

A very special bridge

On the 29th of September, Dr. Karan Singh inaugurated a new building in the Savitri Bhavan complex

“I have a strong feeling that this place really has its own programme and we just have to try and keep up with it,” says Shraddhavan, coordinator of Savitri Bhavan. “This place really has a dynamism,” agrees Helmut, the architect. “My whole time is taken up here now – I no longer go to meetings and I’ve stopped all my other architectural projects. But it’s a very nice feeling.”

We are sitting under a *cassia* tree in the garden of Savitri Bhavan. Behind us workers are weeding a grass mound and putting the finishing touches to a lotus pond in preparation for tomorrow’s inauguration by Dr. Karan Singh. “Some time ago we submitted a proposal for funding under the SAIER development scheme,” explains Helmut. “Recently we got a phone call. ‘Can you spend 6 lakhs in the next three months?’ I looked at the plans, I saw how I could slice off a piece of the larger project, and that’s what is being inaugurated tomorrow – the first module of the core building.”

The first module consists of a meeting hall and office. It provides a spacious entrance to the other parts of the main complex – the library, art gallery, classrooms, amphitheatre and conference hall. Of these, only the library is already built, but funding has already been sanctioned for the next major phase. “When the core building is finished, only the Conference Hall and a 12-room hostel will remain to be completed,” says Helmut.

But what about the architectural challenge? How do you set about designing a place which, in the words of the organizing group, “will breathe the atmosphere of *Savitri*”? “Clearly,” says Helmut, “it can’t be the kind of design which we architects habitually use. It has to be something which can stand through the years, something which seems to ‘grow out of nature’. To achieve this I had to find something which didn’t push my personality into the foreground, I had to go beyond my superficial design ambitions to discover something which answers the deeper purpose of this place. The result may not be as fancy as some other architecture, but this is not important. What is important is that the buildings should not pose disturbing questions. They should simply be.”



The first module of the core building of Savitri Bhavan

I look around. The graceful white sweep of the first construction, inaugurated in 1999, is now complemented by the soaring curve of the north wall of the new core building. Inside all is light, space and simplicity.

But the dynamism surrounding Savitri Bhavan is not only expressed through funding and construction. “Almost every day something special seems to happen here,” says Shraddhavan. She leans forward, excitedly. “Let me tell you the Huta story.”

In 2001 Huta entrusted the whole set of her *Savitri* paintings – which she had worked on with Mother – to the care of Savitri Bhavan. “It was an absolutely unforeseen but marvellous offering: exhibiting them will become a main focus of Savitri Bhavan. But it is also a huge responsibility.”

For example, after 40 or so years the paintings are no longer in prime condition. Fortunately an

Aurovilian put Shraddhavan in touch with Dr. Laura Tacelli, Senior Conservator of Paintings in Genoa, Italy. She advised, among other things, that only a small number of the originals be displayed at any one time: the rest of the collection should be represented by reproductions. These already exist – an Aurovilian photographer, Giorgio, had photographed the entire collection as part of a project to make a series of films. “So when the gallery is completed in the next phase of construction, we will show the entire series of Huta’s paintings, all 468 of them, at the same time, just as Mother wished.”

Meanwhile, the regular weekly activities have expanded. Now, in addition to the Savitri Study Circle which has been meeting for over 10 years, there is a ‘Learning English through *Savitri*’ class, and Shraddalu and Kittu Reddy from the Ashram give talks on *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* respectively. A group also meets regularly to listen to Mother’s recorded talks. Then there is the newsletter, as well as various research activities. These include Vladimir’s research on the Vedic references in *Savitri* and ongoing work on collating *Savitri* references in *Mother’s Agenda*.

“One activity I’d like to start,” says Shraddhavan, “is a study circle on *Sri Aurobindo’s Practical Guide to Integral Yoga*. I think it would interest those people who, like me, feel very strongly that all our organizational, economic and other problems are due to the fact that the innermost aim of Auroville is not upfront enough. From my own life I know that just having the knowledge is not enough: you really have to begin practising the discipline. So maybe a study circle is one way in which we can encourage each other to do this.”

“And then, of course, there are the gardens. So far most of the energy has gone into construction, but with Narad we are developing the concept of a Savitri park made up of small gardens representing key moments in the poem. At present we are focussing on the garden outside the new building. Here we are trying to recreate the atmosphere of the destined meeting place of Savitri and Satyavan.”

Talking of destiny, after laying the foundation stone of the Savitri Bhavan project on 24th

November, 1995, Nirodbaran gave a message. He described Savitri Bhavan as a “twin” to the Matrimandir and went on to remark that “this new project has a great potential and will be growing up to an extent we cannot easily foresee.” Eleven years on, has the ‘great potential’ of Savitri Bhavan been more clearly understood and realized?

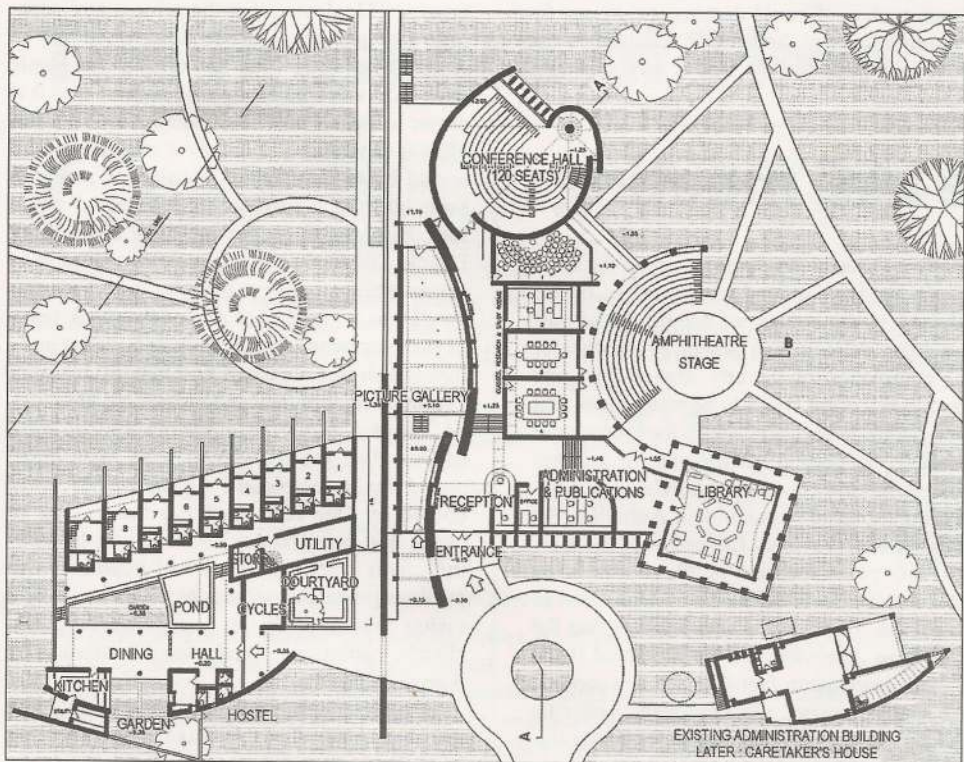
“For many Aurovilians the most important thing is that it is a bridge between the Ashram and Auroville,” says Shraddhavan, “for here is a place where people from the Ashram can come and speak. Many Aurovilians can give intellectual talks about Sri Aurobindo, but people flock to listen to Ashram speakers because they carry something special. And the Ashramites are very happy to come here. When I took round invitations to the Ashram trustees for tomorrow’s inauguration, I was bowled over by the welcome I received.”

“Savitri Bhavan is also an aspect of Auroville which receives a lot of appreciation outside. It is open to the general public and it is something people can relate to because it’s so obviously connected to our ideals. This is particularly important at the local level – there’s an immensely growing interest in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother all over Tamil Nadu. Recently, when I was lying in bed with a bad back, I sensed that Sri Aurobindo was telling me, ‘It will be the people of Tamil Nadu who will build Savitri Bhavan’. So that’s when we started our Tamil journal using transcripts of talks given here in Tamil.”

But perhaps there is one other bridge provided by Savitri Bhavan, and that is a bridge between the Aurovilians themselves. “Many of our visiting speakers attract a very diverse audience of Aurovilians,” says Shraddhavan. It is also significant that the House of Mother’s Agenda has moved to Savitri Bhavan, for this will draw to Savitri Bhavan those Aurovilians who might otherwise not have been attracted there. And this may be a powerful means of dissolving residual tensions between certain Aurovilians stemming from our internal conflicts in the 1980s.

“*Savitri*,” wrote Mother, “is a Mantra for the transformation of the world.” Who knows? In its own way, Savitri Bhavan may already be playing a crucial role in the transformation of Auroville.

Alan



Map of the Savitri Bhavan complex.

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Informal meeting with International Advisory Council

The members of the International Advisory Council discuss how to find a proper organizational model for Auroville.

It was a busy time for International Advisory Council (IAC) members Doudou Diene, Marc Tully and Mark Luyckx Ghisi who visited Auroville from September 30th to October 2nd, 2006. The Working Committee had provided them with ample background information about various issues. They also spent much time listening to presentations of various groups. Yet, they felt that the time was too short to fully comprehend the realities so that they could give meaningful advice on various issues. One of these was the problem of Auroville's internal organization and decision making process. At the IAC's request, the Working Committee organized an impromptu meeting with concerned Aurovilians.

IAC chairman Mark Tully opened the discussion, saying that the Council members have become increasingly aware of the problem of organization and were very interested by the paper produced by the Auroville Council which lists the problems in a very concise manner. "We thought it would be good to meet with you informally. So please speak out." That Aurovilians certainly did. The concerns voiced addressed not only the problem of Auroville's internal organization, but also the functioning of the IAC itself.

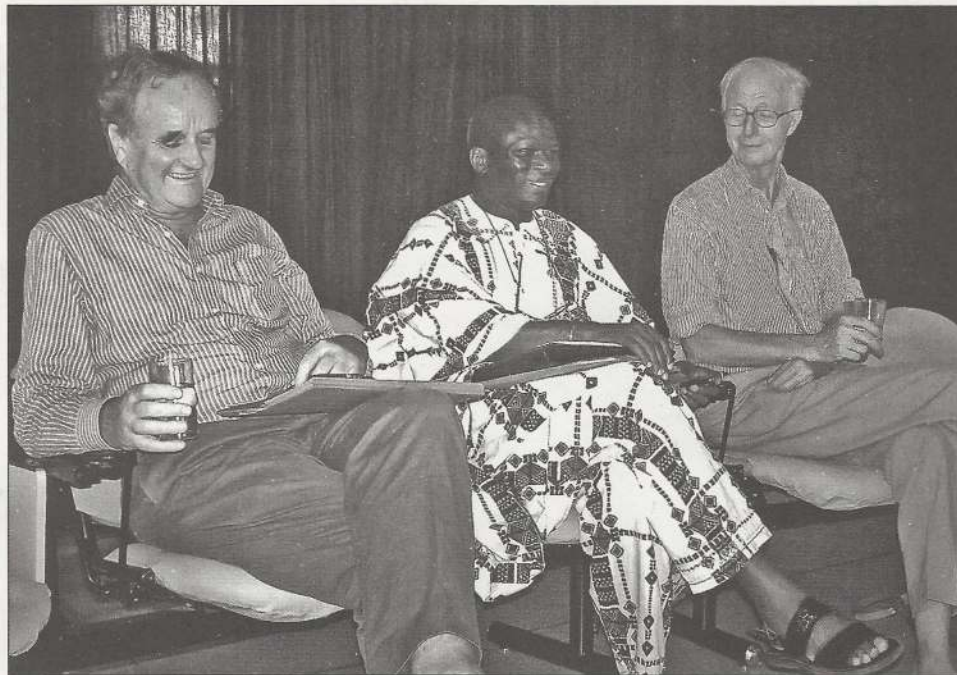
The functioning of the IAC

"As we have been encouraged not to be diplomatic, I'll be frank," said Frederick. He reminded the IAC members that the IAC was the brainchild of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. She had formulated its role as 'to advise and ensure that the Aurovilians have the freedom to organize their own activities', stating that it was important that Auroville not become a department of the Government of India. "But up to now," said Frederick, "the IAC has not played that role fully." And he expressed an anxiety: that the Governing Board might take decisions without having obtained the prior advice of the IAC. "Our apprehension is that the GB will increasingly interfere, like it has recently done in the management of the land purchase committee by appointing half its members. We are afraid that such decisions will never be rolled back, as it is always difficult in a bureaucratic process to undo an earlier decision."

The IAC members replied that their interaction with the GB had substantially improved. Earlier, there had been a clear lacuna in the information which they should receive, but that problem has, to a large extent, been solved. "We are much better informed than at the last meeting, and much much better than the meeting before," said Mark Tully, even though 90% of the information had come from the Working Committee and only 10% from the GB.

The concerns raised by Frederick had to a certain extent been addressed in the IAC's interaction with the GB. The IAC had insisted on absolute transparency, in line with the recent Open Government policy of the Government of India. Also the structure of power was discussed, and the need of sub-

Council were further enunciated by various Aurovilians. The main issue, as many see it, is the lack of leaders. The Mother envisaged a system of governance by people with an intuitive intelligence. But many Aurovilians argue that Auroville does not have people who function from the level of intuitive intelligence, and



IAC members Sir Mark Tully, Dr. Doudou Diene and Dr. Mark Luyckx Ghisi meeting members of the community

sidarity; that every decision should be taken at the lowest possible level. "The highest level has a sfunction to devolve power to the lower level, not to impose its views as in a hierarchical society. In no way should the highest level short-circuit the lowest level," explained Mark Luyckx Ghisi.

Doudou Diene, though welcoming Frederick's comments, added another perspective. "We have just started," he said, "and 2 years is nothing. Only now is the complexity of Auroville becoming more evident." He said that the IAC had already taken the decision to have twice-yearly meetings coinciding with those of the Governing Board, instead of once a year as was customary for previous IACs. "In this way we will be in a better position to advise. We believe that advising implies being part of the process, before decisions are made and executed." Mark Luyckx Ghisi then invited all Aurovilians to email their concerns and proposals directly to the members of the IAC.

Problems of internal organization

The second topic of the interaction was how to build an appropriate Auroville organization. The problems listed by the Auroville

therefore propose to follow the beaten paths of democracy and elect people to certain positions. Others would like to follow Mother's indications, even if it means that many mistakes will be made. What is the solution? How can we build an organization where things are organized by the highest consciousness available to give a unified course of action to the administrative bodies, services and units of Auroville?

The functioning of the Residents' Assembly (RA), created by the Auroville Foundation Act, is at the root of this problem. The Act makes it obvious that the RA is the authority to take decisions regarding the Auroville affairs. But it does not mention how the RA should function. Attempts to make this body an active entity have not been successful; its meetings are usually attended by less than 10% of Auroville's adult population. However, without the adequate support of the residents of Auroville, there is no way to make the Working Committee and the Council effective. This state of affairs has given rise to questions such as 'Should democracy, in one form or another, be at the base of Auroville's organization or should we find a way around it?'

'As The Mother did not favour democracy, how can we create a government that is not democratic but that is still supported by the community?' 'Should we create our own brand of democracy, an Auroville democracy?'

Another problem that is coming up is how Aurovilians deal amongst themselves with interpersonal problems. There is a basic understanding that an Aurovillian will not file a police complaint against another Aurovillian or go to a court of law for redress of any perceived injustice. Auroville attempts to solve such problems by offering mediation. But if one party refuses mediation, it may become necessary to advise people to have recourse to ordinary ways of seeking justice.

Seek the help of professionals

"It's absolutely clear to us that Auroville is not intended to be an ordinary democracy, or should be subject to authoritarian rule," said Mark Tully. To find an ideal organization he advised that Auroville seek the help of professionals. "You can't be frogs in a well. Arrange a series of visits or lectures by people who understand constitutional problems. There are lots of people of goodwill around, and we will be happy to introduce Auroville to a few of them." He then reminded the Aurovilians that they are not here only to pursue their own spiritual development but also to demonstrate to the world that human beings can live in unity. "Fundamentally, that responsibility is yours. If you don't take it, neither the IAC nor anybody else can save you from interference from the GB: for they have their own responsibilities under the Foundation Act."

Have you gone beyond democracy?

Mark Luyckx Ghisi then asked a searching question: "Auroville aspires for divine anarchy and believes it should go beyond democracy. But in order to go beyond democracy, you must first be democratic. Have the principles of democracy been sufficiently applied in Auroville?" He explained that the ABC of politics is division of powers into the legislative, executive and judiciary. "The three should never be mixed. But I have the impression that the three are not clearly separated in Auroville. You have a legislative, which is the Residents' Assembly; you have an executive, the Working Committee and the Auroville Council, bodies that are badly hampered in their functioning with all the strains of the work but without the power; and through your mediation system, there is a bit of judiciary. But there must be a check-and-balance situation to ensure that no authority acts beyond its powers." He denied that the principle of separation of powers was too far-fetched for an Auroville of only 1400 adults. "The principle even works in small monastic orders. And it is easier to install now than when Auroville has 50,000 inhabitants." The first step, therefore, would be to ensure that division of power is built into the Auroville organizational structure. But how to go beyond that? Even Mark Luyckx Ghisi was not able to give examples of organizations that have gone beyond democracy. "I was a member of one of the think-tanks of the European Commission and we've gone through all that we could find in political innovation. Only in business a movement has started," he said. A reference was made to the work of Dee Hoc, the founder of Visa, who introduced the principle of a *chaordic* [a word coined by Dee Hoc implying the mixing of chaos and organization] society and of other initiatives where the vision of business with profit as prime objective is being replaced by a vision where profit is a consequence. But clearly, solutions have to be found by Auroville itself.

Doudou Diene concluded the meeting with the observation that this was the best meeting he had attended in Auroville. "I think you are in a creative tension, and there is much frustration. But at the same time there is a movement behind the frustration, showing that Auroville is very much alive." And he ended, "You have a challenge – that Auroville be an example to the world. We have a challenge, how as the IAC we can be meaningful. We'll do everything we can to help you."

Report by Carel

Excerpts from the minutes of the IAC meeting

In keeping with its tradition, the Council made the minutes of its meeting available to the public before the IAC members left Auroville. The Council welcomed the appointment of new members Prof. Michael Murphy and Dr. Vishakha Desai, and expressed the hope that they will be able to attend the IAC's next meeting which is scheduled for February 20th – 23rd, 2007. The Council further expressed its appreciation that the communication and interactions with the Governing Board had improved, and requested they be informed about the agenda of the Governing Board meetings so that they can properly fulfill their role as advisers.

A main issue in the minutes is the Council's stress on transparency, not only asking for feedback on its own minutes, but also proposing that all Auroville decisions be put on the web, including all financial information.

The Council observed that, since their appointment, the members have been speaking about Auroville to different groups around the world. Though there is a genuine curiosity to know more about Auroville's vision and experience, and many young people would

like to come to Auroville, Auroville is not yet sufficiently visible as a place where they can pursue their spiritual quest. The Council advised that the concrete achievements of Aurovilians should be much more widely known.

The minutes also address the issue of institutional reforms and the apparent lack of focus and co-ordination and leadership inspired by the ideals of the Mother. [see the article above].

The Council stressed their strong conviction that it is urgent that the Auroville community reaches a final decision on the plan to build the city. As seen from the outside, any further delay will affect the very credibility of Auroville. The Council believes this will have an adverse impact on the morale and hopes of Aurovilians. Sharing the perception that any signal to disconnect Auroville from the Galaxy Master Plan would be extremely detrimental to the credibility of the project, the Council stressed that the principles here should be flexibility, participation by the community, respect for the ideals of Auroville, social harmony and justice and the need for maintaining good relations with the villages around Auroville and ensuring that they

receive justice in the development of the city.

On the issue of land purchase the Council advised, in the context of booming land values, to consolidate land as soon as possible for the completion of the city. But at the same time, every effort needs to be made to see that land purchase does not disturb the harmony of relations between Auroville and the villages around. Keeping in mind Mother's vision concerning the ideal population of Auroville, the International Advisory Council is of the view that any plans for land purchase should be linked to a plan to increase the population of Auroville. The Council also believes that the growth of Auroville will be promoted if the present inadequate facilities for newcomers, especially housing, are improved. Auroville should become more accessible for young students, as trainees.

Finally the Council spoke about fundraising, noting with interest the new developments from private sources and the encouraging responses from the Government of India. However, the Council warned that the balance between private and public funding should be respected and advised that criteria and principles be elaborated for accepting private funding in view of the ideals of Auroville.

Governing Board meets Aurovilians

On the evening of September 30th, two members of the Governing Board and three members of the Auroville International Advisory Council met with Aurovilians on the terrace of the Solar Kitchen.

The Board, with seven out of nine members present, had just concluded its half yearly meeting. Its Chairman, Dr. Karan Singh, spoke about some issues that had been discussed. The Board has decided that the completion of the Matrimandir on February 21, 2007, The Mother's birthday, will be celebrated quietly with introspection and meditation. However, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Auroville, on February 28, 2008, the Board wishes to organize a grand event and reach out to those outside of Auroville. As Dr. Karan Singh half-seriously quipped, "Auroville has become well-known throughout the world and has become too important to be left only to the Aurovilians".

With the Matrimandir almost completed, the Board is looking at the next step: building the city. The first issue here is acquiring the lands. Though land purchase has recently restarted, the question of how to find the funds and acquire all the lands for the city and greenbelt areas has not yet been solved. Another problem to be solved is how to organize the building of the city: do we need an Auroville City Development Council? A third concern is the slow population growth. "We have to apply our minds to how we can encourage young people from India and abroad to join Auroville," said Dr. Karan Singh. He declined, however, to speak about other issues discussed at the Board's meeting, saying that hot topics had better not be spoken about in public.

The topic of population growth was subsequently addressed by some Aurovilians. One newcomer complained about the lack of available housing and the stagnation in planning and development due to which new houses cannot be built. He also questioned why newcomers are forced to live in small units in apartment buildings, while some old-timers enjoy large residences. He also complained that systematic research into the types of housing that are best suitable for Auroville is not being done. Someone else voiced concerns about the lack of work opportunities. How can new people be properly maintained if Auroville cannot offer suitable work?

Another Aurovillian did not agree that slow population growth is a matter of concern, as The Mother has

said that the realization of Auroville will only start when the Matrimandir has been completed. Moreover, he argued, The Mother has expressed Her high expectations for Auroville, particularly in the fields of economy, education and organisation. None of these expectations have been met and an influx of people might only bring more of the old world which Auroville aspires to surpass. Dr. Karan Singh, however, replied with his belief that the 50,000 people The Mother talks about has to include the local villagers – though he is aware that many Aurovilians do not agree with him. "Didn't The Mother refer to them as 'the first Aurovilians'?" he observed, and invited further reflection on this issue.

Carel

OPINION

If you can't make a decision

Now that we have concluded the meeting of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council it would be a good idea to come together and reflect on what was presented to them and how the Governing Board responded to our presentations. While everything went quite smoothly as we glided from one topic to the next, one subject kept being raised by the Chairman on at least three different occasions and this was his concern about our Residents' Assembly. At one point he said it is the 'Civic Duty' of each Aurovillian to become involved with the function of the Residents' Assembly. I have never heard this phrase uttered in the many years that I have lived in Auroville and the idea that we have something called Civic Duty seemed utterly foreign to me. It was at this point that I felt more poignantly than usual that our chairman, and previous chairmen and some members of the Governing Board for that matter, all grew up under the indignity of the domination of a foreign power. These men, it seemed to me, are what we could call patriots and that for them it is not some abstract notion to draw a clear distinction between servitude and the freedoms afforded to them under India's democratic process.

While Aurovilians seem very fond of lecturing

the Governing Board or our International Advisory Council on the failures of democracy as defined by Sri Aurobindo, and remind them of the impending establishment of a Divine Anarchy in Auroville, the Governing Board members have an altogether different point of view which, I would think, is also shared by the Home Ministry. They believe that democracy is an equitable and fair system of self-governance and something that Auroville has yet to establish. They have little interest in how we formulate our internal organization and while we may proclaim the imminent installation of the supremely wise governance of the Self, the Governing Board members have a more basic and down to earth concern as to how our Residents' Assembly reaches decisions.

At this point I think it is important to make a distinction between our 'internal organization' and the function of the Residents' Assembly. The Residents' Assembly is a statutory body which is required for the proper functioning of the Auroville Foundation as described by an Act of Parliament and by definition includes all adult Aurovilians. The Chairman took great pains to point out that the participation of less than 10% of the Residents' Assembly in our decision making process is completely unacceptable.

In the past we have tried many different ideas concerning the decision-making process, such as ref-

erenda, petitions, direct voting and, of course, our infamous meetings, all of which, it seems to me, were designed primarily to circumvent our direct involvement in what our Chairman refers to as our 'Civic Duty'. In fact it is our responsibility to involve ourselves in making some major decisions which are now pending, such as what steps we are willing to take, if any, to acquire the land for Auroville; who shall sit in the newly reconstituted FAMC; and who will be the new members of the WC. The sooner we resolve to formulate some kind of equitable system of decision making, the better for Auroville.

I fear that if we cannot bring ourselves to formulate such a system of decision-making it may very well be given to us in the form of some directive from our Governing Board or imposed upon us as some kind of statutory regulation. How long can we avoid our responsibilities as Citizens of Auroville is a question which, if we procrastinate long enough, may be answered for us.

Long ago I went to a workshop to pick up a picture frame and all the employees, it turned out, were part of some rehab centre. On the wall was a truly poignant sign that said it all: "If you can't make a decision, you've made your choice".

Roy (Aurodam)

BOOK RELEASE

The Presence of Time

On September 29th, Dr. Karan Singh released the book *The Presence of Time*, the first volume of *Bharat Nivas Chronicles*, published by the Bharat Nivas Group. This volume contains the thoughts, contemplations, musing and meditations of Aster Mira Patel on a vast range of topics such as time, matter, being, the spirit and the body.

"When The Mother, in 1970, started Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India, in the International Zone, she was insistent that it be finished as soon as possible, preferably by Sri Aurobindo's centenary in

1972," said Aster during the book release. "But it was not to be and even today Bharat Nivas is not completed. In these years Bharat Nivas has not only served as a temporary home for many Auroville services and units, but also as a place for those who wished to contemplate and explore the soul of India, how it manifests in the Auroville experience and how the two together may flow out into India and the world."

Aster's reflections, she says, have been the result of a long experience. Many were written in the last two years; some have a longer history and have been published individually elsewhere. With

Book excerpt

Exploring the 'Inner' Continents – The Secret of India's Vitality

All great cultures are marked by a 'seeking' which is unique to them. This seeking rests on an 'intuition' of the universe, whose secrets it tries to unravel.

India has such an 'intuition'. One that has persisted through time. What is this 'intuition'?

That Reality is One. It is an indivisible fact of Conscious Existence. Existence, of which Consciousness is the very essence. It casts itself in 'forms' of its own substance... by the action of the Force and Energy inherent in it, and by its inalienable Joy of self-expression. Thus it creates this wondrous universe.

Her way of 'seeking' has also been unique... To Know That, by knowing which all is known!

To know this One indivisible Conscious Existence, the surest and most direct way is to explore this indivisible Existence as a fact of one's own being. To do so by a deep and willed penetration into one's consciousness, so as to discover all its possible dimensions and modes of action. This is a first step – as this is the most accessible source of knowledge, attained through direct experience. And existence being One – in 'essence' and in 'form' – to further extend this experience to arrive at a knowledge of the entire universe.

Thus the first question the Indian spirit puts to itself is: What is man? And, even more significantly, this is followed by: What can he 'become'?



Aster Patel introducing *The Presence of Time*

the support of the Bharat Nivas group they are now available in one volume. Other volumes will follow, and may contain contemplations on inner experiences, calligraphy, poetry, or art reproductions. All will centre on the specific role of India as the only country that has an unbroken continuity of spiritual life.

Carel

The Presence of Time,
Bharat Nivas Chronicles, Vol. I
Published by the Bharat Nivas Group
For enquiry email: cicbn@auroville.org.in

In brief

FAMC reconstitution

A study group formed by the Working Committee has disagreed with a proposal of the Chairman of the Governing Board (GB) that the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) be henceforth constituted by the GB. Instead, the group proposed that the FAMC as at present is constituted by the Residents' Assembly (RA), but is accountable to both the RA and the Governing Board. The FAMC would total 15 members and consist of 12 members selected by the RA and 3 members as ex-officio representatives of the GB: the Secretary, the Finance and Administrative Officer and an additional financial advisor. This proposal was endorsed by the Residents' Assembly of 3rd August. The meeting also requested that, prior to finalizing any amendment to be incorporated and notified in the Rules of the Auroville Foundation, these be seen and agreed to first.

Master Plan widening

A discussion has started on how Auroville can incorporate the development of the surrounding villages, some of which are located within the city area, into its Master Plan. Issues of concern that are being studied include how to allocate space within the Master Plan for village expansion, business parks and recreation. Once the village panchayat elections are over, a process of engagement will begin to assess the needs and critical resources that are common to both the villages and Auroville.

APDC stopped

The Auroville Planning and Development Council APDC has ceased functioning from October 1st, 2006. The members of the Vision 2012 team have been asked to see if it is possible to create one planning body instead of the present two (Auroville's Future and the APDC). The Auroville Vision 2012 team has meanwhile conducted discussions with Aurovilians who have been engaged in various aspects of the work over the years and has made an initial assessment of the human resources, optimal structure and process agreements that are essential for Auroville's planning.

Central Fund Management

The FAMC is studying the reorganization of the Economy Group, a subgroup of the FAMC, which manages the Central Fund budgets, Aurovillian maintenances, and coordinates with Services that receive financial support from the Central Fund. More active members would be welcome, particularly from the Services. There needs to be further consideration of how the role of monitoring and distributing maintenances to Aurovilians is coordinated.

Housing survey

Starting on October 15th, representatives of the Housing Service will be visiting each house in Auroville to obtain information for its data bank. The survey will last for 6 months.

Kalsang's story

Kalsang is caretaker of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. She was a Tibetan refugee who joined Auroville when she was only seventeen.

Kalsang was busy arranging flowers for a visiting delegation of Tibetan monks when I entered the pavilion. Stocky and strong, she is very different from the tiny colourful ammas who were helping her. Together with her partner Tenzin Namgyal and her three year old daughter Tenzin Jangchup, Kalsang has made the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture her home. She is in charge of organizing events and the maintenance of the place.

Dianna went to visit her to ask her how she came to Auroville and what it is like living in a Pavilion. Seated in her office surrounded by pictures of the Dalai Lama and Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and with her little three-year-old daughter Jangchup sitting on her knee, Kalsang told her story.

The flight from Tibet

"In 1983, after the Chinese had invaded Tibet, my father carried me and my twin brother and sister to safety over the Himalayas. He left us at Dharamsala then walked back to Tibet. I did not see him again for 24 years. Two years ago I went up to the Indian-Tibetan, now Chinese, border with my daughter to meet him. It was a very strange experience. I hardly recognized him as he looked so old. He did not look how I had imagined he would look and I felt very confused and emotional. He looked at my three-year-old daughter and said that I was her age when he carried me out of Tibet in a basket.

"We were sent to the Tibetan Village Children's School which was a boarding school and very traditionally run, all books and rules. No one ever explained to us why we were living there. I had no idea until someone showed us pictures of Tibet one day, and I realized that that was where I had come from. I often felt very lonely and isolated at school. I always felt sad not having a mother or father in India, especially during the holidays when the other children's parents used to come and take them away and I was always left behind.

"In 1989 the best moment of my life happened when the French couple who had been sponsoring us for 13 years suddenly appeared at the school. They turned up in the classroom, just like that, and I was so proud of them and showed them around the school. I finally felt I had a connection with someone. These wonderful people are still in contact with me and visited Auroville in 2001. I just hope one day I will be able to repay them by helping other Tibetan children as they helped me."

Training in Auroville

"One day when I was 17, a lady called Anne who came from Auroville appeared at our school. She explained that two places for vocational training were being offered by Auroville, one in gardening and the other in cooking. I remembered the Dalai Lama talking to us and saying we should try to live simply, so the gardening course interested me. All I knew of South India was that it was a place that was very hot, and where the people were very dark and ate off banana leaves



Kalsang with three-year-old daughter Jangchup

while sitting on the ground. I decided to take up the challenge and eventually was chosen to do the course.

"I will never forget the day I left Dharamsala: it was the 11th July, 1994. The train journey was very long and it was the beginning of a year of homesickness. I was put in the Kottakarai guest house and waited for my training to begin but nothing happened. I felt neglected and deeply regretted having come all this way. I did not realize at that time I had come from a school where we were spoon-fed everything, and never had to make any decisions for ourselves. I just did not know there was another way of doing things. My English was poor and I had little confidence and no friends. An "International Community" had sounded so good, but I did not see any training programmes or classrooms where I could learn my new trade. I was just left to discover things for myself. After a few days of just sitting around I asked someone where I should go to start my training and they suggested I go to the Matrimandir nursery. It took me a long time to find it amongst all the trees, and I was shy to ask people: Tibetans are not a pushy people, it is not in their nature to be forward. I pretended to be a

visitor till someone asked me what I was doing and finally Martin, who was in charge with the nursery, got me organized. There never was any training programme; I just did odd jobs like compost-making and I was very disappointed. I had thought I would eventually get a certificate and go back to Dharamsala but this did not happen."

Meeting the Dalai Lama

"One day something happened that changed my life. Several young Tibetans had come to Auroville to learn about ferrocement and compressed-earth brick-making and then used the technique very successfully in their Tibetan settlement in South India. I went to visit them for the Kalachakra initiation and was fortunate enough to have an audience with the Dalai Lama. He looked at me directly and said, "What are you doing in India?" "Living in Auroville," I replied. "That is wonderful. We need Tibetans to work for the Tibetan Pavilion," he said. I suddenly realized that Auroville is where I should be, where I can be of use. This was a turning point in my life and I decided to forget the past and dedicate myself to the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. This would be the place where I could fulfil my dream of helping

young Tibetans and being like a Tibetan mother to them.

"French Claude and his Indian wife Abha, who provide the energy behind the Tibetan Pavilion, became like my family. It was so good to be able to share my difficult moments and my hopes and dreams with them. One day they suggested my family move to the Pavilion and live there as caretakers. I had been living in Aspiration, which I loved. It was difficult to leave and move to the Tibetan Pavilion and start all over again in a new and rather isolated place.

"We came here in 2001 and before Jangchup, my baby arrived, we enjoyed being here a lot. We used to go to the courses which are run here and had time to talk and help people. Now, with a very lively three-year-old running around the building, things are very different and often difficult. When we run a course I have to try and keep her quiet, and she cannot invite her friends to come here as there would be even more noise. People knock at our door day and night with enquiries about the guest house and I often work an eighteen hour day and get really tired and bad tempered.

"My dream is to have a little house outside the Pavilion where we can live as a family; I am sure it will happen one day but now the priority is to finish the building. Since Claude fell ill last year even more work has fallen on our shoulders; he now does the accounts and we take care of everything else. The only money we get is from the guest house, which is seasonal and unpredictable. We do not get a single paisa from the Central Fund and I refuse to take one from the Pavilion as it needs every paisa it can get.

"I worry about money a lot. I try to economize, but it gets stressful. This week there is no money to pay the ammas..."

Inner work

"When I went back to Dharamsala a few years ago and met some of the friends I had gone to school with I could not help comparing our lives. Most of them had degrees and good jobs and nice houses and here I was with nothing in comparison. Then I thought that Auroville does not give certificates or degrees; the good behaviour of a human being is his degree. I saw that I was doing far more than my friends by doing what the Dalai Lama advised and dedicating myself to the completion of the Tibetan Pavilion.

"Sometimes I feel a lot of pain in my heart and I can't sleep with worrying. People think I am rude and serious and shout in three languages, but I just get frustrated and overburdened. I have learned to change myself over these last four years. Before, I expected people to help me and was disappointed and angry when they didn't. That was the cause of a lot of pain but now I have given that idea up. I have stopped comparing myself with others and just try to do everything as sincerely as possible. That is all I can do, that is all anyone can do. I am very much a Buddhist and Mother said we all were very much connected and involved with learning to be compassionate. And Auroville is a wonderful place to practice this."

As told to Dianna

PEOPLE

"Auroville doesn't need me or anybody. It has its own way."

The thoughts of a long-term Aurovillian who now lives in the West

Croquette and his wife, Yanne, came to Auroville in the mid 1970s where he soon became involved in theatre and education. In 1992 he left with his family and now lives in Paris. However, he continues to be closely involved with Auroville. He was President of AVI France, he gives talks about Auroville and he continues to visit the community twice a year.

Auroville Today spoke to him on a recent visit.

Auroville Today: You've just had a book published about your life in Auroville.

My whole life in Auroville is in that book. The background is interesting. When I give talks about Auroville in France I give the basis - The Dream, The Charter and one or two other points - but after that I



Croquette

speak about my personal experience of living in the community. One day, a lady who worked for cultural radio came up to me and said, 'This is very interesting. Why don't you write a book about it?'

I went home and sat in front of

my computer. For perhaps one week nothing came. Then I had an intuition. I would use Mother's Dream as the framework because it was The Dream that first brought me to Auroville. So I began "There should be somewhere on earth..." and it came, easily. I wrote the book in three months.

During the writing, I discovered something very interesting: my entire life had been a preparation for coming to Auroville. For example, my father was a teacher and he told me 'Life is the school, you have to go to school all your life.' This is Mother's 'unending education'! And then I've always wanted human unity - even when I was an actor I was more interested in doing something with a community of people than just acting.

When I finished the book the original publisher was no longer able to publish it. But ten years later one of Yanne's editors (Yanne, my wife, writes novels) read it, liked it and

now it's published under the title of *Auroville, un aller simple* (Auroville, a one-way ticket?). Auroville Press International may also publish it.

The late 1970s and 1980s were a difficult time. First there was the struggle with the Sri Aurobindo Society, then there were internal conflicts within the community. How was it for you during that time?

I smiled all the time. You had to take it humorously otherwise you would have left.

Have the issues, the conflicts, of those days been worked out?

Materially, there has been a lot of progress in Auroville.

Psychologically, I believe that the pioneers had to fight, to struggle more than today, because the envi-

ronment was much more difficult. But has something been worked out? Just the other day I went to my first Auroville meeting in ten years and it's the same, it's the same people still doing the same thing!

But I don't want to intervene. In the past, I watched people coming from outside and telling us what we should be doing in Auroville. This really upset me, so I don't want to be like one of them.

When you meet someone in France who wants to come to Auroville, what do you say?

I don't believe it is my job to 'prepare' people for Auroville because everyone has their own way of responding to it. I tell them, 'You cannot understand Auroville if you don't go there. When you come back, we'll talk about it.' I never push people to come here.

(continued on page 5)

The Solitude experiment

Natural farming is the way in Solitude. The community recently branched out, providing organic home-grown lunches. Joanna pays a visit.

Krishna removes a tangled cover of mulch to reveal green sprouts of young rice. I'm on a non-tillage, experimental plot at Solitude farm. This rice is growing in a soil which has not been ploughed for two years. "I've been trying to grow rice

"Fukuoka, the author of *One Straw Revolution*, is one of my major inspirations. I see a deep parallel to the most ancient Vedic teachings in his book because he's teaching about non-duality. He came up with a system of farming where you don't have to plough, you don't have to add compost, you don't have to weed – you

opposed to going to university and gaining knowledge to get a specialized job."

He started Solitude in January, 1996 together with a group of young people. He's the only founding member left. Today seven people are living on the farm and three others work there daily.

Time for flowers

"If you want to create a new flower, you have to select two parent plants, take a cutting of one plant and attach it to the female plant, then you cover it so no insects can come. Like this you can create new flowers."

Freddie has a green thumb. He has managed to grow flowers that had previously refused to flower on Auroville's soil. *Unostentatious certitude* is what Mother called this one. In English it's called a 'balloon flower', explains Freddie. "This is the first generation that bloomed from the seeds I posted from Japan. And this one," he points at a tiny flower. "refused to grow at first and collapsed because of fungal diseases. Now it's blossoming. The Mother's name for it is *Blessing*."

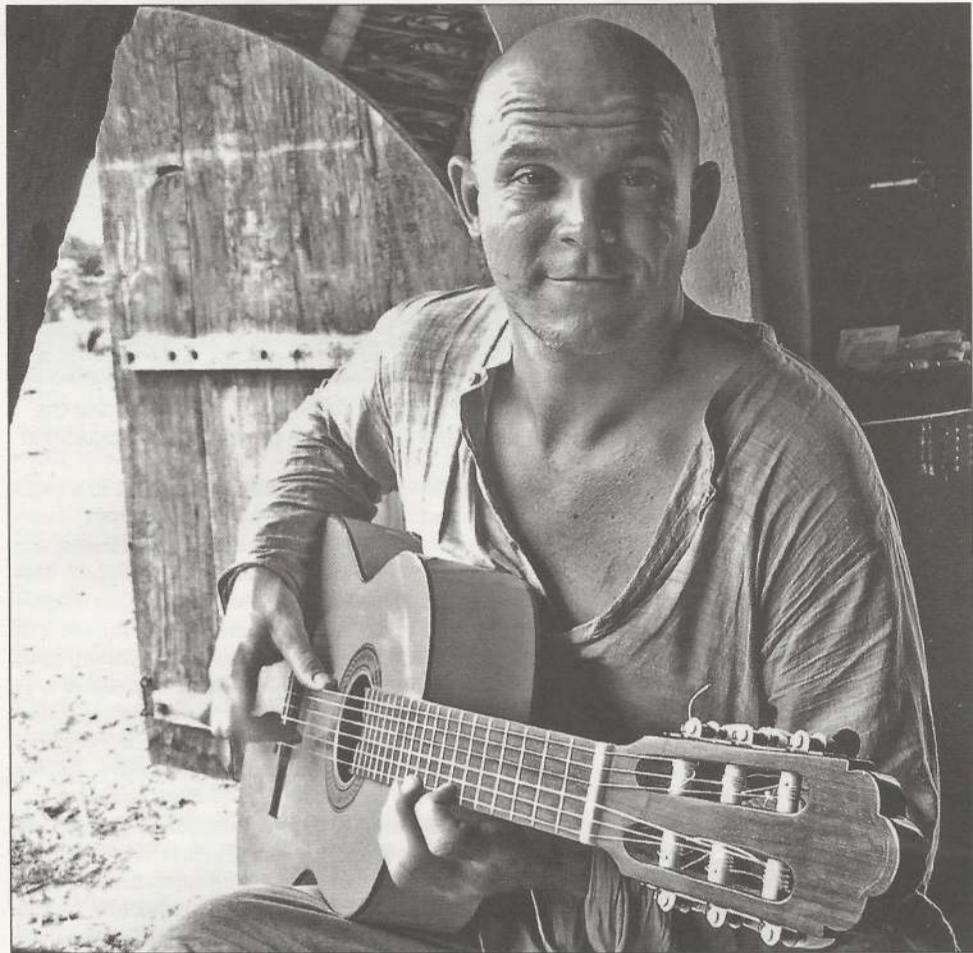
Freddie is returning to Auroville after twenty years and he finds the environment favorable for creative work with flowers. "During the pioneering stage the climatic conditions were too extreme for flowers. Summers were like a hair-drier. But now that the forest has grown and there is shade and coolness you can bring in plants which you only dreamt of before."

As well as managing Solitude with Krishna, he also works at Matrimandir. He has started a nursery where he grows and cross-pollinates flowers from all over the world which he intends to plant on the farm and introduce elsewhere in Auroville. "Beauty is my driving force. There should be an aspect of beauty in everything we do", he says. "Flowers, like people, add to the beauty and diversity of the place."

Farmer with a guitar

Krishna is sitting in the window of his keet hut, plucking his guitar. "People, relationships, working with other musicians inspires my music, I'm working on a new CD at the moment."

Is it easy to combine farming with music? He shows his calloused hands. "It's not easy to play guitar with farmer's hands," he says. "But I'd love to bring more balance into my life, to possibly have half a day when I'm studying and practising music. However, I'm very fortunate I am not carrying Solitude all by myself. I live with people who also take responsibility for the place."



Krishna: farmer with a guitar

in this very natural way for the last four years now and slowly I'm starting to get some results."

For some, six acres of land may not seem very much for a farm but, according to Krishna, it's more than enough to be sustainable. Krishna is one of the founders of Solitude community and its present steward. Besides experiments in non-tillage techniques, Solitude also has a dairy and an orchard with over eighteen different varieties of fruit trees.

This summer the community started offering organic lunches four days a week. Ninety five percent of the ingredients are grown on the farm. "It's going very well", says Krishna. "Sometimes only a few people come for lunch, sometimes up to forty. It's a very good opportunity for us to share good food and to stress the importance of eating organically. It's also a way of getting people a little bit involved in a farm and giving them an insight into another lifestyle." Often the lunch-goers buy vegetables from the farm or sign up for a 'basket scheme' whereby they receive a basket of vegetables regularly. The basket is made up of whatever is currently available on the farm: grains, vegetables, fruits, sometimes oil, peanut butter and jam. "If there is really a big surplus, we supply to Pour Tous or the Solar Kitchen."

But it seems that global warming is having a very serious effect on the farm. This year the monsoon is late. "It's quite catastrophic," says Krishna, "for those who grow crops in a traditional way. We've lost at least half of the peanut crop and we haven't been able to sow millets yet, both of which are the mainstay of our local agriculture. And yet, surely, we'll find ways in which we can continue in a simple way".

Inspired by nature

"We want to live in a harmonious, gentle way with nature as much as we can", says Krishna.

don't have to do anything! Nature is supreme – you leave her be. It's man's interference, he says, that has destroyed nature.

"I had a very strong intuition when I was nineteen which I just followed," says Krishna, when asked to tell his story. He had been a student in a Krishnamurti school in England for four years when he heard about Auroville and he immediately knew that this was the place he would come to live.

"I was very much inspired by the Mother's Dream and by Sri Aurobindo's writings. In my last year of school I had started to work with my hands in the school vegetable garden. I felt that by working with nature I could cultivate my sensitivity as



One of the keet-roofed huts in the Solitude community



Solitude's mission statement: growing organic and indigenous produce

John is a volunteer who serves in the restaurant, milks the cows and works in the field. "When I'm out in the fields with the Tamil workers and they are singing, I feel I'm in India. They are so good at what they are doing. They've grown up close to nature. I struggle with something for hours, and they come to help and do it excellently within a few seconds."

The floating population of volunteers like John increases during the season, when up to twenty people can be staying at Solitude. "We only take those who want to work and are serious about committing themselves full-time and joining in our activities," says Krishna. "They bring skills, enthusiasm, knowledge, goodwill, heart. All those things are invaluable; you can't buy that with money. I've had



Gardener Freddy; in love with flowers

doctors come here, I've had a princess from north India and sons of the owners of massive multinational corporations come here. I have had so many youngsters from universities here – they all want to get back to the land! They all want to live in community; they all want to have a relationship with nature. These are the key words with the younger generation these days."

What money can't buy

"One day I would like to see some sort of school happening in Solitude. I envisage a larger community and a wider diversity of activities, a place where children can come to participate and learn from what's going on. It's not something that is going to happen tomorrow, but I am almost sure that it will happen."

"Success for me is when there are people here and everyone has a sense of meaning in what they are doing. When we are eating our own food and slowly, slowly providing for a larger circle of people. Then I feel we are on the right track."

"Our society in Auroville seems to be becoming more and more consumeristic. People's needs are growing, money is of such importance in Auroville. But look at Auroville's forest, that forest is something so unique because of people's sweat, blood, faith and enthusiasm! It's spirit that builds a place. That's what creation is about, incarnating ones love and passion. It's not about finishing something. It's an ongoing process, that's what I very strongly feel."

Joanna

(continued from page 4)

During your present visit you showed a film about a new theory of evolution. What is your particular interest in this?

I am not a scientist, I am more a dreamer and philosopher, but whenever someone talks about evolution I become interested. Some time ago a palaeontologist, Anne Dambricourt, phoned me in Paris. She said wanted to meet people connected to Auroville and to Sri Aurobindo.

She gave us a DVD about her work called 'Homo Futurus'. When I watched it I thought it was fantastic. In brief, she believes that the motor of evolution is not simply the environment, as Darwin believed, but also something inside us. She's identified a bone at the base of the skull – the *sphenoid* – which has changed in shape over man's evolution. It appears to have been influential in our standing upright, in the development of the brain and larynx and in the narrowing of the distance between the eyes. She calls this the

'inside story' of evolution.

At the same time, I've been studying quantum theory. It's very complex, but I know that there is a link between matter at the quantum level and Sri Aurobindo and Auroville. It's to do with the fact that matter is no longer seen as inert. At that level it is live, dynamic; everything is changing every moment. And what we perceive as solid is actually empty, its strength comes from its dynamism.

This is very interesting, this speaks to me, and when I come here I talk about it to the students (not the

adults, they're too closed!). I tell it like a story. I don't tell them, 'This is the truth' but 'Here is something interesting. If you want to know more, go ahead.'

And the future?

I don't think about it, I live very much in the moment. I'm happy in Auroville, I'm happy in Paris when I meet people like Anne Dambricourt. I don't believe Auroville needs me, or anybody. It has its own way. When people want to 'save' Auroville by

doing this or that, I believe it is a mistake. But let them try it. Auroville will go on, regardless.

The main thing is to be happy. I want to tell all the anguished people in Auroville, 'Don't worry, don't be scared. Take whatever opportunity presents itself and go for it.' It reminds me of those fantastic words of Sri Aurobindo which I have always tried to follow. 'Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected'.

From an interview by Alan

The dharma of building temples

The new pyramidal Sri Karneshwar Nataraja temple on the beach at Kizh Puthupet in Pudhukuppam, 10 kilometres north of Auroville, was inaugurated by Dr. Karan Singh and his wife Smt. Yasho Rajya Lakshmi on September 30th.

It's well known that Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, is the son of the last Maharaja of Kashmir. What is less known is that building temples, in his words, "Is part of my family responsibility." His great-grandfather, Ranhir Singh, who ruled from 1860 to about 1880, has become known as one of the greatest temple builders in Indian history. He built more than a 100 Hindu shrines and temples, mostly in Kashmir. Amongst them is the Raghunath temple, dedicated to Sri Rama, Vishnu's eighth incarnation. "We Singhs are descendants of Sri Rama, who is our traditional family deity," says Dr. Karan Singh. "The Raghunath temple complex, the largest in North India, houses the samadhis of the Singh dynasty."

Times have changed and building large temples has become impossible. "But the impulse remains," says Dr. Karan Singh. In the Raghunath temple complex he built the first Shiva Nataraja

temple in North India, which is now known as the Karanishwara temple. Later he conceived the idea of combining the two greatest symbols of the East – Siva Nataraja, the Lord of the Cosmic Dance, and the Pyramid – in a single structure, with the statue positioned exactly in the pyramid's centre.

A first attempt to materialize this concept was made in the USA, in the Siva Nataraja Shrine of Swami Satchidananda's ashram in Yogaville, Virginia. Recollects Dr. Karan Singh, "Apparently by chance I'd acquired a magnificent seven-foot high image of Nataraja, and an architectural design had been prepared. But I couldn't find a suitable place. In the middle of 1989, when I was Indian Ambassador to the United States, I happened to visit Swami Satchidananda. The main centre of the ashram is the unique LOTUS (Light of Truth Universal Shrine) Temple, a structure designed in the form of a huge lotus. Inside there are alcoves dedicated to all the world's great religions. This is an Interfaith temple, represent-

ing in tangible terms the great Vedantic insight that the truth is one, although it may be expressed in many ways. I mentioned the project to him. He replied that Lord Nataraja was his own Ishta Devata – chosen Deity – and that he would be delighted if the shrine were to be located in his ashram. And so it happened. The statue in the shrine is surrounded with glass on all four sides."

Yet, the shrine was not built in the form of a pyramid. That unique temple was manifested in 2000 when Dr. Karan Singh, together with his wife, inaugurated the first Karneshwar Nataraja temple at Kizh Puthupet. The temple had a steel frame covered with fibreglass panels.

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 destroyed this temple. Dr. Karan Singh then asked the Auroville Earth Institute to design and construct a new temple. Aurovilian Satprem Mad'ni took up the job. He based the pyramid temple on the dimensions of the great pyramid of Egypt and oriented it exactly towards the magnetic north to generate maximum energy. In accordance with Indian tradition, there are three paths for *pradakshina*, the ritual circumambulation of the statue of the deity: one within the sanctum, one immediately around the temple and one around the complex itself. The entrance faces south, in line with the Indian tradition of Shiva as Dakshinamurthy, the Teacher of the South. Says Satprem: "The architecture of the temple is based on the significance of numbers as given by The Mother. There are seven steps that lead to the temple, seven being the number which stands for realisation. The height of the pedestal on which the statue of Lord Nataraj stands is such that the distance from the third eye to the base of the pyramid is one-third – in doing so, the most powerful energy of the pyramid is concentrated on the third-eye level." The two and a half metre deep foundation and the building itself have been made with compressed stabilized earth blocks and stabilised earth concrete, which, according to Satprem, will result in an earthquake and tsunami-resistant building.

"The design of the temple is an indication that we envisage a different type of usage," says Dr. Karan Singh. "Contrary to other temples in India,

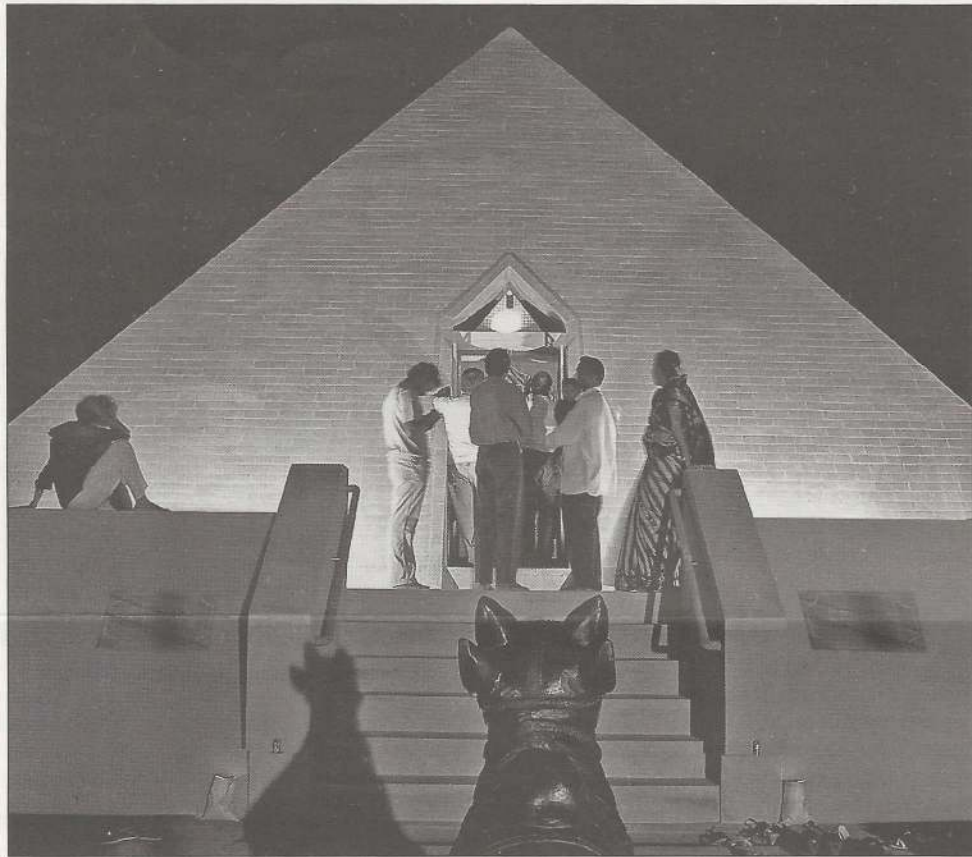
this temple will probably not be used in a traditional way with daily pujas. It is a symbol of secularism, where all people, not only Hindus, can come, enter the sanctum and meditate." This interfaith approach is close to Dr. Karan Singh's heart. He also chairs the Temple of Understanding and the Rumi Foundation, apart from the Auroville Foundation. "Hinduism is in some ways the most appropriate religion to initiate interfaith dialogue," he says. "The Temple of Understanding's guideline is to involve as many religions as possible and promote harmony and understanding, not a synthesis." The interfaith movement simply means that instead of being in a confrontational attitude with each other, the great religions of the world make a deliberate attempt to try to understand the essentials of all religions and to highlight those common elements like compassion, love, harmony, fellowship and brotherhood.

Dr. Karan Singh is well aware that The Mother, after she had announced the descent of the Supermind in matter, has stated that the age of religions is now over. Yet he feels that it does make sense to create more temples. Says he, "I am well aware that The Mother has also said that there will be no religions in Auroville. Yet, a vast number of people are still deeply rooted in their religion. Temples like this one may serve as a help; for there are multiple paths to the divine."

Carel



Dr. Karan Singh and Smt. Yasho Rajya Lakshmi during the musical evening the night before the temple's inauguration



The Sri Karneshwar Nataraja at night, burning like gold

COMMUNITY

Roy's Boarding

Roy's Boarding, as it is affectionately known in New Creation, is home to ten village children who have come from very poor or difficult families in Kulapalayam village.

Roy is an Englishman who came to New Creation School eighteen years ago. Seeing the desperate need of some of the local village children, he built a house in a quiet corner of New Creation Community which could be a home for himself and up to nine children. For the last 18 years this has been known as Roy's Boarding. He funded it with his pension and the rent from his house in England. Donations also came from sympathetic visitors and he was able to find sponsors for several of the children.

Roy himself, though he had no experience of teaching, eventually became the headmaster of New Creation School. He was loved and respected by all.

Three years ago an old rugby injury on Roy's knee flared up and he underwent surgery in a Pondicherry hospital. Unfortunately, the knee did not respond well and he had to return to London and have three more operations. For reasons which have never been explained, the Indian immigration authorities refused Roy re-entry into India and he now lives in England while his case is being reviewed.

The responsibility of running the boarding house now falls on Tixon, a young Tamil man who has been living in the house since he was six. He is supported by Roy's Boarding Support Group, consisting of some Aurovilians who do not live and work in New Creation.

Roy's Boarding is tucked away at the back of New Creation. The house was painted by the boys last year. Outside, chickens and a pet goat roam the garden.

I asked Tixon how the house was running in Roy's absence. "Well, we obviously miss Roy a lot. He was like a father to us, but we have had to learn to manage on our own. As the oldest, the responsibility falls on my shoulders and there is an awful lot to manage, but Ramalingam, the art teacher at the school, moved in two years ago and is a great help. The four oldest girls are in the process of leaving and we are very proud of their achievements: Ramya and Manjula are doing a degree in commerce, Vanitha is studying for a degree in maths and Sathya for an English Literature degree. Selvam has just finished a



The seven youngsters of Roy's Boarding, together with Ramalingam (back left) and Tixon (back, right)

two-year apprenticeship in farming at Buddha Garden and is now working full-time on an Auroville farm." Tixon himself works with computers at the Town Hall and is doing a computer-animation course.

Sathya told me how happy she had been living in Roy's house and what a big change it will be for her when she leaves next year to start a teacher-training course. "It has always

been like a big Indian family here," she told me. The older children help the younger ones and there is always a lot of give and take and affection. Visitors from all over the world come and stay with us and have added a new dimension to our lives and we have been able to give them an experience of living in an Indian house. I cannot imagine what my life would have been like if I had not been lucky

enough to come to Roy's Boarding."

"We take great care in choosing the new children," says Tixon. "After the school has given its approval, the parents have to sign an official consent form in Tamil which is explained to them very carefully. The children then have a health test at the Health Centre; everything is done officially as it is a big responsibility. The new kids are usually lost for a few days but they tend to quickly settle down. We noticed they are given a lot of affection by the older children. I explain things to them five or ten times, check to see they are doing their homework and teach them the rules of the house."

While Tixon explained the state of affairs, food was bubbling on the stove. Several children were sprawled on a bed reading and doing homework, others are watching TV, the younger ones snuggled up to the big ones who have their arms around them.

There was a general air of happiness and contentment. Then huge pots were placed on the table and twelve hungry people lined up for dinner. Evidently, the rules and habits established by Roy for this large family are well kept.

Dianna

Security is improving

Efforts to develop Auroville's security are paying off.

“Violence in Auroville is not increasing,” asserts Ashatit forcefully. “The murder of Shri Arulraj, a former panchayat leader of Bommai-yarpalayam, on August 23rd has nothing to do with Auroville. It is a village affair.”

Ashatit should know. Ever since February 2004, after the brutal murder of Dutch Aurovilian Sydo van Loo, he has been active in setting up the security system of Auroville. “We created two groups: a Security Group to promote security and a Security Task Force to ensure that justice is done in the case of Sydo’s murder.” Ashatit is involved in both groups.

The Sydo murder case

So how has the Sydo murder case progressed? “Painfully slowly,” says Ashatit. “But we hope we’re at the end of the case with court proceedings now in full progress. It has been tough going. For many reasons progress in this case has been slower than anticipated.” One reason was that the first witness, Aurovilian Steve Senesac, who left for the USA, didn’t want to return to India to testify for reasons of security – he feared for his life if would return to India – family and work. It took more than twenty-three court hearings before the court allowed him to depose his testimony through video conferencing from the Indian Consulate in San Francisco. The reason was that video conferencing had never happened before in Tamil Nadu, not even in Chennai. The event drew a lot of media attention.

Another reason for the slow progress is that the defense has attempted to prevent witnesses from giving testimony. Says Ashatit, “At the end of July, for example, the defense lawyers objected to the court hearing the Village Officer – the administration officer who received, together with the police, the confessions of some of the accused. He is a very important witness. When the judge dismissed the objection, the defense lawyers appealed to the Chennai High Court. The High Court has meanwhile dismissed the appeal. But this has considerably delayed proceedings.”

An unexpected side effect of the murder case is that since then Auroville’s relationship with the Tamil Nadu police has vastly improved. “This has been a very positive experience,” says Ashatit. “The police are competent and do a very good job. The relationship is now based on mutual respect and consideration. The police have shown quite a lot of

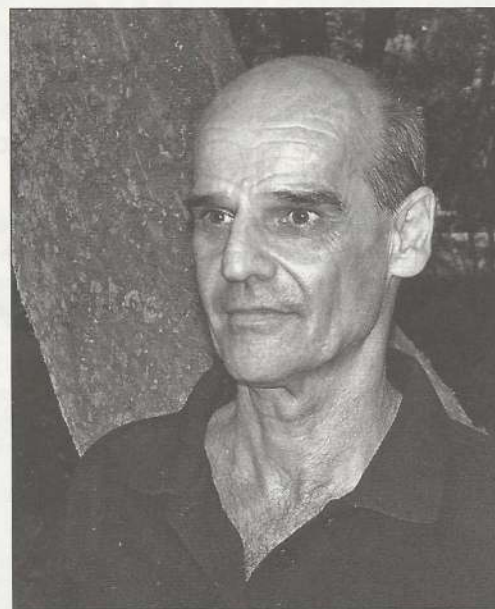
interest in Auroville and are keen to help. They also accept whatever support we can offer. They have a far too limited budget to take up all their responsibilities in the vast area where Auroville is situated. For example, we have provided cars for the witnesses to attend the court hearings in Tindivanam. One of our people has gone with the constable to each witness’s house – witnesses for and against the accused – to deliver the summons and bring him to Tindivanam. If we hadn’t done that, the witnesses might not have turned up. Another help we gave was organizing the video conference, to ensure that everything would run faultlessly.” Auroville’s assistance, so far, has cost it approximately Rs 4.5 lakhs (US \$ 10,000) – 3 lakhs of which were raised through private donations.

Promoting security

Promoting security is Ashatit’s other concern. Surprisingly, this has been a relatively easy affair. Once it became obvious that it is still too early to exclusively work with Aurovilians – the group of athletes which The Mother said should protect Auroville – hired day and night guards were employed. The day guards are provided by ‘Group 4,’ a professional security organization. The night guard consists of youth from each of the five villages that surround Auroville. Ramesh, an Aurovilian who functions as Police Liaison Officer, is in charge. “It works well,” says Ashatit. “Earlier we had all kinds of undesirable elements coming to Auroville, particularly on Sundays. The guards would call me on average twice a day to deal with difficult issues. But that has stopped. The presence of the guards has made a big difference.”

A recent addition to the work is promoting security on the beach at the Repos community. After a serious incident, the Working Committee asked the Security Group to get involved. A guard positioned at the entrance now asks visitors to identify themselves, while guards at the beach take care that Aurovilians and their guests are not pestered by itinerant salesmen or voyeurs. “Our strategy is very simple: everyone is supposed to respect the laws of the country and India has a very well-designed system of law. If people misbehave, the guards ask them to rectify their behavior or to leave. If they don’t respect their request, the guard calls us and we call the police. We have an arrangement that they will be there within 10-15 minutes,” explains Ashatit.

The Security Group’s statistics show that the



Ashatit

incidence of major issues has decreased. “In the last few months we had two burglaries, two cases of bag snatching by guys on motorbikes and one case of robbery, and that’s a big difference from the situation two years ago,” says Ashatit. “The robbery case is the more serious one, but the police have meanwhile arrested the suspects. On the whole, I am surprised with what has been achieved so far. I was expecting less in regard to the resources we have – we get a budget of approximately Rs 80,000 a month – and the geographical reality of Auroville.” The fact that the two gangs that terrorized the village at the time of the Sydo murder no longer exist has greatly contributed to this state of affairs. “The Boopalan gang has dissolved. The Manikandan gang is dismantled; its members are either in jail or on bail, or are facing other court cases,” says Ashatit. “But what worries us is that we heard that Arul was murdered by hired people from elsewhere in India – that is a new development and a big concern for the police and the villagers around. This has never happened here before.” The villages, meanwhile, are happy with the security system developed in Auroville.

There is one area in which the Security Group refuses to get involved – conflicts between Aurovilians. “We had a few incidents, and we badly burned our fingers,” says Ashatit. “So we’ve decided not to get involved in these issues, not even if the Working Committee or the Auroville Council ask us. So if you have problems with your neighbour, ask help from your friends and contact the Auroville Council, but don’t phone us!”

Carel

In brief

SEWA contribution revised

In 1994, the Small Employees Welfare Association was started to provide old-age and insurance benefits to people who are privately employed in Auroville as ammas or gardeners. It now covers about 250 employees. Employers and employees pay 12.5% of the employees income to SEWA. The fund so created can be used by the employee upon retirement or resignation or in emergency cases.

Due to a fall in income and the extension of work, SEWA has decided to increase the employers’ contribution by 2% to cover the costs of running the retirement fund.

Peace Meditation

On October 2nd, the day of Gandhi Jayanti, Auroville joined more than one million people in Sri Lanka and thousands of supporters around the world in a Universal Peace Meditation during a quiet sitting under the Banyan Tree from 4 to 5 pm. The meditation was organised by a former member of the Auroville Advisory Council, Dr. Ariyaratne of the Sri Lankan Sarvodaya Movement.

Auroville exhibition in Montreal, Canada



AVI Quebec hosted an exhibition on Auroville at the Cultural Centre of the City of Montréal during October and November.

Eco-cities in the making

Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi, member of the Auroville International Advisory Council, gave a talk on Eco-cities in the making in China, Brazil, Libya, Malaysia and the opportunities and challenges for Auroville.

Homes for the Soul calendar



A calendar featuring houses in Auroville designed by non-architects has been published. The calendar shows what non-professionals have built, using mainly organic and natural construction materials including wood, mud, grass, stabilised earth bricks and fired bricks. Most of the houses have sustainable energy systems such as solar. Profit from sales will go to build a cultural centre in a coastal village in Tamil Nadu. More info: lilli@auroville.org.in or cosmic@auroville.org.in

AVI ‘live’

On Saturday October 14th, AurovilleRadio broadcast a live interaction between Aurovilians and the participants of the Auroville International (AVI) meeting in Formia, Italy. This was the first ever “live broadcast” from an AVI conference to Auroville, and vice versa. The interaction started with Joy and her team chanting Auroville’s mantra from AurovilleRadio’s workstation in the Town Hall conference room.

CELEBRATION

Celebrating the Goddess within

It’s way past sunset and the sky is inky-black. In stark contrast, the SAWCHU building is spilling out a golden light. A large group of people, mostly women, sit in a circle around the Garba, a filigreed mud pot placed upside-down over a burning lamp, singing odes to the Mother Goddess. Around them other women move in hypnotic whorls to the drumbeats from the dholak, dancing to an inner rhythm, faces dripping with sweat and concentration.

Krishna is a French Aurovilian but tonight, dressed in a flamboyant ghagra (wide skirt) and a mirror-studded choli (blouse), she looks a Gujarati belle through and through, straight out of a Bollywood movie set. She is not the only one. Around her are similarly dressed Aurovilian women, Indian and Western, who have donned sequinned skirts, blouses that reveal enticing backs, and costume jewellery – outfits that are only worn on festive occasions. All are singing, drumming or dancing together. The last two nights of Navaratri have burst upon the Auroville scene bringing an unusual riot of vibrancy and colour.

The nine nights of Navaratri that celebrate the battle of the Goddess Durga against the Asura Naraka before she slays him on the tenth day,

Vijayadasami or ‘The Day of Victory’, is celebrated in Hindu homes all over India. While each region has its own way of celebration, in two parts of the country (Tamil Nadu and Gujarat) the festivities are uniquely feminine-centric. Both regions celebrate the Goddess within; during the nine days, the women dedi-

cate their activities to the Goddess, specifically through cooking and offering the food to the Divine.

In the Dravidian South the women indulge in the bommai kolu, or doll exhibition. For the full nine days, terracotta figurines of goddesses, gods and auspicious symbols are displayed at a prominent place in the house.



PHOTO MARIO

A swirling dancer celebrates Navaratri

Women are invited to visit each other’s homes and receive the Goddess’ blessing and prasad.

In Gujarat, the celebrations are more social with Garba dancing (around the pot) and Dandiya dancing (with sticks). The latter represents the fight between the Goddess and the asura. And here the men join in.

It’s now past 10 p.m. The women, after the strenuous garba, have refreshed themselves with power syrup and fruit salad, and are ready for the men to join in. The two groups form concentric circles, the women in the outer circle. Everyone has a pair of colourful dandiya (sticks). The music begins and the groups start moving to the pulsating beat. The men move clockwise, the women counter-clockwise; this way, every man meets every woman. The men leap; their movements are vigorous and lively. The women skim lightly, with grace. Sticks click and clash. It is delightful to watch.

This is the third time that Aurovilian women from Gujarat and Maharashtra have organized the celebration of Navaratri in Auroville. Earlier, these were more modest gatherings beneath the peepul tree nearby the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. But now the celebrations have blossomed into a richer gathering, celebrating one of India’s festivals with the Auroville family.

Priya Sundaravalli

Welcome to Wellville

In the land of ayurveda and meditation there are many places where one can go to recover one's health. The Institute of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences is just 8 hours away in Bangalore. Many Aurovilians have visited INYS and can tell you something about wellbeing, wellness and enemas. Julietta is one of them.

I heard about INYS from Mauna, a Dutch long-time Aurovillian mainly involved in communication. She returned from her trip rejuvenated and enthusiastic and recalls: "During the last 20 years, INYS has often meant for me a yearly break, an oasis, an open space to recover from Auroville's unceasing pressures, the intensity, work, the hassles and the total involvement. It has helped me immensely in maintaining a balanced stance throughout these years."

"I don't need that" I thought and continued with my unhealthy lifestyle – eating fatty, oily foods, drinking the wrong drinks, sleeping late with little exercise, if any. But the call kept reaching my ears as more and more people talked about the Institute, so finally I decided to check it out. I booked for 10 days and made it through the whole period.

My Indian friend Shama, who works as an architect in Auroville, came along. Different people go for different reasons. And though the majority of them are there for weight loss, a small percentage are there for the good of mind and soul. "I just needed to get away from work pressure and detoxify," says Shama. "Not an alcohol or drug detoxification but a stress detoxification. Emotional and physical stress does affect the body – though you usually notice it much later," she adds.

Shama has no problems with excess kilos and was told to eat a lot. I had to lose some extra pounds, so my meagre diet consisted of fruit and salad.

A healthy mind in a healthy body

Although INYS does not claim to be a place for losing weight, but 'to fight diseases and attain physical, men-

tal and emotional health', one could see many overweight people walking the scenic two kilometre fitness path alongside the lake before breakfast and after dinner. Health problems are tackled by the doctors on duty who see each patient once a day. They prescribe individual diets, exercises and special treatments like massage, sauna, various baths or mudpacks. Physiotherapists take care of your back or joint pain and psychotherapists help with your mental troubles.



The ten-minute laughing session is recommended

You can have acupuncture and be connected to machines that put new energy into your stressed body and brain. There is a gym and there are recreational games for the evenings. The early morning Yogic kriyas (*Jalaneti*, *Sutraneti*, *Vastra Dhauti* – cleansing of eyes, nose and throat) and the *pranayama* and *yogasana* sessions twice a day are compulsory.

Joy and fun is also a definite help on the path to health. The ten-minute laughter session is recommended, but you can escape it if you feel embarrassed about laughing like crazy. Two Ukrainian Aurovilians, Shakti and Svetlana enjoyed it a lot. What they didn't like was me taking their photos when their faces looked so funny.

Fasting and Enemas

One of the books on Naturopathy explains its functioning as follows:

'Healing comes from within the body itself. There are self-curative forces which are inherent in the human body working towards health and healing. In fact, a Naturopath provides required guidance, whereas it is the duty of patient to pave the way towards health by self-control in diet and exercise.' Following this belief, disease at the Institute is treated with fasting and enemas and not with drugs and medicine – as the book puts it, drugging is like whipping an already exhausted horse.

The Institute of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences was founded in 1978 by Dr. Jindal from Jindal Aluminium Ltd. Inspired by his faith in the Radhaswami religion, he established a place for health and healing for the poor and as a service for suffering human beings.

It is not the Institute's policy to get people to come back repeatedly. The Institute encourages people to come and find help for certain illnesses, and to learn to help themselves at home. As a general guideline, admittance is refused for single females under 25, people with serious diseases or addictions and first-time patients above the age of 70. Housewives are requested to come with their husbands.

Make sure you book way in advance to get a slot in your desired time period. And if you have problems adjusting to rules and regulations, be aware that there are a lot of those. For more info contact www.naturecure-inys.org

Three days of juice fasting and regular bowel movements are the starting point for future wellbeing. The highlights of the treatment are the three colon hydrotherapy sessions, of which not everybody will become a fan. Imagine someone sticking a hose up your bottom, pumping water continuously inside until out comes that ancient, settled deposit. But once it's done, you feel as if you are floating on air. After that experience you think twice before going to the next pizzeria, ordering the large salami special and washing it down with a chilled beer.

Experiences of second-timers

Françoise, a French Aurovillian who works as a psychotherapist at Pitanga, was there for the second time and had a lot to share: "I came mainly for cleansing but I will certainly be happy to lose some kilos! I appreciate their food a lot. It is organically grown in the compound and prepared in a simple way." The first time Françoise went on her own and was a bit lost. "All these bodily exercises were overwhelming. But being here is also about giving up and letting go. Once I realised that, things got better. I was surprised to enjoy yoga, pranayama and, above all, massages."

She has her own theory about health. "It would be good to do a cleansing before the hot season starts. This sizzling Indian climate makes the liver work overtime and we have to be very careful about the state of this precious organ." Françoise marvels at the overall cleanliness of the Institute. "It is amazing", she says, "from the kitchen to the treatment section and even outdoors. All the treatments are so nicely done with care and love; people here really want you to be

well." She hopes that a lot of people hear about the place and try it themselves. "After all it's fun to have your whole body covered with mud – it's so cooling. I wouldn't do the colon hydrotherapy again, though," she says smiling.

Small room or big house?

INYS has a few free wards for people with low income. Mauna managed to get accommodated in one of these low-priced rooms and says gratefully: "The fact that it's even economically feasible for Aurovillian 'honorary voluntary workers' to spend a few weeks here is an absolute blessing."

At first Françoise was a bit shocked by the different prices. "There are simple double rooms, costly rooms and very costly accommodation. Now they are even building 'the supernest' where one hardly needs to leave the room anymore: the jacuzzi is built in and you can get all the treatment in your own private space." But these 'supernests' will subsidise and make possible the free ward concept. And although everybody is paying a different price, people are treated in the same, comforting way.

In spite of expensive accommodation and the luxury of peace and tranquillity in these hectic times, INYS doesn't want to be used as a holiday resort. As they say in the dining room: "You won't find the food as palatable as at home. For this any five-star hill station will do!"

As my bowels are still in shock, I will continue eating my home-cooked soup, desist from tea and coffee and attend every possible sports session in Auroville. Wellville is on your doorstep.

Julietta

REFLECTION

The dysfunctional cheer

Of course we are dysfunctional. Look at the hand we were dealt. We aren't mono-racial like Iceland or Japan, we aren't monocultural like Finland, we didn't join forces to make money or form a business... we are bloody idealists!

We were attracted to Auroville by very lofty ideals. Not simple things like hunting and gathering, is it? Not like planning how to increase sales or plant more rice. We didn't just stay at home with our family and enlarge the things we knew... we came to a place that attracted the most radical and rare... the Seeker.

We came wide-eyed from all directions to something unlike any before it and, oh yes, without an instruction manual. We were brought together because of a powerful attraction that caused people to leave home and burn bridges and join this small project the earth needed. Now throw in the fact that the founders could SEE and we can't, and oh, by the way, these founders... they encouraged diversity, and building a city... not a construction company like any before.

These founders, the project's CEO and Her partner, have vacated the physical plane years ago; the CAO (Chief Architectural Officer) scores high on vision and credentials, but low

on communication and leadership skills and yet he has to deal with a troop of rabid idealists. And, by design, the founders didn't pass on the mantle to make leadership transition easily apparent, but rather allowed us to grow into it, kind of a spiritual version of OJT (On the Job Training).

Of course it's hard and of course we fail. Look at WHAT we have to deal with.

But now look at what we do HAVE. All these folks want the same thing and no one else in the world has it. Give yourself some credit and also the bloke coming the other way down the dusty road who is in the opposite camp... they came to the same place as you did: Auroville. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that this place would have all the world's problems reflected in it so you could work on them in your spare time.

What do we need? All together now, shout it out!

Give me a "C", give me an "O", give me an "L",.....what's that spell?!

COLLABORATION

How do we do it?

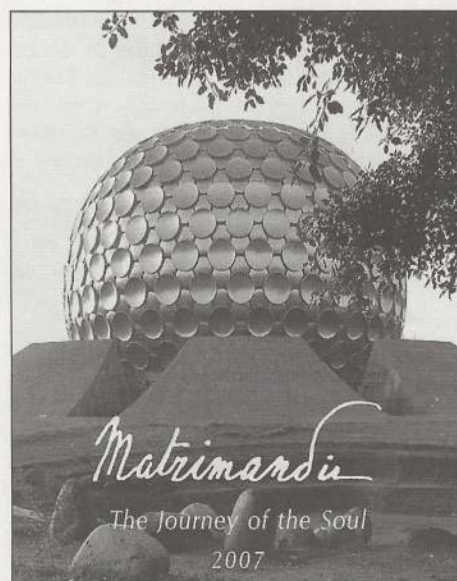
Give me an "F", give me an "R", give me an "A",.....what's that spell?!

FRATERNITY

Jack Alexander

PUBLICATION

New Matrimandir calendar



The Matrimandir Calendar 2007 is out. It features twelve photos of the Matrimandir, including the inner chamber with the crystal and the 12 columns, the interior of the meditation rooms 'Courage' and 'Peace', and the lotus pond at the bottom of Matrimandir. Quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitiri* and an explanation of the photo are provided for each photo.

Like the Matrimandir Calendar 2005, the Matrimandir Calendar 2007 is a spiral bound table-top calendar sized 19.5 cm x 20 cm.

The price will be Rs. 150 excluding taxes, packing and postage. For full tariff and discount information on bulk sales please email tine@auroville.org.in or Matrimandir@matrimandir@auroville.org.in

Proceeds from the sales will go to Matrimandir.

Subscription information:

◆ One year subscription rate: India Rs. 250; other countries Can \$51, EU € 37, US \$38, UK £25.

◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 450; other countries Can \$92, EU € 67, US \$68, UK £45.

Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact Auroville Today for information on reduced rates.

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Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Dianna, Hero, Julietta, Priya Sundaravalli.

Guest editors: Joanna

Proof-reading: Hero, Alan.

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