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The Supramental Manifestation



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29 February: The Golden Day

The lights had been turned off at the Playground after the reading of some passages from *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the children's questions. They all sat on the ground in a semicircle around her. One heard the sea in the distance, and the beam of the light-house swept over the top of the walls — two short flashes, one long. It was the "Wednesday meditation." One saw Mother in the dark, seated in her low chair, bent somewhat forward, with a *Plumeria* flower between her motionless fingers. She always looked white, this Mother, even when dressed in red or in whatever colour, as if something radiated through her body, a kind of white luminosity at times so dense that it became visible to our materialistic eyes. And there were the disciples, silent...¹ This is how a French disciple, present there on 29 February 1956, gives his impression of the moment at the Playground when the Supramental manifested in the atmosphere of the Earth.

The Mother herself noted down that very evening: "This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that "the time has come," and lifting with both hand a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow."²

Later she explained in a conversation with K.D. Sethna: "The whole thing is not so much a vision or an experience as something *done* by me. I went up into the Supermind and did what was to be done. There was no need for any verbal formulation as far as I was concerned, but in order to put it into words for others I wrote the thing down. Always in writing, a realization, a state of consciousness gets somewhat limited: the very act of expression narrows the reality to some extent."³

The significance of this event cannot be overestimated. What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been working for since the beginning of their Avataraic yoga was now realized.

What had they been working for? To bring the supramental, i.e. divine Consciousness down on Earth, to insert it into the earthly evolution and thus make the decisive evolutionary step possible by which one day a divinized species will be present on Earth in a material body...

The manifestation of the Supramental on 29 February 1956 meant, among other things, that the future embodiment of the supramentally conscious being beyond Man, of the divine Superman, was now assured, as it was assured that the human aspiration throughout countless millenniums was being fulfilled: the world would not always be a place of frustration, suffering and death. Like everything else in the One Divine it would be able to materially develop its essential divine nature. K.D. Sethna wrote in his diary: "I wonder when the world will realize that [on 29 February 1956] the greatest event in history took place."⁴

The Mother announced the Event in the *Bulletin* of April 1956. There she published the following four lines under the heading "29 February":

Lord, Thou hast willed and I execute:
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.⁵
This was a modification of four great lines from her diary entry on 25 September 1914, forty-two years before:

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute:
A new Light shall break upon the earth.
A new world shall be born
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.⁶

Tellingly, the future expectation had become the present realization. At the same time, she had the following declaration published, under the date 24 April 1956: "The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it."⁷

Henceforth in the Ashram 29 February was called the Golden Day.

From 'The Mother, The Story of Her Life' by
Georges Van Vrekhem, pp 415 - 425

'A new world is born'

That other world [the supramental world in the making on Earth] is necessarily an absolutely new experience. One would have to go back to the time when there was a transition from the animal to the human creation to find a similar period, and at that time the consciousness was not sufficiently mentalised in order to observe, understand or feel with intelligence. That transition must have taken place in a very obscure way. So, what I am speaking about is absolutely new, unique in the terrestrial creation. It is something without precedent, truly causing a perception, or a sensation, or an impression that is quite strange and new...

What has happened, what is truly new, is that a new world is born, born, born! It is not the old world being transformed, it is a new world that is born! And we are right in the middle of the transitional period in which the two are still entangled in each other — when the old one still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but when the new one is slipping in, still very modestly, unnoticed — unnoticed to the point that, for the time being, outwardly it doesn't disturb anything very much. And to the consciousness of most people, it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, it is growing, till it will be strong enough to assert itself visibly...

Now, all those ancient things [the world of the religions and the Gods] seem so old, so outdated, so arbitrary, such a travesty of the true truth.

In the supramental creation there will no longer be any religions. The whole life will be the expression, the unfolding into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call Gods.

Those great divine beings themselves will be able to participate in the new creation; but in order to do so, they will have to put on what we might call the 'supramental substance' on earth.

And if some of them choose to remain in their world as they are, if they decide not to manifest physically, their relation with the beings of a supramental earth will be a relation of friends, collaborators, equals, for the highest divine essence will be manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on Earth.

When the physical substance is supramen-

talised, to incarnate on earth will no longer be a cause of inferiority, quite the contrary. It will give a plenitude which cannot be obtained otherwise.

But all this is in the future. It is a future which has begun, but which will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak — not in its essence but in its exterior manifestation — not yet recognised, not even felt, and denied by most people. But it is there. It is there, doing its best to grow, absolutely sure of the result. But the road towards it is a completely new road which has never been traced out before — nobody has ever gone there, nobody has ever done that! It is a beginning, a *universal* beginning. Therefore it is a totally unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them: "I invite you to the Great Adventure."

It is not a matter of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a matter of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails. It is a *real* adventure, of which the goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be made step by step in the unexplored. It is something that has never existed in this present universe and that will never be again in the same way. If this interests you, well, embark. What is awaiting you tomorrow, I couldn't say. You must leave behind all you have foreseen, all you have planned, all you have built up, and start walking into the unknown — come what may! And this is that.⁸

The Mother talking to the children
at the playground on July 10, 1957

- 1 Satprem, *Mother or The New Species*
- 2 The Mother, *Words of The Mother III*, CWM 15: 102
- 3 K.D. Sethna, *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 120
- 4 K.D. Sethna, *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 115
- 5 The Mother, *Words of The Mother III*, CWM 15: 103
- 6 The Mother, *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 1: 273
- 7 The Mother, *Words of The Mother III*, CWM 15: 104
- 8 The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, CWM 9: 145-151

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AUROVILLE
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No room in our schools?

A recent report points out that we urgently need to expand our educational resources and infrastructure

Over the last years we've heard plenty about Auroville's accommodation shortage, but now there's another shortfall to worry about — in places in Auroville schools. Lyle, a teacher at Transition School, recently prepared a preliminary report for the SAIER School Board indicating that if action is not taken in the next few years it will become very difficult for students to find a place to be educated in an Auroville school. Already the crèches and kindergarten have reached full capacity, Deepanam hasn't the teachers to take more children and some classes at Transition School are closed to new entries. The consequence is that increasing numbers of students — particularly the children of newcomers — are having to be schooled at home. In addition to new entrants, Auroville's birth rate is increasing. If expansion plans are not realized, all schools except Future School will have reached full capacity by 2006.



Inside the central hall of the Kindergarten

How did we get into this situation? Partly it's a consequence of Auroville's growth in population which means that today we have roughly double the number of children of school age (about 360) that we had fifteen years ago. Transition School, for example, has had to build 8 classrooms over the last 7 years just to keep up. Data from the schools indicates that by 2006 we may have 450 children of school age. If Auroville continues to grow at its current rate the present school population will doubled again in the next ten years. The increase in the number of students would not be such a problem if there was a clear plan for Auroville's educational development in response to this rapid increase, and if the human and financial resources were available to make this happen. Unfortunately this is not the case. The School Board asked the Auroville schools how much they needed to fund the next step in their expansion programme. Not all of them replied, but the figures indicate that funds secured for the schools' expansion are only about 40% of what is required.

'Funds secured' refers to the recent SAIER Development Proposal which the Government of India has agreed to support. However, this proposal focuses mainly upon new buildings: there is little within it which directly benefits the teacher in the classroom. Yet many teachers and parents are convinced that the greatest challenge facing education in Auroville today is the high turnover of teachers. "Teachers' maintenances are so low," says Lyle, "that you can't afford to be a teacher unless you have other financial resources. If we don't resolve this I think the

turnover will get greater and greater and valuable experience will be lost." An important Government of India grant helps pay for 20% of the teachers' maintenances. The remaining 80% is received from the Central Fund. In other words, the welfare of our teachers and, thus, of our children, is actually very much in our own hands.

The main conclusions of the preliminary report prepared for the School Board, however, relate to the need to plan for Auroville's educational development: "As Auroville intends to grow appreciably over the next decade, medium and long-term planning for the educational needs of Auroville's children should become a regular process to ensure coherent, responsible development...Medium-term planning is urgently required now to meet student needs over the next four years."

This is not to say that no planning has taken place or that Auroville's schools have not made great strides over the past decade, largely due to the dedication of the teachers. Today our lower and middle-level schools offer an education which, in its attempt to develop the individual integrally, is admired by many both in India and abroad. And while the higher levels of education remain, as yet, relatively undeveloped in Auroville, active discussions are taking place concerning developing Auroville into a university and, more radically, a 'learning society'. But having said this, many would concede that in education, as in so many other areas of Auroville's life, we still tend to react to circumstances imposing themselves upon us rather than planning ahead. Why is this?

Firstly, of course, the vast majority of teachers are so over their heads in work during term-time that planning beyond the immediate and medium-term needs of their class and school doesn't seem possible. At the same time, the lack of an Auroville schools' planning body strengthens the sense of 'family' which develops between teachers in some schools. This lack can keep them focused on 'their' school at the expense of cultivating a larger vision of Auroville's educational needs. Moreover, while there's no doubting the sincerity of the teachers in their attempts to make education in Auroville reflect the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, there remain differences between them over the best way of effecting this.

Another complication is that there seems no general agreement concerning how many students we are planning for. Lyle's assumption is that at any time approximately 25% of Auroville's population will require schooling through the secondary level in Auroville. This, however, refers only to children of Aurovilians and newcomers. The projected student numbers



Inside the Crèche

in the Master Plan also work out at around 25% of the total population, although the Master Plan calculation also factors in adult Aurovilians following a course of study. However if, as some people wish, Auroville becomes an international education campus drawing students and teachers from all over the world, the ratio of students to residents could be much higher. Helmut Ernst has written a paper in which he argues the economic necessity of Auroville becoming such an international education centre. He estimates that if this path of development is adopted, the target



Classroom in Transition school

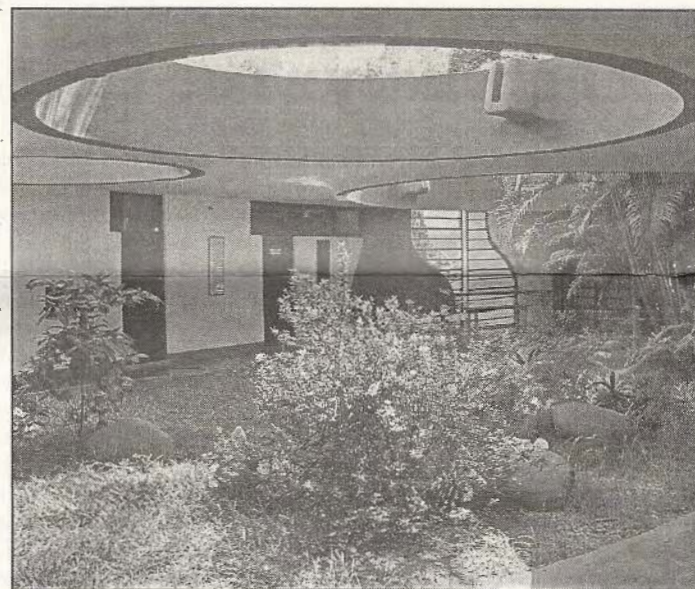
population of 50,000 could include more than 25,000 students and teachers, the bulk of whom would come from outside the community.

Then there is the fact that drawing up plans for educational development implies involving people from many different fields—water, waste disposal and energy experts, town planners, Economy Group representatives, traffic engineers etc. Obvious, perhaps, but it hardly ever happens in Auroville. Why? It seems that broadening out the discussion and decision-making process is not easy for those Aurovilians who have somewhat fixed ideas; and who, over the years, have been used to making key decisions on their own or with reference to a small, like-minded group. In fact, one of the most powerful dynamics operating in Auroville at present is the way in which the increase in our size and complexity is forcing us to restructure our 'pioneer-level' thinking and institutions so that they become more participatory and transparent.

Finally, there's something about the dynamic of Auroville itself which seems to make anything beyond short-term planning something of a lottery. While Auroville is more stable, more 'institutionalized' today than it was a decade ago, there remains a pervasive sense of unpredictability, of the ever-present possibility of violent shifts in course. This is not just the consequence of changing perceptions in the community concerning where we should be heading. We are also subject to external political influences and, ultimately, those occult forces which concentrate themselves around an experiment in consciousness evolution like Auroville, and seek to use us as instruments.

Having said this, things are happening on the planning front. The Auroville School Board is about to initiate a wide debate on the next stage of educational development, and there are ongoing discussions concerning how we can use the expertise Aurovilians have acquired in various areas as a basis for creating a higher level curriculum. Meanwhile Auroville's Future, the town planning group, as part of the 'Master Plan 2004: Directions for Growth' has analyzed existing development patterns in all zones and proposed future development plans based on a population of 5000 people. This Master Plan estimates we will reach that figure by 2008, of which 1,350 will be students (age group 1-19 years). The Master Plan

also notes we may reach a population figure of 50,000 by 2025, when the student population (including adults) would be approximately 13,000. Lyle believes that there will be serious problems in accommodating such numbers in the Cultural Zone, the designated area for educational activities. He also wonders about the wisdom of locating so many educational institutions in one area of the city as it may lead to huge traffic problems. However, Lalit from Auroville's Future explains that the Master Plan envisages



Courtyard of Last school

locating many crèches and kindergartens in the Residential Zone as well as in other Zones. The schools, higher level educational centres and physical education facilities would be located in the Cultural Zone itself, while vocational training centres would be attached to existing workshops and businesses in the Industrial Zone and elsewhere.

The medium-term development envisaged in the Master Plan anticipates we will need 5-6 new kindergartens (for 35 children each) and 4 new crèches (20 children each) by the year 2010. It also implies that we need to expand facilities at the primary (ages 6-14), and higher levels of education and begin constructing vocational training centres. In terms of actual projects it lists out those contained in the SAIER Development Proposal. In the first year this includes a hostel for students and teacher trainees, Transition School staff quarters, an extension to Ilaigarkal School and a new kindergarten. All of these projects are, in fact, underway. Proposals for subsequent years include the construction of a technical training centre, more staff quarters and guest accommodation, language and science labs, a technology centre and a major new High School called Super School.



Super school

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"Develop an Auroville Curriculum"

Auroville's higher education is spread over three schools. This is an undesirable development and the students should be brought together to pursue an Auroville-designed high school curriculum, says Gordon Korstange.

Gordon Korstange was accepted by the Mother to live in Auroville and did so from 1971 to 1980, teaching in the schools and living in the community of Kottakarai. He now lives in the USA, teaching English to the students of the Bellows Falls public high school in the state of Vermont. Together with his wife Jean, he visits Auroville regularly. During this year's visit he talked about the need for Auroville to develop its own high school curriculum which could incorporate a new educational component which is increasingly finding a place in the curriculum of American public schools.

AVToday: Auroville has at present three high schools, Last School, After School and Future School. Each has its own separate building and teaching approach. This development has grown over the years. Yet, you feel that this should change.

Gordon: There may have been good reasons to have many different schools. But I believe very strongly that the Auroville schools from the 9th to the 12th level have to bring the students together. If you consider all Aurovilians 'immigrants' to this new 'reality' called Auroville then it corresponds to the American experience. The older people who came to the USA were still Italian, Polish, Irish, etc., but those children born in the country went together into the schools and came out of it together as 'Americans.' I feel that this must happen in Auroville also; the children of 'immigrants' who now live here are uniquely Aurovilian in ways that their parents aren't.

For this joining to happen more consciously, Auroville needs to develop its own high school curriculum, a course of studies that is both uniquely Aurovilian as well as global. A student who finishes the middle level would move through this high school curriculum. It would be attuned to each student's capacities, needs and

expectations, but it would also prepare a student to be a citizen of the Auroville Township, India and the world (in that order). One essential course, besides English, French and Tamil, might be "The Aim of Life - My Life" so that students entering the high school would immediately start to grapple with where they're going and how. This might combat something we have in the USA called 'prolonged adolescent drift.'

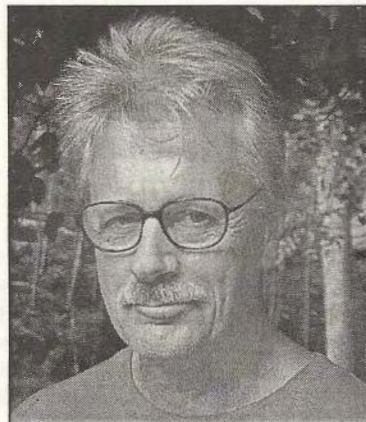
The entire curriculum could be devised in such a way that once the student has completed it and graduated from high school, he or she is ready - with some help - to take outside exams, if that is the choice, or to do something different. That outside exam itself would not be part of the curriculum. Those parents who insist that the main issue is to pass exams could be told: "That's fine, but your child should first go through the Auroville curriculum, and the exams will come later. If exams are the main goal, the children can go elsewhere." I believe that such an approach would enable all high school students and teachers in Auroville to come together in one place - where they could also learn from and about each other. It would also ask Aurovilians to make some fundamental and difficult decisions about what it means to be a young person living and learning in Auroville.

AVToday: What is this new educational component of American public schools?

Gordon: As you may be aware, the American high-school system is credit based. The students work for credits given by the teachers for 'requirements' and for 'electives.' 'Requirements' are the mandatory courses which each student has to follow; 'electives' are optional courses which the student can choose in the higher grades. In addition our school demands that every student does 40 hours of community service each

school year. In our case, the community means the town of Bellows Falls and some surrounding villages.

The new component is that the high schools require students to demonstrate that they have the ability to function outside the school setting by doing a so-called 'independent study project,' also called 'senior project' or 'graduation project'. Here the students choose a topic which they may know a little about, something they want to investigate or carry out. It could be anything: from yoga to dance to car engines to studying poets, doing a specific academic study, making a bicycle, training dogs, or running a soccer camp for young kids. Anything that requires an in-depth work can qualify as an independent study project. After choosing a topic, the student submits a plan on how to execute it. This plan includes some targets to meet along the way. A teacher from the school approves the plan and checks the progress of the student but is otherwise uninvolved. That role will be played by a mentor outside the school, and it is up to the student to find that mentor. If a student wants to build a bicycle, for example, he or she needs to find someone who knows about bicycles and is willing to help. The student is required to do research and keep a journal to record the experiences. The bicycle student, for example, would read up on how bicycles are made or about the history of bicycles. The entire project must be done over several months - we prescribe at least 30 working hours - outside school time. After this period, the student presents an 8-15 page paper, photos and/or the actual product that documents what was done. Then they have to give a 15-minute public presentation to a panel of judges who are not necessarily members of the school, but can be community members or other students. The whole thing is quite an in-depth learning experience, involving investigation, research, experiential



Gordon Korstange

learning, writing and speaking in front of a fairly impressive audience. The graduation project is taken as seriously as the credits. Different schools put greater or lesser stress on that final presentation; some are very strict and if a student doesn't pass it, he or she will have to do it again.

AVToday: This graduation project would then be part of the Auroville curriculum?

I believe that it would be a good thing if both the yearly community service and the graduation project of the final year would be part of the high school's curriculum. Both of them could be an integral part of the 'township' part of the curriculum. These are opportunities for the students to have unique learning experiences that will enhance their relationship to Auroville. The graduation project would be a 'final rite of passage' from the school to their next phase of life, a proof that they are ready for the immediate world.

AVToday: How have your ideas been received in Auroville?

I have discussed the graduation project idea with teachers of Future School and After School and they are interested. I hope that in due time the idea of a universal Auroville curriculum will manifest.

In conversation with Carel

In brief

Auroville at GOPIO

The Global Organisation for People of Indian Origin Convention took place in New Delhi on January 7-8th. Dr. Karan Singh, the former chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, inaugurated the convention. In his address he spoke in glowing terms of Auroville and recommended that the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and People of Indian Origin (PIO) take up the cause of getting Auroville off the ground. Dr. L.M. Singhvi, present Member of the Governing Board, also spoke the following day enthusiastically about Auroville, but more in the context of Sri Aurobindo and his supramental vision for humanity. The afternoon of the second day three Aurovilians made a presentation on Auroville in the session titled NRI/PIO Role in Building India's Image Outside and the Involvement of NRIs/PIOs in Philanthropic, Development and Educational Activities in India. The possibilities of hosting a two-day convention to engage PIOs and NRIs in Auroville are being looked into.

Winter monsoon

Auroville got an average of 1139 mm of rainfall last year. This is slightly less than the average of 1279 mm since 1968. Altogether it is the fourth consecutive year with rainfall shortage, though the rains were better than last year. An anomaly this year was that the rains were not coming from the usual north-east but from the south.

Low cost housing

The Fund and Assets Management Committee and the Planning and Development Council are investigating the best use of Auroville's limited resources for low-cost housing projects. Should they be used for a proliferation of projects, all needing their own basic infrastructure and each aiming at approximately 200 houses but starting with 10 or 15 units, or for one major project? Also the costs of recent collective housing projects are being evaluated to get a better understanding of the term 'low-cost housing.'

Exit proposal

An exit policy proposed by the Auroville Council, incorporating feedback from various working groups has been discussed in a general meeting. It was generally agreed that at this particular stage of Auroville's evolution certain cases may require such a procedure. The Council will reformulate the proposal for final approval by the Residents Assembly.

Fundraising for the land

Individuals in India and abroad have generously responded to the ongoing campaign to raise \$ 1. million for the lands for Auroville by Mother's birthday on February 21st, 2004. In the year 2003, a total of US \$ 600,000 has been received. The Land Fund hopes that the target will be reached.

Open market fair

During the Pongal holidays a two-day open market fair was held at the Visitors' Centre where Auroville units, artists and farmers sold original Auroville products.

No room in our schools?

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The Master Plan estimates that when Auroville reaches a population of 50,000 we will require, among other things, 40 crèches accommodating 20 children each and 50 kindergartens for 35 children each. There are, however, question marks over the space allocation. In terms of built space allocated, the Master Plan

adopts a figure which comes out at approximately 15 square metres per student for a maximum of 13,000 students. This is more generous than the Indian standard for educational institutions. However, Suhasini of the Auroville Building Centre points out that the international standard for educational centres of all levels is approximately 20 square metres a child. If we take the latter as our standard, and if we assume that Auroville may become an international campus with up to 25,000 students and teachers, we may find it difficult (although, in Lalit's view, not impossible) to accommodate all the educational and ancillary facilities in the relatively small space allocated in the township.

It is interesting to note that Roger and his team had proposed a detailed planning philosophy and layout for the Cultural Zone as early as 1968. Lalit explained that, based on the population projection mentioned in this early document, related social infrastructure (education, health,



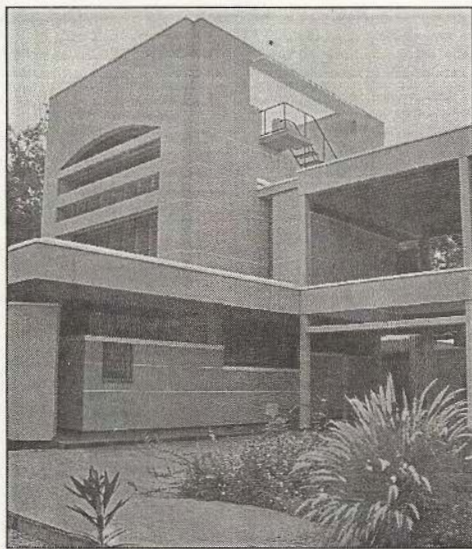
Playground at Deepanam school

recreation, sports, community facilities etc.) and physical infrastructure (road, water, energy, waste management etc.) requirements have now been calculated. He concedes, however, that certain 'ground realities' need to be looked into in a more detailed way to make the proposals ready for final consideration and implementation. "That's why we all - teachers, planners, architects, envi-

ronmentalists etc. - need to sit down and put all the pieces together. We have the basis for dialogue now. We are agreed that we need to plan and we have data that deals with one aspect of the situation. Let's not lose this opportunity to move forward together."

Alan

All photos in this article courtesy Auroville's Future Photo Archive



Future school

The future of India's past

Conservation is an integral part of the management of places of cultural significance. Yet, in India, which has probably more heritage sites than any other country in the world, conservation is only slowly picking up. Too slowly, say conservation architects Ajit and Poonam.

It has become common understanding that places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences. Places of cultural significance are not only solitary monuments but also the specific vernacular architectures of traditional cities. These historical records are important as tangible expressions of a country's identity and development. Places of cultural significance tell us who we are, and the past that has formed us. They are irreplaceable and precious. That these places must be conserved for present and future generations has become an understanding that is now reverberating all over the world.

In India, however, the effects of those reverberations are slow to manifest. The conservation of the vernacular architecture of each of our tra-

see. Many Indian cities have no culture-specific cityscape left, and the modern architecture is so universal that you may wonder in which city you are as it all looks the same."

"Governments have not woken up to the imperative need of conservation and their ongoing responsibility to take action," adds Poonam, "even though many heritage buildings belong to the government. Laws for heritage conservation do not exist and there are very few cities in India that have listed their historic monuments and their heritage of — mostly privately owned — city precincts. Neither have they developed a policy to protect and conserve them. Unlike many other countries, India has not embarked on formulating a Charter for the preservation of its historic sites and cities. In Australia, for example, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the top body of professionals working in heritage conservation, adopted a Charter as early as 1979 in the city of Burra. This 'Burra Charter' has gone through many revisions and is now recognised as one of the world's best documents on heritage conservation. India would do well to take this as an example."

Where governments do not take up their responsibilities, individuals have to jump in. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is India's response to the lack of government action. Set up in 1984, it aims 'to create awareness among the public for the preservation of India's heritage, by acting as a pressure group whenever any part of it is threatened by damage or destruction arising out of private acts or public policy.' It has so-called 'Chapters' in the various States and Union Territories. These Chapters attempt to mobilize public opinion and raise awareness, liaise with local Governments, spearhead legal action if required and interact with State and Central Governments on planning, policy and development issues. Some Chapters also take up specific conservation projects in their region.

Ajit heads the Conservation Cell of the Pondicherry Chapter of INTACH, which gives advice to building owners and government departments on conservation of old buildings. "The Pondicherry heritage is rich with a unique blend of Tamil and French houses," he says. "French streets were characterised by mansion-

type houses with garden-courtyards behind ornate gateways, while the Tamil streets were recognised by their tiled lean-to verandas (*thalvarams* and *thinnais*). But in the last 6 or 7 years, much of the Tamil heritage has been razed to the ground. More than 600 buildings have disappeared that had been listed by INTACH along with the École Française d'Extrême Orient and the Institut Français de Pondichéry. It is an irreparable loss for such a small city. Many buildings were demolished because of fashion — the need to show 'that you have made it' with a modern house — or because of monetary considerations or because of the need of property division. For example, we recently visited an 80-year old mansion that

has been divided into five, each part stretching 4 metres by 25 metres because of persistent family disputes. It is just a question of time before the joint-owners will decide to demolish it and build a structure that is more suitable to their needs. Only a few small stretches of some streets in

Pondicherry remain which still give — and that only partly — an impression of the beauty of the past. The French part is better preserved, particularly around the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. But here too the threat of insensitive modern concrete structures is omnipresent."

Luckily for Pondicherry, a project titled "Achieving Urban Economic and Environmental Goals through Heritage Preservation Initiatives" has been approved by the European Commission under the Asia

Urbs Programme. The project is undertaken by the Pondicherry Municipality in partnership with the cities of Urbino in Italy and Villeneuve-sur-Lot in France. Under it, the facades of 20 heritage houses on Calve Supraya Chettiar Street will be restored to their original grandeur; ten heritage buildings will be restored by giving matching grants up to Rs. 200,000 (US \$ 4,000) to house owners; tourist heritage walks will be organised; the Grand Bazaar will be partly revitalised; and a heritage survey and mapping will be conducted. "It's a good thing," admits Ajit, "but it comes about 10 years too late. The major part of INTACH's work in Pondicherry is still to sensitize the population on the historic significance and value of their city. The Asia Urbs project has created awareness amongst politicians and bureaucrats, but it has not yet caught the imagination of the public at large. Heritage conservation still has to become fashionable."

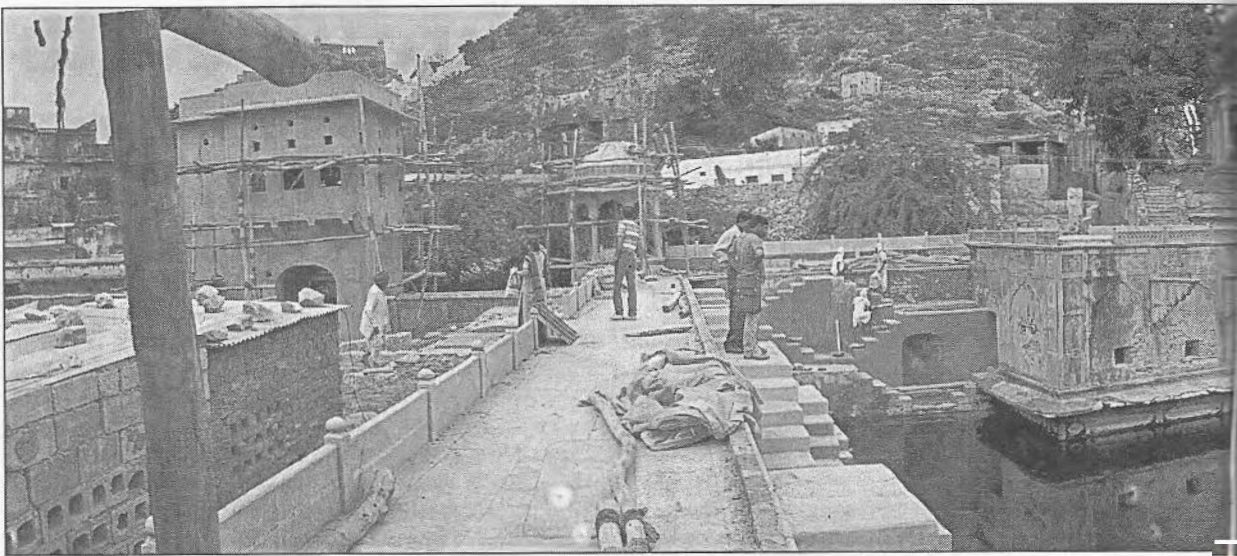
Poonam, who lived in Auroville from 1990 till 1995, heads the Design and Construction supervising team of the Jaipur Chapter of INTACH and is in charge of a 50 crore (US \$ 10 million) conservation project. It includes the gates of Jaipur and various historic buildings and sites and utility constructions in the historic capital of Amber (locally pronounced Amer), a settlement 11 km north of Jaipur, which boasts of continuity since the 11th century. "Contrary to Pondicherry, which received the Asia Urbs assistance largely in the form of grants — the Pondicherry Government was only required to finance Rs. 65 lakhs (US \$ 130,000) out of a total of about 3 crores (US \$ 600,000) — this project is financed from an Asian Development Bank loan," she says. "Consequently, we are not only looking at conservation, but also at the best way of making use of these structures so that, directly or indirectly, revenue is created for the government to repay the loan." Tourism is the preferred way. In Amber, the restoration of a historic stepwell is nearly complete, and a proposal is being considered to renovate 11 neighbouring *havelis* and temples and create a Heritage Walk Amber route. "There are about 24 traditionally built

structures still surviving along this route, 11 belong to the government, the rest to individuals," says Poonam. "To our horror recently one of those individuals pulled down his *haveli* and constructed something modern, which is completely out of place. There was no way we could stop this. But if we are allowed to renovate the 11 government-owned structures, we will set the example for the renovation of the other privately owned *havelis* by demonstrating that renovation is the better and also economically viable way. Once the house owners witness the increase of tourists, they will start revaluing their property and realize that it is cooler to renovate than to demolish and build a modern structure. For the proposed heritage route has great touristic potential, the house owners can benefit from the tourists and the renovated houses can be the centrepiece for future festivals."

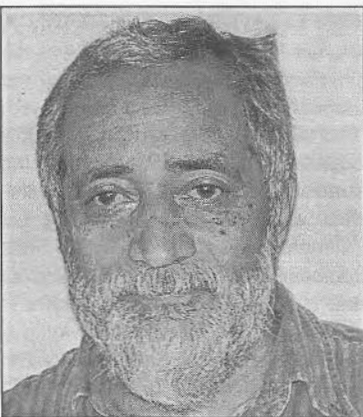
Attracting tourism is also the main reason why the city of Jaipur is interested in renovation. Jaipur, known as 'the pink city,' has a town layout that dates from 1727. Within its walls, artisans and craftsmen thrived. Today, even the famous 'Palace of the Winds' has some of its stories closed as the construction is no longer safe. Many other magnificent buildings are lying vacant or are underutilised. "And we know that if a building has no purpose, it dies" says Poonam.

"So we have to find alternative usages. For example, Jaipur has quite a few almost vacant Rajasthani temples. These temples consist of a number of courtyards with rooms around them and the main shrine in a backroom. In two of these complexes, schools have been established, a perfect way of utilising the space. Another example is an area near the city centre, which after renovation would be ideal for a crafts market."

"But we have learned that if we just renovate a building owned by the government, the example doesn't get us very far. We have to create public awareness that heritage is important. Fortunately, a few years ago concerned citizens set up the Jaipur Virasat Foundation with the aim to protect all living heritage, tangible and intangible. Its aims coincide with those of INTACH. They decided that the best means of creating awareness is through yearly festivals on the lines of the Edinburgh Festival. In 2003, amongst other things, it organised a forum featuring traditional Rajasthani musicians. As Rajasthani music has been slowly dying out, this was another cultural heritage that needs revival. Many musicians came together for the first time in their lives. They performed and shared and learned from each other. For many the festival was



The Panna Meena Miyan Ka Kund in the historical capital of Amber, nearby Jaipur. This stepped well dates probably date from the 10th to 16th centuries.



Ajit



Poonam

PHOTO: ECOLE FRANCAIS D'EXTRÊME ORIENT

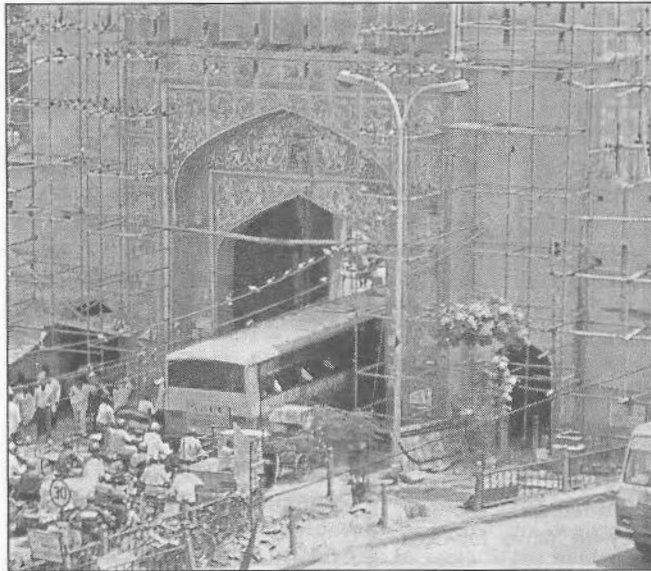
PHOTO: INTACH PONDICHERRY



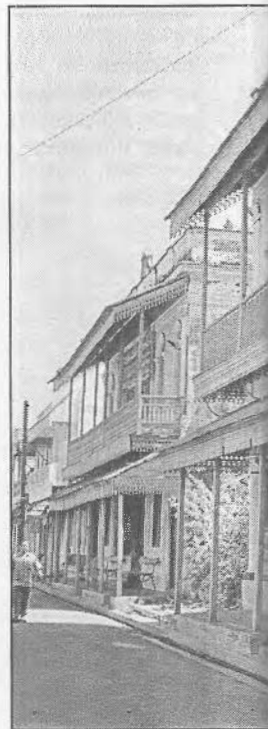
Top: Montorsier street stretch, Pondicherry in 1988, with continuous traditional buildings. Below: the same stretch in 2002 with insensitive new constructions

ditional cities is not being given the importance it deserves; neither in India's many schools of architecture, nor at government decision levels. "The architecture schools deal with India's rich heritage as topics of historic interest without studying their relevance for the present," says Ajit acidly. "Heritage conservation should be a mandatory topic, but it is constantly being overlooked. Instead, Indian architects today study the works of great international masters for their inspiration. The result is there for everybody to

PHOTO: INTACH JAIPUR



Gates are an integral part of the overall heritage fabric of the walled city of Jaipur. Photo: the Chand Pol Gate receives its first major renovation in 275 years.



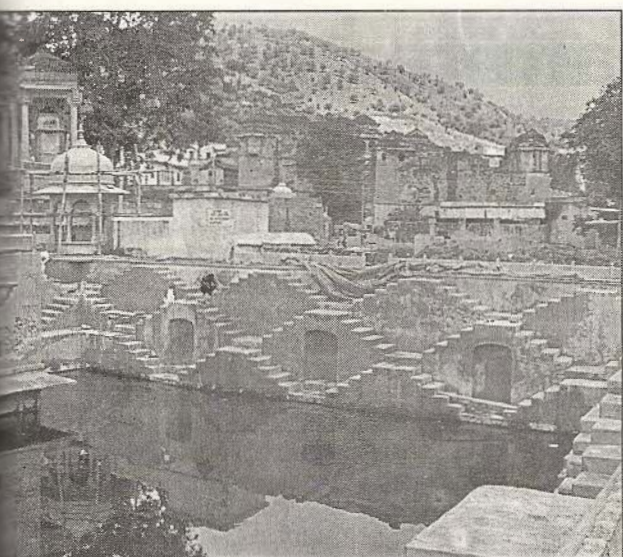


PHOTO: INTACH JAIPUR

from the 18th century; the surrounding historical structures

a stepping stone to recognition and performances outside Rajasthan. In January 2004 the Jaipur Festival will see the novelty of English DJ's jamming together with Rajasthani musicians. It is guaranteed to be a success as the festival has gained much support of the Jaipur people; so much so, in fact, that the organisers are talking about making Jaipur the happening city of India.

"Apart from the music, festivals are tools for demonstrating traditional arts and crafts, and for drawing attention to the necessary renovation of many historic sites and buildings. As tourists have to stay somewhere, many people from Jaipur get the idea. Lodgings in heritage buildings can be offered at a good price, directly improving the living standards of the people of Jaipur, and increasing their pride in their city. And as the festivals require the cooperation of many government departments, the traditional bureaucratic hurdles against renovation – bureaucrats are always thinking in terms of short-term goals, probably because their job tenures are always short-term – are slowly eroding."

Heritage, then, has to become fashionable for momentum to pick-up. In Fort Mumbai, a bank recently opened an office in an old renovated building. Now two more banks want other old buildings to be restored. "We hope that those examples sink in and that soon not only businesses but also wealthy individuals will set the trend of living in renovated buildings," says Poonam. In order to prevent amateurism and provide proper guidance, Poonam considers it necessary that permanent offices are opened where people can get help and information on how to do conservation and what materials to use. "We have learned a lot from our restoration work so far," she says. "We rediscovered some traditional techniques and materials and found that there are people who still know how to work in these materials. This has been documented for others to use." The sincere dedication of the Jaipur Virasat Foundation and the Jaipur Chapter of INTACH has gained acceptance. In November this year, their work was shown to visiting Prince Charles who was impressed. He accepted to become the patron of the Foundation.

"The basic question behind heritage conservation," says Ajit, "is why at present, with all the novel materials at our disposal, with libraries of data and world-wide access to information on the internet, architecture is not producing more beautiful buildings or urban environments comparable in quality to well conserved historic city centres in Europe. What brought our forefathers to create such beautiful structures and built-up environment? How could they do it?" The answers to those questions are contained in the past and still awaits discovery.

*In conversation with
Alan and Carel*

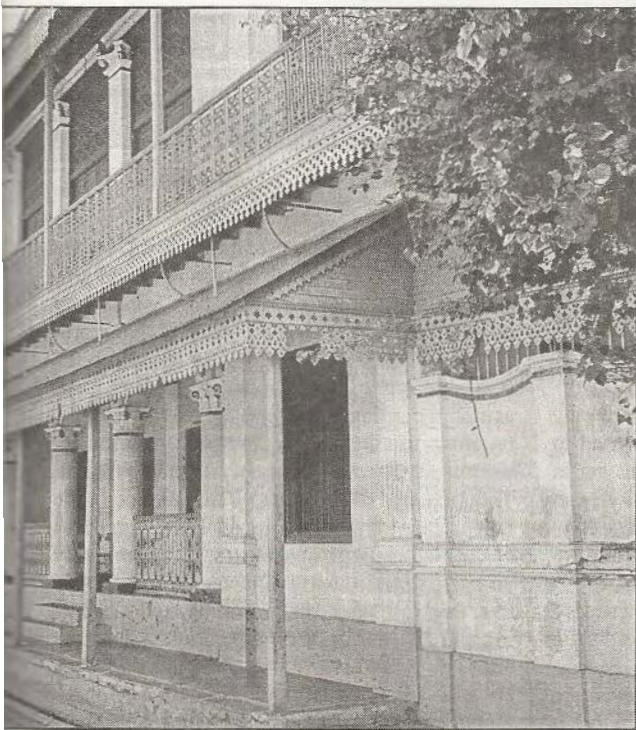


PHOTO: INTACH PONDICHERRY

building in Kazy street, Pondicherry

Auroville: A Future World Heritage site?

Could Auroville become a World Heritage site? Luigi, of Auroville's Future, shares his views about this inspiring concept.

"A passing remark by the Director of ICOMOS – the international non-governmental organization dedicated to the conservation of the world's historic monuments and sites which advises UNESCO on World Heritage – triggered the idea," explains Luigi. "We were discussing the possibilities of the city of Pondicherry applying for World Heritage status. Then he wondered aloud why Auroville shouldn't apply, and even thought that we might stand a better chance. I thought that the idea was crazy, yet, there was something compellingly attractive in it. Would there truly be a way in which Auroville could be recognized as a World Heritage site?"

The concept of World Heritage was established in November 1972, when the general Conference of UNESCO passed the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Under this convention a World Heritage Committee was set up and charged with compiling a World Heritage List of cultural and natural properties considered to be of outstanding universal value, submitted by the states that are parties to the convention. At present, the list contains 754 properties (582 cultural, 149 natural and 23 mixed) located in 129 states. India has 24 of its properties listed as World Heritage sites, including a few national parks and some of its eminent monuments, such as the Taj Mahal and the Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur. But apart from the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri, no city has been listed.

Yet, a number of cities and city centres elsewhere in the world have gained the status of World Heritage site. Some are towns which are typical of a specific period or culture, almost wholly preserved and unaffected by subsequent developments, such as the city of Bath in England. Others are historic town centres that are now enclosed within modern cities, such as the old and new towns of the Scottish capital, Edinburgh. In rare cases the status has been conferred on new towns. Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, built in 1956, gained the status of World Heritage site because it is considered a landmark in the history of town planning. "Every element – from the layout of the residential and administrative districts (often compared to the shape of a bird in flight) to the symmetry of the buildings themselves – is in harmony with the city's overall design. The official buildings, in particular, are innovative and imaginative," states the brief site description of the World Heritage Committee. But the Committee is wary of according this status. In its regulations, it has made it clear that "The examination of the files on these towns should be deferred, save under exceptional circumstances" and "History alone will tell which of them will best serve as examples of contemporary town planning."

"The idea that the city of Pondicherry could apply for World Heritage status came as an after-effect of the Asia Urbs project," says Luigi. "In fact, it is strange that so far no Indian cities have been conferred World Heritage status. Cities like Jaisalmer and Jaipur in Rajasthan, for example, have such a specific historic vernacular and urban fabric that they would definitely stand a good chance. Pondicherry also has a good potential with its original Dutch town lay-out, and the blend of French and Indian architecture which you don't find anywhere else in India. It has Hindu, Muslim and Christian elements. Pondicherry is now starting to fulfill the World Heritage Committee's requirement of regulating its heritage, which includes the listing of all its historic monuments and the drawing up of an appropriate master plan. If it got the status of World Heritage, the advantages would be great. It gives instant recognition and prestige and there might be a multiplier effect for tourism. UNESCO's funds are limited, but the status could unblock a lot of energies for technical co-operation and Pondicherry could become a reference point in South India."

But Auroville wouldn't fit in the same category. "The starting point for Auroville is the fact that the concept of contemporary World Heritage sites is increasingly being accepted," says Luigi. He refers to the proceedings of the Conference on Identification and Preservation of Modern Urban Heritage that was hosted in September 2002 by UNESCO. A significant issue was the determination of the criteria for assessment of modern properties proposed as World Heritage. The conference focused on the question to what extent urban ensembles from the modern era represent major changes in economic, social, cultural, artistic and/or aesthetic concepts and values. It concluded that appropriate methodologies for the assessment and selection of this type of heritage need to be developed and that strategies must be devised to advise states and the general public on the importance of the protection and conservation of modern heritage.

"It is on this basis that we are thinking of an entirely new concept, one not yet recognised by the World Heritage Committee, the concept

of the World Heritage Site of the Future," says Luigi.

"Auroville obviously couldn't apply for recognition as a contemporary World Heritage Site as there is hardly anything to show, apart from the Matrimandir. But Auroville does fulfil the requirements of wanting to effect major changes in economic, social, cultural, artistic and aesthetic concepts and values. Auroville is active in all those fields; it is a place where mankind experiments with sociological innovation as well as with individual evolution. It is a place that aims at human unity, universality, transformation of society and individual growth. It targets innovation and research. And, last but not least, there is the spiritual philosophy behind it."

The concept, to Luigi's amazement, was not rejected out of hand but was welcomed as a very interesting idea. "During my last visit to UNESCO I discussed it with the Indian and the French Ambassadors to UNESCO, both of whom were positive. I later spoke to representatives of DOCOMOMO in Delft, The Netherlands, an organisation that advises the World Heritage Committee on the granting of contemporary World Heritage status. The organisation is dedicated to the study of significant works of Modern Movement architecture, landscape design and urban planning around the world. They too responded positively. But they warned that as no regulation exists that deals with this concept, the idea will have to be cultivated."

The long slow work of building up a pool of consensus for the concept of World Heritage site of the Future has started. The present move is to explore if a number of countries would support such a request. Luigi, the irrepressible optimist, believes it might work. "We have a background which is favourable: the four resolutions

of UNESCO, the Auroville Foundation Act, a number of declarations of support, and the Auroville Master Plan. And, to allay fears that Auroville is a sectarian movement, there is the judgement of the Supreme Court of India that Auroville does not constitute a religious denomination and that the teachings of Sri Aurobindo only represent his philosophy and not a religion. And we can present all the innovative work that has been done in Auroville to date."

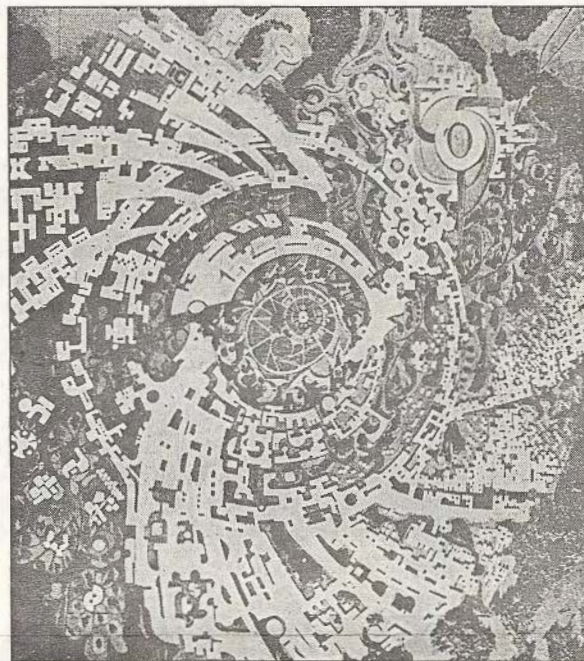
Luigi concludes, "First we need to be certain that the request stands a chance and will be supported by other countries. Only then will we make an official application to the Government of India. If the Indian Government agrees, it would recommend to the World Heritage Committee to recognize Auroville as a World Heritage site of the Future, and then it would go through those channels. It is a very long process, nearly a mission impossible, but yet I sense a momentum. It is a beautiful and inspiring idea."

In conversation with Carel



PHOTO: PNO

Luigi

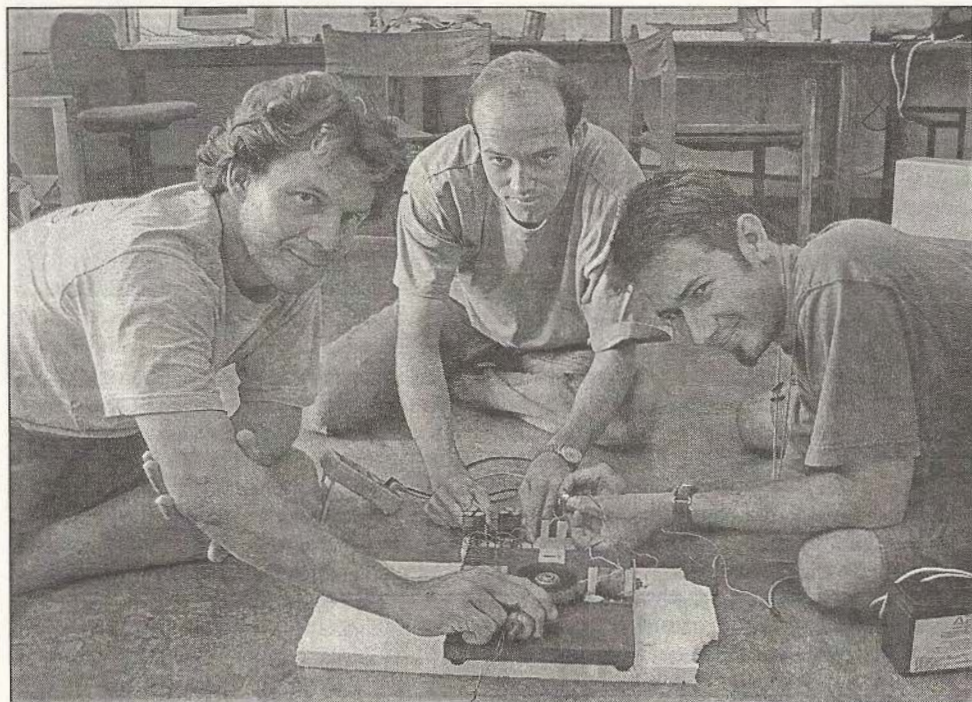


Model of Auroville's galaxy town plan

The World Heritage List, India

1. 1983 Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra
2. 1983 Ellora Caves, Maharashtra
3. 1983 Agra Fort, Agra
4. 1983 Taj Mahal, Agra
5. 1984 Sun Temple, Konarak
6. 1984 Group of Monuments, Mahabalipuram
7. 1985 Kaziranga National Park, Assam
8. 1985 Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam
9. 1985 Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur
10. 1986 Churches and Convents of Goa
11. 1986 Khajuraho Group of Monuments
12. 1986 Group of Monuments, Hampi
13. 1986 Fatehpur Sikri
14. 1987 Group of Monuments at Pattadakal, Karnataka
15. 1987 Elephanta Caves, Mumbai
16. 1987 Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur
17. 1987 Sundarbans National Park, West Bengal
18. 1988 Nanda Devi National Park
19. 1989 Buddhist Monuments, Sanchi
20. 1993 Humayun's Tomb, Delhi
21. 1993 Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Delhi
22. 1999 Darjeeling Himalayan Railway
23. 2002 Mahabodhi Temple Complex, Bodhi Gaya
24. 2003 Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

Hanging out with the Cynergy dream team



The dream team with the dream machine
(from left: Bastiaan, Akash, Sukhamuni)

“As everybody knows, Cynergy began in 1995,” says Akash. Typical tech-talk, I’m thinking: assuming that everybody knows what he knows. Actually, Akash doesn’t really conform to the image of the computer nerd. He looks fairly clean, has been known to change his clothes and doesn’t hunch over his desktop devouring peanut-butter sandwiches. He’s even been sighted on a badminton court.

Akash worked with Steve and others on creating the Auroville CD-ROM which was Cynergy’s first project. He then worked in Germany for two years, developing software and doing website design, before returning to Auroville and taking over the running of the unit. Now, high above CSR,

he’s building a dream team of young Aurovilian techies – comprising, at the moment, Bastiaan, Sukhamuni and himself – who are about to astonish the world.

“Basically at Cynergy, as the name suggests (somebody should tell him it’s misspelled) we’re doing a combination of everything,” continues Akash. “At the moment I’m mainly designing websites for people outside Auroville – that’s the only way we can keep this place running – but Bas and I are also creating software and doing website design for units in Auroville. For example, we are in the middle of designing a major programme for AuroRE, the renewable energy unit, downstairs, and I’ll be doing a design for various modules of

the Matrimandir heliostat.”

Sukhamuni, sitting beside Akash at the improvised interview table, is getting restless – he’s been away from his computer for five minutes and is experiencing withdrawal symptoms. I ask him where he fits in. Long pause as he works out what he can tell me. “Tell him about Linux,” prompts Akash. “Right. Well, the nice thing about Linux, which is an operating system upon which you can run all your applications is that, unlike Windows™, it is free. It was developed by a team of programmers who got together to do something different. They made the basic code available, so now thousands of people understand how it is put together and are actively working on it, searching for bugs and ways to improve its functioning.”

But is it as good as Windows? And can I run all my Windows applications upon it? “It is a very robust system,” explains Akash, “and for most programmes which you run on Windows there is a Linux equivalent. You can’t run more complex programmes like Photoshop, but for them you can install WINE – or Windows Emulator – which allows you to run any programme which can be run on Windows. That way you don’t waste programmes which you’ve already purchased when you switch to Linux.”

How long does it take to learn Linux? Akash waves an airy hand. “For a basic word-processing programme it shouldn’t take you longer than...” He eyes me closely. Clearly he’s dealing with a dummy. “...thirty minutes.” So how many people in Auroville have switched so far? Akash and Sukhamuni steal a quick glance at each other. “AuroRE has switched and so has the High School. It’s just a matter of time before more follow,” says Akash. “To ease the transition, Cynergy plans to set up a Linux installation and service centre.”

What else are they working on? “Right now,” says Akash, “we’re doing interesting experiments with free energy and trying to build an n-machine.” Pardon? Akash looks at his watch. This is taking longer than the 17 minutes he’d generously allocated me. He speaks quicker. “It’s about designing a

machine which produces more energy than you put in.” “Doesn’t that violate one of the basic laws of physics?” I ask. Bad move. Akash launches into an involved explanation of how it’s basically all about magnetic fields collapsing and recreating themselves while, in the process, generating electricity. “We’re trying to create a very efficient motor using powerful rare earth magnets. You can’t obtain them in India but apparently they can be found in hard disks. So far we’ve ripped about 30 apart and now have got enough magnets to begin serious experimentation.” He gestures to a remote corner of the workshop. “We’ve already got a small rotor running.” I take a closer look. Unfortunately the eternal energy machine is not running that afternoon...

Akash is looking at his watch again. Desperately I shoe-horn in one more question. “All this working with computers. Does it change the way you think, behave?” “Definitely,” says Akash. “As a programmer you tend to analyse things much more objectively in terms of efficiency. Not ‘What do I feel like doing?’ but ‘What’s the easiest thing to do?’ And this applies to everything. For example, when I get up in the morning I analyse the most energy-efficient way of combining preparing my breakfast with going to the bathroom.” Does that mean he actually prepares his breakfast in the bathroom? Perhaps he even sleeps there also? Now THAT would be efficiency.

“It’s a whole way of looking,” he continues. “For example, when I have a problem I break it up into several smaller units. Then I ask of each one, ‘Is it this or is it that?’ and, based on the answer, I move on to the next stage. It’s a way of trying to get to the guts of a problem. Useful, but it spills over into my whole life... Perhaps too much.”

Abruptly he and Sukhamuni get up. Clearly they’ve been programmed to terminate the interview at 4.57 p.m. “Well, that’s it then. Be seeing you.”

They’re out the door in 12 seconds flat. Dust, brushed by the sun, swirls in their slipstream. Oh, brave new world.

Alan

Medicis: going places

In July 2002, four young Aurovilians got together and formed a band – Medicis – in order to express their creativity through music. The members define their style as ‘nu-metal’ (contemporary metal, the music is more raw and primal than the metal of the 1980’s and 1990’s) and comprise Julien (23) on the vocals, Nicola (24) on the drums, Samai (18) on the bass and Davy (20) on the guitar. All of them have been interested and involved in music for many years, and are almost entirely self-taught musicians.

Over the past months, Medicis has been gaining ground, and the band is becoming known and popular in south India. They have staged concerts at various venues in Auroville, Pondicherry, Coimbatore, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai. In November 2003, they also participated in a national rock competition: NLS Strawberry Fields, in Bangalore, where they were awarded the best band title, and Julien and Nicola were voted the best vocalist and drummer respectively.

“It’s only the beginning,” explains Julien,

“Though we have been working hard and struggling for the past year and a half, it’s only since the past few months that things are starting to move and happen for us as a band.”

“It’s a bit like a birth,” continues Davy. “Our style has evolved a lot since we started playing together, and is only now starting to define itself. We have a lot to say, but it is only now we are learning to express ourselves in the right way. We are learning to find our identity as a group, build ourselves on stage, work on the dynamics of the performances and interact with the audience. When you’re stage and there is a response from the audience, you feel very powerful.”

For the members of Medicis, music is not just a pastime, it is a profession. “Our life is based on music”, stresses Davy, “Music influences the decisions we take, the sacrifices we make...”

Right now they are concentrating on moving forward, improving the compositions they already have, scrapping some old ones, composing new ones and working on their technique

while taking care it doesn’t overshadow the inspiration and power of the music.

Nicola feels that each musician with his instrument has a specific place and role in creating the band: “On the drums, I have to give the power and the drive to the music,” he explains, “The guitar, with its melodies, creates the ambience; the bass, while accom-



Left to right: Nicola, Samai, Julien and Davy



Medicis on stage at the NLS Strawberry Fields, Bangalore

panying the melodies, also serves as a link between the guitar and the drums. Basically, all the instruments are there to support the voice, so that it has a good foundation. I find the voice is especially important, because it is what everybody can identify with.”

“It’s been quite a challenge to learn to play as a group,” feels Davy, “We have learned to not let our egos as individual musicians get in the way of the band as a whole. We are trying to go beyond our individual needs and desires to be listened to and heard. Slowly as a group we have developed a common vision of music. We are lucky, because it’s first and foremost a story of friendship between us. As we can afford to be frank with one another, communication is easier. We have all embarked on the same adventure and we know we can trust each other whether it is in the studio, on stage, or in life.”

The members are also realizing that Medicis

is not only about the music they play. They are at present starting to work on recording and producing their first album themselves, which they hope to come out with this year. And that represents a lot of work: working on the compositions and lyrics, on the sound engineering and actual recording. This project of theirs also requires funding, and their only source of income at present is the concerts they perform. Though they have the chance to practice in the new, relatively well-equipped Kalabhumi studio, which has a great acoustic, they eventually will also need to invest in new equipment. And then there are the costs of touring, and promoting and distributing their album when it comes out...

But whatever struggles lie ahead, these young musicians seem to have the necessary drive and energy to go far.

Emmanuelle

Formed glass fusion on display

From the 15th of December till the 8th of January, Pitanga gallery showed Hans Isler's work with kiln-fused formed glass. Beautiful objects made from glass like decorative bowls, ornamental glassware; simple stands made in glass etc. were on display, along with some watercolours. The technique employed by Isler in his watercolours is simple: plain washes in grays and primary colors defining flowing forms, and swans and lotuses and calm women caught in the curly, cascading drapes of flat colour with just a hint of modeling. Hans Isler, the painter, has a flair for making warm colours appear cool – almost cold. But his glass pieces felt warmer to my aesthetic sensitivity – the blues, greens and golds were so limpid, that I simply had to know how he did it. Hans Isler's glasswork is colourful – like Marc Chagall in 3D.

Hans has been living in Auroville since the seventies. Everything about him has a quality of

quietness: the community 'Agni' where he lives, his gait, the tone of voice, and even the place where he works – Matrimandir. He has worked at Matrimandir since his arrival here. So quiet is he that you barely notice him. Hans has worked in close association with Michael Bonke on the various experiments that were carried out at Matrimandir. His involvement in finding the ultimate solution to the problem of covering the entire globe of the Matrimandir is noteworthy.

I wanted to meet this reticent man. I called. Hans agreed.

Upon entering his studio I experienced being inside a giant kaleidoscope. A deluge of uninhibited colour teased the white clarity of light. Cluttered disarray of tiny glass objects gives his studio that prismatic look. Glass is everywhere – on top of the table, below it, on the chair and under, between books, on the wall, the windows – plain and coloured.

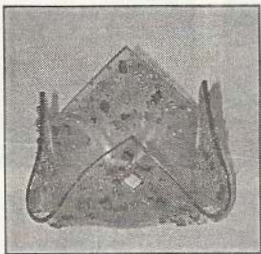
I took some pictures. Hans cleared a small stool for me to sit on. Questions came easily, for there was so much I wanted to know about this fascinating medium.

The fusing technique Hans uses is not new. It is five thousand years old, and was prevalent in ancient Egypt and Rome. "It was valued like gold," Hans told me. A gold leaf sandwiched between two glass pieces found on an excavation site in Afghanistan suggests that this technique which has been used for the Matrimandir discs, wasn't unknown in Asia. It was mostly used to make objects of religious and 'mystical' use. It disappeared almost totally about two thousand years ago, although

other techniques like sand-blasting, blowing, smelting and stained glass continued to thrive.

I asked Hans about the process. Ordinarily, this technique is about re-melting plain or coloured sheet glass. Another piece of formed glass is fused with it. The result is pellucid, like stained glass, but unlike stained glass where pieces are held together with the aid of glaring lead outlines, this technique of glass fusion allows endless possibilities for experimentation in varying the surface and colour within one piece of glass. The fusion of two distinct shades leaves no room for outlines, and colours blend harmoniously resulting in one compatible piece of glass.

Depending on the design, various coloured glass pieces are arranged on top of a reasonably thick sheet-glass base placed on a flat heat resistant plate. The whole is then 'fired' in a specially designed kiln from 550° C (melting point) up to



Art of fused glass

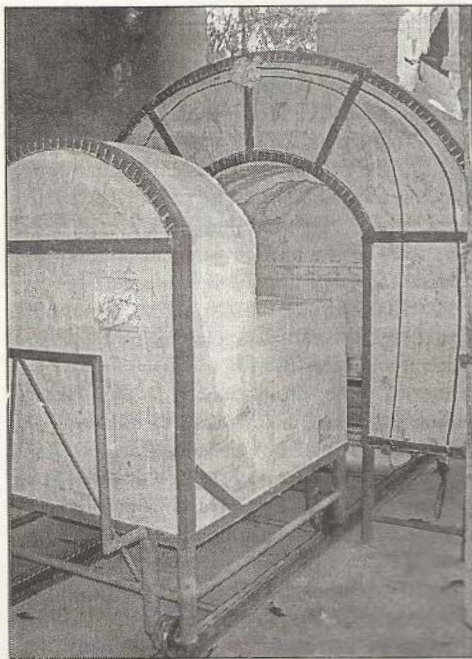


Hans Isler

900° C (molten state of glass). Within these temperature limits, glass can be manipulated in many ways. The surface may be kept smooth and even may be undulated, twisted, layered or bubbled up.

Hans's recent exhibition in Pitanga hall was received enthusiastically by all those who went to see it. A comment in the visitors' book read, 'Finally we have an artist in Auroville.'

Charudutta



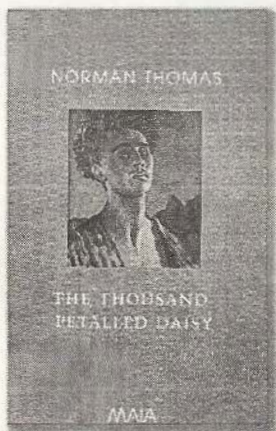
The kiln for glass fusion work

BOOK REVIEW

On the threshold of no return

Has India ever got under your skin? Have your senses experienced the familiar prickle and crawl of its magnified magic reality – where time comes to a standstill, where a moment stretches to eternity, where every instant seems heavy and pregnant with discoveries awaiting to descend? *The Thousand-Petalled Daisy* by Norman Thomas (Navoditte in Auroville) sucks you into a slow churning, kaleidoscopic, four-dimensional world of India, seen through the eyes of Michael Flower, a smart-assed and cynical seventeen year old and his companion Mickey Mack, a wacky wise-beyond-years glove-puppet who spews profound one-liners.

Injured in a riot during his journeys in India, Michael finds shelter in the house of a doctor located on an island upon a river in South India. There he and Mickey-Mack find their lives getting inextricably woven into those of the other residents, including a beautiful Indian girl, Lila, and a mysterious old holy woman. The events unfold over a few days. The pace is languorous in the beginning before roller-coasting to an inevitable finale where several lives will be altered for ever – perhaps the reader's too.



Michael endears himself despite his annoying chatter, noisy and seemingly endless, that alternates with philosophical observations and self-reflection. "One settles for agitation when one cannot settle for peace." The reader suddenly realizes that there is not one but two simultaneous narratives, one perceptible and the other more subtle. At the end of the tale, one is left with a strange sense of familiarity, a feeling of a journey complete, and the embarking upon a new path.

Norman Thomas's first person narrative of a teenager on a free-fall towards adulthood is authentic. The turbulence and contradictions of this inescapable phase of life where confusion coexists with clarity is portrayed with compelling reality. The

Indian characters and India also come alive through Norman's delicacy of observation and eye for fine detail. A book that definitely warrants a second and maybe a third reading.

Priya Sundaravalli

The Thousand-Petalled Daisy
by Norman Thomas
232 pages, £ 7.99
The Maia Press
(www.maipress.com)

BOOK REVIEW

Cleansing the doors of perception

The problem with adventures into the unknown is that they have no blueprint. One has to let go and lend oneself to the mystery at work in a strange new world where multiple destinies – both personal and collective – interpenetrate and overlap. "Man is a transitional Being," wrote Sri Aurobindo some ninety years ago and yet the implications of this statement are perhaps only now becoming globally evident. The need for a change – if not an axis shift in human consciousness – has not only become urgent but imperative for the survival not only of our species but more importantly of our planet as whole.

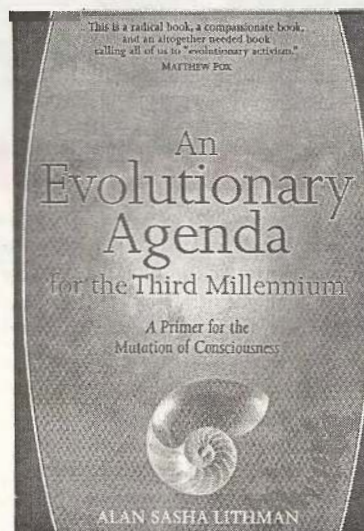
"We exist in two overlapping times, historical and evolutionary, one a sub-rhythm of the other," writes Alan Lithman in his courageous and thought provoking new book *An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium*. He brilliantly examines the symptoms of our present transitional crisis. He feels they are the labour pangs that prelude our phased and conscious mutation as a species into a new species in a future that is nearer than we dare even imagine. The book – a manual, a metaphysical essay and a manifesto rolled into one – is an impassioned and eloquent call to evolutionary activism for the sake of the planet and present and future generations. Highlighting the need to come up with new ways of visioning the planet and our role and place on it, the author successfully adapts and relays concepts – central to Sri Aurobindo and Mother's teachings and writings – that have acquired a growing urgency as humanity nears a new threshold of its collective destiny. The author also examines a number of ramifications of this shift, calling into question many of the dominant principles of our materialistic societies, including the role of money as a measure of value. Is money an end in itself or merely an agreed upon tool and symbol of exchange? What is it that we place value on? Why, for instance, is a rain forest valued only in terms of cubic metres of plywood and not in terms of the oxygen it supplies and the botanical and animal species – many yet undiscovered – that it contains? How to alter the rapacious primal behaviour of Homo sapiens – which the author dubs 'Homo egoicus' – and gradually evolve from thought-based and ego-

enslaved beings to wisdom-based beings? This is the challenge the author sees ahead of us in the coming generations. For perhaps our species' license to plunder the planet's resources with impunity has at long last expired. Maximizing the grace and reducing the traumatic stress of this shift as we turn from our thralldom to the ego to the luminous mystery of a future that awaits our call and which we harbour hidden deep within ourselves, is one of the authors concerns. Releasing our egoic resistance and the fears, addic-

If a change of consciousness and perception of matter and the spirit that it masks occurs in a critical mass of individuals, could this trigger a material mutation? This is one of the many questions raised in this book. The author succinctly pinpoints the 'sleight of hand' that leads on the one hand to the denial of matter and on the other to that of the spirit in order to highlight the need for another more inclusive way of seeing and knowing. For as the great divide of spirit and matter, sanctified by religions over millennia, is bridged and at long last begins to close, the marriage of spirit and matter could well be one of the items of unfinished business on our terrestrial agenda. To quote Blake, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."

With passing references to Madonna, Enron, GM crops, shopping malls and the mainstream TV networks, the book has been written with an American readership at least partly in mind. And yet, given America's power in the world today, even a slight shift or change, not so much in the values it upholds but in the example it provides to the world of selfish and environmentally irresponsible consumerism and its related dependencies – on oil for instance – could have profound and positive global repercussions. Transforming the media and turning it – like the internet – into a positive evolutionary ally and powerful tool of education, communication and information sharing, and the progressive elimination of money as a measure of value, are two of the more radical tasks the author sets out in his manifesto of evolutionary activism. "The next evolutionary emergence will be facilitated by our collaboration, our lending ourselves to a mutation we can consciously participate in, redrafting the evolutionary script instead of clinging to outmoded patterns."

Roger

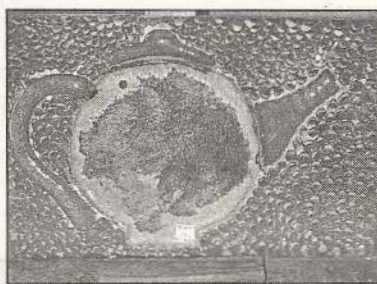
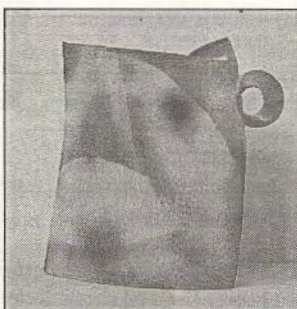
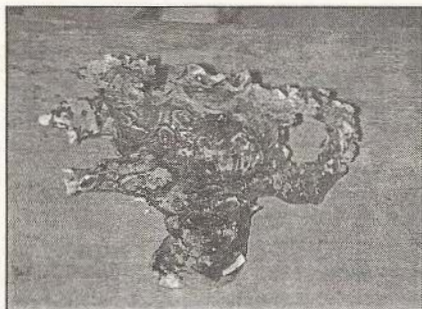
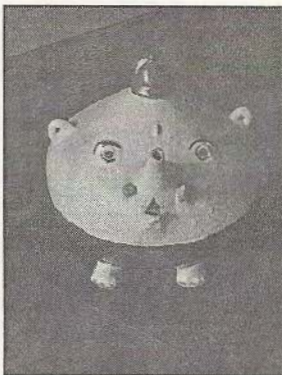


tions and dependencies that it spawns – and which we unconsciously cultivate – is part of this difficult process. Paradoxically, in such periods of accelerated identity change – in order to avoid individual or collective meltdown – the slowing down and voluntary simplifying of one's life-style can be an important and stabilizing factor for both individuals and communities.

If previous evolutionary emergences – life out of matter, mind out of life – might have occurred rather slowly and perhaps even catastrophically – at least as far as the preceding natural order was concerned – humanity with its capacity for self-reflection might well, as it learns to read and decipher the writing on the wall, be capable of becoming a conscious participant and agent of its own evolution and mutation – a metamorphosis in which the defining principle of mind comes under the aegis and the dominion of a new principle of consciousness, based not on separation and division but on an underlying sense of universality, mutuality and oneness.

An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium – a primer for the mutation of consciousness.
by Alan Sasha Lithman
221 pages, 16.95\$
White Cloud press,
PO Box 3400 Ashland, Oregon,
97520, USA.
(www.whitecloudpress.com)

Two teapot exhibitions brew in Auroville



Teapots were crafted by (left to right):
First row: Adil, Anamika, Jayashankar, Julietta, Michel
Second row: Susairaj, Chimanyi (large tea pot) and Deborah (small tea pots), Kalliamurthy, Loganathan
Third row: Loganathan, Muthukumar, Anamika, Michel
Fourth row: Kratu, Vijay, Krishnamurthy

January 2004 saw a unique coming together of two teapot shows within Auroville – the first, the 'Deccan Teapot show' held at the Pitanga Gallery and the second titled 'More Teapots' at Bharat Nivas. The former, a by-invitation-only exhibition curated by Aurovilian potter Supriya and Andrea of Pitanga, showcased the works of professional potters from South India. The latter show was organized in response to this, giving space to the creativity of local clay-dabblers, both amateur and professional, from Auroville and its surroundings. Comments Adil of Mandala pottery, one of the organizers of the More Teapots show, "A tea-pot is considered to be a coming together of many skills. It is also a perfect way to have fun with clay. We encouraged participation from village potters and others with creative instincts to step out of their normal routine and walk the wild side!"

Both shows were whopping successes. While the teapots at Pitanga exude an overall elegance and professional quality, those at the Bharat Nivas gallery abound in creativity and imagination. For many, it was their first foray into an exhibition setting. A teapot resembling the Matrimandir, complete with discs (not of gold but terracotta), an elegant samovar-like specimen in an eggshell blue glaze, a ship teapot sailing away, another with a dragon sunning itself, a whimsical kangaroo pot whose spout opens from the mouth of a baby peeking out of its pouch – all creations of local potters from the bioregion. Amateur potters from Auroville too have jumped into the muddy fray, like the children from the Aspiration community whose delightful miniature teapots are displayed attractively in a glass tank.

Iber, a potter from Golden Bridge Pottery Pondicherry, shares his process of creativity. "I wanted my pots to be unique, something that cannot be duplicated. So I gave a lot of thought to come up with designs that felt special and new." A creeper full of leaves and flowers twines itself around his pots.

The two shows, collaborative and complementary, have given voice to varied vocabularies and achieved a true integrated expression that Auroville seeks, not from a place of competition but of collaboration.

Priya Sundaravalli

ADVENTURE

Gears, Grease and Grit

Chali is the first to skim into the Visitor's Centre, aerodynamically hunched over the sleek handlebars of a light purple and green bike. The others breezily follow. They dismount in style, oozing fitness from every pore, and park their contraptions nonchalantly along the brick facade. From the corner of my eye, I catch sight of several visitors frozen mid-way in sipping their coffees, staring open-mouthed. The sudden descent of cyclists clad in tight blue black bike-shorts and colourful jerseys is a heck of a vision. A gaggle of Auroville's cyclists is ready to embark on yet another dirt-biking adventure – a standard scenario that plays out every Thursday afternoon...

A few weeks ago, a small group (André, Chali, George, Jacky, Pascal, Patrick, and Robi) ventured on a four-day adventure into the Javadi Hills, about 175 kilometres Northwest of Auroville. "The Javadis are easy to reach by bicycle," says Robi. "And winter is the best time to visit – with cool weather and plenty of water, though this time it was dry." Located

in the Western Ghats in the North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu, the hills reach a height of about 1500 metres. The tough bicycles lasted the cross-country onslaught, while the tougher cyclists magnificently endured the trip. Chali was the lone female among the 7-member crew, and is also the only female who regularly participates in the Thursday outings. "She is GOOD!" opines the team unanimously. "For the group, it has been very good to have Chali," adds Robi. "I feel that when people see a woman in the team, it creates an impression that the group is harmless and non-threatening. Also Chali's presence has considerably brought down the competition level between us!" Chali smiles, appearing quite unaffected by this display of adulation from the men in the team. "Being a woman, I sometimes get unwanted attention on the roads. And the men are very protective of me, which I appreciate very much. Once two boys on a scooter were tailing me. Then André positioned himself between me and these boys adjusting his speed as they slowed

down or speeded up. Finally they got tired and began to drive away."

This trip was Chali's first foray into an overnight adventure. "I have to admit," she says, "that there were moments on this trip when I said to myself that once is enough." So what was her most difficult moment? "It was the afternoon we went downhill on a very small walking path. We reached the top of a hill where the Vainu Bappu Observatory is located, and André had found a narrow clear cut going down to the river bed below. Immediately Jacky, Patrick, George and André went cycling all the way down the hillside. But Pascal and I didn't feel comfortable cycling down such steep terrain that was full of rocks and stones so we walked our bicycles down very slowly holding the brakes to keep them from somersaulting. It was a gruelling one hour." Jacky cuts in, "But that was the most perfect mountain biking terrain!" For him, it was the dead-end forest path that was testing. He recounts, "Patrick after consulting the map said, 'Look, a short cut across the hills.'" Snorts



Left to right: Jacky, André, Patrick (back row), Pascal (middle), George, Chali, Robi (front)

André, "Hah- Hah- Hah - one short cut that was! After two hours of slashing through mullus, we had to retrace our steps back to a dependable route."

Any wild animal encounters? "Apart from us, none," guffaws André.

And the most memorable moments? "Spending the nights under the starry sky in sleeping bags after hot soupy dinners of watery noo-

dles...The view from the top of the hill with unending fields of yellow rape seed flowers in full bloom...Tasting the best parotta of my life in a little tea shop at the top of the hill...The camaraderie, the experiences shared, working together, figuring things out as a team with no anger and very, very harmoniously – like one single body..."

Priya Sundaravalli

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