

# Auroville Today

SINCE 1988

DISCOVERING THE DREAM

OCTOBER 2000, No.141

**COVER STORY:**  
Through  
photographers'  
eyes

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Catching the  
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**A** view of Matrimandir at sunset; the smiling faces of happy children; green, leafy trees: these are all images which people throughout the world have come to associate with Auroville.

Such images may seem very natural in some respects. So natural, in fact, that one rarely stops and asks how it is that these particular pictures have come to represent Auroville.

In this issue of *Auroville Today* we take a closer look at some of the processes behind the production and circulation of these images, and show how three photographers chose to represent Auroville.



**THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHERS' EYES:** Olivier considers this picture of the bonfire at the amphitheatre as one of the best for representing Auroville. Says he: "The people gathering together, the Urn symbolizing the aspiration for human unity, the bonfire symbolizing the spiritual aspiration...there is no better way to portray the essential Auroville."

## Looking at Auroville through photographers' eyes

Many Aurovilians and visitors see the large, color photographs hanging in the new exhibition on Auroville in the Visitors' Center. Still greater numbers of people see photographs of Auroville in *Auroville Today* or on the Auroville website. These images are meant to give people a sense of Auroville in a way that simply reading or hearing about the community does not. After all, everyone knows the old cliché, "A picture is worth a thousand words." What we don't always realize, however, is that pictures conceal as much as they reveal. Hidden from view are the processes of selection and edition made by the photographer and later by exhibitors or publishers.

**T**he issue is an important one as Auroville relies increasingly upon visual representations and their accompanying texts. Auroville is presented to the outside world through brochures, postcards, books, T-shirts, videos and CD-ROMs. The motivations behind such representations vary, ranging from the pursuit of education to fundraising or personal profit.

Of course not everyone working with images in Auroville is attempting to "represent" the community. Nevertheless, these images may also come to be associated with Auroville in the minds of viewers. The Joy Postcards sold throughout India and the travelling slide-show, "The Genius of India", are not meant to portray Auroville. In the case of the postcards, however, the address on the back is enough for customers to make the connection. As for the slide-show, the presenters' acknowledgement of coming from Auroville, in addition to the philosophical nature of the show, can forge an association for the audience. As a result, such materials come to form part of the constellation of visual perspectives that outsiders identify with Auroville.

### Challenges in selecting Auroville images

In investigating the processes behind the production of images on Auroville, the first

thing one encounters is a relatively anarchic approach to the various forms of communication. Since there is no one body vested with the authority to generate official representations of the community, the visual materials that exist circulate largely through the efforts of specific groups of interested individuals.

These groups are frequently trying to do their best under considerable constraints. The team behind the Visitors' Center exhibition is no exception. Franz, who was closely involved in this project, explains that the problem was not only insufficient funds. When it was time to select images, the team had to deal with the scarcity of photographs. It is only in recent years that there has been an interest in maintaining an archive of photographs of Auroville. Much visual documentation, particularly of the early years, has been lost.

Whatever the aims of the presenters may be, many of them face the common challenge of attempting to capture some aspect of spirituality. This is no easy task. Spirituality, an abstract concept, is not easy to convey in a single image. As the photographer Sven notes, "People, both visitors and residents, come to Auroville for the inner experience. But how can you possibly rep-

resent the inner to the rest of the world?"

This is true even when presenters are working closely with a spiritual text, as in the case of "The Genius of India" slide-show and exhibit. As team member Christine describes it, the impetus behind the presentation was to "put Sri Aurobindo at the forefront" in celebrating India. Seeking to illustrate the tendencies that Sri Aurobindo attributes to the ancient Indian mind, the team was able to choose from a wealth of photographs in the collection of Olivier, who has been capturing the beauty and timelessness of ancient Indian art for years. Even so, when it came to a particularly complex concept, such as the tendency towards synthesis, the group faced great difficulty in deciding which images would work.

### How are images chosen?

In spite of the many limitations and challenges, however, those who create and present images are making choices, although to some of them their choices may seem somehow "obvious." The decisions they make depend upon their intentions, in addition to the relationship that they want the images to have with a written text.

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An aspect of the exhibition  
"The Genius of India" in New Delhi.

PHOTO: OLIVIER

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# The European Commission recognizes the Auroville township

In May 2000, the European Commission approved the Auroville Innovative Urban Management proposal, a project of Auroville in partnership with the municipalities of Cologne and Venice. This project has major ramifications for the planning and development of Auroville.

In 1998, the European Commission launched the Asia-Urbs program aimed at promoting co-operation between cities in Europe and Asia. Under the program, European cities share their urban expertise with cities in Asia, supported by their own and European Commission funding. "I heard about it in 1998 by pure accident," says Luigi, who for years has been trying, unsuccessfully, to obtain funding for Auroville's town planning department. "When I pursued the matter, it became obvious that I had to go to Brussels to meet the director of the Asia-Urbs program. That meeting was one of the toughest I ever had. The director screened everything I had presented and asked sharp questions such as was Auroville a sect or a bunch of hippies on the coast of Coromandel? But at the end of our meeting something changed. He told me that this was a dream city, that it incorporated the kind of dreams he had had in May 1968 when he was on the barricades in Paris."

## Where is the Township?

"The first barrier we encountered was whether Auroville was eligible, as its legal structure is that of a foundation

and not a municipality" continues Luigi. "But when this director came to Auroville in September 1998 he dropped this objection as the Auroville Foundation Act clearly states that our aim is to build a city. Then, when we showed him around, he observed that Auroville is not a town, nor even a village, as there is no urban tissue, but is a dispersed community of 1500 people. Their project aims at big cities! But he finally accepted that Auroville is an emerging city that plans for an integrated urban and regional rural development, and he recommended to the European Commission to include Auroville in the list of cities eligible for the programme. Parallel to this we approached different European municipalities requesting them to be Auroville's partners. Venice in Italy and Lyon in France were the cities most open to a co-operation. In Auroville an enlarged team was formed to elaborate the proposal. At the last minute Lyon withdrew from the project, as they preferred to co-operate with Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Fortunately the municipality of Cologne in Germany was willing to take their place and in February 1999 the project was submitted. Then there was a major reshuffle in Brussels, and

the project was buried for some time. In May this year we learned that our proposal had been accepted and that Auroville, along with three other Indian cities (Chennai, Baroda, and Raichur) had been chosen for the Asia-Urbs program." Adds Luigi, "This is a little miracle."

## Centre for Urban Development Studies

"The most concrete aspect of the project is the building of a Centre for Urban Development Studies. The rules of the Asia-Urbs program were bent for Auroville as buildings were not part of the program. We were asked if we couldn't rent space in the neighbourhood. When we explained that this was virtually impossible, they accepted that Rs. 50 lakhs (US \$125,000) could be allocated for a 600 m2 building. This building can be seen as a kind of public works department. It will house the departments of planning, urban design, urban engineering, topography, Land Use Coordination, the Development Council and the part of Auroville municipal services that deals with planning such as solar and conventional energy, water management, wastewater recycling, urban environment

and transport. The building will have offices, meeting rooms, a conference room for 150 people and a multi media urban research library. This building can be the seed for a larger town hall.

"Once this building is operational, the municipalities of Cologne and Venice will send their experts to Auroville for periods of 2-3 months at a time. These experts will work on a detailed Auroville urban and regional master plan on the basis of the objectives and the assessment of the problems as provided by Auroville. In this way we hope that they will help us to complete the puzzle of an overall master plan, something we cannot hope to do alone as we need the advice from experts in many areas. Also a number of experts from India will be invited to participate. Another task of the experts will be to conduct workshops in Auroville which address especially the district and civic officers of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, in order to strengthen the regional and local relationships. By the end of 2002, all their work should be summarized and we hope to have a concluding workshop or seminar in Auroville where the planners from India, Asia and Europe can come and discuss what it means to build an ideal city.

"A third part of the project is a workshop in Cologne, most probably on the topic of the environment, which we plan to attend together with at least ten to twelve experts from all over India. In Venice there will be an exhibition on Auroville. We hope we can fit it into the Biennale in 2002, the world's biggest exhibition on town planning and architecture, which is held every two years. Lastly, the project offers a scholarship to an Indian citizen to do a masters or Ph. D. thesis on Urban Planning, and possibilities for the training of 150 individuals from the nearby region in various municipal services."

Luigi concludes: "I hope the project will trigger an acceleration in the quality and quantity of Auroville's development. The present galaxy model should be taken in a flexible way as a guiding reference. It is open to evolution and improvements. Maybe something will manifest which we cannot foresee today. The key words for effective planning will be 'plasticity', 'adaptability to change' and 'clear targets'. Perhaps Auroville is entering a new phase of organic planning where a progressive harmony will be constantly sought between Vision and Life."

Interview by Carel

## EDUCATION

# Training Auroville teachers

For over five years now, Heidi Watts, a professor from Antioch University in the US, has been training Auroville teachers. Some teachers from Auroville have also attended training courses at Antioch University. This year a colleague of Heidi Watts, Dr. Jane Miller, came to Auroville to offer teacher training.

Abbey's third grade at Transition was a beehive of activity. Some children were engrossed in making models, others were busy with a Lego set; one boy sat quietly reading in a sunlit corner of the room, a couple more were painting, and Abbey was showing a little girl how to knit. "She has got a great class going," smiles Jane, "I am really proud of what Abbey has accomplished in these few weeks. Abbey had some wonderful ideas and creative concepts about teaching but she did not know how to put it all into a system. She, her assistant Murthy and I worked hard together for two weeks before school started to develop a curriculum, teaching strategies and aids.



lating my words and explaining to the teachers how they could adapt what I taught to their specific classroom situations. But most of all, I was moved by the sincerity of these teachers who offer their service at the

night schools voluntarily or for very little pay. Working with Tamil teachers who have a different cultural background was a new experience. Sometimes, acting on instinct, I would ask them to do things that they were not used to doing, such as having men and women hold hands. They were not totally comfortable with it, there would be nervous giggles for instance, but they were courageous and open enough to try it out.

## Positive responses

"I have been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response of the teachers to my training. The teachers would immediately apply some strategy that they learned and come back all excited to tell me that it works successfully. Looking back, I realize that Heidi trusted in the Aurovilians' curiosity and in their ability to tap into whatever resources appear on their doorstep. Heidi knew that teachers here would seek me out for help. It would have been presumptuous of me to offer general workshops in the belief that I understood the teachers' needs. My input was more effective for the teachers gave me specific problems to work with. And of course, as they needed

help they were eager to learn.

"The children here are no different from those in the States. They are all naturally curious. Auroville children have an advantage in that they have more exposure to other cultures than American kids and thus have a broader frame of reference. But then of course, there are big differences within Auroville. I remember once at New Creation I did this exercise where first I told the kids a story in English. Then the kids repeated back the story to me in their English. Then they acted it out, each kid taking a different role. And then as they retold the story I wrote down what they said and gave each of

them a piece of paper to illustrate the story through water colours. What I had not realized was that these second graders had never painted before! Also it was amusing that all these Tamil children painted people who wore Western clothes. Luckily their teacher intervened and told them that though I, a Westerner, had told them the story, they were also allowed to paint the characters as Tamils!

## The Tamil influence

"It has been nice to get to know Auroville through Aurovilian teachers who often invited me to their homes.

I feel Auroville is truly an amazing place to accomplish so much in such a short time. Much of what is tried out here is shared with people outside. The challenges that Auroville faces are the same ones faced by any community, including that of my own family. But what is different here is the richness and depth that the local Tamil culture brings to this experiment. And the Tamil people that I met through my work were unanimous in their opinion that Auroville has helped this whole area and opened them to new ways of doing things."

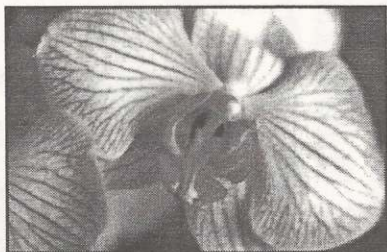
Bindu



Abbey's third grade at Transition making masks



# Attachment to the Divine

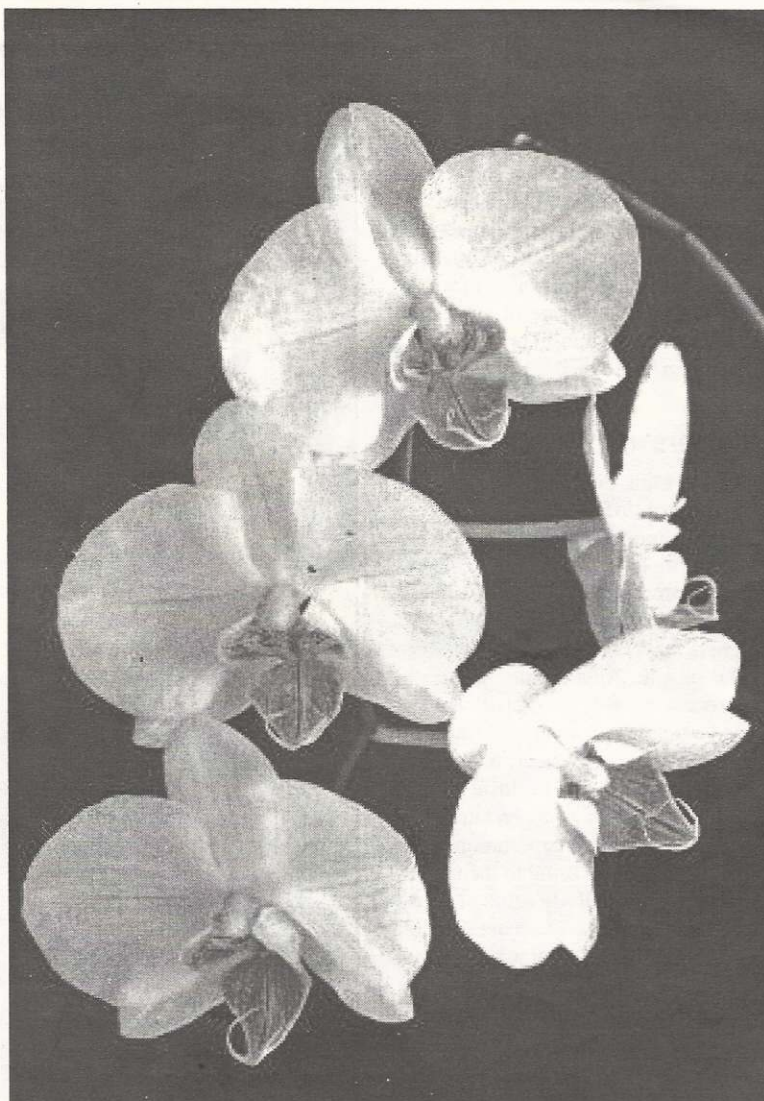


There is a new delight in store for visitors as they walk through the Matrimandir garden on the way to the Inner Chamber. Alongside the path a pergola with different types of beautiful orchids has been erected. Purple, red, white, and lilac flowers with their intricate patterns flutter gently in the afternoon breeze. This display is an experiment to see how the orchids fare in the conditions of the garden, as they are extremely sensitive plants with each species requiring a different microclimate. Mother said that the spiritual significance of orchids, is "Attachment to the Divine". They live purely on atmospheric moisture,

The Matrimandir Nursery has experimented from its earliest days with the cultivation of orchids. Previous gardeners, including Narad,

Alan and Martin, introduced and successfully raised many different varieties of orchids in Auroville. They also experimented with cross-pollination in a small laboratory. However, all three of them subsequently left Auroville taking with them the knowledge of the cultivation of orchids. In later years, when the Matrimandir Nursery was open to public without close supervision, many valuable plants were stolen. Gitendu, who is now in charge of this section, has therefore locked this part of the Nursery and reopened the laboratory. He spends much of his time learning to identify and cultivate the various species and sub-species of orchids with an aim to use them all over the Matrimandir gardens.

Tineke

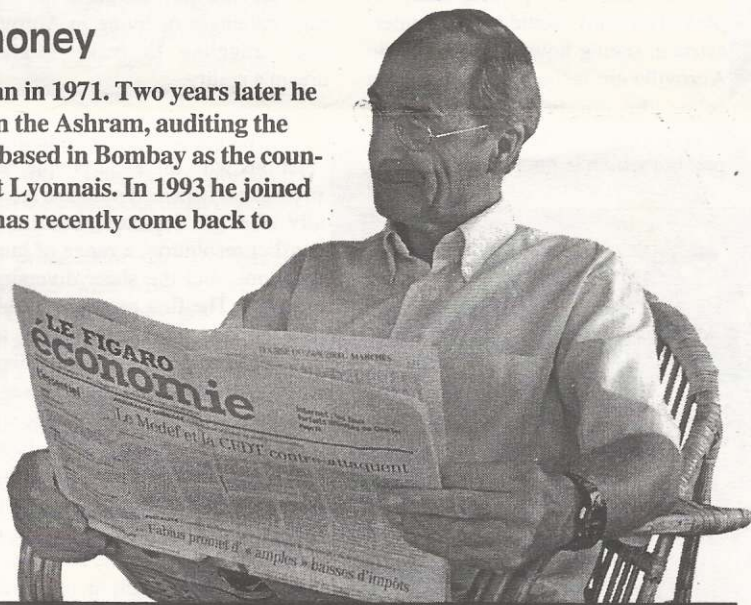


## ECONOMY

# An Auroville prosperity organization

## With no exchange of money

Alain Grandcolas became an Aurovilian in 1971. Two years later he left Auroville and stayed for six years in the Ashram, auditing the Auroville accounts. In the 80's, he was based in Bombay as the country manager of the French bank Credit Lyonnais. In 1993 he joined the "Friends of Auroville" family and has recently come back to Auroville with the intention to stay. Here are his views on how to organize an internal economy with no exchange of money.



The Economy 2000 circle experiment is undoubtedly a step forward in doubting. However, this system does not contribute to an economy that is characterised by "no exchange of money", which the Mother envisaged for Auroville. Could an appropriate organisation be implemented in the present economic infrastructure within the next couple of years? I believe it can. The Prosperity organization that Mother introduced in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram can serve as an inspiration to develop a comparable organization which takes into account the specificity of Auroville.

An Auroville Prosperity organization could be based on a Prosperity list of all Aurovilians who contribute to the collective welfare through work, or through work and money. It would also include those who cannot work due to health problems or old age or who prefer not to work due to an 'inner' reason.

The contribution should be monitored regularly (maybe monthly to start with) through a form showing the person's work (and achievements if relevant), the number of working hours and also the contribution in cash, if any. People who work irregularly, or who do not contribute to the community, would not feature on this list. I think that without this discipline, the monitoring of the contribution cannot be implemented and an internal economy without money exchange cannot take off.

All the Aurovilians on this Prosperity list would receive:

1. free food from an Auroville kitchen. Those who cannot or do not

wish to visit the kitchen would receive their meals at home or at work through a delivery service. Remaining food requirements that are not supplied by an Auroville kitchen such as breakfast and additional food items would be delivered at home.

2. a certain number of free basic items to be provided weekly and monthly as per a list given by each Aurovilian. These lists would show the items available in Pour Tous and indicate how many items the Aurovilian can order each week/month/year. All these items would be delivered at home. Incidentally, the monthly list could include a dozen columns to fill up for monitoring the monthly activity.

3. monthly "coupons", valid for a period of say 3 months, for Auroville restaurants which can cover guests as well, for a (Auroville) petrol bank, for Auroville taxis.

4. a certain cash amount for additional personal expenses outside Auroville.

5. additional luxury items, not included in the weekly or monthly lists of basic needs. There would be a group to assess whether the request is appropriate. If so, the item can be supplied. If it is not sanctioned, the delivery service could obtain it and it could be debited from the individual's account.

6. free health and dental care, free

education for one's children, free maintenance of houses (on sanctioned requests), free maintenance of motorcycles and cycles, free tailoring, free electricity and free telephone rental (which would include free calls but additional calls would be debited).

Any asset which is no longer needed will be returned to Auroville (no sale within Auroville). If an Aurovilian intends to replace one asset by another one (let us say a new motorcycle), the old one is given to Auroville which may help in financing the new asset as an 'additional luxury item.'

### Financing

This system can be financed from three sources. They are:

1) contributions from commercial units. In this system units would no longer pay maintenance to Aurovilians working in the unit. They would also cease to pay the Rs 1,000 contribution to the Central Fund for each Aurovilian working in their unit, and would cease to pay a contribution from their profits. Instead, each unit would make one monthly contribution, not in proportion to its profit but, as the Mother proposed, 'in proportion to the production' i.e. a percentage of the turnover, which would be agreed upon between the unit and an Auroville working group for each coming year.

2) contributions from fully and partly self-supporting Aurovilians. Those Aurovilians who have a combined personal and Auroville income will be on the Prosperity List if they also contribute to the community in work. Among the odd 40% of Aurovilians who do not draw maintenance but fully depend on their personal resources, many of them will equally be on the Prosperity List on account of their work. These Aurovilians will also cease to pay the Rs 1,000 contribution to the Central Fund and instead transfer monthly a certain amount to cover the cost of the basic needs they are receiving.

3) an additional income could come from those Aurovilians who are using their own personal funds to get luxurious items and would agree to share a certain percentage of it to be put at the disposal of less fortunate Aurovilians. For instance, on a yearly basis, an Aurovilian would allocate a percentage of his or her monthly withdrawal to be transferred to Auroville maintenance. The sharing would continue and even would increase.

What about those people who do not feature on the Prosperity list or who are removed from it, that is, those who are staying in Auroville without contributing to the collective welfare? They presently enjoy all Auroville facilities and contribute only the monthly contribution to the Central Fund of Rs 1,000/month. I would propose that they should pay a higher monthly contribution in accordance with the true costs. For example, if they have school-going children, the costs of their education should be reflected in their monthly contribution. These should be exceptional cases since, from what I understand from the Mother, the contribution by money only is reserved for "those who have nothing but money." It is not a question of work or money.

If Aurovilians really want to realize an internal economy without exchange of money, such an Auroville Prosperity organization could truly stand as an original example.

## In brief

● The Government of Navarra, Spain has donated Rs 27 lakhs towards the first phase of the 'Sangamam' project, a prototype of a small-scale model village of 27 houses with a well planned infrastructure. The village will be on 4 acres of Auroville land next to Utility. Auroville workers will have preference in the selection process to join the project. The houses will be rented and the rent paid will be used to maintain the place.

● On September 9th, 2000, the American Consul in Chennai hosted a presentation on Auroville, to which all diplomats and honorary consuls from Chennai were invited, with the aim to make them aware of what is happening in Auroville. Auroville's environmental work was particularly appreciated.

● The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation met in Auroville from September 15 to 18. Main topics discussed were Auroville's land use and master plan, education, CIRHU and internal economy.

● 'Pulse,' Auroville's electronic polling service, announced that out of 124 respondents, 105 people or 87.5%, said 'yes' to the question whether Auroville should open its doors to new people regardless of the housing shortage, 15 people responded in the negative and 4 voted 'don't know'. Respondents' feedback accompanying the vote was forwarded to the relevant working groups.

● The Economy Group reported that 307 Aurovilians and newcomers (227 adults, 26 students and 54 children) participated in the income sharing "Circles Experiment" in the period from February to July 2000. The total deficit for the first six months averaged around Rs 23,000/ per month. The deficit for the next six months is expected to be between Rs 75,000 to 1,00,000 per month. Funds to cover this deficit have been secured.

● Vol.11 of The Mother's Agenda in English has been released, completing the full Agenda in English. Available from Mira Aditi Centre, 62 'Sriranga', 2nd Main 1st Cross, T.K. Layout, Saraswati Puram, Mysore 570 009, or from Institut de Recherches Evolutives, 142 Bd Montparnasse, 75014 Paris, France.

● Two thousand women, including The Mother, were honoured at the Festival of 2000 Women in Frankfurt/Main in Germany on June 1st and 2nd, 2000. The festival had a labyrinth at its centre, made of stones engraved with the names of the women honoured, their year of birth and death, a quality they brought into the world and the name of the presenting woman. Mother's stone tablet carrying the word "Transformation" was presented by Annemarie Rawlinson. The labyrinth could be seen at the Expo 2000 in Hannover afterwards.

● A new service unit called "Connections: Auroville Human Resource Centre" has been started. Its aim is to help Aurovilians to find suitable work and Auroville units find qualified personnel. A large database will be created with the potential to make "Connections" into an immensely useful resource centre for all.



(Continued from page 1)

In the case of the Visitor's Center, the team's primary goal was to educate the increasing numbers of visitors, primarily Indian tourists to Matrimandir who know nothing about Auroville. The exhibit text was guided by suggestions from Kireet Joshi, the current Chairman of the Auroville Foundation. Kireet had observed that the three questions he was most frequently called upon to answer were: "Why Auroville?" "What has been accomplished in 30 years?" and "What is the community's organizational structure?" The Visitor's Center text was an effort to respond to precisely these questions. The accompanying photographs, commissioned from John Mandeem, were to illustrate the text as closely as possible.

Given the educational aim, it is not surprising that the panels of the exhibit remind one of a museum display. The documentary style of the photos, the straightforward tone of the text, and the addition of statistics about the community's size, etc. work together to give the impression of a factual and irrefutable account of the community. What remains hidden to the eye of the observer is the possibility that there may be many other points of view.

A different approach to images was taken by the creators of the new Auroville brochure. According to Alan, a member of the Publications Group, which oversees that all brochures are up to date, the creators of the booklet prioritized the images over the text. Working once again with John Mandeem, the group gave the photographer the written document and not only asked that he come up with apt illustrations, but also encouraged him to create images which could actually replace specific sections of text. "In the past, brochures tended to be very text ori-

that the team felt acknowledged the "down side". "We selected a photo which showed commercial development in one of the villages," says Alan, "as well as one that showed the motorcycle-car aspect of life here." At the same time, the group wanted photos that portrayed a kind of intensity in human interactions. For example, they selected an image of a Western man training a young Tamil man in a workshop based on this criterion.

## Viewers' perspectives

The same photo could, however, be read in a different way. Some people are quick to identify what they believe to be racist or colonial attitudes, especially when looking at images that appear to affirm that foreigners have nothing to learn from local people. Alan admits that it did not occur to the team that viewers might read this photo in this way. This problem reflects the fact that images do not have any intrinsic value, because they always depend upon the myriad possible interpretations that specific audiences bring to them. This problem is particularly acute in representing spirituality. One case in point is the Auroville boutique in Paris. When the shop opened, its window displayed large photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Within days graffiti appeared outside with the label, "sect". The boutique management responded immediately by replacing the photos with a display of products. Whereas in India people expect to see reverential references to the guru, in countries such as France and Germany, where the population is concerned about the dangers of brainwashing and authoritative organizations, the photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo are interpreted differently. The fact that there are many different audiences for Auroville images is something that all presenters must keep in mind, and this is particularly



**THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHERS' EYES:** For Ireno, Imaging Auroville means portraying its people. "This picture," he says "shows joy and sorrow." Ireno's photos reveal his sensitivity to capture peoples' moods, as is abundantly shown in his photo book in English, German, French and Italian. (available from ireno@auroville.org.in or Ireno, Sang

German Aurovilian pointed out, people in Germany would be more interested in seeing how people living in Auroville are facing challenges. This raises the question of what could potentially be of interest to some people, but which is not being presented.

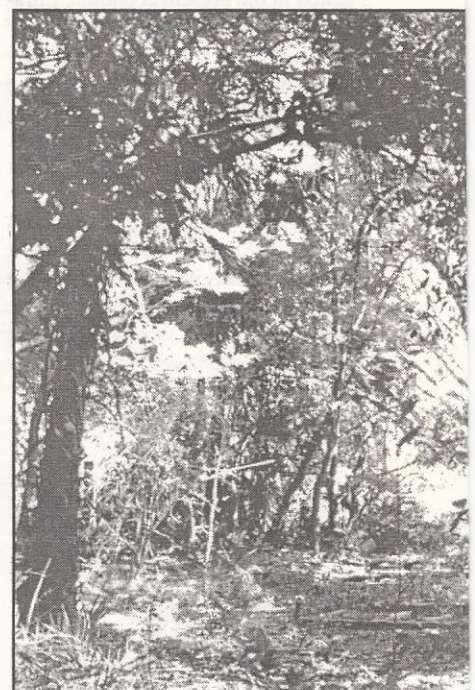
fact, they are quite central to the ongoing challenges of living in Auroville and struggling to make Mother's dream a reality.

Among these themes are labour relations with the local people, work in progress (finished products are usually what get depicted), conflict and conflict resolution, a range of human emotions, and the sheer diversity of attitudes. The first response to this is usually that the community feels threatened and as such is unwilling to portray anything that could be seen in a simplistic, negative light. The situation, however, is more complicated. Some feel that the problem arises from the insistence on the part of some Aurovilians that all public presentations be kept on the ideal level. It may also be a function of growing pains. As Carel comments, "How a community represents itself is a maturity factor — the more mature you are, the more you can accept failure and complexity. If not, you need to show only beauty. It is only now that Auroville is becoming more mature in this regard."

## Seeing into the future

It would seem that, in the end, any visual representation of Auroville can be problematic. After all, no matter what the power of images, they only present partial truths. Moreover, it is impossible to control the messages they broadcast, as their meaning depends equally upon the perspectives that viewers bring to them. For Auroville it is important that its visual representations are never accepted as obvious or natural. Instead, Auroville should constantly ask what its representations try to achieve and what is consciously or unconsciously hidden. Part of the solution lies in encouraging more Aurovilians to get involved in this field. As more images come into existence, the greater the potential to resist what are supposedly authoritative versions of Auroville and to represent the full diversity and complexity of the community.

Shanti



**THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHERS' EYES:** Regina's love for nature expresses itself through the transformation of the forest. "This archive photograph shows the beginning of the young forest around the Matrimandir in 1971. Last year I took a photograph from the same spot. Regina's photos are used in the campaign."



**A workshop training: an expression of intensity in human interaction or an expression of colonialism?**

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEM

ented," says Alan. But after seeing the impact of the exhibit at the Visitor's Center, we thought that there was something we could say better through pictures."

The photographs for the new brochure were selected with an eye to showing Auroville as an ongoing process. This meant in part eschewing a rosy tone and incorporating images

important when the aim is public relations.

## The Auroville we don't show

Given that many visual materials are produced to "sell" the community, there is an impulse to show Auroville as perfect. Perfection, however, does not always sell. For example, as a

When we look at the body of images as a whole, whether documentary in nature as can be seen in brochures, or artistic as in the case of the portraits of Ireno, it is clear that cultural diversity, harmony, spirituality, and the environment have been the priority. Other versions of Auroville have remained hidden, if not purposively marginalized. This is not because these other dimensions of life are unimportant. In



## Catching the spirit of India

Interview with Sven

Sven, an Australian Aurovilian, worked for many years as a dance photographer in Holland. After joining Auroville he started photographing scenes from all over Tamil Nadu and India. Realizing that many of his shots gave unexpected insights into people's daily lives, he started Joy Postcards, an Auroville unit that now sells his postcards all over India.

### Why do you not produce postcards which show Auroville?

Because that isn't so easy. Many Aurovilians ask me this question. First of all, apart from the Matrimandir, how can you symbolize Auroville? There is a certain charm in showing a black and a white person embracing each other, but it is a limited one in so far as it reflects a scene from Auroville. To me, Auroville's primary appeal is essentially an inner one. Auroville has a lot of physical beauty but it doesn't inspire me much photographically. I prefer photographing Indian people in their natural life situations. My photos are often snapshots of life, showing the colourful way people here are spontaneously involved in their culture. There is also a commercial aspect. Most of my postcards are bought by foreigners, and they have India as the focus of their visit.

### You often try out different images to see what sells.

### What are some of the postcards that haven't worked?

There are all kinds of reasons why something works or doesn't work. Postcards that don't sell are those that portray things that people are not familiar with or find strange. For example, one showed a religious procession with quite an aggressive looking god, a village deity. I also had a card showing a beach with a beggar, two children and a stray dog. These cards sold slowly as many card buyers found the images depressing, although they were not at all depressing to me.

My prime critics are the Indian shop owners who have to sell my cards. They like things that present India in an "up" way. I had a card that showed two people sleeping with a dog keeping an eye on them. Shop owners said things like, "Oh, but they are just laying down and you can see the bottom of their feet!" That was something that I had not considered. It's sometimes difficult to please the shopkeepers.

### Do the people you photograph ever see the final result?

I don't usually know the people in the cards, but sometimes they do end up seeing themselves. For example, I have a card with two men on a cycle carrying umbrellas. You can see them looking at the camera and laughing. Later I heard from a boutique that they had by chance seen themselves and that they were delighted. I have had one opposite experience as well. I had used a photo of a woman in a calendar. At the year's end this calendar ended up in a pile of old paper. Some men were sorting through the paper and one said to the other, "Hey, isn't that the girl you're going to marry?" The prospective husband was quite upset to see a photo of his future wife in the dustbin!

### How do you communicate with the people you capture in your photographs?

Mainly non-verbally, though I speak a little Tamil. I enjoy non-verbal interaction instead of the usual mental verbal communication. If you're not able to express yourself clearly in a language, then you must express yourself on some other level, and I have learned to communicate

through feelings. I have a certain distrust of words because they always fall short of the intention behind them and people often interpret what you say in a narrow way. I actually love silence.

### What is it in a photo that makes it represent the spirit of India for you?

What I find most beautiful is any act of devotion. It's the fact of giving time to the divine. You see, people's lives here are very tough. It's their trust in something bigger, their feeling of being supported by something divine that gets them through. And they can feel this way at any given moment in whatever they are doing. To give you an example, once I used to cycle all over and people I met on the road would often just cycle along with me. Once while cycling with a man we passed an anthill that had been made into a shrine. He said, "One minute!" and got off his bike and made his devotions. I got off as well and followed his gestures. To me there was something very beautiful in his wanting to stop there and in his sharing. Such an image of devotion is beautiful, and you are lucky if you can capture it in a photo. I would like my postcards to express such aspects of truth and delight.

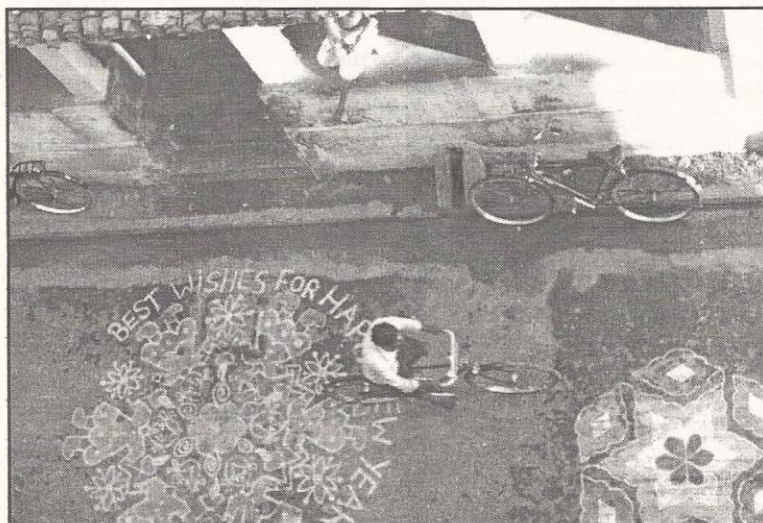
Shanti



Shows a rare combination of Aurovilians in book 'Auroville a Dream' which appeared in 1971, Auroville)



APHERS' EYES: in her interest in showing Auroville nation of its lands. nnings of the Success community in the same spot, showing the luxurious ter tank, the sole survivor from 1971. gn to raise funds for land purchase.



"JOY IMAGES" from top to bottom:

A modern version of the ancient Tamil kolams, traditional decorative patterns made on the road with rice powder, decorates the street in front of a Tamil house.

Devotees offer food (prasada) to the God. After invoking the blessings of the God, the priest hands out the sanctified prasada to the devotees.

Faces of innocence: one sleeps while the other watches.

Procession of a protecting warrior God, a folk deity.





# Battling Sound Pollution

The Pondicherry Citizens Welfare Association has been created to fight pollution in its many forms in Pondicherry. It has asked the help of Aurovilians to deal with the ever-increasing noise levels, a problem that also affects Auroville.

Until a few years ago the city of Pondicherry had lots of greenery and fresh air, and low levels of pollution. In the recent years, however, the quality of life has dramatically decreased. The Pondicherry Citizens Welfare Association now publicly complains about traffic congestion, air pollution, lack of potable water, lack of public toilets, garbage on the road and, last but not least, about noise pollution from a wide variety of sources. It is against this pollution that the Association wants to take action. It has asked a few individual Aurovilians to help with the issue.

A brochure issued by the association details the sources of noise. These include propaganda screaming loudspeakers on touring autorickshaws, generators without silencers used by shops and restaurants during electricity breakdowns, and the indiscriminate use of air-horns by lorry and bus drivers. The major vexation is the non-stop use of amplifiers and cone-shaped loudspeakers at full volume during religious and other festivals. Almost all users are even increasing the power of their amplifiers to compete with each other. "The mosques broadcast the azans around 4.30 a.m., the church recites prayers at 5 a.m. and the temple at 5.30 a.m. so that the entire area is covered with broadcast azans, prayers and pujas. On some auspicious days some temples put the amplifier on at 2.45 a.m. and play recorded songs during the entire day. Some churches put the amplifiers on for one week," says the brochure. The indiscriminate bursting of firecrackers and gunpowder shells throughout the day and night increases the miseries of the residents.

## Disrespect for the law

Sadly, the sound pollution experienced in Pondicherry reflects the norm rather than the exception in India. The Tamil Nadu authorities have passed strict laws against it. These laws, however, are not enforced. "Police authorities are turning deaf ears to complaints from the residents and the human suffering due to sound pollution is ever increasing," says the brochure. It is because of this permissiveness that the Pondicherry Citizens Welfare Association was created. It now intends to file a writ petition in the form of a Public Action Interest Litigation before the Chennai High Court to order the administrations of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu to implement the law. In doing this, the Pondicherry Association follows the example of similar associations elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, for example in Kodaikanal, which, by going to court succeeded in lowering sound levels.

Didier, who was previously a sound expert from France, is one of the Aurovilians whose help has been enlisted. "Sound pollution is also a major irritation for Aurovilians," says Didier. "For example, the recent ten-day temple festival in the village of Kulapalayam has kept many Aurovilians awake throughout the night, even those who live kilometres away from the village. We hope that we can learn from the court action this Pondicherry Association will initiate, which is one of the reasons why we agreed to help them. So far, we have done some sound volume measurements with a sound pressure level meter and the results are shocking. Many blasts measured 117 dBA at a distance of 75 meters from the source. These were explosions of big firecrackers, and 117 dBA means that the

sound exceeded 128 times the permissible limit! It is comparable to the take-off of a fighter jet! This was at 9.30 in the evening, in a residential zone. We heard from the Pondicherry Association that there have been instances of heart patients in a Pondicherry hospital succumbing due to these blasts and this was a case to prove it. The volume of the music from temple loudspeakers, which often continues throughout the night, was measured at an average of 90 dBA at a distance of 15 meters, so that is more than 16 times the permissible limit. It is maddening."

## The Auroville situation

"The situation around Auroville is more or less the same as in Pondicherry," says Manfred, a scientist from Germany who did some measurements during the Kulapalayam festival. At 4 a.m., he measured a volume of 79 dBA at 850 meters distance, or an excess of 8

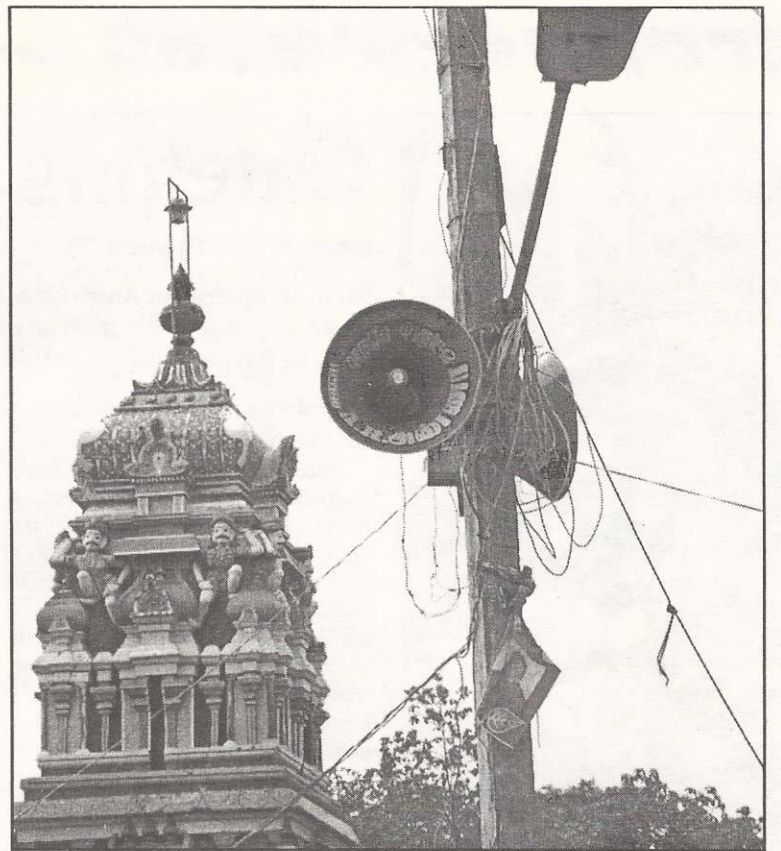
times the admissible levels. "Even at that distance the sound volume is excessive. If you happen to stand too close, the blast of the firecrackers causes physical pain." Heinrich, a German medical doctor, observes: "It is a well-proven fact that 40% of the people who frequent discos in the West have developed irreversible hearing problems. I do not understand how the people in the village, who live so close to the sound source, can stand it. Perhaps they are so culturally conditioned that they do not 'hear' it any more, in the same way that people who live next to a railway station don't 'hear' the trains anymore. But the ear nevertheless receives the sound vibrations, and these ears will be damaged beyond any hope of healing."

## Why the noise?

Why do people tolerate or even enjoy this kind of volume? The opinions are divided. In Kulapalayam,



Traditional musicians celebrate the birthday of Lord Ganesha. They lose however the competition with the temple loudspeakers on the pole nearby.



Cone-shaped loudspeakers are for many the bane of festivals

some villagers accept it as an expression of religious devotion. Others do not, but they are forced to endure the noise levels and are harassed to contribute towards the festival's expenses.

According to many, these types of festivals only serve commercial and political ends. A huge devotional market has come into existence and competition is rife. Loudspeakers and audio-tapes with devotional songs to the god of your choice are available everywhere. The firecrackers proclaim the importance of the festival and that of its organisers — the more bang, the more money spent, the more meaningful the festival is. Didier, who has been exposed to high sound levels for much of his life, adds another point of view: "These high volumes of sound create a kind of trance state," he says. "It is a state that changes the content of perception. You see it at rock concerts; you see it at the climax of a show. Always an excess of sound accompanies the peak moment. Are these excessive sound levels also intended as a tool to obtain a shift in conscious awareness?"

The Pondicherry Citizens Welfare Association, meanwhile, aims to achieve a different shift in conscious awareness. It stresses the right of the citizens to live in a pollution-free society and wants to create public awareness of the dangers of pollution in its many forms. Regarding the noise pollution, it will spare no efforts to bring polluters to court.

Carel

## OPEN FORUM

# Auroville must reopen its doors

The Entry Group's move to close Auroville "temporarily" to newcomers on the grounds of housing shortage has been a totally negative and retrogressive act. It has to be reversed, and the doors opened once again to all wanting to come here, because we're just drifting on with no solution to the housing shortage in sight, and Auroville needs to grow.

OK, there is a housing shortage, but there has ALWAYS been a housing shortage, and there probably always will be; all the more so if we won't allow newcomers to build during their first year here. Just consider: if Auroville's Master List is expanding by, say, 5% a year, then when we were 1,000 people we needed accommodation for another 50 people annually. Now that we are 1,500 we need accommodation for another 75 people annually. When we are 5,000 we'll need



accommodation for another 250 people annually. And so on. (When we're 40,000 it will be another 2,000 people!) In other words the "housing shortage" is likely to go on growing as we expand! Closing the doors to Auroville solves nothing.

So what is the answer? It lies surely in our attitude and faith.

I remember the time when the Findhorn community in Scotland wanted to build a huge new collective building. It was going to cost a quarter million pounds, and they had absolutely no money in the bank. What did they do? They simply reaffirmed among themselves the need for such a building, and went ahead — in total faith that their needs would be met. It worked out exactly as they visualized: the money, the materials and the skills they needed (carpenters, masons and other experts) all came pouring in exactly as and when required. Not once did their faith evaporate, and not once did they find themselves unable to pay bills or having to stop for lack of money, materials or skills needed. Surely this is how WE should be in regard to solving the housing problem — positive, with a clear vision, and brimming

full of a concrete faith in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, instead of acting in a short-sighted way and wringing our hands in despair just because we don't presently see how the housing shortage is going to be resolved.

A final point to consider. Perhaps it's GOOD that we have an ongoing housing shortage! If there was no shortage, we might start attracting less sincere people. As it is, only those seriously wanting to come here regardless of any difficulties facing them are likely to come. And these are exactly the sort of adventurous and determined spirits we need.

Let Auroville be re-opened with immediate effect. Let's remove the negativity, visualize our needs, and go ahead in faith that the money, the materials and/or the people we need will come.

Tim

(This article first appeared in the Auroville News)



# A Westernised 'Savitri'

Review of an exhibition at Savitri Bhavan

A figure in pin-striped trousers with the head of a bird struggles with a Greek goddess over a prone figure; a naked man with a pair of dividers in his hand pores over a circle drawn on the ground while a diagrammatic structure of the atom hovers above him; inverted legs disappear into a large net behind a representation of David's Death of Marat. These were just some of the striking images that were on show in Savitri Bhavan last month. Who were they by? And what were they about?

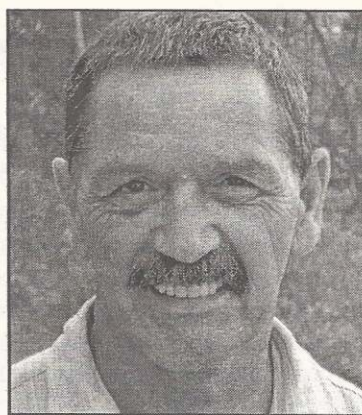


"O mortal, turn back to thy transient kind;  
Aspire not to accompany Death to his home,  
As if thy breath could live where Time must die."

Savitri, Book nine, Canto one

"Actually," says Franz, "they were my newcomer work." Franz first visited the Ashram in 1972, when he met Mother. In 1974 he came to live in Auroville. "At that time in Auroville during the long evenings there was little to do, so I occupied myself by doing drawings." He also began studying Sri Aurobindo's epic poem 'Savitri', first by translating parts of it into German, and then by illustrating particular lines. As a graphic designer in Germany he had accumulated notebooks filled with various images, many of which he would subsequently incorporate in his own work. In the summer of 1974 Franz had visited major exhibitions in Germany of the work of William Blake and the surrealist Max Ernst, "so when I began illustrating 'Savitri' it was natural for me to use images from these two artists as a means of explaining the lines to myself". But the influences apparent in the Savitri Bhavan exhibition are not only those of Blake and Ernst: they also include elements from Buddhist and Egyptian iconography and from ancient Greece and Rome, as well as representations of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

Franz favours collage, and it's interesting to see how he juxtaposes elements from entirely different traditions and periods. In the process he creates new ways of responding to the poetry, new gateways, particularly for people with a Western background. How far he deepens one's understanding of 'Savitri' is an open question — some of this work is more formal, dec-



orative, than penetrating, as Franz is the first to acknowledge. A few of the images, however, are very powerful. For example, to illustrate the lines

"O mortal, turn back to thy transient kind,  
Aspire not to accompany Death to his home"

Franz represents an austere, death-like face behind which one figure reaches out desperately to another. The power of the image lies in its ambiguity: the face could be that of Yama, Lord of Death, but also, in its intensity and other-worldliness, that of Savitri who has shed temporal personality as she embarks on the supreme yoga which will result in Yama's defeat and transformation.

A feature of Franz's work is the fine draughtsmanship, the control of line. Franz was trained in engraving — hence, perhaps, his interest in another engraver, William Blake — and "it would have been perfect to have done all these illustrations as engravings. But the facilities were just not available."

"If I chose to illustrate 'Savitri' again," Franz concludes, "I would do it very differently. For one thing there would be much more of the influence of India: at that time I knew so little about it, and the work inevitably reflects my Western background. But these illustrations were never intended for anybody but myself. It was a way of submerging myself in the atmosphere of 'Savitri' — a kind of meditation — and the joy it gave me helped me through a difficult time."

Alan

## In brief

● Dr. T.H. Chowdary, one of the pioneers of the Information Technology revolution in India and IT Adviser to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, gave a talk in Auroville. He stressed the importance of IT to create universal literacy as India wants to become a software superpower, with Internet linked computers in all the telephone booths in the country. He also stressed the need for India to rediscover confidence in itself as a nation.

● A three-day festival "Tibet through films" was held at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture and the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. The documentaries gave an insight into issues like the reincarnation of Tibetan masters, the world of Tibetan medicine, life in isolated Tibetan monasteries, the sense of desperation that permeates present-day Tibet, and the influence of the CIA in Tibet.

● A group of 30 top performers of Aavishkar, an academy devoted to researching, preserving and making better known the folk and tribal arts of Gujarat, performed a colourful variety of acclaimed pieces from their repertoire, including various authentic dance forms like Hudo, Janvaya Dhol Nritya, Dangi Kahalya Nritya, Garbo and Hinch.

● On the occasion of "Ganesh Chaturthi", the birthday of Ganesh the elephant-headed God, (also known as Ganapati) which is widely celebrated in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India, the theatre group Adishakti presented 'Ganapati', a performance of drummed music directed by Veenapani Chawla and performed by V.K. Hariharan, Vinay Kumar, Arvind Rane and Suresh Kumar with support from Jean Legrand (lighting). Rhythmic patterns beaten on large earthen kijas (pots) and other drums, interspersed with verbal text and bodily images, were used to interpret the myths surrounding Ganapati's birth.

● Twenty-five teams, 18 boys' and 7 girls' teams, participated in New Creation's annual State Level basketball tournament from the August 11th to 15th. Auroville participated with 9 teams (6 boys' and 3 girls' teams), the other teams came from Pondicherry. Auroville teams ended up clinching the title in both the boys and the girls sections.

● About 30 members of "De Nieuwe Gemeenschap", a community in central Holland, visited Auroville for a month. They actively participated in Auroville's life and intend to create a more intense working relationship with Auroville in the future.

● A new health sub-centre was inaugurated in Puthurai to serve the villages of Puthurai, Kalasipalayam and Manaveli. Health workers operating in this area now have a building of their own, which was designed and built by Auroville's Kolam. The building cost was partly financed by the villagers themselves.

● An increasing number of girls are coming to the Life Education Centre in Kottakarai for training in tailoring, typing, and home arts. Vocational training, English and Math are offered and group discussion on life problems.

## PROFILE

# Views on Auroville's youth

Jean-François came to Auroville nearly three ago from France. Since then, he has been very involved in activities for youth, including teaching at Last School and the Centre for Further Learning, taking part in a youth apprenticeship program, and coordinating the Kailash project. He is also involved in the creation of a social care support system for Aurovilians facing family conflicts, or psychological difficulties.

I came here from France because of my girlfriend, Kripa, who grew up in Auroville. I had always wanted to travel abroad, to see something else and do some work, but I always imagined myself going to Africa. And I didn't really know what to expect from Auroville. I guess I was more concerned about the idea of living in India. I did not know much about this country. Also, I was apprehensive about the language barrier. In French, I love to play with words and I love humour and irony. This is my way of relating with people and I wondered how I would manage without this capacity in either English or Tamil.

Now, two years later, I can say it has been tough in some ways and easier in others. What I like about Auroville is that there are many opportunities here. In France I studied social work and I worked for some years in a home for young people with family troubles or problems with the law. As my specialization is working with young people, I wanted to continue with that in Auroville. There are many things that you can do here that would be very difficult to do in France, because there are so many regulations in France. For example, what we are doing here in Kailash would be impossible over there, as you would have to deal with security rules, sanitary rules, and a host of other rules. Also, as

Auroville is a small community, you can more easily identify who can help you in their specific field. On the other hand, everybody, even those who have no knowledge on the topic, feel they can say something about anything: that slows down the work.

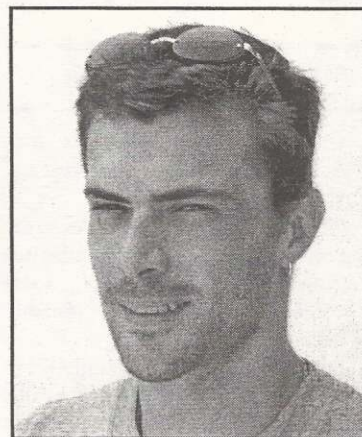
As for the young people of Auroville, I think it's hard to make generalizations. The kids have all different family situations and come from different backgrounds. But a problem faced by all young foreigners is that they do not have a powerful Auroville culture to relate to. The teenage years are those when you build your own identity. Whether you are in conflict with what is around you or trying to fit in, you must have the feedback from your culture. Your culture helps you to reflect on questions such as, "Who am I?" or "What will happen if I do this?" In Auroville there are many cultures but Auroville itself does not have a culture. Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems that this is particularly a problem now. When I hear people like Kripa, Baba, and others who are now in their twenties talk about their experience of growing up in Auroville, it seems it was quite different. Auroville then was a smaller community, and there were more common hopes and activities.

Now young people can't look around them and say that they live in a community, when what they see are

lobbies, groups and politics. This is normal anywhere in the world, but not every place is attempting to live by the ideals we have here. I think it's hard for young people to relate to this adult world where there is such a gap between what people say are the ideals of Auroville and what they actually do.

## Changing attitudes towards youth

There are a lot of things that could be done to improve this experience of young people. The most important would be to change our attitudes towards youth. Young people here, more than in other places, carry a tremendous burden of hope and expectation since adults are always thinking that the new generation is going to make the next step. It is hard for a young person to bear this kind of responsibility. At the same time, there are people who are so afraid that all the young people will turn "bad," that they will all be smokers, etc. Yes, some of them may do things, but it is ridiculous to say that they are all this way. The problem is that we do not provide young people with enough options. We only create activities for the so-called "good kids," those that fit into some people's idea of what young Aurovilians should be like. This reflects some kind of ethnocentrism.



Many people see Auroville only from their own perspective. One says that one understands Mother and Sri Aurobindo and then one projects them out onto one's own choices as if one were speaking for them.

But don't get me wrong. I must say that I find Aurovilian kids very, very sweet in a way that I have not seen in France. Auroville is more open than other places.

As to whether I will stay in Auroville, I don't really know. There are many things that I want to do in my life and not all of them can be done here. Most probably I will go out for a while. I would like to study education and psychology. I think that it is very important for Aurovilians to go out and update their knowledge. We need to exchange and compare, to stay in touch with what is happening in the world. I hope that eventually there will be a way for all young people here to go out to study or work. Then they can choose to be here. After all, what I most believe is that living in Auroville should be a conscious choice.

Shanti



# America and the yoga

This summer we, Alan and Annemarie of Auroville Today, paid our first visit to the U.S. We were hosted by many friends of Auroville and sadhaks who inspired us with the intensity, devotion and openness to the future with which they practice the yoga. On the individual level, the yoga seems to have a very strong foundation. But how do those who practice the yoga in the U.S. relate to each other? Do they form a strong community? Are they attracting new adherents? And does Auroville have any role to play in this? Alan reflects on the visit.

In the U.S. there are a number of different organisations which are associated with the Integral Yoga, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. These include organizations which give information about the yoga, and channel or raise funds for Auroville or the Ashram — like Auroville International USA (AVI USA), the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) and the Foundation for World Education (FWE); centres which host conferences and retreats — like Matagiri and Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetam (Lodi Ashram); and educational centres like the East-West Cultural Centre and the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS). There are also a host of smaller study groups, both regionally-based and 'virtual'.

"The various centres in the U.S. have tended to act pretty much independently, at least until recently," explains David Hutchinson, President of the Sri Aurobindo Association. "In the U.S. the yoga tends to be practised in a very individualistic manner — perhaps this has to do with the national character and the geography of the country — and this makes people eschew large organization and distrust formal hierarchy. For example, a plan for a confederation of the U.S. centres which was floated a few years ago met with more resistance than enthusiasm."

Many of the centres were set up by charismatic figures and even today many of them have individuals who are in strong leadership roles. Dakshina who manages the Lodi Ashram in California along with fellow Ashramite Vishnubhai, sees this as another possible deterrent to closer collaboration between the centres. "A group with a strong leader may not feel the need to reach out to other centres. And many of

those other centres will not accept these leaders in that kind of role."

But there may also be other factors which make for less overall cohesion. Those Americans who lived for some time in Auroville have tended to constitute an informal but close group of their own. At the same time, among those groups in the U.S. which tend to be Ashram-oriented, there is still quite a widespread sense of confusion concerning the relationship between the Ashram and Auroville, and some seem to feel that Auroville is, in some way, alienated from or even hostile to the Ashram — a legacy, no doubt, of the earlier conflict between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society. While this doesn't at all reflect the present relationship between Auroville and the Ashram, Gordon Korstange — who has been active in various Auroville and yoga-related groups in the U.S. — believes that if inhibitions exist between certain groups in America, it is partly because there has never been a true and formal reconciliation between Auroville and the Ashram.

But the times, it seems, are changing. Both the boards of the Foundation for World Education and Sri Aurobindo Association have taken it as one of their key tasks to encourage greater collaboration between the centres. In this respect, the 1998 AUM (All-USA Meeting) was something of a watershed, for the organizers deliberately sought, in Vishnubhai's words, "to mingle the waters" by bringing together different groups. This has continued in subsequent AUMs, in the trend towards common membership of the boards of different organizations, and in the efforts of the Sri Aurobindo Association to bring over Aurovilians

on a regular basis to meet with various groups in the U.S. "What I see over the past two years," says David, "is that a very strong force towards harmony and co-operation is driving us together."

## Why are there not more?

Paradoxically, while there are many centres in the U.S., few Americans have even heard about the Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo or Mother. Is this a matter for concern? "No," says Julian Lines, who runs the East Coast office of AVI-USA, and he remembers the force with which Mother quoted Sri Aurobindo's words: "Nothing depends upon the numbers." "It's in the Divine's hands," Julian

continues. "Obviously the right people will come at the right time." Rudy Phillips, who is a powerful influence in shaping the policies and workings of the Foundation for World Education, takes another view. He believes that many outsiders cannot grasp what the Integral Yoga is about because it lacks an obvious unifying factor. "When people get interested in the yoga, they call one of us up and ask 'Who can I meet with? What can I do?' But we don't know what to tell them because we don't agree among ourselves what the yoga is and how it should be practised. So, of course, such seekers often go elsewhere."

Tom O'Brien, Rudy's close associate in the yoga, explains further. "It's very difficult to explain to others what the Integral Yoga is because, ultimately, it is all of life. The advantage of this freedom for us, as sadhaks, is that we can invent for ourselves whatever we feel is a true expression of the spirit. The disadvantage is that it's difficult to find anything which unites us."

Rudy believes that many American sadhaks are looking for community. "One way to achieve this would be to have shared spiritual practices. Unfortunately, in this yoga we have this deep-seated — and, I think, wrong-headed — bias against religiosity which makes some of us go overboard against any kind of shared spiritual practice, thus denying ourselves an essential aspect of the spiritual pathwork."

David Hutchinson notes another danger. "In a country where there is such a plethora of New Age movements, the seeker can unknowingly be led into various by-paths unless he or she has a very clear idea of the essential lines of the Integral Yoga. And these are not easy to discover." In this context Gordon notes that while spiritual masters from other cultures and traditions have flocked to the U.S., no senior sadhak of the Integral Yoga has as yet taken up residence to provide such guidance.

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Today relatively few Americans are joining Auroville. Why? Rudy is in no doubt: "In terms of the yoga, Auroville and America are mirror images of each other. In both places the core of the community remains hidden because of the lack of agreed spiritual practices, and that's why more people are not drawn to participate."

Tom O'Brien lived for two years in Auroville during the mid-70s. During that period proportionately there were far more Americans in Auroville than there are today. Many left in the late 1970s and early 1980s, never to return. Why? The reasons may be individual, but Tom's experience may also furnish some clues to some common factors. He mentions, for example, that his relationship to the yoga is essentially one of bhakti, devotion, and that the Auroville of that period did not encourage such expression.

## Americans and Auroville

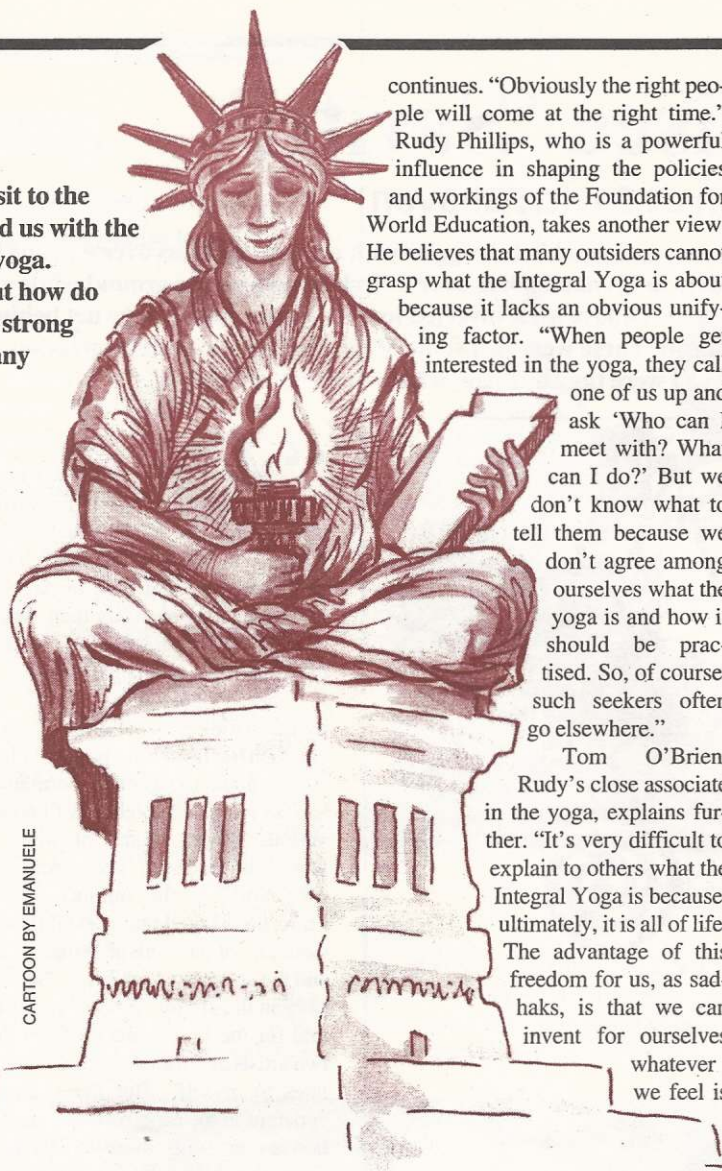
Julian points out that many of the Americans who left during this period were "wounded". "Wounded from the battles with the Sri Aurobindo Society, from the intolerance of some of the French, from the closing down of the schools, from attempts to impose the Galaxy. Many of them wanted an eco-Auroville: they'd already experienced and rejected the American/Western model of materialism. But when they saw these same values beginning to infect not only the local population but also Aurovilians themselves, they felt the battle had been lost. So they left."

Gordon doesn't fully agree with this analysis. "We were not all radical environmentalists, and wounded though we certainly were, our big wide-open country, with all its possibilities, was still waiting for us. We Americans went to Auroville with a very American sense that everything was possible — the American Dream we were taught about at school — and we returned to the USA with that same sense." In other words, America itself still offers so much for pioneer spirits — both materially and spiritually — that many Americans don't feel they have to live in Auroville to satisfy that longing for adventure.

Julian notes, however, that a new season of American involvement with Auroville may be heralded by present discussions concerning the concept of the American Pavilion. "There's a new energy in these discussions which may be a catalyst for bringing Americans — and American dynamism — to Auroville once again." He warns, however, that if such an inflow is to take place Auroville must do much more to actively support its centres abroad, through a better and more regular flow of information, through sending volunteers to help with the work, and through helping make the centres financially viable. "For, ultimately, the long-term health of Auroville depends on the long-term health of its 'embassies' around the world."

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CARTOON BY EMANUELE



## LETTERS

I read with great interest your September 2000 issue on 'Human Relationships.' Sri Aurobindo, in Savitri book ten, canto three, describes how this relationship undergoes transformation.

All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky,  
And Love that was once an animal's desire,  
Then a sweet madness in the rapturous heart,  
An ardent comradeship in the happy mind,  
Becomes a wide spiritual yearning's space.

(CWSA 33-34, PAGE: 632)

RAMAKANT NAVELKAR,  
PONDICHERRY

I consider your cover-story in no.140 / September 2000 regarding relationships a courageous step and well placed (same with the article on abuse of course!). But besides the interesting and wide-range of articles in the middle of the paper, the one at the

front-page, based on talks with Barbara, seems to me one-sided and at least mis-understandable.

Of course, when it comes to the point of "exhausted potential for growth in a relationship", some couples may remain together because they fear changes. But to leave this as the only example and follow with the statement that this "essentially resists the Mother's Force and leads to impotence and falsehood" is opening doors for strange interpretations.

First of all: how are we to judge whether the growing potential is exhausted? Doesn't crisis have the highest potential? Isn't it often the fear of changes that causes partners to split, instead of looking deeper? How should we prepare to dig the bottom-mud, when every now and again we escape in order to rather look at the things we are pleased to see? Is our endeavour to overcome not too short?

I don't want to say that separation out of a partnership is always wrong, not at all. It certainly has to play its important part for the

growth of many of us (especially those of western background). But we don't need to emphasize the let-go on this subject, but rather put the emphasis on the other direction: courage to dig through the obstacles that we have chosen. And that should be very familiar to those living in Auroville.

Besides that, I think it is unfortunate to quote Mother or Sri Aurobindo to foster such ideas like the opening-up of lasting relations to more than only one person (in order to fulfill connections from previous lives...). And I cannot see how advertising them fits into the realm of Integral Yoga at the present time of our evolution.

We should not mix up ends and means.

Probably there comes a time when our relationships are very much different from what they are now. And maybe even on the physical level they will be wider spread than is presently imaginable. But I guess, that we are still far from there.

JONNY MÜLLER, GERMANY

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www.auroville.org/whatsnew/journals/avtodayfr.html