

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

The Matrimandir waits to be unveiled

The main structures are expected to be ready on February 21st, 2007, 36 years after Matrimandir's foundation ceremony.

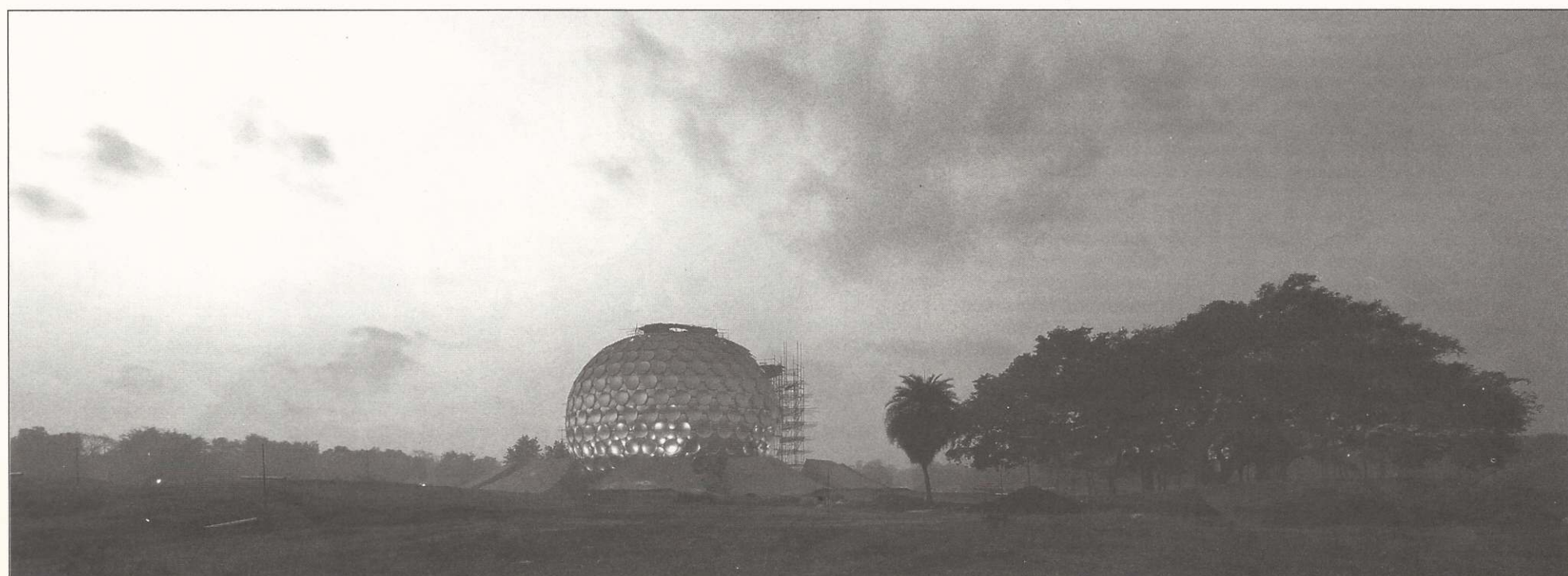


PHOTO: COROLAN

The Matrimandir, described by The Mother as the cohesive Force of Auroville, has featured as one of Auroville Today's main topics ever since the journal started in October 1988. At least twice a year someone from Auroville Today would walk the site with one of Matrimandir's executives and hear stories about new developments, unexpected delays and particular difficulties. And at every visit, a long list of 'works still to be done' would be recited.

This time, however, our visit is different. For the first time we learn that nearly everything has been done. The Matrimandir merely waits to be unveiled. The date, for many, is obvious and beyond dispute. "We want to be ready on February 21st, the birthday of The Mother," says Gilles Guigan, one of Matrimandir's executives. "Firstly because Matrimandir is 'The Mother's Shrine'. Secondly, because it was on this same day, 36 years ago, that the foundation ceremony for the Matri-mandir took place. It's symbolic. The number 12, which is omnipresent at Matrimandir, stands, according to the Mother, for Perfect Stabilised Manifestation and for Double Perfection, spiritual and material, and 36 is three times that number."

But 'completely ready' the building won't be. Says Gilles: "Sometime during the second half of January, the inside of Matrimandir, including the Inner Chamber, will be closed so that we can complete the work. On February 21st, we intend to reopen the Matrimandir together with all twelve meditation rooms in the petals and the

"The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection, union with the Divine manifested in a progressive Human Unity."

The Mother

space underneath the Matrimandir. We are aiming at making the whole place look as beautiful and complete as possible, but some things probably won't be finished." He mentions specifically the large decorative feature above two of the four entrance doors, and to the possibility that the placement of the curved glass parapets on the ramps – described as 'works of art' by the glass experts – might run into problems.

While awareness dawns that the Matrimandir will finally be ready, there is as yet little understanding what impact it will have on Auroville. "There is a substantial pressure that, as Auroville belongs to nobody in particular according to its Charter, the

Matrimandir should also be freely accessible to every visitor, just like the Baha'i Lotus Temple in New Delhi," says Gilles. "But The Mother has told Roger Anger that the Matrimandir is a place for Aurovilians, and that it was 'not for visitors in principle'." Opinions on what She exactly meant by 'visitors' in this respect differ, but all agree that the present policy for casual tourists should continue: they will only be allowed to see the Matrimandir from a distance. Explains Gilles, "It is simply not possible to allow all the tourists because their number is far too great. Each person would need to pull on white socks to walk through Matrimandir, so you can imagine the confusion." He recalls that an earlier experiment to allow tourists to walk in file up to the Chamber, have a look at the Crystal and then turn back, was unsatisfactory to all.

The opening times for the non-Aurovillian pass holders are still to be decided. The main question is the availability of a sufficient number of volunteers: at least fourteen Aurovilians are required for the Chamber and the twelve meditation rooms in the petals.

On an 'occult' level, the finishing of Matrimandir might presage the coming of better times. The Mother repeatedly stressed that the earlier the Matrimandir would be ready, the better it would be for everybody, especially for the Aurovilians. "Build Matrimandir, I take it upon myself to make it into a very strong centre," She said.

Even now, while the finishing work is in progress, something seems to be changing in Auroville's atmosphere; many attempts are being made to harmonize opposing viewpoints. As Nirodbaran, who recalled, in an interview with Auroville Today in August 1991, that Mother had mentioned that "the completion of Matrimandir will coincide with the establishment of peace and harmony in the world."

Carel

Daybreak at the Matrimandir – April 2006

Status Report

Matrimandir outside

Outer skin: Although most discs have been installed, the work of fixing the golden discs will be fully finished only by February.

Entrance doors: Only the golden shields above the North and West entrance doors are expected to be completed by February 21st, 2007.

Crane: The 12 ton stainless steel crane that will be positioned invisibly on top of the Matrimandir is being sent from Germany.

The heliostat is in place.

Area beneath the Matrimandir:

A crystal globe of diameter 17 centimeters will be installed in the centre of the pond beneath the Matrimandir. It will receive a concentrated ray of sunlight which is directed all the way from the heliostat on top of the Matri-mandir. This ray of sun, after passing through the crystal globe in the Inner Chamber, enters an opening in the floor below, travels down through the centre of the Mother's symbol in the staircase, and finally reaches the crystal globe in the pond.

Matrimandir inside

Inner skin: The placement of the white powder-coated aluminium triangles holding fibre-glass fabric is in progress.

Inner skin lighting: Cable and LED lamp fixing is in progress. The computer programme to regulate the LED lamps which will give the golden-pink light prescribed by The Mother is completed.

Ramps: The white glass for the parapets of the ramps that lead from the second floor to the

Chamber will be made by a company in Bangalore. This is the most difficult job yet to be done. Each of the 150 pieces of glass needs to be bent in a different way, which calls for fine craftsmanship.

Entrance foyers to the Chamber: A marble bench and a false ceiling will be added.

Meditation rooms

All 12 meditation rooms in the twelve petals that surround the Matrimandir will be ready. To begin with, three of them will have a/c, the others natural ventilation.

Gardens

Major pathways are done.

Unity Garden: Work is in progress to complete the six plots of the Unity Garden under the Banyan area.

Petal lawns: The lawns on the small and big petals are being reseeded with drought-resistant grasses.

Irrigation: A computerized irrigation system is completed.

Individual garden lay-outs: These are to be decided.

Ancillary facilities: The toilet blocks etc., are still to be decided upon.

Lake

The dimensions of the lake surrounding the Matrimandir are as yet undecided.

Maintenance

The Matrimandir will be a high-maintenance building. To minimize calcium deposits on the marble and discs, demineralized water will be used for cleaning. This will be stored in tanks beneath the amphitheatre.

The inauguration 36 years ago

The Foundation stone of the Matrimandir was laid at the centre of Auroville on 21st February 1971, exactly at sunrise at 6.30 am. A fire, symbol of the human aspiration, had been lit in front of a simple yet magnificent altar and the large gathering sat in a semi-circle, facing the East, while the air resounded with the Mother's message and music. The Mother gave the following message for the occasion: "Let the Matrimandir be the living symbol of Auroville's aspiration for the Divine".

An extract from Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother* was read out by Nolini Kanta Gupta: "The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life Divine and the immortal's Ananda."

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Sri Aurobindo in the Parliament Building

The statues of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo were recently unveiled in India's Parliament House. They were both conceived in Puducherry's Aurodhan art gallery.

On August 23rd, 2006, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Vice President of India, and Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, India's lower House of Parliament, unveiled the statues of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo in Parliament House. The occasion was graced by the presence of many ministers and parliamentarians, both from the ruling coalition as well as from the opposition.

"Spiritual Power," ran the headline of one national newspaper, reporting on the occasion. "A nation honours itself when it honours those who fought for its greatness," commented another one. Both indicated that India has not only a spiritual heritage but also a spiritual destiny. Manoj Dasgupta, the managing trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, summed it up eloquently "We are glad that his statue has been installed in Parliament House and hope that it will be a constant reminder of the great spiritual destiny of India and the role all Indians need to play in it." For India's destiny, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not just to become a nation like many others, but to be the leader in a new world and spiritualise the human race. The Mother, in a conversation in 1954, had said it more specifically: "The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world. The Government of India ought to recognize this significance of India in this sphere and plan their action accordingly."



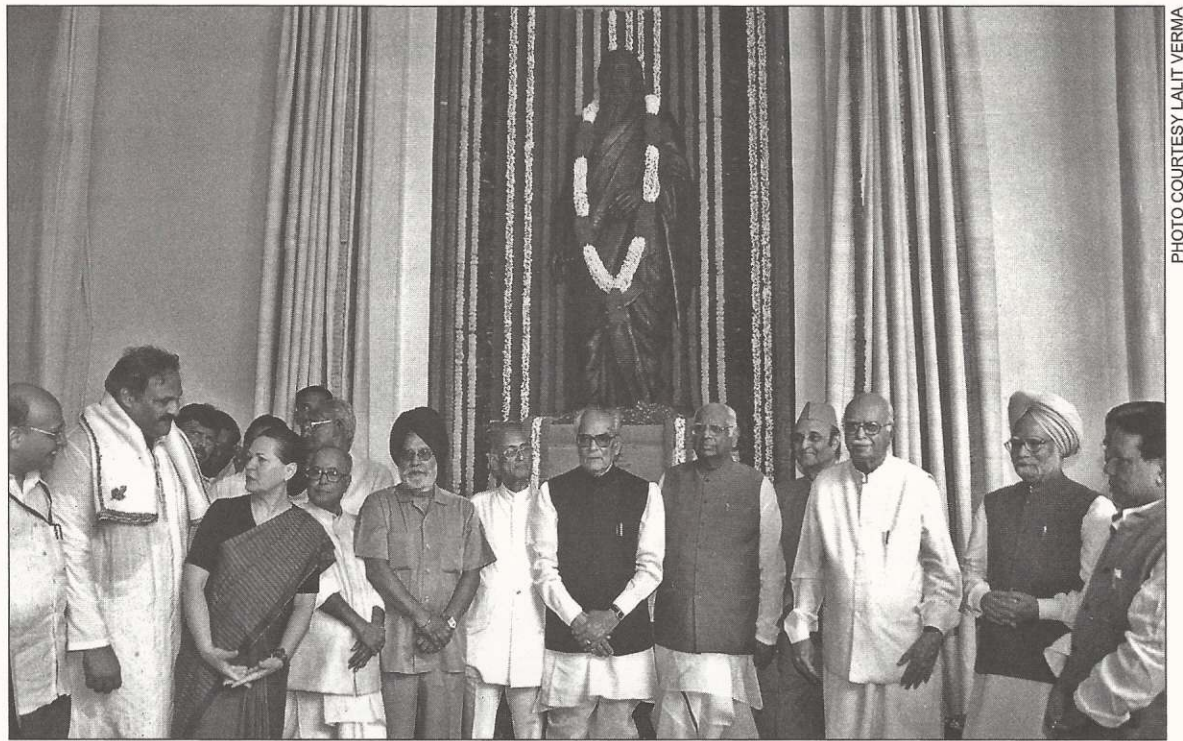
Sri Aurobindo's statue in Parliament House.

The man behind the statues is Lalit Verma, the owner of the Aurodhan art gallery in Puducherry. "Sri Aurobindo is my guru and friend, and I have a deep respect for Vivekananda," he says. "To see their statues in the most important entrance of the Indian Parliament House is a signal that the country, after 56 years, has acknowledged the values they represent and the spiritual mission they initiated."

He adds: "The Prime Minister presented shawls to the sculptors of the statues as a mark of respect. When he put the shawl around my shoulders, I was very much moved. For I inwardly felt that it was a sign that the Government of India would protect and support Sri Aurobindo's organisations – the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville – against the forces that come to disturb them."

The story of the statues began over 10 years ago when Jayantilal Prakash, the former head of the Sri Aurobindo Archives, asked Lalit to make two busts of Sri Aurobindo: one for Kings College in Cambridge where Sri Aurobindo had studied, the other for the Nehru Centre in London. At that time the High Commissioner for India in the U.K. was Dr. L. M. Singhvi, who later became Member of Parliament, and also served on the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

"At some point in time I learned that a Parliamentary Committee was considering placing larger than life statues of Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda in the Parliament House," says Lalit. "On the advice of Dr. Singhvi they came to Puducherry and asked if I could take up the work. I replied that I could do a sketch of Swami Vivekananda's statue, but not the mould making or the casting. This was later done by another sculptor,



Political leaders of India's major parties at the unveiling of the statue of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo at Parliament House in New Delhi. (Lalit Verma stands second from left)

Shri C. D. Dakshinamoorthy. I also said that I would take up the assignment of Sri Aurobindo's statue only if I found that it would come out well. For I was not really sure if I was up to the task. They wanted a statue of Sri Aurobindo as a yogi and sage, based on the well-known photos which the French photographer Cartier Bresson had taken in April 1950, a few months before Sri Aurobindo's passing. But The Mother has often said that it is near impossible to catch something true of Sri Aurobindo in paintings or sculptures. So I doubted I was up to it."

The work took almost 3 years. Lalit, as team leader, did the drawings and the sketches. "There were moments when I was ready to give up," he says. "Our ideal was to create a statue of Sri Aurobindo that would not only resemble him and but also convey something of his presence. I often felt it was impossible." But he struggled on, aware of the fact that if he didn't deliver, someone else would get the assignment and might botch the job.

"The work had become a responsibility. Then I noticed something interesting: all along, while doing the job, I felt fantastic. I had the feeling that the work was being done through me."

The main difficulty was to imagine how Sri Aurobindo would appear standing up. Cartier Bresson's photos are all of Sri Aurobindo in a sitting position. The only photos of him standing are from before 1915. Using measurements of Sri Aurobindo's body, taken by one of the old sadhaks in the 1940s, Lalit made many sketches. "One of them was particularly good. I sent it to the Parliamentary Committee. I heard afterwards that one of its members almost got into a trance gazing at it. They gave the order. I replied that I would do my best, but that the statue would not be released until I had the sanction of someone who had seen Sri Aurobindo." That someone was Nirodbaran, who occasionally would come to check the progress of the work and give advice. "We first worked with small scale models.

Then, when we had finished the mould for the final statue, he came again. He looked intently at the mould, and then said 'Yes, there is no doubt that this is Sri Aurobindo.' I heaved a sigh of relief. Then we cast it in bronze," says Lalit.

Both statues, 82-inches (2.08 metres) tall, have been designed to be seen from a distance of 10 to 12 metres. Will other statues be added to their commanding presence in the Entrance Hall? Says Lalit: "I was told there won't be any, and that a bill to that effect has been passed. For who could stand in their presence?"

The mould for the statue, meanwhile, stands in a corner of the Aurodhan Gardens at Kuruchikuppam in Puducherry. More casts of the statue can, and, in fact, have been made. "One has been installed in the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Calcutta, the others are still waiting," says Lalit. And with a smile he adds, "Something for Auroville?" Perhaps for Savitri Bhavan?

Carel

CELEBRATION

Eleven Days of Global Unity

Kosmos Cultural Café brings the message of peace, sustainability and unity.

Make peace with at least one Aurovilian you have a conflict with, reads a seemingly cheeky line from an announcement posted by the Kosmos Cultural Café. It is one amongst a list of suggestions that Aurovilians may adopt over eleven days of celebrating global unity, from September 11th through the 21st.

For the past three years, the Kosmos Cultural Café has been bringing the Auroville community the message of peace, unity, and sustainability in a spirit of celebration. The 11 Days of Global Unity in Auroville in mid-September saw a wide variety of activities and programmes. There were daily film screenings that included the debut release of a 10-minute short titled *Satyagraha: 100 Years of Nonviolence*; and the documentary *Peace One Day*, the story of one man's attempt to persuade the global community via the United Nations to officially sanction a global ceasefire day. The programme also included an open source peace café at the Unity Pavilion, poetry sessions,

an evening of drumming, music and dance, peace awareness events in schools, round table discussions, and a peace vigil and meditation under the Banyan tree.

Aurovilian Wim Aspelagh is the driving force behind this event. "What is unique about this year's happening is our choice of the dates," says Wim. He explains: "September 11th this year is the hundredth anniversary of Gandhi's first nonviolent action in South Africa, and this ability to overcome injustice without resorting to violence has inspired millions throughout the century to do the same. It is a message that is still relevant today, and needs to be celebrated."

September 21st on the other hand, says Wim, is International Peace Day.

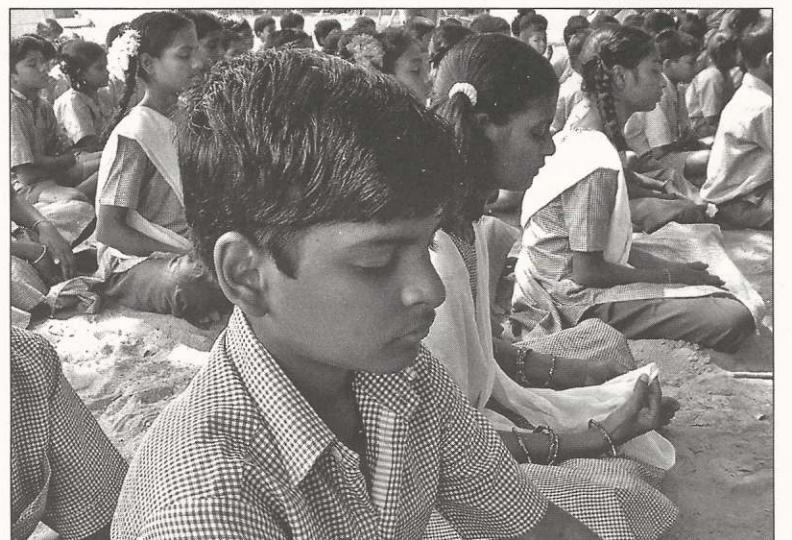
"The United Nations declared that on this day governments all over the world

Peace Day

The U.N. International Day of Peace was first celebrated in 1982. It began as a moveable date taking place on the opening of each new session of the U.N. General Assembly in September.

In 2001, through the efforts of the UK-based NGO *PeaceOneDay*, the UN formally established an annual day of global ceasefire and non-violence on the UN International Day of Peace, fixed for 21 September Peace Day.

observe a global ceasefire, and this means no armed conflict." He explains that, right now, not a day goes by without at least someone losing his or her life to such conflicts. "The hope is that maybe this one day of global ceasefire will create conditions for two or three days of ceasefire and perhaps at some point in time it will create a ceasefire lasting the entire year." Having the event here in Auroville, Wim hopes, will make residents more aware than they already are about creating conditions for peace.



A Meditation for Peace, at the New Creation Bilingual School

This year's celebration was also about having an impact at the global level. "We are living in a global world," explains Wim, "and it's a must that we in Auroville feel and be connected with the rest of the world." For this, the team came up with the idea of electronically linking up Auroville with two world communities – Findhorn in the U.K., and California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, U.S.A. – and having a collective chanting and meditation. The event was web-casted

live. "It was a logistical challenge to connect up the networks together," admits Wim. "We had some technical difficulties on the final night, but the event was a success. We had people from several AVI centres around the world plug into our 'peace ring' and participate in a symbolic act of global unity."

Priya Sundaravalli
Adapted from an interview on
Auroville Radio

Rebuilding Child Development Centres

The success of building the Integrated Child Development Centres by Suhasini and her team, shows that Auroville's tradition of 'Quietly building the best', is being continued.

In April 2006, one of the last of the 27 Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centres in the Villupuram and Kanchipuram districts was inaugurated by Jasmine Sathverad the CEO of the UK-based Save the Children (STC). This multi-crore project was successfully handled and completed by the architecture department of the Auroville Building Centre, headed by Suhasini.

"The story began when Hemant from the Tsunami office was visited by

The Integrated Child Development Scheme Centre

The Integrated Child Development Scheme, a programme run by the Tamil Nadu government aims to achieve community well-being in all its villages. Its main focus is to meet the basic health needs and requirements of children, adolescent girls and women. The centre is a multi-purpose building that functions primarily as a day-care centre for 2 to 5 year olds in the mornings, and offers other programmes during the rest of the time, including evenings and weekends. Examples of programmes are nutrition and health education for women, child health monitoring and record keeping, dental care, adolescent girl counselling, gynaecological check-ups, antenatal and postnatal care, psychological counselling, and immunisation. Each ICDS centre has a staff of two full-time ladies. One has some education and training, and the other assists as a helper. Doctors and health workers also visit at regular intervals to oversee special programmes. Once a month, the centre also serves as the meeting place for the Panchayat with the Women's and Men's Self-Help Groups. Studies have indicated that ICDS centres have a positive impact on the village community.

STC officials," explains Suhasini. "They wanted to rebuild the coastal ICDS centres that had been destroyed by the tsunami, and had funds to build 154 of these in Puducherry and five districts of Tamil Nadu." What STC wanted from Auroville was 2 design prototypes that could be adapted to field conditions with a manual outlining the construction technology. Could Auroville help?

Two modular designs had to be manifested, keeping in mind the centres' various functions (see box). The floor area was to be 85 square metres, costing within 5.2 lakhs rupees per centre (Rs.6000 per square metre) and it had to be built within one month. The team felt the project was doable, and accepted.

"When we took up the job," says Suhasini, "we had the naive idea that we had to make two designs, and then hand them over to the Collectors of the five districts and Puducherry, who would execute them with local NGOs. And then we would only play an advisory role. It was quite unwittingly that we got so deeply involved."

However, there were no NGOs in Kanchipuram or Villupuram districts to build the 27 structures earmarked for those districts. "So they requested us to take charge of these two districts and by now we were already so involved in the project that it was difficult to refuse."

The task seemed impossible – twenty-seven centres to be built within four months. Says Suhasini: "Not just that, the paperwork that was required of us was overwhelming – weekly and monthly reports on all kinds of issues; surprise checks on our financial management and book keeping, and unannounced site visits from STC officials or the Collector's office."

Luckily for the team, the grant got delayed and that gave the team an extra month to get organized. "During this time, we found reliable villagers with whom we could work, and they in turn found the masons and the workers. In the



The ICDS Centre at Bommaiarpalayam

end we had seven teams of masons and workers organized."

Work began at two of the closest centres where all teams received their training. With an Auroville mason as the mason-in-charge, masons from other villages worked under him and learnt the job. The intention was that these masons would go and train others in their village. "In some villages, this was not easy," says Suhasini, "because of the lack of basic knowledge. They are used to making very rudimentary houses, and learning double brick masonry with all kinds of technicalities was very difficult." All this meant that the small team of 3 persons had to constantly be everywhere to monitor the work.

But what amazed the team from Auroville was the positive cooperation from most villages. "It was amazing," says Suhasini. "In some villages the people cleared the land for us, in many the neighbours offered to store the construction material and tools to save on the cost of building a store room and use it for the project. They'd also fill our water tanks in the evening so that we didn't have to wait in line in the mornings."

"The only places we had problems with social cooperation were the villages in and around Auroville. In Kuyilapalayam for example, after we cleared the land, garbage was dumped overnight on the entire site to prevent the construction. It was finally with Dhanapal's help that we got another site allocated by the panchayat. In the village of Chinnamudaliyarchavadi, the tempo-

rary ICDS centre was partially demolished to force us to build on the spot they wanted, leading to problems from the NGO that had built the centre. In Bommaiarpalayam, there were several instances of damage and destruction to the buildings. But whenever a situation was not manageable, the Officer on Special duty and the Collector intervened directly.

"We also tried to get two centres allocated and built for dalit villages, in the neighbourhood of Kottakarai and Sanjeevi Nagar, but it didn't work due to resistance from other castes."

Problems notwithstanding, Suhasini and her team have completed the work successfully. "From an evaluation of all of STC's projects in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, the centres built by us were deemed to be the best, and now Auroville design and technology is being adopted in Sri Lanka." The team also performed well during the surprise financial check from the Chief Financial Officer of STC – UK. "Our book-keeping, expenditure monitoring, project reporting and management were found to be 'exemplary'."

For Suhasini and her team at Auroville Building Centre, this experience of building the ICDS centres has reinforced the belief in the quality of their own work. "This is the first time that we had to work on such a large scale within a tight time frame," observes Suhasini. "And we've found out that not only are we capable of it, but we could even do it well." *Priya Sundaravalli*

In brief

Regional changes

The Auroville area will soon see many changes. Recently, the Central Government has approved the extension of the Buckingham Canal which runs along the coast from Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh through Chennai to Puducherry. This would be of help in the context of the upcoming Special Economic Zone in Puducherry. Other main developments are the projected railway line linking Puducherry to Mahabalipuram and to Chennai, which might cross Auroville; the widening of the Tindivanam-Puducherry road into a four-lane highway; and the further development of the Puducherry airport for daily commercial flights to Chennai.

With increasing urbanization, industrial and commercial developments, the area around Auroville will have a very different face in the years to come.

Kalivelli swamp

Studies are being executed to see if the Kalivelli back water can be turned into a fresh water storage lake, to be filled by runoff water. Preliminary findings indicate that this would imply raising a bund all around the tank of about 2.30 meters above sea level and building devices to avoid flooding the low lying area around the tank. If accepted, the project may prove to be disastrous to the ecology of the swamp that now is fed from the sea, and change the migratory path of many birds like flamingos that show up every winter.

Pondicherry to become Puducherry

The Rajya Sabha has passed a Bill to rename the Union Territory (UT) of Pondicherry, Puducherry. Puducherry means "new colony" and would encompass four regions – Puducherry which is the present Pondicherry, Karaikal in Tamil Nadu, Mahe in Kerala and Yanam in Andhra Pradesh. The people of Pondicherry had been demanding the renaming of the UT because in ancient times, the territory was supposedly known as Puducherry. The new name has now officially come into effect.

Substantial donation

An Indian industrialist has promised a substantial donation of 18 crore rupees for land purchase, a new town hall that would be a 'green building' and for the further detailing of the Master Plan. The first installment of Rs. 51 lakhs has been received.

SaraCon

'Saraswathy Consciousness in Action' is the inspiration for developing a creative centre for economic and entrepreneurial development called SaraCon located in the building previously used for the Bommaiur Toy Factory in Kottakarai. It was opened on August 15th. Its initial activities will include AurovilleArts.Com, a comprehensive Internet Platform for Collaboration; a Laboratory for Integral Entrepreneurship; and Svaram Sounds.

Fundraising for land

Efforts are ongoing to revive the fundraising drive for the purchase of the remaining land for Auroville and to set up an effective team that is able to accomplish the daunting task of raising the necessary funds for this purpose.

RESEARCH

Pesticides Survey 2006

During April and May 2006, a questionnaire titled 'Community Monitoring of Pesticides Health Effects' was circulated in Auroville to get a better picture of the health effects of spraying chemical pesticides. Developed by the Malaysia-based Pesticides Action Network-Asia (PAN-Asia), a coalition of over a hundred international grass-root initiatives, the questionnaire was modified for the local context by Aurovilian homoeopath Nandita Shah.

171 individuals (128 Aurovilians, 13 Newcomers, 21 guests, and 9 Auroville employees) responded to it which is about 10% of Auroville's adult population.

The health effects reported were observed to last from a few hours up to the entire spraying season, and ranged from minor irritations to major health problems (see box). Some major health problems included one case of the worsening of Parkinson's disease symptoms, another of poor healing following an eye surgery, and even allegations of having contributed to the death of a seriously ill patient. The latter was reported by a person who was con-

vinced that her 56 years old partner died because of the extra burden of chemical pesticides sprayed heavily around their house. Spraying around or on the way to schools was also reported by a few teachers.



The two organic neem-based pesticides available in Auroville

An overwhelming 77% of the respondents were convinced that the symptoms they had were caused by pesticide spraying. Their reasoning was that the symptoms were seasonal, appearing

every year at the same time generally between February and May.

The symptoms were most severe during the acute spraying times in March and April and diminished soon after, and that none of these symptoms were present over the rest of the year. Some respondents were able to provide exact dates. Nine people complained about having observed the symptoms year after year, the longest period dating back to 1990.

When asked what preventative or remedial measures the respondents adopted, the answers ranged from avoiding the sprayed areas to wearing face masks. Most of the individuals affected also reported taking homeopathic remedies to deal with their symptoms, besides drinking plenty of fluids, water, juices, and/or herbal teas. The use of allopathic medication such as painkillers, cough remedies or antibiotics was reported to be minimal. A few mentioned medical expenses in the range of Rs. 30 to Rs. 3,000.

The overall outlook by the respondents is nonetheless positive. People felt there was less spraying of chemicals this year than in previous years.

This observation corresponds to the increasing sales of Limonool, an organic neem-oil based pesticide oil, by

Symptoms of chemical pesticide spraying

Fatigue; weakness; giddiness; sleepiness; lack of energy; inability to concentrate; headache; coughing; bronchial irritation; breathing difficulties; tightness in the chest; worsening of asthma; swollen eyelids; eye irritation; conjunctivitis; blurred vision; skin irritation; itchiness; appearance of boils; swelling of the joints of fingers, hands, knees and feet; swollen lymph nodes; nausea; vomiting; abdominal pain.

Auroville's No More Pesticides Team. In the past 4 years the team sold on average of 200 litres/year. Last year, the sales went up to 300 litres, most of it during the spraying season. Also a second product, called 'Pure neem oil,' introduced by a resident of Kuyilapalayam was made available from Pour Tous. Many Aurovilians have become aware of the importance of organic pesticides and have started donating Limonool or Pure neem oil to their neighbours. One teacher from New Creation School reported the success of this year's neem oil spraying by the school's direct neighbours. He mentioned that unlike the previous years, no child fell sick this spraying season.

The No More Pesticides Team plans on using the results of this survey in its conversations with the village panchayats and the district collector. The results will also be shared with other groups that are involved with the same problem, both in India and abroad.

*Priya Sundaravalli
from a report in News and Notes*

"My main pretext is to have fun"

Johnny is unique. Playwright, actor, carpenter, singer, architect, builder, teacher, tree-planter, farmer, odd-job man, since coming to Auroville in the early 1970s he seems to have done it all. Recently *Auroville Today* asked him to share his thoughts on a wide range of topics.



Initially came to visit my runaway family. Jan, my first wife, left Sydney for Auroville with our child, when he was three because I was such a hopeless case. Almost as soon as I arrived in Auroville I fell in with a group of young Tamil men building bamboo houses. In every village you'd have a group of men, or several groups of men, who were house-builders. There was one particular Tamil guy, whose name was Ramu, who was roughly the same age as me. He felt like a Tamil version of me. He had a really good comprehension of geometry, which is actually unusual in a village.

At that time there were about hundred and fifty people in Auroville, many of them trying to build houses without really any experience. I had experience with building things with my hands. So I suddenly found that I was fully employed as exactly the sort of architect I enjoyed being, which was a bamboo-and-rope architect.

Fertile was the first reforestation camp in Auroville. The idea was that you would have a camp and you would plant in the area you could reach and water from a single well, and then you would move on, leaving a watchman, and set up another camp. But that didn't happen, because Auroville wasn't purchasing land fast enough. Moreover, we suddenly had four children and other children were attracted to our children, and we suddenly had a kid's community here. There used to be a huge, three-storey bamboo house here stock full of children!

When we first came we had really no knowledge of afforestation, and all we wanted was shade. And so we planted any possible tree we could find. We didn't know what to plant. As you can imagine, a lot of them died. Paul Blanchflower, who lived here for ten years, brought the know-how. He has a degree in tropical forestry or re-forestry. So he and a group of really qualified botanists that Auroville now contains put together the current planting policy – to replant the initial tropical evergreen forest that existed here when we came. But if you look at Fertile forest as it stands now, it is just higgledy-piggledy, the exotic and indigenous mixed together. You wouldn't consider it to be very good reforestation, whereas the quality of reforestation that goes on now in other parts of Auroville is, I think, among the highest quality in the world.

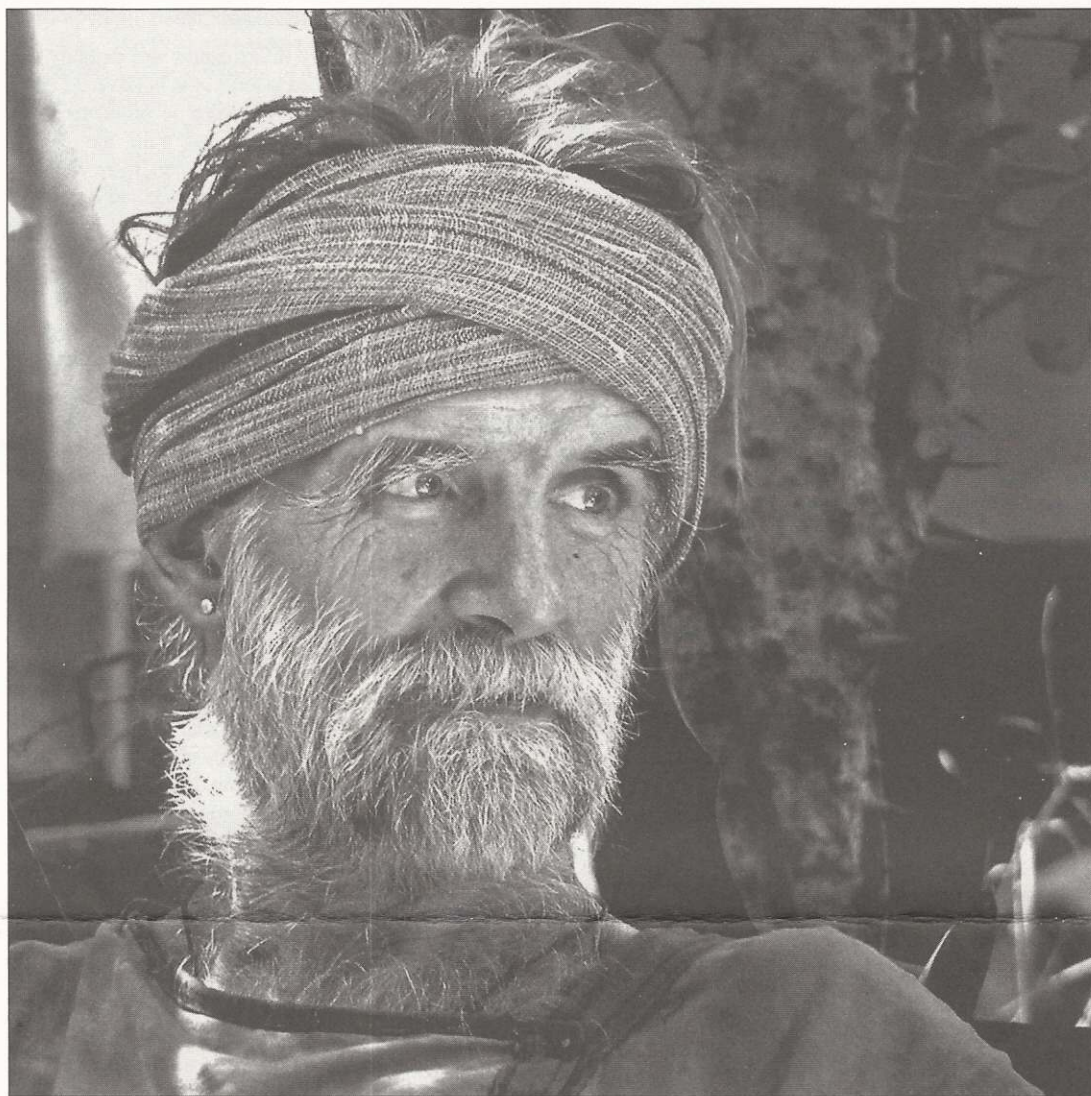
When we first came we had a lot of trouble keeping what we planted from being cut and traded off as firewood. Many times I had to wrestle with a guy with a sharp axe in his hands over trees. And they are tough guys. It's totally the other way round now. We don't cut green timber at all but we are constantly cutting this Australian *acacia*, the Work tree, that grows rampantly all through Auroville. We cut them in the forest and we leave the branches lying, and sometimes the villagers won't even take them away!

The Tamil people

I live here with this young Tamil guy, Elumalai, who's a Tamil Aurovilian. He first came here when he was fifteen. When he married, his wife didn't want to come to live here. I mean, when you look at the situation in a village and the situation in Auroville, you can see that Auroville is very encouraging for men, with motorcycles and volleyball and nice jeans and cell phones. But the women aren't interested in that. What the women like is the support of other women that you have in a village, especially when you have children. Of course, you do have Tamil families living in Auroville and Tamil women happy here, but it takes a particu-

lar type of a Tamil women that likes to live in Auroville because it requires a sense of social adventure.

Elumalai doesn't actually sleep in Fertile but he's here at six o'clock in the morning and only goes at six o'clock in the evening. I can leave Fertile for up to four months at a time and when I come back not only is everything correct and in place but everything's improved. He's a



Johnny

special guy with a very special skill. I couldn't do without a guy like that. And it's the same with all these guys really. Once you get to know them, and get to work with them, you realize that.

Because the thing about the Tamils is that they have a sort of ethics: if they enjoy what you give them to do, then they do it really well and they don't really care how much you pay them. But if you ask them to do something they don't enjoy doing, they won't do it very well and they want a lot of money for it.

India is very much a culture built on people doing what they like to do, even if it's living on the street. I know that people decry poverty in India but the irony of poverty is that it contains a lot of very simple pleasures that a lot of people miss out on by living on the twenty fourth storey of a skyscraper somewhere, with a flat screen television.

Organic architecture

I was originally schooled in what was called organic architecture in the 60s and 70s. The understanding then was that you acted in a way that was invisible in nature. Even in an urban context it never drew attention to itself, it always tried to fit in with the environment. When I came here we tried to make a low impact on nature. We had no right to take electricity or food or services from India. My personal feeling is that it's possible to be autonomous, which means as much as possible you generate your own needs and also deal with your own waste. All our toilets are composting and we have a motorcycle but we try to only use it for bringing building materials; mostly we travel by bicycle or bullock cart. I also like to use low-key building materials, because it employs villagers. People don't realize, when they are putting up a concrete house, the impact of cement on the Indian environment.

The village as a model for Auroville

I think a village is a wonderful institution. We have this Western arrogance, we come to India with a solution to all their problems, when in reality they have a solution to our problems because they know how to live together. Actually in many villages they deal with their own problems, they don't involve the police, the

people who are honestly and earnestly trying to solve problems in the community.

For many years all the politics in Auroville was completely voluntary. And so you had to want to do it. Now if you are part of a group that meets regularly and tries to deal with problems that aren't yours personally, you receive a maintenance. And so you take it a bit more seriously, you say "We'd better make some serious decisions here". And it can often reach a point when people take themselves much too seriously...

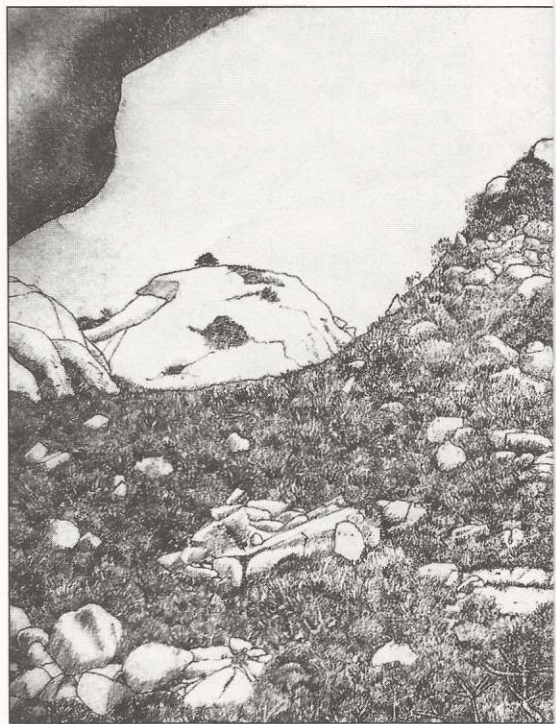
Auroville doesn't really work by force. It's like a river, it follows the easiest course. Despite the fact that there are very adamant and militant people here, everyone respects each other to some extent. There is a lot of hot air about authoritarianism, what you should do and shouldn't do, but it gets down to live and let live.

I can have a major conflict with somebody over some issue. But then I can sit down with them and say 'ok, ok, let's agree that at least what we are after is this. You do it your way, I do it in my way, but let's at least agree that we are heading in the same direction'. Of course, it might take a bit of talking to get to that point...

If you have a centralized authority it disenfranchises the individual. And so if you have somebody who takes it upon him to tell you what you have to do with your land, or your house, or your field, or your whatever, then he's taking away your rights as an individual to think intelligently about your situation or to think collectively about your situation. This is important because as a community we've reached a critical point. We're around 1800 people now, and that's an interesting number which requires a certain technology to resolve problems. What we are trying to do now is to develop a slightly more complex management system in Auroville. And it's quite fascinating watching all these different groups trying different approaches. The encouraging thing for me really is that no matter what's happening, the awareness of what's happening is growing.

Of course, when you've got a small community of people whose main goals are self-sufficiency and solar panels, then you are going to have a harmonious and autonomous community. But as soon as you start to get to the next level, when you start crochet workshops, carpentry workshops and get computer manufacturing, then you are going to have very different sets of demands and criteria. But they are all just a part of a growing society. It's like a broad mind. A broad mind, for me, is one that can accommodate major contradictions. What you don't want is a totally fanatical mind that says: "I'm only this and I won't even think of being anything else!"

(continued on page 5)



'The Cave', a sketch by Johnny. It is one of Johnny's fa



The highs and lows of the Auroville experience

It was the sixth visit to Auroville for Nadia, David and their son Tristan. They are architects and come from Arcosanti, a community in the United States. This time round their stay was almost a year long, during which they maintained and developed part of the U.S. pavilion, an international students dormitory located in the International Zone. We talked to them on the day of their departure for America.

Nadia: We cannot say we are leaving. It's just taking a break for a while. After going through being in Auroville, seeing the state of things, yes, something pulled us back over there. At this point it's good to learn a bit from here, experience what it is, then see how we can bring it back to Arcosanti, where we've spent big part of our lives. It's also some realization that Auroville is not an easy place to be, it's very challenging. It's not what the ideal is; it still has a long way to go... It's been a tough year here, everything is under re-evaluation. There is also some realization that here the lifestyle is still...

David: Unstable.

Nadia: It's not quite what it wants to be. My idea of the city is where everything is there, close to each other. For me all this driving everywhere is very unsettling and makes me really scattered. I had a real hard time with that and I think it's because of our experience in Arcosanti, a community where everything is close together, and where the whole idea is to minimize the time spent going from a distance to the other. Transportation for me is the key.

David: The zoning in Auroville has broken everything up. You are already running into the problems of suburbia.

Nadia: Suburbia, the American Dream where everybody has their own house, own car, own swimming pool, all that – it's a bit extreme to say that's happening here, but I do see that here and there, and that is disturbing me. I've reached the point when in fact I have no desire to have my own house even if I have a family. I'd much prefer living in a complex with others.

So build things closer together. Start from the centre, grow from there. There's no reason to follow a set plan!

Friction

David: The root of the problem really is the struggle between the people who are selling out to the government, in a way of running things in a hierarchy, and people who stay with the collective. The people who want a 'hierarchy' or want to move

towards that, just because they want something done, are a lot of time the people who sit down on the grass, take out a little handkerchief and put it down before they sit down. They don't want to get dirty, they don't want to work, mix with all the people and do things. They want to sit in an office and punch buttons and send letters. Instead of that, have the workers do the work. Most of people who began Auroville were like that, guys in the Greenbelt are still like that. The people in the Town Hall are going back to zoning society – they are the 'smart people', 'the clean people', people that have everything perfectly organized. Auroville is a prototype, it's a new thing. So we are trying to be part of something with the realization that it's going to be copied or done somewhere else. If you show that collective decision-making works the best and people are responsible, that they take care of their environment, than that's something you can reproduce.

Building together

Nadia: And another thing is the work. What we have in Arcosanti it's like a hands-on workshop. It's a bit like what they used to do at the Matrimandir. People talk about those days when all the community would get together and work and dig in. To me it's a big part of building a community. So we were trying to develop that here also with the American Pavilion. And we are hoping that if we get the approval for the second building in the American Pavilion maybe a group of students can come and let's see if they can bring back that energy and excitement, the feeling of building and working together. I think Auroville would benefit a lot from that.

David: I've loathed being involved in politics ever since I've come here. I'd like to see democracy,

people get together and do things, not one person kill everybody's spirit. So the fact that we somehow got involved with the 'Chief Architect' against the blocking process that he's put up, that's been good, because we've learned so much about it. And I think we've contributed our arguments and our passions about having people take part in the process.

Time to go back

Nadia: I take back whatever Auroville has created, it's an amazing place, it's really powerful and all that has been accomplished, all the challenge of mixing the cultures. It's such a rich place, and where else do you get that kind of exchange, discussing things together? You forget it when you are here, you get caught up, there's friction, there's "It doesn't work right!" Some people take advan-

tage, there's this and that. But still – it's an amazing place. The spiritual philosophy that's the base of the whole place... I'd love to learn more about that each time I come.

David: The first thing that comes to mind is the energy, the spirit of this collective process. You go to the Residents Assembly and you experience all these people who have been here for thirty years or so, who treat the whole place as a collective thing. They really support the consensus decision-making. Back in Arcosanti – it's new, you don't see thousands of people who are supporting their idea.

Nadia: I know as soon as I go back I'll be missing it terribly. We'll be thinking about coming back.

From an interview by Joanna

(continued from page 4)

The broader we become socially, the more successful I consider we are because we should accommodate more and more diverse people.

Spirituality

It's not something I think about very often. But I've always been fascinated by the concept of finding yourself. For example, my only way of dealing with somebody who is mentally deranged is to relate to the being inside that I know, the part which I would consider to be the spiritual soul of that person. In a community like Auroville – because you

have access to time and space, and you do have absolutely freedom to do what you like, money is not a constraint, really – you have a freedom here to become whoever you want to become. And I think the natural tendency is to become who you are. The thing that you see in children and the thing I like in working with children is that they know who they are. They might not be likable, but they are who they are.

I don't really see spiritual growth as a separate thing. I believe it has very much to do with your personal development of who you are. Auroville is a terrific opportunity not just for spiritual growth on an individual level but spiritual growth in terms of consideration and cooperation and relating to the rest of the community.

In Sri Aurobindo's writings, there is a volume of work which is mostly about *The Life Divine*, which is actually a guide for the spiritual sadhak. That's information that you don't approach simply out of curiosity. If I am having some sort of spiritual difficulty, I suddenly find that that sort of literature speaks directly to me, to my need for spiritual sustenance. I have been in situations when I felt like on the borderline of sanity, and then I found that if you reach into these spiritual teachings, they are an incredibly powerful food.

Everyday life in Fertile

I don't think I've done the same thing two days running. At the moment I'm doing theatre with the children, I'm building playgrounds outside Auroville, and this is all just voluntary work. The only regular thing in my day is a good cup of tea, ten o'clock, and a good solid breakfast based on grains we grow – I like the old traditional fermented grain breakfast that the villagers like called *kuzhu*.

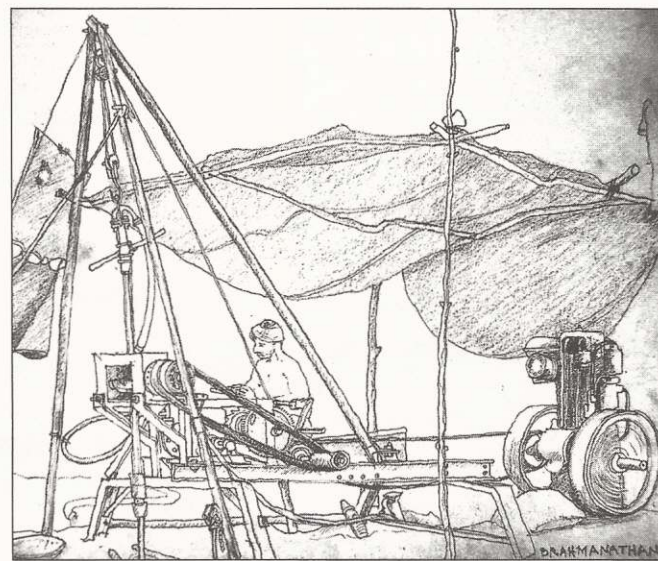
I enjoy all the different aspects of this life. It's enjoyable to farm, to plough, to harvest, to thresh, to deal with grains, every stage of this process is total-

ly enjoyable. It's such a land of opportunity. As soon as one thing finishes there's the next one waiting, it's like a chain effect, things just keep coming. At the moment we have taken on three other children in the community, who are having problems fitting in, so I do some schooling with these children until 10 o'clock in the morning. Then I do some woodcarving for a few hours. At the moment there's also some plumbing to be done. The minute it starts to rain we'll start planting trees again, we've got an idea to plant a whole field behind Jana's house with trees that attract different sorts of butterflies. This is her dream. She knows every butterfly that is specific to a different tree.

At full moon we used to take a group of children and climb a hill somewhere around Gingee. Or we'd go to the beach.

On weekends I do have something of a routine. On Saturday I always make this *dosai*, idly mix. On Sundays I bake all day – biscuits and bread and cheesecake and whatever we can put together. Because Sunday is an open day when people come, it's always totally different depending on who turns up.

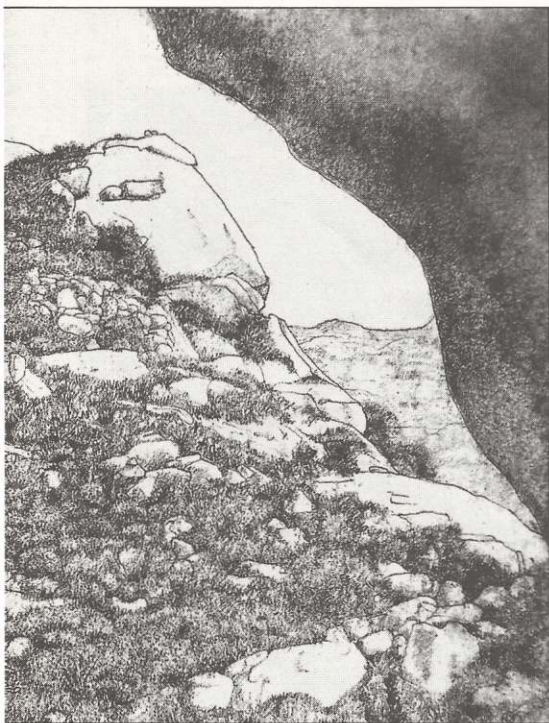
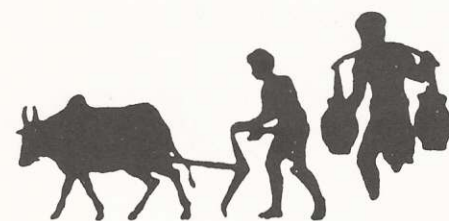
I haven't been to Australia in four, five years, my feeling is that it's much more productive for my children to come here than for me to go there. When they come here they are relaxed and they can view life from a little bit of a distance, whereas when I meet them in Sydney, I get five minutes between coffee and telephone and their work: it's just a major distraction what goes on in a modern society. I had a laptop for a while, but I gave it



'Brahmananthan', a study done at Fertile

away, it became too much of an imposition on my life. We used to have a small television set and watch Tamil movies sometimes at night, but I gave up on that also. Frankly, by the time you get through a normal day here, it will be nine o'clock at night and you are exhausted and it's enough to sit around a fire and talk with whoever might come by.

And that's my definition of a pleasant lifestyle.
As told to Joanna



y: Located in the Gingee hills, yourite camping sites.

Auroville fashion diversity

Is Auroville fashion taking on a new dimension?

Clothing in Auroville used to be a matter of covering and cooling, but in these more prosperous times, with space for wardrobes, ironing boards, and maybe even a washing machine, clothes are taking on a new dimension. For the ladies, anyway.

Cross-cultural dressing is in; in the snap of a finger, women can transform themselves for a trip to the Ashram in the discreet layers of a Punjabi salwar kameez and dupatta and then go back to the Californian look with jeans and tees, or better still, shorts and an itchy-bitsy top for tea at New Creation Corner.

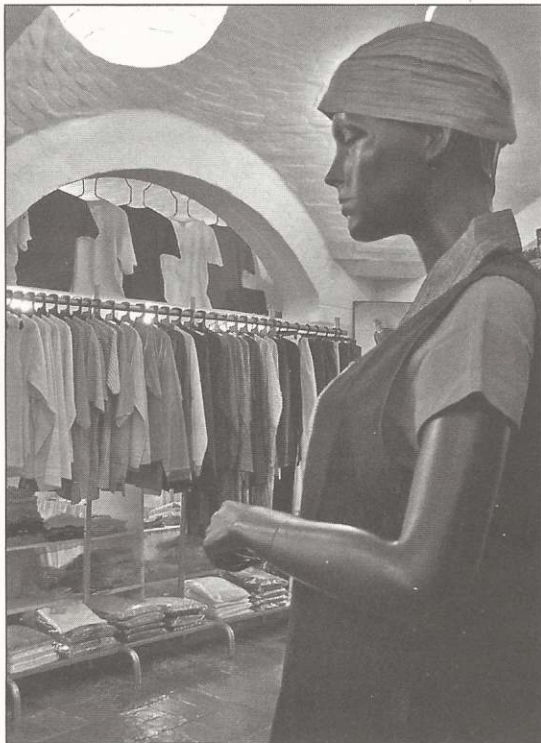
The layered look is particularly popular with the older woman, but all that coordinating of bits and pieces of fabric can become quite time consuming. The hazardous bike trip to Pondy needs to be faced with large hats for the sun, goggles for dust, and scarves streaming behind that can double up to wipe sweat from the brow — then one is hardly recognisable.

This constant presence of dust and sweat leaves its mark on the clothes, and demands an almost military regime of laundering, that is, if you've set yourself some standards; if not, all the better. Laundry here is an organic process that is often not about getting things cleaner. T-shirts and shorts gradually merge into a muddy coloured harmony; white undies turn into a sort of reddish grey. Clothes that would serve you for two years in Europe are exhausted in a season, especially if they are pounded by the amah. A washing machine is definitely gentler, but the process can last a whole day if the power goes on and off.

All is compensated for, however, by that fresh smell of sun-dried clothes and the constant miracle of its drying speed, except during the monsoons, of course. Then it's rush out when the rain stops to hang up the washing, and rush out again ten minutes later to rescue it from a downpour. Later, in full mon-

soon season, the laundry just sits around the house for days developing a weird smell.

Monsoon time is also time for a wardrobe change with the magnificent billowing raincoats enveloping rider, bike and rucksack in strange shapes. Some speed by, reminiscent of those dashing couriers in war movies. Others, in the neon rainbow shades of Indian raincoats, ride by on bicycles, precariously balancing large black umbrellas. Peaked caps and goggles keep the rain out of eyes and, nowadays, even the occasional Wellington boots can be spotted.



A wide range of women's wear is available from the boutiques at the Visitors' Centre

Talking about footwear, wearing pretty sandals in India always seems pointless as you take them off when you get to your destination, that is, if you haven't broken your left one while kick-starting your motorbike. But unlike chappals (flip flops), they rarely disappear from the footwear piles lying outside the Solar Kitchen; only they look so vulnerable lying there.

Accessories are minimal here, despite the tempting wares of the Kashmiri shops in Kuilapalayam. Silver oxidizes too easily with the humidity and leather belts grow a grey fuzz and patches of mould and even your favourite outfits soon sport nibbled holes.

Thankfully, things are easily and cheerfully replaced at the Free Store in Bharat Nivas. It is Auroville's fashion centre with a constantly changing range of styles, sizes and shapes. Carefully arranged rows of white trousers or little tops invite you to transform your tired self. In a few months you can return them all with a blessing for their next owner.

It is the young tourists who brings a dash of chic with their chunky silver jewellery, voluminous Rajasthani skirts and skimpy tops. But the sudden exposure of white, pink or red sunburnt flesh can shock the eye that has become used to a certain decorous modesty, and respect for the erogenous zones of another culture. But all's not perfect; sometimes their hair reminds you of those long Indian train journeys when dust and sweat have congealed it into a sort of mat.

The fashion scene on the beach is another matter. It can get bizarre with tourists in their g-strings besides the Indian women in flowing saris. A big contrast to the New Creation swimming pool, where modesty and efficiency are the rule of the day, plus those compulsory unisex plastic swim caps that makes every Aurovilian look like an athlete.

But the beautiful Tamil women seem to have none of these dilemmas. They don't have the confusion of labels, the endless selection of styles, or the constant search for miracle fabrics. They have found their style in their sari and they stick with it, always looking fresh, elegant and colourful, and somehow, perfectly right. They are definitely the lucky ones!

Dianna

The night of a thousand moons

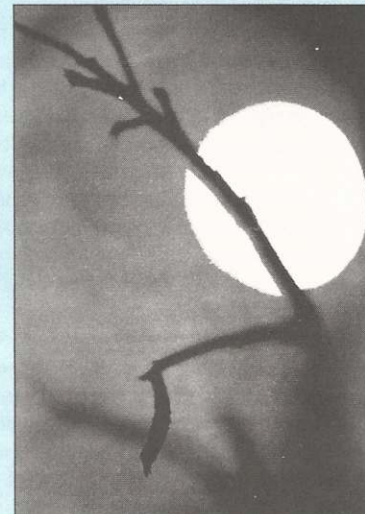
On 9th August a unique event took place at SAWCHU. Aurovilians and Ashramites who had seen one thousand moons were invited to be honoured as elders.

In the Vedas one hundred signifies completion; one thousand means great richness and fulfilment.

The event begins with a beautiful and expressive reading from *Savitri* by a group of young Tamils. Meenakshi introduces everyone, including her own mother and all are honoured.

Saraswati, a diminutive, white haired lady with a huge voice leads us all in singing a Tamil song about a jasmine flower that is quite happy not being a rose. She tells us she is either 75 or 57, but doesn't really care which at her age. Narayan gets introduced as the one who sowed the seeds of Savitri Bhavan many years ago. Several of those quiet people who have been working away in the background, unnoticed for years also get honoured. When Mahalingam's turn comes, he tells us with amusement how, when he looks in the mirror and an 'old fellow looks back at him', he always wonders who that is, as he still feels

In Hindu culture, there are several 'rites of passage' to honour individuals at different stages of life. The one that celebrates longevity is the Sahasrachandra Darshan or 'witnessing a thousand moons'. Traditionally, elders on attaining 80 years of age are felicitated since it is believed that by the time a person turns 80, he or she has seen more than a thousand full moons.



thirty five. Someone mentions that Mahalingam used to be a body builder at the Ashram, but now he is a builder of souls.

Ravi tells us that he often sees Aurovilians looking grim and unsmiling. He shares his memory of an earnest sadhak who asked Mother how he could repay Her for all She had given him. Her reply, "Just be happy; that will please me a lot."

Several Aurovilians are invited to the front to be honoured as elders but many shyly decline. There is Mirrajyoti, Christiane, Aster Patel and Nergez, who looks like a young girl in her pretty blue dress. Don, with his wife Marie Ange, gives us a few words in Japanese and tells us he had come to Auroville to retire, but somehow had been reborn and renewed and has never been so busy in his life.

The evening is completed by a splendid dinner provided by Ganesh Bakery and everyone gets a bag of goodies to take away. As I bid goodbye to friends, I overhear someone say, "This is just like a wedding with so much joy and abundance." It couldn't have been more beautifully said.

Dianna

PERSPECTIVES

Playing with colour and form

Notes from a weekend workshop

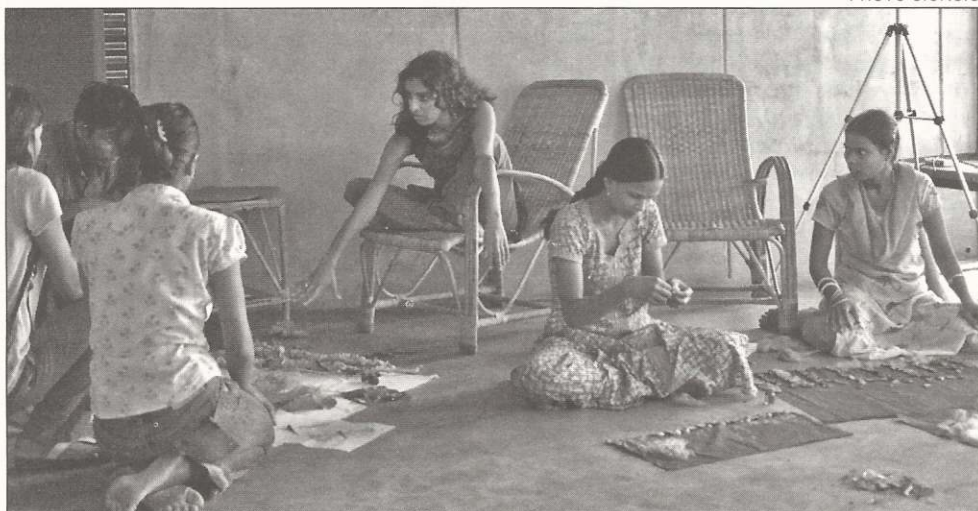


PHOTO GIORGIO

Day 1: Struggling to find a united voice

On this cool and balmy Friday morning, the day seems to stretch out lazily. A few random folk have gathered at Kala Kendra. Chairs are being set out in rows. From the design house of Upasana an assortment of boxes have arrived full of fabric samples, cloth waste, yarns, sequins, beads, knick-knacks... A workshop beginning today on the theme, *Playing with Colour and Form*. What is going to happen?

"Go beyond the usual connotations of textile," says Usha who is leading the workshop. Usha has just arrived in Auroville at 4 a.m. this morning all the way from Delhi. An award winning designer of home décor, she also happens to be the youngest sibling of Uma who runs Upasana. She nudges us along encouragingly. "Remember that you are trying to tell a story." What are our stories? we wonder.

We are given two themes: Nature and Poetry. The approaches can be from a micro

perspective or panoramic view. The challenge seems to be how far we are willing to extend ourselves, and yet be true to what is inside. All that we need lies at our disposal: fabric waste, beads, buttons, string, wool, paper, and from around Bharat Nivas, leaves, stones, tree bark, soil, dry flower. Later some of us go foraging.

But 'playing' with colour and form we quickly find, is not easy. Nothing moves and ideas remain stuck. It is also not easy to work together as teams. Some aspects of our personalities grate, and the hours roll by. Several times I catch myself taking deep breaths and ordering myself to remain calm and not react. At times, it is tempting to quit and gather up what remains of the weekend. It seems totally impossible... Then suddenly something shifts. We all seem to feel the moment open up. Stories form and become concrete; ideas and inspirations spark more, and our hands work fast. The work begins to coalesce.

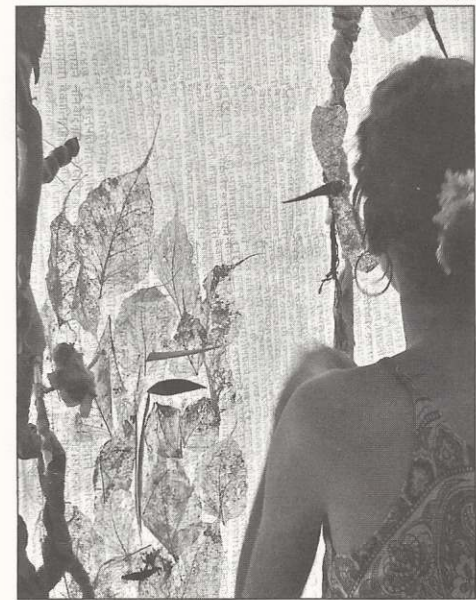
Now the installations are up, mosaic-like yet united. Five teams and their five creations telling a story in colour and form. We go around the creations, observing silently. Two are philosophical, exploring the meaning of life through curves and abstract concepts of unity. The others tell stories: an ancient legend of the Rishi in Auroville's forest, a new interpretation of Tsunamika's continuing saga, and a tale of protecting Nature. They are all poetic. "The whole is more than the sum of its parts." I have heard that said before, and I

see it here. Is this a metaphor for Auroville? I ask myself.

It is late afternoon on Sunday and dusk is on its way. In Auroville, life goes on as usual in it all its parts — small and large, hidden and visible, each ticking to its own beat.

Priya Sundaravalli

PHOTO: VIMAL



Day 2: Contemplating a finished work

Awareness through the Body

There are very few activities in Auroville which can be termed 'cutting-edge'. One of them is the work which Joan Sala and Aloka Marti have been engaged in over the past 14 years with Auroville children. Originally termed 'Body Awareness', they later changed the name to 'Awareness through the Body' to better express the intention of their work. Now they are bringing out a book – *Awareness through the Body: a way to enhance concentration, relaxation and self-knowledge for children and adults – to share what they have learned.*

In 1992 Joan and Aloka, who have backgrounds in physical therapy and bodywork, were requested by teachers at Transition School to give classes to improve the posture of the children. They describe how "after a few classes we realized that, along with work on posture, there were a number of other things that the children needed to know and experience. They needed to acquire more self-awareness, more responsibility for themselves and their actions, and an understanding of their limits and capacities."

Joan and Aloka already knew of techniques that encourage self-discovery, self-mastery and the ability to experience reality in a more complete way. Now they set about adapting them to the needs and capabilities of the children. Their goal? "To provide tools for individuals to expand consciousness, explore different planes of the being, discover their inner selves

and eventually their psychic being." The method? "To discover and explore the body and through the body awaken the consciousness of the entire being and all the parts that form it."

It sounds awfully ambitious, particularly when one realizes they had also agreed to teach Kindergarten children, some of whom were as young as four years. Moreover many of the children needed a sense of boundaries and responsibility. "When we began," write Joan and Aloka, "we found we were navigating high seas in a wholly inadequate boat....Before class we often had to gather the children from the tree-tops".

Over the years, however, Aloka and Joan evolved a programme which is not only very popular with the students, but highly effective in attaining certain objectives. These include enhancing concentration, developing awareness of the different levels of consciousness, refining the senses, learning how to explore, understand and manage emotions, developing a sense of how to collaborate with others, and cultivating the 'witness attitude'.

All of this, and more, is achieved through deceptively simple exercises which, under Joan and Aloka's sensitive guidance, draw out the children's latent knowledge and abilities.

Take the 'witness consciousness', which Joan and Aloka describe as a place from which one observes, without partiality, all that happens both within and outside the being. How, you might wonder, could Joan and Aloka develop such an advanced ability

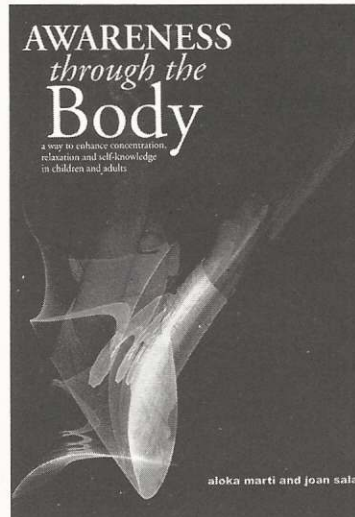
in children? Well, it takes time. With the youngest they simply ask, "How's life today? How are you feeling?" As they get older, Joan and Aloka ask them to 'scan' their breath, their mood and thoughts. Then, when they judge the children are ready, they ask the children to identify that part in themselves which is able to observe all this without becoming involved. "This positioning of oneself," they explain, "is what we call the witness."

"The witness attitude," write Joan and Aloka, "is at the foundation of all the principles we use."

Other simple exercises are used to heighten sensory awareness, to use the mind as a sixth sense and to make the student aware of his subtle physical body. Two major series of exercises explore the influence of the five elements and of evolution on the individual's body, mind and emotions.

Joan and Aloka stress that theirs is not a rigid programme: they are constantly modifying and adjusting it according to the needs of the children. It's a dialogue – sometimes Joan and Aloka lead, sometimes they step back and let the children innovate. But the aim is always to expand awareness and to provide the children with the means to make the most conscious and effective use of their enhanced capabilities.

This is a fine book, not only because of the practical wisdom it contains but also because of the values it embodies. Heidi Watts lists some of these in her introduction. "An equal and integrated address to all aspects of the person. The omnipresent thread of



reflection which runs through all the activities....An unspoken and implicit trust in the students to find their own way with the right balance of challenge and support....The integrity of the work which remains true to its principles in every manifestation."

Perhaps the best compliment, however, comes from one of their students who wrote, "It is good how you two are ready for us at any moment."

It's also good to know that the future of Auroville will rest, if only partially, in the hands of those who have received such a profound and important training.

Alan

Awareness through the Body: A way to enhance concentration, relaxation and self-knowledge in children and adults by Aloka Marti and Joan Sala. 304 pps, 264 colour photos.

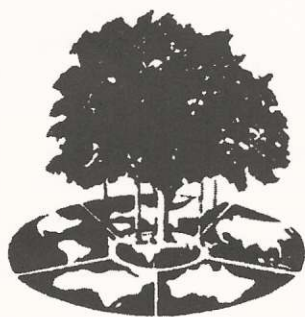
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For more information, contact:
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COMMENTARY

It's a small world

We sometimes think that Auroville, this wonderful place where we live, is a backwater...

A while ago I got this unexpected phone call. "Hello, you don't know me and I don't know you, but you know somebody called Riad ab del Nabi," a strange voice with a Dutch accent is telling me. What? Who? "I am his mother-in-law Annelies and I am at the Centre Guest House". I hadn't heard of Ritchie, which is what his friends call him, since I moved to Auroville 7 years ago. And now someone connected to my past is calling. Annelies came over to my place and we spent three wonderful hours wallowing in memories. I learned that Ritchie, a musician from Hamburg, never made it as a rock star in England, but he moved to Amsterdam instead, married Annelies' daughter Mareijke and they have a baby girl, Mara-Lena.



This is not the first time something like this has happened to me. When I was fresh to India, I mailed some of my friends that I was now a proud resident of Auroville. Franz, another musician friend of mine, mailed back: "Then say hi to my friends Alex and Laurence, who will be coming shortly to live there." Mmmh, seems I was not the only one of his friends to join Auroville.

Another incident: it's the soccer World Cup in Germany. I am surrounded by friends and strangers and we are watching Germany versus Poland in a remote town called Oldenburg. I chat with my neighbour Uwe, who, of course, and why not? has travelled across India and spent quite a lot of time in Auroville. I tell him: "Next time you come, call me up. I am listed in the Auroville telephone directory".

Six degrees of separation is the hypothesis that anyone on Earth can be connected to any other person on the planet through a chain of acquaintances with no more than five intermediaries. By extension, the same term is often used to describe any other setting in which some form of link exists between individual entities in a large set. This hypothesis is also known as The Small-World-phenomenon.

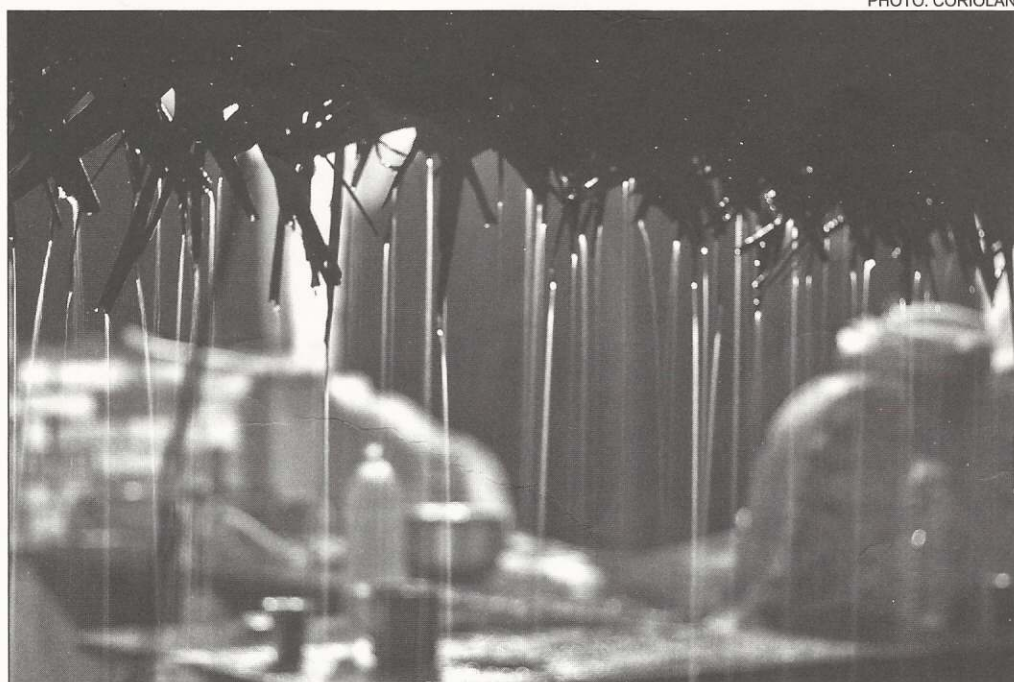
Send your very own story of "I know someone who knows someone who is connected to Auroville" to Auroville Today, and we might publish it.

Do you want to hear more? Jochen works as an editor for a TV Production Company in Cologne. When I come to pick him up, he introduces me to his boss Oliver. Oliver asks me what I do in India and I mention my dealings with the German Social Workers (Zivis). "Auroville, Zivis? Wait a minute," he says and calls one of his buddies. "Hey, what was the name of that Indian town where your eldest son did his Social Service? Auroville? Yes, I thought so. Jochen, start researching, here is your next story."

The knowledge that Auroville exists travels in mysterious ways and it touches more and more people around the world. The media might play an important role as we receive a lot of journalists and they go out and spread the word, like a pebble thrown into water, creating ripples that spread out over a silent lake. Another large part of the radiation happens through all the ambassadors of Auroville. It may be the AVI Centres or Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's devotees everywhere. Or the youth who were born here but who have gone out for education and come home with a lot of knowledge and enthusiasm. Or the ones who lived in Auroville and moved on to pursue their hopes somewhere else while keeping connected. Not to forget the many thousand visitors who take a little spark of the Auroville spirit with them.

So next time you come to Auroville call me up, my name is in the Auroville telephone directory.

Julietta



Rain drips off the keet roof of the Youth Centre. After the insufficient summer monsoon this year, we had rains in late September.

PHOTO: CORIOLAN

In brief

Auroville Volunteer and Internship Service

An increasing number of people come to do volunteer service or an internship in Auroville. Quite a number of volunteers are highly qualified professionals. Interns primarily wish to work in architecture, social sciences, alternative technology and green work, fashion and industrial designs, the IT sector or business. Also the number of requests from post graduate students to undertake research, or conduct their thesis work on some aspect of life in Auroville in the fields of sociology, alternative technology, health, psychology and philosophy, is on the increase. For more info contact unity@auroville.org.in

Repos news

The Security Board, which at the request of the Working Committee has taken charge of improving the security at Repos beach, has installed a new team of life and security Guards. Repos will now give priority to its original purpose, which is to offer beach facilities to Aurovilians, Newcomers and Auroville Guests. Any other persons will only be admitted when they can show a special 'Repos Pass'.

Hall of light

The Creativity community is taking the first steps to open its 'Hall of Light' for regular classes and workshops. At the moment it offers belly dance workshops, pilates and ikebana classes.

Neem cake fertilizer

Siddhartha Farm markets a special neem cake, made from crushed and dried whole neem seeds. The cake can be used as a fertilizer, as manure, as well as organic pesticide against a variety of pests such as bacteria, fungi, nematodes, and snails. Earthworms on the other hand, thrive with neem cake and will show a population increase of up to 25%. Neem cake thrown into ponds is reported to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

Auroville, un aller simple?

The book *Auroville, un aller simple?* by long-time Aurovilian Jean Larroquette's (alias Croquette), written in French, has been published. The book focuses on the experience of a family coming to Auroville in 1975 and gives a page of Auroville's history seen through the lives of some people who came because of a Dream, and tried to realise it. For more information contact: www.monediteur.com

AurovilleArts Logo Contest



A total of 85 people from age 2 to over 70 years old voted on the 36 different logo entries displayed in Kala Kendra, created by thirteen artists. The first prize went to Chloe and Leonard.

Squaring the Circle

Stephanie's exhibition, 'Squares', took place at the Aurodhana Art Gallery in Puducherry. Each painting consisted of a number of squares panels on which a flower was depicted together with phrases from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri. For information contact: www.artsource.de

Streaming towards the future? AV Radio gears up

"Etoile, Etoile, what's up?" "I ate zis Town All, eet iz zo confuzing. I nevaire know vat to do viz my shapelles."

Anybody tuning in to AurovilleRadio a few weeks ago and hearing this exchange might have wondered what on earth they'd stumbled upon. In fact it's an extract from 'Improbable Aurovilians', a goonishly satirical look at Auroville life. Other recent AurovilleRadio programmes have featured Marco on concentration techniques and on working with the Ch'i, an Auroville choir concert, Auroville musicians jamming in someone's back room, 'Soundscapes' (recordings of the sounds – and silences! – of Auroville), Gilles giving a Matrimandir update, and Wim talking about '11 Days of Global Unity'. And all this streamed in crystal-clear audio through the Internet so that it can be listened to or downloaded anywhere in the world.

In other words, AurovilleRadio has come some way from the Soviet-style programming (Auroville news followed by music followed by Auroville news followed by music) of one year ago. And it's not the only change.

"The most important thing," explains Andrea, the project coordinator, "is that now we have 6-7 people working on the project and we have grown in professionalism because Daniel, an experienced radio journalist, has joined the team." Another welcome boost, he adds, was receiving funds from Stichting de Zaaier. This has allowed the team to buy much-needed equipment.

AurovilleRadio describes its vision and mission as "to create better communication inside Auroville and to build a bridge between Auroville, its local surroundings and the world." How is it doing? In terms of bridging to the outside (something like 90% of its listeners live outside Auroville) Andrea notes that in the past 7 months the AurovilleRadio website was visited 33,000 times, and that there were more than 7,000 downloads of its programmes. "The audience is not yet very big," admits Daniel.

One of the reasons is limited scheduling: the present 12 hour programme is repeated twice a day, seven days a week. "This will change when we have a bigger team." Another factor is language. While the Auroville News is also read in French and Tamil, and the occasional

provides more depth and 'actuality' by also including interviews. "We also take a longer view. For example, we are doing a programme called 'Insight' which features interviews with Aurovilians who have been here a long time, and we will run a series called

future. I think this is one of the most important aspects of our work."

Do they take a particular stance regarding what's happening in the community? "Normally media should raise questions, provoke," says Daniel, "but right now we are not doing this. We just show what's there. And that's already a commentary." "We are not here to do any kind of revolution," says Andrea. "To put it another way, the most powerful revolution is the quietest: I don't feel that screaming about problems and bad relationships is more powerful than talking about a good relationship. Also we have to keep in mind that our programmes can be listened to all over the world, so for that reason we need to be positive rather than provocative."

So what's the next step? "We need a space, a studio," says Daniel. At present the team and all the equipment is huddled in a corner of the Conference Room of the Town Hall. "While this is a good location because

everybody comes by we need a proper place for editing and recording, particularly as we are also thinking of starting a computer-based TV channel next year."

"My dream," says Andrea, "is to open a dialogue with the schools. In 2007 we would like to run a course in new media and journalism for the students of the high schools here. It's very important for the future of communication in Auroville that we involve the young."

Partly, this is self-interest. Andrea notes that running a decent radio station with a different programme schedule every day will require a team of at least 20 people, and television requires even more. Obviously he hopes that many of the students in this course will join the team.

But there are deeper issues here. One is that Andrea wants to introduce something of the Auroville spirit into

the medium of radio. "We're here to learn how to make radio closer to the Auroville idea. We need professional dreamers, and students and young people can offer a lot here."

The other point relates to a radical change in journalism. Back in the 1970s, recalls Daniel, to be a journalist was to be someone special because you had access to expensive equipment and technologies. "Now the technology is cheaper and easily available. Now everybody has the capacity to be a journalist, to do radio or write blogs. It's happening everywhere else, so it should happen here too."

Think about it. Enthusiastic students going everywhere, asking questions, recording the answers, then broadcasting them. Could this be the beginning of Auroville's very own communication revolution?

But one moment. An acoustically-designed studio, a new television channel, a team of 20+ – these things don't come cheap (the ballpark figure for the new studio and various technical upgrades alone is U.S. \$ 150,000). So where is the money coming from? "We want to be self-sustaining," says Andrea, "The idea is to create a unit which will sell services and products both within Auroville and outside and all the money generated will be used to run AurovilleRadio and TV."

"We can make programmes for people," explains Daniel. "For instance, if there is a big conference or music event in Puducherry and the people involved want it recorded and broadcast, we'll do it." Other ideas include recording and selling audio CDs and DVDs.

"We are in a moment of transition," concludes Andrea. "We want people to come and share their ideas and requests with us – we're very open to this. But right now we can't do this as we're waiting for the right space."

Alan

The AurovilleRadio website is www.aurovillevet.org. The World Channel can be accessed from anywhere in the world through the internet. The City Channel, which occasionally broadcasts Auroville meetings live, can only be accessed within Auroville through SkyNet.



Auroasha, Andrea and Daniel of the Auroville Radio team

programme is made in other languages, English remains the dominant medium. "We notice," says Daniel, "that the only continent that doesn't listen to us is South America, mainly because of the language difficulty. So now we are thinking of doing some Spanish programmes. Ultimately we should offer as many different languages as possible."

And how many Aurovilians listen regularly? Daniel grimaces. "Many Aurovilians still don't know that AurovilleRadio exists."

So where does AurovilleRadio position itself regarding the existing communication media in Auroville? Is it merely supplementing News and Notes, Auroville Today and the AVNet, or is it offering something completely different?

Daniel says they use 25% of News and Notes as material for their daily news broadcasts, but AurovilleRadio

"Born in Auroville" to explore what being born here really means." "AurovilleRadio does not take the place of any existing media," explains Andrea, "it just gives the opportunity for people to listen and express themselves in another form. When we broadcast the silence of the inner Chamber or the sounds of an Auroville forest we are finding other paths to explore and express Auroville."

"No commercial radio station could afford to run such programmes," observes Daniel, "and that's what makes AurovilleRadio special. Another important aspect of AurovilleRadio is its archives. People like Croquette and Johnny put on many shows over the years but none were recorded. So now we record everything we can – concerts, comedies, Residents Assemblies, conferences – and archive them for the

would be too small to swim across the channel. But within the first few months in the new house, we noticed that we had a whole colony of ants living inside the house.

Uma's theory is that they must have come in during the construction and started living in the house before we moved in and filled the channel. Whatever the case may be, we are a community again – just as it was before the fire.

Uma doesn't like ants living inside the house; they bite her. I have seen ants in my bed, but I have a good relation with them – or it could be that I am bit too thick-skinned. Women are far more delicate than men. Uma was fed up. She

declared war on the ants as I never took any action against them. I am not a lover of ants, please don't get me wrong, but I admire their intelligence and efficiency. They find food no matter how cleverly we protect it. They are absolutely incredible, especially if you consider their size.

I remember Sri Aurobindo writing about ants, I don't recall where I saw it. He closely observed an ant and saw how the ant studied a given situation and made the right choice to solve a difficulty on its way, which required some intelligence. Just imagine Sri Aurobindo, who wrote The Ideal of Human Unity and other profound books, sitting and watching an ant! It seems he took as much delight in observing ants as in transforming the earth. He writes in The Life Divine, 'This mighty energy is an equal and impartial mother, samam Brahma, in the great term of the Gita, and its intensity and force of movement is the same in the formation and upholding of a system of suns and the organisation of the life of an ant-hill.'

I am still thinking about that ant that was seen by Sri Aurobindo. I am sure that ant must have

seen Sri Aurobindo observing him. What if that ant told its siblings about Sri Aurobindo? What if those siblings repeated that story to their siblings and the story was passed along by generations of ants and became a legend among the ants?

Whenever I see a line of ants crossing my kitchen sill, I wonder which one would know the story of their great great grand-ant who demonstrated to Sri Aurobindo the amazing intelligence of their race!

Manoj

Postscript: What happened to the ants?

When I published 'Ants in Bliss' on Avnet, I was not consciously looking for a solution to the ant problem. But miracles are never in short supply here. After reading my story one of my colleagues offered to share her solution to the ant problem. It came in the form of an imported chemical 'Ant Killer Liquid'. But in spite of its terrible name, the whole thing was absolutely clean. All we had to do was to place a few drops of the liquid where ants cross. The ants came rushing to take it home. After a few weeks we noticed a drastic drop in their numbers and no dead bodies, no blood, no screaming. It was 'cool', as they say.

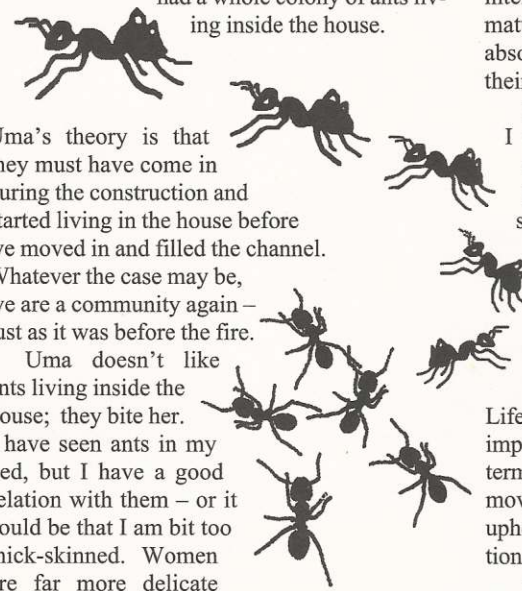
HUMOUR

Ants in Bliss

Bliss is where I live. When I say this, many people think that I am claiming too much; it must be a lie. I have to explain to them that Bliss is the name of my house. Actually Bliss is a community. We are hundreds of ants, many geckos, frogs, fishes, snake in the pond and a lot of very small nameless insects who come in the evening as if to become food for the geckos. You see, it is rather a big community. Among this crowd we live, Uma and me.

Our old house was a thatched hut that was pretty much like home to bats, snakes, rats and other curious creatures, including the legendary thief, the late Vazhamuni, who usually went to the kitchen first to see if there was any food. Anyway, when we built the new house – after the fire that destroyed our cozy little hut – we thought we should, perhaps, get more civilized and tidy.

One of the first things we did was to try to solve the problem of ants. We made a water channel around the house, thinking that the ants



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