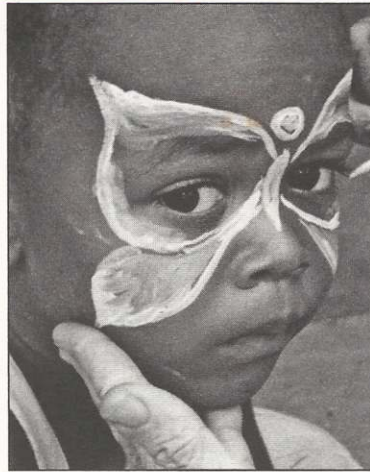


Auroville Today

MAY 2007, No.219

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Earth Day '07 Special!



PHOTOS: ALAN, PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI AND SHIRAZ

From Earth Day to Earth Week

As early as January, little shocking-pink cards with hieroglyph-like images kept popping up on display boards across Auroville. Each ended with a mysterious staccato three-liner:

*Enough Pollution
Propose Solution
Choose Evolution*

Finally, a few days before Earth Day, the secret was revealed and the *QT* (pronounced 'Cutie') made its Auroville debut. *QT*, an acronym for Quiet Transport, is a project of Auroville Community Transport whose aim is to promote ecological transport in the city. Its first project is the renting out of an assortment of electric bicycles. Project leader Chandresh hopes that the perfect electric bicycle best adapted to meet the local road conditions and the Auroville climate will soon be identified.

With each passing year, the Earth Day-related festivities in Auroville seem to get more celebratory, participatory, and practical than the ones before. This year, the organizers, a bunch of motivated high-energy Aurovilians, plus what seemed like an army of volunteers, banded together and put their energies into creating a thought-provoking, informative, optimistic, and fun-filled schedule from April 16th to the 21st, the week leading up to Earth Day on April 22nd.

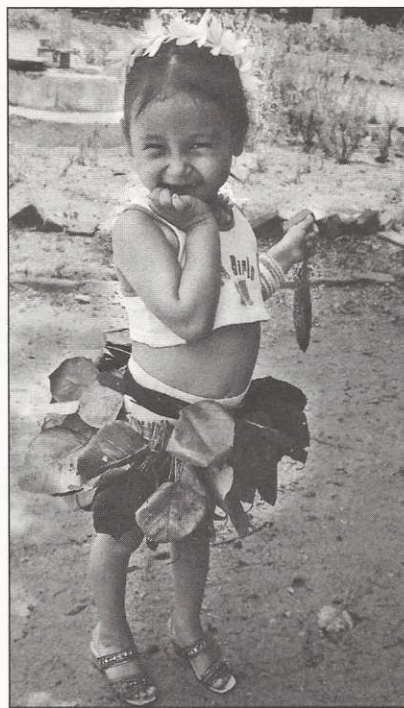
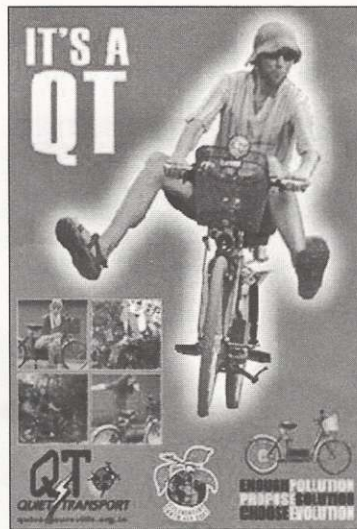
The programme was so full of events (see box page 2) that it was hard to keep up. There were two film festivals every day, late afternoon talks by Aurovillian experts on various environmental topics, a week-long eco-exhibition showcasing diverse themes from food consumption patterns to dealing with plastic waste, and mini-workshops on natural dyeing.

What was even more special was the launching of several unique Auroville creations. Auroville has always had a natural predilection towards Earth-loving acts. Foresters and farmers have shown the way, but now a new breed of Auroville

entrepreneurs seem to have come forward to take the lead. Auroville's natural dyeing company, The Colours of Nature launched its line of naturally dyed jeans, *Go Indi-go!* made with organic cotton and natural indigo dye. A specially choreographed fashion show had 'in-house' Auroville models showcasing the jeans.

Upasana, one of Auroville's garment unit which pursues the model of business with social responsibility, launched its latest campaign, *Small Steps for better living*, against throw-away plastic bags, offering a compact cloth shopping bag. Through this 'eco-friendly, trendy, handy, affordable, portable and convenient' bag made by local women, the project promises to guarantee the livelihood of '333 women for 3 years'.

Two days before Earth Day, a new website named ACCESS – Auroville's Conscious Community Exchange System for Sustainability – was launched. With this, Auroville joins a community-based exchange network where skills can be exchanged and traded using virtual credits. The Community Exchange Systems (continued on page 2)



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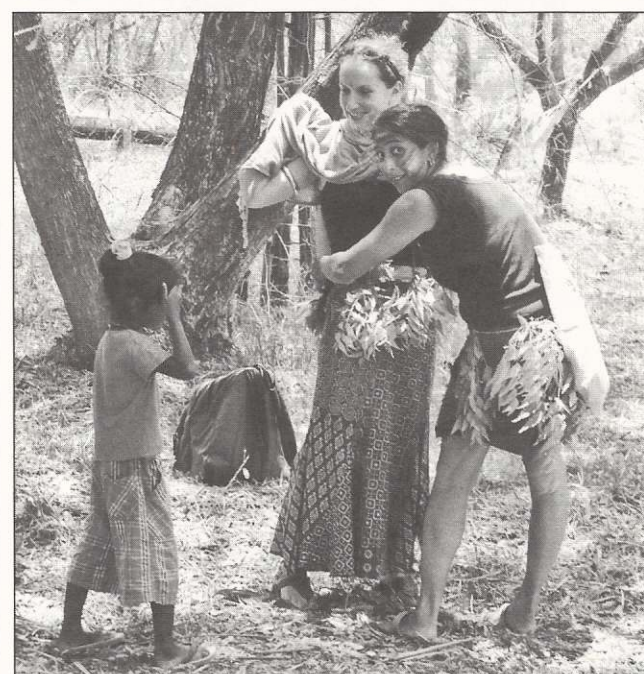


Clockwise from top: 1. Line-up at the Eco-race outside Kala Kendra; 2. Dressing up with indigenous neem 'Hula' skirts for the Eco-parade; 3. 'Don Quixote sees Red', a scrap metal installation by 'technology critic' Njal outside the Town Hall; 4. A Battery Operated Vehicle (B.O.V.) with a potential patron; 5. Bridget, one of the Earth Day 2007 organizers, caught in a lighter moment; 6. A delicious communal soak in a mud bath, Youth Centre; 7. Lunching at the Indus Valley Café – a vegan, organic, and local-produce-rich meal; 8. Creativity with discarded plastic – dreamcatchers at the Eco-feel exhibition.



Earth Week Events

- Eco-Wilderness film series: Planet Earth
- Eco-talk series on a variety of topics: non-animal-based diet, mobility, waste, fresh water, gift economy, Community Exchange System, organic and locally-grown food, and carbon-neutral living
- Eco-film Festival
- Eco-feel exhibition at Kala Kendra
- Eco-conference: Kinship with All Life
- Eco-living Expo at the U.S. Pavilion
- Eco-parade
- Eco-race with alternative transport
- Eco-fair at Auroville's Youth Centre



"Earth Day is no ordinary everyday event; it is a potential movement, a flow that embodies the zeitgeist, the spirit of our times," says Nikolai one of the organizers.

(continued from page 1)

(CES) or Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) are presently running in several countries around the world. In Auroville, ACCESS promises to provide yet another tool to enable both Auroville and the bioregion to move towards a more equitable, currency-free parallel economy.

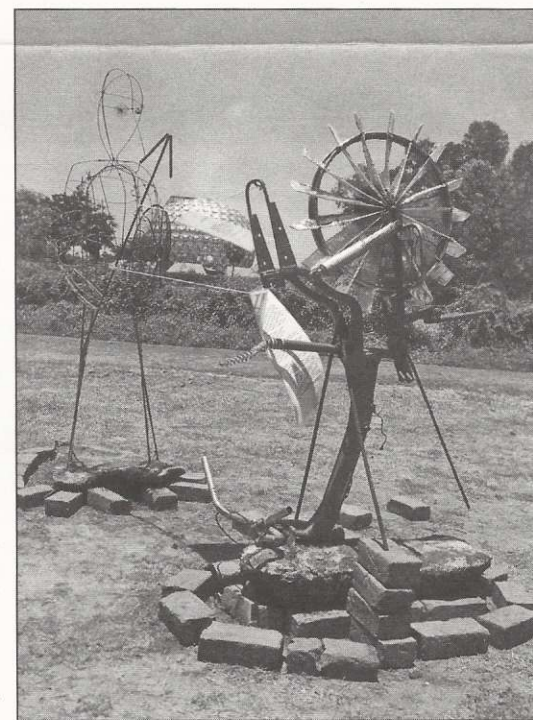
On Earth Day itself, the intensity of activities increased. There was a day-long conference on the theme 'Kinship with All Life', where experts from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), Green Peace activists, veterinarians, and Auroville's own Integrated Animal Care team interacted with the community. Spontaneously, almost all of Auroville's eateries extended their support to Earth Day by offering either vegetarian or vegan menus. Some also made the extra effort to offer organic food, and/or local grains and produce.

Meanwhile the U.S. Pavilion hosted hourly tours to share its own eco-friendly architecture and sustainable living practices while showcasing products that are environmentally-friendly; there was natural-dyeing, music and a lecture at Kala Kendra; and an eco-race from Bharat Nivas to the Youth Centre where, as the programme put it, Auroville's 'indigenous eco-friendly subculture' was celebrating Earth Day in its own way, including putting on an 'organic doomsday musical' and a human powered eco-disco.

"The intention of this year's celebration was not just to open our eyes on one day, but to remind ourselves to act in caring ways towards the Earth throughout the entire year," said one of the organizers. Hopefully, Earth Day 2007 will turn into Earth Year 2007.

Or as Jos, a former Earth Day organizer, put it when he emailed from far-away Myanmar (Burma), "Remember, every day is Earth Day!"

Priya Sundaravalli



Can Auroville become carbon-neutral?

The world is waking up to global warming. A combination of documentaries like Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth', major scientific studies by the world's top scientists and extreme weather conditions in places like the U.S., Europe, Australia and the Antarctic, have finally convinced almost all the world's leaders that something dramatic is happening. And something has to be done.

Auroville is a little ahead of the pack in this respect. Information about global warming has been posted regularly on the Auroville intranet over the past few years and there is a general awareness of the problem. What was encouraging about the recent Earth Week celebrations in the community was that, in addition to awareness-raising activities and lectures, there was a clear focus upon practical action, upon what we, as individuals and as a community, can do to mitigate global warming now.

What is carbon-neutral?

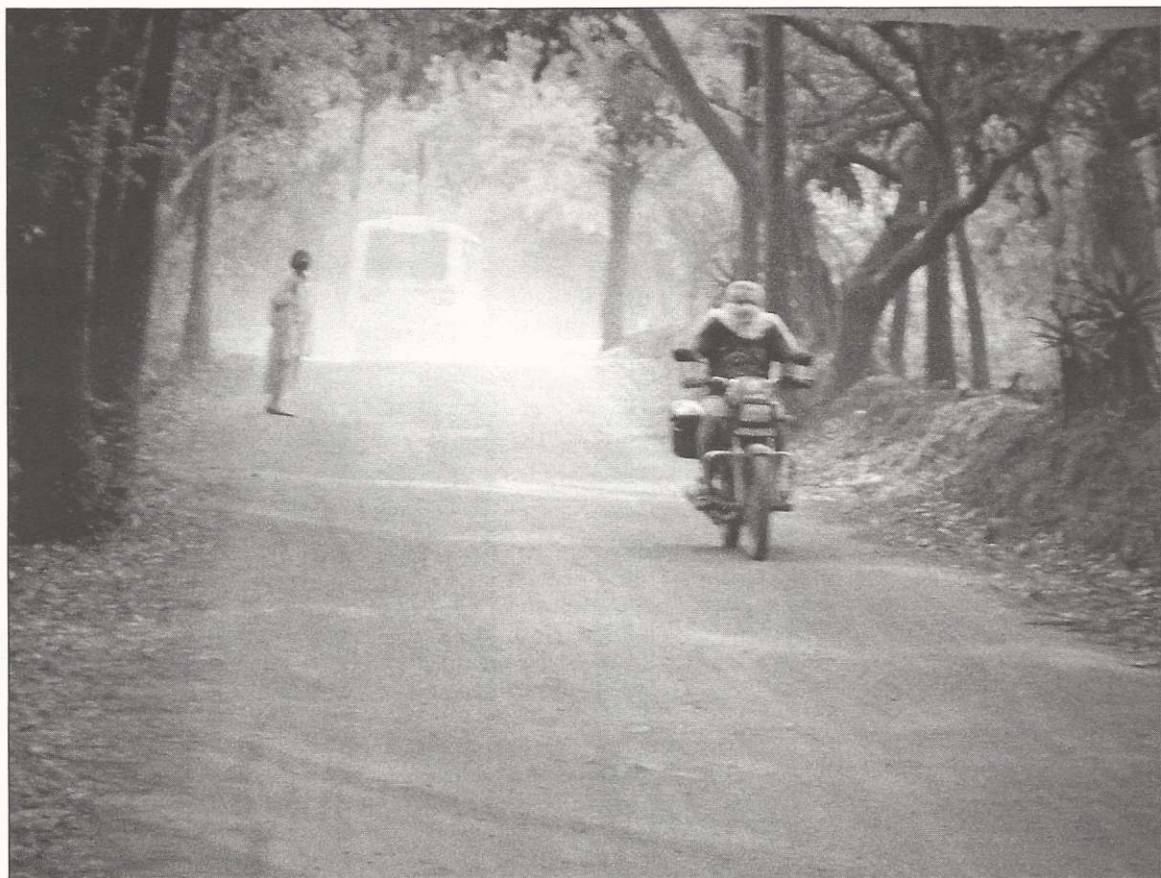
The challenge, as it was presented to us by the organizers, was to make Auroville 'carbon-neutral'. In simple terms, this means that the community would not generate more carbon dioxide (one of the main drivers of climate change) than can be naturally absorbed within the immediate vicinity. It could also 'offset' the carbon dioxide it generates by, for example, planting trees (which sequester carbon dioxide) or installing alternative energy systems in other parts of India.

In broad terms, the picture is clear. One of the main sources of carbon dioxide emissions, in addition to cattle and the burning of biomass, is the combustion of fossil fuels. Vast amounts of carbon dioxide are emitted by petrol or diesel-driven internal combustion engines and by power stations using fossil fuels like oil, gas or coal to produce electricity. But then there are the less obvious sources of carbon-dioxide emissions. The production of materials like cement and steel puts huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Many common materials, like plastics, are oil-based and polluting in their production (as well as difficult to dispose of). Much of the food on supermarket shelves has been grown using oil-based fertilisers and pesticides, has travelled vast fossil-fuelled distances to get there (the average food item in the U.S. travels more than 1,000 kilometres) and is wrapped in (and often tastes like) plastic.

What can do Auroville do?

In terms of Auroville, then, the basic strategy would be to limit the use of fossil fuels while maximising nature's ability to absorb excess carbon dioxide. How can this be done? Presentations during Auroville's Earth Week gave some clues. These included increasing energy efficiency (through, for example, the replacement of conventional lights with CFL lamps) and using alternative energy. One major problem here is the high cost of installing a solar system. A cheaper option is a hybrid system where the conventional electricity supply is supplemented by one or more solar panels.

Meanwhile, Chandresh is promoting electric transport. The history of such initiatives in the community is not encouraging, but this time he seems to have found a willing customer-base for his 'QT' (Quiet Transport). As yet, he has only a small number of the electrically-powered cycles he is hiring out, but eventually he hopes to have a small



Pollution in Auroville: photo from an Earth Day exhibition

fleet of efficient vehicles which can be charged up either at home or at recharging stations around the community. Ideally, of course, the batteries would be charged using solar power. But even if conventional power is used, the electric vehicle will not pollute while on the road.

What would global warming mean for Tamil Nadu?

According to the key findings of the Stern Report on global warming, commissioned by the U.K Government, Tamil Nadu can expect increased frequencies of coastal storms, higher mean temperatures, reduced crop yields, more frequent droughts and sudden flash floods, as well as the inundation of low-lying coastal areas by rising sea-levels. "Only collaborative action by the government, the community and individuals can mitigate these effects," says M.S.Swaminathan, former Chairman of the Auroville Foundation and India's foremost agricultural scientist.

Simultaneously, Akash and Sukrit are working on an electric scooter project. Initially, the motors - which are by far the most expensive item - will probably come from China but finally they may be manufactured locally. Akash estimates that such a bike could cost around Rs 40,000 and have a range of between 30-50 kilometres between charges. Operating costs (including changing the battery every two years or so) would come out at between a third and a half of the cost of a conventional petrol-driven bike.

less costly to the environment than cement. Uma from Upasana is promoting a lifetime shopping bag as a first, small step towards eliminating the use of the ubiquitous plastic bag.

Meanwhile, a fascinating exhibition at Kala Kendra revealed the 'food miles' of some of the common items we purchase in Auroville. Celery, for example, travels 400 kilometres from Bangalore; the wheat used in our bread comes from more than 1,000 kilometres away; processed coconut milk racks up 2000 food miles (the coconuts are grown in Kerala, transported to Nepal to be processed before the finished product travels the length of India again). Worst of all are the Chinese pears (4,000 kms.) and Washington apples which have travelled 10,000 kilometres. The message is clear. Eat local organic produce if you want to reduce your carbon debt.

Is it feasible?

So how feasible is carbon-neutrality for Auroville? What are the main challenges to achieving it? One is clearly the limitations of our knowledge. Manufacturers do not, as yet, include transport miles on the labels of their products, or information about how much carbon dioxide was emitted in their production and packaging. Most of us don't know how much carbon dioxide a tree absorbs over its lifetime or even what the other prime carbon 'sinks' are.

However, there are more and more websites which do provide easy ways to calculate your carbon 'footprint' and, even more interestingly, indicate what your 'carbon allowance' is in global terms. This relates to an interesting concept developed by the Global Commons organization. The aim of the so-called Contraction and Convergence strategy is to contract global carbon emissions and converge per capita emissions across the global population. At present there are big variations between countries in terms of carbon emissions. Every American emits, on average, 20 tons of carbon a year (1 ton of carbon equals 3.7 tons of carbon dioxide). This compares to 10 tons per capita in the U.K., 3 tons per capita in China and around 1 ton per capita in India.

A personal carbon allowance

Could Aurovilians achieve this? Paul provided some figures. One litre of petrol equals 0.6 kilos of carbon, a gas bottle comes out at 10 kilos and if you consume 1500 KWh of electricity a year, that's another 175 kilos. "So our lifestyle is not so far away," is his conclusion. The one huge blip on the chart, however, is long-distance travel. A local travel agent estimates that, over the past year, Aurovilians made the equivalent of 3,000 return trips to Frankfurt. One return trip by car to Chennai 'costs' 20 kilos of carbon, while a return flight to London is a massive 488 kilos of carbon. In other words, journeying to Europe and back from Auroville consumes five eighths of your annual carbon allowance! One group of Aurovilians is so concerned that they are even considering chartering a ship (partially-sail) to take people to the West next year.

"Obviously we need to work on informing and mobilising Auroville to take the steps to become carbon-neutral," says Paul. "We need translations into Tamil, investigations of the spiritual dimensions, and we need more events like this to raise awareness." In this context, it's worth noting that a group of Aurovilians are organizing a concert in Auroville on 7th July to coincide with the Earth Aid concerts that will be happening around the world on that day.

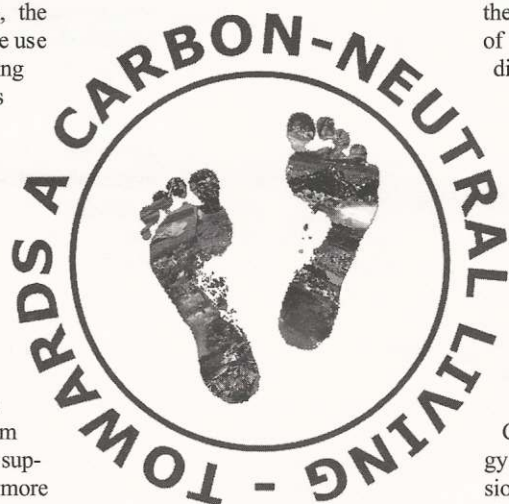
Paul concluded his talk with a 'reality check'. Is trying to achieve carbon-neutrality just one more burden, one more layer of complexity, for the average Aurovillian? Can we be bothered? Do we even think it is relevant to what we are trying to do here?

Our answers to these questions may well determine if we ever become 'The City the Earth Needs'.

Alan

Practical steps towards becoming carbon-neutral (Notes from a 'conversation café' during Auroville Earth Week)

- Transport:** Cycle or go electric
Have emission-free zones in Auroville
Tax heavy carbon users, and provide credits for cyclists
Better cycle paths/more cycle repair shops
Car-share and motorcycle-share schemes
Promote community transport (preferably electric)
Communal shopping and deliveries
Fly less
Slow down
- Food:** Eat local, organic
Eat vegan (cattle are a prime source of greenhouse gases)
Subsidize local, organic food to make it more attractive
Avoid plastic packaging and bags
Buy dry goods in bulk
- Building:** Promote environment-friendly architecture
Do carbon audits for all new constructions
Do carbon audit on Master Plan
- Environment:** Plant more trees both in and outside Auroville and protect wilderness
Naturally recycle water
Minimise non-degradable waste
Encourage manufacturers to recycle their products
Practise organic low/no-till agriculture
- Energy:** Switch to alternative energy
Give 'eco-credits' for good environmental practices (can be exchanged for massages etc.)
Use low-wattage and energy-efficient appliances
Switch off electrical appliances when not in use (no stand-by mode)
Don't set air conditioners too low
- Awareness:** Set up Carbon Awareness Group to disseminate information in different languages
Make carbon awareness part of core curriculum in schools
Products in Pour Tous to be 'carbon-coded'
Separate section in Pour Tous for low-carbon food
Show 'An Inconvenient Truth' whenever possible and make local version
Disseminate information in the villages and Puducherry
Have frequent musical/fun/celebratory events to raise awareness
- And finally:** Have carbon-neutral, environment-friendly last rites!



Another way of reducing our carbon dioxide emissions is by reducing our use or consumption of products which emit significant amount of carbon dioxide in their manufacture or transportation. Satprem points out that the Compressed Earth Blocks (CEBs) that he makes and employs in construction are ten times

New Working Committee and Council

On April 7th, the Selection Committee welcomed the new members of the new Working Committee and Auroville Council.

On January 8th of 2007, a meeting of the Residents Assembly decided, by a narrow majority of 85 against 75 votes and 13 abstentions, to create a Selection Committee to choose the members of the next Working Committee and Auroville Council. Each Auroville resident was asked to send a list with 15 names to the Working Committee by email or put it in a ballot box. The 15 most nominated people would constitute the Selection Committee. It was also agreed that members of the Selection Committee would not be eligible to be on either body.

A few weeks later the Working Committee, helped by a few Aurovilians, checked all lists submitted and published the names of all those who had received most nominations in descending order. The top nominees were 13 Tamil Aurovilians (their nominations ranged from 154 to 82), one north Indian (with 98 nominations) and one European Aurovillian (with 52 nominations). This result caused an outcry. Allegations of vote-rigging were rife, but the Working Committee stated that it had found no evidence when checking the lists that any manipulation had taken place. It had also found that many non-Tamil Aurovilians had not bothered to submit a list.

The Working Committee then contacted each nominee to see if he or she wished to be part of the Selection Committee. Some refused as they wished to be part of the next Working Committee or Council; others withdrew as they felt that the group would be too unbalanced and that other

nationalities should join to make the group more representative. These vacancies were filled up by people lower on the list. The Selection Committee finally consisted of ten Indian and five Western Aurovilians.

The Selection Committee met for the first time on February 27th. It decided to select 10 members for the Working Committee (7 permanent, 3 substitutes), 12 members for the Auroville Council (9 permanent + 3 substitutes) as well propose 2 secretaries. Since then, it met six times.

It observed that it had been difficult to find people. "Very few volunteered their services; others had expressed their inability to serve. In many cases this was because of the pressure of other commitments. However, some people refused to serve because they were not ready to face the disrespectful criticism that seems to await those who serve on these collective bodies," wrote the Selection Committee.

Despite this difficulty, the Selection Committee was happy with the teams proposed. It pointed out that the members proposed could work in a team; that there was a good balance of senior experienced people with younger ones, of women and men, and of different cultural backgrounds. "For the Working Committee we were especially looking for some very experienced people with legal knowledge and organisational skills, who would be able to respond in a constructive way to the challenges and opportunities of the moment. In addition we were very aware of the great need to cultivate good working relationships with local village representatives, not only

in times of crisis but all the time, and of having competent people in the Committee to lead this effort. For the Auroville Council we were looking for people with good communication skills and the capacity for conflict resolution, as well as continuity."

In the middle of March it announced the two lists of names of people which had been chosen, and who had committed themselves to serving the full term of 2 years. The Selection Committee asked for feedback from the Residents' Assembly through a 15 days feedback process.

Feedback was received from thirty-one Aurovilians. Thirteen people expressed objections to the process: either the process by which the Selection Committee had been selected, and/or the process which was followed in choosing nominees for the Working Committee and Auroville Council. Seventeen people communicated feedback relating to some of the individual nominees. "Three small delegations were sent to prospective candidates to discuss the feedback and their commitment and willingness to collaborate. All the views expressed were considered and discussed in depth in two meetings held in the last week of March, and individual replies have been sent to those who objected to individuals. At the meeting of March 31st our lists were finalized,

with one dissenting voice regarding one member of the WC," wrote the Selection Committee.

However, the Selection Committee observed that, "The last three selection processes for the Working Committee and the Auroville Council have not worked well and this continues to be a source of tension and division in the community. The community needs to reflect deeply to find a fair selection process that unites us and brings forward the people who are best qualified to do the work."

"We have been made very acutely aware of the harm that personal remarks about individuals are causing in our community – especially when these are widely disseminated, not only by word of mouth but

through the AVNet [Auroville's internal internet network]. At present, individuals about whom accusations and insinuations are made have no recourse – no way to clear the cloud such remarks create around their names, and no way to discourage the practice or habit of making them. As long as this situation continues, really free and transparent public debate is impossible. We feel strongly that the solution will only come when all of us make a collective resolution to eliminate inaccuracy, exaggeration and defamation from our individual and collective expression. This self-discipline would go a long way to improving the atmosphere of our collective life."

Carel



A Resident's Assembly meeting in progress at the SAWCHU building in Bharat Nivas.

PROFILE

Reconnecting with the artist within

'Creations from Nature' was one of the recent exhibitions at Pitanga. Aurovillian Marije Romme presented her mixed media paintings of leaves, petals, pigment and ink. The common thread that ran through the works was flora and Auroville's forest floors. This is Marije's first exhibition in Auroville since her arrival in 1994.

Originally from The Netherlands, Marije Romme is an artist by training who, as she describes it, was "well into the professional art circuit" in Europe. There she had created a niche through creating public space art. This included her last work in 1991, a mural of an underwater coral reef scene at the zoological park in Amsterdam, which can still be appreciated.

Then she reached a turning point in her life. Marije was diagnosed with a slowly progressive immune disorder that was eating away her connective tissues, leaving them contracted. "It became very painful and physically difficult to finish the work. And I tried not to think about it, but instead take a Buddhist attitude to life. With that, my art career came to an abrupt end, and I had to focus on getting medical help and trying to heal my body."

In this period, Marije began to read a lot and came across books on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. One was *The Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem, and the other, the Dutch translation of Sri Aurobindo's *Lights on Yoga* by Wil van Vliet. "Well, they say nothing happens by accident," says Marije. "After I read about Sri Aurobindo, I had to make a trip to India, and visit Auroville and Puducherry."

And so her journey began. Within three years, Marije made the momentous decision to move from The Netherlands to live in Auroville.

When she came to Auroville, Marije first volunteered at the Visitor's Centre, and later moved to the Matrimandir Nursery. "I could not do any art or painting



Marije Romme at her 'Creations from Nature' exhibition at Pitanga.

as it was still physically painful." At the Nursery, Marije took up the task of making signs that would display the botanical names of trees, shrubs, and plants, and the names that The Mother had given them. "There was nothing complicated about this work. In a nice calligraphic script, I painted the two names of the plant – the botanical one and Mother's name – but the work brought me so much joy. In the process, I

began to observe plants very closely, and my love for them began to grow."

Soon Marije was caught up in scouring for fallen leaves and flowers. "I would collect those that had dropped to the ground, and press them between sheets." The flowers especially held her captivated. "The Mother has given beautiful spiritual names to them; and I became particularly fond of the ones that grow in Auroville – Divine Grace,

Realization, Protection."

Slowly Marije began making simple ink and pencil sketches of them and filling the images with colour. "Even though my body was not fully cooperating, I felt I had to somehow consciously go on." These days, Marije volunteers her time at the Guest Service. "I believe that one has to do something for Auroville, and for me this is my work at the Guest Service."

"Drawing is what I do for myself, and it puts me in touch with myself. And this journey of relearning to draw and paint has been like learning a new language."

"The idea for the exhibition came from Joseph and some friends who kept encouraging me. The drawings were collecting in my cupboard, and they felt I should share them. But I was hesitant. Finally, I showed some drawings to Andrea, and we put together the exhibition."

Like Marije herself, her works appear shy and unassuming. Repetitive leaf and flower motifs appear like mantras of a childlike simplicity. There is a quality of spontaneity and unconsciousness about them.

"The works never stay the same. Sometimes I look at them and they tell me, 'Why not like this, or like that?' and I listen. Even for me, the results take me by surprise." Besides the thirty-odd works hanging on the wall, there are two glass displays where she has created fresh collages from dried leaves and flowers from the blossoms and leaf fall of the week.

"Now with this show I find that I am getting to meet people I did not know and that has been really nice."

Priya Sundaravalli

Working with the body consciousness

In March, Soleil offered three workshops to Aurovilians as an introduction and training in what she terms the Hladina Method, which is a means of maximising the body's capacity to open to healing and the Psychic Being.

"I looked at Her and went into total shock. My brain screamed, 'She isn't human'." It was August, 1971, and 16 year old Soleil was meeting Mother for the first time.

"Just seeing her shattered everything. She didn't equate with anything in my known universe."

Soleil was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. Her American parents enjoyed travelling. By the time she went to boarding high school in the U.S. in 1969, she had visited many countries and cultures. "However, the U.S. was extremely challenging. The anti-Vietnam protests were going on and a lot of information about environmental and other potential global disasters was emerging. Suddenly, the world no longer made sense."

She studied comparative religion and tried meditation, but nothing satisfied her. "I had this strange feeling that I would find an answer in India. I asked my yoga teacher for addresses of Ashrams. When I got the list, my eye went straight to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram."

Meeting The Mother

She arrived before the August darshan, knowing nothing about Sri Aurobindo or Mother. "I was really burning inside. I felt, if I don't find something, what's the point of me being on earth?" Kneeling in front of Mother a few days later, she got her answer. "It was the intensity of Her eyes – I could feel Her going inside me and I could see what She was seeing, and it was dark and muddy. But She kept on going in; all of a sudden, in my heart there was this light. I walked out and sat by the Samadhi for hours, waiting in stillness for something to coalesce. What emerged was the sense that now I knew why I was born. I knew there was an essential reality, beyond the relativity of cultures. There was this 'something' which unites us all."

Soleil wrote to Mother for permission to join the Ashram School. Mother replied that she should first finish her education in the U.S. So she returned to finish high school, then went on to university and graduate school. "I visited Auroville regularly, but I never felt I had Her permission to stay. Plus there was always something more that I wanted to study. It was very difficult because I felt isolated. For ten years after my first return to the U.S., I didn't speak to anyone of my experience with Mother."

Instead she read voraciously. "*The Adventure of Consciousness* was a great help. I also had these lucid dreams which started immediately after I first met Mother. In the beginning they were terrifying. There were all these strange beings. I learned to call Mother into my dreams and discovered these beings would either disappear, or transform into something that non-threatening, or they would give me a gift. So my sadhana has included countless dreams with Mother in which often She has specifically shown me something."

For many years Soleil could not find a way of integrating her inner discoveries with her outer life. "It was like two separate worlds. The real connection came through transpersonal psychology – my graduate thesis was a comparison of Sri Aurobindo, Jung and Assagioli – as well as my bodywork."

Accessing body consciousness

Soleil had begun learning massage on her first visit to the Ashram and continued practising it while pursuing her studies. "Then in graduate school I studied 'Focusing', which is Eugene Genlin's way of working with the body consciousness. This became my link between somatic body therapy and transpersonal counselling which I've used with my clients for the last 20 years."

How does one access the body consciousness? "I would say the body consciousness is always trying to communicate with our conscious mind. It does it through dreams, feelings, sensations, images, and it's through these channels that you can access it. If I am working with new clients, I first have them scan their body and tell me what part is calling their attention – usually it's through a pain or ache. I ask them to describe, in as much detail as possible, the physical sensations associated with it, and then I ask if there are any emotional associations."

"From there the quickest route is to ask the body how long that sensation has been there. This usually leads to a particular trauma, which could be from birth or even from a previous lifetime: it seems there is an *akashic* field of the body consciousness where the body anchors certain experiences. As the trauma is resolved, the learning is understood and appreciated. Then I always bring this experience forward to the heart centre so it can be integrated – and usually any negative physical symptoms disappear."

Breakthroughs

Soleil was fascinated by Mother's work on Her body as revealed in the *Agenda*. But she felt that this yoga was so advanced she wondered how she would ever begin: "It seemed like a lifetime's work just to prepare for the body yoga." The turning-point came during a visit to Auroville in 1997. "I was going through an ordeal and had not been well for nine months. I went to someone I know in the Ashram expecting a conventional treatment. But she reached out her hand and I actually saw Mother all around her. I felt something flow through her hand and I experienced this amazing, instantaneous healing. In 30 seconds! This really blew my mind. I felt, if this can happen to my body, it can happen to anybody's."

The following year came another breakthrough. "I had a pregnant client who, because of childhood trauma, was concerned about her relationship with her husband and whether she would be a good mother. On scanning her body, she felt something dark and heavy at her heart centre. She described it as a Japanese *samurai* weapon which she immediately knew was her defence system. At that moment, I didn't know what to do. I asked Mother and the answer was, 'Have her go behind it'. So I had my client go to the centre of her heart. She saw it as pink and she felt the real love she had always wanted to express. But she didn't stop there. She kept going deeper until she saw this vast white light behind."

"I thought, well, she has been meditating for twenty years, perhaps this white light is familiar to her. But she said she'd never seen it before. In fact, she found it a little scary because it was so infinite. I told her to stay where she felt safe, but to notice that she had accessed this place through her body consciousness so it must be part of her. Then I brought her back up. I asked her about the *samurai* weapon, and she said it had gone and now all she could see were beautiful colours swirling around."

"After that, she gave birth very easily and her whole relationship with her husband improved."

Something universal

For four years Soleil used this 'Layers of the Heart' approach only with certain clients. "Somehow I felt this would only work with people who meditated regularly. But then I started offering it to people who had never meditated and I discovered that they could also experience these different layers. In fact, there was a remarkable similarity in the way they described and experienced the layers. That's what is so exciting – we seem to be touching something universal here."

Soleil's approach is non-interventionist in the sense that she simply follows and supports the experience of the client. "I want my clients to do their own work. Just understanding a pattern through the mind doesn't necessarily change it. The body really 'gets it' when clients do their own exploration. The remarkable thing is that when you resolve something through working with the body consciousness, it's done."

"The only time I intervene is when clients reach the deepest layer of cellular



PHOTO ALAN

Soleil

residue – which Mother also refers to in her own way through the *Agenda*. At this level clients often feel that if they go further, they will die. I began to realize that this anxiety stems from the layer of the cellular consciousness that is formed in the womb when there is a complete fusion between the infant's cellular consciousness and The Mother's cellular consciousness. For the health of the client, I have to convince the body to release the energetic residue that belonged to The Mother because it isn't part of the client's essential self. Usually direct intervention works well, although sometimes I have to ask Mother's help to clear these layers. Inevitably, if we make it through, what the client sees is light and feels an incredible sense of relief."

Auroville needs this work

Recently, Soleil offered workshops and private sessions to train Aurovilians. Thirty-four took the initial workshop; nineteen of those signed-up to become apprentices in The Hladina Method. "I feel it's so important that this work is being done in Auroville. If we have personal

wounds or unresolved traumas, it's easy to project them out as blame or mistrust onto a group or individual rather than taking responsibility for healing oneself; this affects the collective process. Besides, all those who have done deep personal work find it helps develop the Witness Consciousness. This is very important in group process because maintaining the Witness Consciousness helps provide a safe space for individuals to express themselves in an atmosphere of dedicated goodwill and communal aspiration."

After the recent workshop, Soleil was asked if there is any difference between working with Aurovilians and with clients outside. Her clients' experiences, she noted, tend to be similar wherever she works. "However, I feel another dimension with Aurovilians. I feel The Mother inside every person I work with here and this makes me really happy."

Alan

For more information on Soleil's work visit www.inlightenthebody.com

Accessing the layers of the heart: a personal experience

There we were on a Saturday in March. About thirty Aurovilians and a few guests had come to the Harmony Hall at the Quiet Healing Centre to attend the first workshop of Soleil's 3-weeks' 'Layers of the Heart' training programme. The title of the workshop was "Contacting Cellular Consciousness". How does one contact the consciousness of the cells in the body? How does one become aware of what's in the 'mind' of different parts of the body? I had come without any clue.

In reality, it wasn't that difficult to let my body speak to me or at least those parts that felt painful or congested or stuck. In pairs, we helped each other to access those parts and listen to their stories, which were told through sensations, feelings, images and perceptions. Not a bad start, I told myself.

The next Saturday and Sunday was reserved for those who had signed up to be trained in the Hladina Method. The workshop title was "Layers of the Heart". Soleil explained the different layers of the heart – physical, emotional, psychic, and transcendental – and offered us a method to access them. Getting in touch with the emotional layer was not that difficult. In fact, that's a daily reality for most of us. But what about the psychic and transcendental? Aren't those areas reserved for highly advanced yogis or gifted souls having their last reincarnation? Well, again, it appeared that a simple average mortal soul like me could access those deeper layers as well, explore those spaces and bring this experience back to the emotional and physical layers for release and healing.

It helped that I had had a wonderful private session with Soleil, which had given me the experience and confidence that the method really works. But I was surprised by the ease and simplicity with which most of us during the workshop traveled through the different layers of our being and came back with revealing, nourishing and enriching lessons.

Can one talk about them? Have them published in Auroville Today? I'm one of those careful people who avoid speaking about their inner experiences. But, yes, this time I'm ready to share some parts of what I wrote eleven days after the programme and which is still relevant today:

"Till today I have been feeling the Presence, giving me a stronger sense of courage and soul-identity than ever and vibrating with a soft and tender sensation of joy in the background of my daily life. (...) Till today, I feel literally lighter in my body and movements and I have an acute sense that my subtle body has been cleaned and 'loosened up' and has become more receptive for the higher vibrations of Existence. As a result, I'm more open, more authentic and more loving in my interactions with others. It feels as if my psychic has become more alive and tangible in my physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy fields."

Guy Ryckaert

Satprem

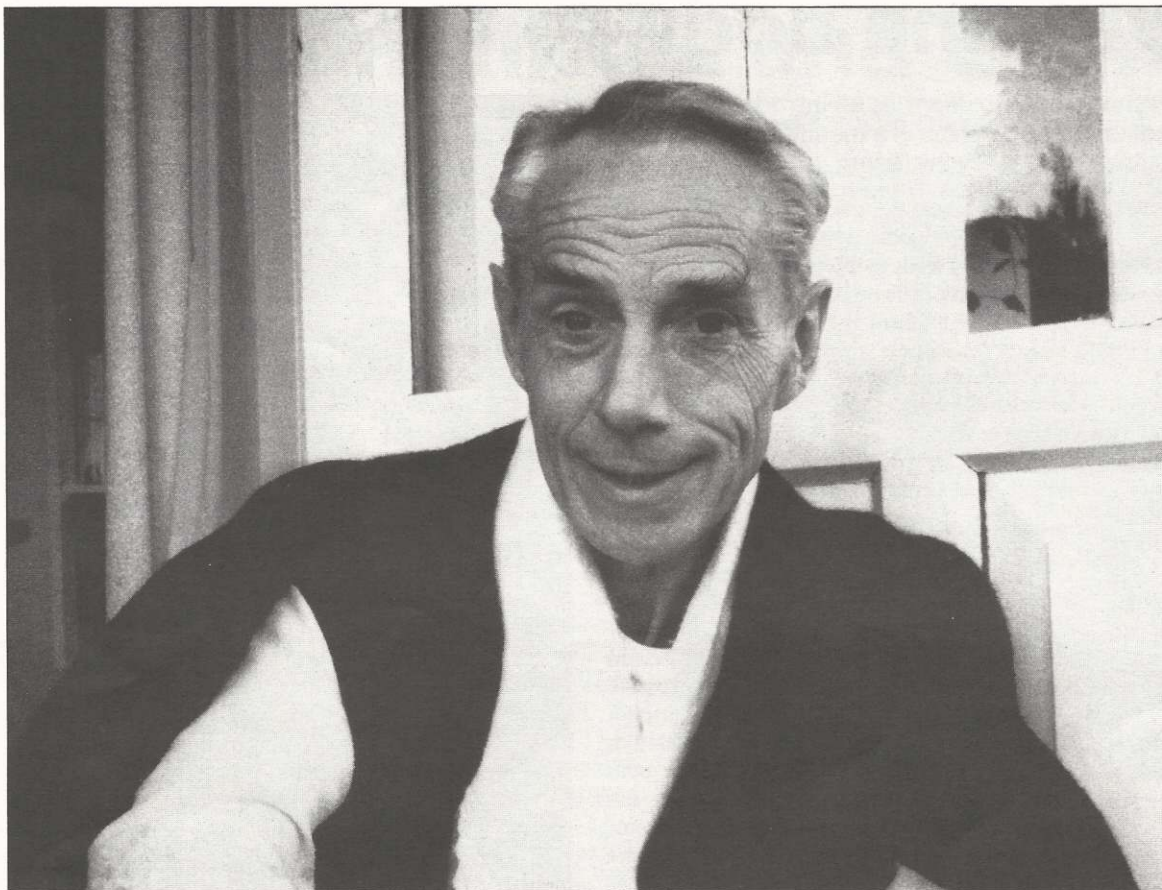
Satprem (born Bernard Enginger) passed away on April 9th at the age of 84. Through his books, and particularly through his role in the publication of the 13 volumes of Mother's *Agenda*, Satprem played a key role not only in introducing many people to the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but also in explaining the scope and significance of the great endeavour they had undertaken. His writings have inspired, and will continue to inspire, people worldwide with their incandescent call to take up the great work of physical transformation begun by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, a work which he and his spiritual collaborator, Sujata, attempted to continue after Mother's passing.

He was also a figure of considerable influence in Auroville during the early years and during the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society, a struggle which he saw as crucial for Auroville's integrity and for the furtherance of Mother's work. Satprem was a charismatic figure who, in his uncompromising stances, attracted great loyalty from some and criticism from others. A survivor of the concentration camps, he stood against all forms of tyranny. Yet some blamed him for his fierce criticism of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and for his attacks upon those who did not follow the path which he favoured.

The following is a slightly edited version of a brief biography of Satprem in Georges van Vrekem's book, *Beyond Man*.

Satprem (...) is a Frenchman who was born in Paris in 1923, but who always nostalgically remembered his youth on the coast of Brittany. In the Second World War he became a member of the Resistance. He had just turned twenty when the Gestapo arrested him; he spent one and a half years in German concentration camps. After the war, and deeply branded by those experiences, he became an exponent of the problematics and the life-view of Existentialism, although not Sartre and Camus but Gide and Malraux were the main sources of his inspiration.

In 1946, he wrote in a letter to André Gide: "I loved you, and certain passages from your books have helped me to survive in the concentration camps. From you I got the force to break away from a bourgeois and mate-



Satprem

rial comfort. Together with you, I have been seeking "not so much for possession as for love." I have made a clean sweep to stand completely new before the new law. I have made myself free ... Finally, I have broken away from you, but I have found no new masters and life keeps suffocating me. The terrible absurdity of the likes of Sartre and Camus has solved nothing and only opens the gates to suicide.'

Satprem worked briefly as a functionary in the colonial administration of Pondicherry, but he felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled everywhere and went in search of adventure in French Guyana, Brazil and Africa.

However, when in Pondicherry he had had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and he carried *The Life Divine* with him even in the rain forests of the Amazon. In 1953, after those wanderings, he returned to Pondicherry to meet The Mother and settle in the Ashram against his individualistic and rebellious nature. "[I was] a good rebellious Westerner and all ways of changing the world looked *a priori* excellent," he writes. He was at times teaching in the Ashram school, and with his remarkable literary talent he looked after the French copy for the Bulletin of the Department of Physical

Education which, in fact, was The Mother's publication. This periodical was (and still is) a quarterly and has all texts printed in English and in French.

Satprem's first years in the Ashram were a period of dissatisfaction, restlessness, doubts, and sometimes loudly voiced revolt. He has included part of his correspondence with The Mother in the first volume of the *Agenda*; these letters present us with a moving picture of the patience, understanding and love with which The Mother treated her rebellious children. She has never accepted somebody for the Yoga without a reason, and when she accepted somebody, it was unconditionally and for ever. Time and again Satprem imagined he had to find his inner fulfilment in adventure. There is not an exotic place on Earth he did not feel impelled to go to; the Congo, Brazil (again), Afghanistan, the Himalayas, New Zealand, the Gobi desert, a journey around the globe in a sailing boat, all that and more is dreamt of in his letters. But The Mother knew what was really prompting him and she let him become, in 1959, the disciple of a very able tantric yogi who was also the head priest of the big temple in Rameshwaram. Then, guided by another yogi, Satprem wandered during six

months as a *sanyasi* (mendicant monk) through India and received the initiation of the sanyasis. His novel *Par le corps de la terre, ou le Sanyassin* (*By the Body of the Earth, or The Sanyasi*) is based on these experiences.

But "the bird always returned to the nest", to the Ashram in Pondicherry, to The Mother. She started inviting him from time to time to her room, at first apparently for some literary chores in connection with the Bulletin. He became more and more spellbound by her. He asked questions (or she instilled the questions into him) and she answered. "At first, she had me called, and there was that big chair in which she was sitting, and I sat down on the carpet on the floor and listened to her. Truly, she knew so much. It was wonderful to listen to her. But most important, little by little she began telling her experience."

However violently Satprem might express himself emotionally, he was a cultured man and possessed a very keen intellect, widely varied interests, and as a writer a passionate, colourful style. We have already seen that The Mother complained about the lack of intellectual eagerness and cultural as well as general interest in the people around her. She had so much to com-

municate, to share, her knowledge and experience were so broad in all essential domains where the human being is confronted with "the great questions", but so little was asked of her. "I am a little bell that is not sounded", she said. Here now was a man with an analytical mind, a poignant life-experience and a thirst for knowledge – the ideal instrument to communicate to others a glimpse of her unbelievable adventure. At the same time she worked on him, in him; she did his yoga as she did the yoga of all those she had accepted and taken into herself.

Satprem started realizing the importance of those conversations with The Mother and took a tape-recorder to her room. Thus the *Agenda* came about. One part of it concerned the literary work he was doing for The Mother; another part concerned his own yogic evolution, his yogic education; and the third part of the conversations was intended by The Mother as the registration, in broad outlines, of the process of her transformation. Everything The Mother said was interesting, everything was informative and instructive, though she herself most probably would never have allowed some confidential passages about persons in her entourage to be published.

After the passing of The Mother, a gap has come about between the Ashram and Satprem, with regrettable consequences. Under The Mother's direction he had written *Sri Aurobindo, ou l'Aventure de la conscience* (*Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness*), a book that has led so many to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He had also read out to her *La Genèse du surhomme* (*The Genesis of Superman*), an essay highly lauded by her. Then after her departure, he wrote the trilogy *Mère* (*Mother*), in which for the first time he analyses and comments upon the invaluable material of the *Agenda* of which he was the only possessor at that time. *Le mental des cellules* (*The Mind of the Cells*) is a kind of crystallization of the trilogy, and in *Gringo* and recently in *Evolution II* [and *Notebooks of an Apocalypse*] he reports about his own evolution (...). In a letter from 1983 one reads: "I had to take the decision to withdraw because I was no longer progressing in my [inner] work, I kept turning around in a circle. There must be at least one human being to prove, to show to the world that the way of the new species is practicable for humans. Otherwise, what is the use of what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done for humankind?"

Georges

The Great Sense

On 28th June, 1969, Satprem read out to Mother the following article which he had written in French for Italian television. He called it, 'The Great Sense'. Mother was enthusiastic. She wrote on the typescript, 'Réponse à pourquoi Auroville? Answer to Why Auroville?'

This is the time of the Great Sense.

We look to the right or to the left, we build theories, reform our Churches, invent super-machines and we go out in the streets to break the Machine that stifles us – we struggle in the small sense. When the terrestrial ship is sinking, does it matter whether the passengers drown to the right or left, under a flag black or red, or one of celestial blue? Our Churches have already sunk: they are reforming their own dust. Our patriotism is crushing us, our machines are crushing us, our schools are crushing us, and we build more machines to break out of the Machine. We go to the moon, but we do not know our own heart or our terrestrial destiny. And we want to improve what is – but the time for improvements is past: can one improve rot? – This is the time for SOMETHING ELSE, which is not the same thing with improvements.

But how shall we proceed?

They preach violence to us, or non-violence. But these are two faces of the same Falsehood, the yes and the no of the same impotence: the little saints have gone bankrupt with the rest, and others want to seize power – what power? That of the statesmen? Are we going to fight over the prison

keys? Or to build another prison? Or do we really want to get out of it? Power does not spring from the barrel of a gun, neither does freedom flow from the belly of the dead – for thirty million years now we have been building on corpses, on wars, on revolutions. And the drama is enacted over and over again. Perhaps the time has come to build on something else and find the key to true Power?

So let us look at the great Sense.

Here is what the Great Sense tells us:

It tells us that we were born so many million years ago – a molecule, a gene, a bit of quivering bit of plasma – and we have produced a dinosaur, a crab, an ape. Had our eyes stopped half-way along the road, we could have said with good reason (!), that the Baboon was the summit of the creation, and nothing better could be done, except perhaps to improve our simian capacities and create a United Kingdom of Apes... And we may be committing the same error today in our jungle of concrete. We have invented enormous means at the service of microscopic consciousnesses, splendid devices at the service of mediocrity, and still more devices to be cured of the Device. But is man truly the goal of all these millions of

years of striving? – The secondary school for all and the washing machine?

The Great Sense, the True Sense, tells us that man is not the end. It is not the triumph of man that we want, not an improved version of the intelligent dwarf – it is another man on the earth, another race in our midst.

'Man is a transitional being' Sri Aurobindo said. We are right in the middle of this transition, it is bursting forth on every side: in Biafra, in Israel, in China, on the Boul'Mich. Man is uncomfortable in his skin.

And the Great Sense, the True Sense, tells us that the only thing we can do is to set to work to prepare that other being and collaborate in our own evolution instead of going round in circles in the old dead-end humanhood and grabbing false powers to rule over a false life.

But where is the lever of this Transmutation?

It is within.

There is a Consciousness within, there is a Power within, the very power that strained and strove in the dinosaur, in the crab, in the ape, in man – it strives still, presses farther on, clothes itself in a more and more perfect form as its instrument grows, and creates

its own form. If we grasp the lever of that Power, it will create its own form, for it is itself the lever of the Transmutation. Instead of letting evolution unfold through millennia of fruitless, painful attempts and useless deaths and fake revolutions that revolutionize nothing, we can shorten the time, we can make a concentrated evolution – we can be the conscious creators of the New Being.

In truth, it is the time of the Great Adventure. The world is closed, there are no more adventures to be had outside: only robots go to the moon and our frontiers are guarded everywhere – in Rome or in Rangoon, the same functionaries of the great Machine are watching us, punching our cards, checking our faces and searching our pockets – there is no more adventure outside! The Adventure is within – Freedom is within, Space is within, and the transformation of our world by the power of the Spirit. Because, in truth, that Power was always there, supreme, all-powerful, prodding evolution on: it was the hidden Spirit growing to become the Spirit manifest upon earth, and if we have trust, if we want that supreme Power, if we have the courage to descend into our hearts, everything is possible, because God is in us.

Bodhi Zendo in the hills

A Zen mountain monastery in South India offers week-long retreats with discipline, silence and deep rest.

The pilgrimage was gentle. A journey of one hour to Villupuram, four hours by train to Dindigul, then a spectacular car ride up the mountains. As we left the hot, dusty plains behind we entered a new world and the air became sharp and clear with smells of eucalyptus and fir trees. Getting out of the car at Bodhi Zendo, we were amazed to see arches of pink roses, dahlias, nasturtiums, all the flowers of Europe. It was as if the climb to 1,700 metres was a journey north of 1,700 kilometres.

Bodhi Zendo is situated on banana and coffee estates and is owned by a Jesuit Society. A commemorative marble plaque at the entrance states the usual donors and dates and then the last line tells us: "Opened on Epiphany Day, February 6th, 1996." It seemed very strange and I was beginning to wonder if I had come to the wrong place but all was soon explained.

Zen Master Ama Samy is a small, elderly, dignified man who is not only an Indian Zen Master but also an ordained Catholic priest. Hence the Christian reference to the Epiphany. He combines the Zen tradition of meditation with the Christian tradition of love. In the beautiful meditation hall which overlooks the mountains he has placed a figure of a seated Buddha with behind it a simple wooden crucifix. It is completed with joss sticks and flowers.

On Ash Wednesday those who wished were invited to take communion and about half of our group and a dozen devout Tamils attended. After the simple service we made the sign of a cross with ash on each other's forehead. We looked like Hindus with these smears of ash on our foreheads. Traditional religious boundaries had blurred and there was a sense of unity.

The programme was rigorous with meditation eight hours a day. No periods of sitting were longer than twenty five minutes as a bell would tinkle and we would do walking meditation or go out on the roof and look at the spectacular view.

One day the clouds rolled up the valleys and we felt as if we were moving and living in a Japanese painting. Our daily routine began at four thirty a.m. with a bucket of hot water to take to our rooms for washing, and at five the Japanese gong rang for the first session. Meditations continued regularly throughout the day with meal and tea breaks and a two hour rest after lunch. Chairs were available for the infirm,

but the others sat cross-legged and straight-backed. It was emphasized that we take full responsibility for ourselves, be aware of others and keep silence at all times. This meant avoiding eye contact and being mindful of our movements. The mornings and evenings were cold and so everyone wrapped themselves in blankets and this gave the place an eerie, unworldly atmosphere.

It was extremely restful to be amongst people without having to produce a personality and a history, though I secretly would have loved to know how everybody else was getting on. Were their feet as cold as mine? Did they swing between boredom and deep restfulness? Had they, like me, mentally replanned their wardrobes and gardens and lives a hundred times over in those long hours of just sitting there?

Lots of thought came up. Thoughts like, this is what prison must be like; or, this is just so nice sitting here doing absolutely nothing and catching the fragrance of dinner being prepared.

Opinions came and went like clouds. I came across a quote that illuminated the situation beautifully: "If you wish to see the truth then cling to no opinion, for or against. The struggle of what one likes and dislikes is the struggle of the mind."

Ama Samy gave us short interviews in the mornings in his private room when we could ask him questions about our practice. I tried to think of something original to say to him, but apart from asking him how to meditate properly, I couldn't think of anything to say. I had the feeling that he had heard it all before. He was a lovely gentle, humorous man and always gave the same answer; "Just sit and watch the breath go in and out. Look at your life. And know that you are deeply loved." One day maybe he felt I was advancing a little as he gave me a *koan*, a zen mind-bending sentence to stretch the intellect, for my restless mind to dwell on. "Where does the bird song go when the bird stops singing?" That kept me occupied for a few days.

In the evening session Ama Samy would give us a short talk and then the door was opened and a huge gong with deep, resonant tones was beaten, or rather played like an instrument. Then a woman stepped out

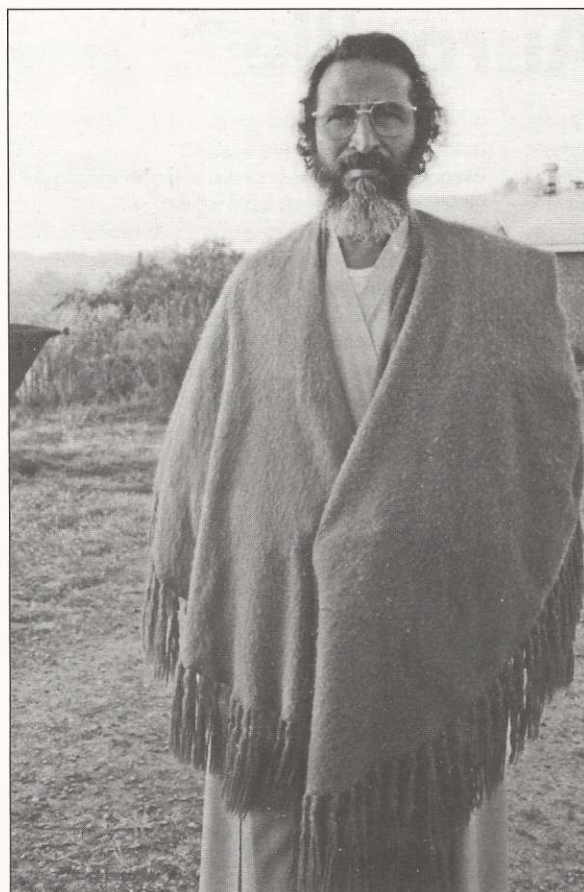


PHOTO COURTESY: BODHI ZENDO

Zen Master Ama Samy

of the darkness and recited these words in a clear, loud voice. They never failed to stun me.

I beg to urge you, everyone;

Life and death is a grave matter.

All things pass quickly away,

Each of you must be completely alert;

Never neglectful, never indulgent.

Sitting for eight hours a day in that intense environment and going to bed after such words made a deep impression on me. I found the group's dedication and the discipline with which they followed the strict routine was very supportive and inspiring. But it is the memory of Ama Samy that will always remain with me.

The grace and dignity with which he presented the teachings in the light of his many years experience was a joy to receive.

Dianna

PASSINGS

Klara Siritzky



PHOTO DOMINIQUE DARR

Klara Siritzky left her body on March 19th 2007 at the age of 95. Many knew her and will remember her smile, her joy of being as well as her faithfulness to Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's yoga which she had followed since the end of the nineteen forties. She deeply loved Auroville and supported it in all possible ways. She visited Auroville often and for a while, in Paris, was president of Auroville International France.

Under the title "A word from the President", she wrote the following in the January-March 1994 issue of AVI France's information bulletin.

"Know that I am the source of all futures." (Bhagavad Gita)
Some Aurovilians and members of AVI France have known me for a long time. Twenty five years is no great time in an unusual and exceptional city. But in the life of a person,

25 years fill up rather more, even if one sometimes feels that in Auroville we are only at the beginning. What is certain, since Auroville began this research, this suprahuman experiment of Human Unity, is that it resonates like an echo everywhere in the world. Also, because of an increasing interest in Buddhism, these days I am asked whether I believe in reincarnation. Indeed I always did, wishing to find again loved ones and so many things one could have done, discovered, understood. A single life is not enough. But contrary to Buddhism which wants to stop the cycle, leave this earth for Nirvana, I wish to come back to find again an ongoing Auroville, ongoing forever as I can very well imagine. The evolution will surpass all our expectations."

May Klara live in our memory and in the light of Krishna whom she loved so much.

Dominique Darr

Dietra

Long-time Aurovillian Dietra (Clare Worden), who created the Gratitude settlement, inviting a great variety of birds to settle down there, recently passed away in USA.

Dietra, Auroville pioneer *magna cum laude*, passed away peacefully on Saturday April 7 at 1:24 pm. She was surrounded by all of her family members. Dietra had been struggling with breath and health for quite some time. Although receiving wonderful care from her son David in his home near San Diego she missed Auroville, body, mind and soul. There was no possibility of her returning.

I am so grateful that I felt to fly to San Diego in February to spend The Mother's Birthday with Dietra. My friendship with her has been central to my life. She was the channel that



PHOTO JUNE MAHER

shikra



Cover of the first issue of *Shikra*, an environmental awareness booklet, edited by Dietra.

brought me to Mother and Sri Aurobindo – to Auroville. Mother had told Dietra to return to Santa Cruz in 1971 to settle her affairs before returning to live in the Ashram and then Auroville. While she was here I went one evening to hear her speak about the Ashram and Auroville and that fundamentally and forever changed my life. So you can imagine the gratitude I have always felt for her presence. Also to note over the years the way she took the stewardship of the Auroville land granted to her and she named *Gratitude* and created beauty and abundance out of that then barren land to give back to Auroville. Then there are the peacocks, for Dietra loved all creatures and had a special affinity for birds.

Dietra walked the earth fiercely passionate and dedicated to what she believed. She was truly a child of The Mother, always. I, along with others, will miss her. Until we meet again.

June Maher

In brief

Annual budget

The Secretary, Auroville Foundation, informed that an amount of Rs 9.45 crores has been approved by the Government of India as budget for the year 2007-2008. Works to be executed with this budget are laying of the Crown Road, building housing complexes and completing the office buildings of the Auroville Foundation next to the Town Hall. Money will also be allocated to maintain public buildings and create solar street lighting, starting with the road from Certitude junction to the Town Hall via the Matrimandir Entrance and the road from the Matrimandir Junction to the Visitors Centre via Bharat Nivas. This work will be done in collaboration with CSR.

First paved road

The Auroville has its first paved stretch of road, from the Matrimandir Visitors' Entrance to the Savitri Bhavan. Interlocking paver blocks were used. The road was funded by the Visitors' Centre.

AVI meeting in Canada

Auroville International will have its yearly meeting in Montreal, Canada, from September 19-28, 2007, on the theme of Auroville and the Future of the Human Race. For more information contact Auroville International Canada with copy to Christian Feuillette. Email address: avi@auroville.org.in or editcheuillette@yahoo.com.

Auroville's 40th Anniversary

Auroville's birthday celebrations team has begun the planning process for the 40th anniversary event in February 2008. The team has sent out a request to the Auroville community for ideas and recommendations for events to be held on this occasion, as well as names of potential invitees – 'people whose lives shine as sources of inspiration on the planet today and who would resonate with the vision of Auroville'. Responses can be sent to jillswar@auroville.org.in.

Gecko! comes out

In late March, Gecko! presented a ready-to-wear Spring and Summer '07 collection in linen, cotton and khadi, at a boutique in Puducherry. This is the first time that an Auroville garment unit has gone public with a seasonal collection. Doty, who co-manages Gecko! along with Stephan, said: "With the 40th anniversary of Auroville coming up, all of Auroville's fashion units should showcase their collections through a Trade Fair."

Organization Study Group

In a General Meeting on March 25th, the Study Group on Organization announced the result of its ballot survey that month, which invited respondents to answer questions on the process of the Residents' Assembly and on the selection and mandates of working groups. As only 76 people had responded to the SGO's various proposals, it was decided that these responses could not be considered representative of the community as a whole. The SGO dissolved, and called on the community to see how the results of its survey could be used to improving Auroville's organisational structure.

Correction

The April issue of Auroville Today mistakenly reported Puducherry's daily release of untreated waste water to be 13,000 million cubic metres. It should have read 13,000 cubic metres. The editorial team regrets the error.

Blogging Auroville

For better or worse, Auroville is now a popular topic in the blogosphere. This diverse selection is drawn from weblogs (or blogs) posted on the internet over the past two months by visitors.

Truly amazing

I have been to Auroville. I don't know if you have ever heard about this place, but it is truly amazing. It is hard to describe what it is about, it is a kind of spiritual hippy commune.

Garden of Eden

What I see is a veritable paradise on Earth, A garden of Eden, germinated and nurtured from dry desert shrub land.

A community of multi-national inhabitants, participating in the creation of a city without nationality, A place where free expression is encouraged and whose centre is the Matrimandir, a symbol of the Aurovilian hopes and aspirations, And also of the Divine's answer to man's inspiration for perfection.

A community that is not just introverted and isolated, separate from the global community, But endeavouring to consciously connect, interact and communicate

With all other groups and communities throughout India and the world.

Its role and goal is as a haven, example and blueprint, for the future development of our questing species.

Rather odd

AV sounds interesting, but it's actually rather weird in my opinion. It's set up like a galaxy, with this golden orb at its centre. By the time our group arrived, the orb was already closed. But being the adventurer that I am, I bought a town map and jauntily set out. At first we were on the main road, down which a lot of Aurovilians were coming. They all looked rather odd, kind of Ithaca commons, hippy-esque, and whenever I made eye contact, which was probably not a good idea, they gave me this strange smile.

India's tolerance

I just spent a week and a half in Auroville. I was here years ago but back then I really wasn't so receptive to such things as eco-living and communal experimentation. This time I'm happily switched on. Of course, one needs at least six months to a year of living among the people of Auroville to understand the place, and to feel the attitudes which exist just beneath the surface. But the constitution is sound and it's yet another example of the great tolerance of India, to allow such an experiment on their own soil. For all the drawbacks of such a complex, populous, and conservative society, there is a certain aspect of Indian thinking which is way ahead of its time.

Creepy

We also visited Auroville, a rather creepy commune, where some 2000 people live in a fashion laid out by Sri Aurobindo and Mother, two beloved teachers of international repute. It's very cultish, with weird rituals and education systems that do not seem quite up to snuff. They say they're waiting for the coming of a new human species on earth. The settlement was sadly built in the shape of a galaxy (what board of directors sat around and said "OOOH! Shaped like a galaxy, great idea Pierre. Let's go with galaxy shape) I mean come on people, I am a physics major and even I acknowledge that that is a silly idea.

Self-indulgent week

There is a peacefulness in Auroville, and it was nice to just ride bikes, and be in a clean environment, and eat wonderful food. Oh my god, the food was good. So many restaurants and bakeries. Pan-o-chocolat, and real bread, and crepes, mashed potatoes, apple pie, and cheesecake even. It was a self-indulgent week, but I really needed it. I feel so well rested and better able to take on India again.

Tough pioneers

Wandering about the settlements, I saw a breathtaking diversity of housing ranging from huts of woven palm fronds and bamboo to graceful stucco-and-wood cottages and jaw-dropping spaceship

designs in poured concrete, as well as earth-fired, postmodernist studio residences.

Everywhere there was evidence of sophisticated aesthetics and venturesome innovations.

The defining moment of a visit to Auroville is the introduction to the Matrimandir. This is an astounding sight: an enormous sphere, supported by four pillars, seeming to emerge from a crater in the ground, like consciousness emerging from matter. Inside the great sphere, the inner meditation chamber is lined with white marble. In the center of the intense whiteness of the chamber is a large crystal globe. Sunlight pierces a vent in the roof above and is transmuted by the sensational translucent globe into a rainbow of delicate pastels. I found myself there, sinking into the profound silence, aware of a powerful tug into a wordless dimension of feelings and heightened sensitivity.



Later, over tea at Bharat Nivas at a table with four Aurovilians, I tried to speak of the unutterable peacefulness and radiance of that chamber and the bewitching effect it had on me. Conversation with the four confirmed the certainty that these are no tied-dyed, crystal-dangling free spirits. Their comments – friendly, candid, rueful – indicated that they consider themselves tough pioneers and rugged individualists in a living laboratory, dealing with real, pressing and pivotal concerns affecting the entire planet. As I left Auroville, I felt strangely exhilarated. The elation was linked, I realized, to renaissance hope. Having lasted well beyond the 15-year shelf life of the average visionary utopia, Auroville indisputably raises the possibility that people – in this case a bewildering national and ethnic mix – can reinvent community and point the way to a sustainable planetary civilization.

Nearly Kidnapped

We went to see the Matrimandir and actually got attacked by a bus full of school girls all shaking our hands in turn and asking us our names and how we were, funny for the first couple but it did get slightly tiresome after 25!

I did a workshop on eating healthy as a cure for serious illnesses, which was very interesting and the food was great! Also I was getting ayurvedic massage every day for about 3 weeks and did a couple of Yoga therapy workshops, I now feel fantastic! Other than that I have been hanging out with my mates and just generally being busy doing not much at all. I finally managed to drag myself away from Aspiration and Auroville. I was nearly kidnapped by Aspiration and a nice Italian man who was doing his best to get me to stay for another month so he could romance me. We hit it off one night talking about the benefits of consuming your own urine!

Imagine

Auroville is kind of like the actualization of John Lennon's "Imagine." No countries, no religion, no private property, just people living together in harmony, with an emphasis on their spiritual development. It's a very sublime place.

Place to reassess

Auroville is a pretty unique and fascinating place. We met some wonderful people. Although I don't feel

that draw that many have, people wanting to live there or have spiritual connections, but I feel like I have learned a lot. I feel like it was a great environment for me to think about my own life and my future, and to perhaps reassess the kind of life I want to live.

Black sheep

What I love about this place is that everyone is here with a great deal of hope and faith that they are creating an ideal human community. Of course it isn't perfect, but it's a fascinating experiment. There's a great mixture of spiritual types, creative people and people who work the land... everyone is particularly intelligent. The music scene is superb, we've met some exceptional musicians. In the words of one of the resident musicians, Auroville is a community for black sheep... it's a great herd!

gr8 experience

Hey guys im back after a long time..... with some fresh news from my find....guess what AUROVILLE, an amazing place to unwind myself.... refresh.... and have a wonderful time..... A sprawling campus with a lot to give.... a system which is simple.... people with different ideas, religion, countries, interests, what not good food too.... and amazing cottages to stay.... it was a gr8 experience for me and my partner to have spent two days and after the coming back to Chennai seems to be returning to your abnormal self....

Getting sucked in

I was only planning to stay for two days but it ended up being six. It's easy to get sucked in when so and so offers to teach yoga in the morning and someone else volunteers to teach qi gong in the evening. Vedic astrology readings and energy meridian type massages were also floating around. I had a reading by this amazing lady, and she told me a few things that really hit home.

Amazing youth

One of the big questions when wandering around Auroville is how successfully it manages to bring together different cultures and ethnicities. On the surface, everything and everyone seems quite separated but when you dig beneath the surface, you see that actually it is quite a successful melting pot. The musicians here played across all cultural barriers, but it was also great to see this happen on a social level too. The youth of Auroville are amazing people, and it's a shame that it takes quite a lot of effort for the outsider to realise what they have to offer to the rest of Auroville.

Peace and serenity nazis

Auroville can take itself very seriously and until you tap into the youth culture, it seems rather lacking in fun and energy. There seems to be a bit of a firm establishment which is rather serious. This is most pronounced around the Matrimandir where the peace and serenity nazis make sure silence is aggressively maintained. So it was nice to see a fundraising evening for a project in Africa involving much dancing and merriment.

Snubbed

We caught a tuk tuk to nearby Auroville which is a community established to promote unity of cultures and countries and is a social experiment on group dynamics, community involvement and sustainability which turned out to be quite an unfriendly place. We were greeted by signs saying 'only residents and their visitors allowed entry', which we ignored and strolled on through, and we left shortly after arriving after being snubbed by the women working in the cafe.

Amazing it exists

We couldn't get inside the Matrimandir as we needed special passes but it looked something out of a Kubrick film. In fact the whole Auroville looks like the futuristic films of the 70s and actually that's precisely what it is, cause it was all inspired and designed in the 60s and 70s in the heat of the cold war when human civilization looked about to be exterminated by nuclear war and people desperately seek a new society. In this almost 40 years of existence they have done interesting things but are still a long way from the goal. It is very difficult what they want to achieve considering there isn't an enlightened leader guiding the project, so it became a community of people practicing each their own personal spiritual path doing the best of their ability. Although the whole project seems to be a bit stuck and not growing fast enough, it is just amazing that a place like Auroville exists in this world.

Not just yet

Those living in this community have renounced all forms of nationality, politics, religion and money in order to live in a state of human unity. The idea of living in harmony and equality was very inviting but may mean that we will never see most of our family and friends ever again. So we decided that we would not make the move just yet.

Selected by Alan

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Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Puducherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.