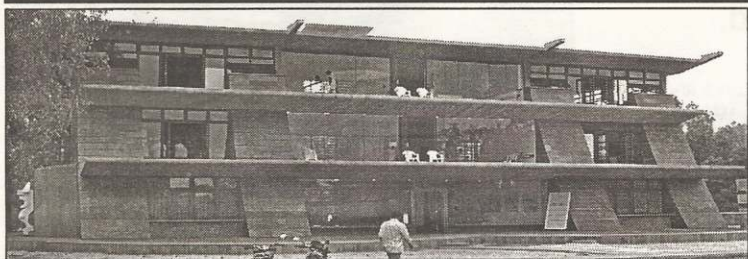


Auroville Today

OCTOBER 2003, No.177

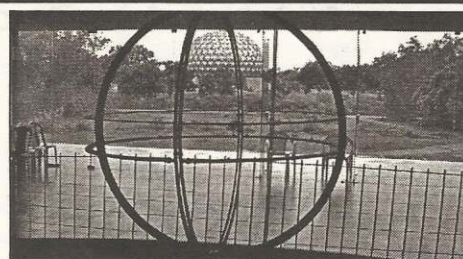


The Auroville Centre for Urban Research alias Town Hall Annex

MAIN THEME: Architecture

- The new Auroville Centre for Urban Research
- Highlighting the last five years

pages 1,4 and 5



View on Matrimandir from inside the ACUR

A step towards Auroville unity?

The first building in the city's administrative sector becomes operational

From the Matrimandir perimeter road the first impression is of a low-slung glasshouse interspersed by dark verticals and diagonals. If the sun is out it's all flashes and reflections, but in a quieter light the building suddenly becomes transparent and you feel you are looking at one of those models in a science museum where all the inner workings of a cell are revealed. Inside, the light stone walls and floors, the large empty public areas and the open-plan offices reinforce the sense of coolness and transparency.

The Auroville Centre for Urban Research, alias the Town Hall Annex, has been functioning for some months now. Although the formal inauguration is awaiting the relocation of Auroville Fund and the Financial Service from their present offices at Pour Tous, other major groups like Auroville's Future, the Land Service, the Housing Group, Development Council, the Finance and Assets Management Committee and the Working Committee and Council have already taken up residence. For some it was a matter of necessity, for others a long-held dream come true. "It's been clear for some time that we had to reorganize to take our administration into the future," explains Judith, "but how? Then Auroville's Future (the town planning group) had to vacate Bharat Nivas, and Luigi and Sauro wrote a project for a centre for Auroville's town planning and development activities which was subsequently funded by the European Commission. We decided this was an opportunity to bring some of our key administrative groups together in one building. However, we didn't have enough money to complete the enlarged building this would require. This only became possible with generous support from the Dutch Foundation, Stichting de Zaaier, and contributions from Auroville Fund."

Then came the challenge of designing the building. The architect, Anupama, began by

studying Roger's plan for the city. She noticed there was one zone in the centre which had been intended for administration but where nothing had been started yet. "In the original model the buildings here were higher, but Roger explained that now that we can better project the nature of Auroville's administration and organization, the space requirements would have to be recalculated."

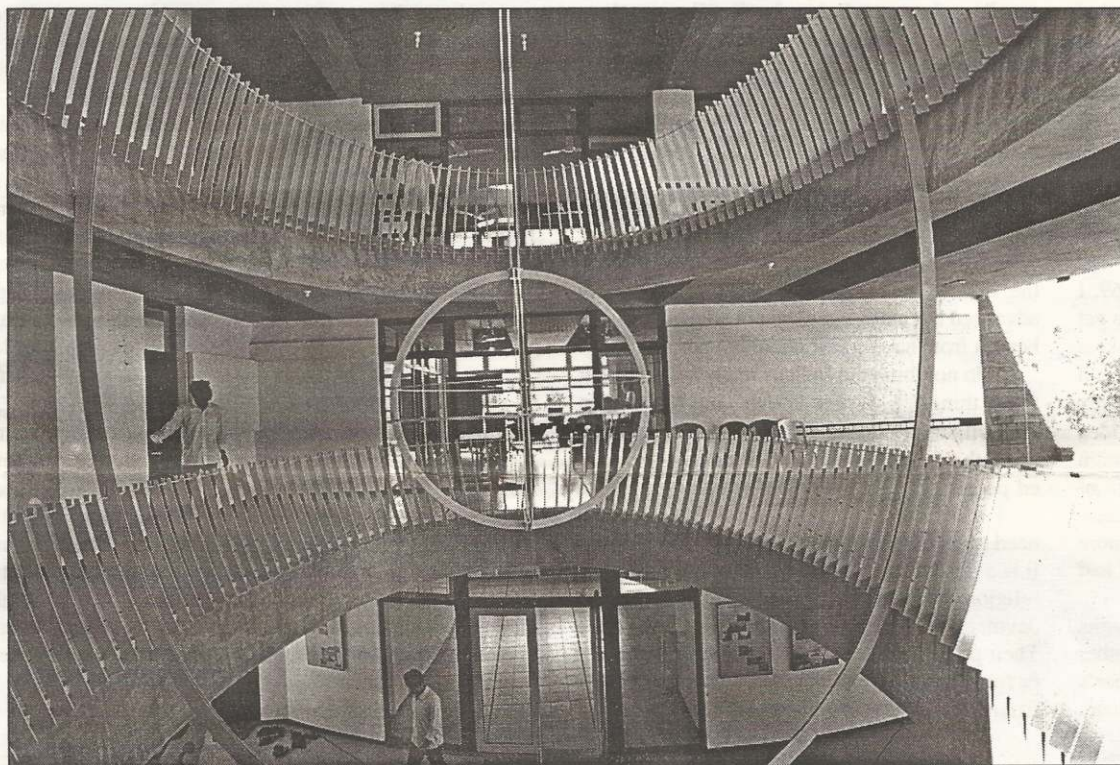
proper) for different work areas. These are interspersed with secondary smaller buildings, such as Auroville archives, libraries etc. and ancillary buildings for services, such as the cafeteria. There are a number of plazas in between. All these buildings are arranged in a curve around Matrimandir which, 320 metres away, is the focal point. There are two main circulation 'arteries': one, on the side facing

well as a solid presence of permanence, it was decided to clad it with stone. I would have preferred to use red Agra stone, the same stone used for the petals and Amphitheatre. This would have accentuated the way in which this building reflects and is having a dialogue with Matrimandir, the soul. However, Agra stone was too expensive, so we ended up using this black stone which, I admit, makes the building

appear a little forbidding while it is still unfinished. However, when the external louvres are fitted, the effect will be very different as the stone cladding will become part of the transitional indoor-outdoor space and some of this stone will be masked. Also, my original idea was to design a building which was climatically comfortable and didn't require air-conditioning, except in specialized areas. Since the view side, towards Matrimandir, is south-facing this was a challenge, but I incorporated big overhangs for shade and I wanted the glass windows to be openable to regulate air-flow. I also designed open-plan offices to maximize through ventilation and a central courtyard open to the sky. Unfortunately several of these original plans have been modified. A decision was made to go for partly fixed glazing rather than all opening windows. This was due to budgetary restraints as well as people not wanting their view spoiled by smaller window profiles, but fixed glass is a disaster in this climate! I've also had to turn one large room into three smaller rooms by erecting additional walls. Now the whole building is much less climatically-efficient. In fact, I feel upset about how unventilated and therefore unsustainable it has become."

Some of the other modifications reflect the changing wishes or needs of different end-users. "While the larger spaces allocated have tended to be based upon how much money a group has raised or donated for the building," explains Joseba, who coordinated the construction, "we knew that many services with limited means also wanted to be included. At the same time, some groups which originally intended to move here have decided not to come. All this means that we have had to modify some rooms and that we must be prepared to use the open spaces as flexibly as possible." The open spaces he refers to are the common usage and circulation spaces in the building, which constitute over 40% of the total area. Anupama has already been requested to consider enclosing some of this space for more offices, but she refused. "People think they can use and modify the space however they want, but for an architect it's a disaster to have end-users who are constantly changing their minds. In a large building used by many people you need open areas as relief. I already reduced the central courtyard and yet one of our donors still complained about the 'wasted space'. What people don't understand is that this is a functional core which brings light and air into the building."

continued on page 5



The atrium: In the centre an unfinished sculpture by Roger Anger

Roger gave Anupama some guidelines for the overall design of this administrative sector. This is the only part of the inner city which must have a direct visual contact with Matrimandir, he explained, as it is important that the decision-makers should have Matrimandir – the force of cohesion and the essence of Auroville – always before them. He also told her that all the administrative buildings in this sector – such as those dealing with education, economy, planning and development, relations with neighbouring villages, public relations and internal affairs – should be linked together to facilitate interaction between groups, and that all residents of Auroville should feel welcome to use these buildings. This would ensure there would be no elitism, no separation between administrators and citizens. Finally he indicated that the administrative sector should be self-sufficient in terms of facilities, such as seminar halls, exhibition spaces, copying and binding services and a cafeteria.

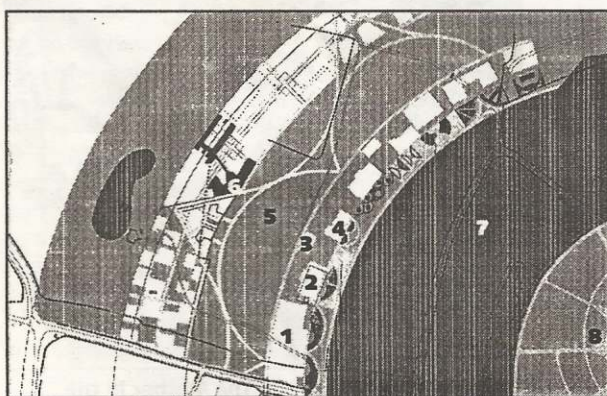
Anupama worked out an urban design based on Roger's indications. It consists of several principal buildings (including the town hall

Matrimandir, is a lake promenade which links all the buildings, the other is a pedestrian walkway on the opposite side of the buildings. Behind is a service road bordered by facilities like the generator room and wastewater treatment plant. Further back is a small park which separates the main administrative buildings from a habitat area for Aurovilians who work primarily in the city centre area; there will also be some guest houses and hostels related to the activities of this sector. All the main buildings will be linked by bridges (there are also ramps for handicapped access) and the ground floor spaces will be open to everyone. "When I showed the concept to Roger he seemed satisfied that it was in tune with what was envisaged there," recalls Anupama.

Today, not only is the Centre for Urban Research operational, but construction of the next major building – the Multi-Media Centre – is well underway, as is the restaurant and plaza which lies between. Behind, the power generation centre for the whole sector is complete and the wastewater recycling plant will soon be ready. Across the small park, a CIRHU hostel for students is also coming up.

Compromises

Clearly, the energy in this new sector is high. But has Anupama had to make compromises? She grimaces. "Yes. For example, to give the building a maintenance-free exterior as



Map of the administrative area

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Site of future Town Hall | 5 Park |
| 2 Auroville Centre for Urban Research | 6 CIRHU hotel (under construction) |
| 3 Cafeteria (under construction) | 7 Matrimandir lake (the dimensions of the lake are not final) |
| 4 Multi-media Centre (under construction) | 8 Matrimandir area |

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• Rare photographs of The Mother page 2

• Are Aurovilians becoming religious?

page 3

• Sauro on Auroville's external relationships
• Constance's solvitur ambulando page 3

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• Pelagius speaks page 7

• A Tamil workshop on self-development
• The day-dreamer page 8

Coming together

On September 11th, Tara Jauhar, who is a trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch, presented to an Auroville audience a video CD recording of The Mother's conversation in May 1967 with her father Surendra Nath Jauhar. She donated two hundred copies of this CD to Auroville, of which the sale proceeds will go to the Land Fund.

"Growing up with The Mother is an experience not easy to put into words...My destiny took me to Pondicherry and engulfed me into Her Divine embrace at the tender age of eight. 'Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.'" So starts the book *Growing up with The Mother* by Tara Jauhar who came to live in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1944. Tara was one of the 6 girls for whom The Mother started classes in June 1951. Attendance to these classes soon grew, and students and Ashramites assembled in the Playground around Her to hear Her answers on any question they might ask. The classes continued till 1958, and have resulted in the invaluable series of *Questions and Answers 1950-1958*.

After December 1958, Mother stopped coming down for her usual activities. She began giving Terrace Darshan four times a year, and people started seeking permission to take The Mother's pictures during Terrace Darshan. It was at this time that Tara developed an interest in photography. Mother encouraged her. But it was only in 1965, on the occasion of her parent's visit to The Mother, that Tara was given permission to take photos of her parents with Mother, but not of Mother alone. That permission came two years later and from that time onwards, Tara became one of Mother's photographers. In 1976, three years after Mother's passing, Tara left Pondicherry to work at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch.

AVToday: It is rumoured that you have recorded more than 10,000 photos of the Mother.

That is not a rumour, that's true. In 1969, I proposed to The Mother that we would try to get all the negatives and transparencies and make a complete collection for the Ashram. This would preserve them for posterity, and we would index them. Mother gave Her approval, but the idea was not quite appreciated by the other Ashram photographers. But I continued my effort of indexing and cataloguing the negatives and after Mother passed away, in November 1973, more than 10,000 photos had been indexed – for I had indexed whatever I could lay my hands on. Probably not more than 300 of these photographs were made by me; the others come from other photographers. This collection spans Mother's entire lifetime. The next step is to digitalise them.

I am still looking for someone to do that work as I have now too many administrative responsibilities. I was happy that just after this video presentation, a young man from Auroville expressed interest, and I hope it will take off.

Are you planning to make these photos available on video CD or DVD?

For the time being, I am not planning to do anything with them. My only concern at present is to save them. But I believe it is wrong to keep these photos locked up and not allow people to see them. Why not? Mother belongs to all of us! I do not agree that anybody thinks he has the exclusive right to prevent access to these photos. The photos that are available at the Ashram in Pondicherry are only a limited few, and they do not make the rare pictures of Her available. That is a great pity as they are so beautiful! So when people are asking me, I give them. That is the reason why they are available from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.

Don't you think that there is a danger of turning Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teaching into a religion by distributing these photos?

It is difficult for me to comment. Different people have different ways of looking at the same thing for we are all at different levels of consciousness. The benefit one has from looking at a photo largely depends on the sincerity of the person. If someone is sincerely worshipping Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as a god and goddess, I do not see anything wrong. And there is the other side: You may be highly mentally advanced but maybe you are not able to have any benefit from having that photo in your room.

I do not think the Indians really bother about these things. I do not know what the Indian Aurovilians are doing, but I must have a picture of Mother in my room. But there are many devoted people who may not be particularly touched by Their pictures, or who do not even feel the need to go to the Samadhi or to the Matrimandir. It is a private matter, but we do not turn it into a religion, as there is no hard and fast rule that devotees or disciples or Aurovilians should have Their photos on the wall or meditate or prostrate in front of Their pictures. But if someone feels from within that they need somewhere to go and

sit in front of these pictures and speak their heart out, that is ok. We should not sit on judgement on anything. Each one should do what he or she feels from within.

Mother never mentioned that danger to you, when She authorised you to take Her pictures?

No, never. In fact, She used to ask me to print pictures for Her so that She could distribute them. I must have printed thousands of Her pictures. She gave them to different people but I do not know why She gave or what She told them. But She definitely gave them with a purpose.

The pictures carry a message?

Oh yes! When I asked Her why meditation in front of different photos gave different experiences, She answered that each photo captures a different aspect, sometimes even a different personality of Her being and that by concentrating on that photo one enters into relation with that aspect or personality. She spoke of the photos being a real and concrete presence, even though a photo cannot in any way reproduce the whole personality.

There are even a few series of pictures to which Mother has given an explicit meaning. Pranab took a series of 5 pictures, and She gave a meaning to each one ranging from Certitude to Realisation. There is a series of four of Her photos which she titled 'Collaboration', 'Aspiration', 'Decision' and 'Salute to the Advent of the Truth'. Then there is the series of seven mudra photos, the photos of Mother's hands in special positions. And in the years when puja blessings were taken She also gave significance to those photos in terms of 'victory' etc.

In your presentation you mentioned that you are the first photographer of Auroville.

(laughing) Yes, I keep telling everybody but nobody wants to listen! You see, when Navajata had bought the first lands for Auroville, he wanted Mother to go and see. But Mother said that She couldn't go and asked me to go along with Navajata and take pictures. I remember I took pictures of Promesse, of Auro-orchard, the mango trees, and of the hut of Bob and Deborah in Forecomers, the one with the coloured glass in the windows. I also remember I took the land-



Tara Jauhar

marking stone with AV written on it and enlarged them pretty big so that Mother could see them. In all, I made perhaps three or four trips to Auroville.

During your presentation, an Aurovillian apologised to you for having asked you, in those early days, to leave Auroville...

Yes, that was very sweet. I actually wanted to hug her but then thought that it might be inappropriate in that Auroville audience, so I restrained myself. That was the time of the fight between the Sri Aurobindo Society and the Aurovilians. I visited Auroville and truly did not belong to any side, but people couldn't understand that. But that chapter is over, it no longer matters.

We witness a growing interaction between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, both in Pondicherry and the Delhi Branch. Do you have any ideas how to further promote it?

I am very happy about that. As far as the Delhi Branch is concerned, I am convinced that we may have some experience to offer to Auroville in the field of education. The Mother's International School of the Delhi Branch – our high school – has been rated for two consecutive years in a survey of the magazine *Outlook* as the Best School in New Delhi and one of the ten best schools in the country. Mirambika, our Free Progress School, has already had a few trainees from Auroville-you know of course that the building was originally designed by Auroville's architect Helmut.

Another activity of the Delhi branch is that we organize national integration camps, inviting youth from all over India to come together. I have been proposing that we have a national integration camp in Auroville, but so far the budgets do not match, Auroville is still too expensive for that kind of activity. I have been told that that might soon change, that Auroville will soon have cheaper places for these students to stay. I am sure that it will manifest at some time in future.

In conversation with Carel

EXHIBITION

Rare photographs of The Mother

When you pursue your mission with all your heart's passion you walk upon the sunlit path. Outer gains made thereby are insignificant in comparison to the inner ones. Besides there is that sense of having done The Mother's work happily. Loretta is on such a mission. To bring people in contact with the Mother's white light is what that mission is.

In two years Loretta has already mounted three exhibitions of Mother's infrequently seen photographs. This year's April edition of *Auroville Today* had a brief review of her previous exhibition in Savitri Bhavan. The latest exhibition opened in Pitanga to coincide with Sri Aurobindo's 131st birthday on August 15th. Throughout the exhibition Pitanga had an unusual air, poise, a not so often felt vibration which seemed to facilitate people's contemplation of the Divine Mother in some of Her more intimate

moments. Many of these black and white photos were taken in Japan where, from 1910 to 1914, The Mother was residing. All the photos are from Tara Jauhar's massive, unpublished collection.



Mrs. Nobuko Kobayashi and The Mother in Japan

When you look at Mother's pictures, she looks back, or smiles; sometimes a tremendous force of concentration absorbs Her powerful being, and for a moment the viewer is thrown off balance. But just for a moment. That perhaps is the moment of contact with Her. One time or the other, the contact is always made.

Loretta with her exhibitions helps us make that contact, which is the very raison d'être of our existence.

The main feature of this show was the pictures taken in Japan. The Mother was staying with Her friend Mrs. Nobuko Kobayashi for two years. About forty years later, when Mrs. Kobayashi came to the Ashram, the two friends were again photographed together on the terrace outside the Mother's room in Pondicherry. Both occasions are immortalized in these pictures. The contrast is strangely moving: two friends, youthful, truthful, loyal and loving. And later, the same friends, wonderfully bonded, still having so much to give to one another, to life. The kimono Mrs. Kobayashi presented to The Mother on that occasion was displayed along with the photos, bringing the whole event back to life. "It was my great good fortune that, in this strange but explicable world I should have met this jewel of my heart and this friend of my soul. The perfume of those two years, when we lived like twin roses on the same stalk, lingers like incense around the divine altar and sways serenely in the sanctuary of my

mind." This is how Mrs. Kobayashi reminisced about her friendship with the Mother.

The exhibition also displayed photographs taken during Her conversations with Anil Jauhar. Loretta had them cropped without destroying details so that the viewer could feel Her 'closer' to them. It worked charmingly!

"Some Tamil school children, aged about 3-4 years came to see the exhibition. I took them to the little meditation room to calm them a bit. Then they saw everything on display and before leaving, all went back to the meditation room and sat there for a while with their eyes closed! Nobody told them to do that. The atmosphere in these exhibitions is different every time. I think that the Mother does something. She works on us through these photos. Tara told me that The Mother had once told her that every single picture is 'good



Mrs. Kobayashi and The Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

for showing'."

I asked Loretta about her next showing, on The Mother's birthday in February. "Mother in Meditation". That's the theme of my next exhibition", Loretta said."

For me this exhibition was a powerful experience. Loretta with the Pitanga team did a conscientious job. The music, the roses, the incense, the calm ambience... Yes!

Charudutta

Beware of religion

A photo of a stone-slab painting of Sri Aurobindo published on the front page of our August issue brought a number of objections from foreign subscribers, varying from publishing religious kitsch to harming the work of the AVI Centres.¹

It was a surprise. None of the Auroville Today editors had raised any objections to the proposed publication of the photo of Emanuele's rock-slab painting, which was judged as 'beautiful, a bit like an early Renaissance miniature.' The notion that it might be considered a religious picture didn't occur. Have we, the editors, become Indianised? For none of our Indian readers raised a concern and perhaps not even an eyebrow as living with images of gods and goddesses or of swamis and yogis is such a daily occurrence. In the West, however, it is different. It is a common experience for all those who endeavour to raise funds for Auroville's projects that one has to be careful in describing the city's spiritual aims. Funding agencies, particularly Western funding agencies, take a somewhat jaundiced view of anything that might appear a cult. So do income tax authorities in some countries. A few years ago, Auroville International Germany successfully defended in court that Auroville is not a sect, in order not to lose the income tax exemption German donors enjoy for donations to Auroville projects.

The times are changing. A number of large foreign institutions such as the Indo-Canadian Environment Facility and the European Community are now funding Auroville projects. And during the recent presentation of Auroville at UNESCO no issues were raised when Dr. Kireet Joshi and Dr. L.M. Singhvi talked about the spiritual aims of Auroville and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. For Auroville's unusual aims and ideals do not make it a religion, even though there is a tendency amongst Aurovilians to frequently quote what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have said and to widely display their photos.

The Inner Divine

It all starts, of course, with The Mother's statements. Her first public message on Auroville, on September 8, 1965, seems innocuous enough for all those who are averse of any form of religiosity:

Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.

*The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity.*²

Striving for human unity, after all, is now a universally accepted creed so this message doesn't meet with objections. It might if it was known how exactly The Mother envisaged that human unity should manifest. As early as 1912, Mother wrote in the essay *An Ideal Society* that human unity is to be realised "through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One. In other words - to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us." Among the most useful works to be done She listed 1) *For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify with it; and 4) Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.*³

So when Mother laid down, in 1967, the 'conditions to live in Auroville': 1. *To be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and to have the will to collaborate for the material realization of that unity; and 2. To have the will to collaborate in all that furthers future realizations.*⁴ She essentially gave as condition the need to become conscious of the Inner Divine - the psychic being. This was made more explicit in the first line of Auroville's Charter: *Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine*

Auroville and the Religions

We want the Truth.

For most men, it is what they want that they label truth.

The Aurovilians must want the Truth whatever it may be.

Auroville is for those who want to live a life essentially divine but who renounce all religions whether they be ancient, modern, new or future.

It is only in experience that there can be knowledge of the Truth.

No one ought to speak of the Divine unless he has had experience of the Divine.

Get experience of the Divine, then alone will you have the right to speak of it.

The objective study of religions will be a part of the historical study of the development of human consciousness.

Religions make up part of the history of mankind and it is in this guise that they will be studied at Auroville - not as beliefs to which one ought or ought not to adhere, but as part of a process in the development of human consciousness which should lead man towards his superior realization.

PROGRAMME

Research through experience of the Supreme Truth

A life divine

but

NO RELIGIONS

Our research will not be a search effected by mystic means. It is in life itself that we wish to find the Divine. And it is through this discovery that life can really be transformed.⁵

Consciousness.⁶ And she added to Satprem, when writing down this first line "They are all going to win at 'Divine', but I don't care! You know, it's the explanation of the Matrimandir at the centre. The Matrimandir represents the Divine Consciousness. All that is not said, but that is the way it is."⁶

In numerous other statements She told Aurovilians to find their psychic being, be guided by it so that the ego's authority and influence can disappear.⁷

The Ideal Society

The need to create an ideal society is also amongst Auroville's ideals. In a message for a UNESCO committee Mother wrote:

"The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realized in the terms of an integral human perfection.

*The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step in the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind."*⁸

Earlier She had said that Auroville was meant to be "the cradle of the superman", the transitional being between mankind and the supramental being. And in December 1972 She wrote: "Auroville has been created for a super-humanity, for those who want to surmount their ego and renounce all desire, to prepare themselves for receiving the supermind. They alone are true Aurovilians." "(Auroville) is a centre for transformation, a small nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example to the world. That is what Auroville hopes to be."¹⁰ In numerous writings and discussions She explained how such an Ideal society could take form at the level of education, economics and organisation.

Quoting and photos

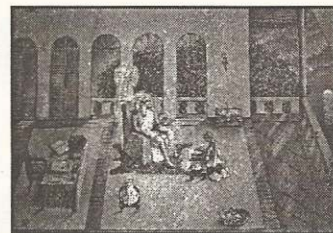
The profound ideals expressed by The Mother are often quoted by those who endeavour to manifest them wholly or partly, or just to corroborate their own ideas. This is not to the liking of all Aurovilians. One reason is probably the large gap that exists between where we

are and what She envisaged and our inability to find ways to bridge that gap - or even to foresee a step-by-step approach. Another reason might be that excessive quoting serves as a constant reminder what we are here for and prevents us to accept approaches that might be satisfactory in others, less idealistic societies.

For some people another sensitive issue is that of seeing Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's photographs all over the place. This issue became a topic of a wider debate when someone raised the question if in the Town Hall Their photographs should be displayed in the lobby or be restricted to the workplace of the individuals. Given the fact that there is hardly any place in the Town Hall which does not offer a prime view on the Matrimandir - literally meaning The Mother's Shrine - the question is perhaps a bit overdone. The responses varied from "These photos carry the Force in them ... All those horrible meetings, I had to submit to in the past four years have often been softened by Their presence on a nice large picture in this or that office, which would come as a refreshing reminder that something else than our petty quarrels exist on earth." "Each picture carries a distinct vibration and creates a very harmonious atmosphere, which helps a lot in the place where you work." "What do outsiders know or care about Mother and our relation to Her and why should we care about what they think of us?" "There should be no big pictures of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in public places. We don't want to encourage or give the impression of religion." The issue has not yet been resolved.

This question is not a new one. In May 1970 Mother spoke to Satprem about what happened in Auroville.

"They have gatherings in Auroville, at 'Aspiration'; I think it's meditations, or something of the sort, I don't know. One of them came and put my photo; so another rushed to his room and came back with a cross!... And he said, 'Well, if you put a photo of Mother, I'll put my cross.' They told me that story... Afterwards there came a whole series of things." She proceeded to write a note on Auroville and the Religions¹¹ and define the word 'religion' a few days later.¹² And when, a few months later, a French disciple intended to distribute a reproduction of the portrait he did of The Mother, She cautioned: *It would be better not to introduce in this gathering anything personal that might suggest the atmosphere of a nascent religion.*¹³



Let's finally have a look at what Mother replied to a question regarding religion.

Question: Many people say that Sri Aurobindo's teachings are a new religion. Would you call it a religion?..

Mother to Satprem: "You understand, I began to fume! I wrote: 'Those who say that are simpletons and don't even know what they're talking about! It is enough to read everything Sri Aurobindo has written to know that it is IMPOSSIBLE to found a religion upon his writings, since for each problem, for each question, he presents all aspects and, while demonstrating the truth contained in each approach, he explains that to attain the Truth a synthesis must be effected, overpassing all mental notions and emerging in a transcendence beyond thought... Let me repeat that when we speak of Sri Aurobindo, it is not a question of teaching nor even of revelation, but of an Action from the Supreme; upon this, no religion whatsoever can be founded.'

This is the first blast.

The second is: 'Men are such fools' (laughing: it doesn't get any better!) 'that they can change anything at all into a religion, so great is their need for a fixed framework for their narrow thought and limited action. They don't feel secure unless they can affirm: "This is true and that is not" - but such an affirmation becomes impossible for anyone who has read and understood what Sri Aurobindo has written. Religion and yoga are not situated on the same plane of the being, and the spiritual life can exist in its purity only if it is free from all mental dogma.'

People must really be made to understand this.

*They are all always ready - even in the Ashram - ready to create a religion."*¹⁴

We call religion any concept of the world or the universe which is presented as the exclusive Truth in which one must have an absolute faith, generally because this Truth is declared to be the result of a revelation. Most of the religions affirm the existence of a God and the rules to follow to obey Him, but there are also Godless religions, such as socio-political organisations which, in the name of an Ideal or the State, claim the same right to be obeyed.

Man's right is a free pursuit of the Truth with the liberty to approach it in his own way. But each one must know that his discovery is good for him alone and it is not to be enforced upon others.¹²

If any legal proof would be required that Auroville and the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother represent no religion, there is the verdict of the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India on 8 November 1982 in the Auroville case "...there is no room for doubt that neither the Sri Aurobindo Society nor Auroville constitute a religious denomination and that the teachings of Sri Aurobindo only represent his philosophy, not a religion..."

Carel

¹ See Avtoday September 2003 p. 7; ² 8 September 1965, Collected Works Mother (CWM) XIII, p. 193; ³ 7 May 1912, CWM, II, 47 - 48. The other two works are: 2) To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it; and 3) To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality. It will be a synthesis of all human knowledge. CWM XIII p. 198; CWM XIII p. 199 - 201; Mother's Agenda (MA) Vol. 9 p. 52; see for example To Be a True Aurovillian, CWM Vol XIII p. 213; CWM XIII p. 210; Written in 1969; CWM XIII p. 197; CWM XIII p. 223; MA Vol 11, May 2, 1970 p. 170 - 181 and CWM XIII p. 212; MA Vol 11 May 13, 1970 p. 1188, CWM XIII p. 213; MA Vol 11 May 2, 1970 p. 170 footnote; MA April 29, 1961, Vol II p. 190 - 191.

In brief

Secretary joins

Mr. S.R. Sharma, IAS (ret'd) joined the Auroville Foundation on August 2nd, 2003, arriving on August 15th to begin his 2-year appointment. Mr. Sharma comes from the Union Territory Ccdre and has served the Government of India as Chief Secretary, Pondicherry, Chief Secretary Goa and Principal Secretary (Home), Govt. of NCT New Delhi. He retired from Government service on January 31, 2002.

World Congress of Philosophy

On August 10-17, the 21st World Congress of Philosophy took place in Istanbul, Turkey. It was attended by more than 1500 philosophers from all around the world. The Indian delegation consisting of Dr. Karan Singh (former Chairman of Auroville Foundation), Dr. Kireet Joshi (present Chairman of Auroville Foundation), Toine (Aurovillian) and Luigi (Aurovillian) presented the theme of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo on August 15th. An Auroville presentation was held on September 1st by Dr. Kireet Joshi, Toine and Luigi.

Matrimandir

The Auroville Council announced that the overwhelming majority (82-88%) of the 200 people who responded to a survey on the management of the Matrimandir feel that a new team should take up the management of the Matrimandir and that the architect be accountable to the Residents' Assembly. Consequently the Council has announced that it has requested four Aurovilians to form the nucleus of a new site-management team while two of the executives have been asked to withdraw.

Auroville exhibition in Berlin

Auroville International Germany, in collaboration with the Indian Embassy in Berlin, presented Auroville in the exclusive and prominent exhibition area of the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin from September 15-28. Accompanying cultural programmes were held in the Sri Aurobindo Centre, Berlin. A second exhibition is planned for the end of October, this time also in collaboration with the German United Nations office. The German ambassador to India and eminent scholars of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga will be invited to speak on the Auroville project. Info: info@de.auroville-international.org

New Pour Tous Foundation Stone

The Secretary Auroville Foundation laid the first stone of the new 'Pour Tous - For All' building next to the Solar Kitchen on August 27th. In his speech Gilles Guigan, the project co-ordinator, said: "The new 'Pour Tous' building aims at improving the means at Her disposal to provide for the needs of each one of us."

Aurosoya

Auroville service Aurosoya, which produces a variety of soya products, has issued a public appeal for help as its new building cannot be completed due to lack of funds. An amount of Rs 2 lakhs (US \$ 4,200) is needed to guarantee the survival of the unit and make it self-sufficient.

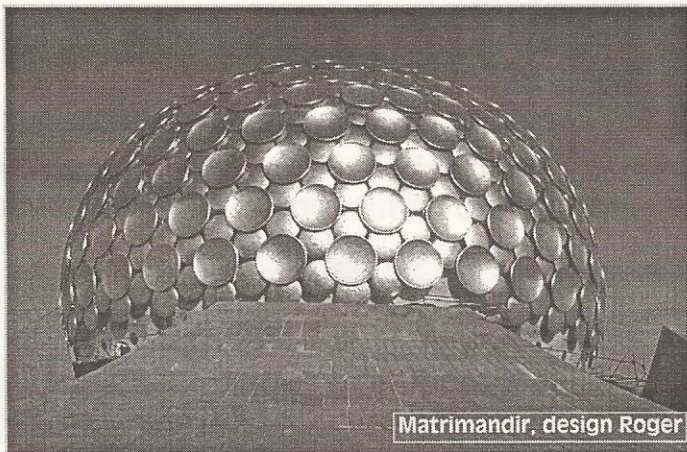
Aspiration in the early years of Auroville. Huts, design Piero



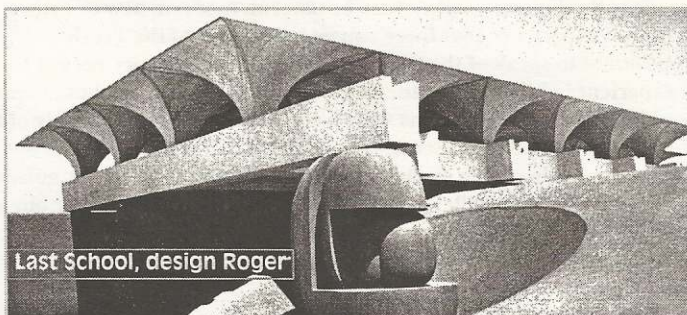
Aspiration hut today, design Piero



We have today the feeling that quality references for architecture are similar to qualities attributed to human beings, seen from the outside as well as from the inside. We think of qualities like sober, honest, correct, simple, sincere, intelligent, amiable, bright, elegant, wise, solid, alive, dynamic. As designers and sadhaks we try to express these attributes through our work.
Piero and Gloria

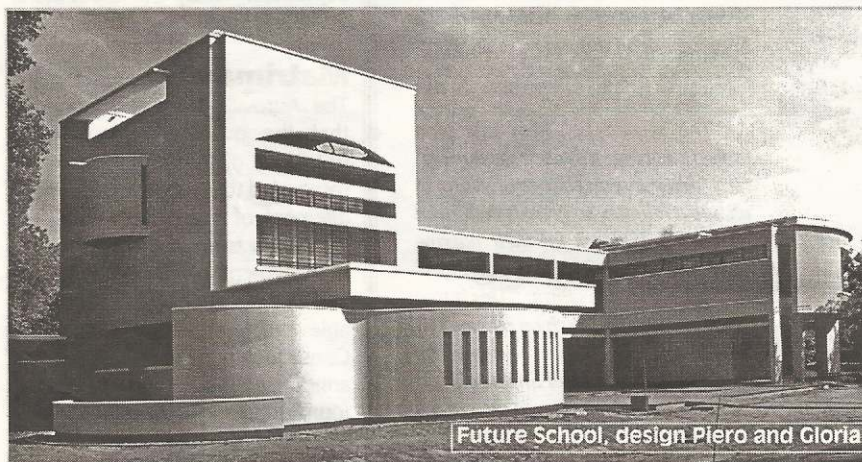


Matrimandir, design Roger

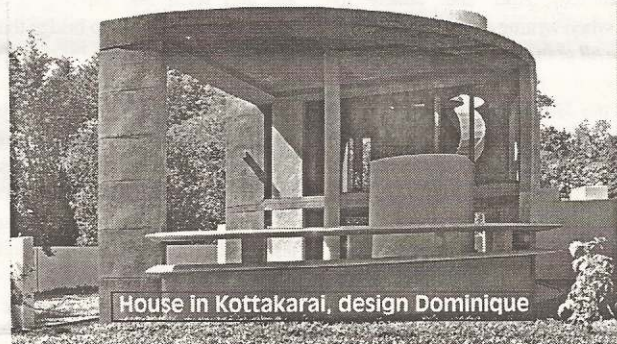


Last School, design Roger

My inspiration was Le Courbusier. He was a genius in his use of form. When I designed Last School it was a revolution in terms of the architectural concepts of that time because of the freedom of its shape. While we used there some indigenous technologies, like bamboo, generally I have worked with ferro-cement which, in its plasticity, represents the creativity of the city.
Roger

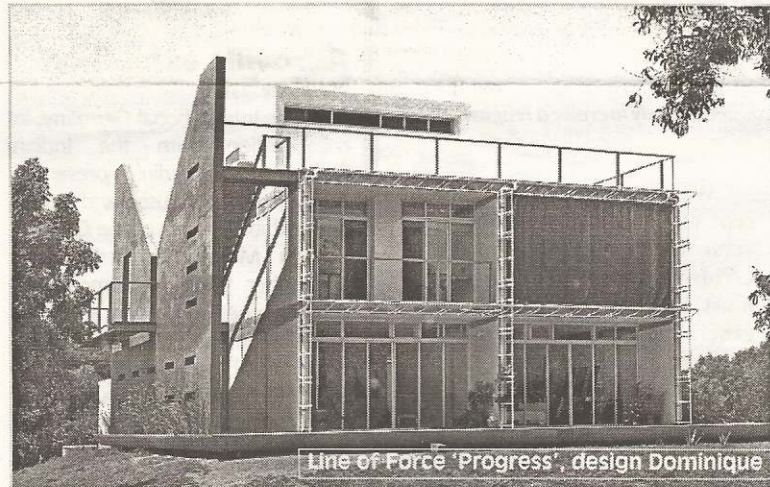


Future School, design Piero and Gloria



House in Kottakarai, design Dominique

Through my work I'm trying to express beauty in permanence through matter. I strive for simplicity and purity.
Dominique

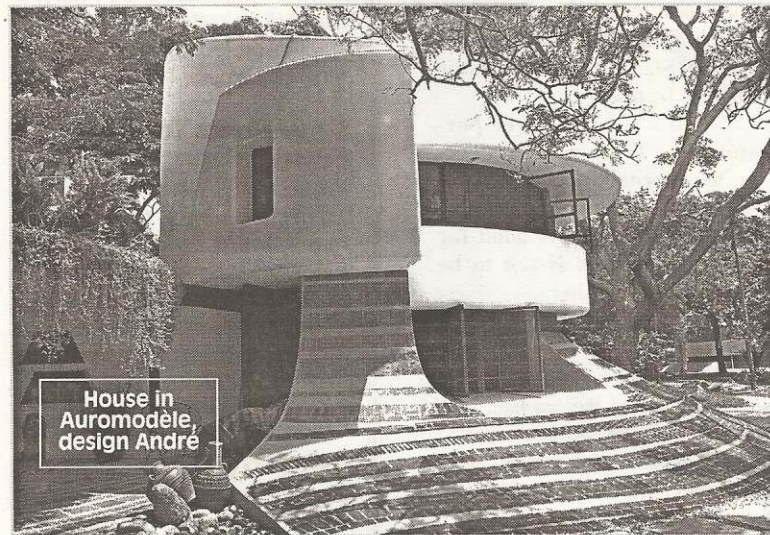


Line of Force 'Progress', design Dominique



'Yantra', house in Kottakarai, design Mona

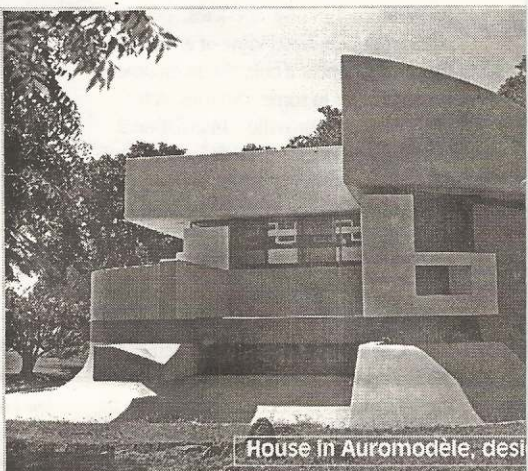
I want to create spaces which lead to the well-being of the users, taking into account the five senses of the human being and activating them through architecture.
Mona



House in Auromodèle, design André

I am grateful to Roger, with whom I worked for many years, and Mother for all that I have learned. Through my work I try to express beauty and harmony, which is automatically linked with functionality.
Andre Hababou

From the first years, Auroville was a place of natural experimentation. In fact, the idea of coming out of a lunar landscape made sense in Brasilia in the making. Those early years saw a number of young architects continuing the work of the Last School building and his house, which favour the more indigenous line of thought. Through experiments and Piero's Aspiration Matrimandir, these buildings are the result of a dialogue. Today, many architects with various approaches have made their home in Auroville. Some others embrace more the image of a functionalist, others express indigenous models, others experiment with new forms. In other words, while there is no single architectural 'style', a lot of interesting things happen. On these pages we picture the buildings from the past and highlight some of the last five years.

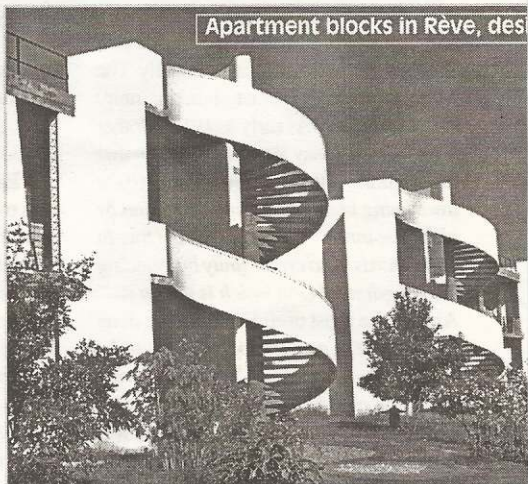


House in Auromodèle, design Roger

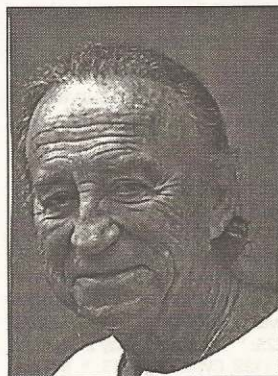


SAWCHU building, design Anupama

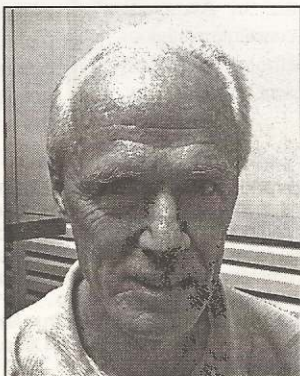
The design of the SAWCHU building draws upon the ancient Indian tradition that defines how a building should be constructed. My use of Vaastu is intuitive. I designed the meeting space as circular as that of a traditional Indian temple, which emphasises unity.
Anupama



Apartment blocks in Rêve, design Helmut



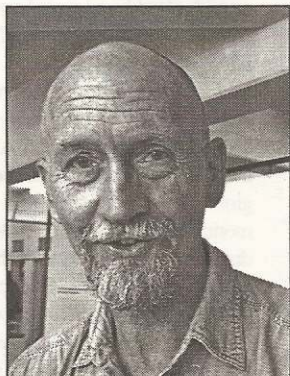
Roger



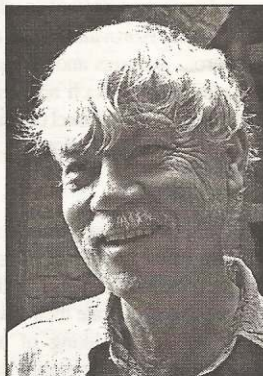
Piero



Gloria



Poppo



Helmut



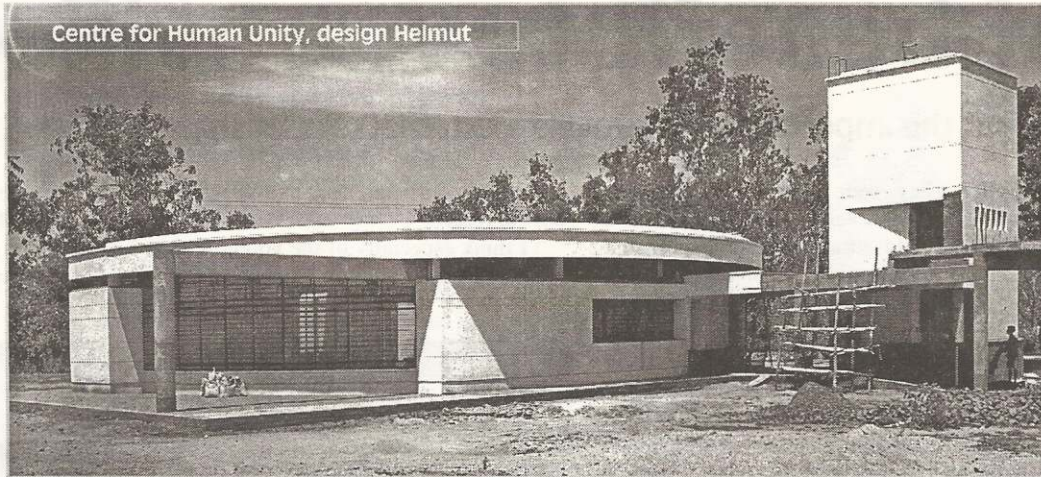
André



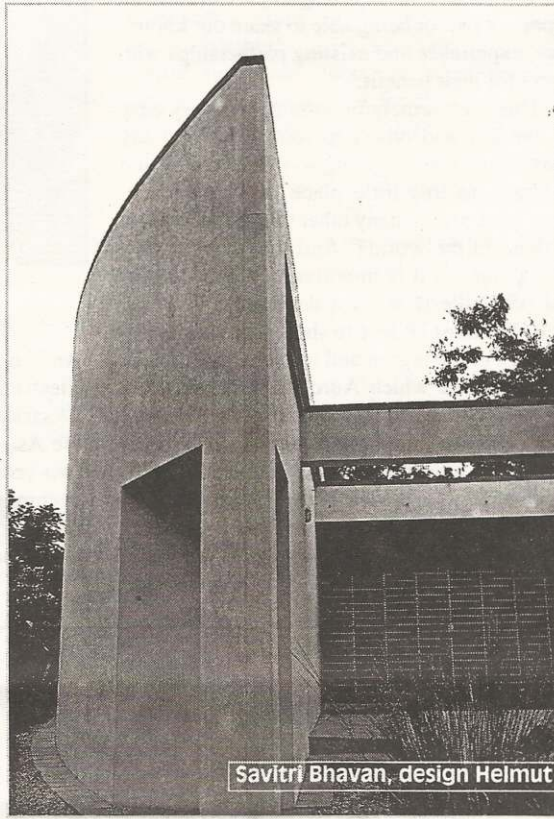
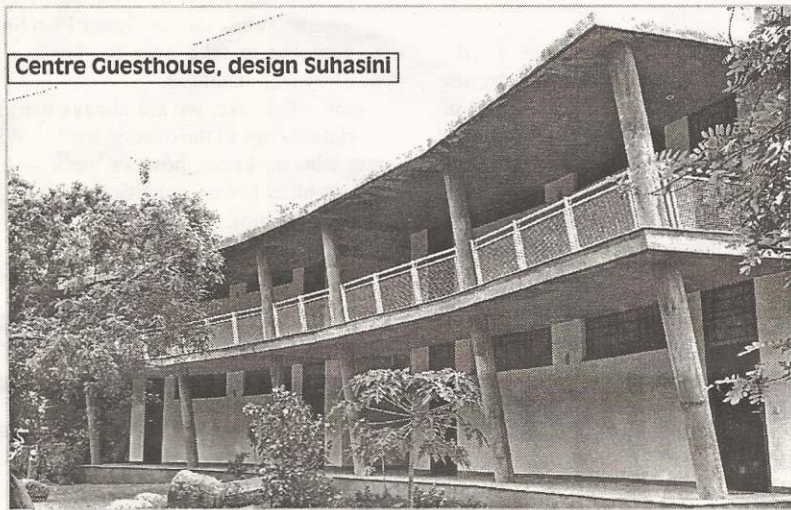
Suhasini

recognized as a city of architecture. These early space-age structures rise and many think this was another set of buildings still exist. A surprising feature is to be challenged by Roger's designs in Auromodèle. Those who look back wistfully at the 'capsule' living huts. Together with the most admired.

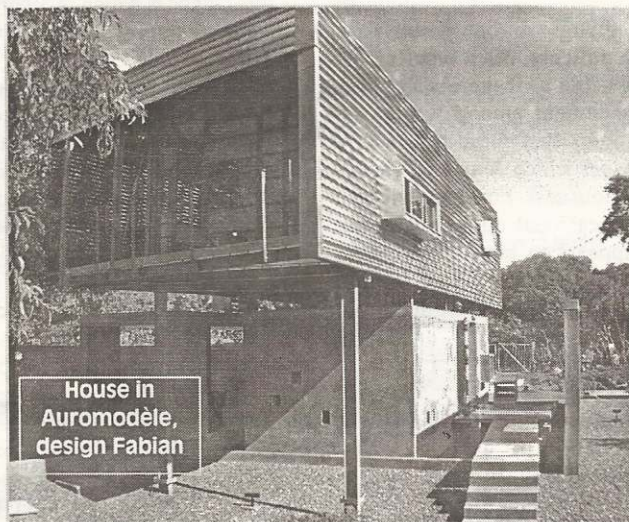
Very different philosophies and are here. Some are client-oriented, some of the architect as god. Some elements; some are influenced by experiment with new materials and such thing as yet as an Aurovilian existing work is going on. On these which inspire Auroville architects of the most striking experiments



What I'm trying to do through my work is to go beyond individual taste, or, to quote Louis Kahn, 'the architect's greatest worth is in the area where he can claim no ownership – the part that doesn't belong to him is his most precious'.
Helmut



What I look forward to and wish for is to be able to find the challenges in terms of design and architecture which allow one to create elegance without artifice, beauty without being contrived, comfort without having to indulge in irrelevance and which, finally, allows one to be truthful without becoming dogmatic. **Suhasini**



I want to build a bridge between the local building culture and contemporary, modern architecture. **Fabian**

I am trying to go beyond the relativity of a fashion-bound architecture through the subtlety of proportions, space formations, combinations of distinct building materials, their surfaces and textures into something which is beyond style or fashion, something which is timeless and universal, something of another dimension, a flowing of peace, serenity, play and beauty. **Poppo**



We gratefully acknowledge that many of the photos on these pages have been taken from an upcoming brochure on Auroville architecture to be published by Prisma. Enquiries to prisma@auroville.org.in

A help to Auroville unity?

continued from page 1

Users' responses

Obviously the organic growth versus fixed design controversy has not yet run its course. Still, most of the present users seem happy with their new home. Anandi of Auroville's Future recalls how dysfunctional their previous offices were in Bharat Nivas. "There was no proper ventilation and we did not even have an assured water supply. This building is cooler and the set-up is much more professional. For example, we have a systems manager who looks after all our computer needs. Data will be regularly backed-up and all the computers in the building are networked, which means that exchanging information within and between groups is made much easier." She admits, however, that one of the features of the new building – the light, open office spaces – can also be a disadvantage. "Computer-users are having problem with glare, and sometimes it's more difficult to concentrate when everything is so open-plan." Blinds and small partitions are planned in order to remedy this. There are also privacy issues. Although smaller offices and meeting rooms are provided, sound insulation is not perfect.

Another charge concerns the reception desk. A small step leads down to the sunken desk, but the step is situated at the exact point where visitors tend to look up to view a sculpture which hangs above in the atrium. "The step is totally unsafe," says Judith, "but plans are apparently afoot to fill in the sunken area." The reception area is one of Roger's contributions to the design of the building. Anupama readily acknowledges how helpful he has been. "He has such a refined sense of form that he immediately saw something I had missed. There's a duality in the building because, while the main axis is aligned to Matrimandir, the longer side of the oval which forms the atrium actually pulls in another direction. In order to harmonize this, he designed the hanging sculpture and the railing for the staircase which integrate both axes and link above with below."

Other issues

Other challenges remain, but they are not design issues. What, for example, do we finally call the building? The Auroville Centre for Urban Research sounds somewhat pretentious, and the abbreviated acronym, CUR, is unfortunate. It's not the Town Hall – that is planned to come up alongside – but Town Hall Annex makes it sound a bit like a broom cupboard. Then there's the matter of the chappals (shoes). At present, users are asked to leave their chappals outside. Piles of chappals at the door do not contribute to the overall elegance of a building. Moreover, when the other buildings come up they will all be interlinked by bridges. This means that you may enter one building and end up on the other side of the sector. Will you remember where your chappals are? And what if you want to walk back outside on the promenade?

And then there is the proximity to Matrimandir itself. For some Aurovilians it's almost sacrilege that the Matrimandir can be so easily observed from the new building. And what happens when the cafeteria becomes operational? "Aurovilians already ask me," says Anupama, "will people be allowed to eat chicken sandwiches or smoke while looking at Matrimandir? It's something I hadn't even thought about!" For Anandi, on the other hand, the visual presence of Matrimandir is an inspiration. "When you look at Matrimandir you can't hide from what brought you here. It's a constant reminder to be sincere."

Ultimate test

Ultimately, however, the test of the new building is not whether it wins design awards, but whether it furthers human unity. This is the first time that most of Auroville's central working groups are sharing a common building. What effect will this have? Will old egos and suspicions erode, will differing visions approach a higher synthesis through daily interactions, through the thousand tiny building-blocks of casual encounters on the stairs and shared coffees on the promenade? Or will a building which in its very design symbolizes openness and transparency become no more than a hollow shell, a bastion of group and individual rivalries, of power and control? As always, it's in our hands.

Alan



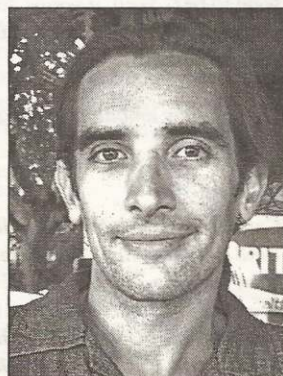
Anupama



Mona



Dominique



David



Fabian

"Not just of benefit to Auroville..."

Sauro, at Auroville's Future, talks about the importance of Auroville's external relationships

From a development perspective, there are four principal levels on which we interact with the outside world. Firstly, at the level of the bio-region there is presently a movement – together with other groups – to get it recognised by UNESCO as biosphere reserve under the Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme. We are also trying to be more involved in the process of planning the development of the bio-region and our neighbouring villages through various schemes.

Secondly, there is our Urban Outreach programme, whereby we are building relationships with other Indian cities. The obvious example is Pondicherry. When the city authorities in Pondy got to hear of Auroville's relationship with the European Union [EU], they asked if we could help them to develop some kind of link. We have been delighted to be able to work with them. One tangible result will be the "model street" renovation of Vasyal Street in the Tamil quarter which is going to start soon. It was partly achieved through partnership funding from Brussels.

Thirdly, there is our own networking with the EU, other multilateral agencies and European cities. The Asia Urbs programme was extremely successful. Of course, part of the funding for the Town Hall itself derived from that project. We are continuing to develop this relationship. Recently, we received literally a busload of European Ambassadors here in

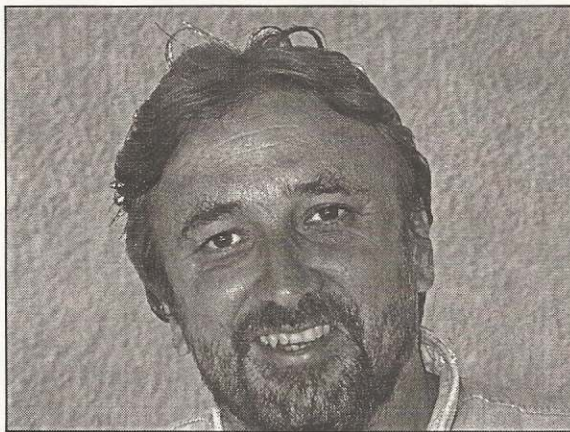
Auroville! They were very curious to see Auroville, and discover how and why such a small place could attract so many funds and projects from Europe. It is worth mentioning that – in addition to Asia-Urbs – the EU has co-funded other projects in the areas of forestry and village education. This is thanks especially to the efforts of AVI-UK.

Fourthly, we are starting to develop relationships with other cities within Asia. This is just at the beginning stages, and I do not want to say too much about it. But again, it will form an important part of being able to share our knowledge, experience and existing partnerships with others for their benefit.

This is extremely important. It is very easy for the EU and others to look at us and say 'How come we are giving so much money and emphasis to this little place in Tamil Nadu, when there are so many other things that need to be done in the world?' And they have a very good point. So it is important to stress always that Auroville is not just devouring funds for itself. We must be able to show that we are giving back to the region and to India, that benefit and assistance which Auroville receives from outside is being shared. And most of all, that we do not grow in competition with others. What is good for us must demonstrably be good for others outside – and vice versa. This is another reason why our bio-region and Urban Outreach efforts are so vital. It is important that Auroville

is perceived as being there to give also, and not only to receive.

I think especially of the young people that come from other cities in India to work with us.



Sauro

And on our own home-turf there is the Electricians' Training Programme run by the Electrical Service. This came about as part of the Asia-Urbs project. We were able to fund a two-year training programme in the basics of becoming an electrician. There were places for fifteen people, all of whom were local young men. They got the practical experience, plus the

beginnings of a qualification. It was very successful! This is the best kind of application for funds, because it really helps people in a practical way. I very much hope that the programme will be able to continue, even though the Asia Urbs component has now ceased.

Our immediate target is to raise funds for Auroville's infrastructure. We are exploring with USAID how they can give us assistance to improve our power supply. We are negotiating with an Italian agency to provide support for projects in the area of waste management in collaboration with the Eco-Service. Back here, we are making preparations for our own reference-library on the third floor of the Town Hall. It will contain maybe a thousand new books on urban development, planning, infrastructure and so forth. The new web-site is being finished (go to www.auroville.com, and click on the Master Plan link); we are preparing to take over the hosting of the Asia Urbs web-database.

And, of course, we are always working on our relationships to the outside world! What we learn, who we know, how we work – all these can help other towns and cities to develop their own relationships.

Sauro

OPEN FORUM

Solvitur ambulando

Auroville, a personal perspective

I was late. A group was already assembled behind the Matrimandir office, listening intently as Arjun, pointing to a large map, was explaining the layout of the gardens. The Auroville International Meeting had adjourned for the day so that the participants could fan out and explore. Most of us were familiar with the various proposals that were being considered for the design of the Peace Area. In order to help the community arrive at a decision, the Matrimandir team had been hosting walks in the gardens "beyond words" – creating an opportunity to contact directly the reality that was there. From my perspective, I thought this approach was long overdue. Hasn't the City been there now for these many years – shimmering in the bright air above the green and red landscape? Shouldn't we just build that? We headed out towards the Town Hall. "Here we are walking under water," our guide told us, "but the gardens will begin again just there."

*

Where is the reality of Auroville? How is it created? How does it come into being? Do the community and the city exist outside of our own invention?

We haven't yet been able to sufficiently answer these questions – at least not with answers that we can all accept. Auroville is, for the most part, still unmanifest to our consensus reality. It remains an intensely personal experience. Isn't it safe to say, though, that the spirit of Auroville is quite real. It is constantly there as our support – shared when the stress of work and survival relaxes – when we can just be together. It is immediately accessible to the psychic life of individual Aurovilians, and it inhabits the sweetness of our collective silences. Lest we think it is absent or sleeping, from time to time it emerges in events like the Platform to demonstrate its power and presence. But it doesn't go and come at our command or bend to

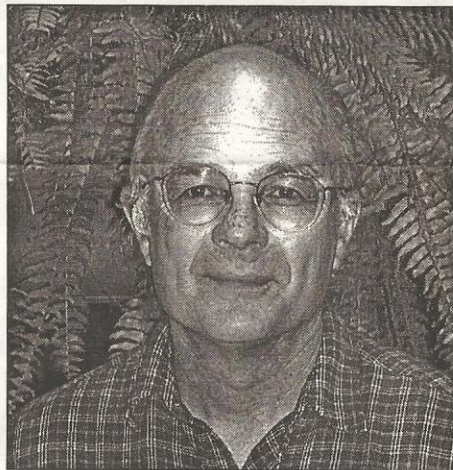
our rules. Apparently, it is not a tame spirit.

From my point of view, there are three aspects to the collective experience called Auroville (and we know that there are at least 50,000 other points of view): it is the Divine spirit of Auroville – the harbinger of a new world, it is a family of souls diving joyously into the depths of matter to participate, and it is a place in space and time where the new life and new consciousness become accessible to human beings. The last two are, of course, the community and the city.

Even if we did not have a place on the earth as our home, the individuals scattered throughout the world who have come here for this would still, somehow, find one another. We are an eternal family. Defying the limitations of distance, the lives of Aurovilians, wherever they are, interpenetrate one another in a constant conversation – sharing the challenges and joys of incarnation, mutually supporting and influencing what each sees and knows and does. And when we meet, we already know one another (the outer and inner life may not be so far apart, after all.) What is being created out of the intersection of our lives? What is the expression of community?

Living in the city of Auroville, for me, is like being turned inside out. One steps into consciousness – suddenly everyone and everything is there. One moves through a structured space of varying densities depending on how far or near in time are buildings, neighborhoods, gardens. Even in the first days of 1968, tourists would arrive at the urn and scratch their heads and ask, "Where is the city?" You would have to laugh. Take a look. It's all around you!

Actually, my first glimpse of Auroville was in 1967 while I was still in San Francisco. It was the



Constance

vision that I was a small child climbing a grassy embankment. Behind me, from where I had come, was a lake and across the lake was the sacred place. Reaching the crest and peering over it, I beheld with awe, encircling the whole area, the shining buildings of the City. That wonder, I knew, was still in the future, but I also knew that it was on the earth. In fact, thirty five years later, we passed that particular spot as our small group moved on towards another part of the gardens.

*

"It's been questioned," Arjun was saying, "whether or not there are any trees on that side at all." In the context of Auroville, what is architecture and planning? How can Aurovilians know what the Matrimandir gardens – the geographic center of our lives – want to be? Well, it seems quite simple, really. We just take a walk – and see for ourselves.

(solvitur ambulando – to solve by walking)

Constance

Constance lived in Auroville from 1968 to 1978. Since that time, he has been helping its manifestation as a board member of Auroville International/USA. He lives in Santa Cruz, California with his wife, Iris, and their son, Gopala.

BOOK REVIEW

Short stories by Medhananda

Books about spirituality, about other dimensions of thought and consciousness, tend to dullness, often insufferable dullness. It's as if there's a collective agreement among writers on such topics that these are heavy-duty issues which demand a tone of high seriousness. Fortunately, there is the occasional oddball who not only appears to have experienced what he's writing about – rare enough in itself if the truth be told – but who also has the impertinence to celebrate and communicate his experiences in language of joy, wonder and laughter.

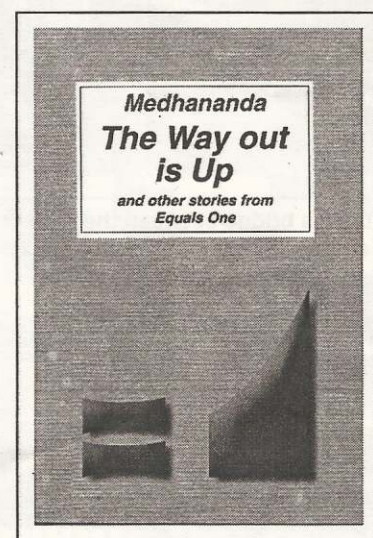
Medhananda is one such oddball. Born in Germany in the early years of the last century, he left with his wife for Tahiti to escape the rise of Nazism. For the next twenty years he lived on a neighbouring island, bringing up their children, cultivating vanilla and coffee, and discovering a rich inner life. In 1949 he wrote to Sri Aurobindo, who accepted him as a disciple. In 1952 he joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where he was the librarian until his passing in 1994.

In February 1965 Medhananda began a journal called *Equals One* (or = 1). The title, he explained, is "the shortest possible formula to remind us that behind the multiplicity of appearances is an essential Oneness of things, and behind the duality of our modern life, behind

the I and the you – man and god – is this Oneness which reconciles all things, all conflicts, a One which gives meaning to all events." Medhananda's many contributions – short stories and prose fragments – derive their power from this tension between the multiplicity of surfaces and the sense of an underlying unity. With his vast learning and exuberant mind, he corrals topics as diverse as the Garden of Eden, mammoths, flying saucers, a yogic school for astronauts and future civilizations. He even allows us to eavesdrop on God being psycho-analysed!

In other words, Medhananda's gift is his ability to take almost any topic and relate it to the great issues of evolution and the purpose of life on earth: as he puts it, "You can do nothing without involving the whole universe". And he does this with such a lightness of touch, such a lack of self-importance, that the reader is easily drawn in, only to emerge, several pages later, with a new way of seeing things, an "Ah, I never saw it like that before".

Some of these short stories have now been published in two volumes: *The Way Out is Up* and *other stories from Equals One* and *Guardians of Oneness and other tales from Equals One*. Further enquiries: prisma@auroville.org.in



Anna's white peacock

A bucketful of clay, a few children to play and The Divine's grace! That is all you need to be happy and gay!

India offers all these – clay, children, and the grace that makes them available. In surplus! The clay-play goes on, but gaiety does not last for long. Why? You need to stabilise things. Yes, the raw clay figurines, which Anna and the children make, have to be baked, fired, glazed or painted, stored in an appropriate studio space, or sold. That costs money. Getting rid of things gathering dust, too, costs. Auroville is no exception. That hurts.

Nevertheless, Anna Marozova moves on, a smile on her lips! She wants to start a ceramic workshop in Auroville, for children and adults. Although there are quite a few ceramic studios, they are mainly commercial. The rationale behind 'White Peacock', as Anna calls her studio, is 'to guide the vital energies of the people (participants) into a positive direction, cultivate concentration, and encourage communication...that will lead to friendship'. That is quite in line with the aspirations of 'the city the earth needs' where communication is still one of the greatest difficulties. Nobody knows that better than Anna, who spoke only Russian when she came to Auroville with her son Arsenij, in '99. But she knew how to smile.

In Russia, Anna ran a special studio for children with her husband for 15 years. Every day, 30 children,

aged between 4 and 15 learnt the craft. She was also a teacher of history of art. In Russia, the education system allows for an after school schedule, so that the children don't have time to roam about. In Auroville, apart from the sports programme at Dehashakti, there is not much that helps children to bridle their energies. "Teenagers do not know what to do and end up hanging around a lot," Anna laments. Also in summer vacations there is little for the Auroville children to do except go to Berijam camp once again. Those with the means, may go abroad; for the have-nots, it is impossible. But education of the vital is an important part of The

erature.

In the context of Auroville, White Peacock will be like a big school, with lots of activities and a workshop for people to choose what suits them best, to do whatever they feel good doing. Anna adds enthusiastically: "Clay is a very 'alive' material. You put your energy into something, make something beautiful, then you can bring it home, or give it to someone as a gift." It seems almost like a dream...

At present, Anna works at Udavi School. She has created a space in the school for children to work. Like the children she works with, the format is always small. Recently, she made posters showing photographs of her students working with her. Some pictures showed tiny little figures made by her students in clay. All her students are dark-skinned, terracotta-like, and like their teacher Anna Marozova they are seen smiling, simply, from the depths of their hearts.

"I am not a manager," says Anna almost apologetically. When she was offered space for her White Peacock in one of the upcoming projects on



Clay figurines made by Anna and her children

condition that she looks after the building maintenance, her studio, the workers, etc., Anna panicked. She was also asked to design decorative tiles for the walls. That is 'fabrication' work according to her. Besides space, nothing else was offered. She would still have to raise her own funds and sell her products to survive. She did not agree. Anna wants to have no strings attached. To her understanding, things do not have to be so dramatic.

You want to agree with Anna that, indeed, the world we live in need not be so demanding. We could simply wish things to happen. But if wishes were horses, beggars would ride... Harsh, but true.

Anna is just one among many who have the idealism but not the means to enforce it, to live it. Money still happens to dictate terms. Instead of making something beautiful to give someone, they are forced to sell 'gifts'. The immaculate beauty of a spontaneous smile gets soiled with the soot of ugly utility. Trying to realise a dream becomes a nightmare. Regret replaces reverie, and man becomes old!

Charudutta

In brief

Irumbai temple

Perhaps due to Auroville's interest expressed on many full moon nights and other occasions, the ancient Irumabai temple has undergone repairs that mar its graceful ageing. In order to preserve its beauty, traditional craftsmen have been identified who can restore the work. Those who have archival images or sketches please contact Ajit: Ajit@auroville.org.in.

Meditation for East and West unity

To promote the ideals and directions given by The Mother for Auroville, a meditation was held on 30th August at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Human Unity, Bharat Nivas on Sri Aurobindo's Message to America to further a deeper understanding of East and West unity in Auroville.

Auro Lang

Auro-traductions announced that, at the conclusion of 50 language classes published in the Auroville News, the booklet *Auro Lang* will appear. It has the same lessons and an accompanying, interactive CD-Rom for more lively sessions. For info contact: avtraductions@auroville.org.in

Lunch breaks cancelled

Following the lead of Pour Tous, the Auroville bakery has also decided to do away with lunch breaks which is a welcome concession to Aurovilians who otherwise have problems shopping during office time.

Evolutionary Agenda

Former Aurovillian Savitra (Alan Sasha Lithman) announced the birth of his new book *An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium*, subtitled *A Primer for the Mutation of Consciousness*, published by White Cloud Press, U.S.A.. The jacket carries endorsements from Barbara Marx Hubbard, Matthew Fox, Michael Murphy and Michael Toms.

Pour Tous clears out

Pour Tous wants to clear out the shelves of some of the non-Auroville products and do away with the avalanche of merchandise that are presently on display. What are basic needs and what are considered luxuries? Customers have been invited to inform the management of the goods they consider as basic.

Health water

Aquadyn announced that it can no longer provide dynamised water free of charge, as the unit is facing severe financial difficulties. To see the unit's work on research on dynamised water visit www.auroville.com/aquadyn.

Salon de Musique

During the months of September and October conductor Eugene introduced and presented French romantic music in connection with the bicentennial birthday of Hector Berlioz.

Cinema crunch

Aurofilm announced that the free film shows in the Bharat Nivas auditorium will continue, but that a monthly contribution from the viewers will be requested to meet the costs.

Recital

Richard Hartz (piano) and Ladislav (violin) gave a well-appreciated concert of Western classical music at Pitanga.

Passing

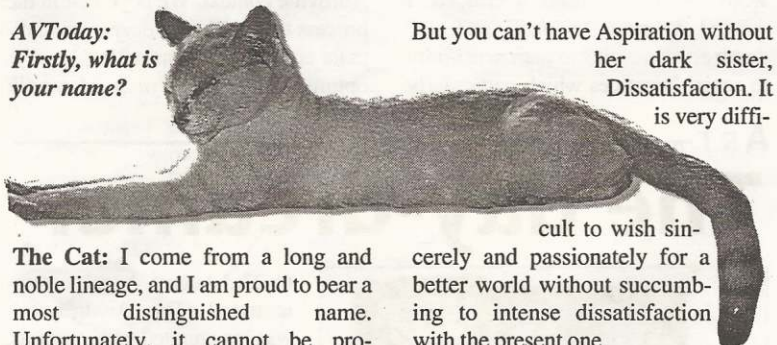
On September 14th, Mary Aldridge from the U.K., a staunch supporter of Auroville who lived a large part of her life in the Ashram, passed away at the Ashram Nursing Home at the age of nearly 95.

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

Pelagius speaks!

For the last two years, the white cat at New Creation Corner has been listening to our conversations over lunch, tea and dinner. This has given it a unique perspective on Auroville. What does the cat make of us all?

AVToday: Firstly, what is your name?



The Cat: I come from a long and noble lineage, and I am proud to bear a most distinguished name. Unfortunately, it cannot be pronounced by the human tongue.

AVToday: Perhaps "Your Highness" would be suitable?

The Cat: (loftily) Sarcasm is not helpful. If you like, you can call me Pelagius.

AVToday: Why?

Pelagius: It is the name of a famous fifth-century Christian ascetic. He preached the doctrine of free-will and the possibility of attaining salvation through doing "good works". I have often thought that he should be the patron saint of Auroville.

AVToday: Why?

Pelagius: Because you're all so earnest about enlightenment and the Supramental. And you're all quite convinced that you can be saved by "working on" yourselves. You don't put it quite like that, of course, but there is a good deal more primitive Salvationism here than anyone acknowledges.

AVToday: Come off it!

Pelagius: No, I'm quite serious. What do all Aurovilians have in common? Aspiration, obviously. You all worship the goddess Aspiration quite openly. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But you can't have Aspiration without her dark sister, Dissatisfaction. It is very difficult to wish sincerely and passionately for a better world without succumbing to intense dissatisfaction with the present one.

AVToday: I guess there's no secret about that in Auroville.

Pelagius: Exactly. However, you must have observed that dissatisfaction is a powerful habit in its own right. Being chronically dissatisfied is a state of mind that cannot be turned off very easily. Hence the cries of "This isn't good enough!" during every debate about any thing in Auroville. If you mix intense aspiration and intense dissatisfaction with a belief that a "better" world is just around the corner if we only work hard enough, you get something very like Salvationism. Excuse me a moment... (*springs nimbly off the balustrade to retrieve a piece of fish on the floor*)

AVToday: You don't seem to think very much of what we're doing here. Surely the attempt to create something better has value?

Pelagius: (neatly chewing the fish) Oh, of course! Don't misunderstand me. You are all representatives of the long and honourable tradition of Utopianism. And one feature of all such people is that you take yourselves and your mission extremely seriously! This is inevitable. There's no such

thing as a part-time Utopian. You have to believe in the attempt, even when the reality is so far from the ideal. In fact, sustaining that belief is Utopianism.

AVToday: You make it sound as though there have been any number of Aurovilles in the past.

Pelagius: In a sense, of course, there have. In any educated society, there is always a minority of people who are too good for the present system. And, we should also note, a minority who are not good enough for it. The thought of starting again, of escaping to a new place where the injustices and stupidities of existing society do not apply, is enormously appealing to both groups of people. When circumstances permit, they set sail for Utopia. It so happens that, in southern India in 1968, an ideal set of circumstances came into being. So here you all are. Just like the Quakers escaping to the New World in the eighteenth century, or the Mormons trekking across the wilderness to Salt Lake a hundred and fifty years later.

AVToday: Surely you aren't comparing Auroville to the Mormons!

Pelagius: (crossly) They are only an example – and a very successful one, at that. You should do half as well! Don't sneer at what you don't understand.

AVToday: Sorry.

Pelagius: Remember where the derivation of the word "Utopia" – the classical Greek word for Nowhere (or No Place, strictly speaking). The present-day usage of it to denote an ideal society derives from Thomas More's

book "Utopia", written in 1516. Being a scholar, he naturally wrote in Latin. It is about a man who travels to an unknown country – called No Place – where society is better organised, fairer, and so on. It was a means of criticising the condition of England during the pre-Reformation era.

AVToday: Are you suggesting that we are simply going through the motions, like all Utopians before us? And that it is actually hopeless?

Pelagius: Good heavens, what an extremist you are! I am suggesting nothing of the kind. I am simply putting your current project in its true, historical context. Two years of listening to your conversations over lunch have convinced me that most Aurovilians consider Auroville to be unique. You believe that Auroville is the first thing ever of its kind ever attempted. This is nonsense. And it doesn't help you to do the work that actually needs to be done. To see yourselves in context, as the latest representatives of a truly noble historical movement that has achieved a great deal over the centuries, would assist you greatly. For one thing, you would feel less isolated. But that's a much bigger subject that we don't have time to explore now.

AVToday: One last question. How could we do better?

Pelagius: My dear fellow, it's no use asking me! I'm a cat. We're long past worrying about that kind of thing. One day, if you like, I'll tell you about our history. It's an interesting story. But I see that luncheon is about to be served, so if you'll excuse me...

David C.

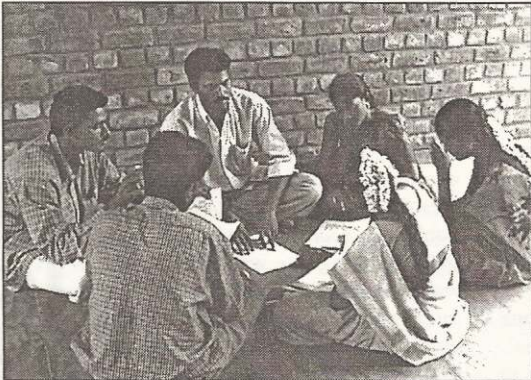
Discoveries from a Tamil workshop on self-development

A three and a half day workshop was offered recently in Auroville targeting a unique audience of 25 development workers from the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), an organization that runs social development programmes in over 30 villages in the bioregion, and 10 teachers from from Isaiambalam, an Auroville outreach school. Ambitious in its scope, it was titled 'The Mother's Auroville Dream and its Relevance to the Individual and Social Development of People in the Auroville Area'. Subash, an Aurovilian who manages Isaiambalam and who offered the workshop, explains that this is the first time that he has introduced the ideals of Auroville and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to a group of adults unfamiliar with them, solely in Tamil. When asked why and how such a topic was picked, Subash answers, "The scope of AVAG's work has started increasing both quantitatively and qualitatively. Its Women's Clubs are gradually achieving women's empowerment through both economic and educational activities. The field staff is in need of taking initiatives to involve the entire village community in the development work. If they can view people with understanding and empathy it will enable them to work effectively with them. I felt that their awareness of the broader Auroville context can produce this understanding." The collaboration between AVAG and Isai Ambalam came about from a desire expressed by Greta Jenssen, the coordinator of projects funded by the European Community, 'to see more interaction between Auroville and its neighbours'.

The workshop model

The workshop was based on the concept of the evolutionary growth of the individual and society with its four stages of development, physical, vital, mental and spiritual, as put forth by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Aware that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not easy to comprehend, Subash prepared relatively simple concepts utilizing a self-analysis format. This was built around four questions 'Shall we dream?', 'Shall we know how we grow?', 'Shall we draw a plan for self-development?', and 'Is it possible to accelerate one's self-development?' Each idea was explored through worksheets, questionnaires, and the sharing of personal life experiences.

At the end of the workshop, the participants were invited to set a personal goal for self-improvement and design a plan to achieve it within the next 30 days applying the tools provided.



Group discussion

ed in the workshop. Sixteen development workers accepted the invitation.

Workshop follow-up

The overall response to the workshop was on the whole positive. Subash notes that the self-analysis exercises were much appreciated. Ayyappan, a development worker, shares how this workshop has affected his life. "My work is intense and I work a lot in the open – under the hot sun, exposed to people and their raw emotions. This workshop helped me see that I have control over my state of response and this gave me a sense of empowerment over my personal atmosphere." After a moment's hesitation, he adds, "I realized that I love myself. Many times I was angry at myself for being a certain way, and it was a burden." Parimala concurs that



A moment of meditation

she too feels more compassionate towards herself now. "There is a greater harmony inside me than before. It seems as if people are cooperating more with me, and I have no logical explanation for this!"

Lakshmi, another participant, says, "Now, after the workshop, when any-

thing negative happens to me, I have started asking the question 'Why?' What is it in me that has led to this disharmony? Before I never worked for myself, on myself. Now I hear a little voice in me that insists that I do something for me. It takes an effort, but life seems strangely smoother." There appears to be a similarity in the experiences among many participants, and they all express incredulosity about the changes they have observed in themselves. They also reveal that following the workshop, their curiosity about Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, and Auroville has increased. They have many questions which they seek answers to: Why are there so few Muslims in Auroville?

Why are Sri Aurobindo's teachings inaccessible to the illiterate? Does this mean that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy targets the upper caste and the educated who are in larger numbers at the Ashram? Why did not more people cooperate or follow Sri Aurobindo?

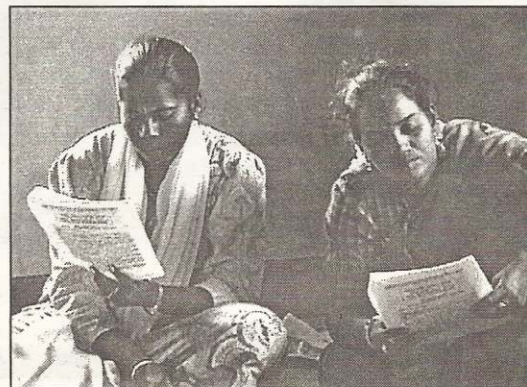
Spirituality versus religion

However, a few of them have also been raising concerns. Some have perceived the workshop to be slightly religious in nature due to the frequent allusions to Hindu mythology, and have been debating the issue since. "This approach was very novel for them," says Anbu who manages AVAG. "Our regular workshops are secular, with no references to spirituality or religion. Though most of our workers come from Hindu backgrounds, almost all of are sensitized to caste issues and its consequence, the class system. In this workshop, for example, the stages of development as described by Sri Aurobindo were illustrated using the analogy of the ten Avatars. A few of the staff could not accept that, and actually dissociated themselves from the workshop."

Subash acknowledges that he was aware of this potential problem. "At the very outset, we requested everyone to 'unhinge' their minds and set them aside. Of course it was easier said than done." Gopi, a participant from AVAG shares his views candidly. "Even though I tried to detach my mind, the examples used made my mind switch on again! For

example, when a video of Sri Aurobindo's life story was presented, the final scene ended with a shot of an eagle circling the sky. To me, it automatically signified Garuda, Lord Vishnu's vehicle. But this did not bother me as I approached the workshop pragmatically, staying focussed on the tools I could use in my daily life."

Others like Valli from AVAG observed that the AVAG staff seemed somehow different from the teachers of Isaiambalam. She found it interesting that most of the teachers seemed to project a feeling of bhakti (devotion) to



Studying the materials

the Mother, which she and her colleagues did not share. "But we seemed to share something else: a certain search for Truth," she adds.

The gender debate

Rajendran and Dhananchezhiyan, who belong to the few that refused to participate in the 30-day goal setting exercise, were troubled by the absence of any female references in the lectures. "All the examples were using male figures," complains Dhananchezhiyan. "Every time the word 'Man' was used, I cringed. I wanted to hear 'woman' instead." Anbu attributes this to their sensitivity to social injustices which particularly



Subash

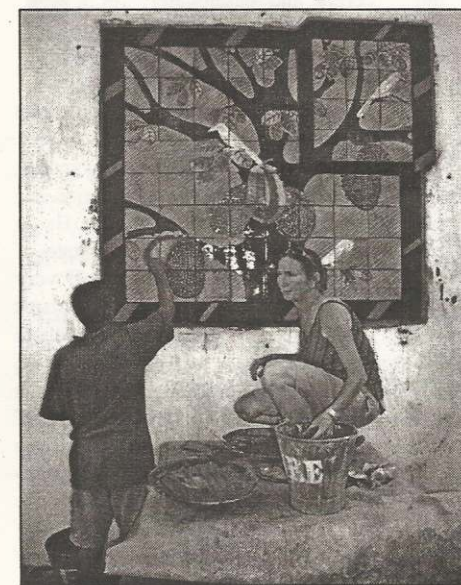
affect women. "There is much gender and class awareness amongst them. This is also what makes them effective in the field, to be able to motivate the women they interact with, counsel those in the throes of crisis, and facilitate initiatives which empower them." On asked about this, Subash says, "It is difficult to include both the genders while writing and speaking in Tamil without considerably affecting the flow of reading or understanding. In fact, such a feeling in some of them did not at all hinder the participants' thinking and understanding about the process and ideas of self-development nor their sharing."

Lessons learnt

The workshop certainly raised unexpected questions and Subash takes this in his stride. He feels that this is a healthy sign and a first step to breaking down barriers. He says that he has learnt a lot from the responses of this audience. "The next workshop will incorporate many changes based on this feedback. I have already started to refine and develop it." He plans to offer the subsequent Tamil workshop to the teachers of other outreach schools in Auroville and to the Tamil Aurovilians who have completed at least high school education. "This time the focus will be on the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and its relevance to the Auroville context. We hope that in the process they will get a deeper and intimate contact with Auroville," he says optimistically. *Priya Sundaravalli*

ART

The day-dreamer



On 23rd August, Ange's ceramic mural 'The Daydreamer', was inaugurated with samosas, music and a brief explanatory talk by Franz. The mural, which is fixed on the outer wall of the Aurelec compound canteen, depicts white crows sitting in a jack-fruit tree. The jack-fruit tree mirrors the large one opposite, but why are the crows white? Many people have their own interpretation, but Ange recalls that Carlos Castaneda referred to a tribe of South American Indians who believe that crows see themselves as white, not black. Dreamers, in other words, like the rest of us...

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Editorial team: Alan, Caryl, David C., Emmanuelle, Priya Sundaravalli, Roger, Sunaura. Guest contributors: Charudutta, Constance.

Proofreading: Navoditte. All photos, unless otherwise attributed, have been taken by the editors. DTP and Photo editing: Mathia. Printed and published by Caryl Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation, and printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.
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