

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988



Aerial view of Matrimandir, 2003

MAIN THEME: Perspectives from long-term workers at Matrimandir

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|---------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| ■ Roger Anger | ■ Alain Grandcolas | ■ Lakshminarayan | ■ Andy |
| ■ Piero | ■ Loganathan | ■ Manavalan | ■ Michael Bonke |
| ■ Narad | ■ Shanmugam | ■ 'Welder' Kumar | ■ Ruud Lohman |

pages 3 - 5

Message from Roger Anger

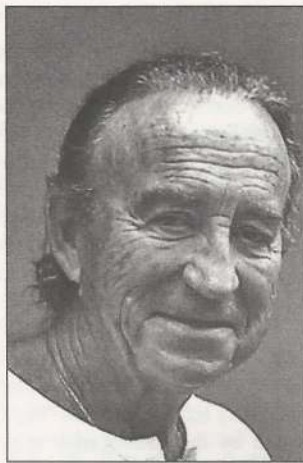


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Since the day the Mother decided to give a form and a dimension to Her Vision, She has never ceased to watch over all the details of its manifestation while working through a handful of people of committed faith and dedication.

The work to be achieved still needs a consecration consonant with the spiritual responsibilities the Mother required for this construction.

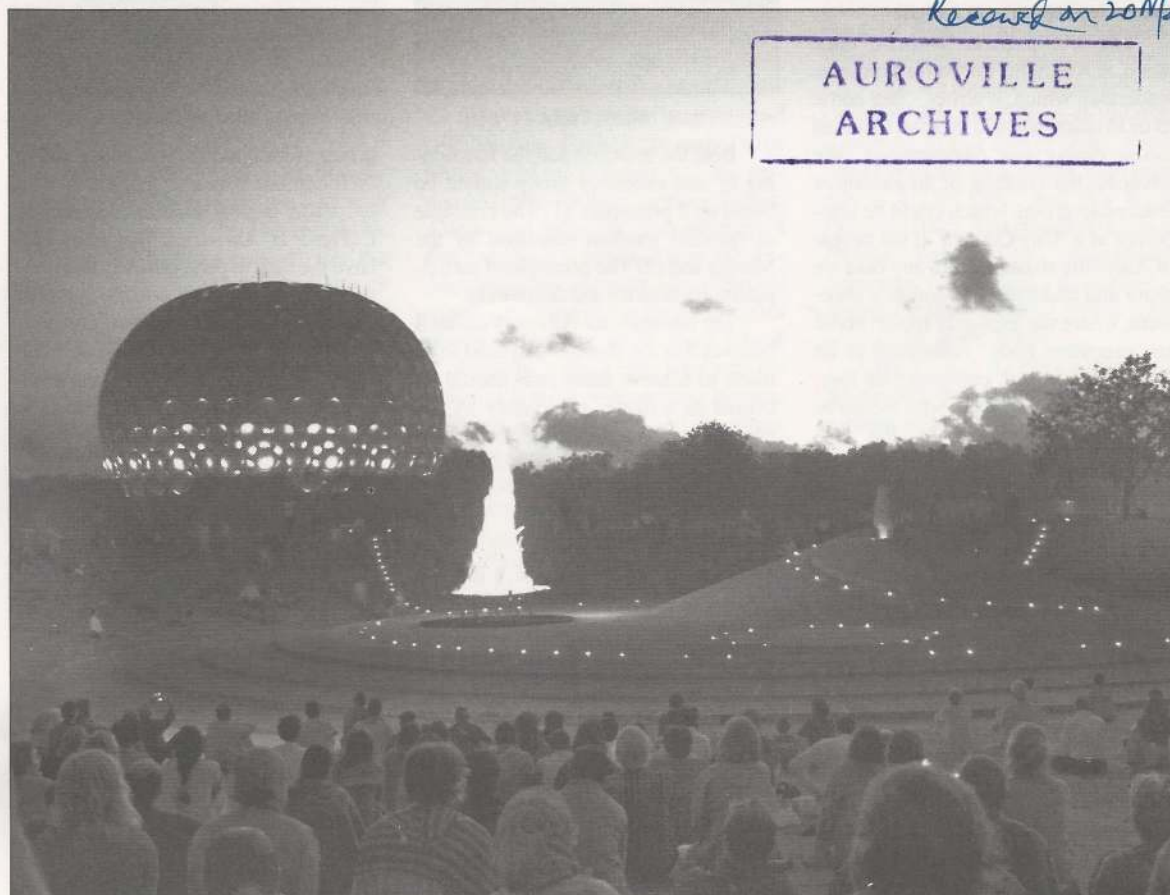
The teams working on the Matrimandir have renewed themselves over the years. Succeeding one another, they have devoted their time and courage to the achievement of this task in spite of pressure and resistance. Each in his or her

own way and to their own capacity knew how to offer their indispensable contribution to the creation of this unique building: the Matrimandir, the tool of The Mother to accelerate the transformation and the advent of a new consciousness.

Undoubtedly it was impossible to assume the responsibility for a work of such an importance without the play of 'forces' wanting to delay its completion – yet even they collaborated fully in its fulfilment.

Today, we must forget the difficulties of the past and fully enjoy seeing the miracle of its realization being finally accomplished.

Auroville, 30th January 2007



Auroville's 39th birthday was celebrated with the traditional bonfire at dawn

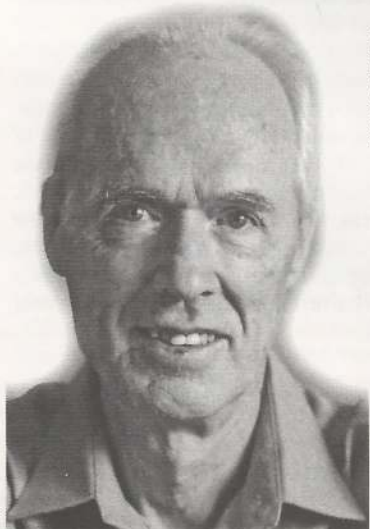
AUROVILLE
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PHOTO TIME

"It was a privilege to work there"

Matrimandir is unlike any other building in the world. When Piero, who supervised the construction for many years, is asked if it has influenced any other existing structure, he shakes his head. "In today's world, who would build such a complicated and impractical thing?! But, at the same time, it has fascinated many, many people."

The experts, Piero notes, often didn't realize what they were getting into when they volunteered to take up one of the many complex technical challenges. There were also some pretty strange ideas circulating in the early years. "For example, at the beginning the globe in the chamber was supposed to float in the air. But how? Somebody worked out that the globe could float 5 centimetres above the floor if we created a strong magnetic field. The only problem was that if anybody got too close, anything metallic, like keys or coins, would be irresistibly attracted out of their pockets! Another researcher had the idea to fill a light plastic globe with helium. The drawback here was that any change in atmospheric pressure would have made it sink to the



Piero

floor or disappear up to the ceiling. Then there was the man who wanted to fit three hydraulic pistons to each of the 1200 disks. The pistons would be controlled by a central computer and the idea was that the disks would move in waves! But people didn't find it ridiculous to study such things. On the contrary, they took it as a serious challenge."

PHOTO SHIRAZ

Piero was challenged himself. Arriving in Auroville as a young architect soon after the inauguration, he began by designing houses. However, as soon as the construction of the Matrimandir began, his engineering skills were called upon and for the next 20 years he became the man to whom everybody on site referred to for technical guidance.

"I started by doing the geometrical drawings of the building: these were not yet fully defined when I began work. Then I would bring them to Chennai for the necessary calculations to be made. Based on these I would do all the drawings to execute the structure. This meant the design of the reinforcement, the scaffolding, the wooden form work, the lifting devices – even the wheelbarrows! On top of that I was doing the practical on-site supervision. It was a huge job. There were always problems to be solved and sometimes it was necessary to make major adjustments. For example, originally there were four ramps, one for each rib, but this made it difficult to get adequate clearance, so with Roger we decided to eliminate two of them."

"Technically, such a heavy structure sitting on only four pillars of very limited section was a huge challenge for an engineer to calculate. Luckily there was this brilliant man, Santhanam, who was also 'captured' by Matrimandir. He was a junior engineer in the Madras Structural Research Centre and he began by writing a computer programme to make all the necessary calculations. It took him one and a half years just to write that programme, but eventually he got

what he wanted: the most accurate results for the building's safety."

The original idea was that the Aurovilians would do the foundation for the four pillars but then an outside contractor would take over and complete Matrimandir. But when the foundation had been completed, many Aurovilians wanted to carry on. Piero wrote to Mother asking for guidance. She told him that what they were doing was very good and that they should continue. "I was probably one of the dreamers who wanted to carry on," says Piero. "but somehow I forgot it would probably take a good part of my life. And when I realized... but how could I have said to Mother that I couldn't spend so much time on this? It was such a privilege."

In fact, Piero was to spend more than twenty years supervising the work on the structure. His last task was the inner chamber. "When we finished that and the crystal globe had been put in place, those of us working there felt that the essential work had been done. From that moment people could go to the chamber for concentration, as Mother had wished."

What kept Piero going all those years? "Even before starting work on Matrimandir I read the conversation where Mother describes the inside of the chamber as a white space pierced by a sun's ray falling on a globe. It was a mystery, a beautiful and fascinating thing, and that passage has remained a huge source of inspiration for me. And then there was the satisfaction of finding a way of building the Matrimandir without a contractor."

continued on page 3

Almost there

In mid January, the Matrimandir was temporarily closed to speed up the completion of the final work on the structure. This meant completing the ramps, the inner skin and the outer doors, in addition to a few minor details. The intention was to 'unveil' the finished building on the 21st February, the 36th anniversary of the beginning of the Matrimandir excavation. However, despite the heroic efforts of the workers, not all the tasks were completed by the deadline.

Nevertheless, Auroville Today decided this would be a good opportunity to speak to Aurovilians and workers who have long been connected with the construction to find out what the Matrimandir means to them and what the imminent completion of the structure may signify.

It's also important to remember that the Matrimandir has not only been built by those who live here. Many people from all over the world have assisted, in their different ways, in its materialization.

Film preview: Building Matrimandir (1971-2007)

On the 21st February, Cinema Paradiso presented a pre-screening of a film on the history of the Matrimandir construction. The film begins with the excavation of the crater and then shows all the main phases of the construction up to the present. Highlights include footage of all-night concretings, the raising of the crane, the arrival of the columns and the unveiling of the crystal. The film is unfinished as its makers Doris and Francis also wish to include the final look – the inner skin, the ramps and main doors etc. – which is yet to be completed. But even this rough cut gives a marvellous sense of the energy, creativity, devotion and attention to detail which has gone into making the Matrimandir what it is today.

- IAC proposes executive leadership
- FAMC reconstituted

page 2

- Ervin Laszlo in Auroville
- Jean Monnet exhibition
- Peace award

page 6

- Awakening creative entrepreneurship workshop

page 7

- Israeli sabras in Auroville
- Korean cultural fête

page 7

- Kids' city Auroville: the Nandanam Kindergarteners' view

page 8

IAC proposes an 'executive leadership' group

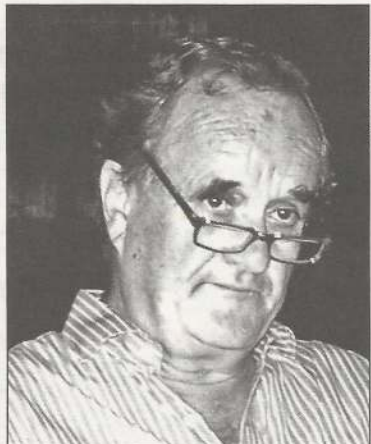
The Auroville International Advisory Council held its half yearly meeting on 21st February 2007. As has become customary, its report was made available immediately afterwards.

The members of the International Advisory Council (IAC), Mark Tully, chairman, Doudou Diène, Michael Murphy and Marc Luyckx Ghisi, had spent quite a few days in Auroville before the meeting, giving lectures and interacting with many groups and individuals. The report of their meeting reflected these intense interactions.

Executive leadership a must

The IAC's main concern, once again, is Auroville's need for executive leadership which, it writes, "had come to us in many ways in relation to issues raised during our consultations. We advocate the creation of an executive leadership group, which could be conceived as a 'City Council' if the people of Auroville so desire it. In any case we share and endorse The Mother's statement, where she explicitly speaks about an 'executive body' conceived as an Auroville Council, composed of four, seven or eight members who would be unanimously accepted by the vast majority of the community and who would share, in essence, the same vision and understanding of the aim and principles of Auroville as they would have been generally accepted by the Aurovilians. The Auroville Council, representing the whole community, would be its executive and administrative body and its assent and participation necessary to all the resolutions and actions of the community in all more important matters of government, finance, policy, throughout the whole range of communal interests. But it would not interfere unduly with the life of the community; it would superintend and assist its right process and see that the *raison d'être* and the main principles of Auroville are observed. And here is the way she describes the type of persons to be in this executive body.

'If there is no representative of the supreme consciousness (that can happen, can't it?), if there is no one, then perhaps this could be replaced (it would be an experiment) by the government of a few - which should be decided between four and eight, something like that: four, seven or eight - who have an INTUITIVE intelligence. "Intuitive" is more important than "intelligence": an intuition manifested intellectually.'



Mark Tully

Both the selection and the functioning of this executive group should be based on 2 principles: (1) The principle of spiritual wisdom described by the Mother and (2) The principle of participatory governance and devolution.

The International Advisory Council believes that the changes that need to be made to achieve these ends should be treated as a matter of urgency by the community. We also strongly believe that the Governing Board should actively assist in this process."

WC selection is divisive

The IAC observed that it did not agree with the mode of selection of the new Working Committee which, it said, was "divisive and generating vehement disagreements. There is a need for a new and less divisive process and for more reasoned discussion." The background to this is that Aurovilians were recently asked to select 15 names for a Selection Committee which would choose the new Working Committee and Auroville Council. When the results were announced, it did not represent the cultural diversity of Auroville. There were also allegations of 'politicking'.

Planning

The IAC also expressed its view concerning a new planning organisation. In September last year, the Auroville Planning and Development Council (APDC) had ceased functioning as this Council and Auroville's Future had been working at cross purposes, at the cost of Auroville's development. Both groups then decided to explore the possibility of forming one planning and development body. Auroville Vision 2012, an unofficial

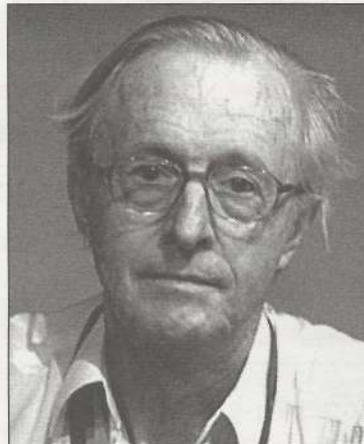


Doudou Diène

group of individuals, was requested to facilitate the process. In February, it proposed a new organisation called *L'Avenir d'Auroville*. This body will have the task to plan, develop and construct the Auroville Township and plan and develop its socio-economic fabric. There will be nine work areas, each coordinated and managed by a competent team leader. Together, the nine team leaders will comprise the management team. On the wider level, the group proposed to create a citizens' body made up of concerned residents who commit themselves to an in-depth review of development proposals. The group particularly stressed their commitment to communicate, take feedback and integrate it for the best result possible.

On February 19th, the Residents' Assembly approved the proposal subject to two conditions: that it would have the right to approve the nomination of the team leaders, and that *L'Avenir d'Auroville* would submit major planning and development decisions for approval to the Residents' Assembly.

The IAC, being informed about these developments, expressed the hope that the newly proposed planning organization will be finally endorsed by the Residents' Assembly and later by the Governing Board. It was distressed that "once again government funds available for development activities were not spent" and considered that "the Governing Board will be obliged to decide on schemes needing immediate implementation, in the best interest of the community if the Residents' Assembly is not able to endorse a new planning organisation within a reasonable time frame."



Marc Luyckx Ghisi

Finance

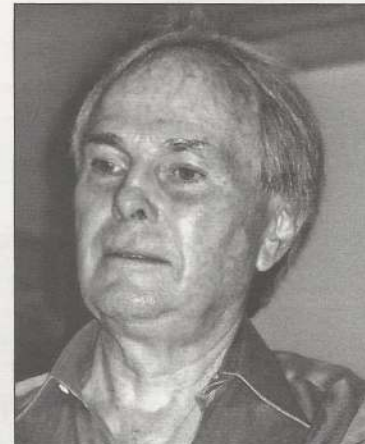
Regarding finances, the IAC mentioned that "there is a need for speedy creation of a Budget Coordination Committee and for establishing guidelines to define the priorities in the allocation of funds." The IAC reiterated its strong endorsement of the principle of transparency in all financial matters and that accounts should be published on the web. It also asked for more transparency concerning 'unspecified funds' and asked that the guidelines concerning the investments of surplus money should be finalized as soon as possible.

International Zone

The IAC was informed of the concerns of Americans about the proposal to drastically change their pavilion in the International Zone (*AVToday* #209-210 of June-July 2006). It recommended that guidelines for national pavilions and for their planning process and responsibilities be formulated as soon as possible, and commented that the inclusiveness of the process is as important as the result.

Visas and Residential Permits

Regarding Visas and Residential Permits, the IAC "strongly recommended that Boris, Chris and Dima (*three young men who had been evicted from India in January 2005 after an Indian court found them guilty of misdemeanour in the New Year's party of 2002, Eds.*) should be allowed to come back to Auroville as soon as possible". The IAC also recommended that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, when recommending the granting of a visa or the extension of a Residential



Michael Murphy

Permit, should normally follow the recommendation of the Entry Group and Residents' Service. If the Secretary disagrees with the recommendations of the Entry Group, the IAC proposes that he inform and has a dialogue with the Entry Group and the Working Committee first. If there is no agreement, the Secretary should submit the case to the Chairman of the Governing Board.

Education

The IAC visited several elementary and secondary schools and was "highly impressed by the quality of involvement and the degree of innovation of many schools. We were also happy to note some future projects of university level initiatives." The IAC asked the Secretary to compile a comprehensive issue-oriented report on education in Auroville, because of the centrality of education for the future of Auroville. The IAC also expressed that it was "particularly impressed by the initiative of Auroville industrial school with its emphasis on education for life."

Auroville's 40th anniversary

Various issues related to the 40th anniversary were brought to the attention of the IAC. "These issues reminded us once again about Auroville's need for both urgent action and executive leadership. This is an important event in Auroville's history, providing the community with a unique opportunity to tell the world about its achievements and aspirations. It would be a terrible loss if this opportunity is missed. It is therefore essential that an effective Organizing Committee be set up immediately."

Carel

FAMC reconstituted

Does the Governing Board's decision to reconstitute Auroville's Funds and Assets Management Committee indicate an increasing intervention of the Board?

For the second time in less than one year the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation has decided to intervene in an area which so far been managed by the residents of Auroville. The first time was in March 2006, when it appointed a Land Consolidation Committee (LCC). Till then, land purchase was the domain of Auroville's Land and Estate Management which was responsible for raising funds, negotiating land prices and purchasing available lands with the approval of the Secretary.

However, under the previous Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, land purchase had come to a complete standstill. Anxious to resume land purchase with full vigour, and aware of the complexity and magnitude of the task, the Board created a dynamic new committee. It consists of 11 members; five of them, including the Secretary, have been nominated by the Board, and six members by the Residents' Assembly. The LCC is accountable to the Board.

In January this year, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) was reorganised. The FAMC is a body created under the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997. These Rules, however, embody contradictions. The FAMC has

been defined as a committee of the Governing Board, while elsewhere in the Rules the FAMC is referred to as a committee of the Residents' Assembly. The latter was the original intention, and had been agreed upon in a meeting at the Ministry of Human Resources Development when the draft Rules were being discussed.

The mistake was only discovered after the Rules were promulgated. The then Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. Bala Baskar, informed the HRD Ministry of the errors along with the request to rectify them. Pending the modification of the Rules, he proceeded according to the original intention and attended every FAMC meeting for the next 4 years as permanent invitee, while the chairmanship rested in the hands of Aurovilians. When he left Auroville in 2001, he commented on his participation as "beneficial for both sides, for us to better understand the difficulty the community faces, and for them to get instant feedback from us, including our assessment on possible outside responses to the problem. It has become an essential point for interaction."

The next Secretary, Mr. Sharma, did not accept the views of his predecessor. As the modification of the Rules had still not happened, he lost little time in

declaring the FAMC 'illegal' and decided not to attend its meetings. But when he left office in July 2005, modification of the Rules was still pending.

By that time, a new Governing Board had taken office. It considered that under the Foundation Act only the Governing Board has the responsibility of administering the Foundation's properties and that only the Board is accountable for their proper management to the Indian Government and Parliament. The Residents' Assembly, according to the Act, has only the power to advise the Board. The FAMC's practical experience - including four years of smooth and effective functioning in cooperation with Mr. Bala Baskar and some years without a Secretary's presence - was ignored.

The Governing Board proposed its own modifications of the Rules to the HRD Ministry. Pending the Ministry's decision, on January 25th 2007, the chairman of the Board, Dr. Karan Singh, reconstituted the FAMC as a committee of the Governing Board. He appointed the Secretary as convener, the Financial Advisor of the HRD Ministry and the Finance Officer of the Auroville Foundation as ex-officio members, and 9 persons proposed by the Working Committee as Aurovilians members.

There is a general unease in Auroville with these decisions of the Board. One reason is that these important bodies are only accountable to the Board and no longer to the Residents' Assembly. Another is that Aurovilians fear that their freedom to implement the ideals of Auroville and their right to self-management will be straight-jacketed by the Board's interventions,

or by attempts to run Auroville as another department of the Government of India.

Yet another concern is that the previous FAMC had constituted two important sub-committees, the Economy Group and the Housing Group. The Governing Board's (proposed) amendments of the Rules say that such subcommittees have also to be notified by the Foundation. Will these subcommittees too become subject to increasing control by the Board and be only accountable to it?

Finally, there are concerns how the new FAMC will deal with the community's Unity Fund - the Fund which currently receives all incomes and channels it to respective units and projects.

Till today, answers to these questions are pending.

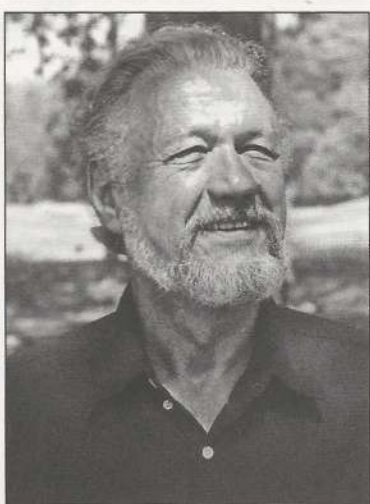
For the Board these concerns are unwarranted. In a reflection on the International Advisory Council's observations for the need of devolution of power - that decisions be taken at the appropriate executive level instead of the top-down approach - Dr. Karan Singh observed that the Board regards the Charter of Auroville as its guiding philosophy and is striving to promote a pattern of governance balancing the Board's accountability with the Residents' Assembly's legitimate role in the development of Auroville. "The Governing Board is deeply committed to the ideals of Auroville and equally conscious of its responsibilities towards the people of India in respect of Auroville. The Board will continue to seek the close and constructive collaboration of the Council and the Assembly in its efforts to advance the cause of Auroville."

Carel

"Harmony is the first essential"

“Wouldn't you like to come to Auroville in a few years? I feel you can do something there,” Mother remarked to Narad when they met for the first time in early 1968. Some months later, after Narad had returned to the U.S., he received a letter from one of Mother's secretaries saying that Mother wanted him to prepare himself to build the Matrimandir gardens. Within a year Narad had returned to begin the Matrimandir Nursery. “The intention was to collect the most beautiful plants from all over the world that would adapt to these climatic conditions.”

Mother asked Narad to design the gardens. This he was unable to do. “I couldn't catch the vision. Instead Mother gave me the opening to working with the soil and with plants.” During the 1970s, Narad and his helpers built up a unique collection of rare and beautiful plants. In the early 1980s he returned to the U.S., but he continued to contact nurseries and friends around the world for special plants for Matrimandir. In recent years Narad has revisited Auroville



Narad

annually for longer periods and at present he is fully engaged in the Matrimandir gardens.

His particular focus at the moment is to plant grass on all the petals by 21st February. “It's a big job. Every petal will have 1300 square feet of grass, but before it can be planted we have to prepare the compost and eliminate all the nut-grass, which is the bane of our work here in the tropics. I've even seen it grow through concrete!”

Grass is a whole world in itself. Narad reels off the names of some of the different varieties he is introducing at Matrimandir: *Tif dwarf*, *Tifton 10*, *Tifton 419*, *Princess 77*, *St. Augustine*, *Centipede*. “Many of the grasses come from the Agricultural Experimental Station at Tifton, Georgia, which is where they grow the finest golf course grass in the world. The qualities we are looking for include low-water tolerance, disease and insect-resistance, high-traffic tolerance and low-nutrient needs. But the first thing we look for is beauty. Each of these fine grasses has a different colour, texture and leaf shape. There's the bluish *Tifton 10*, the rich green *Tifton 410*, the emerald green *Centipede*...” Narad is using different varieties to create interesting variations.

What excites Narad most, however, is not the success he has had with the new grasses (of the 17 varieties he brought, 15 have succeeded), nor the successful cross-pollination of the 29 varieties of ‘*Prayer*’ (*Zephyranthes*) which he has just brought from the U.S. “The most wonderful thing is that every Sunday morning up to 40 Ashramites are coming to work in the gardens. Many of them worked on Matrimandir's concreting in the 1970s

before they were made to feel uncomfortable. They so wanted to come again – we only had to open our hearts. So now that bridge between Auroville and the Ashram has been fully constructed again. Now I would like more Aurovilians to come and join us. There is so much work to be done there is room for everybody!”

In fact, Narad feels there is a completely different atmosphere at Matrimandir now compared to a few years ago. “We begin each morning with a meditation under the Banyan to invoke the Presence and make us work a little more consciously and it definitely has an effect. People are trying to open more, to let the Force flow through them and into the earth. Above all, there's a new spirit of harmony and collaboration. Back in the early 1970s Mother told me to begin with the garden of Unity – which speaks volumes. Although I pray for it constantly, I don't yet have a vision of how the gardens will look, nobody has, although things are sifting down from the higher planes and maybe people catch bits of it. Actually, I don't care who gets the vision, I'll work with anyone because my work is with the soil and the plants. But I have no doubt that when harmony and unity is fully established here, the rest will come.”

There's another reason why Narad is confident that the gardens will manifest. Many years ago, Narad's first wife, Anie, had a dream. In it, Narad was climbing into the sky. The people below were frightened he would fall but Narad had seen a golden branch in the sky and wanted to bring it down to Mother. He brought it down and planted it in the earth near Matrimandir. When Mother was told about the

dream, She said, “It is not quite a dream. It is a very good indication about the work you are doing.”

At another time, Narad remembers Mother's hand making an ascending spiral as She described how one must know how to move from consciousness to consciousness as one progresses through the twelve gardens. “This is the inner journey,” explains Narad, “which is a preparation for the spiral ascent to the chamber.”

Is there significance in the order of the gardens? Narad pauses. “What has come to me is this. The first garden is *Existence*, the second *Consciousness*, the third *Bliss* – that's *Satchitananda*. When *Satchitananda* descends there's *Light* (the 4th garden). From *Light*, *Life* (5th) evolves. And *Life*, in its full manifestation, brings *Power* (6th). Power brings *Wealth* (7th), wealth used properly is *Utility* (8th), and this brings *Progress* (9th). And progress brings an *Eternal Youth* (10th), unassailable *Harmony* (11th) and, ultimately, a divine *Perfection* (12th) which leads, once again, to *Existence*.

“What a task we have before us, to create something where you go into the gardens and experience that. We're not there yet, but we're moving towards it.”

And what about the completion of the Matrimandir structure? Does Narad feel this has a special significance? “Yes, because Mother said to Nirodbaran that the completion of the Matrimandir would be coincident with world peace and harmony. More recently, a saint from the Himalayas meditated in the chamber. When he came down, someone asked him what he had experienced. He smiled and said, ‘One day it will save the world’.”

Alan

"This is my priority"

Alain Grandcolas' involvement with Matrimandir began early. In August, 1970, even before the land for it was bought, he was asked to organize, near the Banyan tree, a ceremony to invoke the Grace for the building of Matrimandir. When excavation work finally began in March, 1971, Alain's job was to pinpoint the centre of the future Matrimandir so that the diggers knew where to excavate.

“At first only Aurovilians were digging. But after six months we calculated that, even if we doubled the speed of the work, it would take until February, 1978 just to finish the excavation – and this was the target date for completing the entire project!” Consequently, the Mother was asked if they could hire an excavator. She told the Aurovilians to take villagers instead, as She wanted to provide them with work.

Alain was put in charge of more than four hundred villagers, some of whom came from as far away as Andhra Pradesh. Within three months the excavation was complete.

When the actual construction started, Alain worked with Ruud Lohman on constructing the ribs. But he was also concerned that the garden work should get underway and asked Mother if they could begin. Mother agreed, specifying that they should start on 24th November, 1972 at six in the morning. “At the end of that morning, however, Piero came and told us a bulldozer was coming – from Calcutta! – and it would be cheaper to wait (instead, a ramming machine arrived!). But we had workers coming next day. So we asked Shyamsunder what we should do. He opened the Matrimandir map, took a pen and put its point on the urn. That was how Ruud and I took responsibility for the permanent construction of the amphitheatre.”

In September, 1973, when the structure of the amphitheatre was nearing completion, Alain left Auroville to return to the Ashram. Later he returned to France. While he visited Auroville yearly, he only came back permanently in 1999. After two years working in the Information Service he is now once again responsible for the work in the Matrimandir gardens.

Why did he return to the gardens? “One day, in April 2002, I was walking in a meditative mood in my room and it

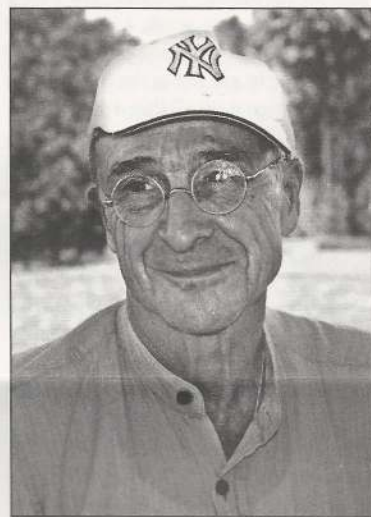
came as an *adesh*. ‘Go and build the Matrimandir gardens according to Roger's design’. So I decided that if, by November 24th, 2002, the gardens according to Roger had not been started, I would begin working there to achieve this. Since then my main concern has been to develop the designs with Roger and Jacqueline and to build them as prototypes.”

Alain is hopeful that the structure of the gardens – meaning the contouring and pathways – will be completed by March, 2007. He notes, however, that Roger now considers that the gardens themselves should continue to develop and evolve rather than represent a fixed solution.

Has Alain's understanding of the significance, the meaning, of Matrimandir developed over the years? “Very much so. In the beginning, Mother's statement that ‘the Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville, the sooner it is there the better’ was sufficient to motivate us. But this was only a very rough understanding of what it represents. At the same time, something very important for Ruud and myself was chapter six of Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* where the four aspects of the Universal Mother are described. We even used to play a game: whenever we encountered a problem, we would try to understand it in terms of the four aspects, playing out the different roles to arrive at a more comprehensive solution.

“Then, one day in the mid 1980s, an Ashramite was going through his papers and found something written by the Mother. ‘The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Universal Mother according to Sri Aurobindo's teaching.’ ‘Symbol’, in this sense, means a ‘charged’ tool that constantly invites us to be in contact with something higher within oneself. I was so happy to read this because, for me, it is the most beautiful explanation of the deeper meaning of Matrimandir.

“The other quote which has helped me in better understanding the Matrimandir is that ‘Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection’. This means that whenever we are working on the Matrimandir we are invited to strive for perfection. My work with Roger on the gardens has been a living experience of this. For he modifies his prototypes many, many times until the



Alain Grandcolas

moment he feels he has attained perfection in the design, which means that he believes he has achieved what Mother wants us to do.”

No one doubts the striving for perfection at Matrimandir. But how is it that the Matrimandir project, a project intended, among other things, to unify the Aurovilians should have witnessed so many conflicts over the years? Alain pauses. “When something is very close to your heart you do not want it to drift off course. People have different views about what should be done but because it's the Matrimandir, and because there's a sense that what is done here is for eternity, people hold on to their views more strongly. And, it must be said, working at Matrimandir boosts the ego very easily.”

So is working at the Matrimandir a blessing or a curse? Alain laughs. “In the early years we felt that in building the soul of Auroville we were building our own soul. In fact in 1986, when some Bombay businessmen offered to fund the completion of the Matrimandir as long as there was a plan to complete it in four years, the offer was refused on the basis that the soul could not be built so quickly!”

“Now I don't think that working at Matrimandir helps you to progress any quicker than working elsewhere in Auroville. At the same time, this place is definitely more charged than many other places. Certainly the inner room has an atmosphere of a very special quality and intensity. It's very similar to the atmosphere of the meditation hall in the Ashram – you feel a peace infusing all the cells of your body. In the meditation hall the atmosphere is more intimate. Here it is wider.”

Alan

"It was a privilege to work there"

continued from page 1

“I knew people were depending upon me, but I never felt I couldn't do it. There was so much help – I was working with a very good team – and there was also this feeling of heroism, of doing something exceptional.”

Piero remembers one of the high points being the 24 hour concreting for the foundation for the pillars. “It was a fantastic experience. Mother sent flowers and we went on through the night, all these people working in this huge pit under lights. It was like something out of a film. The students from the Ashram School came to help, and they were radiating such joy because they were building the temple of The Mother. Even now, years later, when I meet some of them they tell me they have such a sweet memory of that time.”

Ruud Lohman described the Matrimandir as a people-transformer. Did Piero also feel that Matrimandir was building them at the same time as they were building it? “Very much so. You'd see people arrive, offering to help. Some left very soon, but with those who stayed longer often some unexpected talent emerged, like Ruud and his bar-bending. It's very moving this, when you see someone suddenly finding themselves in their right place. And this happened many times.”

Does 21st February, 2007, have a special significance for Piero? “Not really, although it was good to set a date to motivate the finishing of the work. In 1991, when we put the crystal globe in the chamber we did it in a very Aurovilian way –

without inviting people, without ceremony – and it felt O.K.

“Today, I'm happy for Roger that the structure will soon be completed. He's shown such a remarkable will to go on for so many years more than me. Some of his ideas seemed so impractical but somehow, after so many good and bad experiments, a way has been found to materialise them. He's done a magnificent work there.”

Piero's regret – and one shared by many Aurovilians – is that he and Roger and Paulo Tommasi could not have worked more closely together on the construction of Matrimandir. “Somehow, it happened in spite of us rather than through a conscious collaboration. We three would have made a very good combination as we complement each other. I had the technical skills, Paulo held Mother's vision for the inner chamber and Roger has seen through the work on the general design, the petals, disks, inner skin etc.”

It's one of the paradoxes of Matrimandir: that a project initially designed to bring the Aurovilians together has generated so much controversy over the years. But Gloria, Piero's wife and co-worker, remembers that Mother had said that the stronger the light, the stronger would be the opposition. “So for me it is almost natural that there have been so many attacks on Matrimandir as Mother put such an extraordinary force there.” “It's an amplifier,” adds Piero. “It accentuates both the best and the worst of us. So now let's use it for the best.”

Alan

"Matrimandir is our world"

These five long-term workers of Tamil origin, who come from the villages around Auroville, joined the Matrimandir as teenagers or as young men. It was economic necessity that was the prime motivating factor. They all started as apprentices, learning a variety of skills from the Westerners or the Ashramites who worked for the Matrimandir.

What has it meant working at the Matrimandir? How has the work changed over the years? Have they changed though their work at the Matrimandir? What does the Matrimandir mean personally to them? Here are their reflections.

Loganathan



PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

After 6th standard, my parents did not want to spend money for my books and studies, so I got fed up and ran away from home and joined the Matrimandir nursery.

It was a *super* job – all I had to do was to water the plants, and do weeding. My first boss was Narad. Even then he was strict. If we missed even one plant he would get upset. But once the job was done, he would be happy as a child.

A year later I moved on to electrical work. I remember the date I joined duty; 1st January 1973. It was 'leave' day, but I did not know that. When I showed up, I was made to sign attendance, received my pay, and was then given the day off! It was so amusing that I was paid for a leave day.

I started to work under Toine who I consider to be my *Guru-asan* (teacher). I picked up skills quickly on the job. Everything I learnt is by experience; I have no certificate.

My work in the Matrimandir now is all kinds of things that need to be done. Sometimes I do mechanics and machinery maintenance; other times it is electrical work, or help in purchasing, and sometimes even driving... I believe it is Auroville that brought me up, and made me who I am today. I came here very young. Other than Auroville, I don't know any place else. Even now, if I have vacation, I prefer to stay in Auroville rather than go outside. Some of my friends think I am crazy and make fun of me about this. When I am in Madras, I find myself saying to myself, 'Che! Why do I have to be here?'

What I have observed in the last two years is that the work is going very fast. We all feel the pressure upon us, but I find it enjoyable. Instead of being a burden, it is actually a lot of fun. It is as if nobody can afford to walk anymore; we are all running to complete the work! In fact it was hard for me to even make time for this interview – I am supposed to be in Pondy right now taking a delivery...

I know there is a feeling amongst some about how it is not correct to force the opening date before everything is complete. But I look at it a little differently. My question is, when is anything ever complete? We will always have to be doing improvements. So I say let's go ahead. Yes, this work is making us run, stress out, or whatever, but let us complete it. Then perhaps we can relax a little.

In 1972, I saw The Mother. Richard took two of us boys to the Ashram. Mother came on the balcony and it was so *super*! At that time I did not understand how special it was. I was just 12

or 13. Since then I have the feeling that I am working for Her. It is a *bhagyam* (blessing) that I can be involved in this kind of work in this lifetime – not everyone can get this luck

I have no regrets about my life. Everything that has happened has been Mother's grace and Ganesh's grace. In 1988, I became an Aurovilian. It was then I felt something for Auroville, and wanted to become an Aurovilian. At that time my wife was working with 'big' Jocelyn and it was she who encouraged us to go for it. It was a good decision. I am proud to say that my second son was born here in Auroville.

Being just a worker working at Matrimandir is different from being an Aurovilian working at the Matrimandir. Things seem a little more carefree, being just a worker. But being an Aurovilian working in Matrimandir, it feels like a responsibility. Perhaps it is a natural consequence that Mother puts on us.

Shanmugam

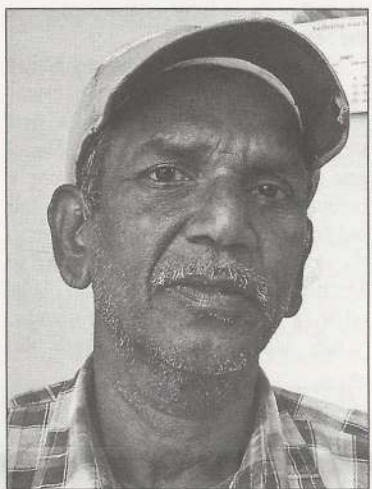


PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

I was a young boy when I started work at the Matrimandir, perhaps even before Auroville started. I remember digging soil in the amphitheatre. I am now fifty-one.

Sometime in the middle, I left Matrimandir to work outside. It was the time of the conflict, but I returned in the mid-eighties. I have been here now for the past 20 years.

There are many events in the construction of that Matrimandir that stand out clearly in the mind. I remember the early days when I was digging the soil, earning a rupee and fifty paise as daily wage. But we were happy. I also have memories of the Matrimandir when it was like an open shell; you could stand inside and look up at the sky and the clouds. I was there when the last ring of the roof was put together. It was a special feeling when that work got completed. There are so many such moments in the construction of Matrimandir. To me, they are all special.

There is one day that stands out very clearly in my memory. It was the day the inner chamber got finished, and the crystal put in place. I was involved in the laying of the white Italian marble tiles inside. It was so beautiful when the chamber was complete with the crystal inside. I think it still is the most beautiful place in the Matrimandir. Until about three years ago, I used to do regular chamber duty between 4 and 5 in the evenings. Now things are not as open so I have stopped.

There is one person I would like to specially mention: Gerard, he is my Guru. I started working under him as a young boy. He trusted many things to me, and it is because of him that I have learnt a lot. Finally I believe that all my work is for the Mother. It is to Her that I am answerable and to nobody else.

Manavalan

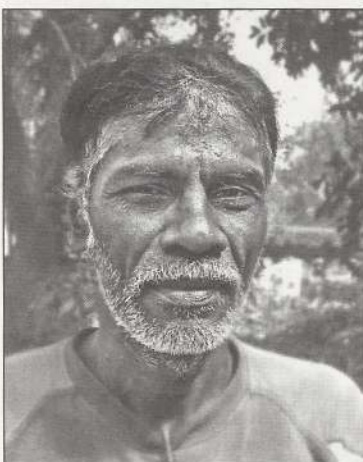


PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

I was on school holiday when I joined Matrimandir. I have had to learn all kinds of work. I can say that there is not one place in the Matrimandir where my hands have not laid. I am the one who does the finishing – I planted the garden; I was among the ones who when the crystal arrived, lifted it and placed it in position. No, I have never been for meditation in the inner chamber, but every time I start a new work, I think of the Mother. At the time She passed away, I had gone to see her at the Samadhi.

But even with all this, I sometimes wonder if my life has not been a waste. Why? Because workers who were junior and working under me are now in higher positions. Sometimes, I also I feel I am like the *kinnathu thavalai*, a frog in the well. I've not seen the world outside; this is all I know. And this is where I'll probably be till the end.

Opportunities did come by to work elsewhere but nothing worked out. Twice I left to go out and do other things, but once I was out, I could not stop thinking of the Matrimandir. I felt pulled and forced to rejoin. Each time I was accepted back without any questions. So now I have to say that this place has a *Sakthi*; it is this which keeps bringing me back and not allowing me to leave.

About the opening fixed for February 21st, many of us don't understand this rush. This is not done in our culture. Especially for something sacred like the Matrimandir. It is a temple, and a date can be fixed only after the work is complete; not the other way around. But I cannot express these things. We are all working hard and as quickly as possible, but it is going to be impossible to have everything ready by the 21st.

Even though I have all these thoughts, I don't know the answers. I just to do my work. Sometimes when I see how the work has developed here, I get flashbacks on how things were in the beginning, when we started the work, and where we are now. It all feels unreal like a dream.

Then I get this determination that I have to finish the work I have started. I have come here, and this is my place.

'Welder' Kumar

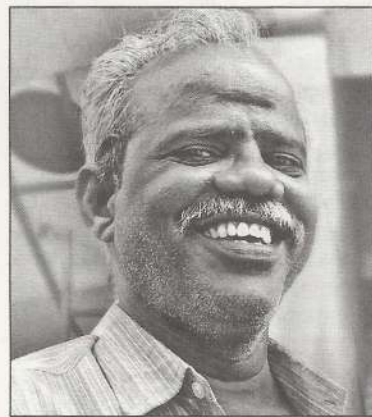


PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

For me there is an inner joy to work here at Matrimandir.

It was a year before Mother's passing that I joined. I was a 15 or 16 year old boy, just completed 8th standard and on summer vacation. I am from the nearby village. I was bored with nothing to do over the holidays when I heard about the work and a daily wage. I came and have never left since.

It was Roger who pulled me in. I learnt everything here, and slowly my responsibilities grew, and I became in charge of some big jobs. Right now I supervise the team that is fixing the four door panels.

My official name is Jayarakshagan. It means 'one who victoriously protects'. But it was a mouthful for Gerard who had to read out our names during the weekly pay-day. So it became shortened to Kumar, which

is my pet name. Since there were too many Kumars, I became 'welder' Kumar.

Many job offers came my way, from Kanchipuram, Chennai, Bangalore, but I refused them all. Sometimes the thought comes if I did make the right decision in staying here. The work is no doubt joyful and fulfilling, but it is not easy being a worker. Even if you have worked for many years, you are still somehow different. After all these years, to get a 'weekly' pay cheque is somewhat demeaning. Also every minute of a worker's time is accounted for; not so for Aurovilians working here. If we are late by half an hour, it gets taken off from the weekly salary. Then there is also the checking of workers' belongings at the end of each workday, to see that nothing is removed from Matrimandir. These things disturb me sometimes.

Then the other issue is the monetary aspect. It is difficult to make ends meet, especially when you have a family and children for whom you want a good and secure future. I have two daughters and a son, and all are still in school. I want them to have better opportunities than I. But education is expensive. I know this is a concern of many workers. We are very happy working here, but what about our children's futures? The Tamil Aurovilians seem to be able to afford to send their children to expensive private schools.

At one time, the chance came for me to become Aurovilian, but I did not take it up. I thought what difference would it make and kept quiet, but now I feel that perhaps it was a wrong decision. The Tamil workers who joined after me and became Aurovilian are now much better off and seem to have everything – big houses, motor bikes and secure futures for their children... Some of us workers even thought that when the Government got involved and the Auroville Foundation came, our future and our children's future would become more secure...

While I say all these things and worry, my work here still brings me an inner joy and peace. Perhaps this is what keeps me working here even though things are not so perfect. Earlier, I used to come and meditate in the chamber but not these days. Things have become a little more strict in the past two to three years.

Priya Sundaravalli

"Her presence has been there from the very beginning"

Lakshminarayan joined the Ashram in 1971. Having a background in civil engineering, he spent about six years as a supervisor on the Cottage Guest House construction project before moving to Auroville in 1978 to work on the Matrimandir.

"Actually I'd been participating in work on the Matrimandir from the very beginning. Some of us Ashramites used to come out on Sundays to help with the excavation. Later there were the major concretings which continued through the night."

In 1978, Auroville was not a comfortable place to be. It was the height of the troubles with the Sri Aurobindo Society. So did he regret leaving the relative security of the Ashram? "In some ways it was difficult to leave the Ashram, but an inner preparation for Auroville had been given to me by the Mother – I think She charged me there for eight years before sending me here. At that time there was some negative feeling regarding Auroville in outside circles but it was always clear to me that this was Mother's work. She

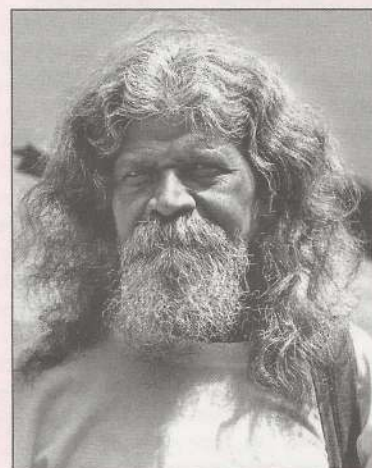


PHOTO SHIRAZ

Lakshminarayan

said that Auroville is an extension of the ideal of the Ashram, a more external manifestation, and I took it in that way. So I never felt I wanted to return to the Ashram."

Over the years, Lakshminarayan has worked in many different areas of the Matrimandir construction – bar-bending, chipping, preparing the nodes on the space-frame, working on the marble in the chamber and on the central staircase. Did the Matrimandir ever become for him just another con-

struction site? "No, because from the beginning I knew it was the universal Mother's shrine. I came with that spirit and that spirit has remained. Of course, the exterior, the body, of Matrimandir took shape gradually over the years but the soul has always been there. The Force that Mother put there, Her presence, has been there from the very beginning."

For many years, Lakshminarayan has been enjoying the privilege of cleaning the crystal in the chamber. "Some visitors want to turn it into a new religion, to worship the crystal, which Mother did not want to happen. For me, it's a symbol. The ray is the light from the supramental sun, the consciousness-force coming down, and the crystal is the individual or collective soul which has to be clean and spotless to receive it. This is the main thing we need to concentrate upon."

And how is the atmosphere around the construction now? "It's very good that many of the Aurovilians who worked here years ago are coming back. There's much more harmony now, and harmony and a spirit of perfection are indications that the work is going well."

Alan

"There has been a moving on"

Andy came to Auroville in 1974. After a short spell in Aspiration bakery he worked for two years in the Matrimandir outer gardens before moving on to the main structure. In 1993, when the chamber was completed, he left Matrimandir and took up other work. In 2003 he returned as part of the new Matrimandir management team, with special responsibility for organizing the workforce.

AVTODAY: Has your understanding of the significance of the Matrimandir changed over the years?

Everything has changed. I've changed, my perceptions of Matrimandir have changed. When we first went to work there, some of us were convinced that the supramental manifestation would occur in our lifetime – and that Matrimandir would be a focal point in this. Now, I'm more pragmatic – obviously another timetable has come into effect – although my original enthusiasm remains.

It's sometimes said that building Matrimandir is as much about building people as about putting up a structure. I'm absolutely convinced of this: although I can't map it exactly, I know I'm a different person because I worked there.

As to the significance of the Matrimandir, it's very hard to say, it's so complex. Clearly the physical structure is only the tip of the iceberg. Even now I'm discovering new aspects, although these are fleeting glimpses which are often forgotten. What is clear, however, is that it is a very living and very strong presence which, once it has hold of you, doesn't let go.

Take me, I was brought back here almost against my will. I had been working elsewhere for ten years and when I was asked if I wanted to join the new Matrimandir management group my head said 'no'. But I found myself saying 'yes'!

Around that time you talked of wanting to become an 'instrument' of Matrimandir rather than of any faction or group. What did you mean by that?

You're leading me on to thin ice here: I don't want to go on record with statements like 'This is what it means to be a willing servitor of the Divine consciousness'! But I think it's something to do with this adventure of consciousness that we came here for. In other words, if you can get to the point where you are not only working for personal gain but are connecting with the essence of the work you do – and I think this could be anything in Auroville, it's not limited to the Matrimandir – then I think you are participating more fully in this adventure.

Matrimandir seems to have its own agenda. It's interesting to see, for example, how much power Mother seems to have invested in that original model. There it is now, almost complete, in spite of all the conflicts and opposition – and I was among those who opposed the disks and petals. Somewhere Mother says that even against their own will people will be pushed towards the right place. I guess that happened with me.

So are the controversies a thing of the past?

I think there has been a moving on. At least we got out of the stalemate [when the previous Matrimandir management team had serious differences with the architect] as is evidenced by the fact



Andy

that the work is proceeding well and many of the Aurovilians who used to work here have returned. How we got out of that impasse I don't exactly know; it happened imperceptibly. Anyway, now there's an unspoken understanding on site that we don't discuss design details as anything can be changed if it doesn't prove functional. There's no longer a sense that everything we build is there for eternity. This is particularly true for the gardens. Roger keeps insisting on this, he uses the word 'ephemeral'.

As a way of proceeding we've agreed on the need to set up a panel to oversee and, eventually, decide on the design on the twelve gardens. But right now the gardens are not a priority; we're focussing on completing the inside of the structure by February 21st, which will, by no means, be an 'inauguration'. Instead, it could be considered an 'unveiling' – and I think this will be a very strong experience for everybody, including those of us who work there.

I still remember when we were finishing the chamber. There was this final, intense period of three weeks when the work space we had been working in, joking in, for many years changed. When everything was cleaned and the coverings removed, suddenly it was something very, very strong. I think it will be the same next February and I'm looking forward to it.

Do you think the completion of the structure will have an effect upon the rest of Auroville?

These things are very complex: most of us don't know because we just don't operate on these levels. But I don't expect some kind of sudden epiphany. What can be said is that the completed structure will be proof that we have transcended a long, dry period of confrontation and that we have managed to complete something which is very central to all of us. And that's a very major point.

What's also remarkable is how much Matrimandir has touched people outside Auroville. We spend a lot of money here – we have over 300 workers on site – but the amazing thing is that over the last three years there's never been any lack of funds. People keep coming and offering: clearly there's a wide and deeply-held belief that completing Matrimandir is something very important.

From an interview by Alan

"It's more like a permanent process"

For many Aurovilians, Michael Bonke is more a rumour than a presence. Although he visits monthly, it seems he's never here for longer than a day or two before he's jetting off somewhere else.

Yet much of Michael's time, money and energy is directed towards completing the Matrimandir, and over the past 15 years he has played a key role in the successful completion of various projects associated with it. These include manufacturing the stand for the crystal, waterproofing the outer skin, fabricating the disks and inner skin and, most recently, organizing the design and manufacture of the hydraulic crane which will soon sit, invisibly, on top of the structure.

Many of these were 'firsts', in the sense that they had never been done before. Take the covering of the disks. "The technique of sheathing gold in glass," explains Michael, "is actually 2000 years old. The problem is that in the heating process the leaf gold tends to be absorbed by the glass unless you have a fast-melting glass such as was used in medieval times. But this glass cannot be used on outside surfaces as it doesn't withstand water. So our challenge was to find a way of encasing gold-leaf in ordinary float glass. It took us 3-4 years, but finally we developed a completely new vacuum process which has proved successful."

Another saga involved the material to form the inner skin. There were various criteria, including non-flammability and the ability to transmit the exact shade of orange which Mother specified. Various materials were tried out, including polyester and glass. "We finally achieved what we wanted with glass, but then a company came out with a fibre-glass and silicon fabric which not only matched our requirements, but which was much cheaper and lighter than glass. However, we are using the original frames so that if, in a few years, the fabric becomes shabby or we find we have problems cleaning it, then we can always replace it with glass."

Michael wonders if there will ever be a time when we can say that the Matrimandir is finished. "There will always be things to improve upon, to upgrade. It's more like a permanent process." But wouldn't he like to spend more time here, to enjoy what has been achieved so far? "Of course, that would be nice. But for the time being there's too much to be done to allow me to think of relaxing. There are still some important issues to resolve."

These include the question of building maintenance. "While the new crane and a gondola will be used for cleaning the disks, we haven't yet conceived of a maintenance system for the inner skin. The fabric will have to be vacuumed regularly as dust will accumulate and change the colour, but we don't yet have equipment which will reach every section of the skin."

"I'm also very much involved in the Matrimandir lake project. At present a pre-feasibility study is being finalised which focuses not only on technical, ecological and social aspects of the lake but also on the water system of the whole area. Soon we want to make three test basins to try out three different sealants and shore designs."

Then there is the knotty question of where the water for the lake will come from. "We've designed, in collaboration with some German engineers, a new type of water-storage system. This would catch all the rain that falls over the lake area annually. We've ascertained that 1.80 metres of water will evaporate each year from the surface of the lake, so if we can store and pump back the 1.20 metres which falls annually over the lake, we only have to find another 60 cm, to make up the level (Roger does not want the level of the lake to fluctuate very much over the year). Another possible way of storing the rainwater is in the ground. It seems there is a geological formation behind Aurodam where we may be able to store it and pump it up when needed. This is also being studied."

Michael is getting restless – he has another meeting to get to. What, I wonder, motivates him to work so hard in raising funds and solving the technical problems of the Matrimandir? "That," he concludes emphatically, "is not a subject for publication." And he's off.

Alan

Extracts from *A House for the Third Millennium: Essays on Matrimandir*

When I studied theology, they kept harping on 'symbol' and 'reality'.

Matrimandir falls right between both: it's too symbolic to be real and too real to be symbolic. It often happens that I'll be walking home after five or six hours work at Matrimandir, and I'll turn round to see if it's really there. It's visible from my room in the Matrimandir Workers' Camp, and when I wake up in the morning I often take a look just to make sure it really exists. And yes, it's really there! But somewhere not really real – or rather, too real for our ordinary earth eyes: it's a sort of reality we're not used to. After I have looked at Matrimandir, all other things about me are for a moment not real, not really there. But then, the Matrimandir is not only symbolic, either – it's too real for that. A symbol doesn't give you callouses. And here we get to the heart of the thing. More than being merely a symbol of, in an important sense it is the *Mater Mundi*, the Mother of the World. This time, in this great incarnation, the *Mater* really did dive down fully into it and didn't keep sitting on the edge of the cosmos smiling down at us. This time the circle closed. *Hoc est enim corpus meum*, this is my body, the *Mater* traversed all the layers of consciousness and reality and went to the source, the arch-reality, the beginning of pure matter, for there She is in her element.

Last night I dreamed that I was in the Mother's room – the *Mater Humana* who lived in an Ashram in Pondicherry and who, when



Ruud Lohman (circa 1970)

she was about ninety years of age, came forward with the idea of Auroville and founded an international community to hasten the evolution, to build a runway for the superjets of the Supermind. She is One with whom you want to be one: that's the deepest aspiration of your being. Well, in the dream, when I went toward her to merge into her, she pointed to a door in her room which stood open, and through it I looked straight into the upper Chamber of the Matrimandir. "Enter there," she said. "This is my body..."

There are always two trends at Matrimandir. One is the ongoing process of the construction, professional – though done mostly by amateurs – a bit boring, with much perspiration, but also much joy; and there is the other trend about which one feels like keeping silent, whispering it, or expressing it in poems, love-songs or a free-flow of feelings; it is that level of reality where Matrimandir seems to open up

hidden springs in the being. It is this trend that expresses indications and intimations of a growing 'Presence', of crises in one's own being, of all those countless 'coincidences', of all those beautiful harmonies and divine teasing jokes (like the day when we finally reached the very top with the pipe-structure and fixed a final structural iron scaffolding cross on its summit, we discovered it was a Good Friday, precisely three o'clock). Some people here at Matrimandir are wary of this plane of reality; they distrust 'visions' and 'numbers' and 'coincidence' and prefer to stick to the precision of the measurements and the hardness of steel and concrete. Others just love this kind of play – and I am surely one of them. Matrimandir for me is full of humour, laughter, playfulness, fun. It is a laborious work, too; fabricating and installing twelve hundred almost identical beams becomes a boring task after you've done the first couple of hundred; that space frame, the outer sheath, of Matrimandir, has kept us busy now for almost five years and we are looking forward to its completion. But through the seemingly endless labour, there always shimmers that unexpressed 'Something' that is so special to Matrimandir, that playfulness in the air, a dance of Laughter and Light. It isn't really serious, it's a big Game, it is not what it is, it is nothing of what we think or feel it is, it is totally, frighteningly different. There is a fear of 'defining' it. Well, one never could, it's too slippery, too alien, too far advanced; and I feel that the most outrageous word-plays are still insufficient, the most daring comparisons fall short of the mark.

Ruud Lohman came to Auroville in 1971 and immediately became involved with the excavation for the Matrimandir. He continued to work on the Matrimandir until he passed away in July, 1986. These extracts are from his book, *A House for the Third Millennium: Essays on Matrimandir*, published by Alain Grandcolas in 1986.

"We are in a race to save humanity"

Extracts from a talk by Ervin Laszlo, former member of the Auroville International Advisory Council

The problem humanity is facing today stems from fact that the West has forgotten that it is part of the larger ecological system which sustains all life on Earth. Humanity has come to believe that the environment is separate, less important than the economy, and that it can do what it likes with it. This is an evolutionary mistake.

This tendency began 10,000 years ago when *Homo sapiens* began manipulating the environment and domesticating animals, but it has only become critical in the last 200 years with the advent of mass-production and high-energy technology.

The consequence is that today we are out of synch with the natural world, and this has many adverse impacts. For example, there is no longer any doubt that global warming is due to human impact. If the rise in temperatures continues, it is predicted that the 21st century will be the warmest century for the past one million years. The monsoon may not come to India or other countries that depend on it, Europe may become either very dry or very cold, and there is real doubt if the planet will be able to feed 6.5 billion or more people living on it. In fact, James Lovelock, [the proponent of the Gaia theory] estimates that the world will only be able to support about 200 million people if the present trends of consumption continue.

Do we have enough time to avert such a catastrophe? Some scientists, like Lovelock, believe it is already too late – that we have already reached a 'tipping-point' beyond which everything will go quickly downhill. Others, like myself, are more optimistic. But there is very little time.

Positive feedback systems and cross-impacts mean that everything is happening more rapidly than predicted a few years ago: temperatures are rising, the ice is melting, and the greenhouse gases like CO₂ and methane are being released into the atmosphere faster than ever before. We are now in a race to save humanity. The planet will survive, but humanity, like 99% of all complex species which have ever existed, may not. And this would be a loss, for in us nature and the cosmos have started to become self-aware.

To understand where we stand today it is necessary to understand how complex systems evolve. Complex systems do not evolve bit by bit. They evolve until they reach a 'chaos point'. At that moment, there is a collapse of the old system and a new dynamic comes into play. Then anything can happen, except it's impossible to maintain the status quo, and it's impossible to revert to a former state of being.

Today, we are facing two crises, one in the biosphere and the other in human consciousness. If we are going to cope with the challenges facing the biosphere, there must be a new human consciousness. It must recognize we are as much part of this planet as the birds and trees, and evolve in response to that. Once we feel this, we will automatically try to preserve our planet.

Another way to reach this is that we must sense our unity, we must feel connected, both to each other and to the biosphere. But we are already connected. This is something spiritual leaders have said for millennia, and it's something that the human race has lived and experienced for millennia – otherwise it would never have survived for so long. But now it helps to know

that we have scientific evidence for this.

For example, it is known that at the quantum level of reality there is no such thing as separation. If a particle is broken apart and the two parts sent in opposite directions, if the spin of one part is changed, the spin of the other changes instantaneously – at several magnitudes of speed of light – even though the parts may be separated by thousands of miles. It is a phenomenon known as 'non-locality'.

There is also the phenomenon of 'teleportation', where two atoms are allowed to interact with each other, and the resulting change in state is immediately picked up and mirrored by a third atom which has no obvious contact with the original two. This is akin to energy transmission by a guru or healer which may be picked up thousands of miles away by somebody in a receptive state.

Brain research reinforces this phenomenon. Normally, the two hemispheres of the brain operate almost independently – and their respective brain waves are quite different. However, in deep sleep or meditation they become harmonized. More interestingly, when several people who already know each other meditate at the same time, and one of them receives some kind of stimulation, it brings waves of the others pick it up immediately and show the change. What happens in the brain of one is immediately reflected in the brain of the others.

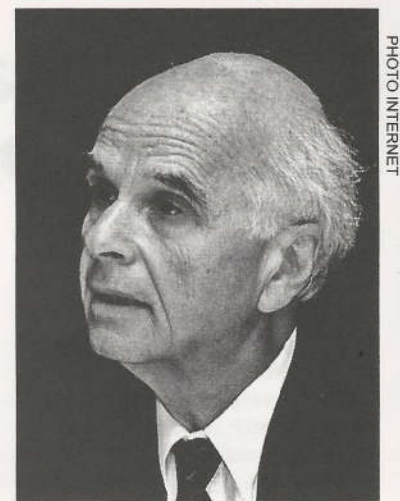
How to explain all this? If connections exist between objects which are separated in space and time, one either has to accept they are mysteriously connected – which puts one outside the

realm of science – or accept that they are connected by something which is not visible or perceivable but which is real. What could this be?

In science, this is called the 'field'. Science knows about four universal fields – the electromagnetic, gravitational and the two nuclear fields (strong and weak) – and some strange quantum fields. However, few scientists have dared to suggest there is yet another kind of field, a field that carries information without conventional means of energy, which can penetrate any barrier, and which transcends space and time. Quantum physicist David Bohm performed experiments and showed that there is an effect like this which he terms 'in-formation'.

How does it work? Everything in the world emits energy. If one's energy field radiates outwards and encounters another object or person, it gets reflected back from that object or person's field. The two wave-fields, the source and the reflection, interact. If they are on the same frequency there is a field conjugation (resonance) or what is called an 'adaptive resonance consonance'. At that point, an exchange happens and information gets transferred from one to the other. So if you enter into communication with another person who has assumed a similar mind-set and consciousness to you, you can exchange information instantly.

We all have this capability, but now we need to develop it very fast so that there can be a new union between cultures and between humans and nature. And it is happening. To my mind, there is an almost miraculous acceleration of this new consciousness, which I sometimes



Ervin Laszlo

refer to as planetary consciousness. Even in biological terms, I'm sure that the genetic code of the children born today is different from ours. As living systems are open, as there is always an energy interchange between them and their environment, the new generation's DNA must have been modified by the crisis we are living through, perhaps making them more able to adapt and survive.

But still we need to buy time; to delay the coming of the 'chaos point' regarding the biosphere until this new consciousness has fully established itself. If the crisis happened today, we would be as unprepared for it as we were for the tsunami.

This is where places like Auroville can play a vital role. For as this new consciousness spreads by what the scientists term 'adaptive resonance', wherever you have a higher concentration of people who sense and act upon their unity, it can be picked up by receptive people anywhere. This is why those who are engaged in living and developing this planetary consciousness bear a tremendous responsibility for the evolution of all humanity.

Edited by Alan

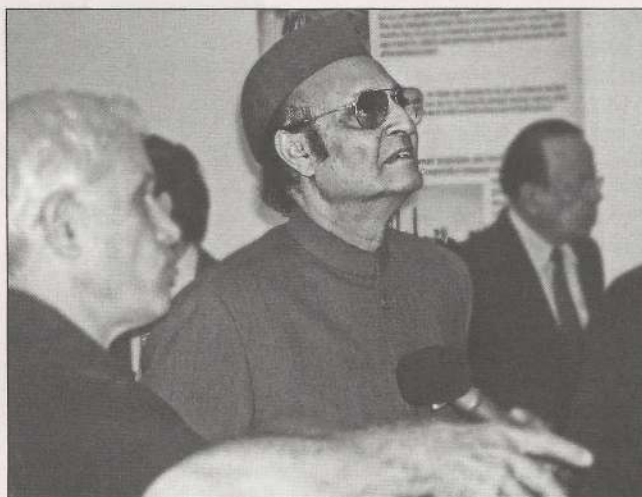
AUROVILLE AND INDIA

UNITING PEOPLE: Jean Monnet

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and to recall the vision and contribution made to European unity by the exceptional personality of Jean Monnet, a number of events were organized from 31st January to 10th February 2007 at the India International Centre in New Delhi. Following an initial proposal from Auroville, the programme was co-organized by seven organizations: the Delegation of the European Commission, the Embassy of France in India, the Centre de Sciences Humaines (New Delhi), the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe (Lausanne), the Pavillon de France (Auroville), the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and the India International Centre (IIC).

The three-fold programme under the theme 'Uniting People' featured a 10-day exhibition, a day-long seminar, and a final round table discussion with experts, former ambassadors, and ambassadors from the European Union, Germany, and France. The seminar was inaugurated by Dr L.M. Singhvi, with Dr. Karan Singh giving the keynote address on the Ideal of Human Unity.

The exhibition, prepared by the French Pavillon in Auroville, provided a glimpse into the extraordinary life and achievements of Jean Monnet, a Frenchman little known in India, whose life is in itself an inspiring story. Monnet was a man who was never elected to public office, never part of any government, never 'in the seat of power'; a man who never held any diploma, or commanded armies, or aroused the enthusiasm of crowds or oratory; yet this "Statesman of the world" as John F. Kennedy called him, exerted a huge and last-



Left to right: Alain Bernard, Dr. Karan Singh and Ajoy Bagchi at the Jean Monnet exhibition

ing influence on the most influential minds of his time. A philosopher in action, Monnet embodied great values which can be described as universal but which happen to be at the core of Indian philosophy, expressed by the ancient Sanskrit saying, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* or 'the world is one family'.

Using Monnet's own words as well as rare archival photos, the exhibition recounted this story. The exhibition also evoked the essence of the European Union, the construction of which Monnet was largely responsible for, and one which is probably an adventure without precedent.

The exhibition was prepared in Auroville as a project of the Pavillon de France by Christine Devin, Claude Arpi, and Alain Bernard. Aron Nicolet was the artist who, inspired by the words of Monnet and Sri Aurobindo, created paintings for the thirty-two panels.

This exhibition will be shown in Auroville this August.

Alain Bernard

PHOTO COURTESY AUROVILLE RADIO

AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

Award for peace

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". This sentence taken from the UNESCO Constitution is also the leitmotiv for Anne Schmeckies' PAX project. This project which is international in scope, uses the universal languages of music and dance for spreading a message of peace, particularly amongst the youth.

In February 2006 Anne travelled to Auroville with her 'Each One Teach One Crew', a group of young musicians, rappers and dancers. They initiated an ad-hoc gospel choir and a fruitful collaboration with young Tamil musicians from the Mohanam Cultural Centre, culminated in a much appreciated concert in Kalabhum. A CD was produced from this Auroville experience (see their website: www.workonpeace.de – also in English) and is being distributed for free, including at various UNESCO 'project' schools. This CD found its way into the hands of a German member of parliament who learnt more about the project and was so inspired that she proposed Anne and her work for the Bundesverdienstkreuz award. This is Germany's highest civilian honour bestowed by the German President. The presentation took place on February 6th, 2007 in Anne's home town, Bremerhaven in Northern Germany. Anne in her acceptance speech included in this recognition all those who have participated in the project, and quoted a Turkish proverb: "Nobody can clap with one hand."

Friederike Werner, AVI Germany

The music CD is available at the Auroville Music Library.



Anne Schmeckies

PHOTO INTERNET

Our Apologies:

In the January issue of *Auroville Today*, a mistake occurred in the obituary of Suresh Joshi. The line 'During the conflict between the Ashram and Auroville...' should read 'During the conflict between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville...'.

In the February issue, the photo accompanying the article on the Auroville's Nature Camp at Kavunji should show only the forest, rocks and stream. The buildings are not yet there. The editors have learnt that an enthusiastic team member of the Nature Camp had digitally manipulated the photo, and the wrong photo had been sent to *Auroville Today*.

Awakening creative entrepreneurship

The Entrepreneurship Laboratory organised a workshop on Creative Entrepreneurship in January.

The E-lab is the one of latest additions to Auroville's research scene. An outcome of the seminar in February 2006 on 'Knowledge, Business and Consciousness' (see *Auroville Today* April 2006 Issue 207), its aim is to promote 'Integral Entrepreneurship.' Its work is funded by the German Breuninger Foundation, which considers entrepreneurship as a way to make many more people participate in the economy.

Günter's Tips

for successful entrepreneurship

- * With a good idea, you have all the potential to become a successful company and create wealth.
- * Let your business idea be 'well thought through'.
- * Create something new; never replicate.
- * Think about how to stay ahead, and not be overrun by imitators.
- * Entrepreneurship is about being different; be ready to go against convention.
- * Stay simple; market one product only.
- * Examine your selling proposition: what else do you offer compared to your competitors?
- * Your marketing mantra should be an extraordinary story.
- * Use the internet; it makes one independent of geographical location.
- * Entrepreneurship is about having fun; you have to like and enjoy what you're doing.

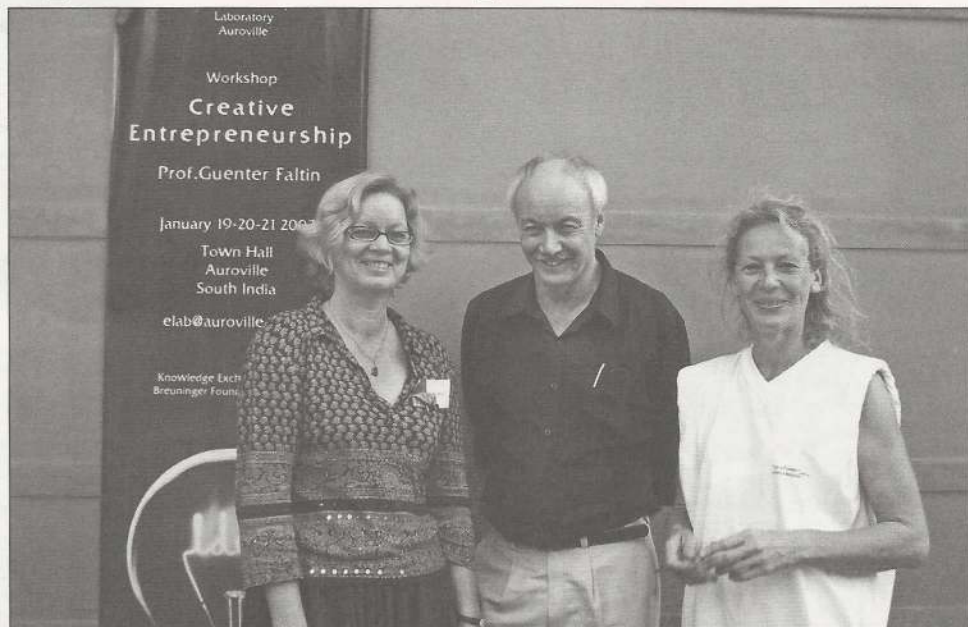
Currently managed by Aurovilians Jana and Petra, the E-lab made its community debut in mid-January through a workshop on 'Creative Entrepreneurship'. The workshop was given by Professor Günter Faltin, an economist from the Free University of Berlin and an entrepreneur himself. There was an overwhelming response with over eighty participants attending the 3-day workshop.

The focus was on understanding entrepreneurship from a different perspective. "Rather than looking at accountancy, marketing, financing, managing people and managing production processes, my emphasis is to show that successful entrepreneurs are those who follow an idea, a mission or a passion," says Günter. "Entrepreneurship is about ideas that empower people, are fun, create opportunities, and finally a surplus."

Günter views entrepreneurship as being at the core of human development. "It's only through right entrepreneurship that we can think about a proper redistribution of wealth," he adds.

The workshop was divided into three parts. On the first day participants were introduced to what entrepreneurship means. The mainstream perceptions are the need for capital, management, and marketing. But there are other valid approaches as well. Günter gave the example of Nobel Peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh who emphasizes micro-financing as the key to success. "He showed that entrepreneurship is something even the poor can do – as demonstrated by those village women in Bangladesh. And he showed something else as well," says Günter, "that economics is not about profits and the marketplace, but about peace."

"Another concept is provided by Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto who stresses the need to legalize existing business enterprises, so that the poor, who often can't read or write, can deal with



Günter Faltin with Petra (left) and Jana, the project holders of the E-lab Initiative.

bureaucrats." Günter has yet another view of entrepreneurship. "My emphasis is on the business idea which I believe is the most essential ingredient – a business can be started without any capital, but not without an idea."

The second day saw participants evolving their own business models. Guidelines were provided by Günter. On the third day, they shared their work with the others.

Günter was positive about his Auroville experience. "It was a wonderful group of aspiring entrepreneurs – artists and socially-minded individuals inspired by an idea," he says. "For me, as an economist, it was interesting to see that the proposed business models all included caring, sharing, using the expertise of others, and thinking of others in the community. Usually economists talk about division of labor. In this workshop it was about sharing and

letting others participate, making use of their being here."

He also observes that Auroville has a valuable store of knowledge and a rich experience of community. "Auroville is an alternative to mainstream thinking and having people from over 30 different nations residing in Auroville is a major strength. This community should create an economic base which is in tune with its values," he says, and adds "If you have lived in Auroville for a long time, you may be disappointed that it doesn't go as fast as you might have expected. I am here now for the second time and am impressed by what you have created and the spirit of loving relationship that exists."

Priya Sundaravalli

The workshop has been recorded by Auroville Radio and is available for purchase. For details contact info@aurovillerradio.org

COMMUNITY

Israeli sabras in Auroville

There are about two dozen Israelis in Auroville; they call themselves the *sabras* after a desert plant that is prickly on the outside.

The latest addition to our little corner of New Creation is an Israeli family which in the last few months has had not one, but two *bat mitzvah* celebrations for their teenage daughters. With multicultural guests and limitless supplies of food the party was festive. I value their warm family life and hospitality and they are perfect neighbours, inviting you in, feeding you as if it just happens to be meal time, and always glad to help.

My Israeli friends tell me that they have known three wars and their children, both girls and boys, have to do two and three years of military service. I spoke to Ilona who has been in Auroville for two years. "The constant aggression we live under burns many of us out and a surprising number of young people head for North India when their army service is completed. There are some restaurants in Delhi that even have their menus printed in Hebrew as there are so many Israelis there."

"Auroville is a bit like a last frontier, and in an Auroville community like Sadhana Forest you feel you are battling with the wilderness like we did fifty years ago. Back in Israel, the spirit of the kibbutz is now finished as the second and third generation have taken them over. The challenge is gone, and the spiritual ideal has been

replaced with constant vigilance and violence. We have lost our aims and ideals; they have been swamped by the Palestinian struggle. My brother was killed a few years ago and it was awful to see the waste of a young life. Now I want my two teenage daughters to be able to live without the constant shadow of violence looming over us."

I like the challenge that still exists here; it makes me feel alive, though of course it can be wearing when you don't have a settled house to live in and your stay here is not even secure and is dependant on the Entry Group. But I love the international feel of this place, the melting pot, and the vitality it brings. The Israelis have a very strong sense of identity. We always speak of Israel as "home" and speak Hebrew in our house. Like Israel, Auroville is very small, but a large family, and I like that."

Sadhana Forest is a sixty acre community started by a young Israeli couple Yorit and Aviram, who live there with

their daughter. It seems worlds away from the neatly forested Auroville with its pucca houses.

At this time of the year, Sadhana Forest is hosting many volunteers, all of whom live and work there. With only five keet houses to host five families, the majority are lodged in mosquito-netted bunks in every livable corner. A gift economy thrives there. They have no paid workers and have very good relationships with the nearby villages, attending weddings and ear piercing ceremonies. Tamil children are made very welcome at Sadhana forest, and come to play there.

Our neighbours in New Creation, Danny and Orly, told me of their love of Auroville and the freedom and beauty of nature they find here. "Being Israelis, we prefer to do our own thing and have a good argument about it and don't like being pushed or organized. Although I am always very aware of the spirit and Mother's force in this beautiful place and the calming effect it has on me."

But life in Auroville has not been easy for the family. "We had a difficult time at first as we had to leave Auroville thrice for visa extensions. The money we had to spend on taking five people abroad those three times is the same as we would have spent building a house. Madness! Also, as Newcomers, we have had to move three times and the children found this very unsettling. They had a few bad illnesses and I am sure this was caused by the stress and uncertainty of our situation."

Danny and Orly have established a recycling project with waste paper and train village ladies. "But just last week," said Orly, "the Secretary from the Foundation office informed us this was not work for Auroville; we don't understand it. We have had plenty of difficulties here but we love it and intend to stay – if we are allowed."

"What I miss is the strong friendships I made in the army and it is difficult to make new friends in Auroville. People here are busy, involved with their own work and problems and often forget friendship, which initially, can take an effort to develop. We always try to invite people around for dinner, maintain a social life and try not get swamped by the daily problems of life."

Dianna

CELEBRATION

Korean cultural fête



On January 24th, a merry atmosphere at the Auroville Town Hall was created by the Korean community, by what seemed like every single Korean Aurovillian and guest in town. The gathering space beneath Café Morgan was adorned with blue and red lanterns and brought to life by solemn tea ceremonies, calligraphy demonstrations, traditional Korean games and plenty of percussion music.

It was obvious that a great amount of work had preceded this event, particularly in creating the gargantuan buffet that offered piles of delicious Korean dishes to the hungry queue of over a hundred visitors. There were varieties of *kim chi*, a side dish of spicy, fermented vegetables, predominantly Chinese cabbage, which is very popular in Korea and probably would be popular anywhere, if only more people knew about it for, once tasted, it's highly addictive.

While people were sipping their miso soup or popping in slices of *gim bap*, the Korean *futomaki*-like sushi, or trying to decide if the radish *kim chi* should be more or less spicy, classical Korean music video projected on screen created an almost meditative atmosphere.

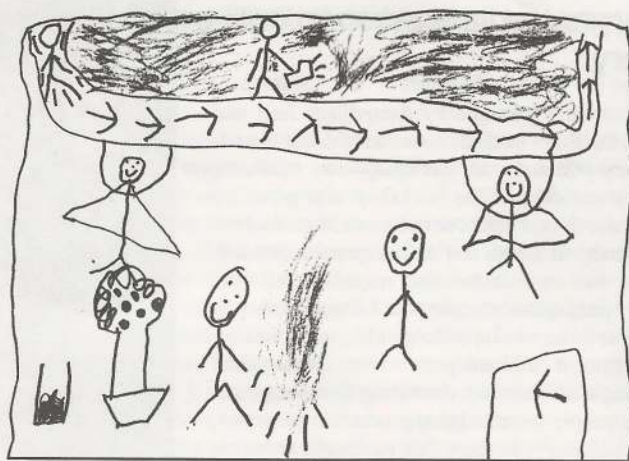
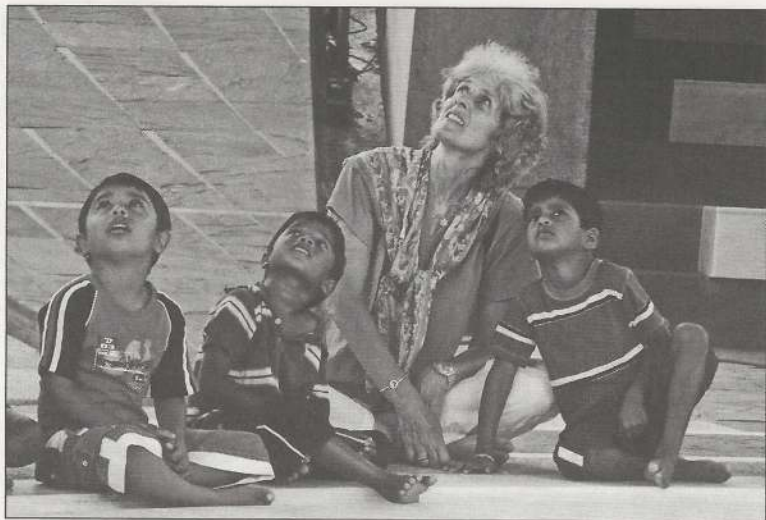
This was in contrast to the excitement of the dance by Jeong Sop, a young guest, who wore a *Sang Mo* hat with its spinning rod and swirling white band on top. The dance, with rhythms provided by drums borrowed from the Korean cultural centre in Chennai, spurred many spectators to join in.

The evening ended with a movie based on the Mahayana Buddhist *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Flower Adornment discourse, whose powerful aphorism "Follow what flows; and don't follow what doesn't," touched the hearts of the audience. It was the story of a young orphan whose life is bound up with the *sutra*.

Eun Kyong and Gum Soon, the two Korean Aurovilians who coordinated the event, summed up the experience. "The right people were here at the right time to make this happen. And we also got all the help from the Divine!"

Chris W.

Kids' city Auroville: Nandanam kindergarteners' view



PHOTOS: PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

The above drawing is by Ilengo (right) who says, "The path to follow in Auroville is very clear. Sometimes you get confused because there is an arrow that points in the wrong direction. But that shouldn't confuse you. The real path is different. It is obvious; and arrows show the way. The path is heavy but the angels hold it up. Sometimes because it is dark, you may get lost in the path, but with the help of the bonfire or the light from a torch, you will find it again. It is actually very simple."



Nandanam, which means 'garden' in Sanskrit, is Auroville's second kindergarten. Nandanam came about because Auroville's first kindergarten could not grow any bigger and take in the new children arriving in Auroville. A group of women, with and without children, decided to put their hearts and hands together to build a kindergarten from scratch. They took up different activities – one became the school's architect and designed the buildings; another got creative with generating money to help the school become bigger; a few became teachers; and all the mums and some dads cooked tasty food that was served at Nandanam's regular fund-raising dinners.

Nandanam has space for sixty of Auroville's 3 to 6 years olds. It has a crèche and three kindergarten classes. They are all named after one of the four elements: *Jalam* (water), *Prithvi* (earth), *Agni* (fire), and *Vayu* (air).

This April, Nandanam will turn four and the oldest class will be ready to 'graduate' and move on to the next school. Everyone is excited, especially *Agni*, which will get to be the oldest class.

As part of their yearly explorations of themes, the nine children of *Agni* have been exploring the topics of *My Self*, *My Family*, and *My Community*. In the process, they thought about what they liked best in Auroville. Then they wondered how they would really like Auroville to look and be.

So the kids wrote; they expressed; they drew; they built models. And finally, they came up with one big idea! Why not build a kid's town in Auroville... and ideas tumbled out.

What shape should Auroville be? Almost everyone wanted it to be a circle; two thought a star-shape would be nice; and one was certain that a triangle would be the best.

And then there had to be water... Many more swimming pools; surely a lake; just plenty of water please.

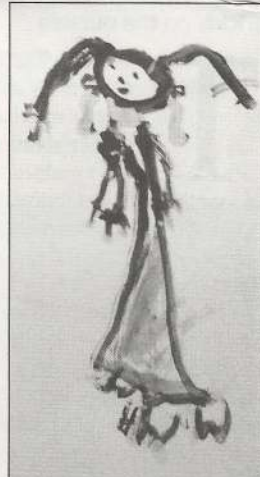
But it is not easy to have so much water... so what to do next? Maybe dig for it? No, not such a good idea... Plant even more trees? Yes of course! Because more trees means more rain. So they decided to surround the city with trees.

Then they remembered that they also liked Matrimandir, and they liked to walk to it. So if they were in a forest full of trees, how could they get to Matrimandir quickly? There had to be many paths; perhaps a railway line with a little train. Trains are fun, and a train can connect all people in Auroville, and everyone can travel together by train. Of course, the Auroville train will stop for every person in town...

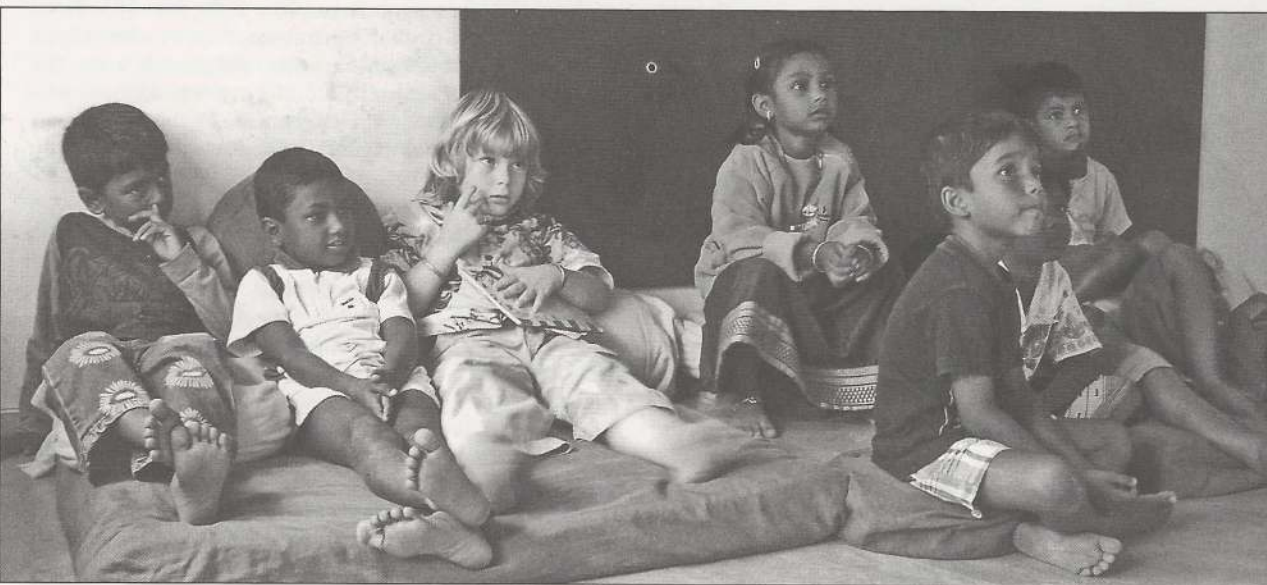
And then they remembered the Town Hall. On one Monday, the day when the entire school takes time to visit different parts of the community, they had walked to the Town Hall. And the Town Hall was like a huge playground; ramps to run up and down, lots of space, and oh so close to the Matrimandir. So what about a few slides from the top floor to the ground; some see-saws and swings, and maybe one jungle-gym?

And so the children sketched, painted and modelled their ideas for 'Kid's town Auroville'.

Priya Sundaravalli



SELF-PORTRAIT BYANUSHA



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