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Auroville-born...

What interests young people born in Auroville? How do they relate to the ideal and to the present situation of Auroville? What is it like to live outside Auroville for those who were brought up here? These are a few of the questions we asked of young Aurovilians, some of whom are living here and some of whom are visiting briefly before returning to their present homes elsewhere. On the first three pages is a selection of their responses.

"I'm really only Aurovilian"

"I'm somewhere in between. I'm nothing and everything," says Usha, taking another quick drag on her cigarette. Usha was born in Auroville and is now 23. Her father, Jean P., is French. Her mother, Diane, is Australian. Six years ago, after finishing Last School, she decided to go to France to continue her studies.

"I stayed there two years, but it was difficult. I missed Auroville. Also, because I grew up in Auroville, I had trouble with my French. I was always translating from English to French, using English syntax. I also got into trouble with my teachers because I forgot to use 'vous' (the polite form). In France, the teachers are not your friends, like in Auroville. Especially with my math instructor I made this mistake and the kids were horrified."

Usha did well in Math, and got praised for her story writing. "I wrote a story about Christmas full of images of Auroville and India. 'Your stories are interesting,' I was told. 'Unusual.'"

"I did *troisième* (10th standard). But I wanted to come home so badly. When I spoke to my father he would say, 'No, no, you have to stay there.' Finally, I came back and went to the Lycée in Pondy but that experience didn't satisfy me. Finally, one day, I took my bag and went home."

Usha started working at Auromode in



Usha

1995. "I had done some painting on silk and designing in France. So my father phoned up Prema and asked her if I could come. I worked there for almost six months, mainly supervising, sometimes painting [on silk]. Then my house burned, so I stopped. I stayed away for one month, because my house was really a mess. Then in November I started again, but Prema wanted me to work in Kalki, their store in Pondy, and I said 'No'. I did not want to go back to Pondy. I went to the dental clinic. It was quite interesting. Jacques always promised to give me more classes, but he was very busy. I worked in the village sub-centers, working a half day in the mornings. The rest of the day I was supposed to be studying. I didn't know what. I was interested in so many things. Luckily, in Auroville, you

can try different places. People are willing."

Usha jumped back to Auromode for a while, then to Pour Tous. "Then I went to Australia in 1996. I wanted to go into photography. But I realized when I was there it was so hard, there's a lot of competition. I wanted to study English. In some ways I rejected my French nationality. But I'm not really Australian either. I'm really only Aurovilian."

She almost got a job in an Indian leather shop, but at the last minute they decided not to open the shop. "At that moment I was completely depressed. I was writing a lot to Auroville! Why can't I do it in Auroville, I asked myself. Why can't I do it in Auroville?"

"So I returned to Auroville, but I needed some structure. I couldn't work by myself. I wanted to try to work really hard. I wanted to give myself to the work, but I found it was difficult. I was not stable. I was lazy. But my father said, 'Work. I won't support you anymore.' So I

worked. We (my friend Sid and I) managed. When you work, if you are sincere, it stabilises your life. It was really hard for me, but I said I have to do it for myself. So I worked two months at Lumière (an Auroville printing shop). Then a friend invited me to come to Hawaii, but almost as soon as I got there, I wanted to come back home. I came back to Lumière. I like my job. Suzanne (the manager of Lumière) is my type. She's really active. Recently she left for three days and I had to organise everything! I mainly prepare the screens and the day's work for the employees. I make the bills, prepare vouchers. I see myself continuing for a while. I'm still in the process of learning. I wouldn't mind doing this on my own some day. I'm happy. I'm into basketball too. One thing I want to say to the Auroville kids, when you find some work you can do, like now I'm working full time, it's good. It really stabilises your life."

Interview by Jill

Auralice

She was born in Auroville, is now 25 years old and lived the first 14 years of her life here. She spent two years in a high school in the USA, and another two years in the Kodaikanal International School, from where she graduated in 1990, and for the past seven years she has been living in the States. She earned her BA in International Relations and plans to go to graduate school there later. For one week in September

[continued on page 3]



"This place will never leave my soul"

Puja was born in Aspiration in 1973. Her father is American and her mother German. After attending Auroville schools, she left at the age of 16 to continue her studies in the U.S. At present she is studying for a degree in nutrition. Recently she returned to Auroville for a brief visit after a gap of four years.

"After living so long in Auroville, I found it really hard at first to integrate into U.S. society. It's a very commercial, consumer society where there are so many laws and never enough time. You find yourself running round like a crazy cockroach! I have kept my distinct personality, yet there are times when I've been overwhelmed and got totally wrapped up in that scene.

"That's why coming back to Auroville is so important for me, because whenever I come back the shell that has formed around me begins to peel, to come off. I'm faced again with my true core reality, with questions like 'Who am I?' 'Where am I going?' I'm reminded again of what's important for me in my life.

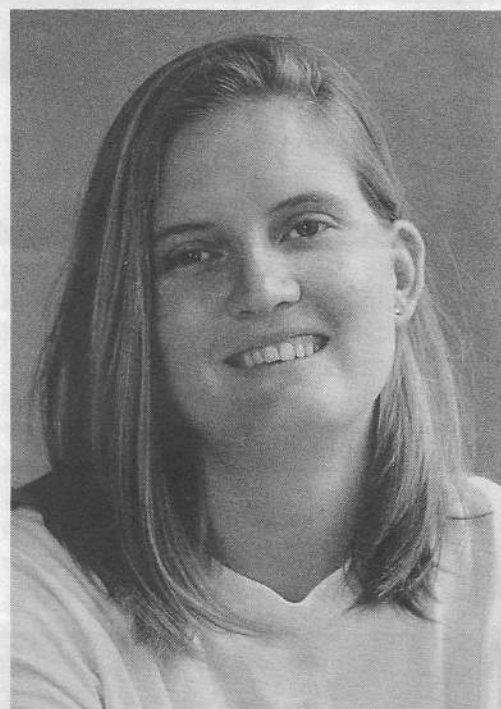
"This time in Auroville, for example, I had a very deep revelation about my future. I came here with a strong determination to go on to medical school after completing my nutrition degree. But now I've decided I won't do that because it's just too much slave labour. I'm very goal-oriented. I drive myself to the limit once I've decided upon something, but in the process I don't give space for myself. So I end up not knowing who I am any more. So being here slows me down, returns me to myself, reminds me to live in the now. It's like coming home...and getting recharged.

"When I left Auroville I was only 16. I had been used to riding my bike and my pony, and everything else had worked itself out. So there was so much about

Auroville that I wasn't aware of. This visit I've been talking to a lot more people, and I'm getting more of a picture of what's going on. And some things have really hit me; I can hardly believe they're happening in Auroville. For example, I've been saddened by a recent incident concerning a Newcomer and the Entry Group. I'm shocked to learn that the Entry Group now concerns itself so much with what people do in their private lives. Yes, Mother gave guidelines, but how can we tell Newcomers to live in a certain way when they can walk around the corner and see Aurovilians behaving differently? We've got to heal ourselves first before expecting incredible things of people coming here. In fact we should appreciate that many people invest or give up a lot to come here, and welcome that energy which wishes to contribute to what we're trying to do here.

"Another thing: when I look around Auroville I see so many wonderful project plans, but because everybody feels they have something to say (everybody feels they have something to say about everything in Auroville!) it makes it very difficult to get anything done. Everybody's ego is getting in the way, putting up roadblocks. I want to come back, I've plenty of ideas, but I know I can't be here now because the roadblocks that would be put in my way would stop me: I don't have the power right now to get over them.

"Another thing really upset me the other day. It was 6.30 in the evening, get-



Puja

ting dark, it was beginning to rain and I was walking by the road in Kuilapalayam. Actually I was limping because my knee hurt. Ten people passed me on motorcycles and not one stopped! I was furious. Where has our sense of community gone? When I was young, everybody seemed to look after everybody else, there was really the sense that people cared. Yet now, in spite of all this talk about human unity, the reality is that everybody lives their own little life in their own little house with their own little luxuries.

"Something that has also hit me hard this time is the attitude of the Auroville youth. For me, Auroville is a goldmine: you can learn anything you want to here. So it disappoints me that so many of the young Aurovilians are not taking up these opportunities, that they're not setting themselves goals and going for them. An example. The other day in the Pour Tous snack bar I asked some of them to show me how to operate the public access computer next door. Not one of them knew how to do it! 'We and computers don't get along', they said. So if they leave Auroville, what kind of jobs are they going to get? Stacking shelves?

"Perhaps in order to appreciate the opportunities here you have to leave Auroville. Yet I was really impacted by the schooling in Auroville. It gave me the drive, the ambition and self-confidence to get to where I want to go, and to get there with flying colours. I was under the impression that all of us who went through schooling here had that same thing—but now I'm learning that's not the case, and it saddens me.

"On a personal level, while the inner chamber of Matrimandir holds a special magic, a tremendous power for me, I'm disappointed by the outside. I thought Matrimandir was so beautiful when you could see through to the chamber, could see the beams—I would sit and gaze at it for hours—but now that it's a closed box it's lost its allure. And if the disks are put on, I think it will just be an eyesore, a golden reflective pin-cushion. I still hope that I'll be surprised by the final result but at the moment Matrimandir doesn't attract me much.

"But I also see positive developments in the community. The fact that the population is growing is good, and I'm happy to see more industry because this is desperately needed for the continuation of the community. There are also some really nice projects, like the Solar Kitchen and the Success wildlife sanctuary, and people are using alternative energy and building energy-efficient homes. And it's great when you're outside to be able to keep in touch with things here through e-mail.

"Finally, for me, Auroville is not just a place on the map. It's in my heart, it's who I am. And what I've learned here, and what I am because I've lived here will never ever leave me: this place will never leave my soul. In this sense whether I am living here or not seems irrelevant. But it's also important, if Auroville is to be part of something global, that Aurovilians do go and live outside. So I guess that at the moment I'm one of those people out there, a little blinking light..."

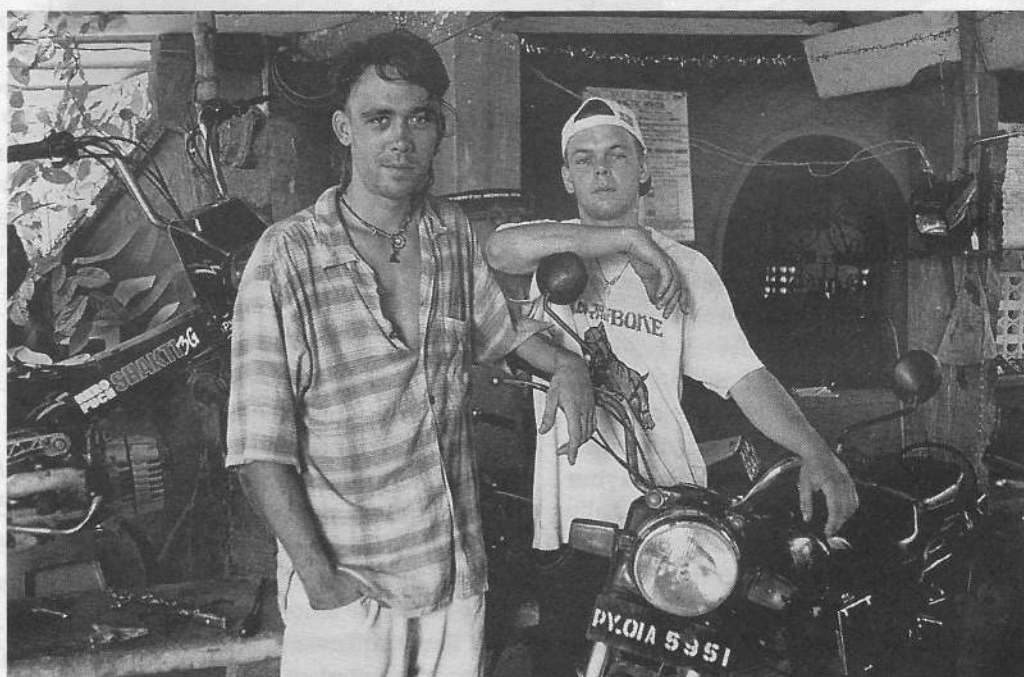
From an interview by Alan

Boris Rents Scooters

You turn off the main road at the Eucalyptus Grove, bounce over a couple of empty fields, thread your way through some cashew trees and abruptly you're in Boris's workshop. He runs a rental service of various scooters for Auroville. But to go there (even if you could find it) is unnecessary because he delivers the bike to your door and can give you the mini-course on how to operate it in your choice of three languages. When you're finished you phone, and he picks up the bike. Boris belongs to that unusual collection of Auroville youth who are not kids anymore. He loves motorcycles — built his own home-made diesel motorcycle—and turned his passion into a means of support and service. He had to go and work in Europe a couple of times to get the money to buy his first scooters and after two and a half years he has ten vehicles and a workshop

to maintain them. He also built the workshop himself and hopes to keep improving it. The workshop runs only on solar energy which he converts to AC to operate the compressor and power tools.

Ritam, a recently returned "Auroville youth" who is also into bikes helps him now. Boris says of him, "He's a true Aurovillian because he really works as an honorary voluntary worker." Dorai, a young employee, is also a valuable asset. "There is no profit in the work as the expenses of building and maintaining the workshop are high," comments Boris. Once the construction is finished, Boris would like to start a subsidized park 'n ride for Aurovilians who would come on their cycles, take a vehicle for a trip to Pondy or somewhere and then return it and cycle back home. He also wants to move into electro-bikes and vehicles. For the moment, he has too much work repairing other bikes, but he plans to specialize in the repair of Honda Kinetic scooters eventually. "Of course," he adds,



"Kids can come here any time...": Boris (left) and Ritam at the workshop

"kids can come here anytime to work on their own bikes and I have a little time to help them fix their bikes."

He and Ritam finish putting in the brake shoes and getting the wheel on.

Then Ritam jumps on and goes for the "test ride" into the open field with the front wheel in the air. Boris smiles approvingly.

Bill

Auralice (contd. from page 1)

she visited Auroville before starting her new job in Delhi.

Auralice: "International Relations seemed to me the only and the most appropriate thing to choose to study when I went to college. At first I did not really even know what 'international relations' meant, but it sounded like something to do with my life, with having grown up in Auroville, an international township, and also with the fact that I speak French and a bit of Tamil. Somehow so far I have stuck with that area of study and I guess I will be going on with it for now."

"I am about to go to Delhi to work as a voluntary intern for a writer/economist/political activist named Devaki Jain. She champions women's political rights in India and other developing nations, and has become very active in that field. She has participated in several global conferences, and organizes seminars and other activities in India to help to teach women to take advantage of their political rights. I've only met her once, so I do not yet know what it will be like to work as her personal assistant, but I think the experience could become a really inter-

esting one for me. When she interviewed me and others in New York for this position, I somehow seemed to be the best person because I would require less 'babysitting' here, being accustomed to India and the differences between the developing and developed worlds.

"When I lived in the States, I never went more than two years without coming back to Auroville. This is where I feel most at home. That does not mean that it is always easy for me to come back, just as I am sure it is not easy for anybody from anywhere to go home after being away for a while. There is each time a larger gap between myself and the friends I knew growing up. I want to be able to come back and just immediately be able to relate to all of them as I once did, slip back into life here. Of course that is not possible. And so it can sometimes be very sad. I see everything sort of drift further and further from what Auroville was to me as a child. I think becoming an adult means that one has to go through a process whereby childhood ideals sort of fall away, and the things or people that used to seem perfect suddenly have flaws. I think maybe this is a harder process for me as an Aurovilian because I was taught so strongly and certainly to trust in the realization of a city full of superhumanly conscious people.

"I can at times feel very betrayed that way. It's almost as if I was promised something of Auroville and then never actually got it. I know that this is not anyone's fault, and that such things take time, but still I think that Auroville raised me to believe it would be sooner, easier.

"What I would answer if someone of my age asked me whether to stay here or go out of Auroville... I don't know, it really depends on the person. Everybody is different and has different circumstances. Certainly, though, it can be good to go out. Those people that came to Auroville as adults were able to see Auroville in the larger global picture, and to choose it as the place where they wanted to be. Growing up here, Auroville is a very different reality. I think definitely it is good to see it from a different perspective, to see other people's perspectives, and to understand that the present state of human consciousness is not just something that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother thought about. So many others have written about it, thought about it, theorized about it. It is so interesting to learn about those other possibilities. It's important too. It is not really necessary to go out I guess, just to be curious and open. I think there is a lot of hostility amongst some of the people that I have

grown up with in Auroville, perhaps it comes from that, from not really knowing about all those other options. There is so much else out there."

"Right now I don't feel as though I could live here in Auroville. Perhaps eventually I will. I don't know. Maybe I will just end up being an Aurovilian outside of Auroville. At times I am certain that I can do much more outside Auroville; probably because I grew up here and have so much baggage, so many of the things that I am exposed to in Auroville tend to slow me down.

"Twice I brought a friend with me. When I described Auroville to them, I did it very carefully; I'm very protective of Auroville and afraid of what people will say. I want them to love it, and to see the good things, the beauty of Auroville. So I always prepare them for the worst, not wanting them to be disappointed. I tell them, people might be rude to you. The two friends who visited thought it was a beautiful place, but some of my friends here were in fact rude to them, unfriendly, which was sad. That's the whole thing—there's such a fear of the outside rather than an embracing of it. One of the two friends in fact wound up moving here. I introduced him to Auroville and he is still living here!

Based upon an interview by

CYCLE YATRA*

My name is Palani. I am almost 20 years old. I was born in Auroville Health Centre. I had my education in New Creation, when I was younger. I have been staying in New Creation for almost eight years. I continued my studies in Last School. And now I am studying in After School. Recently, my friends and I took a cycle tour. I kept a diary. Here are some of the best and worst moments of our trip.



On the bridge at Rameswaram: (l.to r.): Ravi, Palani, Elumalai, Murugan

Five of us—Ravi, Elumalai, Murugan, Suresh and myself, Palani—planned to go for a cycle trip to Kanyakumari. Everyday we used to sit at After School cafeteria and discuss our trip, at snack and lunch break. We started our trip on the 26th May. We started to cycle very slowly the first days. After covering 70 kilometres our buttocks began to burn; some of us got blisters and our wrists began to ache, too. Somehow we managed to cycle in pain for 120 kms. Through the entire trip we did not have any major problem with our cycles except for three punctures.

A NICE FELLOW

One night we reached a place called Devakottai. We thought that it was a big town with lodging facilities. Unfortunately, it was not a good town. It was like a village. We were very much worried

**Yatra is a Hindi word and means "pilgrimage" or "grand tour".*

about the situation because we could not find a place to sleep that night and also we could not find a nice restaurant to eat. We went to a cheap hotel and there they said that they would give food only for lunch and breakfast. We did not know what to eat. So we were forced to eat bananas and some *bajis*. (deep-fried snack-eds.) After our simple dinner we did not know where to rest. One guy from that area came to us and he gave us some instructions, to ask for a place in that village church. All of us discussed for a while.

HOSPITALITY

While we were discussing, a kind-hearted man came like a god and asked about our native city. When we answered him that we are coming from Pondicherry he could not believe it. The stranger said that he used to go also for cycle tours for two days when he was young. When we told him that we did not have any place, with a welcoming heart he took us to his

house very kindly. And he gave the upstairs for us. He even asked us to eat with him, but we half-heartedly said that we ate already.

ADVICE FROM STRANGERS

On our trip we met many people. Some people gave us good advice about the roads and the situation about the place where we were heading. They asked us many questions. When we approached the city Rajapalayam we saw in the newspaper that six people were murdered and a big riot was going on. Many of the villagers warned us not to cross that area. But we had no other option because we needed a place to stay for the night. We were very scared but we were not ready to stop our trip so soon. We prayed and believed that something was behind us and protected us. With a heavy heart we entered the city. The city was covered with policemen. People warned us not to leave our lodges at night. Even at night we could not sleep

well.

We crossed small villages which suffered a lot from lack of drinking water. They had their drinking water from ponds and wells. When we crossed these villages we had to fill our bottles with pond water. Then we came to know that many people were suffering from typhoid. Some of us were not well. We decided to rely on mineral water.

SHORTS STORY

We could not cycle with long pants, so we wore shorts, otherwise we would not feel comfortable. We knew for sure that villagers would not like that. Whenever we crossed a village they thought we were foreigners. Whenever we met school girls and college girls, they were laughing at us. A school girl shouted at us, "Hello, boys. Don't you have long pants?" Then we all realized what was going on.

WIND GENERATORS

On the way to Kouthalam waterfalls, which is in Tirunelveli District, we saw thousands of wind generators which stood like giant monsters everywhere. It was really a wonderful sight. We won't forget that rare scene with green mountains below and the white wind generators which looked very beautiful. Suddenly, the story of Don Quixote came to my mind.

EGG DISASTER

A truck full of egg trays got into an accident and it was there without any person there. Suddenly, the local villagers came and started to take the eggs away. They knew that these eggs were going to be wasted. Some boys played with the eggs, throwing them at each other. This incident made us very angry at the villagers, because they did not feel pity for

(contd. on page 7)

Impressions of August

August is the cruellest month. There is always too much to do—concerts, performances and talks to attend, friends returning home for Darshan to visit, formal meetings and dinners with the Governing Board to arrange, and in the midst of all this whirlwind of activity, one tries to remain calm, collected, to allow the Grace to descend.

Many Aurovilians have experienced this intense pre-Darshan pressure that hits Auroville in February and August. But this year, it being the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo perhaps, the pressure seemed to be even more intense.

Let's see, we had a bonfire, of course—a good one at that—nicely organised by the youth. Behind the scenes, Suhasini, Gilles and others worked overtime to get the Dining Room of the Cuisine Solaire Pour Tous (or the Solar Kitchen as it is more popularly referred to) finished in time to host a community breakfast on the 15th. The Dining Room, well-lit and spacious, is painted in bright colours. But undoubtedly, the main attraction is the beautiful stained-glass window of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's symbols (see article, "An Irish Touch at Cuisine Solaire"). The Kitchen itself is expected to be functional by October this year.

At the same time the Dining Room was being inaugurated, upstairs in the same

building complex, the community's computer network "Auronet!" was hosting an open house to acquaint first time e-mail users and computer geeks with the possibilities of e-mail communication and the Internet. "Auronet!" will soon be moving into its own office at Cuisine Solaire.

And in the afternoon of that day the new Auroville Sports Complex was inaugurated with a quiet meditation and there was a slide-show on "Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Man." The slide-show was originally prepared, by Christine, Serge and others, for the exhibition hosted by India International Centre and Auroville in New Delhi (see "Exhibition on Sri Aurobindo" on this page). Replete with carefully chosen photographs, including less well-known ones of Sri Aurobindo and India from pre-Independence days, Sanskrit poems and slokas, and speeches of Sri Aurobindo read by Aurovilians, the slide-show skilfully interweaves text and image to convey a truly soul-stirring message of Sri Aurobindo's vision for India and mankind.

The days before and after Darshan were sprinkled with a variety of events. Marti mounted an exhibition of photographs she took during the last 10 or 15 years (see "More than just black and white" on the opposite page); Nirodbaran visited Auroville and Prof. Aravinda Basu

gave a talk on "Spiritual Experiences and the Integral Realisation" to a packed house at Pitanga. The Auroville Dance Group presented "Savitri: A Dance Performance" as part of their sadhana, attempting to "communicate in movement the deep and subtle emotional dimension of Mother's reading [of Savitri] and Sunil's music." Auroville musicians (Holger, violin; Pushkar, piano and Marcello, a guest, cello) entertained Aurovilians on three quiet evenings with selections from Bach, Brahms, Beethoven and Franck. To mark the 40th anniversary of their school and the Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, students from the Mother's International School in New Delhi presented a laudable dramatic enactment, of epic proportions, of scenes from Sri Aurobindo's life entitled "From Dawn to Greater Dawn"; the Governing Board met and deliberated on various issues; and Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, the Chairman of the Governing Board gave a talk on "The Problem of Food in the 21st century"

The August fever is over. The buzz of seemingly intense activity has quieted. But the work continues, at the individual level and increasingly at the collective level. New ventures, new initiatives are being tried out, and the community progresses slowly with small steps towards its ideals.

Bindu

Exhibition on Sri Aurobindo

In August, the India International Centre in Delhi hosted a five-day exhibition on Sri Aurobindo, prepared by some artists residing in the international city of Auroville. The theme of this exhibition was Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Man.

How to present Sri Aurobindo and his vision in a way that could appeal not only to the intellect but also to the aesthetic sense, how to present certain texts of Sri Aurobindo without resorting to lining up panels to be read, how to select these texts without diminishing the vastness of his vision, and how to create an atmosphere suitable for receiving Sri Aurobindo's message, these were the difficulties as well as the challenges.

The idea was to create a space of silence and beauty in which the viewer would find himself as if alone with Sri Aurobindo and his words. So the exhibition was conceived as a unique "yantram" around which people could move. (See photo on p.7—eds.) This yantram, which was square in shape and occupied the middle of the room, was made of transparent boxes laid on the floor, containing the extraordinary red earth of Auroville. On these glass panels were placed alternately some lines of Sri Aurobindo and some pictures to illustrate them. At the center of the yantram, a square panel made of small gold-leaf tiles contrasted with the deep red of the earth. Specially selected music contributed to enhance the atmosphere.

Four large pictures hanging on the four walls facing the yantram underlined four

(continued on page 7)

An Irish touch at the Cuisine Solaire

THE
STORY
OF A
WINDOW

During the late sixties two English ladies, both of them deeply interested in spiritual matters, travelled through Ireland. Edith Schnapper and Morwenna Donnelly had both discovered Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's work; together they had created a study circle which met regularly in a flat near Cambridge in England. Their trip through Ireland was for leisure, strolling through the small cities and villages that dot the Irish countryside. In one of them they saw the shop of glazier, a master craftsman who specialised in stained glass windows. Admiring his work, Morwenna and Edith decided to ask him to design a stained glass window for their meeting room in Cambridge: a window where the symbols of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would be artistically combined, symbolic of their action on the world. Some days later, the glazier showed them his design. Pleased, they ordered the work and had it installed in the flat in Cambridge where, for many years, it filtered the light for all those who attended the sessions. When the flat was no longer available, Edith moved with another friend, Joy Calvert into a country house called "Boytons". Morwenna had the window dismantled and stored in the garage of her new house.

Years passed. The window gathered

dust in the garage. Edith and Joy joined a circle of "friends of Auroville", which soon came to be known as Auroville International U.K. Those lucky enough to be invited for longer stays at "Boytons" soon discovered the loft, accessible through a trapdoor only, which served as a meditation place. It was after one such meditation that I chanced upon a photo of this stained glass window. Edith told me the story, adding that this photo had been sent to the Mother, who had returned it with her blessings, commenting that it was very beautiful. When I learned that the window was lying unused, I requested Edith to give it to Auroville. Edith approached Morwenna but the latter refused, saying that it should be kept in England.

Other Aurovilians staying at "Boytons" were equally struck by the photo of the window. "Couldn't a copy in plexiglas be made for the Visitors' Centre that was just being built?", they asked. Edith and Joy thought that was a splendid idea and donated the money for it. Rolf, a German artist in Auroville, made a small model, but somehow the plexiglas version never was made. In the meantime, the Visitors' Centre neared completion, and the possibility to have it installed there disappeared. Meanwhile, the original window continued to gather dust.



The window

(Note: the black bars in the photograph are part of the wooden frame)

After Edith passed away, Joy moved out from "Boytons" to her family's estate near Ockley, in Surrey. Shortly thereafter, Morwenna passed away as well. On one of my visits to her, Joy told me, "I sent my condolences to her husband, and, as an afterthought, added a postscript: 'What are you going to do with that window?' By return mail I got his answer: 'I have no idea. If you want it, please come and get it.' The next day Joy and I took the car and went to see the window. We immediately agreed that it should be sent to Auroville."

Auroville International UK ensured that the window was picked up, the wood removed and the stained glass pieces carefully packed and sent by air-

mail to Auroville. There, for a couple more years, it lay in a storeroom. Then, one day, a very appropriate place was found: in the new collective solar kitchen which was nearing completion. A wall was required to be broken down and some minor structural adjustments to allow for the installation of the window. But finally it was done, in time for the celebration of Sri Aurobindo's 125th Birth Anniversary and the first community breakfast at the new kitchen. Now the sun shines through the radiant coloured symbols of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a reminder of the Mother's words on 15 August 1972: "Sri Aurobindo's message is an immortal sunlight radiating over the future."

Carel

More than just black and white

Bindu writes about a photo exhibition by Marti

It is not that works of art are rare in Auroville. It is not that good photographs are rare. What stunned me about Marti's photo expo entitled simply as, "Mostly black and white" is the range of her work: Stonehenge covered with snow in hazy moonlight; light and shade on the mystic ruins of Machu Picchu; travellers slouching at a train-door in India; Cambodian refugees deserting camp after a bombing; graffiti on a Capetown wall; costumed Italians at the annual spring carnival in Venice; Masai warriors at prayer; punks in Paris... That, and the quality of the portraits, the range of emotions they convey: the dignity of young Buddhist monks, the cool hip of Paris punks, the quiet resignation of a Quechua Indian housekeeper... and is it exasperation that one sees on the face of Lawrence Ferlinghetti (the American Beat poet) as he sits sipping his drink on a houseboat on the Seine? To me, the expo opened a window for Aurovilians to the diverse cultures and peoples that populate our world. And all this from a woman that I knew as a friend, a fellow-writer, an artist and an environmentalist, but no, never as a photographer. Not for a moment had I guessed that she could handle a camera with such adept ease.

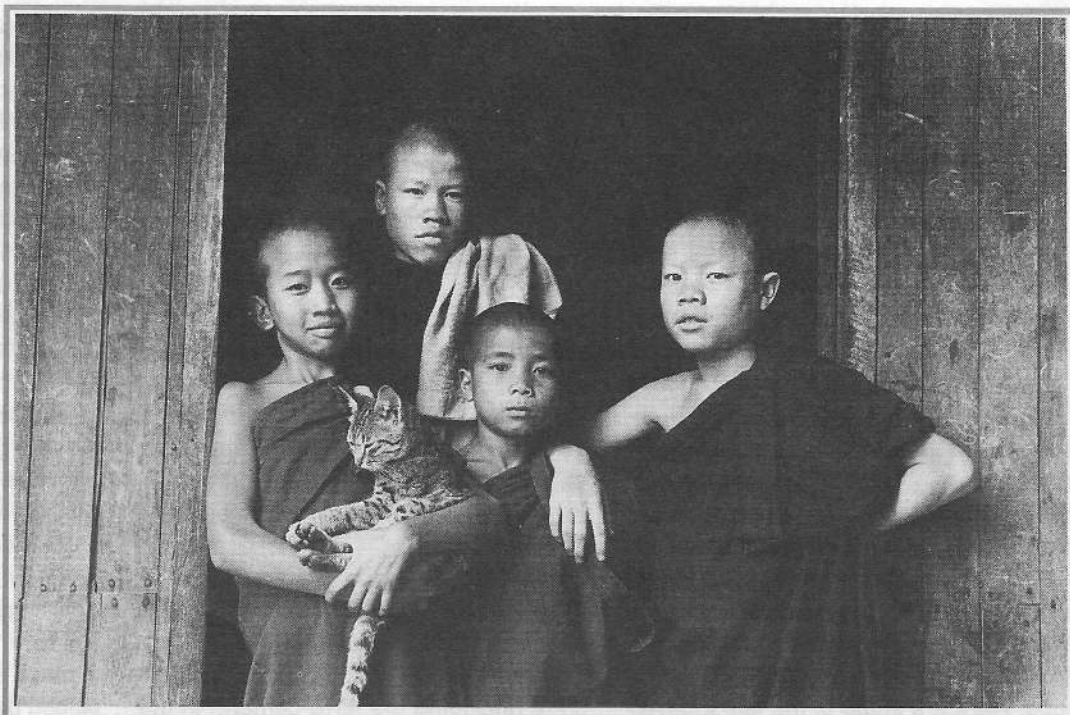
"I believe that's what surprised Aurovilians the most," laughs Marti. "You see, when I came to Auroville, 15 years back, there was so much to be done. And I wanted to help out, to participate in the community, be part of it and not stand outside, observing it and recording it with a camera."

"Even though my photography was mostly geared for the print media during my career as a professional journalist—in

the beginning I was a writer, but I soon started taking pictures as well—I detested intruding on people's lives with my camera. The camera can make an event impersonal. It records the emotions, the sadness, the joy, the apprehension in human lives, and yet by doing so, it robs life of the moment. Sometimes the decision whether to shoot an event and fix it in time or to let the moment pass becomes important... I will always remember for instance, the conflict of emotions, the suffering and the peace, in this dying man's face in Cambodia. But I could not bring myself to photograph him. I did not want his last moment in life to be of me and my camera.

"But again, though I have done a fair amount of landscape photographing, what interests me most is people. And on certain occasions, in order to capture a moment where the people feel free enough to be oblivious to my camera, I have lived with them and participated as much as possible in their way of life. I don't use a tele-photo lens, you see. I like to have a certain intimacy with my subject. My standard equipment is a Leica with a hand-held meter and a 50 mm lens.

"I guess, as an artist, I have a certain visual sense. But I feel my paintings are more subjective and more 'naive' in some ways than my photographs. Photography combines so many things—there are the



"These young monks, at this remote mountain retreat in Burma, who look so solemn and dignified here, had been running and playing just minutes before the photo was taken. Then they scooped up the cat that was napping in the sun and stood so silently for the photo that I could hear them breathing. It was a funny kind of family portrait."

techniques of lighting and movement and form that you have to know or feel, there is the event unfolding in front of your eyes that you have to record, often in split seconds, but how you interpret the event, how you arrange that moment in time and space, all that depends on you—and this is where photography becomes an art."

(Marti has won international awards for her photography and mounted exhibitions in London, Amsterdam, Paris and San Francisco. Her work has been published by *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Le Monde*, and is now included in the permanent collection of the International Museum of Photography in Fribourg, Switzerland.)



"The killing fields of Cambodia where more than 7 million people died. And yet, despite this, despite the grave danger, the constant threat to their lives, (I lived with them for a few months and whenever there were bombings, we had to desert camp and run. I would be holding somebody's baby in one hand and clutching my camera with the other), I found great happiness there. These were the survivors. This camp of 200,000 people were close to the border. They were the ones who had made it and there was a happy, festive feeling in the air. A celebration of life in the face of death."



"The Peruvian Indians, because of their experience of a colonial regime, are often hostile to strangers. It was difficult to get close to them. There was something about this Quechua woman, the way she sat in the courtyard on the eve of the Paucartambo festival (a celebration of the Winter Solstice) that spoke to me. Perhaps it was her quiet dignity despite her poverty and suffering..."

MATRIMANDIR UPDATE

Some months ago, the Matrimandir Forum commissioned a study to see if Roger Anger's design for the disks, the outer skin and the inner skin is technically feasible and, if so, whether any improvements could be made. Michael Bonke, who has been coordinating the research in Germany, was in Auroville recently. He reported that the research, while confirming that Roger's design is technically feasible, has also thrown up some important modifications. Here are some of the latest developments.

The disks Four test disks, covered in glass-gold tiles using different kinds of glass and glues (the gold is fused inside a thin glass sandwich) have been made and are being tested and placed on the structure for observation. The smaller disks use 972 glass-gold tiles and the larger about two thousand. A total of 1200 disks are needed to cover Matrimandir, of which 400 in fibre-reinforced polyester (FRP) are ready for glass-tiling. It has been decided, for reasons of longevity and safety, to make the base for the remaining 800 disks in stainless steel; a sample is on the way from Poona where all the stainless steel bases for the disks will be manufactured.

The material chosen, after extensive tests, to fix the glass-tiles to the disks is a silicon-based adhesive called 'structural glazing'. In accelerated weathering tests its simulated lifespan exceeds 100 years. After this adhesive has reached the end of its lifespan, the stainless steel disks can be heated up, the tiles removed, and then both the stainless steel and tiles reused. Stainless steel is also a better medium for this adhesive.

The stainless steel disks will weigh more than the FRP disks (20 kgs. more for a small disk, 40 kgs. more for the big disk) but this increase is negligible in comparison to the wind-forces for which the fixing is designed.

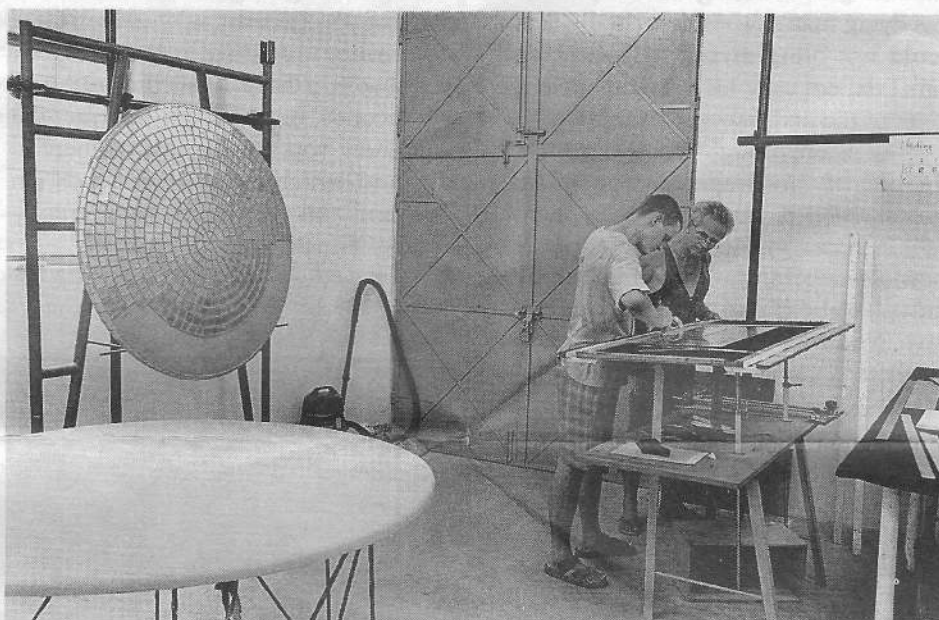
The non-symmetrical pattern in which the glass-tiles will be laid on the surface of the disk has almost been finalised. The gaps between the tiles will be reduced to 1 millimetre from the present 3 millimetres. At present, only one small disk a week can be completed (i.e. the glass tiles stuck to the backing of the disk) in the Matrimandir workshop. A second vacuum-oven to make the tiles is ready to be dispatched from Germany. This will increase the possible disk production to one big and one small disk a day.

Fixing the disks The main problem encountered so far is the bimetallic corrosion which would result from fixing the mild steel bolts already on the structure to the stainless steel bolts on the disks. Dr. Gruen, a specialist from Germany, suggests solving this by screwing a stainless steel bolt over the mild steel bolt and then placing the connection point of the two materials well below the waterproofing membrane which will cover the surface of

the structure. A raised waterproof 'boot' around the point where the struts from the disk meet the outer skin will ensure that there is no water infiltration.

This proposal will result in the disks being approximately 10 cms. further outside the outer skin, which may also facilitate cleaning.

The outer skin The Central Electrochemical Research Institute (Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu) have reported that all the concrete (including the ferro-cement) in the Matrimandir structure is basically sound. However, they stress that the concrete and ferrocement must be protected against humidity and carbon dioxide corrosion as soon as possible and have recommended



Workshop where the glass-gold tiles for the disks are made

a coating of a corrosion inhibitor for the whole structure.

Dr. Gruen has not yet finalised the full feasibility study he is preparing on Matrimandir, but his studies regarding the waterproofing have been completed and confirm that the ferrocement panels must be waterproofed immediately. Dr. Gruen and other experts have all recommended that the only effective waterproofing solution for Matrimandir is a membrane which would be painted on to form an elastic layer covering the outer skin. The best product on the market appears to be Kemperol which can bridge cracks of up to 5 millimetres and which has been used in many buildings around the world for 25 years now. The company has agreed to supervise its application on Matrimandir and to provide a 10-year guarantee. Negotiations are under way to extend this to 20 years.

The inner surface of the outer skin will be coated with a thin polyurethane lacquer as a barrier to carbon dioxide. Research is continuing with a company in Germany to produce such a lacquer with a non-poisonous thinner.

The inner skin Glass is now favoured for the inside surface of the structure (often referred to as the 'inner skin') since it has

been ascertained that sufficient daylight comes through the portholes to illuminate the inner skin. The glass needs to be of a colour that can produce the necessary orange-pink light, and experiments are continuing to make the coloured glass, manufactured in Germany, compatible with the float-glass which will be purchased in India. Once this is done, the coloured glass will be crushed and sieved onto the surface of the float glass. The glass will then be heated to 800 centigrade in a kiln to enable the coloured glass to fuse with the float glass. Finally, the glass sheets will be made into security glass, probably by painting a polyurethane splinter-proof coat on one side. The fusing and the coating with polyurethane can be done in Auroville.

The glass will be glued onto the existing 800 triangular frames, and will be held in place by raised flanges. At night, lamps placed between the outer and inner skins will illuminate the inner skin, creating a fairly similar effect to that achieved in daylight.

The outer surface of the inner skin can be accessed easily. However, research is continuing to discover the best way to

manufacture glass at Matrimandir was unsuccessful and that the suggested waterproofing solution may not work under the conditions that exist here.

A number of Aurovilians continue to express a preference for alternative designs of the outer skin. The two main alternatives are covering the outer skin with tiles and incorporating a disk design into the outer skin itself: both these options would dispense with projecting disks. Michael Bonke mentioned that he had discussed both these proposals with experts and the conclusion was that:

1) While applying tiles to the surface of Matrimandir would facilitate cleaning, it does not constitute a waterproofing. Tiles can be applied on top of the Kemperol waterproofing membrane but this requires the use of a special adhesive as well as a general levelling out of the surface of the uneven outer skin. The present design allows the gold disks to absorb heat and shade the surface of the outer skin from sun, thus reducing surface inequalities in temperature during the day which place huge stresses on the structure. The tile design would not have this advantage. In fact, the experts consulted so far are unanimous that tiles alone are not an option for the outer skin of Matrimandir.

2) An outer skin which integrates the disks in some way would be technically much more complex to realise than the present design and would require a great deal of maintenance thereafter.

Meanwhile, the design modifications for the second level inside Matrimandir that were rejected last year by the Matrimandir Forum have been re-proposed by Roger Anger. The modifications—which include putting waterfalls in the four pillars and a perpetual flame at the beginning of each ramp—have again been rejected on the grounds that they unnecessarily complicate the original design.

New sub-committee The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation at its August meeting appointed a sub-committee of the Board to look into Matrimandir with a view to expediting the process. Roger Anger is the chairman, Ashok Chatterjee the vice-Chairman and N. Bala Baskar, Secretary to the Foundation, is the convener. The Matrimandir Coordination Group has written a letter to the Governing Board objecting to the arbitrary way in which the committee was formed and questioning the need for such a body.

Discussions, meetings, bees

An extensive discussion is ongoing on one of the Auroville International email forums about various suggestions and values concerning the Matrimandir construction process. And the community of Auroville is planning a Residents Assembly meeting on Matrimandir in the very near future, at which one topic will undoubtedly be the need to reinvolve the larger community in what is happening there.

Meanwhile, more than 35 colonies of rock bees (*apis dorsata*) have built nests on the demonstration disks, scaffolding pipes and planks attached to the outer skin of Matrimandir. No matter what decisions are made in meetings these bees have their own agenda, sometimes swarming down to attack people for no apparent reason.

Alan and Bill

access and clean the inner surface. One possibility is to fit attachments to the nodes of the beam structure to allow scaffolding to be erected whenever necessary.

The ramps The 12 millimetre float glass from Germany has arrived in Calcutta to be bent into the curved parapet for the access ramps to the chamber. Running along the top of the panels will be a brass handrail.

Solar plant The solar plant for the lighting of Matrimandir is now under construction near the gardens.

Finance and timing Although funds for the completion of the disks, their fixation, the waterproofing of the outer skin and the construction of the inner skin are guaranteed, many other work areas of Matrimandir are very short of funds.

It is estimated that if all goes according to plan and additional funding is provided for these other areas Matrimandir can be completed in around two years.

Further design ideas and modifications Some Aurovilians continue to have serious reservations about the present design proposals. They point out, for example, that a previous experiment to

Cycle Yatra (contd. from page 3)

those people who came in the truck.

COMMUNICATING

When we crossed from one district to another we had a tough time communicating because they speak very differently from the way they speak here in Kullapalayam. Especially when we came near the Kerala border we were real strangers to the language because the Tamil there is mixed with Malayalam.

ROAD PROBLEMS

We decided to take the major roads but avoided highways as most of the local roads made us very angry with the big holes and big bumps. We travelled only for a hundred kilometres on the highway from Tiruchy to Oolundurpettai. We could not cycle happily because of heavy traffic. The lorries did not give us space to move. Whenever a lorry came near us we had to get off the road. We cycled very carefully. We were very scared when we saw accidents on our way. We saw many accidents in just six kilometres.

Whenever we reached our destination, we would phone from that spot to Auroville to let them know that we arrived safely.

VISITING OUR HEADMASTER

By the telephone connection we

came to know that our After School headmaster, Prof. Somasundaram, was in Karaikudi, which is his hometown. He went for a visit to see his family. So when we got to Karaikudi we gave a surprise visit to him which made them all amazed. We spent half an hour in his house and we had nice sweet mangoes from our beloved teacher's house and we started our journey towards Ramanathapuram. When we were in Ramanathapuram, we heard from our school that some of us had been selected for possible schooling in England. (*More about this in our next issue—eds*). Two of us wanted to be there, but three of us wanted to continue the Yatra, so we sent them back by bus. Their absence made us sad. For two days we felt their absence. Anyway, things changed. When we took the road from Ramanathapuram to Tuticorin we had to follow the coastal road. The wind was blowing strongly such that we had to push our cycles for kilometres. Our lips were all dry from the hot winds. To cover ten kilometres we had to get down ten times. It took us more than an hour. Totally we suffered for a hundred kilometres from Ramanathapuram to Kanyakumari.

THE RISING SUN

In Kanyakumari, the most beautiful scene is the rising sun. We stayed in Vivekananda Ashram where people wake up at 4:30 and they prepare themselves

to do the morning prayers for the rising sun. Most of the people there were visitors. There were almost 300 people every morning at the seashore, watching the sun. We took some nice photos of the rising sun. It was dark red, and we could see the red colour covering the sea. We will never forget that wonderful sight!

THE FINAL DAY

On the final day of our expedition we rested in a junction called Ulundurpettai. The whole night we did not sleep because the mosquitoes did not let us sleep. We had a horrible night there. We woke up very early and came to Pondicherry.

FUTURE PLANS

To arrange this cycle tour we worked really hard to get some money. Somehow we got some money from Auroville Summer Camp and some small units also helped us a lot by giving some donation. We had this problem because we did not plan it well because of our examination. We took the decision very quickly and we did everything very quickly. Next time we don't want this to happen. We want to plan our tour earlier so that we can find enough money and materials in advance.

We all have planned to go for a cycle trip covering the Western Ghats and all the states (Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra) until Goa.

Palani

Exhibition (contd. from page 4)

aspects of Sri Aurobindo's vision for the future of mankind:

- the spiritual gift of India to the world
- the world-movement towards human unity
- the next step in man's evolution
- the new world

In a space adjacent to the main exhibition hall panels presenting the Auroville Charter in various languages as well as some texts and messages from Mother about Auroville were displayed. Visitors also had the possibility to look through books, brochures and leaflets about the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and various aspects of the Auroville experiment. This exhibition was inaugurated on the 4th of August by Dr Karan Singh.

Besides the exhibition, two special evenings took place. The first, presided over by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, was devoted to Sri Aurobindo. The audience was invited to watch a slide-show, prepared by Aurovilians, which focused on Sri Aurobindo's message to India on the 15th of August 1947. In this presentation, it was recalled that Sri Aurobindo was the first to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India. And it was also made clear that when Sri Aurobindo "withdrew" to Pondicherry in 1910, he continued the battle on another plane: in his "retirement" he kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action.

Another evening was devoted to the experiment of Auroville, the international city founded by the Mother in 1968, an experiment dedicated to human unity, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. A panel of Aurovilians, both Indian and foreign, had organised the session. At the outset some messages given by the Mother about Auroville were read out so as to make clear the spiritual aim and the very basis of the endeavour. Then the Aurovilians presented a slide-show with commentary about the different aspects of life in Auroville: environmental work, educational and social work, building and architecture, business activities, community organisation, etc. At this point, many questions were asked by people wishing to visit Auroville. The evening ended on a moving note when one of the Aurovilians on behalf of all the others expressed his gratitude to India for hosting this unique experiment called Auroville.

The entire presentation was very warmly received and the Aurovilians hope to bring the exhibition to all the major cities of India.

At the Delhi exhibition on Sri Aurobindo: "Yantram", with Auroville's earth

PHOTO: ILA



characterized by methods suitable for dealing with a certain aspect of reality; spiritual knowledge uses different methods and has access to different aspects of reality. They complement each other but do not play each other's roles.

When Sri Aurobindo speaks of some utmost atomic existence at which one arrives in spite of all divisions, this can only mean that there are fundamental (meaning, not further divisible) particles. Yet Shraddhalu claims that this passage implies the non-existence of fundamental particles. Apparently he gets this from Sri Aurobindo's sentence: "Not any original Matter is the cause of atomic existence". But Sri Aurobindo does not deny atomic existence here; he only says that it has a different cause (namely the fact that the dividing action of the mind is checked by "the saving knowledge of the supramental").

Shraddhalu's attempt to hitch Sri Aurobindo to an obsolete scientific theory—the planetary model of the atom—is deplorable, for this is an effective way of making Sri Aurobindo's own thought seem obsolete.

The picture Shraddhalu paints of whirling atomic cores and whirling electrons is wrong in many ways, all of which arise from his failure to understand the most profound implication of contemporary physics: the objects described by quantum physics cannot be visualized. With this insight physics has gone behind the manifest world and brought to light a domain which is instrumental in the process of manifestation. This has made it possible to understand, down to the minutest quantitative detail, not only that every fun-

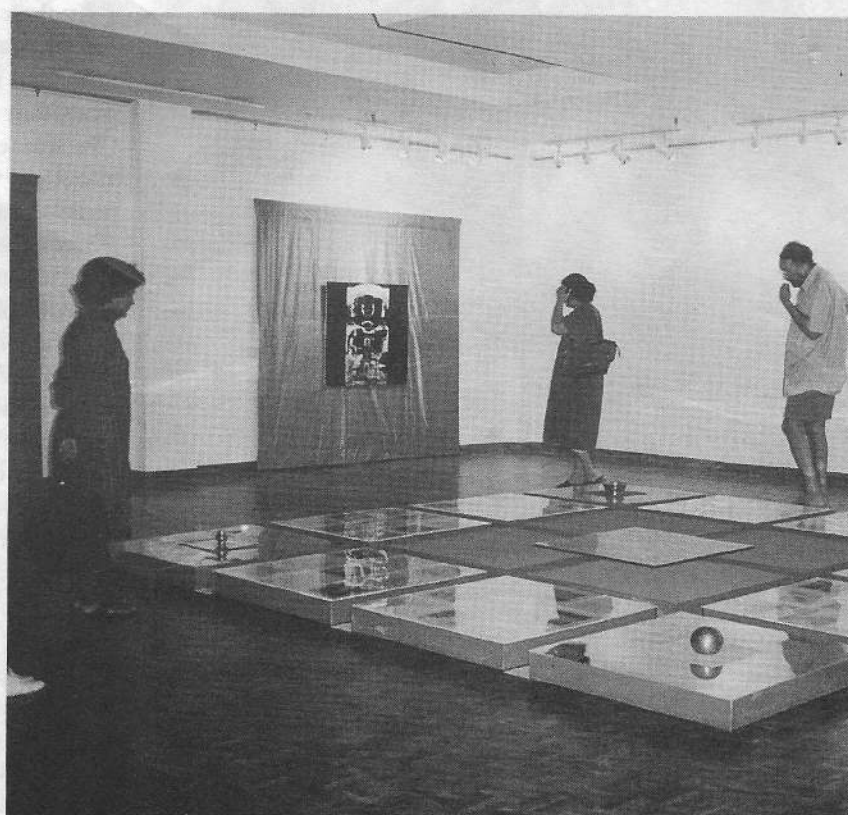
damental particle is identical with the original formless Being, but also how the forms of material things are manifested by means of spatial relations between Being and itself.

There are several other errors of thought and fact in Shraddhalu's piece that must go unchallenged for lack of space.

Ulrich Mohrhoff

The article of Shraddhalu has sparked a lengthy debate between Ulrich Mohrhoff and Shraddhalu, who both live in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Interested readers may obtain further details via email from Ulrich (Ujm@auroville.org.in) or Shraddhalu (shraddhalu@auroville.org.in) or by sending a letter to Auroville Today.

Eds.



Shraddhalu's attempt to cast Sri Aurobindo in the role of a scientist (Auroville Today, August 1997, "Sri Aurobindo: a Vision of Science") is ill-advised, considering Sri Aurobindo's assessment of science which Shraddhalu quotes: "What does science know really? It ... builds theories ever renewed and each time held up as the last word of truth!" Is this what Sri Aurobindo did?

Shraddhalu attributes to Sri Aurobindo "the stunning accuracy of a physicist". But the only accuracy of which physicists are capable is a close agreement between theoretical and experimental numbers. Sri Aurobindo neither measured predicted numbers nor predicted measurable ones.

Shraddhalu calls The Life Divine a "book of physics". But a book that does not contain mathematical formulas cannot possibly be so labelled.

The Life Divine is a metaphysical exposition, albeit one based on concrete spiritual knowledge rather than abstract intellectual speculation.

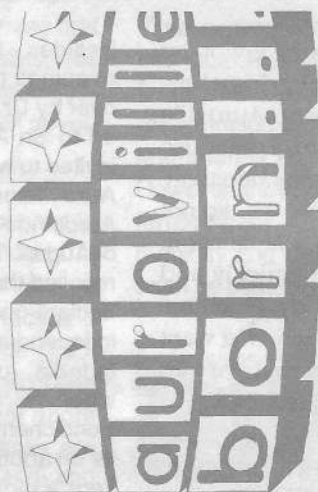
Shraddhalu refers to the "search for the ultimate and the highest Truth" as "Science in the highest sense of the word". If one uses "science" also in this extended sense, one must not keep jumping, as Shraddhalu does, from one sense of the word to the other. Otherwise one can just as easily "prove" that Sri Aurobindo was a musician or a sportsman.

It is true that Sri Aurobindo himself did use "science" in a similarly extended sense, but such a usage is so remote from the currently accepted meaning of the word, which is much more specific with regard to the limitations of science than it was early in the century, that one simply cannot adhere to it any more. Science is

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Jung and Jehuda

Jung and Jehuda

Jung-Woo Nam, is a psychoanalyst. Originally from Korea, she lived and worked in Germany for many years. Jehuda Szlezzynger-Nam, is a philosopher and psychologist from Germany. They have been married 10 years. Recently they came to live in Auroville.

At first it was India that fascinated them. "There are 'real' people here," they were to say later in that startlingly innocent way first-time visitors to India have. "India, far more than any country in South-East Asia, made a lasting impression on us," says Jehuda. "It was shockingly different from anything that I had ever seen. The poverty and misery were the first things we ran into. And the very quick changes from beautiful to ugly—the extremes of life." They came back to India several times after that initial visit.

And Auroville? "It was mentioned as something on the coast," remembers Jehuda. "I had a working relationship with Yusuf, an old friend of Auroville, and we knew he kept coming back to this place in India called Auroville for many, many years. But he never told us anything about it," says Jung. "When we finally arrived, it was pitch dark, and the young driver from Pondy was so scared. He didn't know anything about Auroville either! We looked at each other in bewilderment and asked ourselves, 'Where are we?'" continues Jung, remembering how they finally found Kottakarai Guest House in the middle of the night. "But then we were warmly welcomed and shown to Room 5—it was a most beautiful room and the Dalai Lama had stayed here! And a dinner of spaghetti and salad was waiting for us. Imagine that—spaghetti and salad and a lovely room, after a tiring journey! It made the best impression. We stayed for three to four days. And this was the beginning of our relationship to Auroville. We found it to be beautiful, and yet not one of those 5-star luxury cages. And so serene and peaceful. A marvellous place to rest. It was all something like paradise to us. We wanted to come back—to India and to Auroville."

By their third visit to India, Jung and Jehuda found themselves spending more and more time in Auroville. That's when they got the idea for the interviews. "We wanted to find out what is Auroville about, so we decided to do a research project together. 'The Psychological Structure of Auroville, its Potentials and Limitations and Some Philosophical Remarks on its Spiritual Aspiration'. That was the working title of the study. 'What did Auroville promise for change, for advancement? What happened to that promise? What is the secret, fuelling 'paradox' of Auroville? What is the 'free play' Auroville offers and how is it reflected in the individual? These were some of the questions that we wanted the answers to."

Interviewing over forty Aurovilians for the purposes of the study had a decisive impact on their lives. "I realized that there was something missing in my life," says Jehuda. "It was a good life. But, we got

to a point where it would repeat itself. We had reached what we had wanted to reach, but I was longing for further development. And I wanted to leave the cold—the German culture—this dark cloud which hangs over the country. The general depression... As a Jew in Germany, I felt it—that the situation was always determined by the past. Here, I felt people have an expectation of the future. I felt it was an important change. Not to escape the problems, but to get beyond them. Also, what interested me philosophically was the social-political experiment—the trial to establish something of a modern 'polis' on the basis of individuals: 'the society of the free'. This is an important step forward. And I could see how we could help Auroville somehow, help it where it got stuck."

"For me," says Jung, "I somehow find myself connecting more to my own culture. For instance, in Korea, as in India, we have a tradition that whenever you borrow something from a neighbour, you never return the container empty—you put some small gift in it. It can be quite simple, like a flower. So when I had to return a glass to Mona, my neighbour, I put some onion pickles inside, and these small acts feel so nice..."

They are still analyzing the findings of their study. Of it, says Jehuda, "Part of what we are doing is holding up a mirror to Auroville. Of course, having a reflection can be quite a painful process, especially on the spiritual aspects of life here. We also found that we run into problems that we didn't expect. To be part of Auroville and at the same time to analyze it is not easy. But we have made some observations such as:

- 'Unending education', is only one aspect of growth. Somewhere there should also be a settling-in phase.
- A higher, 'soul' education or formation is part of the experience of Auroville. And coming to live here with all the prevailing insecurities and anarchy...it's a challenge that you would never accept in a more traditional society. It would be too frightening.
- The average Aurovilian has a higher degree of flexibility than a person in a traditional society. Here each and every one has made this choice of moving out of their previous life.

These are all unique aspects of Auroville."

Besides this, Jehuda and Jung participate in the day-to-day activities of the community, helping out with the Auroville Guard. And for the first time, they are working together as therapists. "This also is a process of experimentation. Can we develop appropriate ways and methods of therapy?" wonders Jehuda. "Auroville, I am sure, will teach us how to deal with the transitions and transformations necessary."

Interview by Jill