

AUROVILLE TODAY

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impressions expressions

“Youth needs a united voice”

Swadha and her twin sister Swaha were born in Auroville in 1975 and grew up here until 1990 when their parents decided to go back to France. Swadha came back at the beginning of this year to settle in Auroville. She currently works at the Financial Service, the Free Store, and helps coordinate the project Youth 2000.

AVT: How do the youth perceive Auroville?

Swadha: Some feel very lucky and are consciously choosing to stay in Auroville. I consider it important for youngsters to take at least two years and go abroad and experience life over there. Then they can fully realize how different and exceptional Auroville is. Coming back and staying in Auroville then becomes their own decision instead of being subject to the choice of their parents to live here. That makes a big difference.

Auroville offers a lot of freedom, how is it handled by the youth?

S: One cannot fully realize what freedom is if one has not been outside Auroville. Until you reach the age of 10 or 12, you don't really understand what is happening, you simply go through your daily life as it comes to you. However, when you become a teenager you somehow lose sight of why you are here. It is a period where you don't know what to do and school does not inter-



Swadha

est you any more. Parents and teachers have to constantly push and motivate you to finish your studies. But you have reached the passage towards independence. You want to do something else, all on your own, and often without having the necessary maturity to do so. So as a result, many end up just hanging around with very little to do.

It is interesting to note that you are considered among the youth population until you begin your active life, meaning that you get a job and are more integrated into the working system. Then you are seen more as young adult. This could happen when you are aged 18 or 25. In Auroville, youth is not necessarily defined by age.

What is your perception of the education offered in Auroville?

S: Personally speaking, it was a difficult transition for me to adjust to the French educational system. I was lagging behind my age-group academically. But now I have the impression that education in Auroville has greatly improved—the teaching methods are better and there are fewer drop-outs as the system is more structured.

How do the youth regard work?

S: Those that I know and who have a job appreciate their work. Auroville gives you the opportunity to choose what you want to do according to what you can do. The Auroville job market seems to be functioning well as, upon returning, I immediately received several job propositions. I am often surprised to hear complaints from others because they either cannot find anything or do not have enough responsibility or do not feel accepted. I disagree. When you really look for something, you find it.

How do the youth feel about Auroville's spiritual dimension?

S: I must admit that we are not up to the mark on that subject. A few do show some interest in spirituality but they are a minority. Generally speaking, after you have reached 20, you have opened at least one book from Mother or Sri Aurobindo in an attempt to understand “why” they give rise to such passion and interest. I consider this as a gap for us and it is tied to the fact that the youth in Auroville do not know enough about the past and what happened over here since 1968. But at a younger age, spirituality is not a great motivation and we all know that it cannot be forced so we have to wait patiently for the right opening at the right time.

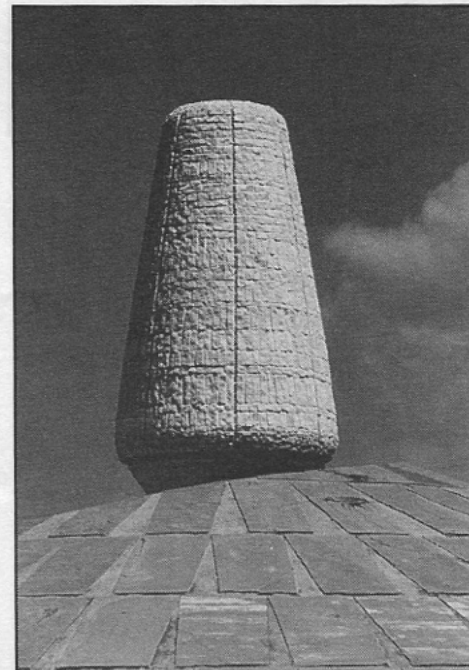
What is the youth's biggest concern?

S: To be accepted by others. Young people need to feel that they belong to a group and this integration is not necessarily easy, especially when you are newly settled in Auroville. Like any other city in the world, in Auroville, you find various groups, linked by some affinity, and everyone tries to be accepted in one of them.

But we have yet to find a place where all youngsters (we are about 200) feel accepted, can dialogue, listen to music, etc. This is why I have a lot of hopes with the proposed Youth Council. (See *Brief News* on page 7) The youth needs to have a united voice, a place where they can express themselves, share their feelings and feel they are listened to.

Do you think that there is a communication problem between the youth and the adult population?

S: Dialogue between youngsters and adults remains at a superficial level. They do not have the same spirit, the same way of thinking, of seeing things. There is a definite gap.



It all began around this urn in 1968. Now, 32 years later, in this last issue of the millennium, a sampling of Aurovilians share their thoughts and feelings with us on a variety of subjects like youth, education, community living, outreach and spiritual research.

So to reconcile this situation I think that you need models, examples of youngsters and adults who can bridge the gap and open channels of communication. Through these channels, people can open up and express who they are and how they feel. You should see how happy youngsters are when they meet an adult interested in what they are going through and available to listen, understand and be with them.

What is your own perception of Auroville?

S: Before I arrived, I considered Auroville as a passage, a transition between the past and the future.

Now that I have been here for ten months, I unfortunately realize that Aurovilians have become much more individualistic in their approach towards community, work, relationships, progress, and so on, just like in the outside world. I don't feel any disappointment because it is better than outside, but still it is definitely not perfect. So now I just need to find a balance between what I thought I would find, what I found, and what I would like to find in the future.

Auroville has a better standard of living now and it is much easier, materially speaking, to live in Auroville. But I feel that this has happened to the detriment of a sense of community. There was such a strong community feeling in the 15 years that I spent in Aspiration.

I feel the more we create collective places where people of all ages can live and share their experience, the better it will be for Auroville.

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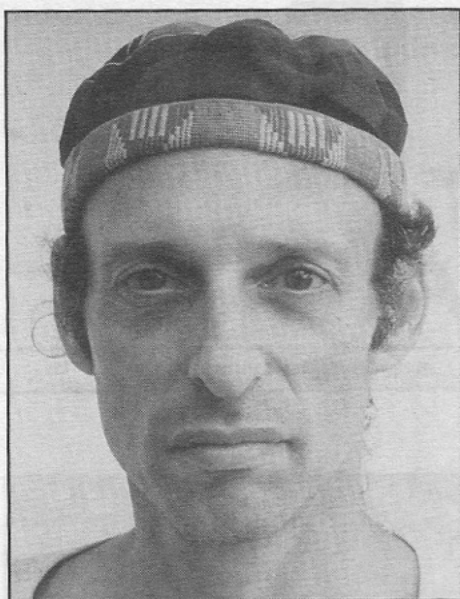
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Michael

“We’re beginning to ripen”

Michael Spector, an American-Israeli living in La Ferme, came to the Ashram in 1976 and settled in Auroville in 1987. He helped initiate the La Ferme Cheese Unit, has been facilitating meditation and dance sessions for many years, and is currently a therapist and teacher at Quiet Healing Centre.

AVT: Is Auroville a place of spiritual research?

Michael: To me it is obvious that it is a place of spiritual research. The mere fact that many people here are seriously striving to realize the goals of Auroville, with its Charter, its vision, makes it a place of spiritual research. Also, we have the Matrimandir, a vehicle meant to receive, contain, and transmit a spiritual presence, and to progressively concretize a spiritual force in our daily lives and in the world at large.

The research that is going on may not be very obvious from conventional scientific or cultural points of view. But it is implicit in our lives here, and noticeable to anyone seriously interested in working with Auroville’s unfolding possibilities.

Spiritual research

Do you feel that Auroville as a collective is growing spiritually?

M: The faith among us in the spiritual adventure is there and growing, and to some extent the dawning of realization, but we’re still far from being an exemplary, unified community. So much is lacking, limping and not in full bloom.

But when you see outsiders who are attracted to the place, they feel a sort of force, a spiritual aura that is moving through it and holding it together. You could say it is the power of love and wisdom and practicality that Mother and Sri Aurobindo have injected into this place, and what allows for progress is that we carry this love in our hearts and minds and deeds.

Mother and Sri Aurobindo state that there are three stages of development: the psychic (individual), the spiritual (universal and transcendent), and the supramental (which unifies these levels). We are still in the process of becoming a psychically-centred community: we have not yet developed a fully functional soul centre. It is still a hidden force, partially and indirectly expressing itself.

Do you think that there is something that Auroville could do to pass more swiftly to the spiritual stage?

M: Yes, on the individual and the collective level there has to be more of a genuine ritual and genuine language, a shared language that allows us to feel and be in the dimension that we call spiritual, where the words resound with the spontaneous truth of what we experience. We shouldn’t just be quoting Mother. We should be speaking Mother, speaking from the universal source.

What do you mean by ritual?

M: A pure and regular action which simplifies our being, that which brings us back to our luminous body, back to the direct perception of the Divine presence that abides in our midst. Ritual is primarily a focussing of our

being in the here and now of spirit. Everything can be ritual—brushing one’s teeth is ritual if it unifies us with our spiritual core.

Many Aurovilians are suspicious of ritual...

M: It is true that most traditional ritual is too complicated and overused to serve this purpose, but we need to do something regularly to engage us with spirit. Auroville is not a traditional spiritual community. Auroville is a community that is trying to be spiritual in new ways that are relevant to all of humanity amidst the great transition that is happening.

“We are not doing conscious experimentation”

Shraddhavan from the U.K. taught in the first Auroville school in Aspiration in the early 1970s. Today she co-ordinates the Savitri Bhavan. Here she gives her thoughts on Auroville as a site of spiritual research.

It’s obvious that Auroville is still very far from being even an ‘initially spiritualised society’ as Sri Aurobindo describes it in *The Human Cycle*. This is a society in which soul-values govern all aspects of individual and social life. In this kind of society it would be possible for some people to open up to the ‘superman consciousness.’ The Mother said in 1969 that it was already actively at work to create the material and social conditions in which the first supramental beings could take physical bodies.

It’s also obvious that a great deal of exploration and learning on many levels has taken place here over the last 30-odd years, which it would certainly be worthwhile to

It is a moment by moment research...

We have only recently begun to exchange our inner findings.

Do you think this is important?

M: It is crucial. If it doesn’t happen, Auroville will not unify into a spiritual collectivity but will most likely remain spiritually fragmented.

What prevented this exchange before?

M: It’s a matter of maturity. It takes us a long time to soften our egoism. We’re beginning to ripen. The spiritual process is one in which we acquire a growing faith in the living presence of the spirit. We are still learning what that faith is. This is our spiritual research.



Shradhavan

make widely accessible in the community and in the world. Yet even so, all this looks more like the learning of laboratory rats finding their way through baffling mazes, than the conscious experimentation of spiritual scientists with a clear goal and methodology. (How many of us have even reached the starting-line: “The first necessity is to find out who you really are, beyond all ... appearances”?)

Finally, however, I think it is more important to make sure that the road ahead remains open than to know exactly where we stand on the road. Auroville has to remain a place where anyone with a deep inner urge can become a true servitor of the Divine Consciousness. A place where they can find the best possible conditions for fulfilling their aspiration, and where they can dedicate all their energies and resources to the realisation of the Mother’s Dream.

That’s why I hope that we don’t give in to our human urge to establish some more easily understandable form of order by compromising the initial conditions—freedom from social conventions, from material pressures etc.—the Mother set up. That’s why I’m in favour of all this chaos in the community. If we had a perfect social organization, a perfect economic organization, there would be in charge of it a certain number of absolutely fallible human beings and we would all be locked into some old pattern.

Based on interviews by Lyle

Matrimandir and the Amphitheatre, October 1999.



Anu on-line

In the 18 years that she has been here, Anu, an Indian from West-Bengal, has had several incarnations as poet, dancer, choreographer, and novelist. Her latest incarnation is that of a founder-editor of a new online magazine called *Transcript*. *Transcript*, a participatory electronic magazine available only on the Internet, hopes to create an exchange of ideas between Aurovilians and the world.

AVT: What motivated you to start *Transcript*?

Anu: *Transcript* happened in a totally non-planned way. My ignorance about the electronic media has gone down by about 20% but I still have another 80% to cope with. For some time I've had this sense that Auroville was stuck with a certain image which was either very positive or very negative. In our meetings too, there is this gap, let's say, between the spiritualists who adhere to an idealistic view of the situation and the materialists who prefer practical solutions. I've always felt both elements are necessary, both essential to achieve 'actual' Human Unity. I'd like *Transcript* to be a space where Auroville can look at itself without pretensions and evaluate how far it has come in being the "city the Earth needs," for instance. We've also stopped laughing at ourselves and that's not funny.

Then, before I got into this magazine, I worked a while at Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India, and I wondered why the International Zone could not take off. Did it depend only on material reasons? Could it be that Auroville's own culture needs to find definition and acceptance first? If it anchors something truly original, its interface with the International Zone will become that much more worthwhile. So I also see *Transcript* as a catalyst for Auroville's own culture—which must learn to situate itself in the context of the world, grow in tandem with the world, but from its own experience. As an e-magazine there are several ways to explore this. Before Auroville started, this land already had its own culture. And then we joined, weaving in our stories, overlaying them with those of the villagers. I see two distinct layers of culture here and I would



Anu

like *Transcript* to explore how this evolves. Finally, I felt the need for a new forum where new ideas could be generated and expressed. But, now we have a team of editors who have very different views about the magazine, so most of the time I'm learning how to change my mind!

What is it that you seek to portray of Auroville, through your dances or through your writings?

A: In everything we do here, we've been asked to create new forms. Not for the sake of novelty, but to create from the inner experience which is the 'new' thing. To translate this experience into form, into life, into richness, so that it carries through. That's a start.

What would you list as the main achievements of Auroville?

A: The main achievement is that in spite of our impossible stupidities the Mother still manages to trick us into life-situations where we are forced to change or let go.

What are your hopes at the dawn of a new age?

A: My only hope is that we are able to let go more and more of old baggage, the fears, and our one-sided perceptions of the truth. To free ourselves on that point. To open to the

Outreach

circulation of the Spirit that the future of the city can bring, in terms of intuition, consciousness and lightness.

Communicating the Vision

Guy, a Belgian, joined Auroville in 1988. While Guy has served on various key groups in Auroville, public relations has been the one field that he has been consistently involved with. He facilitates the writing and coordination of projects by managing the Project Coordination Group and Abundance, a grant proposal writing service. More recently, Guy has been coordinating the Land Fund, doing active fund-raising for it, and publishing the monthly *Land Fund Newsletter*.

AVT: Why did you choose to be involved in outreach work?

Guy: I interpret the first point of the Charter to mean that we cannot develop Auroville in isolation, without the participation of the world. I feel that we have a duty to spread the vision of Auroville to others, be they in the villages, in India, or in the world somewhere.

What is this vision of Auroville that you seek to portray abroad and how do you communicate it?

G: To me, and I think we would all agree here, the message that Auroville has to offer to the world is that of human unity and the evolution of the consciousness. The Charter, the Dream, the words and the messages that inspired us should be shared with others. And in my experience, it is extremely touching to see others similarly inspired by Her words. A change has come about and the world is now more ready to accept such a vision.

I would say the best way of communicating the Vision of Auroville is to live it. But

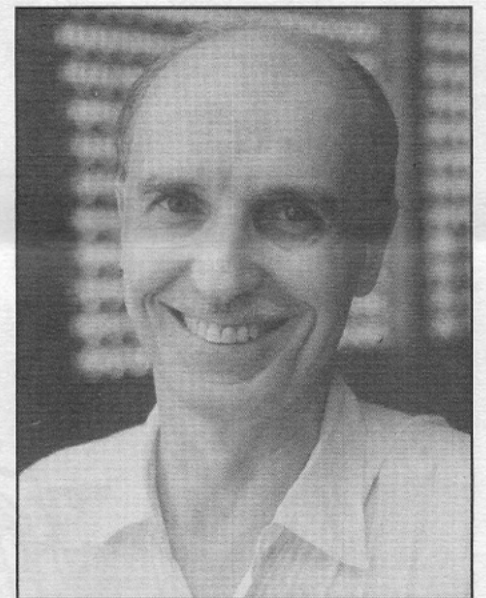
perhaps because we are not doing so, not living up to the high standards that She has laid down for us, there is this need to at least communicate Her words in all their purity. In my public relations work, I make a clear distinction between what Auroville is meant to be and where it stands at present. All communication about Auroville should be based on truth. The motive, as the Mother said, should be to give factual information and not propaganda.

What is your assessment of Auroville's achievements in this particular field?

G: We have not done enough in this field at all. I feel that the community has not sufficiently reflected on a comprehensive outreach strategy. Our greatest priority should have been to share the Vision with the local villagers who work for us and who live amongst us. We should communicate to them what Auroville stands for. For these are the people that we directly influence by our presence. Similarly, until recently we had not taken any steps to inform the Tamil Nadu Government authorities, under whose jurisdiction we lie, about the project of Auroville.

But I am actually glad that the public relations work is not being done by one official body but by a host of individually-funded smaller groups. The differing viewpoints that they reflect prevent Auroville from being put in a strait-jacket.

From interviews by Bindu



Guy

"Expectations are different today"



Suzie

Suzie from the U.S. came to Auroville in 1980. She settled down and immediately began her involvement in the educational field. She taught for five years at the Kindergarten, three years at Transition School and six years at Last School. She lives in Aurogreen.

AVT: Since you've been here, do you think that education has developed?

Suzie: Of course it has developed. When I came to Auroville in 1980, there was only a kindergarten left from the previous experiments. Since then, more options and educational opportunities have been put into place and are readily available for kids.

Can you perceive some trends in the educational evolution in Auroville?

S: It is interesting to note that in the early days of Auroville, the mandate of education was geared towards experimentation: at that time, parents did not want their kids to receive the same conventional education they themselves received at school. But now the expectations are different and we see the pen-

dulum swinging back towards a more formalized academic system similar to what is given outside of Auroville with standard curriculum and examinations.

Personally, I am quite puzzled by this strong push towards "examinations". It almost seems to me that we are falling back to the kind of "security" offered by a more traditional style of education. Mother clearly gave us a mandate to do what others cannot do because they cannot even conceive of the aim which she put before us, i.e. a Soul-centered education.

What are the obstacles that we should overcome in the years to come?

S: We are not working together enough. Nobody has yet the scope of vision to be able

to integrate all these disparate components and put them in their correct role and function. As a result, we experience some clashes and have different ways of seeing things, and see schools competing for the same kids. Instead we could have a system where each educational program is complementary to the others and simply brings more options to the kids.

From a collective point of view, how do you see the future for Auroville?

S: More individual work has to be done before we can see any result at the collective level. We act by way of our human nature and understand via our human minds. It is a fact that there is in Auroville a deep aspiration: we want something else. But this inner call also brings resistance and naturally, through human ignorance, we are manifesting and perpetuating this resistance. It is in all of us. We have to face it and offer it to Mother.

As for myself, I am grateful that Mother created a place like Auroville which allows me to go deeper, to grow and progress in line with Her dream.

Based on an interview by Denis

Education

Credit for skills

Johnny from Australia has been living in Auroville since 1971 and has been very active in helping, in his unique colorful way, our youth to educate and express themselves. His involvement in education began in 1978 at a time when, according to Johnny, there were only a few "funky" schools in Auroville.

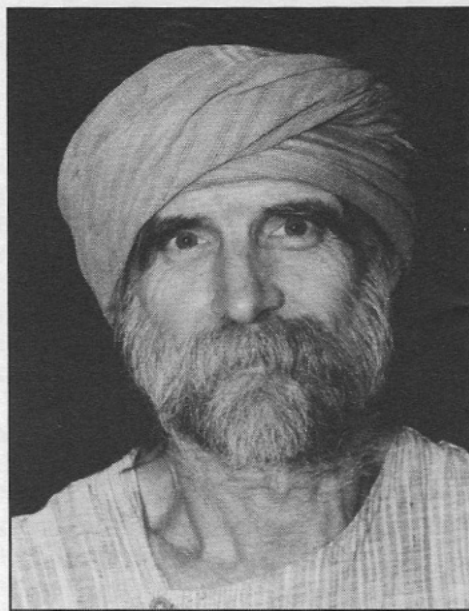
AVT: How do you perceive education within an Aurovilian context?

Johnny: The whole of Auroville is a school and it is our obligation to include and involve kids in everything we do.

Can you give us an overview of your involvement in the educational field within Auroville?

J: It had never been my idea to run a school. But one day my own kids made it clear to me that they wanted and needed some education in order to go to Kodai School; so I decided to give regular classroom teaching to help them. It did not take long before other kids and teachers joined in and we ended up teaching twelve kids. I used to begin with a meditation period and then kids were asked to write down their dreams. After that, together, we discussed what we would do during the day.

I stopped teaching at Fertile when Last



Johnny

School began. I was encouraged to start an alternative school in the Pyramids, focussing more on developing skills—carpentry, metalwork, etc. I also offered a class on "creative expression" to enable kids to deal with chaotic situations. I think chaos tolerance and the realization that chaos is actually an essential stimulus to creativity, especially here in Auroville, is a radically important lesson.

AVT: What is your assessment of the education currently offered in Auroville?

J: Education, as we see it now, is to prepare kids to go out of Auroville—to enter university, etc. So far, kids from Auroville who go out are not at all disadvantaged, they succeed very well abroad in colleges and universities.

Education (cont'd)

But if we consider all the Auroville kids, I would say that 10% of them are self-educated and adapt very well to the Auroville context; another 10% are kids who simply need a more highly stimulating mental environment; and the remaining 80% are open beaks, so to speak, for whatever worms we have to offer.

The American college system is a pretty versatile model. You have an eventual diploma and you earn it by gaining credits. U.S. students come here and gain credits towards a diploma by learning to make mud bricks for instance. Auroville could definitely develop a diploma which could slowly gain international respect, but could be obtainable through a similar credit system, but one that ranged over the wide terrain of community experience. Credits for croissant-making, or bicycle maintenance or tree planting, for instance, could be equally as valuable as academic ones. You can see already that the skills required to survive in Auroville are diverse, unlike in the West where it's increasingly essential to specialize. The wider the range of your experience here the more adept you are.

In which direction should we be heading in the future?

J: My impression is that we need to be able to attract more people who have been educated and trained as teachers. I am a believer in putting intelligence into the hands—developing manual and physical skills—and we need people who are able to bring this learning

dimension.

School programmes should offer more flexibility. The dilemma is always "should we stick to our curriculum and have a rigid pattern of education or include more extra curricular activities, e.g. full moon outings?" Now I am hearing that kids do not even have enough spare time to pursue their own activities and hobbies; we are going overboard.

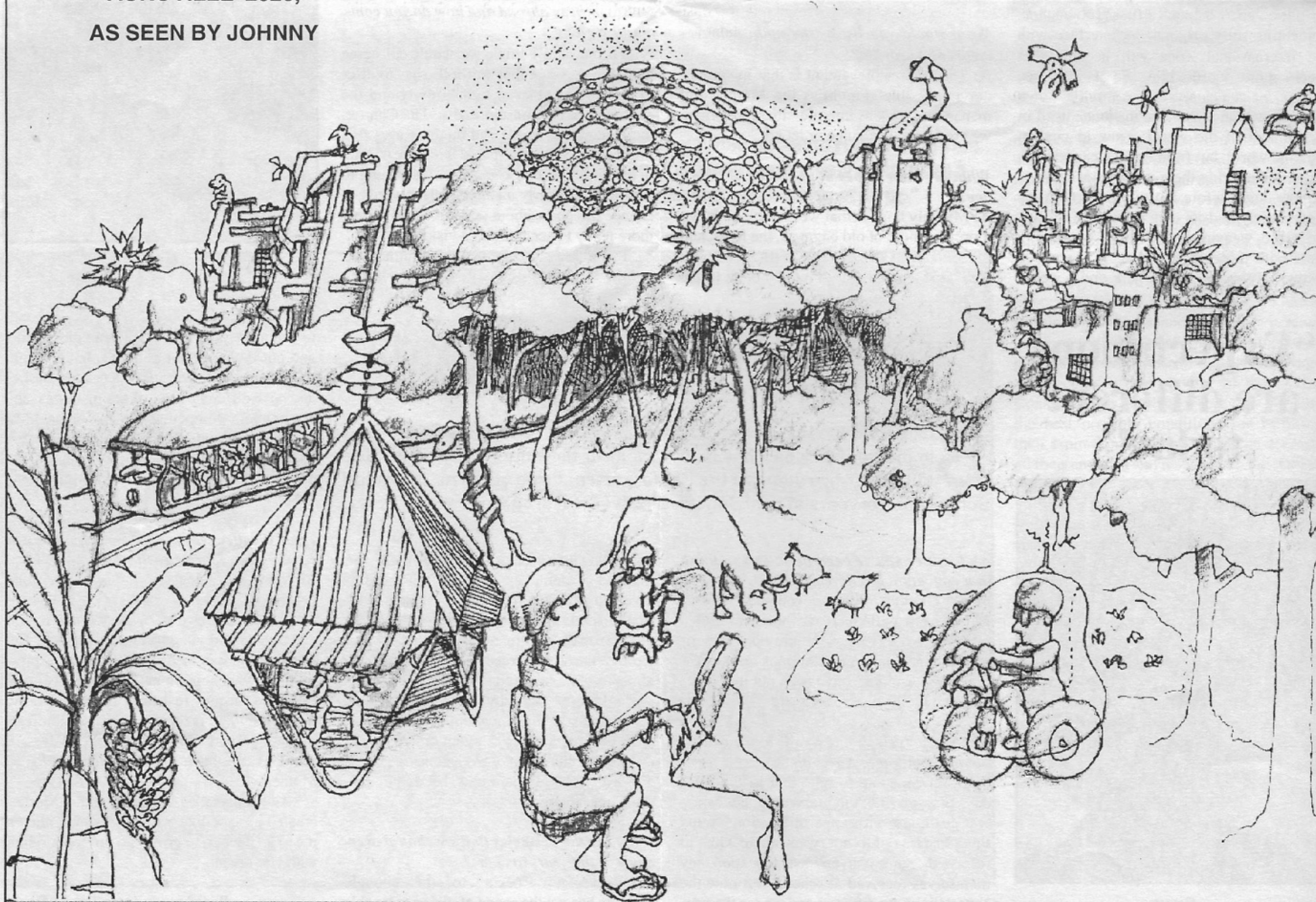
The programs should also be flexible enough to include individuals who can teach what they really love to do, e.g. fixing diesel engines, and can communicate their enthusiasm to kids. You can see from the Jazz Café, that once there is a venue that is open to free-lance interaction, musicians, both passing through and from within the community, develop a super dynamic exchange. We are unique here in the way that there's a constant traffic of exciting and stimulating travellers from very diverse fields of experience. If our educational needs are obvious and open to this type of flow, it can make for a very colourful education.

From a wider perspective, do you see some progress within the community as a whole?

J: What I could say is that we all share the same ideal but it has to be reinforced from time to time. It is like the "traffic free" concept: we all agreed to it, but we are simply not making any move towards it. You only have a certain amount of energy. Better to focus it on the Auroville that you would personally like to see manifest and simply head for it. Once you can clearly see the fields wherein you can be most effective, just go for it. And hope that when the respective bubbles touch, they don't burst!

From an interview by Denis

AUROVILLE 2020, AS SEEN BY JOHNNY



"We are more separate from each other today"

Raman is an architect. He was born in a nearby village and became an Aurovillian in 1977, although he had worked for some years before then in Aurofuture, the Auroville architects office.

"When I joined Auroville, there was a lot of tension in the meetings—it was the time of the dispute with the Sri Aurobindo Society—but Auroville felt very united then. That feeling is less here now... except when there is an external threat. For example, almost all of Auroville came to the Amphitheatre recently to hear about the threat to the land.

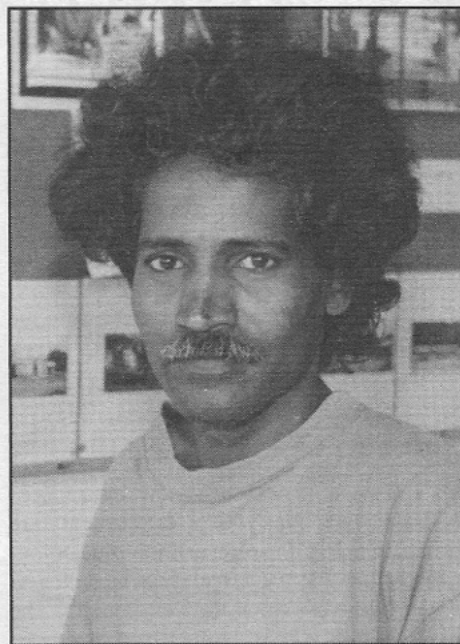
We are more separate from each other today. Partly, I think, because as we develop more and more material things we tend to lose our spiritual and our heart side. So what happens then is that the personal thing, the territorial thing, all the concerns about material security, inheritance for our children etc., develops strongly.

Another reason for increased separation is the family aspect. When I first joined Auroville there were very few families. Now there are many. Before marriage I was a different person: afterwards you change, you create your own circle in the family and you draw away from the larger community.

Yet another reason is that in our settlements we don't always have diversity of cultures or of people from different economic backgrounds. Some settlements are primarily German or Tamil, for example, and some are really only for the well-off while others are made up only of those with few resources. I couldn't live in Auromodele, for example, because I couldn't afford to keep up with the lifestyle there. In other words, people often get separated today on the basis of their financial resources, which is very wrong.

It's very important that our settlements are truly mixed—that we have people from different cultures, with different economic resources, different philosophies, the young

Building Community



Raman

and the old, all living together—because that is the only way we can learn from each other. For example, some of the Tamil communities in Auroville are like slums because the people who live there don't look after their environment. If they lived with Westerners, they would learn to be tidier. And the Westerners would learn from them to smile every day! But for this to happen, people must be much more open and welcoming in allowing people with different backgrounds, particularly Tamil people, to live in their community.

We could do other things to foster a greater sense of community. For example, we could make the responsibility for bringing up children more a community responsibility. Our schools could be boarding schools, like in the Ashram, so that the children learn about the larger Auroville first and don't get stuck to their parents who have their own patterns and projections.

But I think the real key to greater unity in Auroville is Matrimandir. It's clear to many people that there is a big blockage there at present, and has been for the past ten years: something has gone wrong. Matrimandir is

the symbol of unity, so I think if we can bring back the fire, the inspiration there, then all the rest will also change. This is where we have to put all our effort now."

"Consecration is the key"

Bhavana came to Auroville in 1971. After helping set up a workshop with a group of village youths, she has been involved for many years in the coordination of Village Action. She lives in Verite.

AVT: As a community, are we united today?

B: I thought we were totally hopeless until a recent meeting, when I was touched by the maturity and vision of many of those who spoke. However, as far as "intentional community" is concerned, which means a committed effort by groups of people to live together and learn deeply from each other, I find that happens more in smaller groups and places like Verite.

What makes Verite a community?

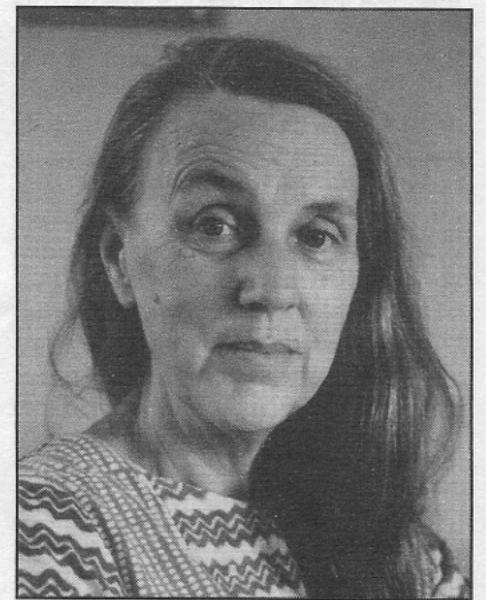
B: We don't have any rules which are written down, but it's generally understood that everybody who lives here shares a commitment to community. So we all take up community responsibilities and, twice a week, we come together for community meetings. One meeting is purely for work-related matters, but on the evening preceding it we come together to share with each other what's been going on inside us. It's very powerful. We simply listen to each other—there is no discussion or questions—and we only share what we want to, but it really deepens our understanding of each other and clears the atmosphere: it's like a weekly vacuum-cleaning!

Another thing which helps us cohere as a community is that we are all fairly mature, and many of us have good communication skills. We're also familiar with and utilise certain psychological or spiritual insights like

that of "projection"—what Mother terms using life as a mirror to study oneself.

But I'd say that the prime thing which makes us a community is that everybody here is consciously putting sadhana first. Everybody is following a spiritual practice, a personal discipline, and this makes it easier for us to accept a collective discipline. And if you manage to contact higher levels of consciousness, then there is the possibility of another kind of organization based on a dynamic shared perception rather than rules.

I don't think there is a mechanics, a tool-



Bhavana

kit of community-building. Rather, it happens through the individual consciousness heightening and widening, although groups of people working intensively with each other can help. For example, we've done two consecration weeks with different groups now. We come together in the morning, read something inspirational, and then go out for our "normal day" with the fresh intention of consecrating everything that we do to the Divine. At the end of each day we share our experience of the day with each other. It's very simple but very powerful.

Consecration is the key: I believe that if we remember to consciously offer to the Divine what is the Divine's, it already leads to a natural sense of community.

Based on interviews by Alan

Postscript

The Hidden History

There's something about this yoga which turns all one's usual perspectives upside down. Take history, for example: the history I was taught at school was all about kings and queens, and about the great men and (more rarely) women who influenced the destinies of nations through their policies and actions. And the important events, the historical turning-points, were always represented as physical, palpable, large-scale: battles, plagues, revolutions...

Today we are a little more subtle in our approach. Yet the daily news bulletins still assume that history is made overwhelmingly by "important" people like presidents, politicians and leaders of industry.

Sri Aurobindo took a radically different view. In one of his aphorisms, he states that the French Revolution was engendered not by the actions of an inadequate monarch or charismatic populist leader, but because "a soul on the Indian snows dreamed of God as freedom, brotherhood and equality." (*Thoughts and Aphorisms*, no.275) In other words, the external event is not the beginning but the consequence of a process initiated on subtler planes by subtler forces. And the real "movers" are those often anonymous individuals who have learned how to direct or channel those forces.

Without this more subtle knowledge, it's easy to misread what is going on around us. Take the coming of the new millennium. The hype surrounding it seems based on a combination of fear (the millennium bug), economic opportunism and a certain inchoate, unexpressed hope that the new millennium will usher in a new world. But on what is this based? Indeed, whose millennium is it; for why should it be the Christian calendar, and not the Chinese or Incan one, which gets to mark this apocalyptic event?

A different clock

Mother, like Sri Aurobindo, worked with a different clock and with a totally different perception of what constitute the crucial events in human history. For them, the crucial events are those occasions when the earth plane is intersected by a new force which undoes the established 'laws', and so

makes possible a further advance in humanity's evolution. One such intersection took place on February 29th, 1956, in what Mother termed the first supramental manifestation on the earth plane. Later she was to explain: "...the really new thing is that a new world is BORN, BORN, BORN. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a NEW world which is BORN. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed...But it is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely sure of the result... It is a beginning, a *universal beginning*." (10.7.57; Mother's emphases)

So here is another striking thing about spiritual watersheds which sets them apart from the classic historical events I learned about at school: they go virtually unnoticed.

Mother was later to explain that the sequence of profound spiritual changes, indeed of any spiritual change, is from within to without, from subtle to gross, so that the external manifestation of change is but the final step, the externally-visible culmination of the whole process.

And what about the qualities, the virtues of the great men and women that I read about in my history books? Even here everything is redefined, for when Mother talks about heroism it's got nothing to do with courage under fire. "Heroism is not what it is said to be: it is to become wholly unified—and the Divine help will always be with those who have resolved to be heroic in all sincerity...you must rise to the height of the task. You must strive, you must conquer all weaknesses and limitations; above all you must tell your ego 'Your hour is over'. We want a race that has no ego, that has in place of the ego the Divine Consciousness." (2.4.72)

"History is bunk", said Henry Ford. While it may be uncharitable to condemn the work of the great historians—the Thucydides, Gibbons and Macaulays—to the dustbin, perhaps it's time that an alternative, truer history of the world received a hearing.

Now wouldn't THAT be an interesting millennium project?

Alan

The Mother gave Roger Anger a piece of her sari to show the salmon-pink colour that she wanted for the inner skin of the Matrimandir. After many years of experimenting with many different materials like polyester and ferro-cement, the option on glass finally won out. Research and testing have been done and are still going on in Germany and on the site. A special LPG-fired gas oven was designed and built at the workshop and the first full-size sample was fired on The Mother's birthday earlier this year. If all goes well, it has been estimated that it will take around two to three years to produce all the 820 glass triangles needed for the inner skin. This article describes two days in the glass workshop with the German glass specialist Detlef Tanz, who has been coming to Auroville several times a year as a consultant, where he works together with Viktor and Valery.

Test firing

"798 - 800 - 803!" Detlef calls out while Viktor writes the numbers down in a book.

No, these are not cricket runs, but the temperatures inside the large glass oven at the Matrimandir workshop. Eleven gas burners are burning full speed. "OK, keep it like this for ten minutes!" Inside the oven there are five checkpoints which can be assessed from the outside at any time to check the temperature. Detlef turns one of the five knobs on the control panel while Viktor runs around the oven, unplugging a hole in one wall, looking inside at its red glowing contents and turning up a gas valve.

"We started the firing at 8.10 this morning," says Detlef. First the oven gets heated up slowly, then it speeds up until it touches a temperature of around 800 degrees Celsius. It is left at that temperature for ten minutes and then it gets cooled down as fast as possible to 540 degrees. This is done by closing off the burners, opening two chimneys and turning on fans. Once this temperature is reached, the burners will be ignited for ten minutes, then it is cooled down to 480 degrees in eighty minutes, and then the burners are turned off for the final cooling process. "By that time it

is 12.30 and we can go for our lunch!" jokes Detlef.

He reminisces about the test firing on the night of February 27th. "We had been working all night with several people. It was exciting to see whether or not the new oven would work. And when we came out of the workshop at 5.15 a.m. on the 28th, we saw the bonfire lighting the sky and the big crowd around it. It was like magic!"

The new oven

I'm standing next to the new, indigenously-built glass oven where experiments are going on to find the right salmon-pink colour and texture for the large glass triangles to cover the inner skin of the Matrimandir. The oven is built with a vaulted roof, inside of which are 'ribs' that guide the heat around its contents, securing a constant heat at any given point. This so-called tunnel design has been known since the 19th century but the system with the ribs is unique.

"It's incredible to work here in Auroville," says Detlef. "The design of the vaulted roof for the oven was Victor's idea. He lives in a house under a vault designed by Poppo. This gave him the idea to try it out here. Helmut and Satprem helped us with the design and it came out perfectly in one go!"

Research

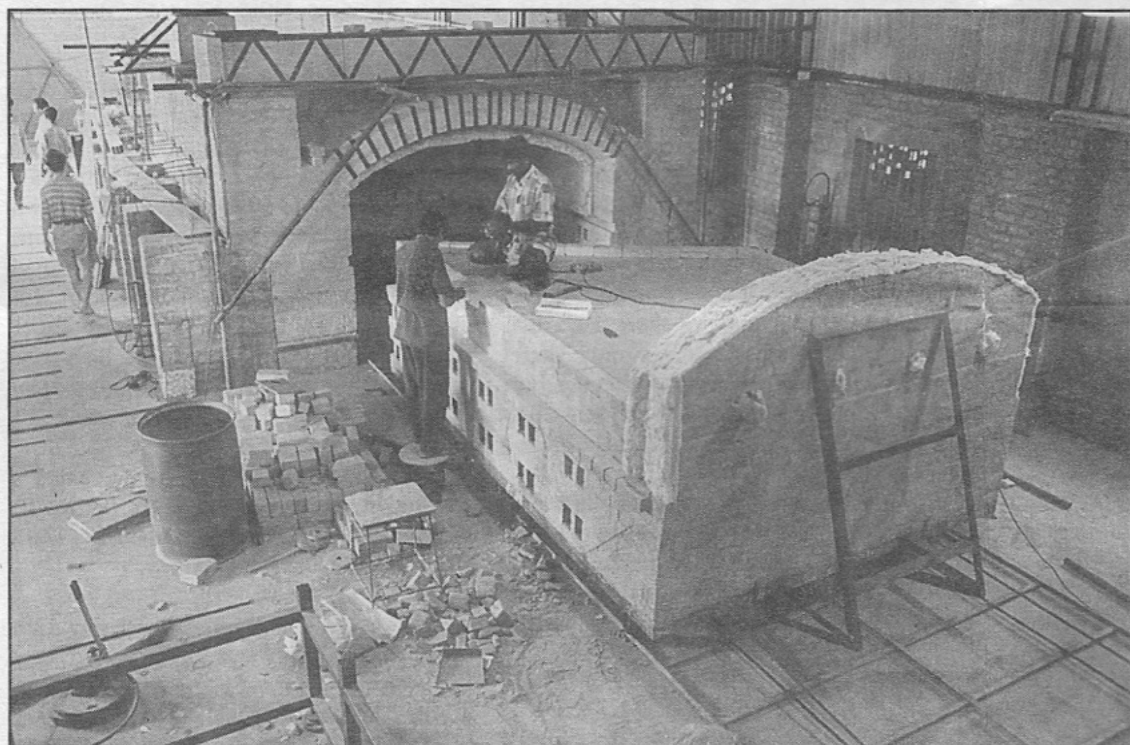
Pumice, or volcanic ash, is the substance used in the West to prevent glass from sticking to the bottom of the oven. This material is not available in India and for all the experiments so far, pumice has been brought in from Germany. Together

with Angad and Lila, both ceramists, the team came up with local equivalents: feldspar and calcified kaolin. When I join Detlef the next morning at the opening of the oven, we are both very anxious to find out the results of the experiments. The glass is still quite warm, but with newspaper ('a great insulator') Detlef is able to lift the first of the two test pieces fixed using this different non-sticking substance. "This one was fired with kaolin," he says as he lifts it up. The powder below the glass is pure white and it comes off very easily. He then lifts up the other test piece, fired with feldspar. This one did not stick to the bottom either and the powder comes off as well. Detlef looks very pleased. "This is great! This might mean that either substance might work here. And look, both the powders are still pure white, as compared to the pumice, which turns light brown after the firing. It means that no chemicals are released during the firing. Once back home, I'm going to try them out with different kinds of glass. I've learned so much!" he adds, beaming.

The next step

It is difficult to predict when the next large triangular piece of glass will be test fired. Many technical obstacles still have to be solved, like applying a smooth layer of the chosen orange colour. So far the test pieces were coloured with the silk screen process, but this will not be feasible for larger surfaces. Tests have been done with applying the colour using rollers, which gives quite a homogeneous effect. Detlef and I look at the various colour samples. From nearby they all look different, some rather rough and speckled, some very smooth. He then asks me to step back and look at the pieces from a distance. The view changes completely—the smoothly coloured glass now looks boring, and the speckled pieces sparkling and lively. I'm very curious to know which colour and texture will be chosen in the end, and I'm looking forward to enter the Matrimandir with its salmon-pink inner skin.

Tineke



The new oven for the glass inner skin

Immersed in Sanskrit

An intensive ten-day Sanskrit workshop was held in Auroville recently. Vladimir, a teacher of Sanskrit and one of the moving forces behind the workshop, explains the how and way of the project. Jill, one of the participants of the workshop, reports on her experience.

Sanskrit is one of the four languages, the others being Tamil, English and French that the Mother wanted to be taught in Auroville. For quite some time now Sanskrit classes have been offered for adults. But a few months back Dr. Kireet Joshi, chairman of the Auroville Foundation, convinced Aurovilians that one can learn to speak Sanskrit in ten days! This led to the hosting of a ten-day Sanskrit workshop in which over 100 adults, primary and high-school students participated. The workshop was led by five visiting Sanskrit teachers who came from different parts of India and were part of a group called "Sanskrita Bharati". The group firmly believes that in order to become united, India has to recover her

Mother tongue, for it is an expression of her inner being, which penetrates into the depth of her history and culture. One of the interesting features of the group is its research into the language and the development of new terms and words that did not exist before. For instance, the word "kara-dipa" (literally, hand-light) has been coined to mean "torch." Similar research is also being done in the International School of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where Sanskrit is taught in a more synthetic way from kindergarten onwards. It is hoped that, given the support of the teachers from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sanskrit will now be offered as part of the curriculum in the schools of Auroville as well.

Vladimir

वदत संस्कृतम्

"Learn Sanskrit"

To be part of a language workshop is to be immersed in another world. For those of use who "plunged", the experience was quite strong as the current pulled us along, but gentle too—at times confusing, frustrating, as the stronger swimmers overtook the weaker ones.

The language itself was the experience: the inexorable march of Sanskrit sounds—deep, sonorous, soft, sweet—like the sounds of many church bells all ringing together. The grammar is daunting, with a plethora of endings and suffixes for every occasion. I found myself singing all day the simple tunes that we were taught—Sanskrit songs for school-children, but their simplicity and sincerity was touching.

Touching also was the naked enthusiasm

and fervour of our teachers. Combining the sacred and the humorous, trying to make it "fun" to learn Sanskrit, and yet advancing every day, mostly through repetition—"I say it, then you say it". At the end, many were speaking simple sentences.

I found myself getting left behind about half-way, because we were progressing as fast as the fastest student, so the slower ones were struggling.

In the end, I can say I took a "dip" into Sanskrit conversation—I got my feet wet. The message of the teachers was fervent—Sanskrit can unite India—we must all speak Sanskrit, read Sanskrit, write Sanskrit. However, I along with others found myself shrinking back a bit from the politicization of this ancient language.

Jill

"The utmost spiritual beauty"

BOOK REVIEW: *Sri Aurobindo on Indian Art.*

With photographs by Elizabeth Beck.

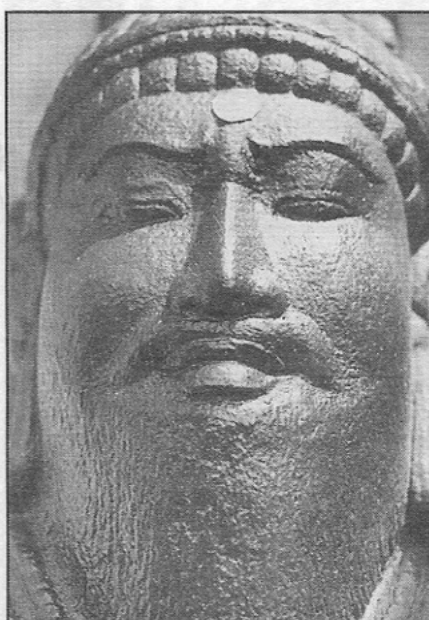
Sometimes a poor book serves a larger purpose. When Mr. William Archer published a book in 1917 dismissing Indian culture as barbaric and irrelevant to the future, it evoked from Sri Aurobindo a spirited series of essays which were later published in book form as *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. Sri Aurobindo's main point, which he illustrates by reference to many examples, is that Indian art is created from within: it does not seek to copy nature but reaches for the expression of deeper, fundamental realities which, far from being irrelevant, are essential for the wholeness of the human spirit.

Now Sri Aurobindo's seminal work seems destined to be discovered by a wider readership through the publication of *Sri Aurobindo on Indian Art*. For this work lavishly illustrates, through more than 150 duotone photographs by Elizabeth Beck, the three chapters on architecture and sculpture from *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

Sri Aurobindo on Indian Art: Selections from his Writings. With photographs by Elizabeth Beck. Published by Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. US\$ 60/UK 40 pounds/ India Rs. 2,000. Available in India from SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. UK/Europe: Antique Collectors' Club, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK (accvs@aol.com) USA: Antique Collectors' Club, Wappingers' Falls, New York 12590 (info@antiquecc.com)

Elizabeth Beck has lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for 25 years, and during that time has travelled all over India photographing temples, shrines and sculpture: everything from the Taj to tiny temples huddled under cliffs. Her images of ecstatically dancing Shivas, Orissan temples, massively silent Buddhas and ancient rock-cut caves wonderfully evoke and complement Sri Aurobindo's illumined prose: "Not the ideal physical or emotional beauty, but the utmost spiritual beauty or significance of which the human form is capable, is the aim of this kind of creation..."

Here are the monumental gopurams of south Indian temples ("As for the objection in regard to Dravidian architecture to its massiveness and its titanic construction, the precise spiritual effect intended could not be given otherwise"), the fluidity of the temples of the north ("The great temples of the north have often ... a singular grace in their power, a luminous lightness) and the aching purity



Agastya, the legendary saint who brought the Vedic religion to southern India. (Naltuna Ishvara temple, Punjai, Chola 10th century.)
Photo: Elizabeth Beck

of Indo-Islamic tombs ("The tombs reach beyond death to the beauty and joy of paradise."). This is a book to savour, to return to time and again for fresh revelations and inspiration.

Alan

Lotus meditations

CD REVIEW: Nadaka's *The Lotus of the Quiet Mind* and *The Lotus of the Silent Deep*

When I first heard Nadaka's music some years ago, I found it insubstantial, hesitant. But listening to his latest recordings, I suddenly realised a thread runs through all his work. And that is nothing less than the attempt to move through sound to the source of sound itself. This explains much: the refusal to be superficially tuneful, the relative sparseness of orchestration, the lingering on the texture and resonances of individual notes and instruments. Above all, the use of silence, space, and the exploration of that borderland where sound and silence meet. It takes a lot of musical courage to inhabit such territory for so many years. But the rewards can be great.

Take his latest work, a series of three CDs—*The Lotus of the Quiet Mind*, *The Lotus of the Silent Deep*, and *The Lotus of the Open Heart*—the first two of which are soon to be released. Each is a meditation—not background music to meditate to, but extended meditations in which the listener participates in an exploration: you feel you are on the cusp of creation, present at the moment when a particular sound first emerges from

the void.

Meditation one: *The Lotus of the Quiet Mind* begins with Nadaka intoning OM, followed by the Gayatri Mantra. Then Debi Gosh plays on the sarod Nadaka's arrangement of Bayragi, a morning raga. What's extraordinary is how the traditional meditative introduction to the raga here becomes pure exploration, the notes wailing, sliding, bending form into infinity, while Manosh Bardhan's tabla subtly patterns out complementary textures. The following tracks—Bamboo Talk, Peace of Mind, Rishi Valley and The Drum Call—take us into nature, particularly, it seems, the Japanese version of nature where music is always present in the wind, the trees and the waters. So here the liquid trill of running water and the song of birds complement or echo instruments like the Balinese englung, chimes and the bansuri flute. Rishi Valley, an extended solo on the bamboo flute by Bryce Grinlington, is in its mournful wailing notes like nature's call to the beyond, while in The Drum Call the distant cry of the Hoopoe is playfully echoed by beats of the sombre drum. Finally we are

returned to the quiet strains of the tamera, the light wings of Sri Aurobindo's version of the Gayatri Mantra—*Tat savitur varam rupam...*—and the ever-deepening resonances and overtones of OM.

Appropriately, the second CD, *The Lotus of the Silent Deep*, begins with gongs and the deep bass tones of the Tibetan monks of the Ganden Shartse Monastery. The Souls' Voyage, the title of this first track, is actually the theme of the entire CD: a voyage which draws particularly, it seems, upon the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, where the soul in its wandering after death seeks for the true light among the false. In the third track, The Forgotten Passage, Nadaka wonderfully evokes, through plangent electric guitar, gongs and vocals, the reverberating depths with their hint of dread and darkness into which the soul must plunge on its journey back to its origins. At first adrift in the void, the approach of the guiding spirit is signalled by Vikku's rhythms on the *gatham* (an earthen pot), and the final entry into the light is presaged by the switch from dark-toned gongs to the lucid, bell-like harmonics of the Tibetan singing bowls. The journey is complete.

Alan

(Further information from Nadaka at Rain Tree Studio, Sharnaga, Auroville. Email: raintree@auroville.org.in)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Art Youth Atelier

Art Youth Atelier (AYA) is an informal school that has organically come into being through the work and hopes of a group of talented young Auroville artists, aged between 13-21. At present, AYA comprises artists from the school of fine arts at Pyramids and the music group Osmose. The group plans to build a much-needed workshop in the Cultural Zone and seeks to finance itself through the publication of a quarterly bulletin and sale of T-shirts.

Towards a Youth Council

In October, around 50 Aurovilian teenagers met to talk about the need for a Youth Council. What are some of the dreams of the youth? To have a place to learn whatever is desired; more programs, activities and gatherings organized; youth involved in meetings and working groups such as the DG, EG, etc. The Youth Council could be a support group when problems arise. They could organize sports activities and civil/social service. And they could be a mediation group when major decisions are taken for the future of Auroville, so that the youths are involved and consulted in the taking of that decision. At the end of the meeting, having these kinds of gatherings happen more often was a general wish.

Deepavali Celebration

On the eve of Deepavali, the festival of light, Aspiration had invited—in the tradition of many years—the whole community for a fireworks display and snacks. The place was suffused by the soft glow of "deepas" or clay lamps, and the happy sounds of excited kids. In the nearby village of Edayanchavadi, Deepavali was celebrated with an all-night, street theatre enactment from the dramatic epic, Mahabharata.

2000 Calendars

To date, not 2,000 but at least three calendars of excellent quality are available from Auroville for the coming year. One features photographs on the theme of Mandala (contact: Ireno, Sangha). The second, "Petals of time" displays Thanjavur paintings done in Auroville (contact: Jocelyn, Ravena). The third, "A New India for a New World," celebrates India through an inspiring collection of ancient Indian sculptures photographed by Olivier. (contact: Auroville Press, aurovillepress@auroville.org.in).

General Meetings Galore

There has been a recent spate of general meetings of the Auroville community on Entry Group policies and the housing shortage, the Planning and Development process, and an exploration of steps to be taken towards a collective non-monetary economy.

New Online Magazine

"Aurovilians are a self-incubated species that grow with the help of something called the Divine, regardless of where they were born..." Intrigued by this self-disclosure? Then check out *Transcript*, the new online magazine available on the Internet. *Transcript* wants to be a catalyst for Auroville's own culture, creativity, convictions and dream. It is managed by editors Anu and Auroson, and overseas editorial adviser Akash Kapur. (<http://www.auroville.org-transcript/transcript.html>)

New look for Auroville Today

Starting from our next issue, Auroville Today will have a new look, and will also cover a wider variety of topics each month. We hope you'll like it!

Subscription Information

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 60, Lt. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to one of the Auroville International centres below (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, Surrender, 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 or cash. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

The following Auroville International centres will accept subscriptions and orders for Calendars:
• Germany: (N.B. new address!) AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Danziger Str. 121, D-10407 Berlin; tel. (0)30-42803150, fax (0)30-92091376; e-mail: wjsavid@aol.com
• France: AVI France, 6, rue du Calil, 75010 Paris; tel/fax: (33)-1.40364367, email: avifrance@free.fr
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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.
Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Bindu, Carel, Denis, Jill, Roger, Tineke. Photos (unless credited): John Mandeem. Layout & DTP: Annemarie. Printed at All India Press, Pondicherry.

Still available:

The Auroville Adventure

This beautiful 175-page coffee-table book, compiled from the best of 10 years of *Auroville Today*, provides a unique and in-depth look at the adventure that Auroville is. It is richly illustrated with photos, drawings and cartoons.

Price: Rs. 250 within India, and \$ 15 for other countries. Postage (airmail) and packaging are included.

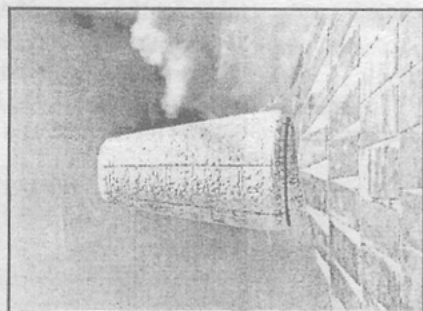
To order, please contact Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, or one of the AVI centres listed.

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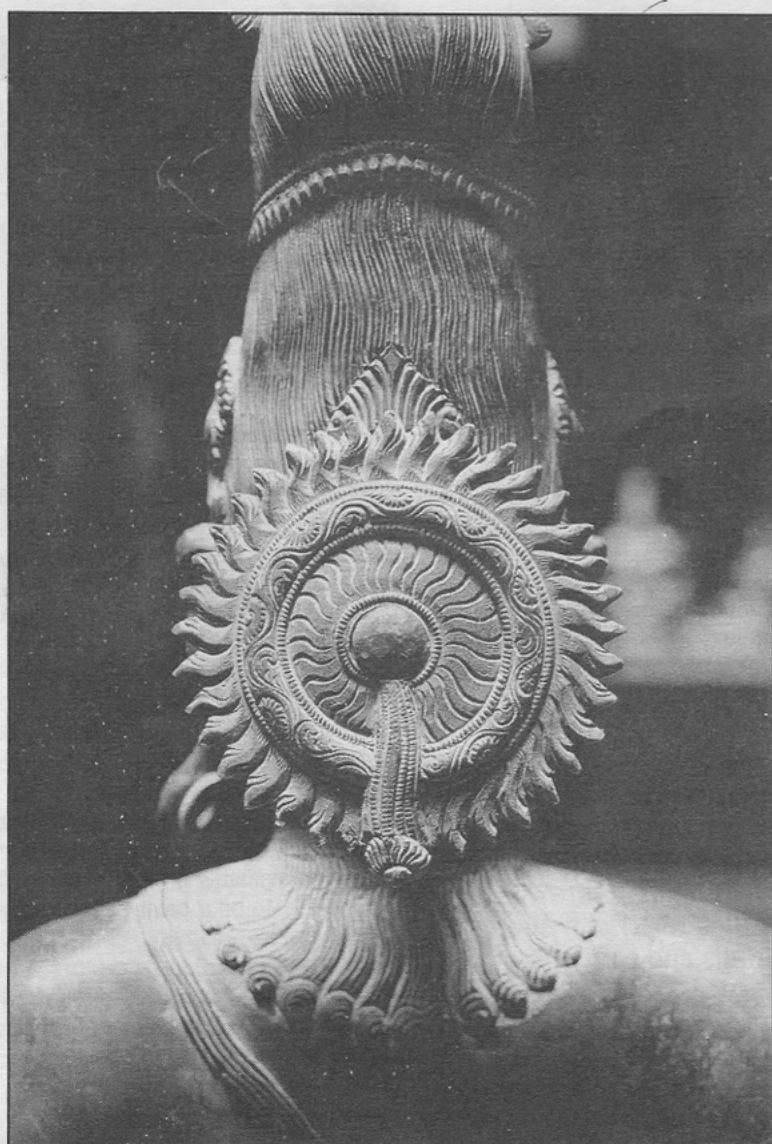


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AUROVILLE

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- MATRIMANDIR: THE INNER SKIN
- BOOK AND CD REVIEWS

December 1999
Number 131



Shiva. Meenakshi Temple, Madurai. Chola bronze, ca. 12th C. Photo: Olivier Barot. This photo has been taken from the 2000 calendar published by Auroville Press, Auroville 605101. (See also Brief News, p. 7)

"I feel endless possibilities here"

Petite and sparkly, it's difficult to catch up with Biggie. She's either at yoga class, or cycling through the Greenbelt, or visiting one of her many friends.

Biggie, who was born in Germany, first came to Auroville in 1975. In 1980 she and her partner Jean-Marie left for France where her child was born and she took up business. In 1988 she came back for a visit, and since then she has continued to visit Auroville regularly. This year she has come to stay in Auroville permanently. She lives with Diego in Samriddhi.

"I first heard about the Ashram and Auroville in the early 1970's from Tublu, a flute player from the Ashram who was visiting Germany to give a concert. In 1975 I came with a friend to India. The Ashram was how I'd pictured it to be, as a kind of fortress or refuge—I remember sitting at the Samadhi and feeling protected and safe, especially after travelling the long and dusty roads of India—but what I really wanted to do was visit Auroville.

"After my first day in Ami guest house, I decided I had to stay longer to find out more about Auroville. I didn't know about the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, but gradually something about the vastness of the place, the red earth, entered me. I fell in love with this place, which I saw as completely open to the future, a place where everything seemed possible.

"My first real home here was Utilite. It was my Auroville birthplace, a training ground where I and many others learned how to work with the earth.

"In those days, Utilite was very much Mali's community, and he ran with a strong discipline, something I needed. Every evening we would all meet in his hut for meditation. We would then talk about our day—our inner as well as our outer day. It was very natural, spontaneous, because there was a lot of trust between us. Afterwards I was to see that Utilite at that time was too self-enclosed, cut-off from the rest of Auroville, but my first few months there were like a retreat.

"Later, after a spell in a small community behind Aspiration, Jean-Marie invited me to come and help him with the forest work in Samriddhi. At that time, I wanted to meet a Sufi Master, and went off to join a Sufi pilgrimage in Rajasthan, in spite of Jean-Marie's protests that there was no need to go: he told me my gurus and my work were here. It was monsoon time in the north, there were floods, and when I arrived I found the pilgrimage was cancelled. When a sadhu gave me a pink rose, to which Mother gave the name "Surrender", it was an unmistakable message. I returned immediately to Auroville.

"We were in Samriddhi for three years, but then things got so tough we had to leave for France. I was pregnant, and physically exhausted by problems with the villagers. I also see now that I would not have been able to stand the conflicts between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society, and conflicts among Aurovilians themselves, which were then developing.

"In France, it was difficult at first. I didn't speak the language and we lived in poor conditions. Later I was to get a job and develop my skills as a businesswoman, but I was constantly restless because I had doubts about the usefulness of living in that society. Then in 1988 I returned to Auroville, found Samriddhi again, and met Diego there. It was a tremendous joy to discover in him the same concern about the beloved red earth, and finally we



Biggie

decided to construct a house together. So when one of my clients gave me a bonus, it was used for that experiment. Before, the worlds of Auroville and my real estate business in the south of France seemed far apart, but now I discovered they could be linked and everything got better.

"In 1988, when I returned with my son to Auroville for that visit, everything had changed. It was not only the landscape, but also I saw people smiling at each other again after the difficulties of eight years before. There was again that spontaneous love beyond all our differences, the love, which had first attracted me to this bunch of adventurers. Now I know that that other time was an aberration, that it can't happen again because, like the forests, something is really rooted here now. That's why I'm sure Auroville will make it.

"There have been other changes. The 1970's attracted the pioneers, the wild people of '68 who were tough and strong-willed. When I returned in 1988, many of the new people coming to Auroville seemed managerial types, able to develop a business or a better organization for the community. In the 1970s the forests came up in a spontaneous, unplanned way. Today we're a much more diverse community, both in backgrounds and skills, and I think we are better organized and more efficient.

"But I don't think we have lost anything in the process. Here in Auroville there are always larger possibilities, in spite of the increased structure and planning. Only one has to have a strong enough will to manifest them. And then for me, each day, I feel above all this deep gratitude to Sri Aurobindo and Mother. They changed my life, gave it a sense. They gave me the opportunity to work for a better life and brought me here to Auroville, which is the best school to learn how to do this. The seed of the future is inside us, and we know it. We just have to have the courage to live it."

From an interview by Alan