

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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## Versions of Community

**T**he open forum on community process at Findhorn (see our previous issue for a report on the international conference there)

was attended by members of eight communities—the Svanholm Collective from Denmark, the Commonground and Maleny co-operatives from Australia, Sirius community in the U.S.A., the Pueblo Ecologico Europea from Portugal, Auroville and the Osho Commune International from India, and Findhorn itself—as well as individuals with a long-term interest in community process.

There were similarities between the eight communities attending the workshop—they were all 'intentional' in the sense that they had been consciously formed for a specific purpose—but there were also plenty of differences. Auroville, for example, was by far the largest in terms of population and land; Commonground was the smallest with only 5 adults and 4 children living on 120 acres. Again, Findhorn and Auroville are the oldest (33 years and 27 years respectively), Commonground, Maleny, Sirius, Osho Commune and Svanholm are 'middle-aged' (15-22 years), while Pueblo Ecologico Europea is only 6 years old. Ownership patterns also vary enormously: at Maleny individuals own their houses, at Findhorn some members own their houses, others are in community accommodation, in Auroville all houses belong to the community, while at Commonground not only does the membership share one roof, but also one table and one purse! Finally, the core purpose which brings people together in these communities ranges from the spiritual—Auroville, Findhorn and the Osho Commune—to social and political activism—Commonground and Maleny—to environmental—Sirius, Svanholm and Pueblo Ecologico Europea.

Reflecting the 'feel' of the workshop, what follows is not so much consensus as a variety of viewpoints and insights on community process.

### Membership

Clearly, the question of membership, of who does or does not 'belong', is a crucial one. Of the communities represented, the Osho Commune was by far the most 'open', allowing anybody to join and use the community facilities on the payment of \$1 a day, the only provisos being that they have an AIDS certificate and aren't involved in drugs or criminal activities. The other communities at the workshop all employ some kind of entry process, during which the applicant and the existing community members get a chance to experience each other. Commonground is probably the most careful in taking in new members, although the Svanholm Collective, because it has a large debt to pay off, will refuse applicants who are either in debt themselves or who may not be able to work immediately for the community.



Building community: Aurovilians and guests take a break during a gathering at Vérité

How do other communities select their members, take decisions or resolve conflicts? What role is played by their young people? Why do people join communities, and what are some of the satisfactions and challenges of community living? These were some of the questions discussed recently in a workshop convened by two Aurovilians, Alan and Marti, during an international conference at the Findhorn community in Scotland. Alan reports.

But what are communities selecting for? Tony Judge, from the Union of International Associations in Brussels, expressed concern that communities may create monocultures by only selecting those who 'fit in' with the ideas and life-style of the existing membership. And he gave an example of an alternative way from a religious order where the existing members, as a discipline, always tried to include one or two members who were perceived as being different, even 'off', "Presumably on the principle of the grain of sand in the oyster which encourages the formation of the pearl".

In reply, Glen Ochre of Commonground spoke for many of those present when she both affirmed the need for a fairly strict selection process—"As community does tend to attract, among others, people who are very needy and eccentric, and I don't see why I should make a hair-shirt for myself"—and for an awareness of the need for diversity of viewpoints. Ulf from Findhorn feels that "There's a certain strength in living together with others with whom you have a core agreement." And he adds that at Findhorn, "We hold a belief that we don't serve people by letting them in when it's not appropriate for them to be here".

But what's 'appropriate'? And who is to judge? At Auroville and the Maleny Co-operative, there's a certain faith that a one year probation process will 'organically' determine the issue one way or the other. At Findhorn, the entry process involves not only orientation courses and work for the community, but

also a process of conscious 'attunement' by which, through meditation, the applicant (as well as those responsible for the entry process) attunes to the spirit of Findhorn and attempts to determine if he or she is 'aligned' with it. "For me", says Hugh from Findhorn, "the whole key is in this alignment. I'd let anyone in who I feel is aligned with our vision, even if I didn't like the person. At the same time," he adds, "I believe the vision we are trying to co-create here is always fluid."

That sense of dynamism, of flux, of different phases that a healthy community moves through in the process of its unfolding, was acknowledged by all community members at the workshop, and recognised as an antidote to 'monoculturalism' or 'group-think'. And Glen Ochre emphasised how, on the individual level, the constant rub and pressure of community process prevents anybody from standing still. "We all come with our personal baggage, and it's the way we interact with others and their personal baggage which forces us to change." Or leave, she might have added...

### Parenting and youth

How do young people experience community? How do the adults experience them? Among the communities represented at the workshop, there was remarkable agreement that community children and youth are both one of the biggest challenges they face, and also one of the saving graces! 'Challenges'

because young people in community—as everywhere else—frequently challenge community norms of behaviour and lifestyle. Mother pointed out that children are often a 'purge' for those aspects which their parents cannot handle in themselves; in this sense, they act as a mirror to the shadow side of their parents and to the community as a whole. Bo notes how frustrating it can be to spend many months training young assistants on the Svanholm farm, only to have them leave "on a whim". All the communities, in fact, noted that their young people tended to leave in their late teens (although some return later). Jill from the Maleny Co-operative found it very normal. "When young people have been born into a community, they need to explore something different, to assert a separate identity."

At the same time, many people felt that they were not doing enough for their children. Bo sensed that in his community parents were sometimes so fully caught up in the needs of the community, or personal spiritual practices, that their children were allowed to 'run wild'. And some of the other members of communities acknowledged that the many demands made upon them by community living can make it difficult to always find time for their children. In this matter, however, the model of parenting supported by the community seems to be crucial. Most communities represented at the workshop tend to adhere to the nuclear family model which, even while the community provides various facilities for the children, still means that the parents are responsible for bringing up their children. At Commonground, however, all the children are looked after collectively—there are not even separate family rooms—and child neglect is not a problem. "Parents should not own their children," is how Glen explains their philosophy.

Many people noted that growing up in community often gives young people maturity, independence and a gift for leadership and Jill, from the Maleny Co-operative, noted that even the 'wildness', the 'in-groupiness' of community children, is not so much inherent as a defence against all the comings and goings, the outer instability, of community life. "They have to find their own place, even if it means excluding others. It's too exhausting to keep meeting new people."

### Conflict resolution

It's because living in community can be 'exhausting' for everyone that conflicts often break out. How do different communities handle this? "One of the rules in our community," says Karuna of the Osho Commune, "is that when people are caught up in a tough emotional process with each other, they agree to regularly meditate and spend time together. And in this process of 'dynamic meditation', of dancing, sitting together and watching an



## VERSIONS OF COMMUNITY (Continued from page 1)

Osho video, we often drop back into our core, and some of the hot issues dissolve." She adds that Osho had told them "Don't bring emotions to meetings" because if people take out their emotional issues on each other, it becomes harder and harder to work together.

Jill from the Maleny Co-operative is unconvinced. "It's a great ideal, but I think the reality is that we often bring emotions to meetings. And I'd rather have it this way because we want people to be real, to bring their whole selves, on such occasions." Their solution was to send some of their members away on courses to learn facilitation and mediation techniques. When they came back, they trained the others. "It works!"

Linda from Sirius community stresses how very old personal issues can sometimes underlie what appear to be conflicts about community issues. "Some time ago I and another member of the community were always getting into conflict in community meetings. Then one day, as we were arguing, I suddenly had this picture that it was my father standing in front of me! After I had worked on that, my whole relationship with this person changed. Somehow, we had to get into this crazy dance together so that we could finally get free."

## Leadership and decision-making

Do communities throw up patterns of leadership different from conventional ones? It seems so. All the communities represented at the workshop had asked themselves questions like "What is real authority?" and "Where is it drawn from?", and all had rejected the conventional answers of money, influential friends or seniority. Regarding Auroville, for

example, Mother was specific. The ideal organization for Auroville would be 'divine anarchy', based upon the 'inner discovery' and the consecration of oneself 'entirely to the Divine'. In such a society, there would be no need for external regulations, for everybody would spontaneously take up the work most suited to them in the most appropriate way. Alan and Marti stressed that this was still a goal rather than an achievement. But they also pointed to the development, in the interim, of a kind of 'fluid leadership' whereby differing individuals 'catch', at differing times, a note that resonates throughout the collective. Glen Ochre talked of the 'wisdom of community elders', or long-time members, as a form of non-institutionalised leadership in her community. Henning from the Pueblo Ecologico Europea notes that in his community, "An individual's influence on the community process depends a lot on how well they handle their ego, and how well they can connect with common needs". In the Sirius community, willingness to take up community responsibility is the key factor in deciding who will be given authority to make decisions, while Karuna from the Osho Commune stresses that they are a 'meritocracy': "Somebody can be the coordinator of a major work department within three weeks of arriving here if they have the right commitment and skills."

None of the people at the workshop seemed easy discussing issues of power and authority—there is still a strong anarchic orientation in the alternative movement—but the sense that trusteeship and service are essential components of leadership was widely shared. 'Inspirational leadership', where an individual may strike off in a new direction, was supported in principle, although it was noted that it is sometimes difficult to ascer-

tain at the outset what constitutes self-serving revolt against the existing order, and what constitutes genuine inspiration. And here, in the concern with the existing order, was the first hint that old patterns of power can still assert themselves, even in modern intentional communities. Finally, Ulf made it explicit. "I think one of the deeper issues not dealt with at Findhorn is the struggle between newcomers coming in and wanting to implement change and old-timers hanging on to the old structure." From the wry grins of recognition around the room, it was a familiar story!

How are major decisions taken? The vast majority favoured consensus. Bo feels that the process of having to explain, and re-explain his ideas, which he sees as a consequence of the consensus process, allows him to clarify what he's standing for, and Henning, from Pueblo Ecologico Europeo, while acknowledging that consensus can be hard and time-consuming, nevertheless believes it's "A very good training in shedding ego".

But what form of consensus are we talking about? In Henning's community they operate 'consensus minus one', meaning that one person can block decisions, but only for a maximum of one week: after that, if nobody has 'moved', the original decision is implemented. At the Osho Commune, consensus is also used, but only within the central organising group of work group coordinators: the community as a whole is not directly involved in the decision-taking process, presumably because the larger community is so amorphous. The Sirius community, after trying for total community consensus, has gone a similar way. "We got bogged down trying to achieve it," says Bruce. "And it's wrong if people who have only been in the community a short time can block something everybody else is in favour of." So now a smaller group,

after getting wider community feedback, make all the major decisions.

At Findhorn community, the decision-making process involves a lot of initial discussion, but after exploring the 'rational' line, explains Judy, "We always try to let go of that mode by taking the process into meditation and asking a higher spirit, force, to play into the equation. I've seen previous rational decisions reversed by this, and our collective agreement is that, if this happens for all of us, this is the way we'll go. We also agree to keep discussing, to keep going into meditation, until we have consensus."

Recently, a modification of consensus was introduced. When a major decision has to be taken quickly, the chairperson can now call for a majority decision... BUT it cannot be taken at the same meeting, and there must be a 90% majority for it to go through. This new modification is already controversial. "It makes decision-making more politicised," complains one member, "because some people now put more emphasis upon capturing votes than upon attunement."

And Auroville? Clearly we favour consensus for decision-making. But the reality, as Alan and Marti pointed out, is much more complicated, as it involves a complex play of forces and personalities. "Finally," said Marti, "decisions are not so much 'taken' in Auroville as allowed to happen by something we don't fully understand."

"Something we don't understand". If there was one common element among the diversity of viewpoints it was the recognition of something larger which moves, and moves through, community process, and the need to 'attune' to or connect with that larger force. In this sense, 'community' and 'communion' share more than an etymological root...

Alan

# Auroville on the World Stage

"Friends of United Nations" bring together people from different parts of the world

The 50th Anniversary of the United Nations in October 1995 saw not only the heads of 185 countries come together for a widely publicised gala celebration but also, and perhaps more importantly, it gave a chance for ordinary people and communities from all over the world to meet one another and share their knowledge and experience. This process of bringing together people from different parts of the world was, to a large degree, facilitated by the work of the "Friends of United Nations" organization.

"Friends of United Nations" is a non-governmental organization based in Canada that sought to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the U.N. by presenting awards to 50 communities that stood out as successful examples of people's initiatives in ten categories of activity that are important to the United Nations, namely, Peace and Security, Environment and Sustainable Development, Economic and Social Development, Human Rights, Human Settlements, Education and Health, Women and Children, Cultural Development, Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, and Humanitarian Activities. For each of these ten categories of activity, five communities from different parts of the world received an award entitled "We the People" consisting of a certificate and a plaque.

## The awardees

For the purposes of the award, community was defined as "any group of people who share a common unity and a sense of place" and the awardees included, "organizations and

"I feel a very special energy in this unique international gathering that I would like to take back to Auroville."

(Meenakshi, addressing an audience of 300 in New York)

Award for Auroville: "In recognition of your contribution to 'creating common unity'."

social movements whose efforts are directed towards developing a sense of community at a local, regional or global level." Thus among the 50 awardees were the Kosevo Hospital in Bosnia-Herzegovina which in the face of desperate odds has struggled to save the wounded and hold the community of Sarejevo together; the Re'ut Sadaka movement in Israel that brings together Jewish and Arab youth to live communally; the Seikatsu Consumers' Cooperative in Japan that promotes a comprehensive economic strategy to create self-managed lifestyles; and the Community Justice Centre



AWARDED TO

Auroville

in USA that focuses on individual and community empowerment to stimulate change in urban areas that are marked by poverty and violence.

## 'Human settlements'

Auroville could have qualified for a nomination in at least four of the above categories,

but it was nominated for and received an award in the category of "Human Settlements." The other four communities selected in this category were: the Community of Whitfield in Dundee, Scotland; Batikent in Turkey; Panzihua City in China; and Ouje-Bougoumou in Canada. Whitfield is an urban community that a decade back was among the poorest housing estates of Scotland, but now through civic action and participation it has reduced its rate of unemployment, poverty and overcrowding by more than 50%. Batikent, with a population of 170,000 is the largest housing project and the first successful example of public and private partnerships in housing in Turkey. Ouje-Bougoumou is an indigenous Cree village that successfully integrates both traditional Cree values with modern technology and environmental sustainability with aesthetic beauty. Panzihua city houses a multi-ethnic community in China that survived the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and demonstrates unity and harmony at all levels. Unfortunately, the Chinese Government officially boycotted the ceremony because the exiled Tibetan community in India was one of the awardees.

## Workshops and celebrations

All in all, representatives of 45 of the 50 →



# Pantheon on CD-ROM

Thirty-three million gods at the click of a button

India, the land of sights and sounds and smells. The land of temples, of myths and deities, of rituals and traditions. The land where a pantheon of 33 million gods and goddesses is worshipped by an even greater number of devotees. The land where one cannot pass a single day without encountering some form of worship or the other. The land where religion is not merely a matter of belief but a matter of daily experience. The land where a living fount of spiritual knowledge has flowed constantly through the ages, from the ancient times of the Vedic rishis to the current age of Ramana Maharishi and Sri Aurobindo. India, the land of the magical and the mystical.

Who could ever hope to capture the panorama that is India? No one perhaps. At least not in its totality. But soon, computer-users will be able to get a glimpse of India, of Hindu philosophy and mythology, at the click of a button. For right here in Auroville, perhaps for the first time in the world, a multimedia CD-ROM software package is being developed that provides a detailed and comprehensive overview of Hinduism using text, illustrations and sounds.

It all started simply enough, about a year ago, when Ela, a teacher from Germany and a long-term Aurovilian, took a group of Germans who were visiting India for the first time on a tour of South Indian temples. An enthusiast of Indian culture and religion herself, Ela tried a variety of techniques—talks, slide-shows, music-recitals—to make the complex and bewildering details of Hinduism accessible to her audience. And she always wondered about the possibility of sharing her knowledge of and fascination for Hinduism with the West.

As chance would have it, soon after the tour, Theo, her partner and colleague at Penta Services, a unit dealing primarily with computer related-services, introduced her to the world of CD-ROMS where text, visual and audio data are recorded on a compact disc and can be accessed through a computer. Here was what Ela had been looking for. But, to both

Theo and Ela, living as they do in Auroville which about a decade ago did not even use telephones not to mention computers, the idea of producing a CD-ROM seemed absolutely fantastic. So they decided to approach some multimedia companies in Bangalore with their idea, and to that end, they enlisted the help of Steve and Akash of Cynergy, a new unit for software development, to help them produce a prototype. That was six months ago and since then the four have never looked back. For while making the prototype, they realized that they had the knowledge and the means to make the CD-ROM here itself in Auroville.

To make a CD-ROM, the basic hardware one needs is a multimedia PC—a personal computer with a memory large enough to handle audio and visual material; a scanner to load pictures into the computer; and a sound card. The more sophisticated the hardware, the better the quality of pictures and sound. The resources available to Penta Services and Cynergy are extremely basic, and even some of those, like the scanner, have to be borrowed from other units in Auroville; but the software package they have produced with these resources is comparable to any available in the West.

Click. And the screen fills up with a picture of "Trimurti," the Indian trinity of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Go to any one of these pictures, let's say Shiva, and click; and the screen then tells you about all the attributes of Shiva and about the various forms in which he is worshipped, such as the destroyer, the beggar, the ascetic, the teacher, the head of the holy family. Click on any one of these and you get details about that particular form with the relevant illustrations. Point to a detail in any of the illustra-

tions, say the fountain of water that pours forth from the top of Shiva's head, and click. and a voice explains that that fountain of water is Ganga, the goddess and the holy river, who was captured in the locks of Shiva's hair as she descended from heaven onto earth. Come back to the written text and click on any one of the highlighted words: let's say, "Shiva's consort" and then, you leave the world of Shiva and enter that of his consort, Parvati...

Through certain tools, provided by the software package and designated as "jumps" and "pop-jumps", the viewer can browse freely through the text.

Ela, as compiler and editor-in-chief, wanted the software to provide an overview of India for tourists and laymen as well as to fulfil the needs of teachers, students and researchers interested in the finer points of Hindu mythology and philosophy.

Accordingly, the software also includes tools, such as indexes, references, and personalized bookmarks and notebooks to enable the viewer to undertake a detailed research. The main menu, as it now stands in the prototype, offers the following six modules: Basics including introduction, historical development, literature, philosophy; The World of Gods including the Vedic, Epic and Puranic deities; Spiritual teachers and their teachings; Living Hinduism which lists among other things devotional practices and festivals; The Temple; and The Journey to the Source. The information contained in the last two modules allows them to be used as travel guides. "The beauty of the whole package," Ela explains, "is that the body of knowledge present in the package is not necessarily restricted to a particular linear structure; this body of knowledge can be explored by viewers in any format that they choose and to any

depth that they choose."

The technical programmers, Theo, Steve and Akash point out that unlike most CD-ROMS, the particular one they are developing, allows viewers to choose the structure that they like—either to be guided through the text, screen after screen, or to wander randomly through various screens. "I would like to program it such that one can just read the stories and the legends," quips 18 year-old Akash, the youngest member in the team. The team is now working full steam to have the prototype fully ready by the end of January for presentation to distributors in Europe, America, or Asia. They hope to catch the interest of a commercial publisher so as to find the funding for better equipment that will allow them to improve their software package. At the head of their list of priorities is a video-capture board that will enable them to screen moving images.

While this new software is impressive, equally impressive is the process or the collaboration that went into making it. More and more Aurovilians are coming forward to offer their skills: Regina, a photographer, has joined the team as Art-Director and Thomas, a professional broadcaster has promised to do the voice recording. "And I could do with more hands to help with the research and writing," says Ela.

Penta Services and Cynergy are also looking forward to collaborating in manufacturing and marketing CD-ROM packages on other topics, such as greenwork, ferro-cement, etc. "We have such a wealth of knowledge here in Auroville," says Steve, "and CD-ROMS are the best means available today to communicate this knowledge to others." Akash has already started developing a CD-ROM that provides information on Auroville. "It all started out as a dream, and for me the beauty of it all, like much else in Auroville, is watching the dream manifest itself into reality," concludes Theo.

Bindu

Illustrations: computer scanned images from popular temple posters (originally in colour) used on the CD-ROM

communities came to New York to receive the award in person. Auroville was represented by Meenakshi, a poetess who has spearheaded numerous and diverse activities in the community to encourage contact with the Tamil culture. While a number of communities expressed their anger and sorrow at the world in their presentations, Meenakshi opened her talk simply with the common Indian greeting of "Namaste" [which in Sanskrit means, "Salutations to the Lord who resides in you"]. And to Meenakshi's surprise, the entire audience of 300 people responded by saying "Namaste" in return. Documents about Auroville which were prepared by Meenakshi, Roger Toll and Julian Lines, and included a copy of the Charter, were distributed to all present. Meenakshi concluded her talk by saying, "I feel a very special energy in this unique international gathering that I would like to take back to my community." Julian Lines, who attended Meenakshi's presentation said, "People were responsive to Meenakshi and positive about Auroville."

While there was not much opportunity to interact on an individual basis with each of the 45 communities present, the five communities that jointly held the award under a particular category, participated in a study conference to learn from one another—to brainstorm ideas and share solutions to common problems. Thus Meenakshi, who was attired in a traditional Indian sari, was in a group with Scotsmen from Dundee dressed in their native kilts, Cree Indians from Canada and city planners from Batiment, Turkey. One surprising finding of the study conference was that Auroville enjoyed the support of its national government; other communities had to fight the government of their nation in order to establish their values. The Scots presented each of the other three communities in their category with a small shield from the city of Dundee as a souvenir.

On the last day of the celebrations, there was an interfaith service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest Gothic cathedral in the world. The Cathedral of St. John

the Divine which received the "We the peoples" award in the category of Cultural Development, is not an ordinary church. It is an inclusive social organization that embraces a wide variety of ethnic, cultural and religious traditions and provides a forum for the expression of different cultures and arts. So it was only fitting that it should host the concluding ceremony of the 50th UN Celebrations which included the keynote address by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of the UN, and talks by Mark Dixon, the great grandson of Winston Churchill, and Ela Gandhi, the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi. The ceremony also included a three-hour pageant with prayers and songs from representatives of many religious faiths. At the centre of the stage where the ceremony was held, stood the recently completed second Nakashima Altar for Peace. Made of black walnut wood, these altars express the late George Nakashima's vision for world peace. The first altar was gifted to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and it was Nakashima's wish to send one Peace Al-

tar to each continent in the world. The second Altar was originally meant to be sent to Russia to commemorate and guide the process of Perestroika, but now it will be gifted to Auroville instead. A leaflet describing the Peace Altars, distributed to the audience, read, "perhaps it will be find a home in the center of the 'City of Peace' Auroville, India, which sprang forth from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, the same spiritual source which brought forth Nakashima himself." And as Meenakshi put it, "It is truly remarkable that Auroville should have been the centre of attention at this monumental gathering of hundreds of people from all over the world."

But above all, what mattered the most in these celebrations of the United Nations was getting acquainted with the work of so many inspiring people from such different walks of life. In the words of Julian Lines, "It was that classic synchronistic feeling of extended family—that we are all working together, from all different levels and perspectives."

Bindu



# NOVEMBER DAYS

## MY MONTH IN RETROSPECT

They catapulted me into the Working Committee this month. My name was suggested in a meeting to help the struggling caretaker Working Committee to deal with the visa

problems of Gilles Pfeiffer and 14 Russian and Ukrainian Aurovilians. There was no way to say 'no'. Consequently, I spent the better part of this month in discussions with the Secretary, writing letters to the Home Minister and a variety of other government officials, the Governing Board and International Advisory Council members, phoning to the Chairman of the Governing Board, visiting lawyers, composing draft affidavits and last but not least, drafting a proposal to change the entire visa and residential permit situation for all the foreign residents of Auroville. It is not my favourite way to pass the time. None of us, I must say, is really enjoying this. Least of all Gilles and Judith who, somewhere in the back of their minds, doubtless contemplate what life would be like without Auroville. Tanzania? France? England?

And the Russians and Ukrainians? They too face that frightening prospect of queuing up at the entrance to the Indian Embassy in a sub-zero Moscow or Odessa to obtain, *Deo volente*, or rather, *Indian Embassy volente*, a different rubber stamp in their passports so they can come back here. The track record of those particular Embassies is none too positive. Anatoli phoned to say that Aurovilians Galina and Alexei who are at present in Moscow, cannot get an Entry Visa and that the Embassy wants to grant only Tourist Visas, which are useless as one cannot get a residential permit in India on the basis of a Tourist Visa. What to do? The prospects for these people who belong to my brother- and sisterhood are bleak indeed.



The visa work had to be done in between the other activities: giving piano classes, the morning meetings of Auroville Today, the regular evening meeting of the Economy Study Group, an evening class teaching math and rehearsing Schubert's song cycle "Die Winterreise" (The Winter Journey) with Nico in preparation for a performance mid-December.



Amazingly, music is 'in' these days. It seems as if a door has suddenly opened, engulfing Auroville with a children's opera in July, a donation of 9 pianos, a decision to build something like a conservatory of music in the Cultural Zone, and the tripling of the size of the choir. Transition and Last School have followed the flow as well. Music is now a fixed part of the school curriculum, and those who study an instrument get time in their schedule to do that every day. At present some 12 children and 5 grown-ups endure my ministrations with patience and even goodwill, though one of them smirked, amidst a lot of giggling, that 'you haven't got a diploma'. "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is

king," I explained to her after a playful thrashing. Holger, our violinist, later assured me that there was no problem that could not be solved with a decent amount of cash and would I like to buy his diploma? It was only then that I understood that we both operate on the same principle: he advises those who come to him to study piano, while I advise them to take up violin or guitar. We talked music on our way to see Rebello in Madras, the architect who is working on the details of Roger Anger's design for a music conservatory in the Cultural Zone. This building will be much larger than the originally planned "Paca project". It will consist of a small hall which can seat an audience of about 200 and a number of large and small rehearsal rooms. "A small hall", says Holger "one that radiates warmth and friendliness so that the amateurs who perform feel welcomed and carried." I cannot but agree. The voice of Nico thunders in the dance hall of Pitanga but would be lost in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas.



Warm and friendly would also be an apt description for Auroville Today's editorial meetings this month, though at times they were tough. There is a kind of ego-bashing (mine) going on all the time, in particular when I see the comments on my well-meant but ill-fated articles, or read the endless corrections of the proof-reader. The only thing missing is a grade at the bottom. Seven years in Auroville Today, and still I do not know how to write the Queen's English! Oh well... As a special task we study these days to what extent we should continue in the old groove, or change the magazine to a different format and a different content. Is there sufficient money to change? Did any donation come in for our building? Though work on the building foundation has started, the answers are both in the negative. But financial constraints do not prevent us from celebrating whenever there is some reason for it. This month it was Jill's new flat (which was nothing short of a materialisation of Divine Grace), Bill's birthday and Roger's return from the North.



Money is also the concern of the weekly evening study groups dealing with a possible change in the economy. The question, "How much does an Aurovilian cost?" has become standard jargon. To the outsider this might give the impression that we are planning to sell Aurovilians in the same way a football club sells its players. Attractive though this option is (oh boy!), this is not what we mean. We try to understand what the community should pay if we are to understand Mother's Dream literally: "There, work would not be a way to earn

one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service for the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action."

Is it possible to change the present economic system into one in which the community provides for each individual's subsistence? What are the costs involved, and how do we get the money for this? The Auroville Board of Commerce, the assembly of the Auroville's commercial units, has responded positively to the idea and is ready to fund part of the extra requirements, subject to the condition that the Aurovilians concerned work full time for the community. Many of the commercial unit holders feel that too many Aurovilians take life too easy. "We are not prepared to support those people who profit from the community and care only for themselves. We feel that they should contribute in cash as they do not work for the community," is their observation that reverberates like a bell through all our discussions. A detailed proposal has to be made. Yes, I know, it will mean lots of work in the days to come.

1:1=1

And one evening a week I discuss fractions with my math pupil, who comes from one of the surrounding villages and is on her way to becoming an Aurovilian. She never had the opportunity to go to school as a child and fractions baffle her. I do not manage to make her understand, it must be my failing, I realise. But as she is very good in other aspects of life, in particular dance, and as a knowledge of fractions is not (yet) a pre-condition for becoming a true Aurovilian, I have decided to give up on them, to her—and my own—obvious relief.



November is a rare month as it has two Darshan days; the 17th, the day of Mother's passing, and the 24th, Sri Aurobindo's siddhi day. "You always come out a little different," observed my friend Georges once when we were discussing the usefulness of going to the Ashram for Darshan. Ever since then I have experienced the correctness of his observation. Our early morning tickets provide entry to The Mother's room on the 17th, and to Sri Aurobindo's on the 24th. Both times all agreed that "the atmosphere was strong", which is probably as close as we can get to expressing the Inexpressible.



A special treat this month was the arrival of Mr. Antony, a piano tuner from Bangalore. Jean-Michel, who had to give up his job at

Transition school in order to work for a year in Bangalore to earn enough money to pay for the cost of the overruns on his nearly finished house in Grace, (shame, Auroville!) tracked the man down. "He will come with the bus, you please collect him at the bus-station" was the simple telephonic message. So there I was, waiting and waiting, until I discovered that the bus had already arrived and the passengers had alighted at another bus stand. One of the main tests for any aspiring yogi is the control of anger. I failed the test that evening. Scanning through the hundreds of people at the bus stand, I also failed to find the man. My concern will be understood if one realises that piano tuners are a rare breed in South India. Their coming is hailed like the arrival of the monsoon after a drought. The last piano tuner was seen two years ago, a friend from Argentina, who 'did' Auroville in between the Sai Baba ashram and some Himalayan experiences.

Mr. Antony finally came two hours later by autoriksha. He is 71 years old, and tuned eleven pianos in 4 days, a great achievement for someone of his age. An amiable person, he promised to come back in March, once more enduring the discomfort and the perils of the 8 hour bus ride. I admired his equanimity and stamina. He made many of us very happy.



And in between there was the four-day Ayurvedic massage course. In an unguarded moment, I had expressed my interest to Ursula and was promptly enlisted. The course was given by Govinda, another 71-year-old, this one with an astonishing physique, a follower of Vinoba Bhave. "I massage myself a lot," he explained before detailing the various techniques of Ayurvedic massage. We learnt how to massage the body starting from the feet and moving upwards, the use of different oils each of which has its own peculiarity, and the so-called spiritual energy massage. I enjoyed every minute of the two days I was able to follow the course.



Outward happenings inevitably evoke the inner worlds. Or is it the other way round? I am not so far that I can answer this from my own experience. When outer events disturb the mind and upset the emotions, my refuge is Matrimandir. The ideal time is during the early evening, when visitors and workers have left. Sometimes 'it' does not work, and I leave the Chamber as I entered. But there are moments when the mind falls silent, and gratitude takes the place of grumbling. At those moments, when I leave the building some clarity appears, and the energy comes to face the new day with joyful expectation.

Carel



# "I was late in reaching Auroville..."

## A newcomer's odyssey

I was late in reaching Auroville; more than half of my life had passed before I finally arrived. Looking around me at the younger people here I could be envious of their youth and all the time ahead they have to develop and extend themselves in Auroville. But I am not, I am just so glad to be included, to have made it at this time, this very special time when humanity is experiencing so many rapid changes. Looking back on my life I see how rich and kaleidoscopic it has been. I have played so many of life's roles in one lifetime, that I almost have this sense of being speeded up; and from this I receive a sense of purpose and that Auroville is my final destination, of being drawn here by the golden thread of Artemis.

I think I was aware, even as a child, of how abundantly blessed I have been by my childhood. To have been born and to have spent my early years in such a beautiful part of the world, this area of northern England with its unique landscape. It is fell countryside, composed of rolling hills, stone walls and villages, isolated farmhouses, sheep and heather, verdant valleys and very simple but friendly people. More recently I have spent time, months at a stretch, trekking in many different parts of the Himalayas, but I have had more of a perception of emptiness, a feeling of the eternal in these Yorkshire Dales. The colouring too, the purples are equal in magnificence to the ochre shades of the lovely valleys of Lahaul, Zaskar and Ladakh.

From my parents I received a lot of warmth and love. They have much dignity and even now in their eighties have so much love for one another. The village where we lived is small and pretty and at that time it was a village, a community where everyone knew each other, and there was more time, constancy and simplicity. I think we were much more connected then, to each other, to the seasons of the natural world, and to our past.

Later, in 1958, our family moved to Singapore and lived there till 1965, after independence, so I had this experience of the Mem-sahib albeit at the fag-end of the Raj. The age of colonialism was coming to an end, but somehow we continued to live our lives unaware of the changes taking place in the world around us. So for this reason I am glad I experienced this period of history because I got a feeling of how things really were, and it does not feel bad to me. It was a romantic period of history and these sentiments have many times been echoed back to me by Singaporeans and Gurkhas in Darjeeling, contemporaries of that time in Singapore. My Chinese amah was a member of our family, more so than amahs in Auroville are, and she was my confidante. Penang Island and the hill stations of Frazers Hill and the Cammeron Highlands in northern Malaya were our leave centres and travelling to them by train was a joyous occasion because Malaya, which is how the Peninsula was then known, was still densely covered by a thick blanket of rainforest. How can it be that in less than three decades such a vast area of magnificent, life-giv-

ing ancient forest land and the rich diversity of an ecosystem that these noble trees supported could have vanished so irreversibly from the surface of Malaya and Malaysia as a whole?

When I got married I was young and very naive. I think it was a time of less consciousness—the early 60's—and the Beatles were not so established yet, at least not in Singapore. The romantic, sentimentalised music of the 50's continued to have an influence: Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole's "I'll be loving you always" etc. The man I married was in the Royal Air Force, a military man. He was tall, dark and handsome, what we called suave, an officer and a gentleman. I was much more external then and I fell in love with his good looks. By the end of the 60's and the beginning of the 70's everything was changing. Social taboos were being questioned and it was the time of the hippies and the Flower Power people. The music of the Stones, Fleetwood Mac and Eric Clapton expressed this need for change. I began to feel more and more constrained by the regimentation, the uniformity and all the petty rules of Forces lifestyle. I studied Yoga and personal growth, but my duty was to support my husband and his career. In 1973 I went back into education and qualified as a social worker. I was given a post working in a large prison for men. This new involvement took me further away from the bridge evenings and weekends, or the golf course—the lifestyle of the Forces. Now I was moving in the criminal world and meeting the unfortunate, the unprivileged, the victims of our society.

After 19 years of disharmony my marriage finally came to an end; simultaneously our son was killed in a road accident. The years following were poignantly painful ones, a time for soul searching. There were many questions that needed an answer. I experienced more and more suffering from my work: as my workload and responsibilities grew, so did my feelings of disillusionment around what I was doing. By taking on voluntary work as some compensation, I became overactive and exhausted and eventually experienced a 'burn-out'. It was impossible to continue with my life as it was, so I gave up my job and sold my house. I bought tickets for a one-year trip around the world, to give me some space and distance and at the beginning of 1987 I left for the first leg. I flew to India.

Some subconscious inner guidance must have directed my planning of the journey, or otherwise how could I have given five months out of one year to India when I was not expressing any desire to go there? During those five months I travelled extensively and loved the warmth, colour and rhythm of India. When it was time to move on to Thailand, I did not want to leave and I resented the tickets bought in advance that compelled me to go. When I eventually got to Australia three months behind schedule I got rid of my remaining tickets and following the call of my heart, journeyed back to India.

Over the following years I plunged deeper



Anne came to live in Auroville several months ago and found a place in a newcomer's unit in Grace.

away from them as I knew the truth contained in the message and knew that it contained the answers I was seeking. I stayed for two weeks, to read Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and to reflect.

Although I continued to sing for another 20 months in Varanasi, I was also reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and feeling another spiral, another of life's roles coming to a completion. I did not know the adventure of consciousness was going to be in Auroville until this year and there was resistance to it during the four months I spent in England to get my Entry Visa and see my family. Saying good-bye to my elderly parents, my daughter, family and friends, and this landscape which seemed more glorious and precious, seemed like a valediction and so final. Recently, after some time in Auroville, I began to have this experience of unity, of wholeness, and I saw that I have not lost anything, that there is no separation. My parents, family, England, my history, past lives and experiences, Auroville, all, there is no difference; it's the same and contained within the whole, within Her, within the Matrimandir. Life is but one journey, and that is the journey home to the Divine.

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Anne

## Auroville five years from now

### Janet dreams

If I dream of how I would like Auroville to be five years from now, I see a town with many parks full of trees and birds and winding paths. But I also see a town where schools and healing centres and administrative buildings are ultra-modern and equipped with the latest technology. Thirty thousand people from an ancient and traditional culture mix freely with a few thousand people from cultures whose main theme is change and everyone, even the most experienced and most wise, can be a student. It is a place which is doing its best, in constant dialogue with world class educators, to provide appropriate learning opportunities for all of its youth, whether they be the children of the 30,000 who were always here, or the few thousand who have come more recently. And people of good will from anywhere in the world are coming to learn and facilitate learning. In the Auroville I dream about there are simple flats available for rent to anyone involved in this process. There is little motorized traffic other than the very efficient public bus service and everyone rides a bicycle, unless he/she is very young or very old or sick. Our gardens reflect both a developed sense of beauty and a high level of awareness of the need to conserve water. I imagine gardens like ones I have seen in Japan, made of sand, pebbles, rocks, cacti and indigenous plants because precious water is

used for essential agriculture and distributed so every inhabitant of Auroville, whether he/she be a so-called villager or a so-called Aurovillian, can have a daily bath. I imagine an Auroville where people exchange experience and ideas about difficulties like housing and money with other people from around the world who have struggled with the same problems, rather than an Auroville where people keep reinventing the wheel.

I imagine how much fun it would be if our children and the 5000 Tamil children who share the land with us were working together on projects which concern us all. I imagine courses for adults that could be followed on many different levels, so that you and I and people from the village and research students from abroad could follow the same course and do common projects. I imagine every Auroville employee getting an hour off work every day to do sports or dance or follow a course. I imagine an Auroville where meetings are few but productive and half the hours that we now spend in meetings would be spent doing something physical or practical together. And we would find ourselves becoming young at heart, the youth that never ages.

(This article appeared recently in the AUROVILLE NEWS)



**B**uilding your house in Auroville is a unique, time-consuming, hair-raising, patience-testing, character-moulding experience. You can get lost in a fun house of obstacles and mirrors reflecting back to you your own inadequacies and stupidity. There are plans within plans, work schedules within work schedules. You invest time and energy, and there are the massive efforts of friends who come to help and share in the creation of a home. Months of masons, carpenters, painters and endless trips to Pondy, phone calls, questions, money from where? Miracles: and Mother's Grace, overall. Ultimately, you learn the lesson of the Interdependency of All Things. Because, finally, the larger question is: in what way do we help to build Auroville? What are we creating with all this brick and concrete? What style of life? What level of consciousness does it reflect? You may start with a single brick, but you end up with the Divine and the question of how to manifest the Divine in all things.

During the often chaotic construction period, our conversations sounded like this:

Tineke: Hi Jill, how are you? I missed you at the last editorial meeting of Auroville Today...

Jill: I had to go suddenly to Pondy to buy the sink for my new kitchen. The mason told me at 9 o'clock that morning that he needed the sink immediately, otherwise his work had to stop. So what to do? I gave up my plans and tried not to get frustrated.

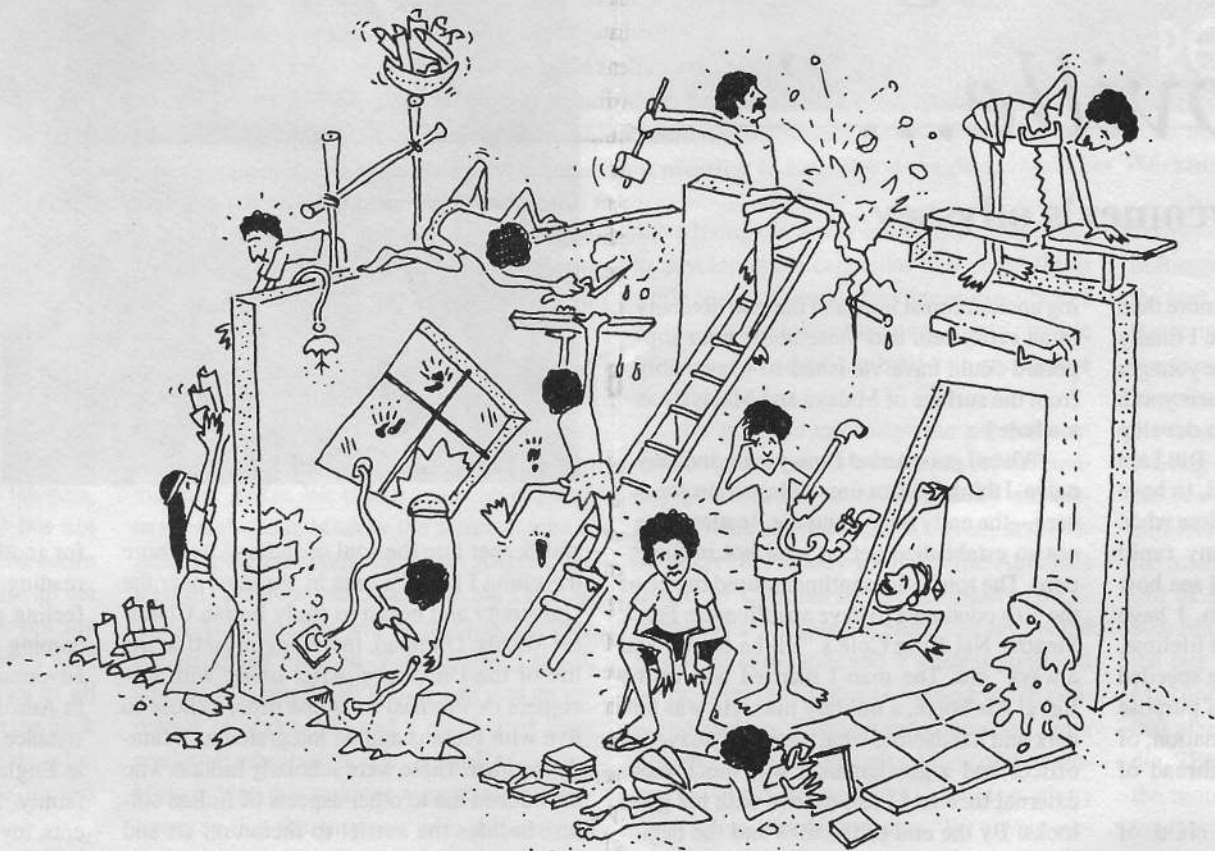
Tineke: I know exactly what you mean. I had to rush off to Madras the other day to get a roll of mosquito screen for the windows in our new house. Same story; otherwise the carpenter could not go on with his work. I spent three hours in the shop before I got the correct gauge! When do you think you will move in?

Jill: I hope soon, but it is difficult to say when it will be ready. What about you?

Tineke: We just moved in, even though

# Building Blues

Two women of our editorial team are building a new home, and have been overseeing construction work for the past few months. This is their story.



the house wasn't completely ready yet. But I was tired of waiting. For instance, every time the painter finished one window, the carpenter had to do some work on it, and messed it up again so the painter had to start again. Or the mason came in and splashed fresh cement on a section which was already painted. In the end I threw them all out! The other day we finally connected our water system. We filled up all the water tanks and opened the taps. The water came out! Hurray! The next morning though, Silvano woke me up saying, 'The water is coming through the wall.' 'What? Where?' I was still half asleep and had no idea what he was talking about. I walked over to the new house and found his office floor flooded. The water pipe from the

bathroom had burst! This meant chipping the newly laid tiles on the bathroom wall to find the leak. Where would it be? After only half an hour of chipping and five broken tiles, by some miracle we found the broken PVC pipe, which had a one-foot-long crack in it.

Jill: I was trying to find a gas bottle so I can cook. A friend promised me one of hers. I have to get it from Pour Tous. Pour Tous tells me to come back next week. Temporarily out of stock. My gas bottle (once I get it) will fit into a small compartment on the outside of the kitchen, but this doesn't have a door. I go to Pondy to find 12 mm. hinges for the door. Out of stock. They only have 6 mm. The gas bottle (once I get it) will only be operable once I drill a 12 mm. hole in my kitchen

countertop, allowing the connecting gas line to peep through. But I don't own a drill. Maybe my upstairs neighbour has one. Yes, but his drill bits are fragile. I have to go to Pondy to buy a 12 mm. drill bit. Maybe by then they will have the 12 mm. hinges! Maybe some day I'll be able to cook! Once I told the

mason to make a particular design with tiles in front of my door and went off, trusting that he understood my instructions. But when I came back, I couldn't believe my eyes. Then I understood, the mason is not familiar with placing tiles at random. So I have to be there to supervise. There's no other way.

Tineke: It's a communication problem. Very often I'm thinking of how to save money on costs, and the mason is thinking about how to make the most from me.

Jill: Exactly! Working together, we find a middle ground. And when there's a good feeling on both sides, the work goes well and everyone gets energised. If you've got a really good mason, then you can learn something about cement and bricks and plaster. Then something can take shape that you've created together.

Tineke: When we moved in we did a little local-style *puja* (blessing ceremony). All the workers and guest-house staff

were present. They had brought their brass oil lamps from home and transformed one of the bookshelves into a little altar for the deities, adorned with burning incense and flowers. As the woman of the house, I had to carry a burning oil lamp across the threshold. Then Silvano and I were put together on a chair and garlanded like a newly-wed couple. At that moment, a boy from the "Grazia" workshop showed up with a wall hanging with Auroville's symbol as a present from a friend. Great timing. It was the final touch to our ceremony.

Jill: And it all starts with a single brick!

Jill and Tineke

## Book Review

*A House in Pondicherry* by Lee Langley (Heinemann, London, 1995).

*A House in Pondicherry* is a novel written by Lee Langley, who was born in India and spent her childhood here. Her last two novels, both set in the subcontinent, received critical acclaim. In fact, *Persistent Rumours*, written in 1993, won the Writer's Guild/Macallan Best Novel Award and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best Novel for the Eurasia region. *A House in Pondicherry* is a story about love and time, impermanence and change. At its centre is the character of Oriane, a woman whose will power is awesome, but who cannot express her true feelings easily. She is the proprietor of the fictitious Hotel de France, on the corner of the rue Laval, an old French colonial-style house whose rising and falling fortunes mark the appearance and disappearance of an era in Pondicherry.

For those who live here, *A House in Pondicherry* is a little unsettling; it depicts people and places and events which are both

familiar and fictitious, and you're never quite sure where one ends and the other begins. Which is also part of its charm. If you can stop trying to guess who this one and that one really are—the book is an enjoyable read, with the changing character of Pondicherry over the centuries being the main subject of the narrative. And then, of course there's Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and Auroville.

"A place where people can live in harmony... not driven by commercial forces, belonging to no one and to everyone. This will be a place for love and peace. Utopia perhaps," Oriane writes to her friend Marie-Helene, who is the grandmother of Raymond, the French architect who visits Pondicherry and becomes involved in the building of the "new city". This new city, with its settlements ("the names resonating with hope and faith") is described fairly accurately and even-handedly. "Auroville was impossible to pin down: it existed, as an idea, potentially; it also existed as a place, but less convincingly. There was no tarmac, no traffic, there were no shops. Apparently, there were no people. Just the harsh red earth, its emptiness broken only by trees and sharp-edged bushes." So Charlotte feels Auroville, on her first visit, sometime in

the 1970's. Charlotte is the daughter of Judith, an Englishwoman who has an affair with Raymond in Auroville, returns to England and bears a child who returns to India to discover her father and this strange land.

Lee Langley describes Mother through the fictitious Mr. Chetty, an Indian devotee who lived in Auroville during "the spartan times." "The Mother was our guiding spirit," he tells Charlotte. "She said, somewhere there must be a place where people could live with truth and harmony... Judith had spoken of the Mother, an ambiguous, enigmatic figure, Aurobindo's acolyte; to some, sharing Aurobindo's divinity, to others, a manipulative power behind the throne. Mr. Chetty had no doubts. 'Without the Mother, there would be no Auroville'."

Pondicherry itself dominates the story and its power to attract and hold people is magical. When Aurobindo Ghose looks for a refuge after his trial in 1909, he comes to Pondicherry, a town of "palm trees, low-lying houses, a lighthouse. A small town, adequate for what he imagines will be a short stay. . . It was a fine, gleaming town with an imposing Promenade that curved the length of the bay, straight streets lined with trees,

houses spilling bougainvillea down their white walls. . . In fact, France ran from the surf-sprayed Promenade to the east bank of the canal. At the west bank, India began."

The vast differences between French and Indian sections of Pondicherry reflect the often unbridgeable gap between the two cultures, and between the men and women who inhabit this colonial territory. This gap makes the love affair that evolves between Oriane and Guruvappa unusual, astounding even. Guru, as Oriane calls him, is a young Indian student when they first meet who is studying political cryptography in London: "a survey of secret communications and coded messages between the colonists and colonised." Lee Langley allows their relationship to evolve beautifully, slowly, carefully. The 60 years that they share together encloses the worst and the best times of Pondicherry and the Hotel de France. Although their love is never physically consummated, their intricate *pas de deux* and the strength of their bond, forged over the years, is unbreakable, hilariously funny at times, and ultimately, profoundly touching. For those interested in Auroville, Pondicherry, India and the French colonial era *A House in Pondicherry* is a sweet, satisfying story.

Jill



## Foundation Ceremony for Savitri Bhavan

In the groves of acacia and teak trees that line the road between the Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir, the chanting of Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra could be heard in the late afternoon sunlight on November 24th. This auspicious day was chosen not only because it is the day when, in 1926, Sri Aurobindo experienced the descent of the Krishna consciousness, but also because it is the first anniversary of the Savitri Study Circle. This group began meeting weekly on the meaning and significance of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*, which is a legend and a symbol about the journey of the soul. They have launched a project to build a study centre at this spot based on a design developed by one of Auroville's architects, Helmut.

Dr. Nirodbaran came from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry to lay the first stone. He acted as the personal scribe of Sri Aurobindo during his final years, noting down sections of *Savitri* while it was being composed and revised before it was finished in 1950. At the ceremony, Nirodbaran who is now 92, spoke movingly about *Savitri* and of the great importance the Mother gave to it as a means for personal growth. He recited a section from the Book of Everlasting Day that ends with these lines:

"Nature shall live to manifest secret God,  
The Spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life become the life divine."

A large and diverse group of people attended the foundation and invocation ceremony including children from the Arul Vazhi School, Aurovilians, Ashramites, visitors and guests. On the Sunday following the ceremony, the Savitri Study Circle met at the site for their regular meeting, enjoying the ambience of the forest. Dr. Suresh De, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, has taken the initiative in organizing the study circle and promoting the Savitri Bhavan project with the help of members of the group.

## New Creation Dances

It seems as though it was only yesterday that Stuart and I were expressing our hopes for New Creation. He wanted it to grow and be a place of "international collaboration where the Aurovilians, village children and guests could work together"; I merely wished that Aurovilians would take the time to know New Creation better and support the experiment that was going on there (see AVT 83). Our wishes came true unexpectedly, one evening not so long ago, when Paula, a visiting American teacher and choreographer, and a group from New Creation presented a well-attended dance performance at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium.

"Contemporary dance," said Paula that evening in an introductory speech, "has gone beyond the presentation of dramatic stories and angst-ridden movements. It has sought to push the limiting definitions of art and seek out new means to keep dance a universal medium. Pop music and stylized movements are used nowadays to reach out to a larger audience—to ensure that all in the audience feel that art is for everyone and not just a select few."

And in all the four pieces that the group performed, this proved to be true.

The group, called "Ilam Tendil" which means "breeze" in Tamil, included eight to ten dancers: children aged 9 to 12 from the villages; Murugesan, a Tamil dance teacher from New Creation, and Paula. The first piece, choreographed by Murugesan, borrowed the music from a film, "The Gentleman" as three boys and three girls tapped their way through a fast number in a style

reminiscent of dances one sees in Indian cinema.

"Flying and Gliding", the second dance, was choreographed by Paula and set to the music of an Australian group, "Outback." This number, performed by 12 children, used more varied movements, including gymnastic-styles back-flips and rolls.

The third piece was an unexpected delight—it was developed by the children themselves without the help of their teachers, Murugesan and Paula. Introducing it, Paula said, "When I first saw it, I was reminded of the exuberant energy that one finds in New York City, in Central Park, or on any street in any modern city where kids get together to do their thing." And indeed, dressed in T-shirts and jeans, hips swaying and gyrating to the music of a box-office hit film song, "Hama Hama," the kids transported the audience from the solemn auditorium of Bharat Nivas to the streets of Am-

## Matrimandir layoffs

The laying off of some of the Matrimandir workers has begun due to insufficient funds for some of the activities. In brief, the decision to make a concerted push to complete the disks has resulted in much of the money which previously was donated unspecified now being specified for work on the disks. The consequence is that the other 11 work areas—which include the inner skin, the petals and the gardens, and which still require substantial financial support—are now relatively starved for funds.

The immediate effect of the cutbacks is that most of the work on the petals and gardens has ceased, and nothing is happening in the Amphitheatre where the laying of the red stone and other work is far from complete.

The Matrimandir Management team is appealing for everyone's help both in providing fund-raising ideas and in generating the funds themselves. As the most recent (low-cost) Matrimandir Newsletter put it, "each one of us can do something, however big or little, and indeed there is no big or little in this process, there is only the offering that comes from within and knows no limits, the 'yes' to that which the future is bringing..."

## Windpump network for India

Approximately 30 windmills, many of which are designed and fabricated in the 'Aureka' workshop, are pumping water in Auroville. It is appropriate, therefore, that the 'Wind Pumping Network India' was officially set up recently at a workshop organized in Auroville by CSR and the Tamilnadu Energy Development Agency (TEDA), and sponsored by the Overseas Development Agency (ODA) from the U.K. The network, which will be coordinated by CSR and the ODA, will offer seed money and technical assistance in improving indigenous windpump designs, import proven models from abroad for various applications, organise awareness programmes for potential users, and stimulate manufacturers to give proper training in the operation and maintenance of windpumps.

The network is part of a U.K. programme for Asian countries; similar networks will be introduced soon in China, the Philippines and Vietnam.

## Snakes

There are many species of snakes in Auroville. 'Wild Collection' has presented all the species in an attractive ring bound book with quality colour photographs. As might be expected, the four venomous snakes species (the spectacled cobra, the common krait, the Russell's viper and the saw scale viper) take the first pages of the book. Reading about the toxic venom of the krait—"six to eight times more than the cobra"—and its effects—"usually nothing is felt immediately after the bite; it takes several hours for the first symptoms to appear and by then it becomes too late"—it strengthens one's decision not to walk around at night without a torch. The other pages of the book detail the 13 non-venomous snakes species which one can find in Auroville. The book is a true contribution to Auroville, the more so as the photographs in the few books about snakes which are available in India are all of extremely poor quality.

"I hope this album throws more light on these misunderstood and mistreated creatures," writes Rajeev Bhatt in his introduction. We hope that the album will help to diminish fear and contribute to the love for these elegant animals.



Outdoors--but no city streets here: New Creation children dancing

sterdam, Bombay, or New York. This third piece was undoubtedly the favourite of all.

The last dance was largely a solo item by Paula with the children in the background. Paula had started developing the dance in the U.S. a couple of weeks before she came to India, but it took its final shape only in her last days here. Entitled, "Images of India," the dance consisted of three parts: "In a shattered mirror," "My lost soul," and "The monster within me." The dance could be interpreted as a portrayal of the emotions that a young person from the West feels upon visiting India for the first time. The crowd of children rolling in the back stage, or squatting with their backs to the audience and expressing their emotions through hand-movements, reminds one of the masses of poor people

that haunt this country, of their inability to change their situation, of their mute appeals, and also of their intense love and their power of resilience. Encountering such poverty, a person from the West is first shattered, but then slowly comes to terms with it and recognizes herself among the poor.

If there was one thing that united these four pieces of such diverse music and movement styles, it was the ease with which the children performed. For a group of such young dancers, their sense of rhythm, their apparent spontaneity and the total synchronization of their movements was truly remarkable. Rhythmic movement—the joy of vital expression—is something that comes naturally to these village kids, and through the unfettered elements of contemporary dance they suc-

ceeded in transferring their joy and their vitality to the audience. The audience, the majority of whom were Western Aurovilians, were far more receptive to these modern dances than they are to Bharat Natyam, the traditional dance form of this region, the symbolic movements of which that they do not fully comprehend. In other words, as Paula said at the introduction, the audience felt welcome and included in the expression of art.

Returning home after the performance that night, I could not help but think that this is what New Creation is all about—to bring up children that blossom and express themselves naturally and in doing so create joy and goodwill among all the people who live here.

Bindu



# AUROVILLE TODAY

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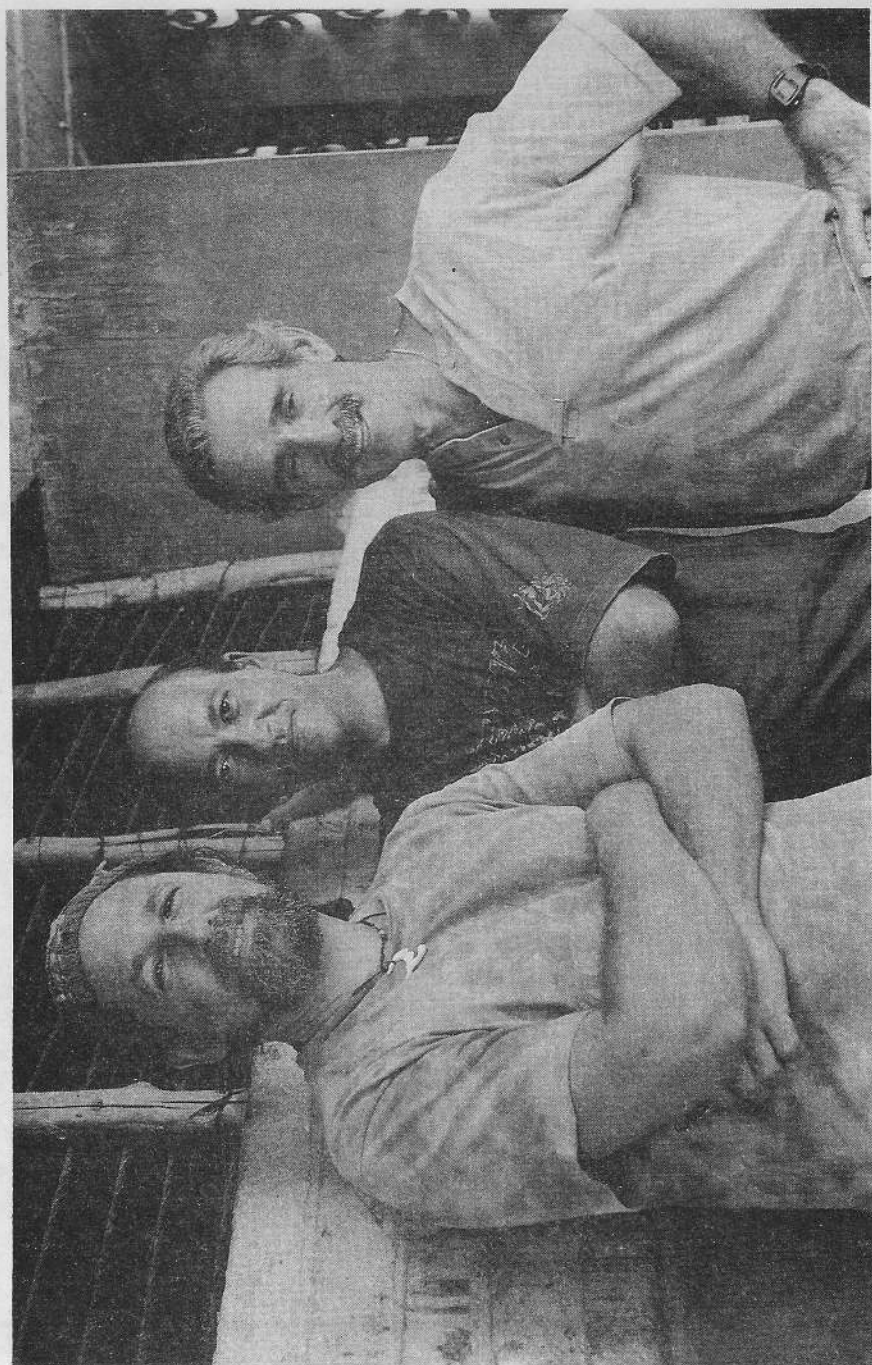
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IN THIS ISSUE:  
ON COMMUNITIES; PERSONAL STORIES; MISCELLANEOUS NEWS



Auroville News editors: l. to r.: Roy, Santo, Michael. "We bite the hand that feeds us."

## The AUROVILLE NEWS

### An inside view

"Who pays for the AUROVILLE NEWS?" was an openly voiced or mumbled question during the Auroville International meeting in the USA this year, but—not wanting to awaken sleeping dogs—no one pushed the puzzling matter too hard... The AUROVILLE NEWS editors are just concentrating on getting the paper out every week, stuffed with information relevant to Auroville's immediate functioning and more, and are not really concerned about the financial aspects of their already considerable plight. In fact, week in week out, some 500 AUROVILLE NEWSes are emerging from a small, 3m x 3m space located at the entrance of the Secretariat building at Bharat Nivas—come hell or high water! Festivals, government holidays, strikes, epidemics and editorial blow-ups notwithstanding, the News goes out; an achievement that hardly ever gets acknowledged in spite of the fact that the News is read and appreciated by (well, almost...) all. Though normally we take the editors' job totally for granted, stress factors included, perhaps for once we could focus a bit on their work, bearing very much in mind the vital importance of this blood-and-breath-life-link-with-Auroville for Aurovilians and friends abroad.

There is Roy, hunched forever behind his desktop, a little skullcap on his head and a tangled braid of gray hair down his back, his eyes sweet and wise and his grin weary, typing and typing away, patiently receiving floppies, catering to wishes and demands, categorising data, formatting, hunting for new ideas, quotes, covers, slogans and so on.

And there is Michael Z., who has the final editorial say, working his way through the endless, often practically illegible little notes scribbled on flimsy bits of torn paper waiting on his desk, patiently streamlining them and turning them into readable English. He expects to see them come out in print on a stencil, possibly enlivened by one of his snide "editor's notes" about which the community may shake its wise head for at least a week, going "Tshk, tshk..., this time he really went too far!" But Michael heroically stands for his Puns and Principles and is just *unable* to let go of a good opportunity to crack another joke... "We publish (or don't publish) material, comment and editorialize entirely on the basis of our own judgement of the piece or issue involved, without regard to what individual or group might potentially be offended by our actions," is his motto. "We bite the hand that feeds us".

And of course we have Santo being Santo in the middle of it all, trying to keep matters and wits together in his sweet, airy or grumpy way depending on the mood of the day, valiantly defending the righteousness of things, supplying deep thoughts and quotes, being the main drive behind the actual production of the News, insisting on buying the stencils in Pondy himself, cycling up and down there to get them, paying ink, paper, envelopes and stamps from an old battered cookie box and doing 1001 other things in between...

The News wouldn't be the News without Segar, who spends the last days of the week in a sort of trance while printing the stencils and counting and counting and counting away...

Just around the corner of our wise and winsome editorial trio we find Rathinam of Auroville Fund, who smilingly and generously provides the budget, and who has for some time been patiently warning the producers that they were steadily overspending on mailing costs and that they really had to do something about it.

So who pays? The Auroville Fund for all the copies sent to Aurovilians and members of the Governing Board and the Advisory Council, and to people in charge of Auroville International centres. From now on, all other people who have been receiving a copy are requested to contribute towards the costs of printing and mailing.

Efforts are ongoing to get the AUROVILLE News out through E-mail, and to make it accessible on the Internet as soon as Auroville's satellite link has been established. This raises the immediate question if the AUROVILLE News is at all interesting for the outside world. What influence will it have on Internet surfers? How will Boris' offerings go down on the World Wide Web? What will Belorussian computer nerds make of Paulette's exhortations? Most of the writings and reports in the AUROVILLE News can only be appreciated—or reviled as the case may be—by insiders, those who know a bit more than that which is expressed in cold print. But for those whose life blood is heated by the same vibrations as Auroville's, the AUROVILLE News is food for the hungry. With one warning: at times one may suffer a little from indigestion.

Mauna

(Reprinted from the Auroville News, with adaptations and concluding comments by AVT editors)

### Subscription rates

To cover our costs, the suggested new subscription rates for 12 issues of AUROVILLE TODAY are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. **Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund**, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do **not** send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire..

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AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

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