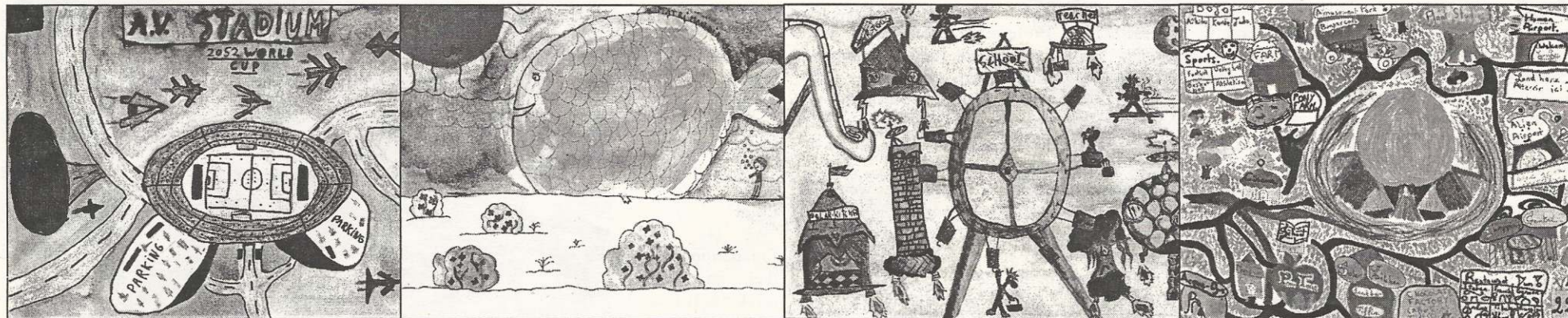


# Auroville Today

JUNE-JULY 2003, No.173-174



## Drawing the Future

Five hundred and forty children imagine the future city

Imagine an Auroville in time to come. A city with a body, heart, and soul, perhaps tempered in fire and gold. A river-fed island of rich green in a blue sea, anchored by a white buoy. Where zebras run along the golden beaches in the light of the rising sun. Where penguins and reindeer brave the tropical sun with equal tranquility. A city with a free canteen, and a grocery store in the shape of an apple. A place where a giant rotating ferris wheel functions as a school (and play area). Where skiers glide down snow-clad Matrimandir slopes. Where rocket-powered humans with diaphanous grasshopper wings soar overhead on meditative journeys.

Hard to imagine? Not so for the 540 children who enthusiastically participated in the recent drawing contest "How do our children see the future of the city?" Organised by the Land for Auroville team, the contest was open to three age-groups: 7-9 years old; 10-11 years old; and 12-14 years old. Of diverse economic, social, and cultural backgrounds, the children belonged to schools in Auroville and the surrounding villages that are coordinated by the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIR). Selection of winning entries was a difficult task considering differences in quality of facilities and equipment that were available for students. But an effort was made to spread the prizes over as many participating schools as possible. The nine winning entries were by: Ludovico (Transition), Arun (Udavi), Tamilzarasi (New Creation School), Chandra (Last School), Valentine (Home schooling), Satish (Transition), Rajappan (Udavi), Dhanalaxmi (Kuilapalayam Trust), and Sridhar (Ambeth Nagar Night School). All nine winners were offered a plane ride over Auroville.

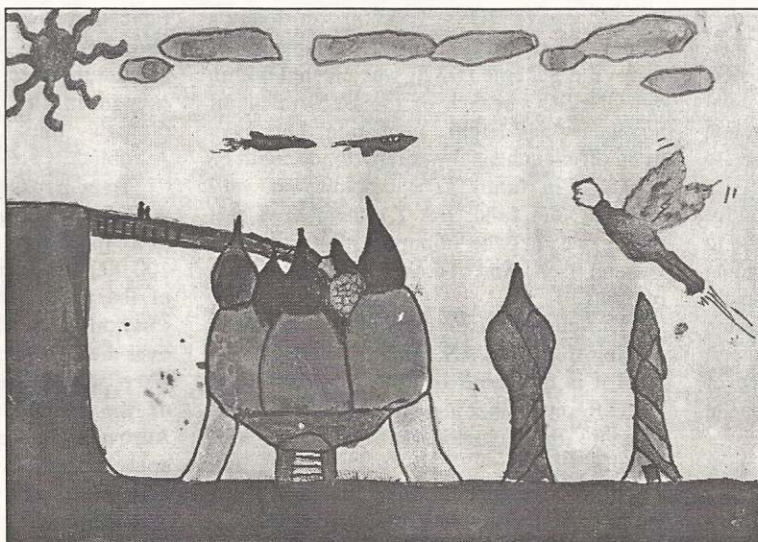
Made on plain white poster paper with crayons, sketch pens, and water colours, the drawings display literal, and sometimes outrageous representations, of what Auroville is or should be. While most submissions were untitled, a few ambitiously futuristic ones came with headings. "Pour Tous 4422"; Matrimandir 3000 A.D"; "Auroville Stadium 2052 World Cup" are worth a mention. Objects commonly associated with the Auroville landscape such as coconut palms, the banyan tree, the sun, windmills, the beach, and keel-roofed huts populate more than a few drawings. The Matrimandir, not

surprisingly, was the single most represented object in the contest. While most children drew their inspiration from the existing significance of the building, a few daring ones took liberties one

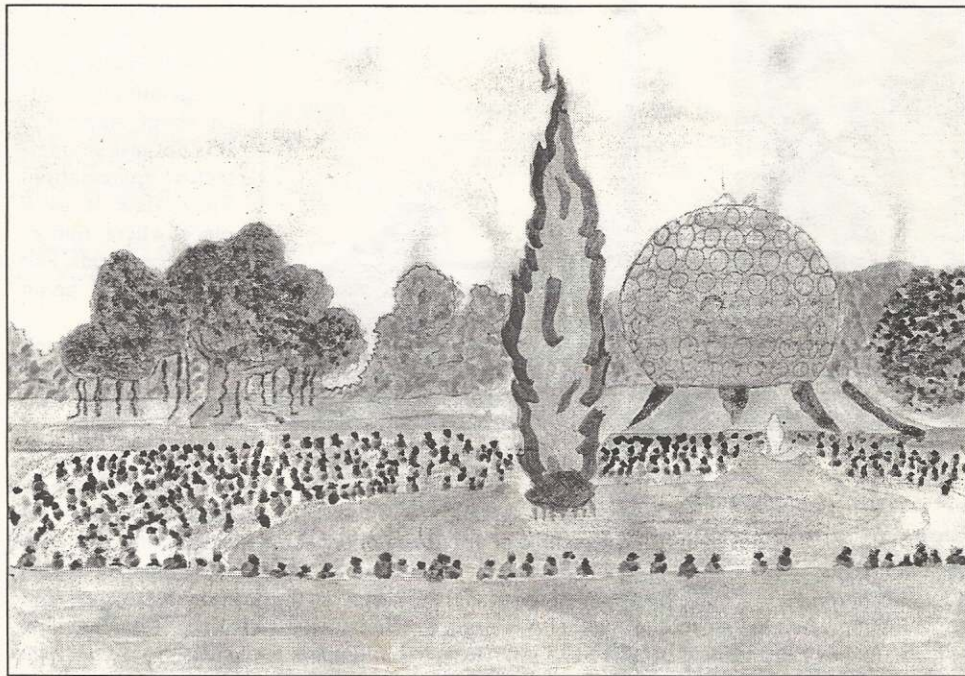
can hardly imagine. "Future Zoo", for example, depicts a long shot of a giraffe and its young playing ball inside the dome. Another shows a rotund snowman, atop the Matrimandir, wearing a Charlie Chaplin hat. A Matrimandir spaceship lookalike about to take off for an unknown destination is another visual that stalls the viewer.

Roughly speaking, the drawings could be divided into three categories. Idyllic scenes of the village, imaginary lakes encircling the Matrimandir, and

views of the greenbelt, and the beach, focus on the city's natural richness and the coexistence of its urban and rural way of life. Animals with human characteristics, and those not native to the region also fall under this category. A drawing with igloos nestled in the Auroville greenbelt, while animals socialize with food and drink not too far away is one of the fun representations that is easy to catch a person's fancy. The spiritual centre of Auroville – the Matrimandir and the Banyan Tree – was, as I have already mentioned, the most popular subject among the contestants. It was also the most creative category. A sunflower with a small Matrimandir as its centre growing in the shade of the Banyan is one example of this unconventional perceptivity. Another showed the Matrimandir dome sprouting flowering trees from its outer surface. Snowflakes falling on the golden sphere with



its red and green base the colour of Christmas is yet another eye-catcher. The third category was the unabashedly futuristic one, more adventurous than the other two, which represented Auroville in



Top row: "Auroville Stadium 2052" by Ralph; "Matrimandir 3000" by Issa; "Wheelschool" by Ludovico; "Cityshape" by Valentina. Above: "Bonfire" by Dhanalaxmi. Left: "Greenbelt" by Nandini. Bottom: "Rocketman" by Satish.

a fiery rocket-powered age when everything – humans, trees, and buildings – would be in harmonious motion, propelled by their own energy dynamic. Two winning drawings, by Satish (9) and Ludovico (10) of Transition School, belong to this category.

Snowflakes, igloos, lakes, pyramids, golden sands, fire, rocket technology – one wonders what these elemental depictions of water, fire, and ice finally represent? While it would be a hard exercise to ask all five hundred and forty children how they set about translating their inner visions onto paper, here is a brief look at what some of the winners had to say about their specific drawings. Valentine (12) of Home schooling, and Chandra (13), of Last School, both drew composite views of Auroville. Valentine focused on the urban map of Auroville, with the Matrimandir at the centre surrounded by a huge lake, and the rest of the cityscape comprising of an apple-shaped grocery store, a school built like an open book, and an "alien" airport. The inspiration for the lake came from the exhibition at Aurofuture where such a lake idea is currently under discussion. "I think it's a great idea. It would solve the water problem and it would be fun to reach the Matrimandir by boat instead of on foot," she says with remarkable candour. What about the alien airport? What does it mean? "It means that in the future alien spaceships would need a place to land. And Auroville would be the only place where it could happen!"

Chandra's drawing was inspired, she says, by an aerial view of Auroville she had seen in a photo. Focusing only on the natural landscape of the city she also drew the lake around the Matrimandir with the rising sun behind it, and lots of trees and windmills, with village settlements in between. "Of course Auroville will be the greenest city on earth so trees

must be abundant. Will rivers make the land more fertile?" she reflects.

Fertility, abundance, and respect for nature is a concern that speaks out from more than a few drawings. A student of Udavi School, Arun (9) envisions Auroville as a city where the village, with its natural modes of living, contributes to the greater good. A smiling sun peeping over treetops that overlook the Matrimandir and a little girl fondling a calf beside a river, is how one would describe his beautiful sketch. In similarity to Arun's very life-like depiction of Auroville, Dhanalaxmi (14) of Kuilapalayam Trust School has drawn the Auroville bonfire celebration, an actual event that brings the resident community together three or four times a year. Of remarkable precision, depth, clarity, this painting captures the spirit of Auroville regardless of time. Shy and reticent, Dhanalaxmi said she decided to make this drawing after coming to know that for her family and other people in her village, the bonfire is the one event that they truly appreciate about Auroville. An occasion for silent prayer, togetherness, and remembrance, the bonfire is and always will be a part of the Aurovillian ethos.

The children's drawings were a visual and conceptual delight that far surpassed the expectations of the organizers, and the rest of the community who got the chance to view the exhibition, first at the Tibetan Pavilion, and later at the Centre of Indian Culture where it was on until May 25th. Warmly appreciated by everyone, the exhibition is an example of how the visions and dreams of children in Auroville are as important as those of adults. And perhaps how they can sometimes revitalize the forgotten dreams of adults caught in the mundane circle of day-to-day life. Who knows, some of these dreams drawn in wax crayons and water colours may one day translate into a more tangible reality or bring the community closer together in the future planning of the city.

Abha Prakash

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# UNESCO hosts Auroville colloquium

The 35th anniversary celebrations of Auroville at UNESCO in Paris were more than just affirmation of an old friendship. They may mark the start of an entirely new phase in Auroville's development.

Of all Auroville's relationships with the world outside India, the oldest – and one of the most valued – is that with UNESCO. The General Assembly passed a unanimous resolution supporting the township in 1966, two years before it was actually founded. Three more were to follow.

To celebrate the Auroville's 35th foundation anniversary, a celebration was held in the Paris headquarters of UNESCO on April 10th. As reported last month, the Indian Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, Auroville International France, and Auroville's Future – Auroville's townplanning department – together mounted a major exhibition and colloquium. The exhibition was opened by

Politiques, Culturelles et du Dialogue Interculturel de UNESCO" arranging the formal invitation.

Although Professor Joshi could not attend, the Government of India was represented by Education Secretary Mr S.K.Tripathi, who took the opportunity to announce a major increase in funding for Auroville by his Department [see SAIIER article in this edition of AVToday].

Joss, Luigi, Meenakshi and Gilles were all in Paris to attend the ceremony. Upon their return, the four travellers described their experiences – and some of the possibilities that are emerging for the Auroville/UNESCO relationship – at the new Town Hall on May 4th.

What was it like for them in Paris? Luigi comments, "People at UNESCO are genuinely excited about Auroville. It is not just an intellectual appreciation. They view it as a place where tomorrow's problems and solutions are being explored."

"The very week we gave the exhibition, Baghdad fell. Many people at UNESCO commented that, at such a time, it was wonder-

ful to be talking about human unity.

"Over the years, we have received financial support from them on small projects. And this has been very welcome. It has enabled trust to build up on both sides. So we are now at a point – particularly with the increase in funding to Auroville from the Government of India – where we can make proposals to UNESCO on a larger scale, and expect to be taken seriously. This opens up a whole new range of possibilities."

The biggest and also the most remote possibility at this point, is Luigi's vision of having Auroville and its surrounding area designated a World Heritage Site of the Future by

UNESCO.

Since such a category does not yet even exist; and since there are no definite plans to bring about its creation, this is very much a dream. But as Luigi says, "We lay the foundations for their and our thinking. It is a suggestion, an idea, a vision. It would mean that Auroville gains official recognition, and

protection, as a place which is crucial to the world's future evolution. Just as the existing World Heritage Sites of the Past recognise and protect places which were crucial in our evolution to this point."

Secondly, there are plans to gain UNESCO protection for the whole Auroville bio-region. "Joss has been extremely well received in Paris," explains Luigi. "The work on plant-species identification and re-introduction by his team is recognised there as literally world-class." Gaining bio-sphere pro-



UNESCO'S Director-General Koichiro Matsuura delivers his address.

tection status would benefit the entire region. Not only would it greatly facilitate species-preservation, water-management and propagation of the tropical dry evergreen forest: but it would help drastically curtail unsustainable development, mining, industrial pollution and over-cultivation of the fragile eco-system.

Thirdly, there is the project closest to Luigi's own heart – the creation of a physical home for CIRHU (the Centre for International Research in Human Unity) within Auroville. "It will be a place where research, exchange, and the pooling of results from experiments all over the world can be facilitated." He is hopeful that the major SAIIER grant from the Government of India may act as a springboard for other bodies – including UNESCO – to provide matching funds which will kick-start this project.

All three of these possibilities were discussed in Paris during the team's visit. "We were given a fantastic opportunity by the Government of India's high-profile endorsement of Auroville for the 35th anniversary," says Luigi. And the results of that initiative look like providing enormous benefits both to the township and to its surrounding bio-region for years to come.

David C



From left to right: Luigi, Croquette and Gilles at the Auroville presentation

UNESCO'S Director-General Koichiro Matsuura. His speech of unequivocal support and appreciation on that occasion has already been communicated to Aurovilians, and also, we learn, to every department of UNESCO.

The prime mover behind both exhibition and colloquium was the Government of India. The Minister of Human Resource Development, Science and Technology, Professor Murli Manohar Joshi, had asked the Indian Permanent Delegation to set things in motion. Her Excellency Madame Sabaharwall – the Indian Ambassador to UNESCO – gave her full support: and Madame Nazam Fariwar worked for six months with the "Division des



Top view of part of the exhibition

## SAIIER/CIRHU project

The Government of India recently announced a big increase in funding for research in Auroville

Early in March 2003, the Department of Secondary and Higher Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development approved a grant to Auroville of Rs 11.5 crores (US\$ 2.45m) to be spent on facilities for research and education over five years, ending in 2007. Apart from the Palmyra project a few years ago, this is probably the biggest single injection of funds into Auroville in its history. It also represents a significant vote of confidence by the Government of India in Auroville's future. How did this come about, and what does it mean for the City?

Alain Bernard is one of a small team that worked on developing a submission to the Department for almost three years. The project has been managed under the auspices of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) and the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), in close consultation with Auroville Foundation Chairman Kireet Joshi.

"Kireet presented a paper entitled 'CIRHU' to Aurovilians in December 1999; the central concept was a proposal for significant research and education funding to be submitted to the Indian Government," says Alain. "Our task was to adapt this to the present reality of Auroville. This involved the co-operation of many Aurovilians already working in education and research. The process went extremely smoothly. We were able to compile a large, very ambitious SAIIER Development Plan which was submit-

ted in early March 2001."

The money is to be spent on increasing Auroville's capacity for research. This includes improving our existing schools and learning-centres, as well as developing entirely new ones. Such an inflow cannot help but have a transformative effect upon the community. Nearly two-thirds of the funds will be spent on construction alone, with twenty-four new buildings planned to be completed by 2007.

The first to break ground will be a hostel for up to 50 visiting students and trainees, close to the new Auroville Town Hall facility. According to a SAIIER document, "it will provide much-needed accommodation for the ever-increasing numbers of visiting youth... who are volunteering their skills and energy in the service of Auroville." It will also facilitate the development of SAIIER's educational training activities.

Other construction will include a guest-house, several training-centres and other buildings for the Faculty of Education, new faculties and CIRHU itself. About a quarter of the grant will be allocated to new research equipment, the fitting-out and furnishing of new buildings, and improvements to existing ones.

All this is good, says Alain. But even better is the tacit demonstration of Delhi's increasing faith in Auroville. "Over time, they have come to believe more and more in what we are doing here. And that Auroville can consistently deliver results in the areas of education and human unity."

"The first substantial grant that I can recall was made in 1983, when the Government of India gave us the equivalent of Rs 1.2 crores (US\$ 260,000) in today's money. Then in 1985 the Development of Auroville Scheme [DAS] was created within the UNESCO branch of the Department of Secondary and Higher Education. This gave us an official channel whereby funds could be allocated in future. The amount was very small at that time. But I remember Kireet telling me that the important thing was the channel itself. And of course he was absolutely right."

The current five-year funding is indeed coming through DAS. And although on one level it is the result of three years' slog by SAIIER, on another level it is the culmination of more than twenty years dialogue with Delhi.

"Over all that time, Kireet has been untiring in his efforts to secure educational funding for Auroville," explains Alain. "And even though he is such a respected influence in those circles of government, Auroville has had to demonstrate that it can deliver the goods. Being given money is one thing. Spending it wisely and getting tangible results are quite another. The fact that we are now being entrusted with a grant of this size, over five years, shows that the Department of Secondary and Higher Education has considerable confidence in us."

In his address to UNESCO on the occasion of the 35th Anniversary Celebration of Auroville in Paris on 10th April, 2003, the Education Secretary, Mr S.K.Tripathi, said, "We envisage that SAIIER, which is now being supported by us, would bring about a change in the education system in India through the implementation of Sri Aurobindo's vision of integral education."

To help make sure that the project does go well, tight controls will exist on all budgeting and expenditure. A total of Rs 45 lakhs (US\$ 100,000) has been allocated for administration of the grant. An accountant was appointed early this year. All submissions for funds, split over the five years, are reviewed by her team. There will be centralised purchasing for most of the individual projects. As usual, the Auroville Foundation has the responsibility of approving all expenditure: so SAIIER is by necessity working very closely with Mr Srinivasamurthy and his team.

"This is not the first time we will have been overseen by the Auditor-General of India," says Alain. "Even back in 1983 we were accountable to that office. But the size and scope of this is altogether something new."

"This is a big, new step for the community. We have an excellent team working on the whole project. I feel very hopeful that the next five years will really demonstrate what Auroville can do at this higher level."

David C



# Auroville as an International Educational Campus

Helmut Ernst, a 'Friend of Auroville' who lives in Germany, proposes to create an international educational campus in Auroville as a means to develop the city within fifteen years.

The slow growth of Auroville is reason for concern. After 34 years the population totals only 1,632 people. That means that Auroville has grown on an average by less than 50 persons per year or with a rate of 4%/year. Were this to continue, Auroville would only reach its target population of 50,000 inhabitants by 2090.

The consequences of Auroville's slow growth are there for all to see. As Auroville lies near to the burgeoning city of Pondicherry, encroachment of Auroville's projected town and greenbelt area by entrepreneurs and speculators is happening – and we may expect that we have only seen the beginning of it. Another problem is that due to its slow population growth, Auroville lacks a sufficient economic base, which in turn restricts its development. Auroville generates no income to build the city, and barely incomes the money needed to sustain its public services. The city is only developing because of donations from outside sources.

Another consequence of the slow growth is that Auroville's youth has insufficient opportunities to acquire skills and professional competence. Young people must either go out into the outside world and study there and practise there what they have learned, or remain in Auroville with the risk of always being the semi-qualified, assistant level of the working force. Many youngsters who have left Auroville in the past never return to Auroville, either because it does not provide enough opportunities for personal growth and development or because there are serious economic problems, for example in getting oneself a house. But if Auroville cannot satisfy the requirements of its youth, it loses its potential of a sustained growth, because the youth is in a way the "capital" of the future. Who better than the young people who have grown up in Auroville can genuinely embody the spirit of Auroville and can contribute to Auroville's future?

For these and other reasons there exists a real urgency to bring Auroville to its intended size of 50,000 people within the next 10 to 15 years. But how is this to be done? Auroville cannot reach its goal without tremendous financial input from the outside. But why should the outside world be motivated to help build Auroville? One may expect that it would only be interested if it would obtain a return of some kind from Auroville. But what return could be interesting for outsiders?

One of the strong sides of Auroville is that it has re-created a natural environment that is conducive to education from kindergarten up to higher studies. Because of its specific multi-cultural character Auroville is the ideal place to house a true international campus for an integral education and research of a new type, which could be the model for generations to come. The "product" Auroville can offer to the world then is "education" of youth in a new way, which is based upon soul-qualities like freedom and self-determination and creativity rather than competition and over-specialisation. Many parents would be willing to pay for a good education for their children, and Indian and foreign governments, development organisations and international institutions can be found who would be interested to finance a model of such innovative education. Auroville's International Educational Campus would attract students from all over India and from elsewhere, and would be the prime source of funds to build the city.

The education provided would naturally be along the lines and ideals of the founders of Auroville, based upon a true universal spirituality, which sees everything and everyone as united in spirit. Nevertheless one should be alert to the risk of developing here a new religion or cult. Everything should be done to encourage the free expression and practice of spiritual paths akin to one's specific nature, so that each individual can experience and live his or her own truth.

The idea to create an international educational campus needs further to be developed. Auroville's SAIER (the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research) can serve as its operational basis, and initiate workshops and courses on the topic in cooperation with academic institutions in order to develop curricula as the basis for enrolment and organise the needed teachers, facilities and formalities. Also, the International Zone can be used as the bridgehead by creating facilities for accommodation, teaching and social gatherings to manage the stream of young people coming in. If required, the present Master Plan may need to be adapted to the new overall educational alignment. Lastly, a strategy has to be developed to approach nations and institutions for funds and for assistance in human resources and in kind to build the city.

A first economic model for such

an international educational campus has meanwhile been worked out. It is based on a number of assumptions, such as an increase in the growth rate from the present 4% to a maximum of 25% in a few years, and thereafter to a sustainable level, which would lead to the intended population of 50,000 in 2033, three decades from now. The critical times will be the next 15 years, when Auroville will remain very small compared to the villages and the exploding Pondicherry-region. Therefore, the growth-rate must be highest in this period.

The economic model shows that ways exist to develop Auroville quicker if Auroville offers something

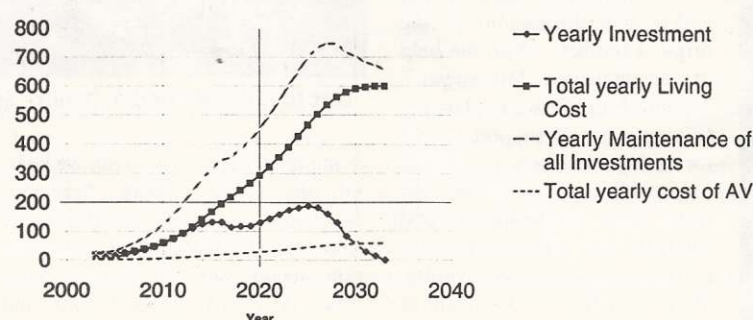


Helmut Ernst

genuine and unique that the world is in need of. For without such an offer one cannot expect the in-flow of funds of the required order of magnitude of many hundreds of crores, or millions of dollars, to build the city.

For more details of the proposal and the economic model, contact Helmut Ernst by email at 01736614658@vodafone.de

Yearly costs in crores (10 million Rs)  
Rs 5.88 lakhs (US \$ 12,500)/person, maintenance 2%/year



## LAND MATTERS

### Land for Auroville

The team behind the Million Dollar Challenge, which aims to raise \$ 1 million by August 15<sup>th</sup> to purchase vital lands in Auroville, has now opened a website ([www.auroville.org/million/million.htm](http://www.auroville.org/million/million.htm)) to keep everybody posted on what's been happening and what's planned. The initiatives so far include:

- About 250 Aurovilians have signed up to make a monthly contribution to the Land Fund; this brings in over \$ 1,000 a month.
- An exhibition featuring the work of over 30 different artists was held at Bharat Nivas Auditorium during Creation for Land. It ran for ten days, during which time the number of participants grew. All the work was donated, and the proceeds of the sales raised Rs 1,20,000 (approx. \$ 2500). A second exhibition is planned for later in the year.
- A flea market was held in the Eucalyptus grove. Over \$ 1,000 was raised for the land.
- A visiting clown gave a performance, with some fellow fire artists, at the Information Center at the beginning of March, in aid of the Land Fund.
- The Earth Day celebrations, featuring the showing of seminal nature and cultural videos, raised around \$ 1,000.
- A donation of around \$ 40,000 came from the UK to support the purchase of land adjacent to the Botanical Gardens that is currently in the hands of a property developer. Around \$ 200,000 is still urgently required to secure this piece of land for Auroville.
- A donation of around \$ 50,000 came from America, as a result of a

Land Fund newsletter detailing the threat from a property developer.

● La Ferme Cheese production unit have made a special edition cheese, Gouda, which will be sold for the land. So far three and a half kilos has been sold, representing a contribution of \$ 35.

● An Auroville artist, Mayaura, has donated one hundred prints of one her paintings to sell in aid of the Land Fund. 12 prints have been sold, representing a contribution of \$ 720.

● A visiting actor, Norman Bowler, recorded a CD with four of his autobiographical stories. All proceeds will go to the Land Fund.

● An Aurovillian, Tina S., has recorded a music CD called A Thousand Miles, and donated some of the CDs to the Land Fund to sell.

● A massage course was given in Auroville and all the participants were asked to contribute Rs. 1,000 to the Land Fund.

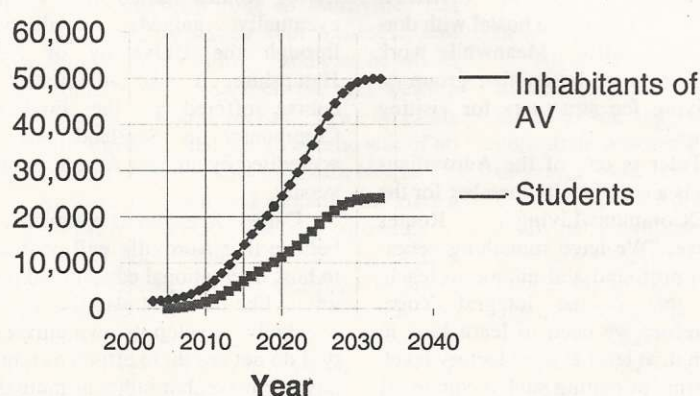
● The Dutch foundation Stichting Aurofond donated 1,000.

In addition, various individuals have pledged to raise \$ 1,000 by August 15<sup>th</sup>. A 1000 x \$ 1000 campaign is being launched in the U.S. in May, and a One Million Euro appeal is in preparation in Europe. A special appeal has also been sent within Auroville, asking Aurovilians to take up responsibility for one or more \$1,000 'shares'.

All in all, around \$200,000 has been raised so far.

If you know of anybody who would be interested to participate, or if you require more information contact [botanical@auroville.org.in](mailto:botanical@auroville.org.in) or [landfund@auroville.org.in](mailto:landfund@auroville.org.in)

### Possible growth of Auroville



## In brief

### AVNews reviewed

The community has agreed to review the Auroville News, Auroville's internal weekly newsletter, as many voices had been raised against its often objectionable and low-level contents. Also the News is – incorrectly – viewed by outside parties as an official publication of Auroville, implying that views expressed are interpreted as views of the community as a whole. A survey has been done so that everyone can give their views on its future look and contents. A news summary is being published as a temporary replacement.

### Town Hall

The Interim Development Council announced that the building which in popular parlance is called the Town Hall shall henceforth be called Auroville Centre for Urban Research with the unfortunate acronym ACUR. The building, which is still under construction, will house the Financial Service, Auroville Fund, the Housing Service, Auroville's Future and several other Auroville groups. The new occupants are scheduled to move in by the end of May.

### Residential permit matters

The Working Committee informed that in December 2002 two Aurovilians were refused re-entry into India. No reasons were given, but the immigration officials in Pondicherry and Chennai stated that an investigation is ongoing which might take 6 months or more, before the situation can be cleared up.

In February 2003 an Aurovillian was informed that his visa extension would not be granted. The reason for not extending the visa was an article written by him in the Auroville News which was considered as inciting religious riot. This case is still pending. At the beginning of April, five Aurovilians learned that their residential permits would not be extended and they would have to leave India within 14 days. In none of these five cases was a reason given. With the help of the Chairman and a member of the Governing Board, the situation has been cleared up.

### Auroville Council and Working Committee lack members

A seven-member Working Committee and a nine-member Auroville Council started five months ago. By the end of May membership was down to three full-time and one part-time member for the WC, and four full-time members for the AVC. A process of taking in much-needed members has been started. The WC and AVC, who meet together once a week, hope to move into a shared space in the Town Hall by the end of May.

### The Auroville Handbook

The 2003 issue of the Auroville Handbook is out. It contains a completely updated map of Auroville, and has been expanded from 117 to 150 pages of detailed information, making it the richest available source of up-to-date information for Aurovilians, guests and visitors. Price in India Rs 125. For more information contact [prisma@auroville.org.in](mailto:prisma@auroville.org.in)



# AIR takes wing

An innovative project hosts international artists and benefits Auroville students

The 'Artists in Residence' (AIR) programme was born over two years ago when Dimitri and Emilie set up a project to host, for a period of 1-3 months, established artists in various fields. In exchange, the artists would give workshops and contribute a work to a community art collection. The idea behind the programme was to invigorate the art scene in Auroville through exposing young Auroville art students and others to the skills and visions of international artists. At the same time, the visiting artists would have an opportunity to discover India and to work in a very different environment from the pressurized art scenes of places like Paris, Berlin or New York.

Dimitri and Emilie's first contact was with the Parisian artist, Jerome Mesnager, to whom they casually mentioned the idea at an exhibition. Two weeks later he phoned them: "I've bought my ticket." Two and a half years on, Mesnager has revisited

twice and nine other artists have been hosted by AIR – two sculptors, a musician, a video-maker, a graphic artist and painters. All the AIR places are now taken up until the end of 2004. In the meantime, the location of the AIR programme has shifted from Pitchandikulam to a beautiful 30 acre site by the sea about 7 kilometres north of Auroville. "We wanted to do it in Auroville," explains Emilie, "but we were told it would take up to 20 years to purchase the land...and we wanted to get started."

On the new site there are already a number of keet houses and workshops and the first permanent buildings are under construction. Emilie gestures around her. "That building is for engraving work, while over there an exhibition and workshop hall is coming up. The tall structure will be a water tank with an office and video studio below and an apartment for a writer above. On the other side of the site there will be 4-5 keet houses incorporating small workshops for the artists in residence. Our house? That will come last!"

The change in location has added new dimensions to the original project. "With the help of our manager, Murugayan," explains Emilie, "we're planning to open a small support school for the local villagers. In addition to providing education in subjects like mathematics and English, the school will also include art in the curriculum. Then, if we find a student who is really talented in this field, we'll support him or her until they get into art school. I also plan to work with our neighbour, Anna from Eternite, who has ideas for a big education project involving, among other things, artistic expression and the environment."

How has the experience been

for the visiting artists? "Almost without exception, fantastic", say Emilie. "Most of them had not visited India before, and India, particularly for an artist, is very special. There is the nature, the richness of art forms, the mythology. Above all, there is the freedom, the open-mindedness. Paint something on a wall here and everybody enjoys it. Try the same in Paris and in no time the police are there, asking what you are doing. Freedom

adds Murugayan, "but these artists, through their skill and sensitivity, help us see it afresh as well as providing new ideas for them. I remember when Andre Severan came back from a trip to the north. 'My head is bursting', he said, 'I've got so many new ideas'." However, India can also be overwhelming for sensitive souls. "That's why we have to protect, support the artists," explains Emilie, "until they are ready to experience India on their own. Relating to these special people with their different needs and helping introduce them to India is a beautiful human experience: we learn so much from it."

Does Emilie feel that the Auroville art scene is more dynamic now than it was when she and Dimitri set up the AIR project two and a half years ago? "Definitely. You need only have visited the recent art exhibition in the Pyramids to have experienced the fantastic creativity of the students now. They are searching, researching, on the move and taking their influences from everywhere. In this sense it's a kind of world art. But what's amazing about them is they're so concentrated. They go inside and then they express what they find there. So while they learn a lot from the visiting artists these artists are inspired and learn a lot from them."

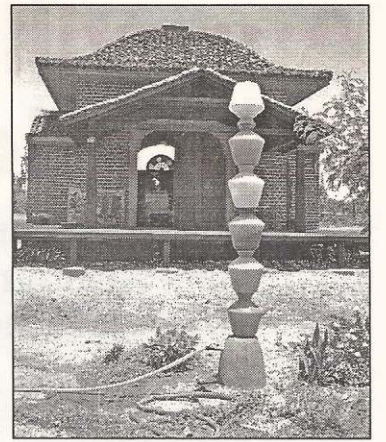
For Emilie one of the highlights of the AIR programme so far was the five day workshop Andre Serveran held two months ago. "For four days



Left to right: Narendra, Dimitri, Emilie, Murugayan

is in the air here. Last month we hosted the artist Andre Serveran. Suddenly, after giving a workshop, he said he'd rediscovered the intuitive, non-mental way of drawing he'd practiced many years before and which he never thought he'd find it again. When he returned to France his wife sent me an email. 'What happened to him in India? He's so joyful and peaceful now.' As for Auroville, some of the artists really make a strong connection with the people and the vision. But we leave this up to them: we don't push it."

"India is rich in so many ways,"



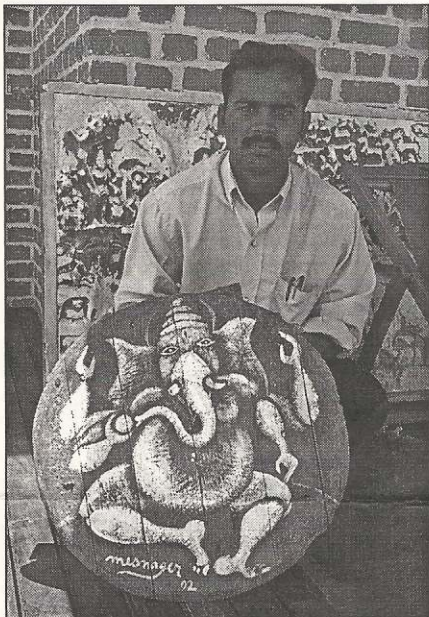
Plastic pot sculpture

we painted to music, then, on the last day, we participated in a one hour happening at the Visitors Centre. The Medici group composed special music for the occasion while the seven participants painted before an audience. The amazing thing, when we stepped back to view what we had done, was that it looked like the work of one person. I don't think this kind of osmosis is possible in the West, but it could happen here because the students are so open and respectful. On that last day we were really one – and that's what we're here for, isn't it?"

And the future? "One thing I want to do is work much more with Indian artists. So far our visiting artists have been from the West, but next year we have an Indian artist taking up residence. Another avenue which has opened up is a collaboration with Alliance Francaise. They are enthusiastic about our project and enabled one of our visiting artists, Jerome Mesnager, to mount an exhibition at their gallery in Pondicherry. We'll do more exhibitions with them in future and perhaps work with some of the artists they sponsor to visit this part of India."

"Ultimately, however, this is not a business: we don't want a commercial relationship with the artists. We don't even ask them anymore to leave a piece of art behind when they go, although most of them do so anyway. More than anything we are a family, one family here."

Alan



Murugayan displays one of the Ganesha pieces by Jerome Mesnager

## Tertiary education in Auroville

A group of Aurovilians is trying to take the Mother's notion of 'Unending Education' to another level

Aurovilians have become accustomed over the years to the guest season influx of American student groups that utilise Auroville as a temporary campus to undertake courses offered by their universities. But what if Auroville was to offer such courses itself? Could Auroville develop its own tertiary courses or even develop its own university over time? What courses could be taught? Who would teach them and would take them?

Firstly, what is the attraction of Auroville as a place to undertake a college semester? Daniel Greenberg is the executive director of the GEOCommons/Living Routes programme, which sends groups of American students to Auroville twice a year. As he puts it, "Auroville is a real-world model of sustainable development experimenting with integrated, human-scale solutions. Students who live and learn in Auroville come away with a profound understanding that we can make it if we all work together".

Karen Litfin is a political science academic who accompanies groups of students from the University of Washington to take her 'Nature, Spirit and Political Theory' course in Auroville. "Auroville offers a unique space for the students to explore questions of sustainability, community and cross-cultural interaction, as well

as an environment that is conducive to inner exploration and to introducing students to the ideas of Sri Aurobindo". She points out that in the recent semester held here, her group had time for an informal course taught by Aurovilians that offered a great diversity of experiences. This gave the students "a wonderfully rich exposure to Auroville that our past programs have not offered."

Margot and Andrea are two students who participated in the recent GEOCommons/Living Routes semester. Margot reflects on the benefits of studying in Auroville. "Although the course is about sustainability, the focus on integral practice creates a capacity for the individual to cultivate sustainability within the self. This is something which not many people focus on in academia." As Andrea points out, "There's a different sense of hope here. You get told at home that everything's been done, everything's outlined and it feels quite sterile. Here it feels like there are more possibilities."

Wim is an Aurovillian who is currently the Program Director of the GEOCommons/Living Routes course held in Auroville. He points out that initially all the staff were from the USA, but now more Aurovilians are getting included. He sees the next step as Auroville offering its own courses with a faculty made up of

Aurovilians. "Auroville doesn't offer anything for higher education right now. We need to offer the experience and wisdom of people who've been here for a long time – this is integral education. At the same time, Auroville needs to increase its capacity to provide skills and resources to the outside by establishing more structure in a centralised way. The seeds are here, but we need to nurture them so that we can develop a university or centre for higher integral education in Auroville."

Daniel points out that Auroville has already done a lot of the ground work to offer its own study programmes. "I think Auroville has come a long way in being able to support and offer higher education programmes. When the GEO groups started coming in the early 1990s, there was very little programmatic support and our faculty had to do everything. Now we work with Aurovilians who help set up our orientations and internships, arrange travel and support students' academic work. This has all allowed the students to become more integrated into the larger community, which is one of the core aspects of their experience."

Daniel sees the move by Auroville to offer its own courses as a natural evolution. "I think the study group is on the right track in exploring ways to better support external

programmes in higher education. This makes it possible for more educational groups to come to Auroville and also provides opportunities for Auroville to learn what it will take to offer its own independent programmes."

Kathy is a member of the exploratory group of Aurovilians that has started to identify thematic areas of study such as spirituality, ecology, sustainability, city-building. They've also begun to identify Aurovillian resource people in these areas. "The group will develop a programme," she explains, "and CIRHU will provide the infrastructure possible to host them. Students on this programme could use the resources that are coming up under the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER) grant: this includes a hostel with dormitory facilities. Meanwhile work has been done by another group on evolving fee structures for visiting groups."

Peter is one of the Aurovilians who is a core faculty member for the GEOCommons/Living Routes course. "We have something necessary, profound and unique to teach, and that is the Integral Yoga. Therefore we need to learn how to teach it, at least at introductory level. In terms of getting such a course off the ground, we also have to figure out

how to package it so it is something that people want. And it has to be accredited." Wim acknowledges the difficulties of getting accreditation, "but that is much further down the road. We need to create all the conditions first before we take the steps to get accreditation."

Karen Litfin points out that, while there can be input from Aurovillian lecturers, the only way at present the University of Washington can offer credit for its study abroad programs is for a University of Washington faculty member to be teaching and coordinating the program.

However, the success of the GEOCommons/Living Routes programme in gaining accreditation gives the exploratory group hope. Living Routes started in 1990 and eventually gained accreditation through the University of New Hampshire. It also administers a course offered in the Findhorn Community in Scotland that is accredited by another American university.

Daniel Greenberg is optimistic. "I believe that Auroville will continue to host international educational programs like ours and also that it will eventually develop its own university. I do not see these efforts as mutually exclusive, but rather as mutually beneficial."

Lesley



# Bonding across boundaries

Three Aurovilian women share their experiences of inter-cultural parenting

**M**allika, an Aurovilian from French Guyana, recounts a strange but impressionable incident she encountered in Pondicherry in 1975. While making her way through the crowded marketplace, a Tamil woman in a cycle rickshaw stopped by her side and wordlessly offered her her baby. The tiny infant didn't look more than a month old. For all her love for children, Mallika hadn't thought of adoption in a serious way but, some years later, the desire intensified until she found a four-month-old Tamil baby boy with whom she instantly bonded. The child was sickly, susceptible to frequent attacks of pneumonia, but that didn't faze Mallika. Perhaps because of the care the baby needed, she became more and more involved in natural cures to the extent that she gave up language teaching to



Subhadre and Mallika

become a full-time healer. Today Subhadre (popularly known as Titu) is a bright-eyed and cheerful twenty-one year-old who has spent all his life in Auroville. Was raising Subhadre a different experience than raising her own two children? "Completely," says Mallika. "You could say it was an adventure that came with its own rewards and challenges."

Is a child more special when he or she is your own? Is an adopted child less so? When it is a case of adoption, does the process of raising the child become easier if the child is from the same culture as you? Or does bonding of this type transcend the conventional boundaries of race, class, and ethnicity? Within the multi-hued, multi-cultural mosaic of the Auroville social experiment, such bondings have been happening for years. The children in these inter-cultural relationships are mostly of south Indian origin. With few exceptions, they are able to integrate their identity with the help of Auroville's pluralistic aesthetic. Besides Mallika, the small number of Western Aurovilians who have adopted an Indian child include Cecilia and Didier, a French couple, and Prema and André, an Argentinian-Algerian couple. Their stories are similar, and yet uniquely their own.

Ludivine was adopted through a recognized orphanage in Bangalore in 2002. Before she came

into their busy lives, however, Cecilia and Didier had not felt for many years the need for a child to fill the so-called "gap" that some childless couples feel of their lives. But when the desire to parent a child did come, it was somehow too late. "Adoption was not at all a last resort, but a first choice," says Cecilia. Living in Auroville since 1994, the couple wanted the opportunity to give a disadvantaged Indian baby a loving and comfortable home environment to grow in. But how has the little girl's arrival affected their lives? "Welcoming Ludivine into our heart seemed like a very natural thing. That Ludivine would be Indian did not surprise us at all either. We had the feeling since many years that it would happen one day so we were quite prepared. We already knew each other well by the time she arrived home in Auroville. Still to become a round-the-clock, full-fledged mother and father of a 6-month-old baby from one day to the next was quite something! I remember eating only left over baby food for the first week of her arrival, as we were totally overwhelmed. And Ludivine was so easy, so much at ease from the very onset. She is blossoming here!"

Like all new mothers, Cecilia's eyes light up when she is with her child. The two look completely unlike, the mother being blonde and blue-eyed. Cecilia's Indian friends wondered about the contrast in the beginning, but almost everyone, she says, felt touched. To people who say, "She is lucky to have found you," Cecilia and Didier respond with, "We are lucky we have found her" and to the question: "Is she yours?" they always answer: "No, we are hers!"

On the cultural level, Ludivine has helped her parents anchor themselves in India. Their unit Sound Vichor takes them often to different cities in India but now, being parents of an Indian child, has made them feel more at home. So much at home that they are not so keen to return to France even for a brief holiday to visit their relatives. "We'd rather see our parents come over here to visit us and their grandchild in our own environment."

Although the whole legal process was somewhat tedious, Cecilia and Didier are happy that it was available for them. In the 1980s, for example, when Mallika was going through Titu's guardianship, a formal procedure for adoption by foreigners was not in place. Her initial experience of trying to adopt through orphanages in Pondicherry was difficult. "I was not Indian or Hindu, and was already a natural mother of two children. That made me

suspect to some degree. Being single did not help either."

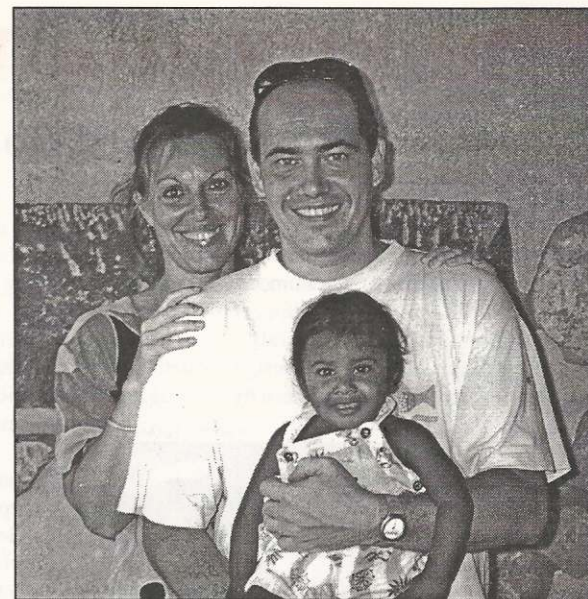
For quite a few years now, the Indian authorities have been encouraging Indian parents living in India and abroad to come forward to adopt. They feel a young child will develop into a better and more stable person if he/she lives in his/her country of origin or within a familiar cultural milieu. International adoptions have, however, become rare perhaps because of the stricter criteria the prospective parents have to fulfill. Cecilia and Didier feel the new procedure is in place to save the interest of these very vulnerable young children and counteract the abuses that may have happened in the past. In their case, the fact that they had been married for many years, had been regular visitors to India since 1989, and had lived in India on the same visa since 1994, was decisive in convincing the authorities of their good intentions. Also, almost everyone they had met after contacting the orphanage in Bangalore had heard about Auroville. They felt reassured, says Cecilia, "that a child entrusted to us foreigners here would grow up in tune with her country's culture and language, in a safe and loving surrounding beyond caste and colour prejudices as far as possible."

Prema and André are legal guardians of Pavitra, a three-year-old Tamil girl from Kuliyapalayam, a village close to Auroville. It happened in 2000, through a close friend of Prema's who had adopted a Tamil boy. His sister, she discovered, needed a home as well. The little girl's biological mother was a widow who was too poor to support her, and the child was at an age when bonding with another person, so removed from her context, was understandably difficult. Language was a major barrier as Prema and André



Pavitra with Prema

PHOTO: COURTESY PREMA



Baby Ludovine with Cecilia and Didier

PHOTO: COURTESY CECILIA AND DIDIER

knew no Tamil. Also, being in their mid-fifties and busy with managing Auromode, a big garment unit, the couple were not too sure if the arrangement was going to work. But when they met, says Prema, the energies were so strong that within six hours Pavitra was living at their house.

One of the brightest children in her class, Pavitra studies at Deepanam school. Having adjusted to her new family with remarkable ease, she also spends one day in a month with her biological mother and siblings in Pondicherry. Linguistically versatile, Pavitra speaks Tamil, French, and English, and understands Spanish, her "Western mother tongue". For Prema, Pavitra is a "sweet, gentle, fantastic, intelligent" (the list of adjectives goes on) child who has brought much joy into her life. "The amount of love I receive from this child has led to my opening to the Divine", she confides. Like Cecilia and Didier, Prema also feels parenting an Indian child has deepened her contact with India, a country she has lived in for more than 23 years.

Interestingly enough, prior to their becoming adoptive parents, Mallika, Cecilia, and Prema somehow knew that a little being was coming into their life. In all three cases the women believe that coincidences, interventions, and the workings of grace have played a role in facilitating the entry of these special children into their lives. It was all meant to be, they emphasize, the adoption or guardianship process being merely an instrument. In their own way, they even question the suitability of using the term "adoption". While Mallika argues it is not so much a question of adoption but about "raising a child, helping him to grow and discover his inner self," Prema's response invites us to consider an interesting inversion: "I believe it is the child who has adopted us!"

Abha Prakash

## ORGANISATION

# I was almost kept waiting

**T**here is a story about Louis XIV, "Le Roi Soleil". His Majesty was being dressed one evening for a function. As he prepared to leave his royal apartment, the valet responsible for handing him his cane appeared at the last moment – in time, but only just. Louis remarked, "J'ai failli attendre." I was almost kept waiting.

Majestic indeed, this suggestion that each Royal second is so precious that almost wasting one or two of them is a serious offense.

It occurs to me that the Sun King would have had a difficult time in Auroville. His Majesty would almost be kept waiting... and then actually kept waiting... and then he would wait some more... and then the real waiting would begin. It would, perhaps, dawn on Louis XIV quite quickly that his royal time was of no value whatever in the City the Earth Needs.

At least, that is how I already feel after a grand total of five weeks back in Auroville.

This is not so long. But already, in that newcomer-ish way, I have somehow acquired four-and-a-half jobs around town. The half job I'm not sure about, because I was supposed to have lunch yesterday to hear all about it – but the man concerned never showed up. So I had a

very bad-tempered meal on my own in the Aurelec café, and moodily repaired to New Creation Corner for a restorative cake with ice-cream.

Another job is as acting Secretary to one of Auroville's grander working-bees. This involves taking notes at the thrice-weekly meeting of that body: and being the official recorder of the General Community Meetings which happen on three Wednesday evenings per month at the moment. (Yes, the very cross-looking man in the blue T-shirt writing down your every word is me.) That is nine-and-a-half hours of meetings per week.

All of them begin late and finish late. They meander along. They end at some point. More meetings are suggested and arranged. Further consultation is necessary, for which even more meetings will be required. Decisions are reached, but they don't mean anything because if anyone doesn't agree then it's as if the decision never happened. People say things. Other people say things. Then the first lot of people say something else. It's as though we are all hoping to exhaust one another, and the last one left awake will have won.

When I was in Corporateland last year, I

possessed a memo which described the five possible reasons for a meeting. They were: give information, get information, hang-out together, make a decision, discuss options. It turns out that there is a sixth reason for a meeting, which exists only in Auroville.

But I don't know what it is.

In the West, the Prevailing Myth is that if you pedal fast enough for long enough, you will have lots of money and you can buy lots of things and have a great house (or two, or three) and not have to work anymore... and THEN. Then it will all be okay, and you will have Solved It, and you can relax, and Everything Will Be All Right. Phew!

The Myth is passionately believed, and vigorously defended. Imagine walking down Wall Street asking people, "What are you all doing? Don't you realise that this is all unnecessary? What are you doing to yourselves?" How would they react?

In Auroville, by contrast, the Prevailing Myth is that if we just hold enough Meetings, if we can include enough people in The Process, if we can only talk to each other enough, if everyone (everyone) can have their say, if we can just fit all of us in... THEN. Then it will all

be okay, and we will have Solved It, and we can relax, and Everything Will Be All Right.

This Myth is also passionately believed, and vigorously defended. I know exactly how (say) the AVCouncil would react if I asked, "What are you all doing? Don't you realise that this is all unnecessary? What are you doing to yourselves?"

At one end of the scale, I have a lawyer friend in Sydney whose time is charged out at \$300 per hour, billed in seven-and-a-half-minute increments. This is putting a value on time with a vengeance. At the other end of the scale there is... well, there is Auroville, where it seems that no value is put on time. The mere act of meeting is deemed to be of value in itself. Asking whether anything is being achieved is beside the point: as though one were to ask a stockbroker to put a price on a sunny day.

Put it another way. On the eve of another tour, Charlie Watts was asked, "What's it been like playing with The Rolling Stones for twenty-five years?" He famously replied, "I haven't. I've spent five years playing, and twenty years hanging about waiting to play."

Come and check this place out, Charlie. Au revoir, Louis!

David C



# The Egyptian museum

Brand New Day's design makes it to the top 50

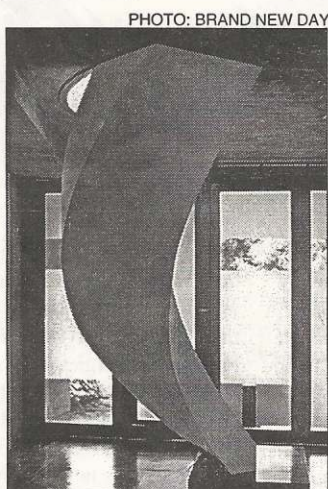
There are moments in life when, confronted with some stunning new photo, painting, shape, fashion or design, the immediate reaction is an exclamation of "Wow! How fantastic... beautiful ... fabulous (or whatever)." The design for The Egyptian Museum in Cairo by Auroville's Brand New Day (BND) unit headed by French-Canadian born architect Dominic Dube tends to evoke just such a reaction.

Sixty storeys high (approx. 200 metres) and occupying some 100,000 sq. metres, BND's design results from an extraordinary call in January 2002 to the architects of the world from Egypt's main museum of antiquities in Cairo, supported by the United Nations and UNESCO, inviting them to submit plans for a comprehensive new museum to be located near the Pyramids at Giza. No less than 1,500 entries were received. Of those 1,500, the international judging panel in October '02 whittled the number down to a final 20, but then – encouraged by architects around the world and the International Union of Architects – in

Paris added another 30, all of whom are to be incorporated in a book. BND's design has been included in that second batch of 30, making it one of the most outstanding in the world, when one considers that nearly all the famous names in architecture from Europe, Asia and the Americas had made sub-

missions. When asked how they had approached their design, Dominic elaborated as follows. "In awareness of the proximity of the River Nile, which has for thousands of years been absolutely central to Egypt's life, well-being and culture, we were first inspired by the timeless felucca river craft of that great river, the life blood of Egypt and its civilization, to create a

shape like a giant sail, carrying – as we saw it – the energy from the past, the contents of the museum to be, to the present time, to today's humanity. For the chunk of the museum where the collections are to be displayed we used the concept of a giant golden sarcophagus, housed within the heart of the outer administrative and support structure of the museum."

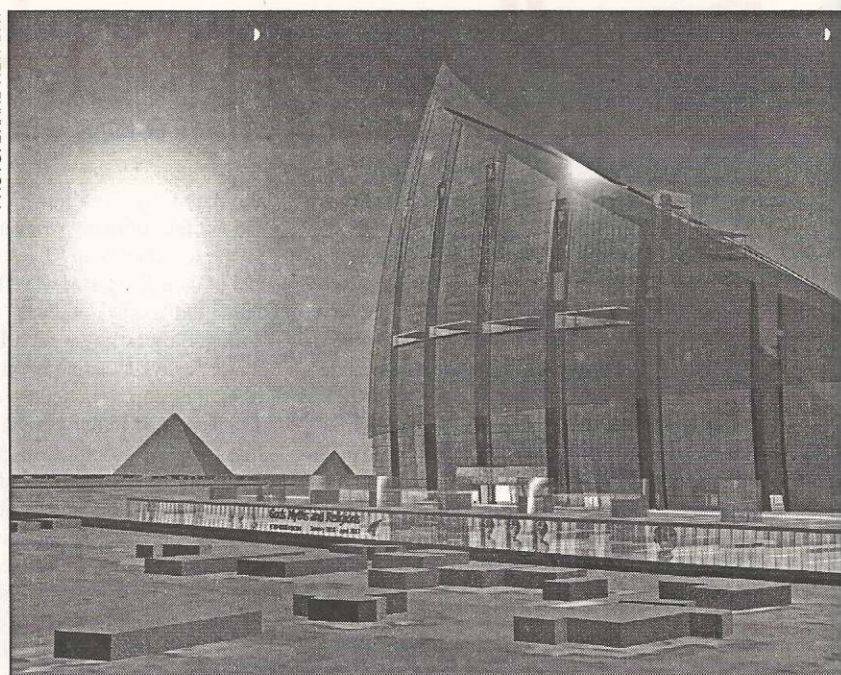


Staircase in Kottakarai house

Talking about the experience, Dominic told how the BND team of 18 architects and support staff – some 40% of whom BND has recruited from the local villages and trained up to become significant contributors, like skilled model-makers – had felt inspired and carried by a higher energy, which they ascribed to Auroville's strong connection with the Mother and Her Egyptian ancestry. Over a period of 6 months they had gone into amazing detail to come up with their proposal, which had to incorporate storage and display space for some 15,000 artifacts, including the complete collection of Tutankhamun artifacts, plus many tens of thousands more from other sources and those yet to be discovered; had to allow for a flow of around 20,000 or more visitors a day, including their transport; and had to provide adequate space for admin, vehicle parking, restaurants, research, and many other needs. The end result, they knew, would go far beyond the published budget of 350 million dollars to build, but they had a strong feeling not to cut back, hoping that their proposal might so excite the imagination of the international judging panel that they would feel justified in considering an increase.

Through their submission BND has certainly put itself – and India – on the world map of available architectural talent, but it is not the first time that the unit has hit the headlines. Not so long ago they won the

PHOTO: BRAND NEW DAY

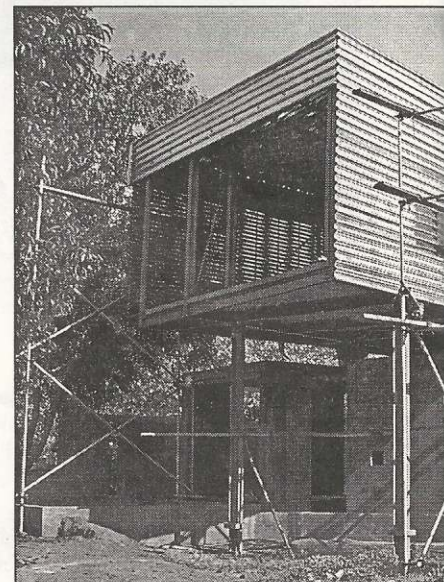


'Commendation Trophy' in the annual design competition run by India's prestigious 'A & D Design' magazine for 2001 with their plans for Auroville's Rêve community, and more recently have again won the same prize in the competition for 2002 with their design for an exciting Aurovilian residence in the Kottakarai area.

With new architects already signing up to join his team from as far away as Korea and Thailand, Dominic is more than ready to take up a range of other challenging projects to pour his and the team's talents into.

Tim

For more information e-mail [brand-new-day@auroville.org.in](mailto:brand-new-day@auroville.org.in) or visit [www.brandnewday.com](http://www.brandnewday.com)



Top: Model of the Egyptian museum. Middle: Klara's house in the final stages. Right: Bobby's house under construction.

# Arcosanti: an urban laboratory

An update on a city experiment which had links to Auroville

In the late 1970s a young American, Peter Callaway, had a vision of three interlinked points of light on the earth which he sensed represented something important in the evolution of a planetary culture. Those points were the communities of Auroville, Findhorn (Scotland) and Arcosanti in the U.S. The 'Hexiad' project was set up in 1979 to further learning exchanges between the communities (the vision and project were described in a book, 'Linking the Future'). The project, however, was short-lived. Over the intervening years informal exchanges have continued with Findhorn but little has been heard of Arcosanti. In fact, many Aurovilians thought the Arcosanti project had been discontinued until three members of the community – David, Nadia and Brad – visited Auroville recently and gave an update on what's been happening there.

Arcosanti started in 1970 when the Cosanti Foundation began building an experimental town in the high desert of Arizona, seventy miles north of Phoenix. When complete it will house 5000 people. Arcosanti is designed according to the concept of 'arcology' (architecture + ecology), developed by the Italian architect Paolo Soleri. Arcology advocates cities designed to maximize the interaction and accessibility associated with an urban environment; minimize the use of energy, raw materials and land, reducing waste and environmental pollution; and allow interaction with the surrounding natural environment (as Soleri puts it, the built and the natural environment should interact like organs in a highly evolved being). To achieve these aims, Soleri favours building on marginal land and at high-densities (of the 360 acres owned by the Cosanti Foundation, only 14 acres are allocated for the town). When completed, Arcosanti will be a complex of linked pedestrian-friendly buildings designed to maximise efficiency of space and energy flows. Soleri is particularly interested in using solar energy for lighting, cooling and heating (unlike Auroville, at Arcosanti the buildings need to be heated for nine months of the year). He does this by using materials like concrete which absorbs heat and releases it slowly, and by circulating heated or

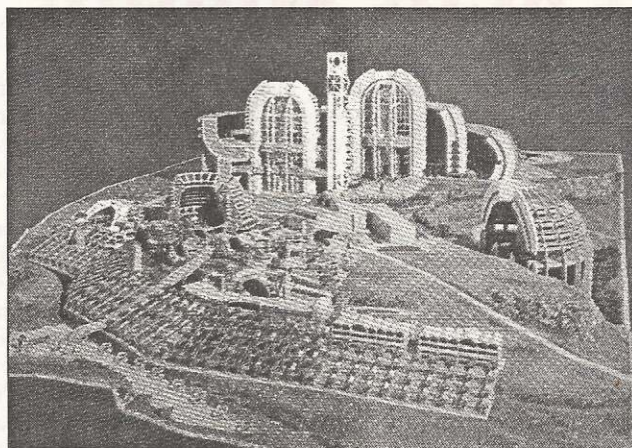
cool air through solar chimneys, fans and special membranes. One example of whole-city design is basement greenhouses that provide food for the inhabitants while channelling hot air upwards into the main area of the town. Soleri also make extensive use of the apse (a quarter of a sphere) in his design, for the apse provides shade when the sun is high but allows the sun to warm up facades and open spaces in the cooler months when the sun is lower in the sky.

Many spaces within the buildings are designed to be multi-use – an open space can be transformed into a workshop area then a meeting space within a few minutes – in order to ensure the most efficient use of facilities and to prevent 'dead' areas developing at certain times of the day. For the same reason, living quarters are located next to work and recreation areas. But this is not just about the efficient use of resources. Soleri also believes that the intensification and complexity of activities generated by such dense living arrangements (what he calls the 'urban effect') will induce creativity and a change in consciousness of the inhabitants. "In this sense," points out David, "Arcosanti, like Auroville, is designed to be an experiment in urban consciousness, an urban laboratory. Not surprisingly, we are facing many of the same challenges. And that's why we've come here now – to renew the learning exchange."

Soleri himself visited Auroville in the early years and was fascinated by the challenge of designing a city for human unity. "If you want a symphony," he remarked apropos Auroville, "first you have to build an instrument which will allow you to play a symphony."

Arcosanti is very far from being finished: less than 5% of the concept has been materialised. The work so far has been done by work-

shop volunteers, who sign up for five week training programmes, and by a small core of 30-40 permanent residents. Almost all the construction has been financed by the sale of the famous Arcosanti bells (which bring in \$1 million a year) and by people paying for workshops and tours (50,000 tourists a year visit Arcosanti). However, construction is expensive in the U.S., which is why Soleri is clear that the larger constructions at Arcosanti can never be financed in this way. "He believes," explains David, "that what is required is a major paradigm shift in society from building weapons to developing new models of human habitation. Then the energy and resources will be there to complete a project like Arcosanti. In the meantime what is important is the process. What Paolo encourages



Model of Arcosanti

us to engage in here are experiments in thought, in ways of visualising urban settlements of the future which are alternatives to suburbia and which try, in Soleri's words, 'to turn the tide of ecological disaster'. Soleri himself has designed an arcology for 100,000 people (to be housed in a 'hyper' building one kilometre high), an arcology where the city integrates a dam, even an arcology for outer space. That's why he's known as a visionary architect. He forces us to

think differently. And this can influence the way an architect approaches more prosaic projects, like designing a hospital or school."

What's it like to live in Arcosanti? Selvam is an Aurovilian who spent 7 months in Arcosanti last year. "You can't compare it with Auroville because it's not intended to be a community but a town and the population is always changing. What I like about the place is that people – including Soleri, who is in his eighties – really work hard there. They've also got good resources. I'm interested in graphics and, after doing the introductory courses, I ended up working on their website using really good equipment and fast connectivity. That's something I miss in Auroville! On the whole, though, Auroville lacks nothing in comparison. In fact, people there look up to Auroville."

But Arcosanti is about 'densified' living – is there a lack of privacy, and what about the noise? David, who has lived in Arcosanti for over twenty years, points out that everybody has private space. "As for the noise, it's something you learn to live with. We have an apartment on top of the foundry but when it gets noisy I tell myself that this is where most of our funds for the project are generated. Actually, I'm normally working elsewhere when the foundry is being used." Nadia, David's partner, loves their apartment, some of which is underground but which opens above to the clear desert skies. "It's like living in a sculpture," she says.

The population of Arcosanti has grown over the years. "As you get more people," says David, "you have to work harder on certain things like decision-making and communication. Every morning at Arcosanti all work stops for 20 minutes and we all sit together to discuss matters of the day. At least once a week Paolo attends a meeting at which all of us – visiting students and residents – are encouraged to discuss any issue. Paolo will talk on any subject – architecture, philosophy, history, religion – but he never tries to impose his views on us. 'I'm designing the instrument,' he says, 'not writing the music'."

Alan



# Challenging aesthetic sensibilities

Fabian, a young architect, shares perspectives on home design in Auroville

Like a ship emerging boldly out of the horizon, Bobby's aluminium and steel home rises out of the green terrain of Prarthna. The dull grey sheen of metal reflects the expanse of sky above, with subtle curves of a sweeping roof and taut pylons of steel like ropes holding sails to a mast; it has an undeniably futuristic look, sleek and well-crafted like a fine piece of precision machinery.

At the other end of the city, in Auromodel, Klara's house is a picture of post-modernism – metal juxtaposed with warm yellow Jaisalmer marble, smooth grey plaster, warm Vengai wood and sand-blasted glass. The stairway floats out and a zen-like quality pervades it both inside and outside.

Homes that could very well have come straight out of the sets of 'Matrix', and of which everyone seems to hold such strong opinions about: "What is this? A boxy railway caboose?" "A factory with tin-roofs?" "An oven? Surely the residents are going to fry inside!" "A transformer station?" The biggest critiques come from seemingly the most open people. Amidst all this, the bold architect, his non-conforming clients, and two communities that stand behind the experiment open to new perspectives.

Auroville Today met

the upcoming architect Fabian and learnt of his motivations, challenges, visions and dreams.

Trained in Germany and with work experience in Berlin and Mumbai, Fabian has been for more than one year part of the Brand New Day Team. He is proud of the international nature of the 15 member team there. "We feel ourselves strongly as a kind of global office. Dominic and Jean-Marie are French-Canadian, Baskar, Suresh and Rajendran are Aurovilians born in the neighbouring villages, architects, trainees and supporting staff come from various places in India and Europe. We want to remain like this – diverse and mixed."

He speaks of the influence of other architects at Brand New Day on his own work and appreciates the interaction that happens between the team. "While we have our different styles, what we have in common is our love for architecture, the love of building and the commitment to the ideals of Auroville. But we don't see ourselves as being limited to a specific location. We see Auroville can manifest in whatever form and the spirit of Auroville can be found anywhere."

However, getting the communities of Prarthna and Auromodel to approve his personal vision for two houses was a challenge. Fabian reminisces, "Suhasini was very open-minded and with her nod of approval, I gave the drawings of Bobby's home to the Development Group. At first there was an uproar – how can this be here? But the Group and the community soon agreed that the spirit of experimentation was welcomed in that particular place. It was the same in Klara's case too. In that area in Auromodel different kinds of houses with no connecting visual aesthetics or a uniform architectural style stand side by side, still going harmoniously together. It is a kind of unity in diversity that is enhanced by the green carpet that connects the buildings."

Fabian attributes his ability to manifest these new kinds of homes essentially to the openness of his clients and good communication amongst the people involved. "Klara came to me when I was still working with Satprem," he says. "She was very receptive to modern architecture and we found a common ground in our appreciation of it. I was very interested in trying out this fusion of a light steel frame with a solid base and Klara liked the idea and the design as she wants to have a house that is

designed like a modern capsule. In Bobby's case, something very interesting happened. While there was a similar kind of trust and openness, he did not have a specific vision, except that it was understood that the house should reflect his stylish vision of himself." Fabian came up with a proposal tailored to Bobby's situation – that of a young single guy, upwardly mobile and modern, a computer professional living alone but perhaps not for ever. "So I felt why not give him a house which fits his frame of mind. When he wants something else, then he can just disassemble the house and sell it on the scrap market or extend it. Bobby fell for it!" And so the idea of the steel frame with aluminium was born.

Fabian realizes that he may be perceived as the 'wacko' guy doing oven like steel and aluminium sheet homes, but doesn't see himself limited to a single style. "I think I am far too young as a professional to be judged and placed in a slot and I do not believe in the application of the same recipe to different situations. Every project has different parameters and the job of the architect is to understand them, ask the right questions and – in continuous communication with the client and consultants – to create a structure which satisfies these parameters. We all at Brand New Day are committed to modern architecture trying to cope with ever-changing needs and requirements. Architects and "their" architecture have to be flexible and adaptable, like surfers riding the waves of the ocean, to use a metaphor of Rem Koolhaas."

He explains that while Bobby's house is pure in the sense of material used, restricted to steel and aluminium and clearly separating materials and construction, Klara's home is almost a departure from traditional architecture. "It is a hybrid with conventional brick work, natural stone, steel beams, wooden screens, aluminium, glass... The design plays with opposing elements/characteristics like open and closed, light and heavy, industrial and natural, neighbour and inhabitant."

Fabian strongly believes that these new homes are suitable for the climatic conditions and affordable in the long run. "Aluminium is long-lasting, reflecting the sun and light. Its thermal mass is low, which means it does not collect heat to radiate it back at night like in brick houses. If you combine the qualities of aluminium with insulating materials like Aircon-

panels (concrete with air-voids) or insulating layers of air which can flow freely, than one can call this kind of construction climatically responsive.

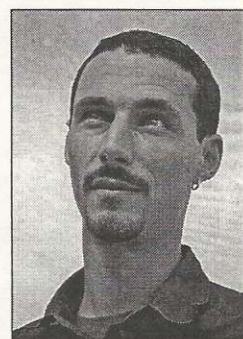
Along with these measures the roofs in both houses have a large and ventilated air-buffer between the actual roof and a kind of false ceiling defining the living spaces."

The cost-effectiveness of these homes is still an issue. "We continue to learn," he admits. "The materials (and the skill to work with them on the site) that are so easily available in the West, prefabricated and of a controlled quality are hard to come by in India and contrary to Europe not cost-effective but expensive. Plus everything in India has to be done with manual labour. But we are learning the techniques and the ways to optimise the construction, to make it less complex, less heavy, with less material. I think this is something that is worth experimenting with and I believe that industrialized materials provide the means for beautiful, cost-effective and climatically responsive future buildings."

What does Fabian feel about his creations? "I think Bobby's house has something of the cover of a computer desktop. Like a motherboard with all its circuits inside into which you can just plug in. A cover for something vibrant inside. Klara's home corresponds very beautifully to the organic growth of the nature around. It forms a counterpoint to nature rather than merging with it."

For Fabian, materials like aluminium or steel with their technological / intellectual character and their rigidity can form a perfect backdrop for the actual flow of life within the building. He points to the grey sky above Klara's home. "Aluminium has the wonderful quality of connecting the sky with the earth. See how the home appears – with the reflections of the almost leaden sky on the material it perfectly fuses the two elements! And it reminds me of airplanes made in the forties (Junkers JU 52) and the streamlined cars of the fifties, designs expressing the vision that technology can serve humankind in beautiful ways."

Priya Sundaravalli



Fabian

PHOTO: BRAND NEW DAY

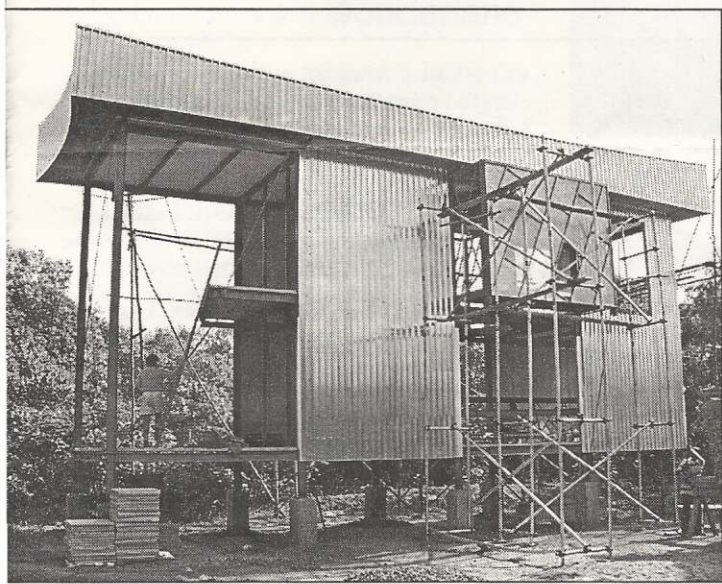
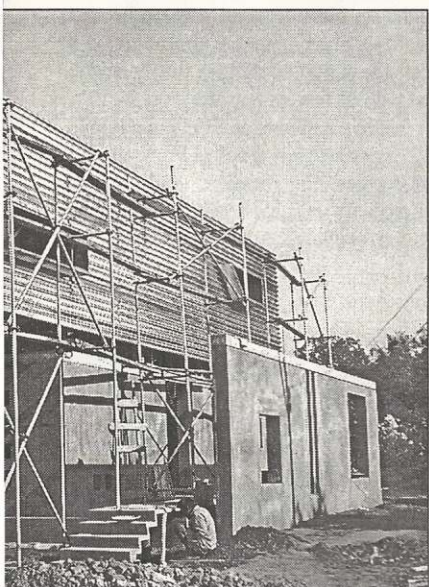


PHOTO: BRAND NEW DAY

## Creating a Dream

Through the doors of Auroville, a young man learns how to put his artistic talent to use

Rajendran, a young Tamil Aurovillian with creativity and ambition, spends his days as an architect for Brand New Day. He was born in the nearby village of Bommaiypalayam, but grew up in the atmosphere of Auroville. His parents worked in Auroville and he started going to New Creation school at a young age. He continued his education at Last School and later at After School. When asked when his love for art began he explained, "When I was attending Last school, I was able to board at New Creation. I had a lot of time in the evenings and I would spend it in my room painting or drawing. I also spent time at the Pyramids where I was taught by many and learned different styles of art."

Raje (as he is known by his friends) has a humorous smile and a generous nature. His passion for artistic creation flows into his everyday living, inspiring a continual search for new experiences. "Each step is a new adventure," he explained in his optimistic way. "After finishing my studies, I applied to many different art schools outside of Auroville. I even went out and visited some of the schools. But, I was thinking a lot about how I could make my way as an artist. I felt it would be very difficult to support myself so I decided to learn something more useful while using my art work."

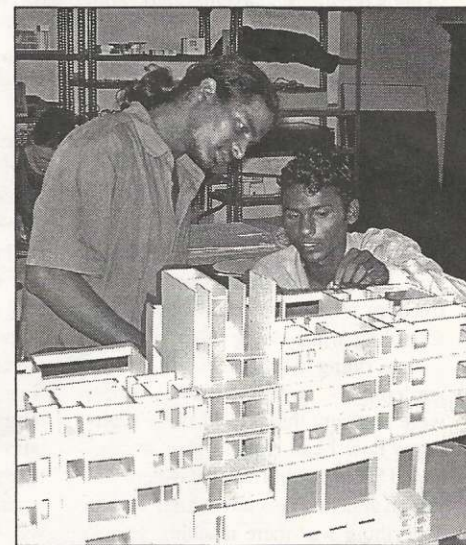
With a keen eye for detail, architecture presented itself as a way for Raje to do exactly this. "I went to Aurofuture and spoke with Anupama and Raman. I worked there for several months but there wasn't a lot of work for me so I joined Dominique and the team at Brand New Day."

Dominique helped Raje get an internship in Ahmedabad with the well known Indian architect BV Doshi. "Actually," explained Raje, "I had applied to the architecture school called CEPT which had been built by Doshi who was also the chairman. But my test scores weren't as good as they should have been and I was not accepted." Still, his passionate drive to learn the trade of architecture gave him a chance to study for some time under the guidance of Doshi. After six months, Raje decided to return to Auroville. "Most of the projects I helped with in Ahmedabad were large urban developments. My work didn't include a lot of detail and I enjoy working in detail very much. But I was working with many different people, juniors and seniors alike, and feel that it was a very good experience."

Back at Brand New Day, Raje found himself busy with a great variety of work including drawings, model making, designing and even supervising sites. "It was really good to be able to work on

so many aspects of a project and to always be doing something different. My days were never the same and this kept things very interesting and challenging. One thing I really like about Brand New Day is that you work as a team and yet you are also on your own." After three years, Raje decided to take a break and do something entirely different in Auroville. He began working at the Auroville Bakery, using his hands to create breads and croissants. Ten months later it was time for change again. "Working at the Bakery was a good learning experience and I had fun, but I got tired of doing the same thing every day and was drawn back to architecture. I had never intended to give it up, I had just needed to try a new aspect of work in Auroville."

Last fall, Rajendran had another adventure propose itself through his work at Brand New Day. "There was a friend of mine who I met through our mutual architecture work who lives in Bijapore. He had many projects and offered me a place to stay and work. The projects were mostly individual houses and small hotels. It was nice to visit another city outside of Auroville. It is good to see what is happening around you in India and the rest of the world. I was also able to learn more about designing on a computer which is a good skill to have today." He also spent a month in Bangalore work-



Rajendran (left) at work on a model

ing on a model for a large apartment complex.

Having recently returned to Auroville and the Brand New Day office, Rajendran smiles as he talks about his life here. "When I travel I realize that there is no place like Auroville. I love the variety of work and people and projects that Auroville provides. In the future I would love to continue to travel and use my skills in architecture and other forms of art work to make my way. At the end of each adventure though, it always nice to come home."

Sunaura



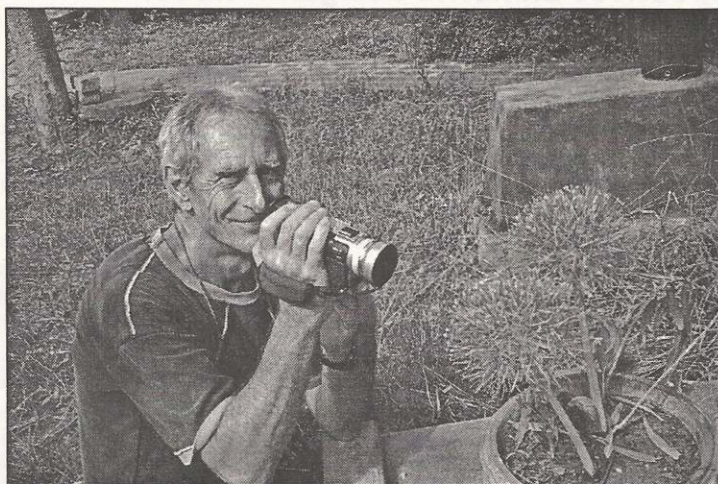
# The extraordinary within the ordinary

A former baker discovers a new vocation behind the camera

The video begins to roll. "A nest of pale ivory white ghostlike baby mantises tip-toe delicately about their newly hatched egg case – a gigantic female moth's cottony belly unravels like a mummy as she lays mustard-seed like eggs – the sharp clicks of a male moth with his feathery antennae vocalizing his presence to potential mates – a garden lizard licking ripe dates ..." and Life begins to reveal itself before our eyes.

It is a secret no more. Auroville's very own wildlife photographer is a shy and intense Frenchman by name of François. A resident of Dana community, he is the caretaker of a flourishing wild garden which he has nurtured from its early days and which is now the stage where Nature unfolds her drama for his eyes. As yet unheralded and unrecognized for the living wealth he has been documenting through the camera lens, François's introduction into this intense calling was quite serendipitous.

It began two and a half years ago, when he received a gift of a camera. He found himself fascinated by the fauna and flora around him and began to capture it on camera for his own curiosity and pleasure. Nothing fancy or flashy, just a modest beginning with flowers that blossomed in his garden and little creatures that lived in and around his home – the skinny yellow frog that perched on his fan, the gecko who loved to eat moths, a giant crab spider with its multiple eyes, menacing whip scorpions... all became his models. Now and then he would stumble upon scenes he had never witnessed before, like the mantis at the tip of a Canna plant arms in prayer and head cocked, staring right back at him through the lens,



François recording flowers of "Supramental Manifestation" (*Haemanthus multiflorus*)

or the tender moment of motherhood when a mama scorpion scurried on the bathroom floor with a teeming nursery of babies piggybacking along... The list grew and in no time the collection of photographs became unmanageable.

The first few people to view these photos were his nieces, the twins Swaha and Swadha, who soon spread the word, and they began to do the rounds within the larger community, including the inevitable circuit through the dining halls of Aspiration, courtesy of Boris the insect guru. François confesses that it was Boris's infectious enthusiasm which transformed what started as a hobby to a serious avocation.

Boris's knowledge of zoology also proved helpful in identifying many of the creatures.

Soon, the limitations of photography pushed François to explore the dynamism of video recording. Now he has over sixteen hours of live video recordings and the work continues to grow. François has been approached by some teachers from Auroville schools and environmentalists working in the bioregion for the use of his videos for education or field training. However, while he is quick to point out that for such an ambitious undertaking much work would need to be done like editing and the development of a background narrative to accompany the visuals, he has been generous to share this body of work with those interested. Anton from Transition school has just made a copy of the entire collection for students of biology. Eric and Saravanan, environmentalists working in the Kaluveli Tank, have also expressed interest in accessing this video bank. The potential for further expansion and enrichment of this work is promising and awaits person(s) with interest, commitment and drive.

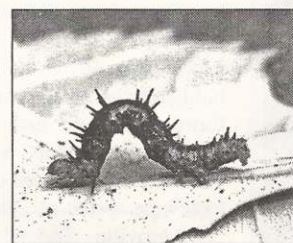
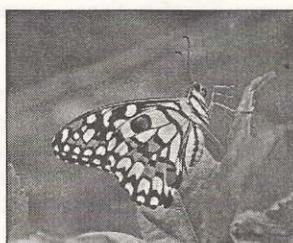
Today is Thursday and at 11 am every Thursday, François screens the latest recording of

his forays into the natural world. Open to all and publicized by word of mouth, these matinees have become very popular with a loyal following – Boris, Rita, Nyal, myself, and occasionally students from the local schools.

I am an hour early to tour his garden. The land is parched awaiting the May showers, but many plants and trees are in full summer bloom. The chikoo and jack fruit trees are heavy with fruit. As we walk by, François identifies flowers by the names that Mother gave them – New Creation, Quietness in the Mind, Psychological Perfection, Adoration, Mental Purity, Renunciation of Desire, Krishna's Ananda, Solace, Miracle... I am filled with delight just listening to those names. He draws my attention to the animal life hidden amidst the foliage; most are invisible to my untrained eyes until he points them out. An abandoned mantis egg case, a silvery chrysalis quivering from under an oleander leaf, a green horned caterpillar with its hearty appetite chomping on a hyacinth leaf, the tadpoles darting busily in the cement pond with its few inches of water...

I realize that life is abundant if only one is able to see it, and its essence has touched François and perhaps transformed him for ever. And he with endearing simplicity and modesty, continues to discover the extraordinary within the ordinary.

Priya Sundaravalli



PHOTOS: FRANÇOIS

## VISIONS AND DREAMS

# Twins Dream

Swadha and Swaha, 28 year old Auroville born twins, reflect on their childhood in Auroville, their studies abroad and their dreams for Auroville's future

Though they have many likenesses and share the closeness of twins, they have their individual dreams and ambitions. Swadha currently works on the Auroville Council and is raising her one and a half year old son, Kylan, while Swaha has just finished teaching the school year at Transition. She will soon be departing for an adventure abroad where she will be visiting Montessori schools under the Heidi Watts program to get a broader understanding on educational teachings. Over a cold glass of water on a hot summer day, they shared with me a little about their past experiences and what they hope for the future of Auroville.

"My favorite childhood memory," said Swaha with Swadha in full agreement, "was going to school by horse. The lack of a certain structure here in Auroville gave this amazing freedom where we could have some schooling while doing other activities such as riding to school, learning about gardening – anything really – there were so many things." "I don't really know how I can express it in words," added Swadha, "but every day here was just an amazing new adventure. I mean everything was there teaching you so much about being alive and living and learning about nature and all that is surrounding us. In the West I would be in school and they would teach you so many mental things that it was easy to forget all the inner things." Together with their mother, they travelled abroad for the first time when they were sixteen. "The transition to the West for me was damn hard," admitted Swadha, "I completely denied Auroville for some years as a way of survival." Swaha reacted the opposite way and would

spend all her time day-dreaming about Auroville. She expressed that this was difficult because she was living in the West but her thoughts were all somewhere else. Regardless, both girls worked twice as hard as others as they had to build a academic foundation as well as master their current courses.

After five years abroad the twins returned to Auroville. "We had lost even the thought that we would come back here to live one day," explained Swaha. "And then on the first morning when we woke, we realized and could not deny that this was home." Even though 'home' was rediscovered, they returned to France where Swadha worked for some time before returning to Auroville for good. Swaha, who was studying to be an English teacher in France, went to the States where she had a job teaching French. It was her first time on her own and she reflected that "it was a super experience. At that time I didn't even know if I would return to Auroville to live. I was offered a job in Mexico to teach and just two months before taking the position I realized I wanted to go back home to Auroville and that I could travel later on if I still wanted." Young and energetic with a new perspective of what Auroville meant to them, Swadha and Swaha both became active in the creation of Auroville's dream upon their returns.



Baby Kylan with Swaha and Swadha

What do they think about Auroville youth today? "I think the children born here or who come to live here at a young age all have the desire to leave Auroville at some point. And it is really good that they are given the tools to do it," said Swadha. "I don't think that most teenagers in Auroville today would have a difficult time adapting to the west. They have the kind of mental preparation that is needed to get along anywhere. This is good but I feel that something got lost somewhere." "For me," added Swaha, "what I did not like about my childhood in Auroville was that there was not enough schooling. I think the schools now are a real mixture of both the spiritual and the academic." "I don't think we missed anything in our youth here," her twin said, "At 16 or 18 it was my big thing to think 'Why didn't Auroville give me that?' but now it feels very different. Every day that I work for Auroville on the Auroville Council I see all these problems arise and we have to learn how to face them."

Swadha. "We would know each other better and be connected and talk. We would be just fully in Auroville for Auroville. I think there are people in Auroville right now that are not here for Auroville. But, we have to go through this and at one point it will all just untangle and be like it should. It would be good if we grow because that would mean more people are interested in Auroville's ideals, but sometimes I think when we were just 600 sincere people, it might have worked better than having thousands. What I would like most is that people become more conscious of what they are here for and not for their own personalities." "People don't know how to communicate," Swaha added, "It is something we can hope for in ten years – that we can have a way of communicating and regulating the whole city." I asked her what she thought one way for better communication would be. She laughed and said "eye contact."

"I hope," said Swaha, "the schools will be working together more

To me, this is a real education. We're learning and I think in Auroville that is one thing you can't miss."

So what about future dreams for Auroville? "I hope we realize that the simplicity of the early days was the best way" said

and that we have more kinds of schools. That we find a way to work together and share buildings, materials and teachers. It is important that we learn to work together and not stay in our own little individual worlds. I hope there will be many more teachers." "My dream for our economy," said Swadha, "is that there should be just one big account and you can get what you need off it – not only rice and dal. And that all the products of Auroville are given out to the community in exchange for work. I also think it would be good to have some kind of funds for travelling such as with youth who want to go out and experience. I think we have enough resources like the Auroville units to make it work and at the same time Auroville is getting a good name for its products outside. This would generate funds. And probably the tourist thing will develop. People coming here to see how we live would generate money. It could be realized if we worked for it. I know some people have really high standards of living but then just add a bit of consciousness."

"I also hope that we find new water sources," continued Swaha, "and new alternative energy resources. We need to use the wind and the sun more. It's also what we should try to do now." "Yes," agreed Swadha, "lots of new energies and a little train going all over Auroville so we don't have to pollute with all these bikes. I would really like Auroville to have a public transportation system. And, if we are dreaming, I would like to see flowers everywhere. All along the sides of the railroad tracks and everywhere you looked, flowers of all kinds would be there to greet you..."

Sunaura



# Seeking a new dimension

Manoj is part of the Auroville website and AVNet teams, Uma manages Upasana Design Studio which designs and manufactures garments.

**AVTODAY:** What is important for you? What motivates you at present?

Uma: My primary interest is not in building Upasana into a successful business. What's most important to me is my relationship with those who come here. Sometimes somebody comes and you know that what she really wants is not new clothes but warmth of heart. And that's what I give them. In other words, what we're trying to find here is another dimension, to reach the deeper self and ask 'How are you?' rather than just sell clothes. Most people would call this very unbusinesslike, but even at the level of business I find it works beautifully.

Manoj: Auroville has many layers, from the most superficial to the deepest. Auroville works through personal networks, and people relate to one network or another depending upon which layer of Auroville they are attracted to. When you graduate through the layers and go deeper to the soul of Auroville, you will see that the ideal of Auroville is a living fact: it is not something that we have to create, it is already there, we only have to tune into it. Then you

understand that if you offer yourself entirely everything is given to you, that you are provided with exactly what you need to progress. That's the Auroville which motivates me, to which I want to be connected.

**AVT:** What are your visions? What direction would you like your work to take?

Uma: The world of fashion is a highly corrupt world. It cashes in on creating a sense of crisis about one's looks and one's body. It makes people identify so much with how they look that they forget who they really are. I'd never felt comfortable in this world, never understood why I'd taken up fashion design, and when I came to Auroville I saw it as a chance to break with the whole thing. But then I sensed this was just an ego reaction and that actually Mother wanted me to continue. Why? I see now that what Mother wants is a purified version of the body language which is clothes, one of the strongest languages humanity is speaking today.

In other words, a new dimension in clothes design is needed, and I'm sure it can come from Auroville. At present I am trying to find my own mantra in textiles, to discover the spiritual background of Indian textiles. In terms of textiles, each State has a very different personality. Where does this come from? It's a beautiful, meditative research and I'm beginning to see that most regional designs are, at root, very pure: they have taken birth in front of the Lord in the temple.

My dream is to bring the best of what has been discovered into our work at Upasana so that a very special kind of value, another dimension, is added to the clothes that we make. Mother will do it. I get a glimpse now and then and know it will happen in the very near future, but I don't know how She will do it and whom She will use. All I can do is make myself ready to be an instrument.

Manoj: Over the years Auroville has developed various organs of its collective body, but I can see that the brain and the central nervous system of the community, which would enable it to act as one entity, have not yet been



Manoj and Uma

developed. In this context, I believe that AVNet, the Intranet of Auroville, will play a very important role in developing our collective self-awareness. Modern technology which has made possible the Internet has given us a totally new evolutionary possibility. One thing I've learned is that feedback is the basic mechanism through which intelligence grows and evolves. This is why we are building more and more ways of giving feedback to each other into the next generation of AVNet. The present generation AVNet allows only very basic feedback – it's not an organizational tool – but the next generation, which we'd like to inaugurate on

August 15th, will really facilitate more efficient team-working through allowing groups not only to exchange information but also to work on drafting joint documents and make decisions online. As groups increasingly link up with each other through exchanging information, so the central nervous system of the community will evolve and the community will become increasingly self-aware of its collective body and its intelligence.

It sounds like a dream but I know it will happen because I see very clearly the higher intention behind which is doing this work.

*From an interview by Alan*

## ART

# Through a Looking Glass

Exploring Eva's wonderland

The comments in the guest book for Eva Mikulski's exhibition in Pitanga early this year have a common thread. "Insightful and joyful in expression. You made me happy", "Creative and fun – I couldn't help but smile", "The children love it!" "Super!! This is real creativity. Even if you don't call yourself one, you are an Artist with a capital A", "Beautiful and funny", "First living works of art I have seen in quite a while."

Anyone who crossed Pitanga's threshold during those three weeks in January came out either with twinkling eyes, a lopsided grin, a skip in their step, or just plain flying. As for the exhibition itself, it featured, among other things, little white people scrambling up a spiral of blue clouds, the orange 'scrunchie-man' exploring the limits of a square, champagne glasses tipping with lusciously ripe earths made of painted ping-pong balls... A wonderland it was.

Eva Mikulski is bespectacled with a boyish crop of salt n' pepper hair. Her scholarly and severe appearance softens deceptive. As she begins to talk, her soft voice exudes an intense warmth and sincerity.

"I was never trained formally in art except for a few courses in still-life at the Pyramids", says Eva. Her engagement with art began only seven years ago and came about dramatically in her adult life. "A sudden internal change made me take the big plunge," she recounts. "I left everything at this point. I left my work which was in administration, my partner, my community, my house – everything. And on top of it all, I had a health crisis. I went to a very good homeopathic specialist and she treated me. Suddenly administration work was not possible anymore, and I went into education."

"The thing I like very much in Auroville is when you feel a call towards something, you don't need to go to school to get a certificate. It is sufficient that you feel the call and you invest yourself in that."



Eva

Eva immersed herself in education but quit after a few years. "When I was in there, I loved it. Children are wonderful. But we, the adults, have too many mental imaginations. How the children should act, how they should function, what is good, what is bad, and so on! My lesson was that it was too early to do experiments in education."

Her departure from education naturally led her even more into art. "After leaving the school, I felt I became more childlike. In the school, I learnt a lot from the children about creativity and the absence of mental impossibilities or limitations."

"I read a lot of books on Art, especially Picasso. Somewhere he says that it took him sixty years to paint like a child! And when I saw this, I said to myself, 'Why don't you go and be like a child. Become a child!' Okay, but to say this and to become one are two different things. Perhaps my experience with children, the books I read and what was going on inside of me, all of it had to come out!"

In the past, Eva had followed a few courses at the Pyramids, but soon she began to explore art on her own as well as copying, and when she completed a work, she would rip it apart and reassemble it into a collage. "Collage lets me stretch my imagination and helps me see differently."

Eva also began to favour mixed media, and material became very important to her. Some of

the items she uses in her works are astonishing. Things a layperson would walk past without a cursory glance get a second lease of life with Eva. She uses a lot of found objects in her work: left-overs from units, workshop scrap, recycled material, plywood, canvas, plaster of paris – anything that catches her eye. Eva admits that part of her studio is a veritable junkyard. Even her own works that come back from her exhibition, which no one wants, she recycles and transforms into something new.

Speaking of her first work, "It was made of plaster of paris, cloth, and half a tennis ball. I sold it in Chennai at my first exhibition. Actually there is an embarrassing story that goes with it. This painting was done with fresh plaster of paris directly applied over the canvas. The lady who bought it for an architectural office called me two months later with the news that the painting was self-destructing. The plaster was cracking and falling off!" With such learning experiences behind her, Eva had to become more and more acquainted with material properties and their optimal use. "Of course now when I use plaster of paris, I always make sure of using chicken wire as back-up," laughs Eva.

Eva has held three exhibitions. The first was 'Perception' and it happened because her studio was overflowing. Using this same approach, she has had two more shows titled 'Along the Way' and 'Explorations'.

Asked if the nature of her works has changed over time, Eva replies in the affirmative. "It is like everything you do, art is just a tool to evolve." She admits that her life experiences immediately show up in the works. For example, after travelling to Australia, she found that the size of her paintings had changed. "Australia is a very vast country. When I came back, the size of my works went from small to huge. That was quite funny."

What is special about Eva is her idealism and aspiration that is true to the Auroville dream. "At my first exhibition in Chennai I sold two pictures. But here, in Auroville, I don't sell. We have not come here for this, for money exchange."

"Moreover, this is a gift that has been given to me. It is not that 'I' do, the big I. It is something that comes and I put it down. Where is the 'property'? How can I sell it?" Eva reveals that at her latest exhibition, a lot of her works had willing takers.

But would people not take advantage of her goodwill? "If so it is their problem," laughs Eva. "If after some time, one doesn't want to see a painting or a sculpture any more, one may want to give it back and take something else. But if you have spent money on artwork, there is always the tendency to cling to it and to see it as an investment."

On the topic of her latest exhibition, the works exhibited showed baffling contrasts. It was hard to conceive that such diversity of expression came from the same artist. "Yes, but there are different natures to the artist," reflects Eva. "That is why I chose to call it 'Explorations'. I did not want to limit myself saying, 'Eva, this is not your style or this is only temporary'. All this comes from inside and so it has to be from some real part of myself."

"I spoke with another Auroville artist and it gave me the confirmation

that the tool for everybody is different, the direction is different. I have a mental rigidity and it is very important to let go and surrender. I see art as a tool to confront myself, discover and manifest what I am and surrender. To protect and imprison oneself is what prevents one from being happy and creative. Anything, anything at all can be the tool," she passionately declares, "But let us just DO! To give up and settle down – this is life's biggest tragedy."

*Priya Sundaravalli*



Scrambling up the cloud spiral

PHOTO: EVA

PHOTO: JEAN

PHOTO: EVA



# Subramania Bharati

## A spirit of the local landscape

The name Subramania Bharati is well known and beloved to the people of India, and especially to the Tamilians, but it is mostly unfamiliar to Westerners. Bharati played an important role as a freedom fighter, first as a journalist in Madras, and then as a poet in Pondicherry, where his life was interwoven with those of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He was the father of the modern Tamil style, who breathed new life into a rigid, formalized language. He is best known for his lyrical poetry, which is considered outstanding. Although he lived in poverty and exile, he produced his finest poems in Pondicherry, where he used to contemplate sunrise or sunset from the end of the long pier that used to stand in the Bay of Bengal, or escape town to walk in the mango-groves of Muthialpet, not far from the present edge of Auroville. His spirit is intimately linked with the local landscape and sense of place, as an ancestral presence and ever-fresh source of inspiration. He died young, at the age of only thirty-nine, as the result of a tragic accident.

Subramanian was born in 1882 in Ettayapuram in a minor principality of the Madras Presidency. His father was prominent in the princely court. He showed precocious aptitude for spontaneous poetry in Tamil, but his father wanted him to study mathematics and English. To this end, he sent his son to a high school in Tirunelveli, but Subramanian paid little attention and failed his matriculation exam. He returned home, and provided the sinecure job of reading daily newspapers to the local chieftain. About this time, the title "Bharati" was conferred on him by a gathering of poets at a court function. Henceforth, literary circles knew him as Subramania Bharati, or just Bharati (embodiment of Saraswati, goddess of Speech).

He was married at age fifteen. His father died soon thereafter, leaving his family destitute because of his forward-looking but unsuccessful businesses. Bharati realized he would have to get some formal education, so went to Benares, where he was accepted at Hindu College with high marks. He developed a love for English poetry, especially Shelley and Keats, and a keen interest in the social ills of Indian society. In 1902, the prince of Ettayapuram visited Benares and invited Bharati to return with him. Bharati lived as court poet for two years and, during that time, picked up form the prince what was to become a lifelong habit of taking opium.

He left the prince in 1904 and soon began working in Madras as assistant editor of the Tamil daily newspaper Swadesmitran. His wife Chellamma's hard career of marriage to a man who was brilliant and charismatic, but a poor provider with unpredictable and unconventional attitudes and interests, began in earnest with the birth of their daughter and the move to Madras, where they lived in a dingy room. Bharati's work was to translate into Tamil the news from the English dailies, including speeches by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, a demanding job at which he excelled. His first published poem, "Hail Bengal", appeared in 1905, when he met the extremist Lokmanya Tilak, who swept him off his feet. Bharati began to make speeches and to sing his poems at the Marina sea beach. People gathered round him spellbound. His wife became the

butt of cruel stings from neighbors and friends.

In Calcutta in 1906, Bharati met Sister Nivedita, an Irish disciple of Vivekananda and a great social worker who zealously encouraged women's education in Bengal. Sri Aurobindo, who had met her in 1902, described her as "fire". Her meeting with Bharati had a major impact on his mind, influencing him to adopt the ideals of women's education and social equality. Returning to Madras, he quit his job at the newspaper and started up a Tamil weekly with two extremist followers of Tilak. This weekly, India, soon became known as the most daring of nationalist papers. Ever-growing audiences came to hear him sing his

Aurobindo and the other writers-in-exile were frequent. They intensely studied the Vedas and mystical philosophy together. Bharati translated Patanjali's Samaadhi Pada into Tamil. Sri Aurobindo broadened his friends' knowledge of Western literature and introduced Bharati to the American poetry of Walt Whitman. In turn, Bharati inspired Sri Aurobindo with appreciation and knowledge of Tamil.

The atmosphere in Pondicherry in those days was deceptively sleepy. Smuggling was major business. Secret games of cat-and-mouse were continuous. Spies came in ever color, disguised as fake sadhus, sham diamond merchants, and even



of incriminating him. His wife was often angry because of their extreme poverty. Escaping to the groves of Muthialpet, he wrote the immortal poem "Kuyil Pattu", the mystical song of the Tamilian cuckoo. From this same period, 1912, date the cream of his writings, "Kannan Pattu", a series of twenty-three poems on Vishnu, and "Panchali Sapatham", based on the Mahabharata. In 1914, when Mr. and Mrs. Paul Richard visited Pondicherry, Bharati met them at the reception held in their honor, as an esteemed member of the artistic community.

Fragments of his 1915 diary remain, showing him to be very poor and in bad health, often ailing for weeks on end. It is unclear how much of this ill health was related to opium. He could not afford a doctor even when his child was seriously ill. He decided to leave French India in 1918 and go live in his wife's village of Kadayam. He was promptly arrested. Under the influence of various people from Swadesmitran, including Annie Besant, he was freed after three weeks, under the promise not to engage in any anti-British propaganda. In Kadayam, he lived flouting caste restrictions and proclaiming the equality of the sexes. His wife's friends and relatives thought he was insane.

With the end of World War I and the beginning of the civil disobedience movement, Mahatma Gandhi was touring India. In Madras, Bharati burst in, unannounced and uninvited, to the house where Gandhi was staying and invited him to a beach meeting that night to hear him speak. Gandhi had a previous engagement, so had to decline, and Bharati got up and left as abruptly as he had arrived. His spirit had impressed Gandhi, however, and he said he hoped that someone was taking good care of him. Bharati in turn was won over by Gandhi's message of nonviolence. He had mellowed.

After a disappointing period trying to get his collected works published, a project that failed to find backers for fear of reprisals, Bharati returned to his old job at Swadesmitran in Madras after an absence of fourteen years. He took increasing interest in Vedanta, and reached a state of bliss and detachment, seeing the One in all things. He went daily to the Parthasanthi temple to offer coconuts and big bunches of bananas to the temple elephant. One day, however, the elephant was unexplainably irritated, perhaps in rut, and it attacked Bharati. A devoted friend saved him from being trampled. He recovered temporarily, but his constitution was shattered. He fell ill, but refused treatment. He died several weeks later. His family was in dire straits for some time, but from the 1930s, publication of his works brought them some support. His songs gave a powerful impetus to the freedom movement. His lyrics have become part of the spirit of the land.

He has left us a considerable amount of work, touching journalism, poetry, prose poetry, drama, short stories, novels, humor, essays, and translations. A gifted linguist, he was in command of the four recommended Auroville languages – Tamil, Sanskrit, English and French – plus Bengali and Hindi. Considered the pre-eminent poet of the Tamil Renaissance, he regularly translated English to Tamil as a journalist. Sri Aurobindo held his translation of the Bhagavad Gita in high regard. He enjoyed reading Victor Hugo in French and translating from French to Tamil. Sometimes he wrote in English. Translating his own poems into English was work he left unfinished.

Christine Rhone

## Seeking the Grace of Goddess Poesy

Come, Goddess with the jewelled name,  
Beloved Goddess, Poesy!  
Days, months and years have passed since I  
Beheld directly face to face  
Your gracious countenance and you took  
And used me as your slave. O then  
We two alone, hidden, withdrawn  
From the human crowd, rejoiced and sported  
In a limitless ocean of joy.  
In those days which together we spent  
No bird-song in the garden sounded  
Sweet as your voice, no flower shone bright  
Like those your eyes, no rivulet  
Ran cool and smooth like your clear words.  
Alone with you, with you my life,  
My Goddess, many days I spent  
Adoring you and you alone.  
As if a thorn should pierce and choke  
One's throat when one is swallowing heavenly  
Nectar, when I was all absorbed  
Enjoying your blissful company,  
I was afflicted by the cruellest  
Evil in the world, Penury.  
I for a while went out and, getting  
Rid of the thorn, returned. Alas,  
The golden pitcher of nectar divine  
Had disappeared.  
Yes, to get rid  
Of painful Penury, I agreed  
To serve a chieftain in the south  
And do base jobs in this base world.  
You, faithless lady, forsook me and vanished.

Missing the bliss ineffable,  
Your gift of grace, I suffered anguish.  
A few days later (how shall I say it?)  
The memory of my life with you  
Faded slowly from the mind.

The story goes that once a sage  
Cursed and condemned to be transformed  
Into a pig, forewarned his son  
(Before the curse could take effect):  
"Do not, my son, stand by and watch me  
Living the vile life of a pig.  
Quickly take a sword, hack, slay  
That hateful body. This, your duty,  
Do. This, my command, obey:  
Do this and know it is no sin."  
Reluctantly the youth agreed.  
The sage having become a pig,  
The son recalled the sire's injunction,  
Could not himself endure the sight

Of his famed parent's present plight,  
And sword in hand came near to kill him.  
But then the pig with penance ripe  
Uttered these words, "Stop, fellow, stop.  
Stop, stop, I tell you. This life, I find  
Is not as painful as once I thought  
It would be. Wind and water I have,  
And grass and roots in plenty to eat.  
Pleasant and sweet enough it is.  
If after six or seven moons  
You come again, you may kill me then."

Distressed to hear this plea, the youth  
Bent down his head and went away.  
Many months later the youth returned  
And found his father in the sty  
Well settled amid a family  
Of little piglets male and female.  
Doubting his eyes and sadly grieved,  
He pleaded, "Father, father, what,  
What do I see? Does this become  
Your name and fame, your greatness which  
Great saints and Vedic scholars praise?"  
With these words and eyes filled with tears  
He drew the sword to slay the pig.  
The former sage in anger cried,  
"Away! Get out! You evil wretch!  
Pleasant and sweet I find this life.  
But if it happens that you feel  
Unhappy, plunge into your heart  
The sword, and perish." So saying, the pig  
In penance ripe preserved its life  
And went back to its wallowing.  
Seeing all this the youth reflected:  
"When people fall from high estate  
They are at first a little bewildered.  
But not for long, for soon they come  
To love the new low life they lead,  
Though full of falsehood it may be.  
They quite forget the nobler life  
That once was theirs. Such, such alas  
Is maya's magical power of illusion".

Serving one with whale-like body,  
Tiny mind and full seven wives,  
I lost my pride and lived a life  
Like that of the sage in the story.

Original title: Vaaraay kavidaayaam. Translated from Tamil by Professor K. Swaminathan. From *Subramania Bharati, Chosen poems and prose, published by the All-India Subramania Bharati Centenary Celebrations Committee, 1984*

patriotic poems on the beach, which went straight to their hearts. In 1907, he attended the Surat Congress, when the extremists took over, and encountered Sri Aurobindo. Bharati's writings in India became increasingly outspoken.

The publisher of India was arrested in 1908, and Bharati fled to French Pondicherry, becoming the first Indian politician to take refuge there. The press was smuggled into Rue Dupleix and, for a short time, India and two other progressive papers that Bharati edited were printed there. However the British soon put a ban on all his writings in their territory, which effectively silenced him, since all his subscribers were in British India. One by one, his papers folded, leaving him frustrated and penniless. On the brink of dark despair, Bharati welcomed Sri Aurobindo when he arrived from the north in 1910. They were soon joined by V.V.S. Iyer, who was a well-known short story writer and a political refugee embroiled in the suspected Ashe murder case. The entourage grew. A new page opened for Bharati. Visits with Sri

false friends, to tempt the refugees to step out of French and into British territory where they could be arrested. One of Bharati's poems, "Love Your Enemy", was the result of a near-betrayal one night by a spy pretending to be a friend. When the spy returned the next day, Bharati sang the poem to him, and they spy fell at his feet in remorse and admiration. In another incident, false documents were planted in a well, meant to incriminate Sri Aurobindo and the exiles. The French investigating officer saw that Sri Aurobindo knew ancient Greek and Latin and decided not to arrest him. The police officer then went to arrest Bharati, but stopped when he saw nothing but pages of poetry in his room. A few years later, when the British put heavy pressure on the French to expel the freedom fighters and send them to French Africa, Bharati, in excitement and confusion, went to discuss the matter with Sri Aurobindo. The latter categorically refused "to budge one inch".

Bharati wrote profusely, yet many of his works were "lost", more likely stolen in the hopes

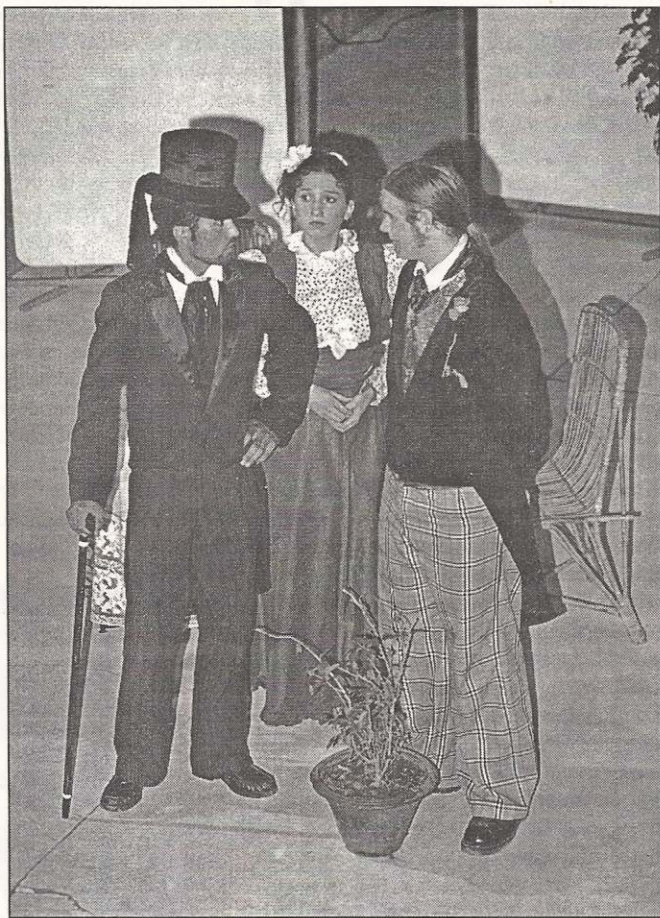


# Being earnest about "The Importance of Being Earnest"

After a difficult final rehearsal of Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" in February 1895, Wilde took the two dispirited leading men to his club. He said, "My dear George, my dear Alan, I have just one thing to say to you. You are neither of you my favourite actor. We will now go in to supper."

He would, no doubt, have been far more impressed with the performance of his masterpiece that was given at the Visitors Centre on the 24th of April by the Jericho Starlight Theatre Group consisting of Sam, Jackie, Riah, Ben, Fabien, Impi, Lazlo and Suresh. But what did the actors make of it?

"It's a trivial play for serious-minded people," says Riah. "Of all the performances in which I have ever been involved, this one was by far the most difficult, but for the same reason, also the most rewarding. Lacking a director and being amateurs in theatre, we, the performers, sought to work together to create a single flow of energy, something which any successful play requires and is not so easy to achieve. The production was rushing and chaotic to the very end, and there was not one cast member who did not seriously consider quitting at some stage. But we all recognized that we were building something together as a whole; that were any of us to quit, it would break, and we couldn't just leave our friends to pick up the pieces. So we held on to our dedication to this production, through all the chaos and confusion, the late nights and early mornings, the fighting and forgiving, and in the end it was all well worth it. It's amazing how much one can learn about oneself when pretending to be someone else. I think that we all came out of this with a better understanding of ourselves and our interactions with others, despite doubts and dispute over the success or even the point of this production – we were informed by a few individuals that comedy only distracts higher consciousness and that this play was far from being spiritual enough to justify its production in Auroville. The cast came out of it with a very successful performance, and more importantly, of unity."



Fabien, Impi and Ben in 'The Importance of Being Earnest'

# "Flowers aren't enough"

She had been slapped. That had happened regularly from the first day of their marriage, when her husband had tripped over her wedding slippers lying in the bedroom. In the years that followed the physical violence had increased, alternating with insults. She had tried to cover-up the problems, hiding the marital discomfort from her family and friends, hiding the bruises wearing long sleeves, burying the insults within.

A welt disappears in time. But personality-destroying insults heap-up, until one either decides to leave the marriage, or leave life. The latter had been the choice of Michal, a young Israeli woman from an upper middle-class family, who woke up in hospital after she had unsuccessfully tried to slash her wrist when her husband had beaten and humiliated her once again. Her family was around when she woke up, wondering loudly why she had never shared her problems with them. She said she couldn't. And there was a bunch of flowers, with an apology note from her husband. Realizing that this was just a note like so many others before, she made up her mind to leave him. For flowers are just not enough.

The play, in the form of a monologue, was based upon true stories and actual incidents. It was written and enacted by Naomi Ackerman, a visiting artist from Israel, and performed in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium for a mixed audience consisting of Aurovilians and women from the surrounding villages who had arrived with chartered busses. And this did not really work. Naomi's superb acting notwithstanding, many Aurovilians left midway, either feeling that the treatment of the issue was too elementary, or that the topic of a wife-beating husband had no relevance for Auroville, or that the topic was passé. But this was clearly not the case for the many women from the villages, where wife-beating is too often a normal experience. But they suffered from the lack of translation, and understandingly began to talk amongst themselves during the performance. That the text had been circulated in Tamil before the play had started was of little help, as most of the women are illiterate. Even when Naomi, bothered by the increasing whispers and frustrated that her words were not understood by a major part of her audience, asked someone to come forward and translate, the translation offered was not up to the mark. The translator also stated that part of the text was beyond the cultural understanding of the Tamil audience, as some of the circumstances of life in Israel are so different from life in Tamil Nadu.

# Rolling Stones Darshan

Then

February 1968. The band that had spent four years successfully offending every establishment ethic in England, Europe and America was in trouble. Four of its five members had criminal records – three of them for serious drug offences. The lead guitarist was showing symptoms of the nervous breakdown that would lead indirectly to his death a year later. Their last album, a dreadful "psychedelic" experiment, had been badly received: their previous single had failed to reach number one in the UK. Their manager had quit. They were directionless. They were broke.

The month that Auroville was founded, who would have believed that the Rolling Stones would still be around – triumphantly – thirty-five years later?

A song by the Stones – probably off their next, great album "Beggars' Banquet" – was played to Mother on April 16th, 1969 by Francois B. She said, "It's clearly a complete rejection of all mental rules, and that's the first step needed to go beyond. There are two or three minutes when suddenly – hop! (gesture of piercing through) you feel it contacts something else."

Still rejecting all the rules, including the one which says that men in their late fifties shouldn't really be doing this kind of thing, the Rolling Stones arrived in Bangalore this April for their first ever gig on Indian soil. Fifty Aurovilians (about 3% of the entire AV population) went along. How was it? Sam, an Auroville student, filed this report...

Now

April 4, 2003: The prospect of a weary 8-hour journey at 9 AM on a Friday morning is apparent in the faces of the 24 concert-goers waiting patiently in the Visitors centre car park. Questions are being fired left, right and centre at any one who will listen. Where the hell is that bus? I'm so tired. No breakfast... uuuuhh. Finally the Bus arrives, and it is more like a dwarf version of India's public transport than the luxury we had been promised. Everyone stares in abject horror, as they climb aboard, at the tiny seats made for 4-yr-olds, the absence of the luxuries known as leg-room and taperecorder. However, the trip begins as we settle into our seats.

Four hours into the journey, our first stop. Everyone piles off, saying God I need a drink and a fag. Where's the toilet? Heat, dust and many villagers, eager to see new faces, greet us. Realizing the extent to which this sudden burst of things meant, I passed out in the aisle.

Bangalore: 4:00 PM. Gates open at 5. Oh dear. Some are still without tickets, some need food, to locate a bathroom. A wild goose chase ensues round Bangalore, to locate Briegard Road, the place where some tickets are to be collected.

After Foulax and Eric have been dropped at their rendezvous point, the rest of us proceed to the Bangalore Palace Grounds, our

goal for this hot day. Our Mission: finally to see the Rolling Stones in concert! Some of our people have been fans for thirty years and never seen them; others are converts of a few hours ago, but still excited.

We reach the car park. Where do we park? Where are the toilets? Where are Bobby and the others with the remaining tickets? Aaaaaaaahhh! Queue: very long. Checks: no tobacco, no food, no drink, no bags. Inside: one huge stage, several free water stands, a few food stalls all selling the very same two options – spicy chicken in a chapatti, veg Patti.

Queue for the merchandise, not so long, make the most of it. Line up, buy t-shirt: MISTAKE! First rain comes: design gone. Underneath the various no-smoking signs dotted around the first section, people light cigarettes and the occasional tempting waft floats across. So much for enforcement of rules! However, I dread to think how these people got it in!

Excitement starts to wane after two hours of waiting, and cheers of "Come on", "Get on stage" result. Enter Mick Jagger, front man of the Veteran British Rock Group known as The Rolling Stones. Screaming, shoving, waving, calling "Take your clothes off Mick" all these things overtake the rational mind. It is the familiar beginning of what most concert-goers experience as two-and-a-half-hours of pure delight. The rest of the band join him – Keith and Charlie, who have been there since the very beginning, and Ron Wood who has been lead guitarist for "only" twenty-eight years.

Fantastic guitar playing, sensational saxophones, backing singers with voices to die for, and Mick. The true front man. Pulling off his clothes to the cheers of the crowd, he ran out in the downpour getting soaked like the other 20,000 of us, although the logo on his shirt did not run off with it. The rain adds to everything. 4 ft from the stage, water cascades onto us, drenching us right through, making everyone ten times livelier.

Lyrics are sung back to the crowd pleasers, but none more than that favourite of all favourites: (I can't get no) SATISFACTION. That's it, everyone on their partner's shoulders, screaming the words. The big screen features none other than my own Mother, Jackie, a teacher in this very school! And our British flag – humbug to all those who do not hail from our little Island!

It feels almost as if it was over as soon as it started. People now rushing and fighting for t-shirts, dive for the exit. Half-an hour waits to leave the car park. We retire to the only Pub we know the location of in this huge industrialized city in the South of India. The Underground. We have half an hour before closing time to reflect on what the day has brought us. We saw the legend. We were there. Due to Government restrictions and a weak economy, this was the first time in India for The Rolling Stones and we were there.

Another eight hours bus ride. Soaking, smelly, tired, deflated. No one speaks. Back in Auroville. No one speaks. Bed time, at 8 AM Saturday Morning.

Sam



PHOTO: COURTESY NAOMI ACKERMAN

A chance has been missed. With a little bit of foresight the organizers could have arranged for a running translation, and ask Naomi to slightly adapt the text to a Tamil situation so that her Tamil audience could identify with it. For that was what ultimately matters, and what Naomi, a crusader against the mistreatment of women who has performed the play over 500 times for diverse audiences in the world, wanted to share.

Carel

# AVToday and advertising

Recently the AV Today team has had prolonged discussions about how to improve the journal's financial situation. As raising subscription rates would not be fair or appropriate, we have decided to accept advertising from Auroville or Auroville-related businesses on an experimental basis. If you would like to advertise in Auroville Today, please contact us at [avtoday@auroville.org.in](mailto:avtoday@auroville.org.in) or phone 0413-2622517/2622572 for more information.



# FANTASY 2300

## Could this be Auroville?

“**T**his flower used to be called ‘Beyond Mind’ a long time ago, didn’t it?” asked the luminous Amritamaya.

“Yes, it was only about 50 years ago when it began to transmute from yellow to orange that it got its name ‘towards Supermind’. And it wasn’t half as beautiful then as it is now,” replied the equally luminous Pavitram. “Actually this flower took upon itself to reflect the struggle of that period to go beyond mind and was in its own way doing the yoga for the Aurovilians of that time who somehow failed to do it on their own.”

“Wasn’t that the time when decisions were made or attempted to be made at collective gatherings from a purely mental level?” exclaimed Amritamaya thoughtfully. “I wonder why they didn’t think of referring all matters to their innerbeing!”

“Well! The problem was that they had no contact with their inner being. You see, it was the time before they became true Aurovilians,” replied Pavitram, as the two watered the garden of ‘Gratitude’ in the oval area on a bright, breezy, late summer afternoon in the most beautiful city on earth.

Pavitram expressed tones of gold, orange and red that mounted in flame-like movement all over his form while Amritamaya revealed shades of blue, green and silver that radiated an inner peace and tranquillity like the lake around the garden they watered. “That’s why I call it the triple ‘c’ time of Auroville or the time of ‘ceaseless cerebral circumambulation’” he continued, “which pushed them into the double ‘d’ decade or the decade of the ‘despairing democracy’ when everything went into total turmoil and collective confusion and it was only with the slow appearance of the ‘aaa’ era that things really began to change.”

“Did you say aaa?” asked Amritamaya amused at his inclination for alliteration.

“Yes, ‘aaa!’ as you would exclaim when you are finally enlightened about something. Only in this case it means the ‘almost always aspiring’ state. It was only when they reached this state of ‘aaa’ that things took an upward turn for the Aurovilians. The Matrimandir for example was finally completed during this time,” exclaimed Pavitram, gazing at the golden globe.

“Did you read about how the ‘aaa’ happened?” asked Pavitram as he manoeuvred a jet of water from the lake with his steady gaze and allowed it to run through his translucent fingers, dynamizing it

before pouring it at the base of a flowering bush. “It seems they came to their senses when they noticed that the crows which habitually lived and flew around the Matrimandir were gradually turning white and were singing in this incredibly beautiful voice which nobody had ever heard from a feathered creature,” smiled Pavitram, looking quite golden all of a sudden.

“I read about that one!” Amritamaya said excitedly. “According to the journal of an Aurovillian of that time, it was the discovery of an old and faithful gardener of the Peace area, a quiet unobtrusive fellow, a true Bhakta of the Universal Mother (one of the very few of that time) who one day pointed out the bird to someone and said joyfully “Grow!” and brought their attention to it. Only it isn’t clear whether the name ‘Grow’ of this new species was the result of a deep philosophical speculation or merely the result of a phonetical mispronunciation of the local inhabitant. In any case, the ‘Grow’ phenomenon plunged the inhabitants of the City of Dawn into a state of inevitable introspection from which they finally emerged into the state of ‘aaa’. It seems there were even a few who accused the Force of being partial to Nature,” laughed Amritamaya, turning quite silver.

“Look! There is little Senthil struggling on his latest ‘swift surface skimmer’ and he can hardly swim,” exclaimed Pavitram as his attention was caught by a little boy balancing precariously on a fast moving disk propelled by fusion technology on the surface of the lake. “I admire the perseverance of this little human. He has been at it all morning already.”

They both drifted like a gentle breeze towards the lake gazing with interest at the struggling child. He saw them and waved excitedly, losing balance and falling into the water with a splash while his machine escaped from under him. Amritamaya stopped its run midway and held it close to the child merely with his powerful gaze. Senthil surfaced and clambered gratefully back onto it and found himself and his toy gliding towards the two onlookers.

“Thanks for saving me. I always feel safer when you guys are around. Hey! That’s a cool dress you have on today!” enthused the boy as he jumped ashore. “It’s great! I’ve never seen that one before!” He spontaneously hugged the beautiful being and felt this incredible energy flowing into him that always made him deliriously ecstatic.

Srimoyi

# 4 X 7 = 28

## Radical ways of celebration and creating community

**W**hat fosters community? In a growing and diverse community as Auroville, how can the spirit of community thrive and new connections be forged? Novel approaches are necessary, and an usual invitation I received at the parking lot of the Solar Kitchen definitely qualified.

As I was pulling my bicycle out, a young woman called out, “Excuse me. I don’t know you but I would like to invite you to a dance that my friends and I are performing.” I recognized her as the dancer Tina, who had performed a solo at a Newcomer’s party a few months ago. It had been quite interesting, a performance with no music and pin-drop silence from a rapt audience. “Each of us is allowed to invite four people,” she continued, “You are my fourth. And you can invite three friends. Can you come? It’s the day after tomorrow!”

Flattered at being singled out and amused by the originality of the invitation, I impulsively accepted but felt an immediate burden descend upon me. Pyramid schemes or chain e-mails had never been a personal favourite and I wasn’t sure which three friends I could call at such short notice.

I ended up calling no-one, unsure if I would go myself. The Rajasthan singers were featured the same evening. However early this evening, 10 minutes before the appointed time, I succumbed to novelty and I found myself pedalling furiously towards Sve

Dam in search of the elusive venue, Dariya and Johann’s home. A lit path and the ground speckled with dancing flames of Agal vilakkus (clay lamps) made their home hard to miss.

In a clearing, under a triangle of service trees festooned with lanterns, three dancers stood motionless in flowing whites. They were Tina, Dariya and Johann; Tina and Dariya from Slovenia, and Johann from Belgium. My eyes impatiently scanned the audience for signs of a familiar face, and I was relieved to see a few – Guy, Maria, my student Andre and his mother Elena. Enough to feel comfortable. I sank onto a mat.

The music began with a deep note reverberating as if from the belly of the earth. And slowly the dancers stirred, their movements haunting and primal; singly, in pairs and all together they moved. The movements seemed charged with metaphors, as if the meaning of life was played out. But dance being dance, it was an enigma. The message quivered behind an invisible wall that frustratingly seemed both easy to break through yet impossible to penetrate. How could this be? What was all this about? Why this performance? Why the unusual invitation? The performance over, I walked up to Tina full of questions, and I wasn’t alone. Guy had the same quizzical expression.

“We call this ‘Four times seven is twenty eight’. It is a gift to our friend Simo who has turned twenty-eight today,” said Tina, a threshold age which she believed is when a person truly steps into adulthood. The performance had been divided into four sections of choreography, each with a hidden message of initiation for Simo. She was willing to reveal only two – transformation and abundant love.

And the invitation? Was it some experiment to test the psychology of Auroville residents? She laughed, “No, just a novel way of bringing people together without losing the personal touch.” It made sense but I wondered if it was the whole truth. With Johnny making fresh hot dosas on the open fire with a generous side of coconut chutney, it would have been a disaster had the

whole community descended.

Later into the night, we ‘dance-played’ as Dariya called it. The dozen or two of us, strangers before, now friends. Our barriers down, shyness tossed out beyond the forest canopy, comfortable holding hands and looking into each other’s eyes, we moved, we laughed, we played mirroring each other and sharing space on the soft leaf-laden floor.

What magic was at work... a little event with an unusual invitation had forged bonds between people, and fostered the sense of belonging and community.

Priya Sundaravalli



Darya, Johann and Tina in ‘Dance Play’

PHOTO: COURTESY DARYA

## EXHIBITION

# “My life is painting”

An exhibition of Sivakumar’s impressionistic paintings titled “Open air atmosphere”, was held at Pitanga Hall a few months ago

**O**n display was a collection of oil paintings on canvas, depicting landscapes of the Bommaiypalayam canyons, seascapes and scenes from the Pondicherry harbour, as well as a striking self-portrait. This collection represented a year of work, during which Sivakumar travelled from location to location with his canvas, paints and brushes, and sat down to paint for days on end.

Walking through the exhibition, I was mesmerised by his skill in capturing light, colour, and atmosphere, and bringing it all to life on his canvas with bold, impressionistic brush strokes. Whether it was the rich red of the canyon laterite contrasting with the blue of the sky, the evening sunlight illuminating the beach sand or

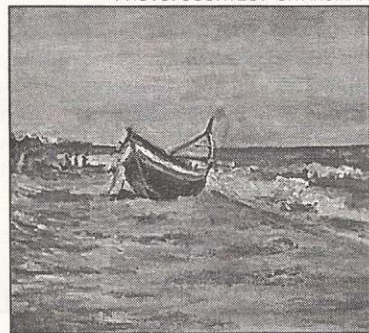
the intensity with which the self portrait stared back at me – I couldn’t help but be touched by so much beauty.

Hailing from Kuilapalayam, twenty four year old Sivakumar was drawn towards painting from a very young age and started his forays into art on his own. Though he did work with Aurovillian painters at some stage, most of the time he was alone, exploring and experimenting in the world of painting.

“I have been

greatly inspired by the great impressionist masters Monet and Van Gogh,” he explains. “I use their techniques, though of course the scenery is different, as I paint the scenery of India.” Sivakumar’s main painting subject is landscapes. He goes out into the open, chooses a location, sits there and paints all day, alone. “My life is painting,” he continues, “I paint every day. Painting is like meditation for me. When I paint, I feel very peaceful, very calm.”

PHOTO: COURTESY SIVAKUMAR

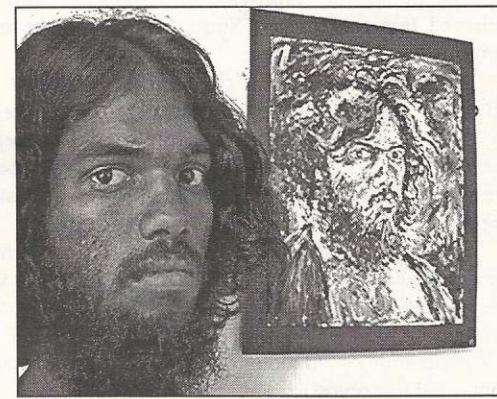


Seascape by Sivakumar

Sivakumar has already presented over ten exhibitions in Auroville and Pondicherry, and is at present in the process of setting up a gallery in Palmyra, Aurobrindavan, where his works will be on permanent display.

Sivakumar has also been teaching art to children for many years, in the Kuilapalayam Night School, and for the Auroville Village Action Arts Workshop.

In April 2002, Sivakumar started Yatra, the “Art for Children” project. Every Saturday and Sunday, children between the ages of five and twelve years from Kuilapalayam and the surrounding villages come to Sivakumar’s studio in New Creation,



Sivakumar with self-portrait

PHOTO: COURTESY SIVAKUMAR

to discover the world of art. All the materials, paints, brushes, paper, etc., which the village children would not normally have access to are provided. “The children come here to enjoy themselves and to express what they have inside themselves,” explains Sivakumar, “I teach them certain techniques, help them in their discoveries, but there are no rules. I let them express themselves freely. I love working with children.”

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