

# Auroville Today

APRIL 2006, No.207

## No more business as usual?

It's late February, and the Auroville seminar season is in full swing. The big event this year is called "The 2nd Auroville dialogue on Knowledge, Business and Consciousness. Manifestation of Consciousness through Business in the Knowledge Society." Here is Alan's take on the event.

PHOTO:VOLKER HANN

Who, I wondered, would be brave enough to tackle such a topic? Fortunately we had the irrepressible Marc Luyckx Gishi, International Advisory Board member and Dean of the Zagreb Business School. Marc launched proceedings by explaining that today we live in a 'knowledge society'. "We are a global network in terms of information. Everybody knows everything about everybody else: the knowledge economy creates a level playing-field between nations."

Clearly a man who likes to start proceedings with a bang. Marc's breathtaking assessment, however, was not shared by all. "We are not yet in a knowledge economy," said Ranjan Mitter, Professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, "we are still in a post-industrial society."

But, one moment, what exactly is this knowledge society/economy which everybody was suddenly talking about? Good question, because although it was the main topic of the first day none of the speakers described it in any detail. Presumably it has much to do with the explosion in information transmission and storage, enabling all kinds of information to be shared much more widely and swiftly than before. For Sergio Lub this makes good business sense. "The whole reason I'm successful in business," says Sergio, who owns a jewellery company, "is because I stay in touch with the people I meet." He also believes that sharing information about one another can be an important way of building trust and community.

The information revolution can also be a means of improving national and local governance through raising the general level of awareness/education and making those in power more accountable. In fact, these were two of the Prime Minister's motives in setting up the

Indian National Knowledge Commission, explained Dr. Pushpa Bhargava, the Commission's Vice-Chairperson. "A corrupt government does not want its people to have more knowledge. When knowledge is disseminated unevenly, there is a great possibility of exploitation. This is why knowledge equity within and between countries is essential for world peace."

The dangers inherent in the unequal distribution of knowledge were also emphasised by Dr. Doudou Diagne, International Advisory Board member. "For knowledge to be liberating there must be a free flow of information. But the way knowledge is accumulated and transferred in the world today merely supports existing power structures. For example, wealthy organizations are investing in schools, universities and the media as a means of influencing what is taught and expressed."

So how has the information revolution affected Indian businesses? For Ravi Chaudhry, former Chairman of the CEMEX consulting group, it has increased efficiency. However, Ram Seghal (former President of the Advertising Standards Agency of India) points out that it has had little impact on the motivation for doing business. "Today the emphasis remains only on profits, on making money in a hurry. There's no value system, no sense of social responsibility."

Ranjan Mitter, who has been teaching value-based management for over 20 years, demurs but he agrees that empowering people through knowledge is not enough to make a sustainable and more just society. "For that we need 'wisdom leadership', the kind exercised by the Emperor Ashoka. Mother said Auroville was founded to resolve India's problems. So perhaps Auroville can take a lead in this."

Cue for the second morning on which Mother's vision for the ideal Auroville economy was presented. 'Coffee Ideas' Marc followed with a



The seminar in full swing in the Town Hall conference room

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of Auroville businesses today. The perceived strengths included a unique environment and socially- and ecologically-conscious managers who share a common vision. A mite of wishful thinking? His description of the weaknesses, however, seemed spot-on: lack of quality standards and common marketing strategies, inadequate management skills and a culture of competition rather than collaboration.

And the opportunities? Auroville, he said, could be a model for a post-industrial campus (a what?). We should set up an institution for management and business consciousness.

That a spirit of unreality had somehow infected the morning was confirmed by the next presentation: Marti on establishing a 'brand identity' for Auroville businesses. This involved a vision statement (The Dream), a mission ('To build the city the Earth needs'), a 'signature' ('building human unity') and a catchy sound-bite ('Many dream of building a new life on Earth. Some are making it happen.') And then, of course, there was the all-important logo: the Auroville symbol.

Amazingly, the ensuing discussion was all about improving the Auro-sell. Nobody questioned the ethics of using our ideals as a means of selling more candles and jam.

The final morning began with Olivier explaining how Auroville could develop a 'sustainable and integral economy'. In essence, this would involve expanding the 'kind' aspect of our Pour Tous accounts into a complementary currency or

credit system. This could be used to pay for all Auroville services, for exchanges between Aurovilians and even for goods produced in the bioregion, providing local traders were willing to participate. The advantages of such a system, he said, are that it would encourage economic activity within the community, it would allow us to put a new value upon certain essential services, it would improve our relationship with our neighbours, and it would de-link us from problems - like fluctuating interest rates - associated with the ordinary money supply.

It was an impressive presentation. However, Toine noted that such an economy would not solve the essential problem. "The present Auroville economy is not sustainable because there is insufficient diversity of economic activity and investment." Olivier agreed, pointing out that this idea would only take off when bioregional activities were also included.

The next session had the title "Development of criteria to create an incubator for integral entrepreneurship in Auroville and its bioregion. New consciousness and values." Stripped of its verbiage, this was about coming up with ways of assessing the success of Auroville businesses.

Helga Breuninger (of the Breuninger Foundation) began by summarising what she'd understood was Auroville's vision for its businesses. This included being small, blending modern techniques with traditional experience and knowledge, emphasising research, and including inner growth, beauty and perfection

in the process as well as the final product.

The participants were then divided into groups to come up with ways of achieving this. When they reported back it was immediately obvious which groups contained the business-people and which groups were populated by those with, well, rather less hands-on experience. For example, while one group talked pertinently of the need for Auroville businesses to cooperate in sourcing and marketing, another group seriously suggested that Auroville units should integrate invocations and ceremonies in their manufacturing process in order to ensure that everyone remained in the highest consciousness. Yet another group concluded that 'spiritual values' should be included in the pricing.

Guenter Faltin's lively talk on new entrepreneurship was a welcome relief, for here was a man who had actually succeeded in the marketplace and, moreover, by bucking conventional wisdom. He began by investigating the tea industry and noted a huge price differential between source and customer. Why? He discovered that there are many middlemen, that tea is sold in small quantities, and that a lot of money is spent on advertising and packaging. So he decided to buy direct from only one plantation, to be transparent (he reveals the exact amount of chemical residues in his tea), to sell in large quantities and to operate only through mail-order. All this enabled him to cut his prices. "You must be mad" the experts said when he revealed his business plan. Today he is the biggest importer of Darjeeling tea in the world...

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PHOTO:VOLKER HANN



Group session on the terrace of the town hall

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*See you in April*



# The observer and the observed are one

On the eve of Auroville's birthday and the 50th anniversary of the Supramental descent two members of the Governing Board and three members of the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation addressed the community.

PHOTO: CAREL

The second meeting of the present International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation took place from February 25-27, 2006. Present were Sir Mark Tully, Chairman; Dr. Doudou Diène; and Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi. Absent were Prof. Diana Eck and Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, who has resigned for health reasons.

The meeting of the Council was scheduled to coincide with the half-yearly meeting of the Governing Board. However, the Board's meeting was unexpectedly postponed. The Council members therefore only interacted with three members of the Board, Aurovilians Aster Patel and Roger Anger and Mr. Bagchi, who had come from New Delhi.

In his address to the community, Sir Mark observed that, as physics has demonstrated that the observer and observed are one, the IAC members also feel one with the Aurovilians. During this visit they had more time to go around and see some of Auroville's units. "I am impressed, he said, "and I'm wearing now with great pride a Tsunamika which has become an extraordinary tribute to the spirit of Auroville." Council members also visited Isaiambalam school, Pitchandikulam, the Botanical Garden and other activities. "All this made us realise that the autonomy within these different units that allow the individual talents to flourish must not be hampered by any administrative or other arrangements," said Mark Tully.

He added another feeling of the Council: that Auroville has arrived at a special moment and that the city of Auroville should start to be constructed now. "We fully acknowledge that the city of Auroville can only be built in the spirit of The Mother." Replying to an observation

that 'Auroville is building a collective life, not just a set of buildings' he replied that none of the Council members wishes to say that 'building the city' only means 'creating more buildings'. "But you cannot construct a city unless you start off with a consensus on what the city is to be, and how that consensus can be implemented." The Council could not offer a solution but proposed that international experts be invited to help with the Auroville decision-making process to achieve consensus on important issues.

Mark Tully also stated that outside Auroville there is a growing spirit of welcome towards spiritual enquiry and spiritual elements in life. "More and more people are dissatisfied with materialism and are looking for spirituality in their lives. Auroville can go out to these people and let them know what is happening here. For you Aurovilians have dedicated your life to this search, and the city is a living monument to that search. This is a time for you to go out and invite the world to come in." The Council proposed that, in order to give visitors a deep experience of Auroville, some of them should stay with Aurovilians rather than in guest houses.

In the Council's meeting minutes that were published two weeks later in Auroville's News and Notes, more detailed proposals were made. The Council gave specific suggestions for increasing international awareness of Auroville. They include asking all Indian diplomatic missions to promote knowledge of Auroville's ideals and activities; inviting Ambassadors of diplomatic missions in New Delhi and representatives of the UNESCO member

states to visit Auroville; and encouraging the World Council of Religions for Peace and the World Council of Religious Leaders to take an interest in Auroville. The Council also suggested that Auroville organise a conference on the issue of "the balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion and beliefs as expressed in international instruments".

The Council's concern for the autonomy of individuals was reflected in its observation on the proposed new financial management structure. "Though it is essential to establish a Central Fund and to establish arrangements to prioritise allocation of resources, the arrangement must allow the autonomy necessary for the different units to take decisions on investments and to

operate efficiently and effectively in accordance with the purposes for which they have been established."

The minutes concluded that two days of meeting were not sufficient and that next time there should be a

three day meeting at the end of September which, preferably, should coincide with a meeting of the Governing Board in order to ensure an exchange of views.

Carel



Members of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council interact with the community. From left to right: Mr. Ajoy Bagchi, Ms. Aster Patel, Mr. Doudou Diène, Sir Mark Tully and Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi

## SECURITY

# Security Report

The Security Task Force, created after the murder of Sydo, reported in the News and Notes on what has been achieved in the last year. Here we provide a summary.

Auroville's Security Board, which coordinates the activities of the Day and the Night Guard as well as the Police Liaison, operates from its office in the Service Area.

The Day Guard consists of 6 uniformed guards hired from Group 4, a Security Agency in Pondicherry. They patrol Auroville's roads 11 hours a day, seven days a week, and are equipped with mopeds and cell phones. They monitor the behaviour of the visitors and all those who cross the city. They secure the school areas in the morning, at lunch and in the evening, and also watch the Solar Kitchen and the main roads at peak hours. The decision to hire Group 4 has proven to be a good one. The fact that they wear a uniform gives them authority, and their orders have never been ignored by the public.

The Night Guard consists of three teams of two guards plus their coordinator. They patrol Auroville's roads at night, equipped with torches, cell phones and motorbikes. They wear a jacket with "Auroville Security" in large print on the back for easy identification. They have been registered at the Police station by the Sub-Inspector as "Friends of the Police" and have been given an ID card by the Security Board – signed by a police officer. This gives them credibility and authority to perform their tasks.

The relationship with the police has considerably improved after the tragic murder of Sydo. Contacts with high-level officers in Chennai and Villupuram have increased. The day

to day relationship with the officers in the police station of Morattandi has improved. The understanding of the police force about Auroville has greatly evolved, and the Security Board has been better able to understand their situation and work environment and is therefore more able to provide them with the support they need. Now, whenever a legal problem or a crime occurs, the police give their best effort.

A separate group of Aurovilians, called the Security Task Force, have concentrated on the follow up to Sydo's murder. This has involved a lot of work where patience and endurance have been indispensable qualities. But

the case is moving forward. As a result of following this case, a better understanding of the procedures of justice in India has been developed.

More importantly, by doing this, a strong message has been put across that Auroville is determined to see that justice is secured and that an end is put to the cycle of violence which claimed Sydo. Without this determination and perseverance very little might be achieved.

The budget for the Security activities is paid from contributions of the Central Fund, the units and individuals. It must be kept at the present level of approximately Rs 100,000 a month in order not to jeopardize security. The budget needs to be increased by an additional Rs 10,000/month if the Night Guard shift is extended from 4 to 8 hours, which would further improve the overall security situation.

Security Board



Security guards from Group 4

## SEMINAR

# No more business as usual?

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And so to another excellent cup of coffee (courtesy Marc) and the winding-up of yet another Auroville seminar. Was it a success?

That's very hard to say. For how can you assess all the intangibles, like the long-term consequences of a conversation over lunch? However, if 'success' means exposing Aurovilians to new perspectives and energizing them to re-envision the future; or if it means persuading talented and value-based businesspeople to embark on long-term relationships with the community; or if it means receiving tough but useful feedback about Auroville's present course then, yes, these three days were definitely worthwhile. And, it should be said, a vast improvement in terms of organization on the first business seminar last year.

On the other hand, it's difficult on such occasions to separate the reality from the hype and the hope. For, soaring on a conference 'high', participants' brains sometimes turn to pap, buzz-words replace rational thought, and soft-focus idealism replaces hard analysis. During this

conference this was not just reflected in the failure to define key terms – 'knowledge society', 'integral entrepreneur', 'post-industrial' etc. – but, more importantly, in a lack of examples to back up claims that we are entering an era of 'new consciousness-based business'.

For even businesses like Guenter's 'Teekampagne' – which he presented as an example of 'new

There is also a very real danger, warned Ravi Chaudhry, that Auroville will ignore its real achievements in environmental restoration etc., in pursuing high-profile projects like an Auroville Business School which we don't have the resources or expertise to make a success of.

Finally, and most tellingly for a conference billed as a 'dialogue', few Auroville businesspeople actively participated in the presentations and discussions. Why? No time? Or had they already written it off as irrelevant to their needs? One of the handful who attended all the sessions remarked that he definitely felt energized, but he'd learned nothing new.

So what, in the end, was it all about? Was it really about a new knowledge society, about the Auroville economy and businesses? Or was it more about collective dreaming (Auroville offers a wonderful 'dream space') and, through that, a 'bonding of the brotherhood' in the pursuit of individual and global change?

Perhaps, after all, that was the real, and no less valuable, bottom-line.

Alan



Helga Breuniger and Guenter Faltin

entrepreneurship' – rely on old-fashioned business thinking, like taking advantage of wage and cost differentials between India and Europe. (And, while we're at it, is flying 450 tons of tea 5000 kilometres across the world really a sustainable model for the future?)

PHOTO: VOLKER HANN



# Accelerating the building of the city?

A proposed Auroville Universal Township Development Council does not mention a role for Auroville's population.

On February 15th a letter from Roger Anger to the Chairman of the Governing Board was leaked. In the letter, sent on January 17th, Roger considered that, with the Matrimandir now nearing completion, a need is felt by many, particularly those participating in the Auroville Vision 2012 initiative, to accelerate the planning and construction of the Auroville Township and complete it within a specific time frame. Recalling that the task of building the Auroville Township is the work and responsibility given to him by the Mother, Roger mentioned that during the last couple of years he has endeavoured to create awareness amongst Aurovilians and the members of the Governing Board about the need for changes and reforms in Auroville, which would allow him to take up the task of building the Auroville Township. But till now, he wrote, such changes and reforms, which include a re-dedication to the Charter of Auroville and to the aims and objectives given by the Mother for Auroville, have not taken place. He proposed that the Governing Board appoint and empower a special body, 'The Auroville Township Development Council', to plan, develop and build the township under his overall supervision and guidance.

A detailed note labelled 'draft 6' containing the proposed mandate of the Council was also leaked. It would have "an executive team of twelve persons" with "five-year tenure," a management team of five executives and an external expert advisory committee of four members, all appointed

with approval of Roger Anger. Each executive would have responsibility for a specified functional area, such as planning, engineering, construction, administration, human resources, communication, village development and integration, quality assurance and liaison with governments. Existing Auroville activities related to planning, design and building of Auroville would be integrated in the Council. The powers of the executives were to be specified, but the final decision was to be Roger Anger's alone.

This proposal at once became the talk of the town. The fact that it didn't mention the Auroville residents and ignores the existence of the Residents' Assembly, one of the authorities of the Auroville Foundation Act, did not escape attention. Some observed that Roger's mandate was given to him by The Mother at a time when nobody was living in Auroville; today over 1800 people reside here, and not to give them any say in the shaping of the place where they live seems unrealistic if not outright unfair. Others wondered why the Auroville Planning and Development Council (APDC), a working group constituted a few years ago, had not been consulted. After all, this body has at present the community's mandate for planning. And why was the Vision 2012 process mentioned in the proposal but its facilitating team not informed about it?

The team behind Vision 2012 immediately distanced itself from the proposal, stating publicly that it implied a circumvention of the AV Vision 2012 process, and would consolidate the decision-making authori-

ty over Auroville's development in the hands of a very few. "We feel that it is only by us joining together and offering ourselves as instruments in a true aspiration, sincerity and receptivity, and by doing so rising up to meet the manifestation that is descending from above, that Auroville will come to be. In that meeting point, all impossibilities, all opposites dissolve. All those who are impelled from within to participate in this process are naturally part of it and are welcome and valued," wrote the team.

Auroville's intranet, a medium not known for its shyness of expression, also blossomed with objections and observations. The top-down approach of the proposal was challenged – seen as an attempt to establish a totalitarian dictatorship over Auroville's evolving group soul. In an open letter Roger was asked to reflect on ten questions on the proposal and the Master Plan. Does either serve as a viable model for the spiritual and ecological development of India and the rest of the world? Do they reflect the true and liberating spirit of the Charter of Auroville? Can the community evolve an alternative development plan? Who would be Roger's successor as the head of the new organization if the time would come for him to leave? And how will Roger's leadership serve as an example to us all? "To say that you have Mother's blessing and to then use this blessing in order to impose your will on the community in 2006 is not enough. Until we hear your voice, until we see your actions regarding these very important questions I cannot help but feel that the imposition of you and your chosen team will be a great dan-

ger to the Charter of Auroville," wrote someone. These questions have remained unanswered in print, even though, as another correspondent observed, "They express a deeply moved and very concerned portion of the evolving population of Auroville – and as such they cannot be put aside."

Roger meanwhile wrote to the Working Committee that he objected that drafts of his correspondence with Dr. Karan Singh were published without authorization.

In a separate communication, Aurovilians were invited to a clarification and reflection with the team that has assisted Roger in the formulation of the proposal on Sunday February 26th. That invitation also included the final draft of Roger's proposal – the earlier draft, apparently, had never been sent to the Chairman of the Board. But the final proposal contained similar elements as the earlier draft, with the notable exception that it did not mention who would constitute the Council, though it would still be empowered by the Board. But in this draft also, involvement of the community was excluded; the final authority of Roger had been maintained. The final version also stated that the creation of the Council should be complemented by other changes in Auroville such as in the areas of economy, education, organization, and communication.

The discussion on that Sunday did little to assuage the fears of the community and the conviction that a small team of people are endeavouring a 'take over'. The views of the Governing Board on the proposal are now awaited. *Carel*

## The Dreamcatchers

At the beginning of the day some architects share their dreams about the city.

At 6 in the morning hardly any Aurovilians are talking business. But for a select few this is a preferred meeting time. Once a week, from 6 to 8, a small group of inspired architects and other interested Aurovilians come together, each time at a different location, to share their dreams about the city-to-be.

The map of the galaxy with a huge green area around it serves as today's focus point. "Today we

expressed, and what new ideas have come up." The meeting structure is of the pop-corn variety: those impelled speak out while the others listen quietly. Active debate is discouraged. "We want to see what comes up without disturbing the train of thought."

The architects silently sip their tea. Then they recite three 'aums'. After a minute of silence, today's topic is broached. The inner meaning of the Greenbelt is discussed – it feels like the aura of the city, says someone – and the lack of its delimitation

outer ring is to have a transport function? Someone observes that a corridor of identical trees such as Realization could well define the border of the city, while the outer border of the Greenbelt could be planted with Transformation trees or even Protection – as a symbol of Mother's esoteric protection of Auroville. Another person asks for the meaning of such delimitation according to Feng Shui or Vastu.

Another idea is proffered. The Greenbelt should be seen as a 'Zone of Transition', before entering the Auroville atmosphere. In this concept, the city would be a kind of oasis surrounded by a 'jungle'. Entry to the city could be through 'green corridors', dense green tunnels, and when you exit, you would enter a new conceptual reality. And right there, at the entrance of the city, there would be the transit points with, for example, free bicycle godowns where visitors and guests could get a free cycle. The examples of Venice in Italy and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan are quoted. There, public access is similarly stopped at the entrance and people have to use transport provided by the city. The transit points then, would be zones of exchange, of exchange of energies, of speed, and perhaps of consciousness.

While the brainstorming continues it becomes clear that the Dreamcatchers are not really interested in making decisions, but would rather talk about the possible consequences of envisioned developments. Today they talk about the meaning of

the greenbelt, of boundaries, of transition and transit points. In a previous meeting they talked about how one perceives Auroville with one's acoustical, olfactory or tactile senses. Far out? Not really. For the acoustic experience leads to the need to find solutions for sound pollution. And fragrances, so abundant in the tropics, could be used to define zones – certain routes could be lined with specific plants creating 'flowerlines' – what about a jasmine road from the Solar Kitchen to Transition school?

Early morning sessions are fruitful. The Dreamcatchers prove this by sharing ideas – many still green, some ripe – about a bewildering variety of topics. Apart from the meaning of the greenbelt and the sensory experience of Auroville, they've touched on transport, street lighting, village developments and 'zones of cooperation', building illumination, maintaining the wilderness within the city, the meaning of supra-urban planning, merging the ground reality with the Galaxy, architecture of light and malleability, the positive and negative aspects of the Lines of Force, how to ensure security and constant health, and how Auroville can become a truly unique city, evolutionary of and in itself. But this is only a beginning. Many more aspects of the city await discovery.

Meanwhile, to stimulate an inclusive planning process and to invite others to participate in their dreams and give feedback, the Dreamcatchers are planning an exhibition of ideas in April. Do visit. It will definitely broaden your horizons. *Carel*



PHOTO: SUMEET KUMAR

The first Dreamcatcher's meeting 2006 took place on the scaffolding on the roof of the Matrimandir

would like to explore the idea of boundaries or borderlines between the city and the Greenbelt, and the function of the Greenbelt," says David by way of introduction. "We ask each person present to speak about what happened since last week, about the evaluation of ideas then

to the outside and towards the city area. What are proper borders? In the Master Plan an outer ring road is situated between the city and the Greenbelt. But is such a road appropriate as the city's main artery? Can we consider another type of marker, for example a tram or monorail if the

## In brief

### New Matrimandir Access Policy

The Matrimandir Access Group has published a new access policy. Guests and friends of Auroville who have already visited the Matrimandir can meditate in the Petal meditation rooms Peace and Equality without prior booking, while for concentration in the Inner Chamber prior booking is required. Timings are from 5 - 6 every evening. Guests of Auroville who are first time visitors of the Matrimandir can visit the Petals and the Inner Chamber after first seeing a 5-minute introductory video. They should first meditate in the Petals' meditation rooms before being admitted for a concentration in the Inner Chamber. Casual visitors are only permitted to visit the Amphitheatre in the Matrimandir Gardens, where they can view the outer structure of the Matrimandir.

### General Meeting on organization

A general meeting on Auroville's internal organisation has formed a group of people who will take responsibility for proposing a new, improved internal organization for Auroville. Such a new organisation should preferably be in place before the expiry of the term of the present WC, Council and Selection Committee by end 2006.

### Deepanam School

Deepanam primary School, in existence since 2001, has 20 children now but has space for 50 children. Deepanam is evolving towards a free progress education, following Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's principles and also integrating the work of other educational researchers and pioneers who are in tune with these principles. Two to three times a month, there is an excursion exploring life in and around Auroville to gradually extend the area of the child's experiences. The weekly School Assembly gives the students the opportunity to make their own decisions regarding the functioning of the school and to come in touch with the decision making process.

### Women's Day

International Women's Day 2006 was celebrated on March 5th with sports and games such as musical chairs, relay race, sock running, three legged race, skipping race, a tug of war, etc. in front of the Matrimandir Nursery main gate and a cultural programme at SAWCHU on March 8th with devotional and other songs and folk dances.

### All USA Meeting

The AUM meeting this year will be held from July 1st - 5th, 2006 at Menla Mountain Retreat (formerly the Pathworks Center). In a collaboration with the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) and Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, the Integral Psychology Conference (IPC) will be held as part of the AUM program. In collaboration with the New York Open Center, a pre-AUM symposium on Integral Psychology will take place on June 29th in Manhattan. More info on <http://matagiri.org/events.htm>

### New exhibit space at Visitors' Centre

The Visitors' Centre has opened a new exhibition and reception space. For the occasion "7 hymns of silence," – paintings by Veronique, were displayed on its walls.



# Auroville and the revolution

After a few years in the Paris Centre, Shankar joined Auroville in 1975. He teamed with Uma in 1981. Financial considerations forced them to settle in France in 1989. The Book Review *"The Antithesis of Yoga"* inspired his article. Shankar went thrice to jail during the "revolution". He believes that Aurovilians, especially the children, should have a broad and positive view on their past history. Reconciliation is a must though, with the Neutrals and the Ashram.

**A**mong the many aspects shown by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, two major ones seem to predominate. At first sight, they are contradictory. A closer look reveals their complementarities. The first aspect could be called the "royal side". Its most obvious qualities are creation, harmony, order, discipline, power, equanimity, justice, organization, knowledge, wisdom, the protection of arts and letters.

The other aspect, less spoken about but equally important, is the "revolutionary side". Sri Aurobindo has spent his early years in India leading his countrymen in an open revolt against British imperialism. If, in one of his past lives, Sri Aurobindo had been Augustus Caesar, the greatest Roman Emperor, he may have been Spartacus too, the potent gladiator-slave whose fiery rebellion had shaken the foundations of Rome's iron rule in the Latin peninsula. If he was Louis XIV, the Sun King, he was also Danton, the mighty feller of kings. As for the Mother, if she was Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great, she was also Joan of Arc, the greatest rebel ever. And why not Antigone too, the tender yet unflinching Hellenic sister of Savitri?

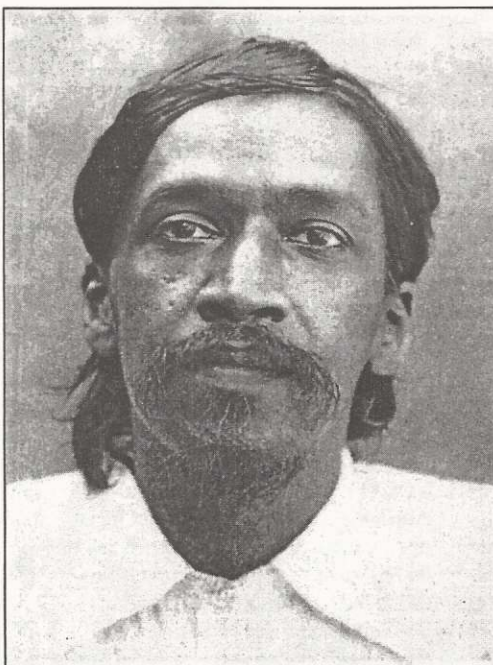
Of the two legacies left by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, their Ashram, with its strong qualities of collective discipline, seriousness, concentration, expresses best the royal aspect. It was left to Auroville, the second legacy, to exemplify the revolutionary side. Two months after Auroville's first stone laying ceremony, a "spiritual rev-

olution" ignited the world, mobilizing the youth. This cannot be a coincidence.

Auroville is the daughter of revolution. By itself, in itself, Auroville is a revolution. In the light of this, is it surprising that, in the mid-70's, a turbulent revolution engulfed Auroville in turn, lasting to the mid-80's? Did not Auroville have to pay the penalty for being so revolutionary in character? Is Auroville such an ordinary, dull and tame affair that too much noise and turmoil around its aims and purposes can be deemed preposterous, uncalled for, needlessly ridiculous?

A revolution is never done by gentlemen. The only two gentlemen of this chaotic era were Sir C.P.N. Singh and J.R.D. Tata. The simple fact that these outstanding persons sympathized with our poor ignorant lot proves that there must have been some element of truth in our movement. As for we, the "revolutionaries", to be honest, we behaved at times like a pack of inebriated baboons. Our arrogance knew no limits. Wisdom, knowledge, intelligence were daily trampled by the soles of our dirty chappals. We were the "sans-culottes", the patriots of a young republic, the red brigades of the new era. Yet the buffoonery of our tantrums, the soaring twin pillars of our intolerance and vanity did not prevent us from being the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's blind and raw instruments. Auroville needed a revolution. We did the dirty job.

During a revolution, everybody



Sri Aurobindo in his revolutionary days

suffers, the leaders, the followers, and the victims. There is no hero, no winner. It is an ordeal by fire. A revolution is messy, unruly, insane, an offence to civilization, "the antithesis of yoga", as one Aurovilian aptly puts it. But to judge a revolution on the basis of moralistic or yogic standards is a vain and irrational exercise. Is a volcano "moralistic"? was the tsunami "yogic"?

Long after, when, away from its context, one analyses a revolution from a rational viewpoint, it does not make sense any more. The sheer absurdity of it jumps at your face. The participants resemble a mad crowd escaped from a lunatic asylum. The

sloganeering looks pretentious, empty, devoid of meaning. The whole thing appears more like a collective seizure than a conscious act of a free will. Doubt enters one's mind.

You have simply forgotten how it was *before* the revolution.

It sometimes takes decades before the end results of a revolution can be fully assessed. More than twenty years after these events, maybe we can examine the results of the Auroville Revolution, measure its validity, draw the balance sheet.

Freedom of the Press is the surest way to test the vibrancy of the democratic spirit of a country, the extent of individual and collective freedom enjoyed by its people. Judging from my reading of Auroville Today, the Aurovilians seem to enjoy an amazing amount of freedom, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of research, study, experiment, association, enterprise, freedom to challenge and criticize.

Whatever jaundiced view one may entertain about our revolution, this freedom was definitely not there before. The free flowing spirit of the present day Auroville starkly contrasts with the sadness, the deep feeling of depression I felt when I arrived in Auroville in 1975. The impression was that of landing in a graveyard.

Photographic portraits of Aurovilians abound in Auroville

Today. Their smiles pervade. All these beautiful and open faces belong to a happy contented people. When shot in a group, Aurovilians, young or elderly, clearly enjoy being together, working together, playing together. A feeling of brotherhood seem to link them all. This too is a progress compared to the tense period I was living in Auroville.

The Neutrals were a casualty. In the name of Liberty, we repressed their freedom to disagree. We were not wide enough, strong enough, chivalrous enough to pursue our struggle to its conclusion without bothering about a handful of brothers and sisters who could not cope with the violence of the prevalent atmosphere. We were too blind to carry on our revolution without falling into the trap of a civil war, with its ugly side of persecution. We missed an opportunity. For this, we should feel sorry.

For the rest, judging from far, a large extent of Liberty, a fair amount of Fraternity seem to prevail in Auroville. Two sides of the triangle of human unity are manifested. Equality is missing. Some Aurovilians are rich, others are poor. The triangle is lame. Nevertheless, with the jewels of Liberty and Fraternity already embedded in the Auroville crown, our sacrifice was not in vain. It was worth a revolution.

Therefore, yes, admittedly, our behavior was "the antithesis of yoga". But Auroville as a whole was engaged in a fierce and intense Tapasya.

Auroville was doing the "Yoga of Revolution".

Shankar (Patrice Ghirardi, a.k.a. "Big Patrice")

## HEALTH AND HEALING

### Shambhala

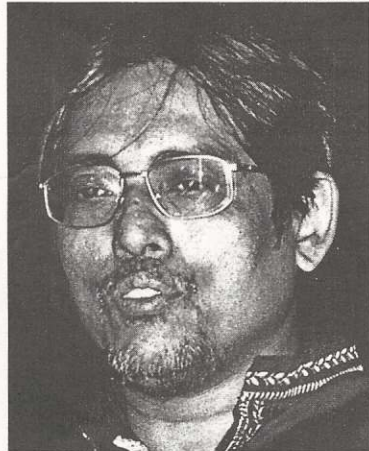
Shambhala is a Sanskrit term meaning place of peace, tranquillity and happiness. In Auroville, it is the proposed name for a centre for 'Integral Yoga Psychology'.

**A**uroville is a place where people easily develop mental health problems. There are two to four serious psychotic cases a year, and the number of less serious cases run into dozens. People involved with Auroville's mental health service are now proposing "Shambhala", a centre where Aurovilians, members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and clients from the outside world would receive help in all matters of personal growth and psychological treatment. The centre would also assist in addressing mental emergency crises. It would be run by professional doctors, therapists and healers from within Auroville and outside.

"Doing sadhana carries dangers," explains Dr. Soumitra Basu, a psychiatrist connected to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. "Some people get problems due to an uneven growth of different parts of their personalities. There may be disharmonies between different planes of consciousness such as the physical, vital and mental planes at the level of the outer being. There may be discordances between the outer being and the inner (subliminal) being. All these problems can give rise to mental disturbances and even serious illnesses. The exterior manifestation of such illnesses is similar to 'normal' cases, but as the inner cause is different, a different treatment modality is required. We have experienced that the outside world doesn't

understand these subtle nuances though we have tried many times to impress this upon them. We conclude that it is unfair to send these people out for treatment. We have to treat

PHOTO: CAREL



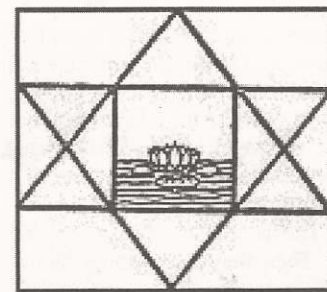
Dr. Soumitra Basu

them inside Auroville."

The Mother envisioned such a place on the geographical edge of Auroville. In 1971, after hearing a report on two mentally imbalanced people in Auroville, she said that there should be a suitable place for treatment of these types of illnesses. "This place should be on the outskirts of the town, not in the centre. It needs to be a large area so that they don't have the feeling of being shut in. It needs a special house. They must feel completely free, and at the same time, they must not be able to go out."

Basu stresses that, in dealing with serious psychotic cases 'in-house', the centre has to run in accordance with the mental health laws of India. But the centre is not envisioned for serious cases alone. People who need more simple psychiatric or psychological assistance would also be able to receive help in the centre and can reside there for some time. Finally, Shambhala could also be used by persons who are not suffering from any obvious psychopathology but who are just interested in their own development.

The centre also plans to house an academy for research in 'integral yoga psychology' and integral health. Explains Basu: "There are many people in the world who want to learn about Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's thoughts on psychology of and the implications of yoga on mental health. And many would like to receive training. But Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's ideas are not easily accessible; you have to experientially go through many volumes of their books to get a proper understanding. Already in the outside world people have started teaching their views in a distorted form, using some of their concepts fragmentally, half understanding and confusing things. For that reason, an academy for teaching, training and research must be part of Shambhala." Research and training in other subtle therapies such as homoeopathy, body-work, energy-work, and flower remedies will also



The symbol for the Integral Yoga Psychology work designed by the Mother

have a place in the centre.

The building of the centre and its initial running costs will be financed by the Mirravision Trust set up by Basu with the collaboration of Dr. A.S. Dalal, a psychologist and a senior sadhak from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. A symbol designed by the Mother and given by Her to Dr. Dalal has already been approved by the Ashram Trust for use for 'Integral Yoga Psychological' work by the Mirravision Trust. Dr. Basu has already presented the project at various psychiatric conferences worldwide and gathered favourable feedback and valuable suggestions. The design of the centre will be done by a team of Auroville architects, David, Ganesh and Maria, who have taken inspiration from the healing space for psychotic patients that exists in the Shiva temple at Thiruvaidamarudur in Tamil Nadu and the Indian Vastu-Shastra (equivalent to the Chinese Feng-Shui). A location has been identified in the Hermitage area outside Auroville. The project will soon be submitted for approval to the relevant Auroville working groups. Carel

## NEW CDs

### Savitri: Book one canto one

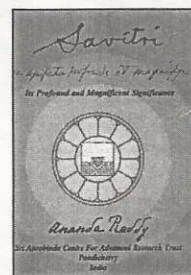
by Ananda Reddy

**M**any people complain about the difficulty of understanding Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus *Savitri*, in particular its opening canto, which, in Sri Aurobindo's words, is 'a key beginning and announcement.'

Help for the better understanding of this canto is now being offered by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) in Pondicherry, which has published two CD's with 12½ hours of deep deliberation focusing on the symbolism of *Savitri* as it emerges in this canto. The CDs contain the live recordings of a workshop on *Savitri* held in Nainital in the year 2000 by Dr. Ananda Reddy.

Dr. Reddy, a well-known lecturer on Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*, the *Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Essays on the Gita* and *Savitri*, grew up in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is today one of the few scholars worldwide who present Sri Aurobindo's thought with-in India and abroad.

The CD's are available at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research Trust at Rs 250. Email [sacar@auromail.net](mailto:sacar@auromail.net) for details.





# Making nature fun

Exploring Auroville's Botanical Gardens

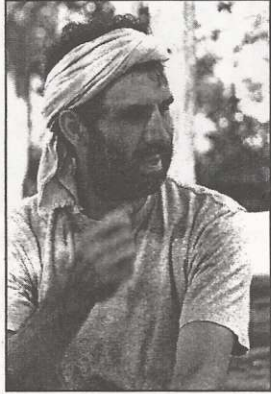
"That's a wild orange. And this one, *Buchanania axillaris*, has an edible fruit. We're lucky. It's rare and difficult to germinate but this one came from rootstock. Now over there, the small tree with the beautiful white flowers, is one of my favourites, *Cerbera odollam*. It never needs watering."

Paul is leading a small group of us on a tour of Auroville's Botanical Gardens. Work began on the Gardens in August, 2000, and today is an open day to let people see what's been achieved so far. It's quietly impressive. The basic infrastructure includes two wells and an extensive irrigation system, a seed room, two houses under construction, keet huts for volunteer workers, as well as a beautiful thatched education pavilion. Then there is the tree nursery, neat beds of 'heritage' vegetables and, the core of the Gardens, a 30 acre arboretum and a Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) reserve.

"Most of the basic planting is almost finished," explains Paul. "We

planted the TDEF reserve in the first year and we already have about 260 trees in the arboretum, one of each species. It's not ideal – we should have at least two of each in case one dies or is blown over, but we don't have enough space to do that." In fact, the original plan was for 100 acres, but only 50 acres have been acquired so far. Paul points to a forbidding grey wall which runs along the northern perimeter. "Behind that are the other 50 acres. We hope Auroville will purchase them soon."

PHOTO: SHIRAZ



Paul

The idea is that the flowering trees in the arboretum will form a circular walk. Inside them will come smaller specialist gardens of cactus, orchid etc. "Now that the basic infrastructure is there, the specialists are coming in. AuroNevi, who was one of the initiators of the project, moved the orchid nursery here 6 months ago. We'd also like to involve sculptors, painters, to make the gardens lively. Now here, for example...."

We're standing in front of concentric rings of TDEF hedges in which gaps interconnect pathways. "It's a maze. I've been fascinated by

mazes since I was a child and I always wanted to make one in Auroville."

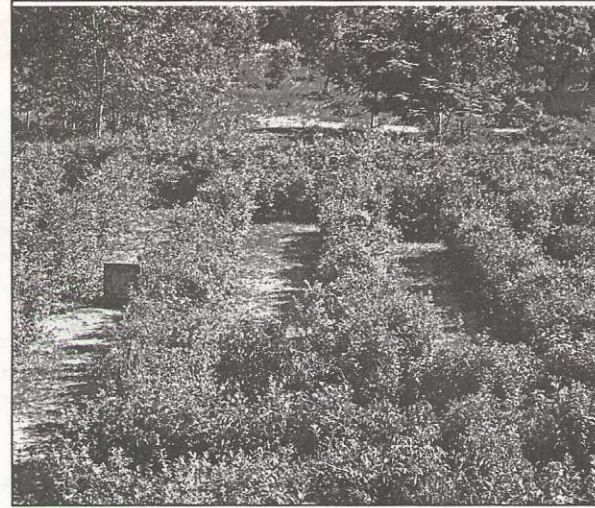
It's a clue to what Paul and the other 'botanicals' are trying to do here: to make nature fun, accessible for the young. "The whole gardens are designed for education: they won't ever be public gardens for tourists. So every garden has to tell a story that will help kids understand nature better. The orchid garden, for example, will be all about how plants and insects evolve together."

The educational programme has already started. Twice a week students come from New Creation, once a week from Udavi School. The resident teacher is Kundavi who used to teach environmental studies at the Crocodile Farm up the East Coast Road.

"It's a perfect environment for learning," says Paul. "The kids ask 'What is this TDEF?' We explain. 'But what does it look like?' We take them to the arboretum to show them specimen trees, then into the TDEF reserve so they can experience what it's like to be in that unique environment. Alternatively we take them to the maze. Inside are paintings of animals, so we can talk about the wildlife of the TDEF. We already have porcupines in the Botanical Gardens!"

The next step, says Paul, is to build an educational centre for exhibi-

PHOTO: ADHI



Labyrinth in the making: Nine different Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest species have been used

tions and showing nature videos. "We see ourselves serving a catchment area of 30 kilometres radius – about 40 schools – so we'll also need a bus. Within 5 years I expect that we'll have 2-3 different groups of school-children visiting the Garden daily. For the really keen ones, we'll start up eco-clubs. We'll take them up the canyons on full moon nights."

"Kids don't get taught much about the environment at present. And if they do, it's usually classic clichés about planting more trees because it's good for the planet. Without context, that's just a slogan. Yet you see some kids come here with an incredible interest in nature. So it's all about drawing them out, giving them a place to express that..."

But surely all these plans will cost

a rupee or two? "I've written a five year education project for 2 crore rupees (approximately US\$ 450,000) which includes an education building and a support staff of seven. At present it costs two and a half lakhs rupees (approx. US\$ 5,600) a year to run this place. The nursery almost pays for itself and we get financial help from the Forest Group, but we still have to find one and a half lakhs (US\$ 3,370) annually."

Paul hopes they will get contracts to landscape hotel gardens with drought-resistant TDEF plants and trees.

"Then the nursery would start making a profit and contribute to the upkeep of the Gardens. But so far I've found that whenever you really need the money for development and you're ready for it, it comes."

So what, ultimately, is his motivation? To change the world through making as many children as possible environmentally-conscious? "That's too big. All I'm trying, as an individual, is to make a valid contribution. That's a good enough target to head for. And, unlike changing the world or even Tamil Nadu, dealing with kids from forty schools is finite, that's doable."

Alan

For more information contact [botanical@auroville.org.in](mailto:botanical@auroville.org.in)

## Van Ustav in Sadhana Forest

For one week Sadhana Forest turned into a vivid meeting place for those interested in indigenous forestry and a simple sustainable life. Over one hundred visitors from all over India took part in the Van Ustav festival. In addition to over thirty volunteers already working with the reforestation project.

Participants could choose between a variety of workshops on indigenous forestry, organic farming, the greenhouse effect, bird-watching or making handbags from old tyre tubes. Even more than the workshops, the every day life of the community was a demonstration of basic sustainable practices.

Sadhana Forest was started two years ago, with the objective of reforesting 70 acres of severely eroded land between Aurobrindhavan and Hermitage. Yorit and Aviram Rozin, founders of Sadhana Forest and hosts of the festival, managed to create a community where sustainable living ideas are being put into practice. They live in huts, plant Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest trees, practice veganism, use compost toilets, and recently started to grow their own organic food. In the near future they plan to turn the project into a zero waste zone, which simply means that everything that comes in stays in, and is used. Nothing's wasted nor thrown away.

"I have been inspired by what I have seen: how people here work, happily carrying buckets of water every morning..." says Dhruva. Dhruva is an engineering student from Vellore who would rather do something else in life once he is done with the college. He feels there is not enough respect for non-academic knowledge and too much glorification of technology. "When you are trying to do things a little bit differently, the question nags at you 'Am I doing the right thing?' I have learned here that I am not alone. I will be not afraid to make my own choice."

"Universities are not the only place to learn," claims Allon, who has just completed his PhD in



PHOTO: JOANNA

Participants in the Van Ustav festival at Sadhana Forest

Psychology. "Most people believe that they need degrees, institutions and positions to pursue their goals. Forty years ago there was nothing in Auroville – now there is a vibrant community, and two million trees. Two years ago there was only eroded land in Sadhana Forest – now there are 10,300 trees. Most of this has been achieved by people without any formal education in forestry."

Yorit and Aviram had exactly this kind of a learning process in mind when they invited people to come and exchange their experiences. "This is not a course or a conference," emphasizes Aviram. "It is an informal gathering where everybody can offer something, whether they have formal qualifications or not. We want to be as inclusive as possible. Everybody can come: foresters, village kids, organic farmers, travelers, NGOs, ecology students. For us it's a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the amazing work going on in India." "There surely is an organic movement across all Indian states," confirms Dhruva.

"We are new here and have much more to learn than to teach," admits Aviram. "There is all the knowledge about the indigenous plants and wildlife that village children have and we don't."

Children proved to be the best teachers, eager to share and with much free time. When their parents join the folks from the forest, this is often their first encounter with solar panels and the concept of living in huts of thatch.

Besides the tacit knowledge that has been shared during the week-long festival, some concrete ideas have emerged for future cooperation. There is a plan to make a bicycle trip to tribal villages and exchange experiences with the local people. Plans for the next Van Ustav – Forest Festival, the third, are already developing. In the meantime, Sadhana Forest welcomes volunteers who want to help with the reforestation process, especially during the planting season between August and October. Accommodation in huts is free.

Joanna

## AUROVILLE LIFE

### This end that end

When we first got our lovely house in New Creation, a friend from Pitanga came to visit and said:

"Well, it's very nice, but I suppose you'll eventually move up to the other end of Auroville." "Help," I thought, "I'm at the wrong end!" It seems there are many sides to Auroville: the wrong end, the right end, the up and down end, This End and That End.

So, who lives where and why? The Industrial Zone is clearly defined as the commercial area, the Green Belt for trees and forests, but then it gets a bit vague. Is there a Back of Beyond for far flung outposts like Eternity or Hermitage? Maybe it is with the comfortable rather hippy Ami or is it the more bourgeois Certitude?

I guess if you live at Pitanga end you are nearer the heart of Auroville with the Matrimandir on your doorstep and a hop and a jump over to the video library. Then there is the Cinema Paradiso and the new café at the Town Hall that serves French fish dishes. No need for a bumpy, dusty ride up the road for Matrimandir Petal Duty, you are right there with your finger on the pulse of the Town Hall, Savitri Bhavan, the smart Kala Kendra art gallery, Bharat Nivas, and even a handy Free Store to help dress you. The smart apartments up there give a sophisticated urban atmosphere, with Invocation like a huge ocean liner and Surrender's one street curving like a little corner of Los Angeles.

So what does That End (my end) cover? We have the bustling New Creation Corner café and the internet shop, New Creation community with the school and gym and sports ground and now that beautiful new swimming pool. Behind it are two quiet little communities and the spacious greenery of Fraternity, the Youth Camp (definitely a minus on the elegance ratings there), the humming technology of Aurelec with its smart green coated guards and

the very useful Dental Service lie a little further on. And of course there is that hub of activity, the Pour Tous Centre, with its handy little café and the electrical graveyard of Mahasarasvati.

Further down the road is our own classy suburb of Auromodèle, the original model for Auroville's city that somehow never grew very much. In its heart is Roma's Kitchen, a tranquil little eatery that feels like a proper restaurant.

Being at the Wrong End has many and varied advantages like being only six minutes (I've timed it) from the beach for an early morning swim, then a still warm Bakery croissant over a little breakfast at the Tea Stop with the morning paper, "The Hindu." And did you know there is a library in the Cultural Centre, that pretty little building opposite the Bakery? Rather dusty books but a no hassle borrowing system. Keep them as long as you want, no questions asked.

Here there is no need to wait anxiously for a taxi to come three kilometres up the road; you just stroll up to the taxi service at New Creation, wake a sleeping driver and climb into a waiting car. And the petrol service lives here, too, definitely a great plus.

Kuilapalayam is our neighbouring Tamil village and I always find the villagers smile and Vannakam me as I walk through the little streets. I am often offered a cup of tea. Though I never fail to be shocked by the sudden contrast of cultures, I feel it is a privilege to be able to share something so very different, yet so comfortable. I am sure this is quite rare.

I've got a great idea. Every three years say, everyone can put the names of their house into a big hat then we'll all gather round, dip in and take out our house for the next three years. This will happen on Mother's birthday, just to spiritualize the whole affair. We will all then discover the joy of keet versus concrete, Aspiration versus Invocation, five a.m. temple music versus the dawn chorus... Good luck!

Dianna



# Magic in the Free Store

The Free Store, in existence for over fifteen years, waits for its final location. Dianna investigates.

“There is magic in this place,” says Krishna passionately as we sit in the Free Store, surrounded by racks of clothing and bundles and boxes on the floor. Krishna, and Kamala, a French and a Tamil Aurovilian, run it with great dedication and enthusiasm. The Free Store offers clothing of all shapes and sizes and colours, sometimes of the wildest ethnic variety. I see loon pants; long thermal underwear; a cowboy hat. “How do these get to Auroville?” I wonder as I pick up a heavy, fur-lined coat. Krishna explains that they are unloaded by people coming down from the mountains and gratefully received by people going up to the Himalayas.

A book case at the back has stacks of books and magazines in at least half a dozen languages. A shelf displays all the remnants of tropical holidays; mosquito sprays, diarrhea tablets and pre, during and post sun creams, all sitting there waiting to be of use to the next person. It's good to see things are not wasted.

“The Free Store helps develop generosity and freedom from attachment,” Krishna tells me. “It can help to make us live more simply by not accumulating possessions. We can learn that there is a joy in giving and we can understand that our gift will

make someone happy. I think perhaps this is the only service in Auroville that is absolutely free and promotes the spirit of giving and taking according to need.”

I once drifted in here when I was a guest. Then it was explained to me that the Free Store wasn't yet for me. Quite right. It is a service for Aurovilians and Newcomers only and depends on generosity and discipline. The ladies are preparing a quotation of Mother's to hang up on the wall that explains the purpose of the Free Store. ‘Auroville is not for the satisfaction of desires but for the growth of the true consciousness.’

Krishna tells me the first Free Store was in Aspiration; then it moved to Matrimandir's office, then to a little room under the amphitheatre before it came to yet another temporary place in Bharat Nivas. She would like to see it settled in a good sized space so she can expand and improve the service, as the present location is far too small. They are hoping to get rooms above the new Pour Tous, next to the Solar Kitchen, with a space for a few chairs so people can sit and chat when they meet friends. “This is part of the service, the sharing of friendship as well as clothes.” She says people, well, women actually, come here when they feel a bit down and it makes them really happy when they find a red dress that fits perfectly or

a party dress for their daughter. Women often wear something for three months then bring it back and it circulates again.

Krishna supervises the tailoring section next door where the tailor rattles away on his machine making curtains, cushion covers and doing repairs, all free of charge. Also new clothes for Aurovilians are made free of charge,” says Krishna.

Kamala came to work here ten years ago and is just as enthusiastic as Krishna about it. She is a lovely woman who tells me her friends could not understand why she did not work with computers or in an office. “I feel this work is equal to any work,” she explained. “There is no high or low work if it is for the Divine. It is like a big family here. After all, it is part of the Indian tradition. If I have something I do not use I naturally pass it on to my sister. When you give you open your heart and feel more transparent and free.”

“I would like to receive more men's and children's clothing,” she tells me. “It is now eighty percent women's clothing, but then women do enjoy clothes

more than men, don't they? A few men do come in and I would like to be able to offer them sports clothes and work clothing.” As we speak a young Tamil father comes in with a big bundle of what look like well used and loved Lego and Kamala starts dividing it up into smaller bags to take to the schools. A young mum with a huge infant strapped to her front unloads bags of baby clothes. There's definitely a big turnover here.

Many items come from the units and some of them are very generous. Maroma donates incense on a monthly basis; other units give beautiful clothes; if they are sometimes too big, as they have been designed

for large ladies overseas, or are too glamorous for dusty Auroville, be sure the theatre productions make happy use of them. Mandala and Flame pottery sometimes give surplus ceramics, or seconds; word gets around surprisingly quickly and they disappear immediately.

Occasionally people do get carried away and take too much but then it is gently pointed out to them that we must all share these things. In front of me is a big box of incense with a notice saying “One only, please”, but on my way out Krishna points to a large bowl of lemons someone had brought in and tells me to take as many as I want.

Dianna

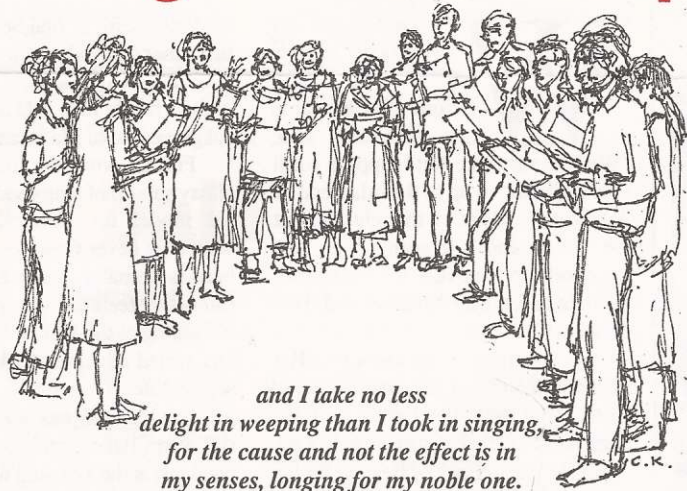
PHOTO: PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI



The Free Store: A place for material sharing of gently used items

## CULTURE

### I sang and now I weep



So sang Italian Francesco Petrarca in ‘Cantai, or piango, et non men di dolcezza’, one of the 366 sonnets from his song book ‘Canzoniere’ inspired by Laura. He might not have realized that these poems, in turn, would inspire generations of composers who set them to madrigals and songs. And he would certainly never have imagined that some of these, one day, would be sung in Auroville.

Petrarch (1304 -1374) is best known to posterity as a poet though he also rates, together with Dante, as the father of humanism and as the founder of alpinism. Most famous are his sonnets to Laura, a woman for whom he felt an overwhelming love, but who was already married. The sonnets speak about the joy he felt in her presence, the unendurable torments of unrequited love, and his grief upon her death which is as difficult to live with as was his former suffering.

Conductor Eugene Liven d'Abelardo, as much a lover of Renaissance music as an admirer of Petrarch's poetry, convinced the 15 members of the Auroville Renaissance Cappella to sing the sometimes difficult four, five or six-voiced Petrarca madrigals from Renaissance composers Arcadelt, Willaert, Rore, Verdelot and Orlando di Lasso. He also got pianist Heinrich to interpret the Tre sonetti del Petrarca by the Romantic composer Franz Liszt's piano suite Années de Pélerinage. For better appreciation, English translations of the sonnets were read by Norman. It was three times performed in Auroville and once in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and on two occasions

Heinrich provided the pianistic intermezzi.

If the choir was characterized as ‘aspiring amateurs’ a few years ago, their performance convincingly proved that an upgrade in nomenclature is in order. Though none of the members are professionals, they demonstrated that high quality can be achieved with perseverance and under good guidance. Heinrich's interpretation of the devilishly difficult sonetti showed technical virtuosity and sincere musicality.

If the performance had a fault, it was the reading of the English translations of the poems. This is not due to Norman's sonorous renditions but due to the fact that the beautiful atmosphere created by the madrigals was interrupted by the readings. Perhaps a handout with the Italian and English texts might have been preferable – the more so as the poems deserve rereading.

The performance concluded, startlingly, with a modern song, *Little lamb who made thee*, one of William Blake's poems set to music by contemporary composer John Tavener. “This music was used at the burial service of Diana, Princess of Wales, and became an instant success,” said Eugene. Listening to the hauntingly wonderful and complex chords of Tavener's music required a mental and emotional shift, after hearing the linear contrapuntal madrigals from the Renaissance. But it also created a hope: that the Auroville Renaissance Cappella may venture into modernity and one day give a concert of contemporary masters – perhaps with a Renaissance madrigal as encore.

Carel

## CULTURE

### The Chalumeau's debut

There is a special atmosphere even before the concert begins. Verite Hall makes you feel as if you are in the sanctum sanctorum of a temple.

On entering people lower their voices; someone is meditating. Three flute players slowly enter from the sides, bringing sound from dark corners on to the stage. The event is to present a newly-invented instrument produced in Mohanam musical workshop – a bamboo clarinet called ‘chalumeau.’

The music comes in bits. First there is an illusion of an underwater cave induced by sucking sounds drummed on a plastic water bottle (Gino Ginocchio). There are pictures of a desert conjured up by the chalumeau and bossa nova guitar (Rüdiger Schödel). Towards the end, a curious duet of a monolithic singing stone and a simple one-string berimbau appears, fusing futuristic sound with the archaic (Hannes Fessmann and Gino Ginocchio).

The chalumeau is one of the results of Rüdiger Schödel's experiments with wood and sound. Simple as it may look, it took him two years to develop. He is a German musician, music therapist, instrument builder, but first of all a sound researcher. A compromise has to be reached between ergonomics and the tuning of the flute, resulting in the two openings that can be closed only by a leg. He squats on the stage showing how to use the



Rüdiger Schödel and his student playing the chalumeau

“leg-claps” that connect octaves.

He didn't exactly come to Auroville to build instruments. Twenty years after his first visit he came again to have a rest and try ayurvedic treatment. But his chalumeau caught on in Mohanam's musical workshop, as he and Aurelio, the workshop founder, got on like a house on fire from the first moment. Shankar and Sentil, two Tamil trainees, are now engaged in the chalumeau-making process and, incidentally, also learning how to play it.

Rüdiger is thinking about the larger-scale production for sale. During the summer he will be busy with his Klangwerk musical workshop in Switzerland, working on the construction of wind and string instruments, xylophones and sound sculptures. But he is coming back after the monsoon to teach the trainees how to tune the instruments. Tuning is the hardest part. Rüdiger also promises more live music.

Joanna

PHOTO: JOANNA



# Mother's photographs



PHOTOS COURTESY SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM - DELHI BRANCH

Another exhibition of unusual photographs of The Mother has been held in Auroville. There are now two such exhibitions each year; one around February 21, Mother's birthday, at the Savitri Bhavan; and one around August 15, Sri Aurobindo's birthday, at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. The organizer of these exhibitions is Loretta. She is Auroville's focal point for the three-way collaboration between Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and the Delhi branch of the Ashram. The photographs are from the Sri Aurobindo Book Distribution Agency (SABDA) branch of the Delhi Ashram; Mother and Sri Aurobindo's possessions are loaned by Srismriti, the Mother's Museum in the Ashram; and the work for the exhibitions is done by Aurovilians.

The latest exhibition, called "Mother's

Care", took place at Savitri Bhavan from February 18th until March 19th. There were many photographs of Mother with children and there was one wall with a series of portrait-photographs of Mother in conversation, showing Her changing expressions. The accompanying quotations were mainly memories of tender and caring things Mother had done, and a few excerpts from Savitri. There were also some of Mother's personal belongings which had stories associated with them. As usual, some rare and some well-known photographs of Mother were for sale.

"My perception is that Mother and Sri Aurobindo work through Their photographs and through the exhibitions," says Loretta. "Each exhibition has a different atmosphere, but always you can feel Their Presence. My goal in arranging these exhibitions is to have that indescribable

atmosphere that, to me, is Mother's living Presence; the Presence which I felt, day and night, when I was living in the Ashram when Mother was there. It makes me really happy when the old Ashramites tell me that, to them, the exhibition feels like it did when Mother was living in the Ashram."

The plans for each exhibition start six months to a year in advance, when the idea for the theme comes. "There is such a vast wealth of material that I never start with pre-set ideas. I just stay open," says Loretta. "The content of each exhibition unfolds through the selection of the photographs, the research for quotations, and the selection of the various items which belonged to Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Once everything is framed and prepared, the location of each photograph and object arranges itself spontaneously in the exhibition space."

There are always flowers in the exhibition. "They seem to have a special affinity for Mother's Presence and Her photographs," says Loretta. "We were amazed to see how long they lasted - 22 days, without refreshing the water. Also last August, in the exhibition called "Mother's Aspirations and Prayers" there was a place for meditation in front of a very large photograph of Mother which She named "Realisation". One morning I'd arranged many stalks of orchids in a large bowl, in a fan, like a peacock's tail, in front of the photograph. By 5:00 pm, each individual flower had twisted around on the stalk to face the Mother's photograph."

"Working on each exhibition is like opening a door to somewhere, and when it is all over and I walk out, I feel a different person," says Loretta. It's a feeling many will have shared.

Carel

## OBITUARIES

### Jossy

On Thursday March 2nd, long time Aurovilian Jossy

(Françoise Josette Eblagon) passed away in the Auroville Health Centre, closely surrounded by her partner Adhara and children Dayini and Jyotis. In a most loving and dignified last tribute, family and friends buried her in the Adventure burial ground early in the morning of March 7th 2006.

Jossy came originally from France and lived and worked in Auroville since 1974, amongst others for the Free Store and as teacher at Transition school. She would have been 65 this year.

"Jossy has been our teacher, colleague and friend for many many years. She is greatly loved and will be sorely missed by all. Wonderful memories of her and her loving way of working will stay with us," wrote her friends and pupils of Transition School. Remembered Marti, "She was deeply committed to the wisdoms of indigenous peoples and had a lifelong interest in children and



Jossy with her granddaughter Taia

education. She developed the 'sand-box,' a way of working with the emotional problems and dreams of children through non-verbal play in a wonderful space that was safe, beautiful, and fun. Quiet and loving, she always got on with life and her own work in a humble way."

*Like a dragonfly you turned  
On the roads of a sun-bright future.  
Like an open flower you bloomed  
At the dawn of the Eternal Morning,  
Whom you conquered.  
Like a lonely bird you departed noiselessly,  
With your golden flame, which never dies,  
Into Infinity....  
See you soon, on a new Earth,  
In Sri Aurobindo's and Sweet Mother's Love!*

Gangalakshmi

### Raymond

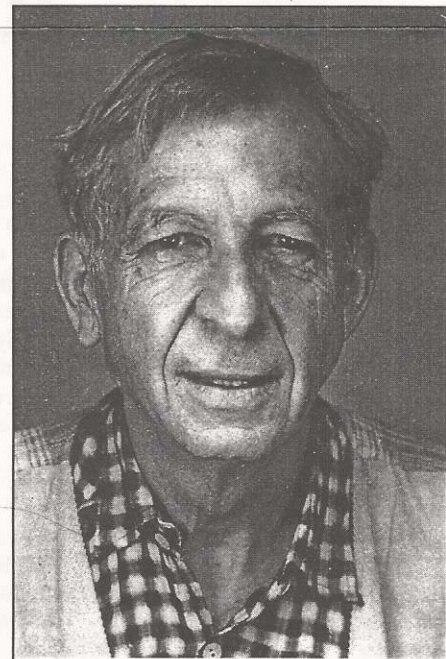
In a dawn burial on March 18th, Raymond Thépot was laid to rest by his family and friends. Raymond had undergone several operations for his illness over the last few years. He was 71 years old.

Raymond was born in France and spent some years in the navy and as a teacher. He first came across Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through a book by Gabriel Germain in the late sixties. He started to write to Mother and she sent him many letters of guidance and blessing packets. As his inner life grew, so did difficulties with his family and working daily life. Satprem's book *The Adventure of Consciousness* acted as a catalyst and in 1968 he came to live in India. "India," he said, "where the Sun of Truth, Surya is present behind the veil only."

He spent a short time at the Ashram. In 1977 he came to Auroville and in the first years planted trees and worked at the Matrimandir. But his true calling was translating Sri Aurobindo's

poetry. As he said, "There are quite some translations to be done grafting the beautiful texts of Sri Aurobindo onto the tree of the French language." He translated Sri Aurobindo's epic poems into French, starting with the great masterpiece *Savitri* and the Trojan war re-rendering *Ilion*.

As his web page on the Auroville's website shows, he also loved to write. A collection of his essays and short stories called *Real Utopias*, describing Raymond's feelings about Auroville, was recently translated into English by Shraddhavan. She recalls: "Of all the writings I have been called on to translate over the last thirty years, perhaps Raymond's have given me the most delight. I enjoy his poetic, subtle, and humorous way of writing about ideas and experiences which are not superficial. His playful mastery of language and ideas carry the



Raymond

flavour of a more cultured place and time, which we linguistic exiles can savour as a rare delicacy."

#### THERE IS

*There is the hollow of the heart  
There is a hunger which does not want to take  
There is a voice which opens me and finds me  
A handshake beyond telling*

*There is in the world's hollow a warmth  
A being naked defenseless which gives itself  
Wave after wave the harvests of sweetness.*

*There is the kinship a spreading echo  
The slow transhumance of familiar signs  
The confidence wandering for a listener*

*There is the hollow of the world  
There is the hollow of the heart.*

Raymond

*Of course, it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer,  
to give up customs one barely had time to learn,  
not to see roses and other promising Things  
in terms of a human future; no longer to be  
what one was in infinitely anxious hands; to leave  
even one's own first name behind, forgetting it  
as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.  
Strange to no longer desire one's desires. Strange  
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away  
in every direction. And being dead is hard work  
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel  
a trace of eternity.--- Though the living are wrong to believe  
in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves have created.  
Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living  
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent  
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms  
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.*

From Duino Elegies by Rainer Maria Rilke



# God's art: dancing as ritual

After a break of over 15 years, Krishna Kumar and his wife Gita were back in Auroville leading a motley crew of sixteen Aurovilians through a six-week long intensive dance workshop to an evening performance at the Sri Aurobindo auditorium on February 27th

PHOTO: PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

**K**rishna Kumar and Gita have been associated with Auroville for over 20 years. "In fact my connection began even earlier," says Krishna. "I was in Auroville on the day of its inauguration; I had just finished my matriculation exams when my granny thrust 150 rupees into my hand and told me to make a round tour of the South of India. On the day I arrived at Pondy, someone took me to a bus full of young people all carrying a little earth." He remembers sitting right in front watching the inauguration ceremony of Auroville.

Krishna comes from a traditional south Indian family with a background in theatre and arts. Since the age of three, he has been performing on stage. "I was thrown into that world just like my father and his father before him," he says. Gita, his wife and dance partner, whom he fondly refers to as his 'Shakti', is German by origin. The two met in Delhi when Krishna was teaching dance and she was his student. "After two years he was not somehow my guru anymore - we were boyfriend and girlfriend. Then the problem came that his granny pressed him to get married in two months. So we simply told the family that we got married to keep the pressure off," she says with a grin. The couple got married later.

What brought them to settle in this area? "It is Mother's work,"

says Gita. "After our time in Delhi, we wanted to move to Kerala and start a new dance school there. But then we had to first visit his family in Madras. Then we headed to Chidambaram to see the famous Nataraja Temple and there it suddenly started raining and pouring down. With half of Chidambaram under water we were advised to move to Pondy and stay by the beach; the logic being that even if it rained, the water would go into the sea. So we came to Pondy, rented a hut by the beach in a place called Serenity. It was run by some French man, Pappa Serene or someone, and there we started practicing - Krishna his Mridangam, and I, my dance." The two loved the place. "It was so nice - we'd practice, go to the beach, swim, come back, practice more. Finally we ended up buying some land right on the beach."

For the past fifteen years, the couple has been leading a nomadic life, dividing their time between Europe and India. "But our hearts have always been here," says Gita. Through their earnings in Europe they managed to build their home and studio by the beach. Every two



Krishna Kumar and Gita in rehearsal

years, the couple returns for a precious few months to work on new compositions and choreography, give music or dance performances, or, as on this trip, conduct workshops for students. This time they have also been training ten children from their neighbouring fishing village.

As teachers, their approach to teaching dance is radical and refreshing, perhaps also a result of their own inter-cultural partnership. While strongly grounded in tradition, they exude a certain global avant garde quality that is simultaneously philosophical, playful, adventuresome and exploratory. "We are in the modern world," says Krishna. "And no one wants to learn this art form anymore in the traditional way, so as teachers we have to create fresh interest." Their unconventional style and approach to dance is often frowned upon by purists. It is the main reason why the two prefer Auroville with its open-minded audience. Over the years, they have been teaching an array of 'global' faces, a term Krishna uses to refer to their multicultural stu-

dents from Auroville and its environs. Saroja, one of their earliest students, remembers how as a little girl, she and her friends living in the hostel in Fraternity, would swim along the coast, get to Krishna and Gita's house, learn dance and then return back to Auroville.

After all these years of dance and music, Krishna says that his perspectives on the fine arts have deepened. "Dance, music, mime, painting and sculpture - all these five arts can be a medium to solve one's problems: your kama (lust) problem, your artha or 'desire for material possession' problem and all your other problems can find release. Through dance I have experienced that all my wishes are fulfilled; and that I become free from them, that they are no longer important."

"For me, dance is God's art. I can't work for

just a performance, for me dance has become a ritual. And you can't cheat in a ritual. It depends on your inner attitude. It's this that you have to give to the audience; they must feel that." Adds Gita, "And some do. In Europe sometimes people came to us after a performance with tears in their eyes. They had felt 'something'. The whole experience became transformational."

Though their work in Europe is not yet over, the colourful and eclectic couple wishes to shift focus to India. "We need a new generation of dancers who create Bharatanatyam in different ways. We would like to train them in our dance studio. This dance now needs global faces," says Krishna.

Priya Sundaravalli

## Discovering my Indian identity

Eighteen year old Suryamayi talks about her experience of participating in a recent dance workshop

**"B**efore I was so focussed on my studies that I'd set a lot of other things aside for that. But when I realized that exams didn't really work for me, I got a totally new perspective on life. I wanted a comprehensive education, and it included dance. A year ago, I had seen a Bharatanatyam performance which left me mesmerized. I felt I had to do dance. It was like an inner calling. When Krishna Kumar and Gita offered their workshop, I signed up at once.

"But the workshop did more than teach me dance. I felt I was touching something real and I don't yet know what that was - it was something deeper than dance. When I was watching the other dancers, I felt I was at the doors of another world, looking into a completely different dimension. It was full of power, a spiritual power.

"Perhaps every dance form has a spiritual basis and you can experience it when you see a good dancer. But with Bharatanatyam, the connection is obvious and palpable. You can even feel something coming through seeing an inexperienced dancer. I haven't felt that with ballet, for example.

"There was an added dimension. I

was brought up in Auroville, and I don't like the label of being a 'foreigner'... it has been a sensitive issue for me. I tried to deal with that by learning Tamil but still it didn't feel authentic. Bharatanatyam finally gave me the connection to India. I came home one evening after my class, and seeing me all happy my housemate Mukta asked me how it went and if I couldn't show her something. And I showed her a namaste. She then looked at me and said, "Wow, this really fits you." And that's how I've felt. I have been experiencing something that really expresses Indian culture. During this workshop, my origins became a non-issue, and I identified with this very Indian style.

"I need to work on my body now to get to an optimum level of fitness. It is a shift from the mental to the physical. With the mental I reached a block. I wasn't feeling satisfied, I wasn't getting enough out of it; and I was getting stressed, feeling limits more than anything else. Through dance, I discover that I have access to many feelings, even though there are



Suryamayi

also many limitations in the physical.

"Now I really want to dance. I'll be leaving for Europe this summer to explore dance programmes that will accept inexperienced dancers, places where I can get 6-7 hours of dance training everyday to get a good grounding in the basics. Ultimately I want to go deeply into Bharatanatyam as well as Flamenco, another dance form I admire."

As told to Priya Sundaravalli

## NEW BOOK

### Journey through an ecstatic world

*"In this earthly place, the Supramental beings dwell..."  
"...they are upon earth to establish  
the Bliss of existence for all..."*

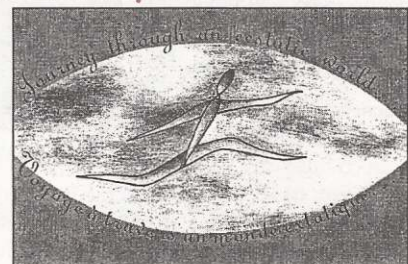
**W**hen two thirteen year olds are encouraged to visualize an Auroville 300 years from now, what they come up with is a world of divinity that can inspire any one of us.

"Journey through an ecstatic world" is a jewel of a picture book created by Alizée and Aurévan, students at Deepanam school in April 2004. With the encouragement of Vidya their teacher, they wrote a bilingual tale in English-French and illustrated it with delicate pencil sketches. While it may appear to be a book of wishful thinking, it is far more inspirational in its simplicity. This is a book that will appeal to all ages.

Published by Auroville Press through the support of SAIER, 'Journey through an ecstatic world' has seen a first printing of 500 copies, and awaits discovery.

Suggested contribution: Rs. 100 or US\$ 5 (includes mailing charges). Profits from sale of book will support other creative student projects.

For more information, contact [sundaravalli@auroville.org.in](mailto:sundaravalli@auroville.org.in)



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Editorial team: Alan, Ancolie, Caryl, Dianna, Emmanuelle, Priya Sundaravalli, Roger.

Guest editor: Joanna

Proof-reading: Hero.

DTP: Matthia. Photo editing: Matthia

Printed and published by Caryl Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation, and printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

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