then everything works perfectly."

Alan

An Entanglement of Chaotic Unity

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So how can you love anyone?" The young Aurovilian explained: "As long as I don't want anything, it is all right."

A time-honored solution to this dilemma would have been to give up the will to act. But the quietistic method was ruled out by the very nature of Auroville. After concentrating for a few minutes, the Mother said: "It is because when you want something, it is the ego that wants. So, the ego... must be ignored. The first thing to do is not to act for yourself but to act in obedience to the Divine, to express the divine Will.... When conflicts arise, and they arise all the time, for all of us – immediately it is as if one were drawing back into one's own skin. For that is what happens: each one draws back inside

himself.... When we say, 'We are at the service of the Divine', it is not just words. It is He who should act through us, not we ourselves. The greatest objection is: How can we know the divine Will? But as a matter of fact, I tell you: if you sincerely renounce your personal will, you will know."¹⁰

Perhaps the thing we most need to do today, on the threshold of a global age, is to widen our too narrow, egocentric consciousness. The Mother suggested a number of simple exercises for making a beginning in this direction. These range from mind-expanding visualization to methods of enlarging one's outlook by seeing things from other points of view.¹¹ At a more advanced level, we have the account of her experience of global consciousness in the truest sense, recorded on November 26, 1915. She described her physical body as "seized, first in its lower members and next the whole of it, by a sacred trembling which made all personal limits fall away little by little even in the most material sensation." The experience continued:

*It was as a progressive dilatation of the cells until there was a complete identification with the earth: the body of the awakened consciousness was the terrestrial globe moving harmoniously in ethereal space. And the consciousness knew that its global body was thus moving in the arms of the universal Being, and it gave itself, it abandoned itself to It in an ecstasy of peaceful bliss.*¹²

References

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- 3 Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), p. 72.
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- 5 The Mother, *Words of the Mother – I* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), p. 204.
- 6 Ibid., p. 264.
- 7 *The Life Divine*, p. 1099.
- 8 Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 197.
- 9 Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2011), pp. 740-41.
- 10 *Words of the Mother – I*, pp. 332-33.
- 11 E.g., The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1954* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), pp. 344-46.
- 12 The Mother, *Prayers and Meditations* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), p. 311.
- 13 The Mother, *Words of the Mother – II* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), p. 266.

The whole trouble comes from the fact that you cannot harmonise with someone unless he is in agreement with your own ideas and his opinion and way of doing things are in conformity with yours.

You must widen your consciousness and understand that everyone has his own law. It is necessary to find the ground of understanding and harmony in a happy combination of individual wills and not to try that all may be the same in an identical will and action.¹³

"There's a lot of love and respect in this group"

Quiet Healing Centre opened in January, 1997 and today it is managed by a small core group. How well do they function together?

Auroville Today: How has the Healing Centre been managed over the years?

Dodo: In the early years there was a small management group but all decisions were taken by the director, Michael Zelnick. When Michael resigned about five years ago, we decided to have a team organization rather than a one-person hierarchical structure. This extended team included all the Aurovilians who were working in Quiet at that time, about twenty people.

Ute: The experiment lasted for a year and it was difficult. There were people who had a lot to say but didn't want to take responsibility for seeing that the work was carried out.

Dodo: There are many facets to running a place like this. Some of that new team were therapists who came in to give a few sessions a week then left without any real interest in looking at the larger picture. This made decision-making very difficult because not everybody had all the necessary information.

Ute: So we reached a point where we felt we needed a core group which had the power to take all the decisions and which would take responsibility for ensuring that all the decisions were manifested. That's when the present core group was born.

How was this core group chosen?

Ute: It chose itself. We needed a group in which all aspects needed to run Quiet were represented: the executives, the therapists, the practical organization and the financial side of things. And it had to be people who had been working in Quiet for a considerable period and who were willing to work full-time. The larger group accepted us; we've been working together now for about four years. Only Guy joined more recently.

So what precisely do you do?

Ute: Our group takes care of the total wellbeing of Quiet including the Auroville staff, our Indian staff, our guests and the environment.

How does your group work? Do you each have a special area of responsibility?

Guy: No. Each of us looks at things from a certain angle because of the specific work we're doing but each of us tries to have a global view regarding every issue.

What happens when there is disagreement about a course of action in the group?

Ute: Generally if a person is in a minority they will step back and allow the majority decision to stand. We can do this because we trust the others and we know that if something doesn't work out we will all meet again and find a new solution.



The Quiet core group, from left Ute, Jürgen, Dodo, Cristina and Guy

Dodo: There's such a richness of minds in this group that I feel I can let things go, even if I disagree with a decision. I find this very liberating.

Cristina: On a personal level we are very straight with each other. If we have a problem with one of the others we speak to them immediately about it. This is easy because we see each other every day.

Guy: What I find so interesting working with this team is that if you listen carefully to what others say then you get input which enlarges your own view of things. It helps you to come to a decision which is more integral, more comprehensive, than if you just rely upon your own ideas.

Most of you have been part of other groups in Auroville. How does your experience with them compare to being in this core group?

Guy: The other groups I worked in were mainly larger working groups which were looking at the overall welfare of the Auroville community, which is much more complex than what we are doing here. In those other groups I felt the play of personalities to be much stronger. Actually I don't feel any strong ego pressures in our group. Also, we are dealing here mainly with down-to-earth issues, which is different from some working groups, such as the economy or development groups, where "ideological" differences make decision-making much more difficult and time-consuming.

Jürgen: When I sit in those larger groups I get bored because often there's lots of talk, then work is given to people, then you meet again a week later and nothing has been done. In our group we are dealing with very practical things. We have a very simple organization, we each know what we have to do and we get immediate feedback about the consequences of our decisions. For example, if we don't treat our guests right, we get less guests and so there's less money to run this place. It's as simple as that.

Dodo: From day one in Quiet we were lucky enough to be financially independent. So we create our own financial resources and then we decide what to do with them. This makes some things much easier.

Jürgen: If we want to buy 50 chairs we don't have to go and have a long discussion with someone from the Financial Service!

What are the main challenges this group is dealing with?

Guy: We have very high repair and maintenance costs, partially due to our proximity of the sea, but the main challenge, of course, is the beach erosion. The electricity situation is also holding us back very much because we don't have sufficient power supply.

Jürgen: All this limits our future planning: we can only make short-term decisions.

Guy: We want to build a new kitchen and

new hall but we are held back because we feel insecure: we don't know what is going to happen because of the serious beach erosion which is destroying parts of Quiet.

Have you as individuals or as a group had to take on new roles to deal with this threat?

Guy: I've taken up the responsibility to liaise with the various bodies, like the Auroville Foundation and the state governments, which have to be involved in solving this. In one way I feel I'm going back to a previous period in Auroville which I had hoped I'd left behind. But I love this place so much I can't just sit back and watch this happening. And I get a lot of support from everybody else in this group.

Ute: We're so glad that we have somebody like him to take up this task. None of us would be as efficient as him in writing letters and communicating with these people.

How could the functioning of this group be improved?

Guy: I think the link between the core team and the rest of the Quiet staff could be improved. We used to have weekly meetings where we communicated to them the decisions that have been taken. This is not happening now because it's difficult to find a time when we can all sit together. But if we could improve this it would make us gel better as a larger team.

You seem to be a very harmonious group. What is the secret?!

Ute: There's a lot of love and respect in this group. I really trust and appreciate each member because I feel there is so much goodwill behind everything that we do. We really love Quiet and the vision for which it stands, and we want to serve that vision. When you have that foundation, work never feels like a duty or a burden.

Guy: The most important part of working in a team is having respect for each other and being open to listen, to really hear where the other one is coming from. We do this a lot with each other. What I also value very much in this team is that it feels like Quiet is our baby and we have to take care of it. That sense of taking care and nurturing is very strong for all of us.

There is also the 'magic' of Quiet itself. It's important to me that it was blessed, initiated, by Mother; it's a special place with special energies. Personally, it has helped me move down from my head to my heart in the way I relate to people, look at issues, and make decisions. This is a very 'heartfelt' place!

From an interview by Alan

WORKSHOP

Partho pulls no punches

A Vedanta Retreat at the Tibetan Pavilion took place at the beginning of 2011.

Partho jumped in at the deep end with his explanation of the Vedas. "Vedanta starts at the end, not the beginning. They start with the understanding that you are perfect and your work is to find out why you do not know it. The aim of Vedanta is to get the mind to attain silence as only a silent mind can reveal truths already known to us. That is the radical Vedanta teaching; this is the relentless quest of the Upanishads. Vedanta emphasizes the finding of the Self within. There is no meditation in the Vedanta, no rituals or particular teachings. The only valid practice is sustained self-enquiry into the nature of the Self and the teacher will initiate and guide you in that direction." He concluded his introduction by saying: "Leave your ideas of Vedanta outside with your sandals."

A shocked surprise fell on the forty guests and Aurovilians sitting in the beautiful upper room of the Tibetan Pavilion. It sounded incredibly simple and incredibly difficult. But Partho seemed a very reasonable, modern and down-to-earth North Indian man with a nice sense of humour, who had obviously done all this many times before, so we all stayed put.

He told us he had been a teacher

in Integral Education for many years in Delhi and that he had joined the Delhi Sri Aurobindo Ashram some time in 1987. His main vocation now is conducting retreats and workshops on Vedanta in India, Europe and the USA. "Applied spirituality" he calls it – where he applies mystic and Yogic wisdom to human affairs and corporate systems.

He went on to explain: "The traditional learning of Vedanta is directly from the Guru, he who has realized the truths of the Upanishads. We learn through spiritual enquiry, questioning and experience. We study the Upanishads with the Teacher who is our guide and our inspiration."

"Misunderstanding or an incomplete understanding of Vedanta has existed for many years," said Partho. "Sri Aurobindo's yoga brings Vedanta to its true and profound conclusion. Traditionally, the aim of life on earth has been to escape from the world of matter to a higher realm of Spirit. Sri Aurobindo transformed this worldview by showing us how life is rooted in matter and how matter itself has to be transformed down to the very cells of the body, to yield its deepest truth."

"In Vedanta, the important thing is experience – not theory. Directing the mind-stream to the discovery of

the Self – the practice of *Atmavichara* – is an initial Vedantic practice. This is a 24/7 self-enquiry."

Partho then got us to do some practical exercises to demonstrate his point. "Make sure you are sitting comfortably and relaxed. Now listen to the sounds outside, maybe that bird singing in the tree or people talking in the distance ... just hold the attention there for a few minutes. Don't get carried away by any feelings or thoughts that will inevitably arise. Come to pure awareness. Now go and have a tea break, holding this practice in mind."

As we sat in the sunshine with tea and biscuits, a deep and comfortable silence rose from us. Nobody spoke, or wanted to. We felt as if we were bathing in a gentle calm. Of course, it did not last for long as our old patterns soon emerged. When we spoke about our experience in the class afterwards, Partho explained that once one has genuinely experienced that peace, it is as if there has been a slight parting of the veil and its imprint remains on a subtle level in the being.

"The mind in us is mostly thought and sense. We have to learn to put thoughts aside so the mind can learn to unwind. Think of it like a thread in cotton fabric. When you pull one thread the whole piece will start to unravel.

"We have become preoccupied with the thoughts of 'I need to be something' and 'I need to do something.' Our minds have a natural tendency towards becoming. This prevents us from coming to simplicity of being. A direct simplicity of being is the opening to the true consciousness in us."

After lunch Partho invited questions. Many hands shot up. The first one asked was: "How can we apply these things in our daily life?" His answer was deceptively simple. "For the next few days lead a very simple life and be as quiet as possible. Then do gardening, or play with children. For some time, do the minimum of things, try always to be aware of the present and observe that the present carries no memory. Try to go inside yourself and watch, observe how things happen. On its own, in the course of time, something will unfold from within."

"What can we do about present-day world problems?" was the next question. His reply was Aurobindonian. "World problems are problems of consciousness. The solution depends on developing the true consciousness. Meanwhile, we can learn to live in the grace of the silent mind."

Next question: "How do we deal

with the runaway mind?" "This is a critical step, to learn to look at what is happening behind mental activity, to learn to shift your centre of attention from the brain, the thinking mind, to something behind, and observe. With practice and training you will get to quietude. By creating a state of calm and perfect disinterestedness we can be more effective in the world."

"What do you want to do?" he asked a young French guest. "I want to play music," he answered. Partho suggested that instead of saying 'I want', he should try replacing the thought with 'Let music be played through me.' Instead of saying: 'I am hot', replace it with 'There is heat.' "It will shift the energy from the same old dance of ego and create a small space of impersonality. One basic rule I can always suggest is not to add to the noise of the world."

Everyone laughed at this, obviously recognizing its relevance.

Partho had just run a three day course in Auroville on "Integral Leadership" with the purpose of encouraging those in key decision-making positions to develop more conscious leadership qualities. As he explained, "This is Vedanta in action, a way of transforming consciousness for the modern man."

Dianna

Auroville and a world in crisis

International Advisory Council member Marc Luyckx Ghisi reflects on the global situation, on Auroville and on his personal growth.

“The global situation is frightening.” Marc Luyckx Ghisi served on a think tank that advised past presidents of the European Commission and has been observing global trends for many years, so his observations are not to be taken lightly. In this instance, he is referring specifically to the weakness of the U.S. dollar.

Marc explains. “After the Second World War it was obvious what would happen. America had won the war, its central bank was full of gold and we had the Bretton Woods agreements which ensured, among other things, that the global money system would be based upon the dollar. The dollar was very strong because it was based on gold.

“However, in 1971, due to massive war spending in Vietnam, the United States suspended the gold convertibility of the dollar – the dollar no longer corresponded to gold reserves. Now when your currency is no longer linked to gold, it is only as strong as the confidence people have in it. And confidence in the dollar is now very low because the U.S. is again embroiled in a very costly war in Afghanistan and one of the ways it pays for it is by issuing dollar credits which, to put it crudely, are simply a licence to print money. In brief, the U.S. is massively indebted.

“The people in the know, the central bankers and members of the IMF and World Bank, have no illusions. They say it’s not a matter of *if* but *when* the dollar will collapse. And this could happen soon. Nobody is talking publicly about the possible collapse of the dollar at the moment; it is kept carefully out of the news. People are only invited to talk about other currencies, such as the euro. However, there is a conversation going on at the highest levels now about what will happen if the whole world financial system collapses. For example, the Russians have already created a task force for the post-dollar era and the Chinese are exploring which basket of currencies could succeed the dollar.”

Marc points out that as all world trade is tied to the dollar, if it collapses world trade as we know it will collapse also. “This will be very serious. It wouldn’t be the end of the world, but it would mark the end of the industrial economy in which we are now, an economy which is completely unsustainable and detrimental to the planet. This is the kind of event Sri Aurobindo predicted one hundred years ago when he said that the coming of the supramental would break down some structures which no longer had any evolutionary usefulness.”

So there may be positive aspects to this bleak scenario. In fact, the present crisis is causing more and more people to seek alternatives, new perspectives on the world and on themselves. The sociologist Paul Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson call them



Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi

‘cultural creatives’,” says Marc, “and there are a lot of them – perhaps 50 million in the US and 100 million in the EU.

“But you won’t find these alternatives in universities: everything in our university system is designed for the present world, not for the future. So people intuitively will start looking for places where there is a different conversation, a conversation, for example, about new levels of consciousness. For the ‘cultural creatives’ often quote Einstein to the effect that it is impossible to find solutions to our present world problems without a higher level of consciousness.

“What makes Sri Aurobindo and Theilhard de Chardin very relevant today is that, like Einstein, they talked about the need for this change in consciousness. And here Auroville has a very high level competitive advantage. For this is a place where, among other things, people try to go beyond religions and to explore spirituality in daily life. I don’t know how far you are succeeding in this, but at least you try and there are not many places like this in the world. That is why we in the International Advisory Council would like Auroville to receive some additional form of protection from the Government of India, like the status of an international experiential learning centre.”

But if the present industrial world order collapses, what does Marc believe a post-industrial world would look like? In his book *The Knowledge Society* Marc talks about a new kind of society, the ‘Transmodern Knowledge Society’. This society, which Marc claims is already born and growing, is centred upon a knowledge economy, an economy where knowledge rather than the produc-

tion of material goods is the prime resource and driver of progress. “And the CEO of a company in the new economy has to have a higher level of consciousness than that of a CEO in the industrial economy because you cannot manage knowledge as you manage material objects.”

But what about Marc himself? Has he personally experienced the ‘paradigm shift’ in consciousness which he sees as a necessity to usher in a new kind of society? “I recognise that you cannot announce a paradigm shift without changing the paradigm in your own life. When I was a priest hearing confessions it was easy because people didn’t see my shadow. But when I looked at myself, I discovered that I am 80% dinosaur, so I have to work daily to diminish it. It’s not easy. However, recently I attended a workshop which was a great help in this process.”

Marc is referring to PRI or “Past Reality Integration”, which was recently introduced to Auroville by Ingeborg Bosch Bonomo. “Her main idea,” says Marc, “is that when we were children we created defences to protect ourselves against things like the feeling that we were unloved. But if we persist in using these defences in adulthood they get in the way of our spiritual growth. She identifies one of the most common defences as ‘false power’, which manifests as the feeling that you know the truth and do not need to listen to others,” explains Marc. “During her stay in Auroville she observed that there may be people here suffering from this. If this is the case, it makes any form of executive power very difficult because these people think they have an exclusive lock on the truth.”

From an interview by Alan

Exceptional beings – and a shadow

Whenever I speak to any Aurovilian, I am always full of admiration. Almost everyone here has gone through a spiritual journey and is ready to speak about it.

And Aurovilians know each other, accepting the cultural and gender differences. They know each other, they work together they appreciate each other, they deeply love each other – despite differences in language, race, mentality, or culture. There is a huge potential of ‘Human Unity’ here.

At the same time, the shadow of the “City of Human Unity” is there. As sometimes happens, the same people who love each other and appreciate each other suddenly cease to speak to each other for mysterious reasons...and for years. Auroville’s very shadow is the lack of humanity. Sometimes small conflicts can occur. Sometimes big conflicts are pumping everybody’s energy.

How to go through this collective shadow? I do not know. Until today, I have not found any therapist or spiritual master who could help solve the problems linked to the collective shadow.

Very high level of energy

I also think that Auroville is a place with an exceptionally high level of energy. Matrimandir is a masterpiece. When I visited it for the first time after its completion, a word came to me: “*Opus Magnus*.” This is a Latin word that the alchemists were using in the European Middle Ages to describe the transmutation of lead into gold, but more deeply, the internal spiritual transformation of the alchemist himself into an enlightened being. That was the “Greatest Work”, the most important work to be done in life.

Matrimandir is a “Great Work” in many senses. It is a transmutation of matter into gold, into a “Chef d’Oeuvre”, an architectural masterpiece. But it is also a symbol of the birth of humanity into another level of consciousness. It is finally an active symbol of the coming down of the supramental into humanity. It is enacting concretely what it symbolises.

Matrimandir is for me like an “energy condenser.” It condenses the cosmic energy in a very powerful way. I would compare it to French cathedrals which are also “energy condensers”. And my impression is that Matrimandir is about five times more powerful than the French cathedrals. If you are inside the Matrimandir, you have the choice between closing up because the energy flow is too intense, or opening up and accepting to be transformed. There is no other choice. This means also that life in Auroville is a hard life because of this very high level of energy.

Excerpted from Marc Luyckx Ghisi’s article “Auroville is 40 years old ... and the Future” published in the magazine *Ritam*, November 2010

A few days after this interview, the members of the International Advisory Council, continued this discussion at a round table session entitled ‘Auroville’s relevance to a world on the brink’. Here is an extract from the contribution by Doudou Diène.

“I’m not comfortable with the notion of the world collapsing, firstly because the notion of collapse involves the idea that there is nothing we can do about it and, secondly, because it contradicts the law of the conservation of energy which says that nothing is created, nothing is lost, but everything is transformed. So the world is not collapsing, it is transforming.

“You may think that Auroville is the only place where there is some kind of answer to the world’s problems, but there are many people of goodwill around the world who are also doing their best. For example, before coming here I was in Seoul at a side event to the G20 meeting. We were a group of spiritually-orientated people and scholars who knew the solutions of the men in the grey suits meeting next door were absolutely not the answer, so we decided to call our event ‘Re-envisioning Prosperity’. We agreed that beyond the material meaning of prosperity there is a deeper meaning and I mentioned Auroville as one of the places which has this deeper notion of prosperity. From there I went to Kyoto for a meeting of Sufi yogis where we investigated the deeper meaning of the mystical dimension of many religions. Of course, everybody began by quoting from their sacred books. But we ended up realizing that quotations are not enough. What we need today is for people to put the fine words of love and compassion into practice.

“So the world is in a very deep process of transformation. And while Auroville is definitely one of the attempts to put alternatives into practice, Auroville is not alone, and it would be sad if Auroville was alone in providing the answer.”

From left International Advisory Council members Julian Lines, Doudou Diène, Marc Luyckx Ghisi and Governing Board member Aster Patel



Developing the International Zone

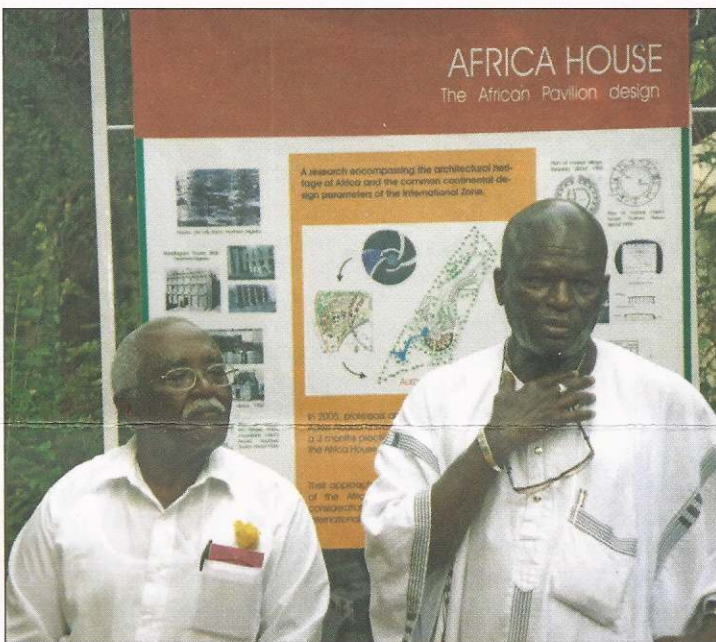
An exhibition on the International Zone of Auroville titled "Welcome to A Universal Playground" was opened at the Unity Pavilion



Jaya introducing the Blessing Ceremony of the African Pavilion. Seated from left are Governing Board Member Dr. Aster Patel, Chairman of the Governing Board Dr. Karan Singh, Mr. Shimelis Adugna from Ethiopia, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation Mr. M. Ramaswamy, and International Advisory Council members Dr. Doudou Diène, Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi and Julian Lines.

Where are we with the International Zone today? The question hangs in the air while Jaya, one of the 6 members of the International Zone Coordination Group, ponders how best to answer it. "I would say we are making good progress," she says finally. "Many Aurovilians are becoming aware of the importance of the Zone. Already 25 pavilion groups exist in Auroville, and the issue is very much alive with all the Auroville International Centres abroad."

The International Zone now houses two pavilions, one of India, the other for Tibetan Culture. An Inuksuk statue has been installed by the Canadian Pavilion Group, and there is 'The International House' a student dormitory, sponsored by the US Pavilion. Plans for other national pavilions are in the making but there is as yet no concerted drive to contact the various governments to find the required funding. A number of institutions are also located in the Zone: Savitri Bhavan, the main part of which is already in use; the Visitors Centre which handles more than 600,000 visitors per year; and the Unity Pavilion whose construction will be completed by June



Mr. Shimelis Adugna, from Ethiopia, and Dr. Doudou Diène from Senegal talk about Africa in Auroville at the blessing ceremony of the African Pavilion

2011 (with the exception of its Hall of Peace which will host the Peace Table for Asia and for which Rs 33 lakhs still has to be found). The Unity Pavilion, part of which is already in existence, serves as a coordination and administrative centre for the International Zone and hosts several pavilion groups and their activities. The Language Laboratory and the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) are also planned in the Zone, but these projects are still on the drawing-boards.

"The present exhibition is to bring awareness of the raison d'être of the International Zone, and shows where we are today and what has been achieved," says Jaya. "This was the only Zone which The Mother started Herself when she initiated Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India. We intend to take the exhibition across India and would like to present it in the Sri Aurobindo Centres in Orissa, Gujarat and New Delhi. We are also working on an outdoor exhibition for visitors to Auroville."

With a population from 43 countries, the existence of 25 pavilion groups in Auroville is a good sign. "Some are very active, others moderately so," says Jaya. "Thirteen of the active ones decided to participate in the ongoing exhibition: there are panels from India, Tibet, Kazakhstan, Russia,

Japan, Korea, Germany, France, Spain, the USA and Canada. There are also three panels on Africa, and the South Americans made two panels on 'One America'." She hopes that residents of some countries that are well-represented in Auroville but haven't as yet taken an active interest in their national pavilion, and residents of Middle East countries will start Pavilion Groups in due time. "The International Zone Coordination Group is ready to support them."

A noteworthy development is that of the African Pavilion. On November 28th, members of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council participated in a blessing ceremony for this pavilion. "This development gained momentum in 2005," says Jaya, "when students from Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia came to Auroville for three months to work on plans for an African Pavilion. In March 2010, 65 students from

Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda who are studying in Tamil Nadu came to Auroville and presented an African Night. As they had some spare time, I showed them around and also showed them the site for the African Pavilion. And then something happened I hadn't expected at all. They said, 'This land is for Africa, let's make a prayer here'. One after the other they said a prayer for the blessing of the land and the project. They were students coming for a cultural event, not a spiritual group; I had informed them about Auroville, showed them the Matrimandir and then this happened. The spiritual message went straight to their heart."

The International Zone Coordination Group looks forward to promote the presence of Africa in Auroville. One initiative is to make

International Zone Master Plan reviewed

L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's town planning service, published in the News and Notes of 20 November 2010 its decision to restudy the Master Plan for the International Zone approved by the previous L'Avenir d'Auroville team in Dec 2009 in consultation with the International Zone Group, following a request from the International Advisory Council which objected to the space allocated to some of the continents in the plan. The new study will also take into account ground realities that have not been formerly considered, such as the location of the village of Bharitipuram, of canyons and the Darkali Park inside the Zone.

more contacts with African students in India – an estimated 3,000 are studying in Tamil Nadu alone. Another one may present itself during the forthcoming Auroville International meeting in October this year in Addis Ababa. "We hope that a delegation of Auroville International together with International Advisory Council member Dr. Doudou Diène and Mr. Shimelis Adugna, a former Ethiopian Minister of Labour and Social Affairs who attended the Blessing Ceremony, can visit the African Union to ask them for help for the realisation of the Africa House and establish contacts with representatives of various African countries," says Jaya. Immediate plans for the Africa House are the building of an outdoor amphitheatre for drumming and dance, which can then be used for cultural events in collaboration with the various African student groups in India.

In conversation with Carel.

Eric from South Africa

Eric is twenty two years old, a computer science graduate, and is now applying to become a Newcomer. "There are about half a dozen Africans in Auroville," he says. "Tekeste from Ethiopia was the first and actually met Mother several times and is now working on creating connections in Addis Ababa. There are now Aurovilians from Tunisia, Egypt and South Africa. The Auroville meeting in South Africa was a great encouragement for us and we are all looking forward to the Auroville International meeting in Addis Ababa this year."

I have only been in Auroville four months but love being here and am fascinated with the concept of the African Pavilion. I have been working on clearing the land and am putting a lot of energy into making connections with African students in Tamil Nadu. It is quite difficult as they are all busy with their studies and most have never heard of Auroville, but the cultural events they have been involved with in Auroville have aroused a lot of enthusiasm. The African Pavilion will encompass the 54 countries of Africa. They are all very different and have enormous problems, but when they see the possibility of unification in the African Pavilion it will hopefully inspire them and lead to resolving some of their conflicts. Africa has been divided, poor and exploited for too long. The Auroville African Pavilion will show the world, and the African countries, what potential we have."



Dianna



A view of the exhibition

Auroville Today: What is the housing requirement today?

Joseba: We have many demands. More than 50 cases are truly urgent; and I estimate that this number can easily be expanded to over a 100. The former Entry Service did not verify if newcomers had money to contribute to their house or apartment, and this led to a large group of people joining Auroville without financial means. Then there are the requirements of the Auroville youth, many of whom are now in their twenties, who are working in Auroville. They will never be able to contribute towards an apartment from their Auroville maintenance. Lastly, there are a large number of people living in sub-standard conditions.

Then there are those who want to join Auroville. The Entry Service is dealing with around 300 applications, but we cannot offer Newcomer housing to many of them.

The number of requests will grow from year to year. The situation is quite difficult. It hampers the building of the city and affects the richness of human life in Auroville.

What is the Housing Service proposing to do?

We have prepared an analysis which we made public in the *News and Notes* and on *Auronet*. We want Auroville to build 350 apartments for families, couples and singles. We propose that 200 of these will be funded by the people themselves and that for 150 of these units Auroville seeks the money: 50 units are intended for people with no money, such as youngsters; 50 are Newcomer units to lodge Newcomers for one or two years while they plan their permanent house; and another 50 units will be made available against a monthly contribution. In this way there will be a diversified housing situation. We are now having meetings with the Entry Service, L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's town planning service, and the FAMC, the Funds and Assets Management Committee, trying to find a common approach. This should then be finalized in a General Meeting.

Is there a drive to build more housing?

Not enough. About two to three years ago, a number of projects were initiated to construct 120 flats and houses in the City Centre and in sectors I and II of the Residential Zone. Many of these projects are presently getting finalized. They are all fully booked.

But far too few new projects are starting. In September last year, the Housing Service and the Entry Group jointly requested L'Avenir d'Auroville to urgently launch two or three new housing projects. Unfortunately, till today we have not seen any concrete response to this request. L'Avenir also publicly stated that it is reluctant to allocate land for individual housing because it considers it cannot make decisions without readjusting base maps to match reality. Instead, it appealed to existing communities to allow more houses to be built within their borders.

Is there willingness from existing communities to allow new houses to be created there?

Almost none. We tried this a few years ago, but the response was negative and sometimes even hostile. Some people freaked out at the idea that another house would be built in 'their' community. This appeal of L'Avenir won't solve our housing problem.

So we are stuck. This is really frustrating as we cannot offer the people enough possibilities.

How does the Housing Service propose to finance housing for those who can't contribute?

In three ways. One is from funding from private sources, the second from grants from the Government of India, the third from the proceeds of selling outlying land owned by Auroville.

Private individuals have already funded the *Citadines* buildings in which

Battling the housing crisis

The population growth of Auroville during the past years has been minimal, largely due to the non-availability of housing. Joseba has been working for Auroville's Housing Service for the last three years. Here he presents the views of the Housing Service on the housing crisis.



The members of the Housing Service. From left standing: Satyakam, Anbu (representing L'Avenir d'Auroville), Jocelyn (representing the Entry Service), Karin (representing the Auroville Council), Joseba, Ambalagam, Dhalia. Sitting from left: Venkatesh, Nergez, Volker.

33 apartments were made available free. We hope that more funds from private sources will be raised in future.

What about funding by the Government of India?

The Indian Government has provided the money for the *Inspiration* building and is presently funding the *Maitreye II* project. *Inspiration* provided 15 apartments free. *Maitreye II* will have 27 apartments for 16 singles, 6 couples and 5 families.

The government grant is part of its total grant for Auroville, and the Housing Service is fighting a battle to allocate more of that grant to create more housing instead of creating more public buildings, many of which are constantly underutilised. We believe that the ratio of public buildings to housing is imbalanced. Moreover, Auroville doesn't even have the money to properly maintain all those public buildings! It is the need of the hour that we concentrate on housing.

And the third option, the sale of outlying Auroville lands?

A year ago the FAMC constituted a sub group, the Land Resources Development Group, to study what to do with outlying lands owned by Auroville. The group identified lands that can be disposed of and lands regarding which there are different views in the community; it also contacted the Indian company Jones Lang Lasalle, one of the most prestigious in India, which graciously assisted in giving an assessment of how the various pieces of land could be optimally used. This resulted in a list of lands which Auroville should keep, and a list of lands that can be sold or exchanged with land inside the city and greenbelt area.

We propose that Auroville starts selling the land that is not required. Part of the proceeds should be used to acquire lands in the city or greenbelt; another part should be used to create infrastructure and build housing. In this way, the largest present-day needs would be covered. This proposal is still being discussed by the FAMC, and should be presented for approval in a General Meeting. If accepted, we believe that this will free up large amounts of money.

Many new people hesitate to donate for a house in Auroville. Is this issue being addressed?

The fact that nobody can own a house in Auroville is based on the first line of Auroville's Charter, "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular..." This means that today, in order to get a

house or apartment, a person has to make a substantial donation to the Auroville Foundation, now in the order of a minimum of Rs 8 to 15 lakhs. Many people do not have that amount of money – Auroville will have to build accommodation for them – and those who do have the money are often not happy to donate it, as this money often represents their life savings and will not be returned to them if they decide to leave Auroville.

The present Newcomer period is one year. There is an arrangement that Newcomers can get the money they donate for a house back if they do not become Aurovilian after that year. But for many people a year is too short a period to decide if they want to join Auroville permanently. Perhaps this arrangement should be extended so that if an Aurovilian decides to leave Auroville, say, three years after joining, they can still get the donation back.

Another proposal is that Auroville builds apartments and make them available against a kind of monthly contribution or lease. Some people have a monthly income coming from outside Auroville and would be able to join Auroville under this arrangement. We have found that a rent of up to Rs 8,000/month would be feasible, and then, after 20 years, we could cancel the rent.

Is renting of houses by Aurovilians now accepted?

Yes, but within limits. To prevent abuse, we want all rent contracts to go through the Housing Service.

For we have been witnessing a very disturbing phenomenon where

Aurovilians were renting out 'their' second houses to newcomers at exorbitant rates. In a few cases rents were charged of Rs 18,000, Rs 20,000 or even Rs 25,000 a month! Taking in consideration that these Newcomers have to contribute monthly to the community and are to work voluntarily in some unit or service we consider this completely against the principles of Auroville. It should be eradicated. We have intervened in a number of cases and we will have to intervene in more. But the best policy to eradicate this kind of behaviour is to create more houses and apartment which the Housing Service can make available at moderate rates.

The FAMC and the Auroville Council have meanwhile issued a statement that nobody can be steward of more than one house. This should do away with the possibility of people renting out 'their' second house. But people do not inform us. Some Newcomers, who have their backs against the wall as they have no other housing option, choose to pay and not inform us.

What about newcomers renting a house in a neighbouring village?

We need to be flexible. This is certainly not ideal, but sometimes it is the only possible option because there are not enough Newcomer units to accommodate Newcomers. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation agrees to this, in view of the housing crisis. But we put as a condition that there should be no house or apartment available in Auroville and that the Newcomer will live in the vicinity, not in Pondicherry.

You mentioned that people cannot get their donation for a house back once they become Aurovilian. Is this fair to those who wish to leave Auroville?

The FAMC are studying how people can be compensated if they want to leave Auroville. But the idea to relate this compensation to the amount they donated for a house or for starting a unit has been dropped. Instead, the FAMC believes that compensation should be based on for how many years a person has given his or her energies to Auroville. The present repatriation fund should be strengthened for this purpose. For it doesn't make sense that people stay in Auroville who are not happy here, Auroville should help them live elsewhere.

Quite a few people who left Auroville many years ago are still controlling 'their' house from afar, deciding who should occupy it and for what period of time. How does the Housing Service deal with this?

The present condition is that you can leave Auroville for five years and still be considered an Aurovilian, which means that during that time 'your' house is available for you when you return to Auroville. But there are many cases of people who left for far longer periods, and still claim 'their' house.

The FAMC and Auroville Council are reviewing the Auroville Housing Policy and there is a proposal – it has not yet been decided – to reduce that period from five to three years.

The Housing Service, over the years, has dealt with a few cases and has always taken a very flexible stand. Some people have asked us to postpone the decision for a few years, as they are out of Auroville to earn money for their child's education or to solve a family problem, and they say that they will come back. Some people have told us that they do not know yet when they will return, but continue to pay for the house repair and maintenance. But there are also cases where people give no indication that they want to come back, or only return for a few weeks every year. This will not do; these cases have to be resolved.

What are the views of the Housing Service on the future?

The Housing Service is positive. We believe that Auroville today is not a 'poor' community. Our collective managerial skills and the optimisation of our own resources may be ineffective, but we have many of the necessary resources to face our present challenges and to welcome future Aurovilians. However, we need to take serious decisions for the next stage of our development. The necessity of the hour is to think big and to think of the future.

In conversation with Carel

HOUSE REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

The Housing Service deals with four major issues: house repair and maintenance; housing development; Newcomer housing; and housing transfers. The work has been allocated to various teams. The repair and maintenance branch looks into requests for help with repairs. Volker, together with Ambalagam, is in charge of this aspect of the work.

"Quite a few Aurovilians live in what we could call 'sub-standard' housing, houses built years ago without proper plans or engineering support," says Volker. "For example, someone builds a little house. Then he gets a little extra money and builds a small extension, and does so once again when the family expands. And so on. This has led to quite a few ramshackle structures. Technically speaking, it would be better to demolish these houses and help the people to move to the city area instead of repairing these houses. But given the present situation, we can't do that. So we are doing patchwork."

"The monthly budget, about Rs 85,000 a month, is allocated by the Budget Coordination Committee. This income is barely sufficient to do the actual work; and there is no money for any real maintenance. Quite a few communities are getting run down; many houses badly need painting, which the people cannot afford from their monthly maintenance – and even if they have a little extra money, there are always other more pressing needs and there is little or no inclination to spend it on the house. But we do not have the money to take this up."

"We started a keet scheme to make a reserve fund for the renovation of keet roofs. The change of a keet roof of a large hut in Aspiration community costs Rs 14,500, and that is required every two years. Each hut in Aspiration costs in fact Rs 600/month in keet repair. This has become a heavy burden. The keet scheme has been set up to carry these costs: each Aspiration resident donates Rs 100-300 a month into the keet fund and the Housing Service adds to this fund whenever necessary. But keet has become a liability as the labour costs have become too high. We have to find another low-cost roofing solution."

"It would be great if we would have sufficient funds to start proactive maintenance works to give everybody a proper living standard. Recently an Auroville service unit for carpentry was created to do house repair and maintenance in cooperation with the Housing Service and soon this will happen also for painting; a masonry and plumbing unit may come in due course. These units are not money but service-oriented. That is a good development."

Two new scholarship funds started

Aurovillians involved in education have long spoken of the need to help youth from Auroville and from the nearby villages in pursuing higher education.

The Auroville Scholarship and Educational Fund

In January 2009, the Scholarship and Educational Fund (SEF) was created. It operates under SAIER, Auroville's educational umbrella organization, and is run by two executives and several support group members.

The group agreed on several principles on which to base the SEF. They agreed that formal higher studies – i.e. beyond the 12th grade or equivalent – are a necessary and desirable option for Auroville youth, and they realized that many Auroville youth see leaving Auroville as an important step in their development: they want to experience “the world outside”. While many ultimately return to Auroville, they want to make their decision to do so on their own.

Because many Auroville youth seek higher study experiences outside of the community, the SEF group agreed that Auroville should be financially responsible for students' higher studies needs, just as it is for school age children, and that an agency should exist to handle this responsibility.

Another SEF consensus was that the primary criterion for giving financial assistance should be financial need. Many Auroville youth do have access to private funds and financial support, but many do not, such as those from the former Soviet nations or from the local villages. SEF's role is to even out some of these discrepancies and to make higher studies a goal that all Auroville youth can reach for if they choose to. While academic merit is also examined when reviewing applications, financial need is the main factor looked at.

Lastly, the group agreed that contributors to the SEF can do so by specifying a particular student, or they can leave it to the admissions group to determine to whom to channel the money. However, specified donations from Auroville commercial units have to be matched by an unspecified contribution of a similar amount.

These principles determined the SEF's official aims and objectives (see box).

The SEF has received funding from the Auroville City Budget, Stichting de Zaaier in the Netherlands, and the Foundation for World Education in the USA, as well as from individ-

uals and business units inside and outside Auroville. With these funds, we have supported a total of 18 students, fourteen of whom are Indians. Most of the beneficiaries are either Future School students needing financial assistance to take British O and A level exams here in India, or are students attending colleges and universities, mainly in India. Another four students have received student-specific support.

Funds released are given as interest-free loans, except in the case of student-specific support. Students commit to repay them to the SEF after they have completed their studies and have established themselves financially.

SEF team members are working without any remuneration. All administrative expenses incurred are borne by the team members and their respective business units. It is hoped that this mode of operation can be sustained for some time.

During application interviews, the SEF team realized that students are often poorly informed about their options for higher studies. In order to remedy this, last October an experienced career counsellor, Mrs. Pippa Mukherjee



Clockwise from top left: Jean-Michel, Lucas, Martina, Selvi, Auralice, Satyen, Suryagandhi, Bobby, Palani

Aims and objectives of the Scholarship & Educational Fund

- * To fund-raise and operate as a fund for the education of Auroville youth inside and outside Auroville.
- * To help in creating educational and training opportunities inside and outside Auroville.
- * To help in creating equality of opportunities for Auroville youth.
- * To work towards finding optimal educational options for each individual.

from Kodaikanal, was hosted in Auroville for four days. Pippa's services were appreciated by students, parents and teachers alike, and it was suggested that she be invited every year.

Working for the SEF is a learning experience. We realize that our Auroville youth in general has a fine level of self-awareness. Those who are not yet clear about their study and professional choices are quite aware of their position and can express themselves with refreshing self-confidence. They often have a detached and balanced perspective on Auroville, aware both of its gifts and its lacunae.

Abirami, a Future School student, is one of the SEF beneficiaries. She has studied in schools in and outside Auroville and recognizes that the school outside has imparted to her a good sense of discipline, yet she fully appreciates the learning experienced in Auroville

schools. Meena, another SEF beneficiary, is in her third year in a college in Karaikal. She states frankly that her parents pushed her into formal schooling and studies and she sees the shortcomings of the college curriculum, yet she admits that all this has been a valuable process of growth and maturing.

We also realize that more educational and vocational options need to be offered by the Auroville adult world. While many of us are ready to busy ourselves with interns and volunteers from all over the world, the needs of Auroville youth seem not to be addressed well.

We are extremely grateful to the financial support received from both Auroville and from all over the world, without which the SEF cannot function.

Lucas

The SEF can be contacted at scholarshipfund@auroville.org.in

Scholarship fund for village youth

Education opportunities for village children have much improved, but a college education is still beyond many families' financial means.

Reach for the Stars is a new initiative started by a group of Aurovillians and villagers that will provide funds for talented but underprivileged village students to attend college. Founder Stephanie explains that she was often meeting youths who wanted to do further study, but were constrained by their situation. “It wasn't just that they couldn't finance their studies,” she says. “They're often expected to work to support the family immediately after they leave school. I saw them struggle.”

The team researched costs of college education in India, and concluded that it would not be costly for potential donors abroad. A computer science degree at a basic college costs about Rs 10,000 a year. On average, the cost for a completed degree will be about Euros 600-800 over three years.

In addition to simply making donations to the project, donors can participate in a sponsorship programme. Donors are matched with one student whom they will fund for their entire college degree, so that they can build up a relationship and enable easier communication. As Stephanie says about this option, “It's good for students to know the money's not just coming from heaven. It's from an individual and the student has to report to them on their progress.”

The project operates under the Auroville Village Action Trust, and donations are funnelled through AVI/Auroville Fund to ensure transparency and to provide tax receipts. Students can nominate a degree and college of their choice. However, the team encourages the applicants to choose government colleges because of their higher standard of education and better value for money.

The scholarship is only for students who have no financial means and their financial background will be thoroughly assessed by the team in order to ensure that the most deserving students are



Clockwise from top left: Balu, Angela, Francis, Stephanie, Segar, Doris.

given the help. The project initially planned to ask the students for a co-contribution, but eventually dropped this approach because they felt it may discriminate against the underprivileged students, which is their target group.

Students must complete an extensive application that includes two essays in which they are expected to explain their hopes and aspirations for their life and career. “To get the scholarship, they need to put a lot of effort into the questionnaire, to finding out where they want to go and what their goals are,” says Stephanie. “It's not an easy step, so I think we can learn a lot about them and see how enthusiastic they really are to get into the programme.”

It is often difficult for students to answer questions about their goals, as they are rarely encouraged to think about individual aspirations and are not exposed to career options beyond the popular career stereotypes of engineer, doctor, accountant or nurse.

“That's basically it,” says Stephanie. “Why not biology or architecture, or something out of the frame? That doesn't happen. We hope with the project we can start to get them thinking about different opportunities.”

The long-term career goals of local youths are generally influenced by social concerns. “They want security and it's not so important to develop yourself through your work,” says Stephanie. “They have to support the family or find a good husband, raise the children. The team doesn't want to change their way of thinking, just to offer more opportunities.”

The first batch of sponsorships will take place in 2011 and will include six to eight students. The team will aim for an even spread of students from the villages of Kulapalayam, Edyanchavadi and Kottakarai, but acknowledges that a gender spread might be a challenge. Stephanie explains that many girls get married soon after completing their degrees, while the fund would prefer they work for a while before getting married. “We don't want to discriminate, but the project needs to have an impact,” she says. “The impact is stronger if you give the funds to a girl who wants to continue to work in that field. Of course, at one point she'll get married and have kids, but once she has worked, she'll be in a stronger position, socially and financially.”

Fundraising and coordination are undertaken by Stephanie and Doris, and the recruiting team for suitable applicants and selection team are separate. The recruiting team members are Aurovillians Segar, Shankar and Francis, and non-Aurovillian Balu. The selection team members are all Aurovillians: Angela from Italy, Karin from Germany and Alok from India.

The team was warned that they would encounter people expecting financial handouts who may not understand why some applicants are refused. But the team is very positive, pointing to the visible changes in village youths who have already completed college. “You see a great shift in their confidence,” Stephanie says. “There are more and more young people who have this in them.”

The team has the vision and hope that with this small project they can make a difference and help fulfil the dreams of some young people. People who ‘reach for the stars’.

Lesley

For more information or to help the *Reach for the Stars* project, visit <http://www.reach-for-the-stars.org/>

Lessons from China and the past

The 2010 Shanghai Expo was the most expensive Expo ever and attracted over 73 million visitors. The theme, 'Better City – Better Life', seemed tailor-made for our town planners. However, Aurovilian participation was limited. Auroville only had a one panel display in the India Pavilion and few Aurovilians visited the Expo. In fact, Ajit, the Aurovilian who spent the most time there, was not even representing Auroville but was presenting heritage restoration work in Pondicherry.

As a young architecture student Ajit had been attracted to Auroville by the Galaxy plan as well as the concept of unending education. When he came in 1971 the Auroville architecture office, run by Roger Anger, was located in a beautiful old villa in Pondicherry. "Last School and some other projects were being constructed. Two or three times a week we would go out on site then return to Pondicherry to do more drawings. At that time I was totally blind to the beauty of old Pondicherry. The only thing that interested me was Auroville and the Galaxy."

In 1978, Ajit left for Germany. "The idea was that I would stay two months in Germany, then go to the Middle East to earn money so I could return to Auroville and build a house. But I ended up living in Germany and travelling a lot in Europe. For me it was an opportunity to unlearn and relearn. This is when I got hooked on heritage because I became fascinated by beautiful old cities like Florence, Venice and Paris." When he returned in 1987, he began volunteering for the Pondicherry chapter of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) doing heritage listing work. Since 1998 he's been involved in protecting the heritage of Pondicherry full-time.

Ajit's interest in heritage architecture also led him to reassess the Galaxy and the way we are building the city. "It struck me that there is a lot to be learned from traditional cities. Somehow, in Auroville, we think our city has to be new and extraordinary. We are the victims of 'star architecture', the approach which has dominated architectural studies and practice since the Second World War. It has led to architects always trying to do something different, to design fantastic stand-alone buildings. The result? If you look around the world today we have hundreds of beautifully-designed modern structures but not one single square kilo-



View of the Pondicherry stall at the Shanghai Expo

metre of timeless architecture which takes your breath away like, say, Oxford in England. And the same tendency to stand-alone architecture is here in Auroville.

"I think that building a city is perhaps so simple that we don't get it. When I say that we should learn lessons from old cities I mean in terms of their urban form, scale and human dimension. The beauty of a traditional city is that it's always a product of the land, it springs out of the local conditions. And then it grows incrementally using a shared pattern language in such a way that every part contributes to the whole. Look at the well-preserved parts of the French and Tamil quarters in Pondicherry. They have a common architectural language and yet no two houses are the same."

"I'm not saying that we have to abandon the Galaxy but we have to radically question it without fear. If I were to prepare a brief for Auroville town planners and architects today I would point out we don't know how many people will be here in five years, we don't know how much money we're

going to get and we don't have all the land, so come up with a design which makes it possible that even if we build in small steps it slowly adds up to something whole."

While Ajit was in China he took the opportunity to travel a bit in the country. What did he learn?

"China has really realized the value of heritage; it is way ahead of India in terms of heritage preservation. The other thing I think we in India can learn from China concerns making cities people-friendly. Everywhere you go in Chinese cities there are tree-lined and beautifully-landscaped pavements, pedestrian precincts and parks where people can walk, linger and enjoy themselves. While their

At the Expo, INTACH created a little bit of Pondicherry by incorporating a typical Tamil veranda and a French gate in the Pondicherry Pavilion design in the Urban Best Practices Area (UBPA). According to Prashant, who made a fleeting visit, the Pondicherry presentation was one of the best in that area. Ajit is more modest. "Even though we had a very small budget, it certainly wasn't the worst. A lot of Aurovilians participated in the design and manifestation of our presentation. And we got a good response: there were many articles about us in the professional press in China."

For more information visit: www.pondicherryatshanghai.com

cities have space for cars, they don't neglect the pedestrians, which is what we do in Indian cities. This is a sign of civilization for me, to focus on people and not just vehicles as an important element of urbanism."

Hosting the Pondicherry pavilion and visiting other pavilions at the Expo also confirmed Ajit's previous reservations about the present conception of Auroville's International Zone. "I have seen the Expo and I've spoken to people about it and many are questioning the very idea of world Expos now. It takes huge resources of money and energy to set up such an Expo – just to make one presentation is already a major work – but still you cannot really capture any country in a display or exhibition. This is why I can't help questioning what Mother said about the pavilions. Because even if we do manage to build all the pavilions, the real challenge is to make them living, interesting, for 365 days a year and not let them become dusty buildings with fading presentations, supervised by bored curators."

"I think it makes more sense to have one complex, comprising auditoria, exhibition spaces etc., where different nations and cultures take turns in presenting themselves for a limited period of time. This is already being done successfully at places like the India International Centre in Delhi and the House of World Cultures in Berlin. Instead of nations having to invest a tremendous amount of money and energy in building its own pavilion, we could use the existing buildings in Bharat Nivas as the basis and invite different nations to contribute to extending and linking up facilities which could be used by all."

"When it comes to Auroville," concludes Ajit, "I don't think there should be any taboo in questioning anything connected with the city: nothing should be seen as sacrosanct. We should be very sincere and truly question what it is that we want today."

From an interview by Alan

AUROVILLE YOUTH

Jiyeah's story

Jiyeah, like many Auroville youth, left Auroville to pursue higher education abroad, in her case in her native country Korea.

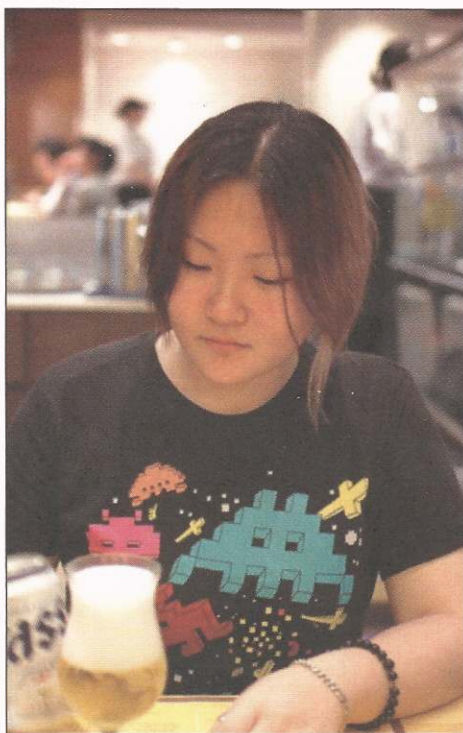
Maybe for us second-generation Aurovilians, Auroville is an egg. You know, Hesse's so-safe-and-warm-you-don't-want-to-leave-but-have-to-egg. Then Boom! The world! Bam! It slaps you in the face! ...Or at least it slapped me.

I left for Korea for the simple (or maybe not so simple) fact that I am Korean. The bait my father threw in was that since I was Korean I had to know Korean history (ironic since my least favorite subject turned out to be Korean history) and culture. I bit that bait, not yet knowing there was a bullet to bite too.

If I told you there was a high school where all students had to be in class from seven a.m. till ten p.m. Monday through Saturday, would you believe me? Then, if I told you that there were 300 such high schools and that an Aurovilian child went to one of them? And that she didn't quit the school and finished all three years?

It wasn't just the school hours; it was also the people and the environment. Living in 20-something storey apartment blocks where one building can house a population equal to that of Auroville was quite new. My first impression was, when I left that chickenhouse-like home, that I always met people with brown eyes and black hair and similar clothing who always spoke the same language. Being different is not something you want other people to know about.

The first year was difficult and I must admit I sometimes whined to my mom about coming back or going anywhere else, it didn't really matter where. By the end of the first year my classmates noticed that I wasn't so 'weird', or maybe 'weird can coexist with nice', although I must say I made some eccentric friends (by Korean standards, of course) who listened to



metal or Japanese pop, or who wanted to become artists (something shunned because it is commonly thought to be a career in which you will never earn money, and money of course is something you should absolutely have, want, and like).

The studies themselves were not as difficult as outsiders usually think from the stories they hear. Rote memorization is not the best method of high school education, but it is simple, notably if you go to a 'foreign language' high school, where they teach you just that for seven hours a day with four hours to revise every day, except every other Sunday. Going from creative essay writing to learning by heart is much easier than vice versa, I suppose. Anyhow, I applied for early admission entry to Goryeo (or 'Korea') University's International Studies Division, which selects students based on foreign language skills and extracurricular activities, unlike regular admission which is solely based on Korean SAT scores and GPA. I had to take a

string of exams: the TOEFL, Dalf, and even APs, do volunteer work as well as participate in national competitions for foreign language skills.

Then university – 180 degrees from high school! Since the department was mostly made up of students who've had experience living abroad it was more open. What surprised me more was that even outside the International Studies major, there were many who thought differently from what I'd observed in high school. Feminists had a strong influence in the student union, equality among different ages and groups was emphasized, many living on their own were interested in environmentally-friendly food and lifestyles, most were trying to be unique in their own ways; things I was implicitly taught to shun for three years. This was the year I dyed my hair pink. It might seem out of the ordinary, but in my year in my division there was also someone with an Afro hairdo and another with a Mohawk. That spread and soon you could see about three Mohawks and two pinkheads (the other one was the school rock band's vocalist). So Korea's maybe not all that afraid of differences, at least not my generation.

During the two years at university, I learned to drink 'Korean style': drinking all night, then getting home without dying on the way, and showing up in class next day. I went to every gay club in the city and even to an African club (places most Koreans only hear of) thanks to my gay and/or crazy friends, became close friends with Kenyans, Bulgarians and an El Salvadorian, been on the indie music scene in Korea, had a bisexual boyfriend, made some money tutoring English, bought a Canon and a Prada, been active in the school's feminist campaigns and applied to the ROTC, so you see, it's not that different from Amsterdam or Paris or Boston.

This year will make it the eleventh year since I first arrived in Auroville, unable to speak a word of English. Now I speak five languages, and I'm back in Auroville on holidays, but at the same time not really here just yet. I'm almost glad and grateful I walked out of that warm egg.

Jiyeah

OUTREACH

Chennai dumping yard becomes herbal park



Top: A part of the Otteri dumping yard
Below: Benches in the Otteri herbal park



An 11-acre dumping yard in Otteri, Chennai, has been transformed into the city's first herbal park. The transformation was done at a cost of Rs 2.25 crore with assistance from Auroville's Pitchandikulam Forest Consultants. The park will be opened to the public soon by Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. The park has at least 200 indigenous plant species, most of them natives of tropical dry evergreen forests. Medicinal plants grow in abundance along with fruit-bearing trees like lemon, guava and jamun and trees that trap dust and noise. As in the Adyar Poonga, stone slab boards display information about the names of the species and their medicinal properties.

Auroville art

January offered much for exhibition-going culture-vultures in Auroville. Savitri Bhavan's white expanse and sleek design – arguably the best exhibition space in Auroville – hosted Aurovilians Grazi and Nathalie's exhibition *Colourful Silence*. The exhibition celebrated nature in richly coloured paintings that featured ethereal nymph-like visages peering out from woods or lily ponds. Other paintings evoked Chagall with their delicate abstract motifs and dream-like mood.

Sarasija's *Mandala* exhibition at the Tibetan Pavilion shifts from her former work on mandalas to focus on the butterfly, the symbol of transformation and metamorphosis. The artworks featured butterflies cut from paper and

decorated variously, set into the frame with subtly-patterned paper shapes reminiscent of delicate Japanese origami designs.

Former Aurovilian Diane Smith presented her *Silk Life* collection of fine silk art at Pitanga. The richly-coloured wall hangings depicted an array of themes, from lotuses and landscapes to female deities and Mother. Her delicately stitched artworks use rich silk fabrics cut across the grain to capture the light in different ways; for example, to depict the petals of a lotus flower in afternoon light. Her well-attended opening saw many who appreciated the works.

Celestine's *I Am Art* exhibition/installation at the gallery Square Circle at Kala Kendra was a contrast to the ethereal quality of the previous three exhibitions with its more earthy approach. The circular space featured photo self-portraits that celebrated and arguably fetishised her head of multiple long braids as a powerful agent captured in movement and dance. The downstairs space was given over to an installation that featured rustic objects, hanging braids and candles – a work that gave a sense of grounding to the upstairs photographic offerings.

The exhibition *The Wild Flowers in Matrimandir* at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture showed the fine work of Padha from Korea. "Working at Matrimandir, I was impressed with the perfect beauty and strong life-force of the tiny wild flowers," he wrote in his introduction to the exhibition. "They were manifesting perfection of the divinity." And he started to paint them in a calligraphic style – a work he described as "com-

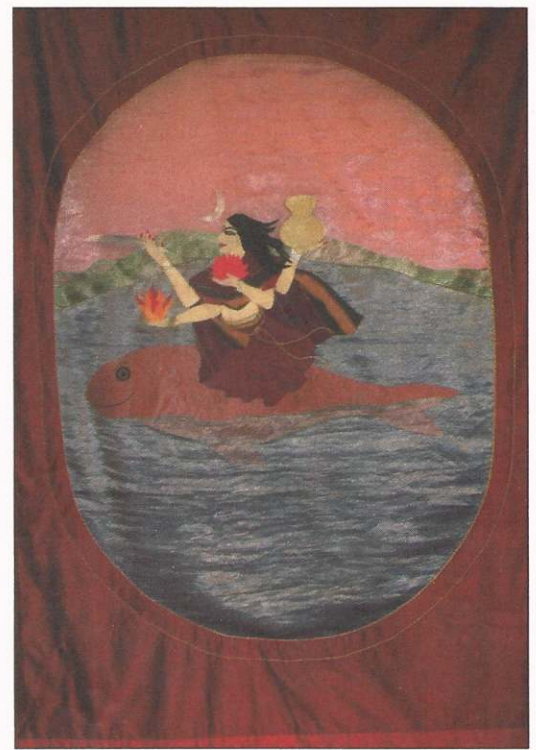
municating with the flower in meditation, expressing their beauty in the oriental beauty of emptiness." His work captivated the essence of the flowers, as well as the attention of the public.

The *Autumn in Kyoto* exhibition of photo collages from Franz was displayed in the Aurelec cafeteria. The collages evoked a Japanese autumn through rich images of trees, landscapes and tea ceremonies, inset with the occasional photo of a young kimono-wearing Mother. The graphic shapes contrasted well with delicacy of presentation. These beautiful artworks deserved a better display space than behind the buffet serving tables!

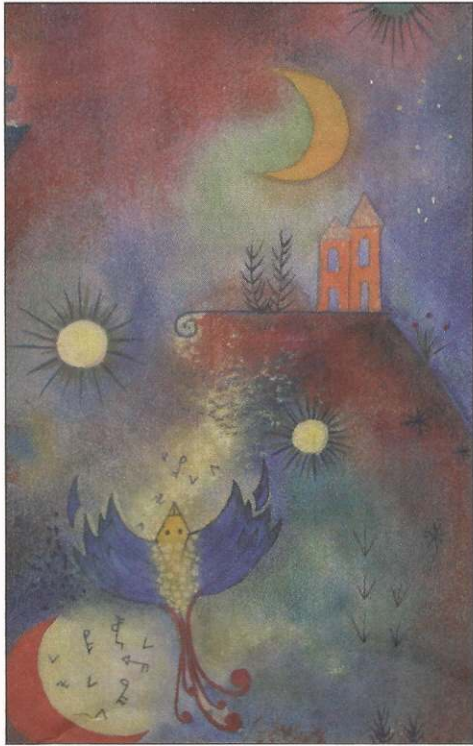
Lesley



'Inocenza'. Acrylic on paper by Grazi



'Chandreleka's self portrait' Silk art by Diane Smith



'Pension Night'. Water colour by Nathalie

Is Auroville art lacking in variety?

Much Auroville art shares an ethereal quality, a delicacy of execution, soft colours, and a focus on nature and otherworldly female images. Do Auroville artists broadly have a tendency towards certain artistic styles and themes, to the point where Auroville's collective art offerings start to become monochromatic? Will Auroville ever produce edgy art that pushes boundaries in its themes, genre and execution, while still maintaining the high standard of execution that we see in Auroville?

Art that makes socio-political commentary is largely absent, as Auroville artists generally focus on rendering visual an interpretation of the 'inner', keeping the two domains separate. Art that challenges viewers to think about Auroville in different ways is also lacking. Is it possible for artists to bring, for example, some of the subversive elements of the Genius Brothers on to the exhibition walls in Auroville?

In terms of genre, multi-media art – currently popular in the West – is largely neglected in Auroville. Whilst Auroville has hosted very credible exhibitions by its photographers, these artworks are usually literal representations. The importance of concept and innovation is often overlooked by Auroville artists. Is it time we expanded our interpretation of Mother's focus on beauty and aesthetics to develop art with diverse conceptual approaches across new and exciting genres?

Lesley

POPULATION STATISTICS

Comparing statistics – Auroville Population 1999 – 2010

Comparative overview by nationality

Nationality	Nov. 05	Nov. 06	Nov. 07	Nov. 08	Nov. 09	Nov. 10
Indian	736	760	799	876	918	932
French	261	279	290	303	323	324
German	226	232	226	228	242	247
Italian	85	89	93	100	111	118
Dutch	77	75	83	78	81	88
American	61	65	67	70	80	80
Russian	40	41	45	46	52	50
Swiss	42	50	53	52	53	47
British	50	51	45	49	47	46
Spanish	30	32	33	34	36	43
Israeli	16	21	28	23	27	42
Korean	20	25	19	24	31	36
Belgian	17	19	19	18	19	26
Swedish	12	13	14	17	24	22
Canadian	23	23	24	23	23	17
Ukrainian	15	16	16	16	15	16
Austrian	12	12	12	12	13	13
Austrian	10	10	7	7	8	8
South African	1	1	6	7	6	8
Tibetan	7	6	7	6	6	7
Japanese	4	4	4	4	4	7
Danish	3	3	3	2	3	6
Slovene	2	2	2	4	7	6
Argentinian	8	7	7	7	7	6
Brazilian	2	3	5	3	3	5
Nepalese	1	1	3	4	4	4
Sri Lankan	4	4	4	4	4	4
Belorussian	1	1	1	2	3	3
Portuguese	0	0	0	0	1	3
Taiwanese	0	0	0	0	3	3
Hungarian	3	3	4	6	6	3
Icelandic	0	1	1	2	2	3
Colombian	1	2	1	1	2	2
Latvian	2	2	2	2	2	2
Ethiopian	2	2	2	2	5	2
Bulgarian	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lithuanian	2	2	1	1	1	1
Thai	0	1	2	2	1	1
Algerian	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kazakh	1	1	1	1	1	1
Irish	1	1	1	2	2	1
Moldavian	0	0	0	0	0	1
Egyptian	0	0	0	0	0	1
New Zealander	1	1	1	1	1	0
Norwegian	0	0	1	1	1	0
Finnish	1	1	1	1	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total	1783	1865	1935	2044	2184	2238

It's that time of year when we look back and see just how far Auroville is progressing in terms of counting heads. Rather than simply look at the current figures let us see what changes have occurred over the last decade.

Despite continuing infrastructural challenges faced by Auroville, most importantly the housing situation and water requirements for a developing city, the population continues to grow. In 10 years it has increased by a whopping 31%. Still, the male/female ratio for both adults and children remains has remained almost constant at approximately 52% and 48% respectively.

In 1999 the number of minors (under 18 years old) was 399, in 2010, however, this figure has grown to 515. The youth of Auroville is 23% of the present population; in 2000 it was 26%.

On 1st November, 2010 the total population of Auroville (including Newcomers and Newcomers' children) stood at 2238, only 54 more than in 2009. This represents a growth of 2.5%, the slowest for some time. (2008 witnessed a growth of 5.3% while 2009 saw growth of 6.8%). The slow increase this year is largely due to the fact that for a considerable time no new people were being admitted to Auroville pending resolution of the ongoing housing crisis.

Auroville is presently home to 43 nationalities. In 1999 there were 31 nationalities.

The percentage of the population represented by each nationality remains almost the same as 10 years ago. The Indian population has grown the most from 507 (1999/2000) to 932 (2010). This is an 84% increase. Closely following are the French and Germans. Today these three nationalities alone make up 67% of Aurovilians. The Italians, Dutch and Americans have also a significant presence, together about 10% of the total population.

Since the year 1999 Auroville has lost and gained the following nationalities:

Lost: Moroccan, Estonian and Kiwis (New Zealand), Norwegians and Finns.

Gained: Israeli, South African, Nepalese, Bulgarian, Ethiopian, Icelandic, Latvian, Thai, Taiwanese, Algerian, Kazakh, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Danish, Egyptian and Moldavian.

It must be pointed out, however, that

Auroville population adults and minors by gender

	Nov. 05	Nov. 06	Nov. 07	Nov. 08	Nov. 09	Nov. 10
Adults	1370	1464	1489	1587	1704	1723
males	728	786	788	836	890	899
females	642	678	701	751	814	824
Minors (< 18 years)	413	401	451	458	480	515
males	220	215	233	243	262	276
females	193	186	218	215	218	239
Total Total	1783	1865	1940	2045	2184	2238

most of the nationalities which disappeared off the radar only ever had 1 or 2 representatives.

Looking at the statistical comparison you can see that the top 5 nations, in terms of growth of numbers over the last decade, are the Indians, French, Israelis, Italians and Koreans. They are followed by the Dutch, Americans, Russians and Germans.

However, if you look at the actual percentages there are a number of nations which have more than doubled their presence. These include the Koreans, Japanese, Slovenians and Belarusians. The Israelis were not even on the radar in 1999. Today 42 of them are residents.

Louise

PASSING

Maurizio

Maurizio Gabriel Musi, born in Italy, passed away on December 29 in Creativity due to complications from a lung disease. Maurizio was 55 years old.

Maurizio first came to Auroville in 2003 and joined in January 2006. He will be remembered as a fine musician, playing different string instruments including guitar, mandolin and bass, who was familiar with Western classical, flamenco, jazz and other music. He was known for his ability to transform the most insignificant piece of music into something original, and for his fine and gentle playing. As music teacher he encouraged and supported numerous young musicians. Maurizio also participated in the Auroville Choir. He also worked at the Pour Tous Distribution Centre preparing meals, until his health failed. He was cremated at Adventure's farewell grounds on January 3rd. To listen to his music visit <http://www.aurovillerradio.org/arts-a-culture/music/1998-a-tribute>



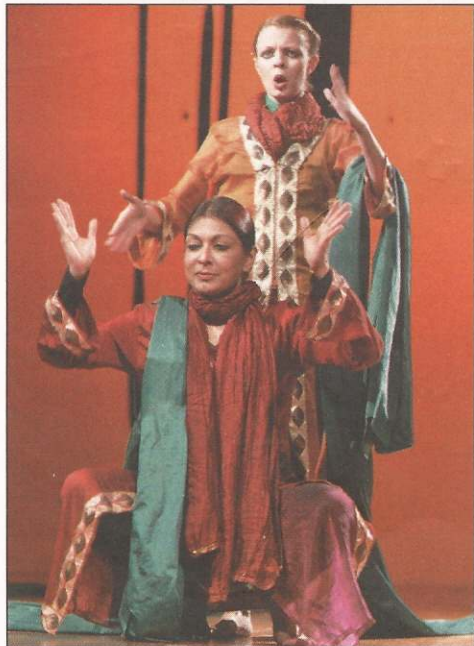
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Orfeo in India

"Orfeo moved me as a heartfelt entreaty to the gods."

Claudio Monteverdi

Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, first performed in the Italian city of Mantua in 1607, is known as the first great masterpiece in the history of Western opera. Monteverdi's innovative genius found expression in his use of monody, the single musical line, as well as in his large variety of forms, where choruses and dances are interspersed between the arias and melodic recitatives, and in his large orchestra of 43 instruments. The opera, which was neglected in the period between his death in 1643 and the twentieth century, has now been firmly established in the operatic canon.

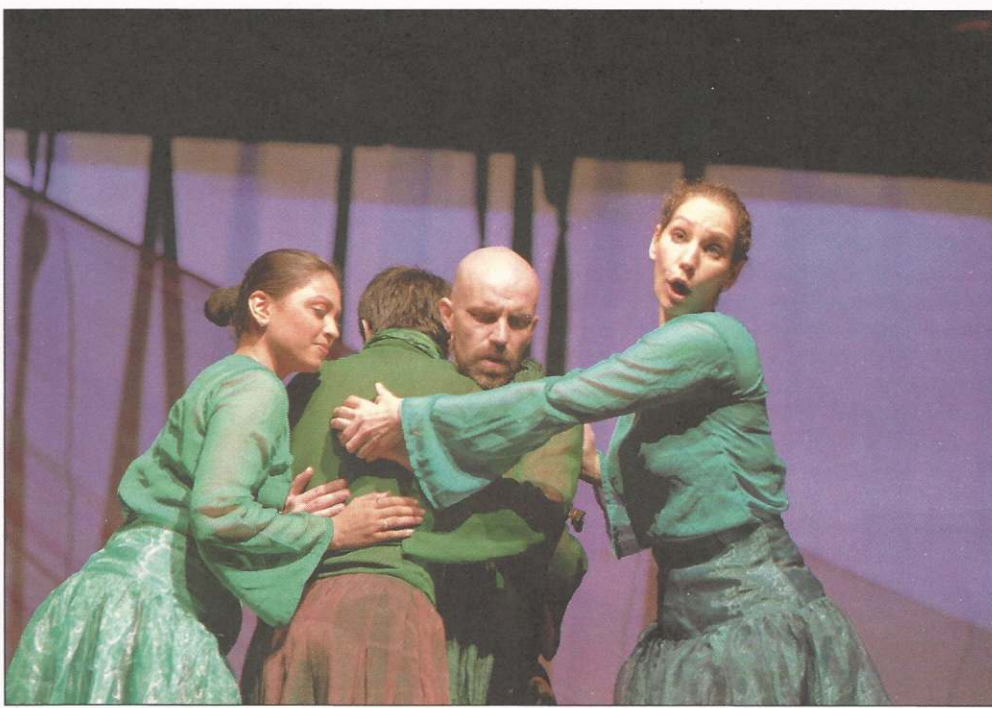


Soprano Camille Hesketh with dancer Mallika Sarabhai

Orfeo has as its subject the classical myth of Orpheus, a poet and singer who travels to the underworld in an attempt to bring back from death his wife Euridice. The power of his music persuades Plutone into letting her return, on condition that Orpheus should not look back as he leads her to the upper world. At the last moment he does so and he loses her once more.

On January 5th, Aurovilians and guests filled the Sri Aurobindo auditorium to watch an Indian reconstruction of *Orfeo*, a collaboration between Dutch director Miranda Lakerveld of *Les Autres Music Theatre*, Amsterdam, with Indian choreographer Mallika Sarabhai of the *Darpana Performance Group* from Ahmadabad, and American-Dutch composer Ned McGowan. The object was to create a performance in which European and Indian musicians, singers and dancers would be equally involved. As Miranda Lakerveld wrote, "This opera once was created from a necessity, from a living context, taking its roots from folk-music and rituals, thus creating a natural relation to the community. By connecting Monteverdi's opera to living traditional Indian art forms, like the tribal dances of Gujarat and the Raga-tradition, I hope to go beyond the classical mask and focus on its tribal character, thus opening the spirit of the piece to a culturally much more diverse audience."

Orfeo in India fused Western and Indian musical styles. Monteverdi's music was played by an ensemble consisting of four specialists in Western Baroque music and six Indian musicians. On stage, three western classical singers and two Indian singers mirrored the movements of the Indian dancers, who were engaged in the folkdances of Gujarat and the highly stylised *Bharata Natyam* dance form. Throughout the



From left: Euridice (danced by Pooja Purohiti), Orfeo (danced by Revanta Sarabhai), baritone Arnout Lems (doubling Orfeo) and mezzo-soprano Antje Lohse (doubling Euridice).

opera, the main thread was the echo-motif.

Did it work? As always, opinion was divided. The musical quality of the performance was generally considered superb, with accolades going to baritone Arnout Lems, soprano Camille Hesketh and mezzo-soprano Antje Lohse. The fusing of the musical styles was smooth and at times surprisingly beautiful, as when the Indian flute echoed the melody of one of the baroque instruments. But the quality of the dancing was felt to be of a lesser standard. Perhaps it was the doubling of the characters that prevented the dancers of the *Darpana Performance Group* expressing themselves fully. If the singers had been part of the orchestra, doubtless the dancers would have been able to blossom more.

The stage setting designed by Rakhi

Peshwani was simple but highly effective. The separation of the upper and underworlds was achieved with a transparent cloth dividing the two worlds. A novelty for Auroville was that the text of the opera, which was sung in Italian, was projected in an English translation on to one of the side walls of the auditorium. Next time this may be improved further by projecting it above the stage for more easy readability.

Orfeo in India was the first classical opera to be performed in Auroville, and, hopefully, won't be the last. We thank Mallika Sarabhai, who is also a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, to have Auroville included in the cities in India where this beautiful and ambitious production was performed.

Carel

Fusing Baroque and Carnatic music

American/Dutch composer Ned McGowan, who studied European classical and Carnatic music and has been coming to India for the last 10 years doing fusion projects, was the music director of *Orfeo in India*. Auroville Today asked him how he had experienced this production.

"The title 'music director' doesn't really fit," says Ned. "In fact, my job description was evolving by the day. I first had to sort out which European classical instruments could be used here in India; then how European and Carnatic musicians could play together in harmony; which sections of the original score could be played by whom and in which combination; and what additional music must be composed to make it all fit together. Finally, I also conducted and played in the performances."

"It started with finding the instruments. Monteverdi's score calls for an extensive battery of instruments, including a harpsichord, an organ, lutes and a variety of other instruments that you can't find in India. I searched the Internet and found an organisation that is dedicated to recreating traditional baroque sounds with electronic keyboards. That solved one problem: we used a midi-keyboard to control a computer programmed to create sounds that come close to those original instruments. This gave us the harpsichord, the harp, the harmonium, the organ and also a kora—a West African harp which sounds a bit like a lute. We contracted a Japanese/Dutch harpsichord player to play the keyboard and three baroque musicians from Belgium and The Netherlands who joined with a viola da gamba, a baroque violin and a number of baroque flutes. For special effects, I brought a modern instrument, a two metre high contrabass flute.

"The house ensemble of the Darpana Dance Academy provided the Indian half of the ensemble: the bamboo flute, the Indian violin, the chitravina and a variety of percussion instruments such as bass drums, cattle drums, the tabla and the mridangam."

"The main challenge of this production was how to exploit the opportunities of such a collaboration while respecting both the baroque and the Indian traditions. First of all, the two groups of musicians had to get used to each other's different approaches to music. We warmed up each morning with 30 minutes of tuning because Indian musicians hear pitch differently from European musicians. I wanted to maintain those differences in the melodic passages, but it is also necessary to have well-tuned harmonies. Then we sat together to transcribe the Monteverdi melodies. As the Indian musicians were unfamiliar with Western notation, we played the melodies and they copied them by ear into their own system of



The music ensemble for *Orfeo in India*. Ned McGowan stands left, next to the contra-bass flute

musical notation. Then we concentrated on phrasing, dynamics, rhythm and timing.

"There is a world of difference between the two musical systems and each musician, whether European or Indian, had to be open both to the other tradition and also be flexible enough to reconsider their own tradition in this context. In some ways, the European musicians had a tougher job. With a classic composer like Monteverdi, they held strong views on how to play his music, views that needed to be flexible to allow the potential of this production to flourish."

The decision about which sections should be played by whom was another challenge. "Through a process of trial and error I let my ears decide what was the best solution for each moment, for example whether a melody should be played on the baroque or Indian violin. Further, I cut the original score by 20-25%, composed a few small bridges and a new ending, and then allocated specific parts to the Indian instruments. In *Orfeo in India* there were three Western singers, a soprano, a mezzo-soprano and a baritone, and two Indian tenors. It was quite clear from the beginning that the recitatives had to be sung by the Western singers while the roles of Plutone and Charon were opportunities to explore an Indian interpretation."

Ned explains that the production does not follow the published ending composed by Monteverdi. "The director, Miranda Lakerveld, chose for this production to follow Monteverdi's first ending, in which the story ends as in the original Orpheus myth where the Maenads tear Orfeo to shreds. In Monteverdi's official score, however, Apollo comes and takes Orfeo into heaven—a happy ending which may have been desired by Monteverdi's patrons at the time. Since none of the music for the original ending has survived, I took that as an opportunity to compose a new one to function as the apotheosis of this bicultural production, where elements of Vedic chanting, Carnatic classical and tribal rhythms are combined with a *moresca*, a late medieval fight dance."

Ned is quite happy with the result. "It was quite a lot of work but it all came together well. We discovered that Monteverdi's melodies and polyphonies sound divine with the Indian classical ornamentation. Listening to the Indian musicians playing Monteverdi in their own way melted my heart. As Monteverdi himself was a great innovator who explored new things in his music all the time, I like to think that he would have approved of our interpretation."

In conversation with Carel

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