

Auroville Today

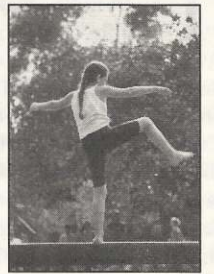
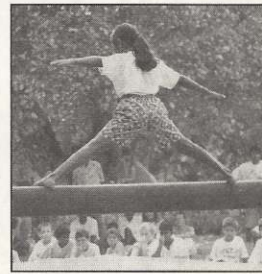
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The Auroville Today Team wishes all its readers happiness and enduring vitality for 2004



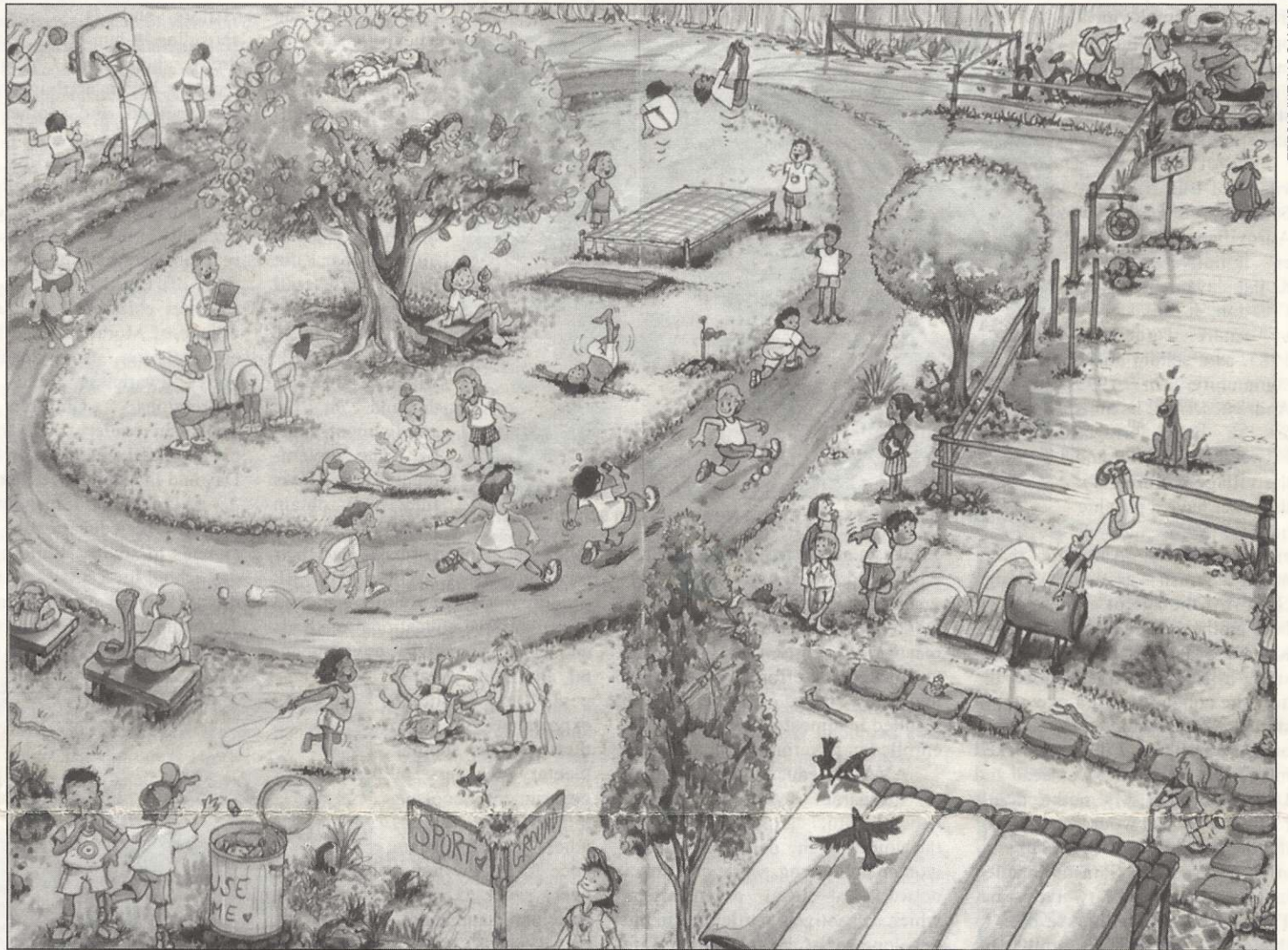
MAIN ISSUE: Developing the body

- On the trail of body consciousness
- Dehashakti's child-centred sports programme
- For the love of water
- Body awareness develops
- A sportsman's soliloquy



It's been remarked that if you want to see unity in action in Auroville you should go to the sports field. Not everyone would agree – during the football season half of Auroville appears to be suffering from some form of collateral damage – but there's more than a grain of truth in the perception that playing games together is a powerful way of dissolving barriers and putting things in perspective. Think only of that Pour Tous meeting where two Aurovilians were apparently locked in mortal combat, only for them to be sighted, later in the day, cheerfully batting tennis balls across a net in Certitude.

Physical exercise in some form or other is very much part of the weft of this community. For some it's a form of yoga, of conscious self-exceeding, for others a relief from the treadmill of meetings, for many it provides the camaraderie which is missed in so many other aspects of today's Auroville. Whatever the motivation, the choice of physical activities for such a small community is huge. In this issue we touch upon a few of them as well as upon Dehashakti, the organized sports programme whose aim is the integral education of the body. Take a deep breath...



CARTOON: EMANUELE

On the trail of body consciousness

If body-oriented activities are an indicator of a healthy society, then Auroville is positively glowing

Physical activities are nothing new to Auroville. In the early days it was primarily the environment that required intense bodily effort. The activities – forestation, building capsules, or bending steel at the Matrimandir – required strength, litheness, agility and, most definitely, hours of physical labour. Turning sinewy and nut brown under the blazing sun was part of the package. Recalls Frederick, "Life was extremely pioneering, exposed, and physical. At that time, there were no motor bikes and we either cycled or walked. Visits to Pondicherry were day-trips, cycling down in the morning and back at night." It was a lifestyle that did not seem to require any extra physical activity in the name of organized sports or games. However, as young people wanted to 'do things together' and the older ones also wanted some fun, people began to play. "These games filled a need for social interaction and for a sense of community," says Fred. "Many interpersonal problems were solved at sports. They fought in the morning and played in the afternoon, and it all balanced out."

But it was the presence of children that in 1972, sparked off organized

sports. "Like everything else in Auroville, sports developed out of necessities and needs. A letter was written to The Mother asking if Auroville could have some of the Ashram's sports teachers or have the children participate in the Ashram programmes in Pondicherry. But Mother said 'no'. She wanted Auroville to develop its own facilities." With a few adult volunteers, a novice sports programme was started in the Aspiration area for the 'Last School' children. The sports programme was, of course, designed along the lines of the Ashram. Frederick points to a photograph from those times, "Look! This could have come straight from the Ashram Bulletin. The kids in their uniforms and us, the so-called teachers all lined up just like in the Ashram playground." He narrates how Shrudderlal, a teacher from the Ashram who came to Auroville, divided the Auroville children of Last School into three groups – those with no lice, those with only eggs or nits, and those with adult lice.

Hari, one of the ex-students of Last School from that period, recalls the original Aspiration sports ground with nostalgia. "It was the first sports arena in Auroville. At that time it was huge;

with a sprawling football field, basketball and volleyball courts, two running tracks, a long jump and high jump pit, and a shot-put area. But the situation changed during the conflict between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville. Many of our teachers moved out and the school shut down and with it, the sports programme. In those years, with youngsters having little to do except 'hang out' at the beach, work at Matrimandir, or doggedly look 'for anyone to teach us anything,' it was sports that kept us together. It became the one activity that helped us stick through that trying time and it showed me the unifying power of sports. I realized that it gave us the strength to deal with any problem by putting up a united front, and to organize and successfully carry out any task."

With Auroville's growth, the sports activities gradually shifted to the Certitude community. Tennis courts were built and other games began to be played – table-tennis, badminton, volleyball and basketball. A small gym for body-building activities also got established. "It all developed quite fast, and Certitude soon became the official sports ground," recalls Frederick. "The children would arrive at 4 pm and

sports would start. The entire programme was initially administered by Aurovilians with no formal training in physical education."

It was largely due to the help of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIR) that was set-up in 1986 that sports was able to further develop. "Sports received due recognition," says Frederick who was appointed Director of Sports. "Besides the organized activities with their four categories of athletics, gymnastics, games and aquatics, other projects developed such as cycle tours, summer camps, and trekking, done during the holidays." Kerala, Point Calimere, Nilgiris, and even the Himalayas became popular destinations. Athletics and games further developed after tennis coach Yves arrived from Canada in the early nineties, and he became the driving force behind the Dehashakti Sports Grounds near Dana in the Cultural Zone. Meanwhile, André had created a sports ground in New Creation, originally envisaged for the children of New Creation school, but later used by anyone interested. The gymnasium built by Savitri expanded the New Creation facilities with body-building equipment and a hall for dance

and martial arts, and its swimming pool awaits funds for completion. Other Aurovilians also created dedicated spaces such as the hatha yoga hall in Pitanga, the Tai Chi hall in Sharnaga, the open-air kung-fu theatre in Vikas, the climbing wall in La Ferme, the riding schools in Kottakarai and Brihaspati and a host of courts all over the community. A skating rink and skate-board park are coming up in Dana.

Today there is a wide range of body-related activities happening in many corners of the community. Aurovilians have a choice of many activities – body awareness; hatha yoga in its many derivatives; Pilates; Tai Chi; Qi Gong; dance in its many forms such as Western ballet, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, jazz Alvin Ailey style, free form dance with the five elements and salsa; martial arts like Aikido, Kung fu, and Kalaripayattu; pony and horse riding; aerobics; cycling; roller-blading; gyro riding; skate-boarding; wall-climbing; jogging; trekking; water sports (including swimming classes for babies); surf-boarding; and wind-surfing. There are no excuses for any Aurovilian to not be on the sportive trail of body consciousness.

Priya Sundaravalli

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Deconstructing the walls of separation

The goat-herding children and the Aurovilians swooshing by on motorbikes are neighbours. However, invisible walls of cultural and social differences separate their worlds

Through education, Auroville is trying to make those walls visible, to villagers as well as Aurovilians, so that they can be deconstructed. The Mother strongly emphasized the importance of education for the villagers. She named the school which would help the village of Edaiyanchavadi out of its severe poverty, Udavi (meaning 'help' in Tamil), and the community which would provide education, training and employment opportunities for the village of Kuilapalayam, Fraternity. Both were started in the seventies and still exist.

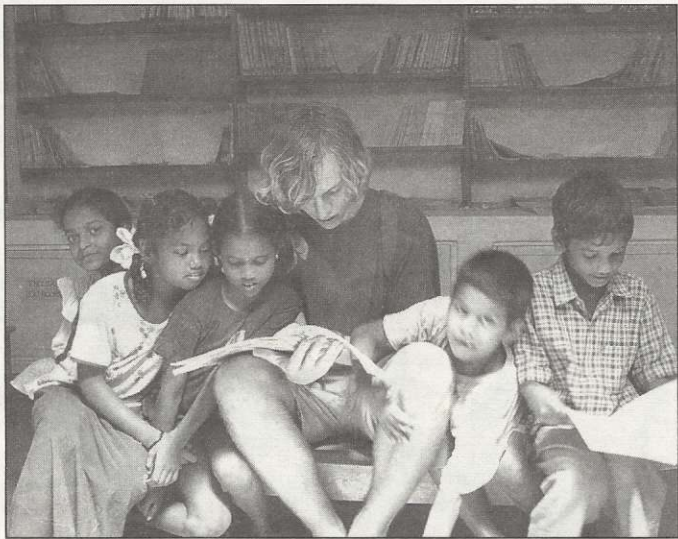
Out of the Mother's vision of true fraternity between villagers and Aurovilians grew another initiative in the Kuilapalayam area, New Creation. It was started by André Tardeil in 1983, as a school and a community. In 1995 André described its aims as "to build bridges between Auroville and the village children, for the latter have a psychic quality, a joy and an enthusiasm that Auroville really needs". Sarasu was such a 'village child'. At the age of eight, she left her mother and four sisters in Kuilapalayam, to go to live and study in New Creation. She recalls how the conquering of a new world started: "André adopted me and four or five other kids. I think he picked me because my father was dead and I had no brother. My mother didn't really know what would come out of it, but she said yes because our situation was so bad." Sarasu remained in New Creation for twelve years. Three years ago she moved back to live once again with her family. But mentally she has traveled far away from them. She has now been Aurovilian for seven years and works at the Financial Service. André was only one of the many Aurovilians involved in the early educational outreach. Meenakshi started Ilaigarkal (meaning 'youth' in Tamil) in 1976. Ivar started Isaiambalam ('a stage for music') in 1978, and Varadharajan started Arulvazhi ('the way of grace') in 1985.



Circle time at Isaiambalam

These schools, together with New Creation and Udavi, today all come under the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER), although Udavi is funded mostly by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. They are all situated in the Auroville area, where they cater to the children of Auroville workers, other children and young adults from the local vil-

lages, as well as the Auroville workers themselves (at Ilaigarkal). In addition, SAIER manages the 'Tamil Ulagam Evening Schools', currently operating in eight villages in the bioregion where they serve children who are in need of complementary education. The Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), the other main coordinator of Auroville's village education, started a night school programme in



Christophe reads a story at the New Creation school library

1980 as a means to educate children who had dropped out from government schools because they had to work during the day (or for other reasons). Recently, however, it was terminated as efforts increasingly made by the government have resulted in almost all children being enrolled in government schools.

AVAG's educational activities are inseparable from their work in general, which aims to encourage the voices of the dalits (casteless), women and young, while creating a network of local organizations which can actively participate in the development of the area. At the Life Education Center (LEC), run by AVAG in Kottakarai, a group of twenty young women learn English and maths, and are trained in skills such as typing, tailoring and embroidery. The primary focus of the two-year programme, however, is a rehabilitation of self-esteem gained through journal-writing, artistic expression, and group discussions on topics such as environmental hazards, gender awareness, and village power structures. Deeply

question it." Not that wearing shorts is necessarily something 'good' in itself, but Sarasu's simple words, and the little smile accompanying them, could symbolize how deeply-rooted cultural practices are just starting to shift and change within many of the villagers and villages touched by Auroville's educational outreach.

AVAG's other educational projects include the Primary Education Project (PEP) and a new women's literacy programme which is soon to start in twenty villages. A new vocational training centre is under construction next to the AVAG headquarters near Koot Road. It will receive sixty students yearly to be trained in skills which are in demand on the employment market. The governmental certificates they will obtain will permit them to

take bank loans in order to start their own businesses. Within the PEP programme, local youth are trained in progressive educational methods emphasizing creativity, environmental and body awareness, and cultural expressions. They then act as supplementary teachers in government schools in thirty local villages, where their appearance for a few hours every week is much anticipated and appreciated.

Providing skills in reading, writing, language, and maths, along with vocational skills, may be seen as the basis of Auroville's village education. This helps new generations of villagers to better face the increasing complexities of life in an area which is rapidly changing due to the presence of Auroville and many other factors. There is, however, also another basis: the vision of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Theirs was a vision of education which allows children to remain in contact with their souls, while it gently guides and cares for the development of all aspects of their being. This is the kind of integral educational environment Auroville strives towards - for villagers and Aurovilians alike. At Isaiambalam several

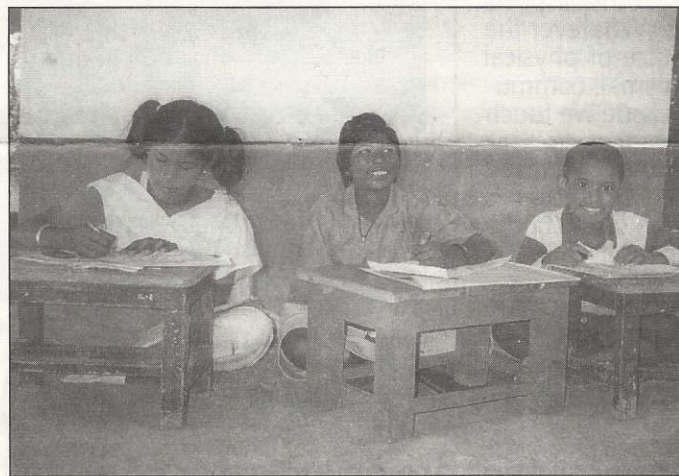
innovative educational methods are applied as an experiment in finding the best ways to approach the Auroville educational vision. The Rishi Valley Method, for example, taken from the Jiddu Krishnamurti school in Andhra Pradesh, has been adopted, recreated in Tamil and renamed the 'Multigrade, Multilevel Study Card System'. It includes a series of study cards (in Tamil, envi-

ronmental science and mathematics) geared to self-directed learning.

Creative and 'play-way' activities are inbuilt in the cards. The innovative work of Isaiambalam draws frequent visitors and is spreading. A hundred schools in Chennai have recently begun applying the study card method, and another 250 are likely to start soon.

At Arulvazhi the link with the Mother is especially tangible. Most of the teachers, who are long-term residents of the Auroville community Promise, had the personal darsan of The Mother. The school educates children from the nearby village of Morattandi, with special emphasis on sense development, body awareness, and cultural expressions. Children from Arulvazhi regularly do dance performances in Bharat Nivas on Republic Day and Independence Day.

At Ilaigarkal Education Centre, Auroville's educational outreach extends to adults. While offering a day school for a small group of children, Ilaigarkal caters mainly to Auroville workers. They attend normally after work but are welcome



Class in the former Ilaigarkal building

any time. The school is student-oriented and students support and learn from each other. Tamil and English is also taught to workers at their work places. Currently teachers visit the Solar Kitchen and Samasti to offer classes. Ilaigarkal has evolved into a centre of Tamil culture in Auroville, promoting local talents in the arts, and hosting a Tamil library, a study circle, and a hostel. Research on heritage topics such as the palmyra tree, Kolam drawings, and ancient Tamil art is carried out, and the results are published in a monthly paper.

Through Auroville's educational activities, village children and young Auroville employees are increasingly learning English - a key to the deconstruction of those invisible walls. Recently three village youth were admitted to the Auroville Last School. This was thanks to a small-scale English teaching programme of AVAG, soon to be taken over by Isaiambalam. Sarasu too had to learn English. "From eight till eleven, I went to Transition School, because André wanted us to learn to speak better English," she recalls. In Transition, the little group of children from New Creation took part in many different activities, including artistic ones. Whereas they learned



Sarasu at the Financial Service

English they chatted in Tamil as soon as they had a chance. Then, from the age of twelve to nineteen, Sarasu attended Udavi School. "When I came to Udavi everything was very strict", she says. "We had to pay a penalty of 20 paise if they heard us speaking Tamil. In the beginning I was so tired. I told André that it was too tough, and that I didn't want to go, but he pushed me. And I'm happy for that. I was very happy in Udavi and made many friends. The teachers would be very strict when classes were going on, but outside they'd be like friends. I still go to Edaiyanchavadi sometimes to visit a teacher who lives there." Today, Udavi offers an informal, 'free progress' education up to the sixth standard. This means, for example, that if a child shows interest in how a light tube works or how a plant grows, then a project on this subject is initiated. Throughout schooling, activities like yoga, Aikido, crafts, dance, music, clay modeling, sports, and computer skills, complement the curriculum, which is guided by the educational principles of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Sarasu remembers: "On Thursdays the classes were only half day, and the rest of the time we were practicing for a performance in the end of the month; drama, dance or singing. I

liked that."

Sarasu feels that she is starting to understand and appreciate Auroville more and more, but the path has been long: "It was when I came to Udavi that I understood that I was an 'Aurovilian' because the other kids saw me like that. Before that I had just thought of myself as being taken care of at New Creation." New Creation is still functioning as an outreach school focused on the poorest children, who are given an individualized education, and is expanding as an Auroville community where most of the residents are former students of the school. In addition to the original school, there is now a kindergarten for children who are all given boarding in New Creation. This financially and functionally independent project was initiated by André and is based on 'free progress' education. The long-term goal of creating a centre for vocational training at New Creation has begun in four new buildings with rooms dedicated to carpentry, electronics, metalwork and tailoring.

Those who want to continue their studies after New Creation have the opportunity to do so at After School.

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Returning to Matrimandir

Andy arrived in Auroville in January, 1974, after driving a Mercedes van from Germany with his aunt, Janna. He was fresh out of school and didn't plan to stay. But he did.

AUROVILLE TODAY: Did you immediately begin working at Matrimandir?

No. I worked for a year in Aspiration bakery before starting work in the Matrimandir gardens. At that time working on the actual construction was seen as a very elevated post of responsibility – by invitation only! However, about a year later many of the people working on the construction site left and guys were needed to do the scaffolding. That's how I came in. For the next 20 years I worked there, progressing from scaffolding work to bar-bending to placing the beams and, finally, to the marble work in the Chamber. At each critical stage someone showed up with expertise to show us how to do it and, of course, over all there was Piero with his quality control and his very clear and structured way of organizing the work.

AVT: In recent years Matrimandir has been embroiled in controversies. Was it always like that?

Piero was always clear that he did not think the petals and golden disks were a good idea and, because I've worked with him so long and found that he's mostly right about this kind of thing, I've never questioned his view on that. At the same time other Matrimandir workers, like Ruud Lohman, were absolutely convinced that the vision of Roger would be materialized. But in the early days these differences were rarely talked about – we hadn't yet reached a stage where major design decisions had to be made.

The heavy politicization began when Roger returned in the late 1980s. Then everything became a lot more 'us' and 'them'. In 1987 there was the famous meeting at which Roger's conception for the skin and disks was adopted by majority vote. I think it was a very unfortunate outcome in the way the decision was interpreted and implemented: I believe many of the problems we face now at the Matrimandir are a direct outcome of this. If the same meeting happened today there would be a lot more effort to ensure that the major players identified by Mother took up the responsibilities She gave them and collaborated with each other.

AVT: That meeting agreed that Piero's team should finish the Chamber. Upon completion you all stopped working at Matrimandir. Was that a difficult decision to take?

Not really. There was a strong feeling of gratitude for having been able to participate in such a privileged work, and there was a sense that we had accomplished something, not that we were being kicked out. Perhaps it was hardest for Piero and Gloria because they had given so much of themselves towards constructing Matrimandir, and I think their contribution was never sufficiently appreciated: for me it's beyond question that if Piero hadn't prepared the structure, the whole project would never have got off the ground.

Another thing that helped my transition from Matrimandir was that I joined the second Working Committee and was immediately caught up in that work.

AVT: Working Committee members often suffer burn-out, partly because they have to deal with so many issues relating to the negative side of Auroville. Was it like that for you?

I felt we were in the middle, being bombarded from all sides. There was a lot of pressure but in the end it was a good experience, partly because I developed a certain impermeability so that the heavy stuff just ran off. Today, in terms of our community process, we've grown up a bit. There are still a lot of unpleasant things the community has to deal with, but when I see the very focused and coordinated way in which the present Council dealt with the Matrimandir issue I feel we've made quite a bit of progress.

AVT: Your next major work was at Decauram, the carpentry workshop. Was that also a big change?

It brought me a whole different work experience because there I was based in an office doing accounts. Neither Jan, who invited me in, nor myself are business people and we never did more than just keep Decauram afloat. But I liked the work and it gave me yet another perspective on Auroville. For example, when I hear

people criticize the units for not giving more to Auroville I understand now it's not as easy as that.

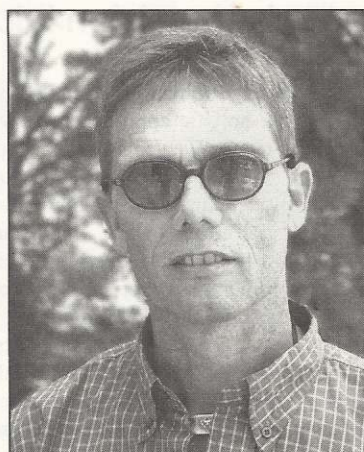
AVT: Very recently you returned to Matrimandir as a member of the new management team. At the time, many people anticipated there would be a long and difficult struggle with the former management group who hadn't wanted to leave. What was your initial reaction when the Council asked you to serve on this group?

My brain said 'no' but my mouth said 'yes'! I'm at a loss to explain it. After I'd agreed, there was a period of about 10 days in which I imagined all the difficult situations I might find myself in and a quite a few times I wanted to phone the Council and say, 'Look guys, no way'. But for some reason I didn't. It was one of those moments when you understand what is meant by the saying we're all instruments moved by larger forces. Because while all around us things were happening in a big way – lots of thunder and lightning, rumours, manoeuvres etc. – the new team sailed in quiet waters in the midst of the storm. There was definitely a feeling of guidance, of an outcome destined from the beginning. All we had to do was just be there.

Now there is a feeling of relief from all sides that this particular issue – in which the former management had been locked in a battle with Roger – is finally over and that we can devote ourselves to the completion of the project.

AVT: In practical terms, how has the situation changed at Matrimandir?

There's been an influx of energy and the new atmosphere has resulted in the return of some Aurovilians who'd worked there before. A lot of restructuring is going on in terms of work processes. The old management style tended to be top-down whereas now it's more participatory: inputs come from all sides which are discussed at a weekly meeting of area coordinators. In terms of design the responsibility ultimately lies with Roger, although it is clear that the community has an important role to play in giving inputs on issues like the lake, the gardens and access, which are the only major issues left to be decided. From the side of the



Andy

management group it's understood we will not use our position to block or influence design matters but will merely implement what has been decided.

AVT: For many years you disagreed with Roger's vision for Matrimandir. How difficult is it for you now to help implement that vision?

If I'd been asked 15 years ago to collaborate with Roger and facilitate the materialization of his vision of Matrimandir I would probably have refused. Now it's different. I'm faced with a situation where the things I thought were not good are already there and there's nothing I can do about it anymore. I do think Piero's technical concerns about the petals, the outer skin and the disks have proven to be justified, but now the need is to get on and finish the project. At the same time I think my perspective has widened, and things that seemed important at one time seem less important now – in those days we were moving much more in a frame of ideology. Then there's this strange thing about the Matrimandir: the way you think about it and the reality of it are completely different. Occasionally I'd get a glimpse of that 'other' Matrimandir and then I'd realize that all my feelings about it, which depend upon shifting impressions, are totally unimportant. Ultimately, I don't want to be the instrument of any particular individual but of Matrimandir itself. If I can be that, the other considerations lose a lot of their importance.

From an interview by Alan

In brief

Matrimandir

The new executives of Matrimandir reported a smooth transfer of management. Fears of workers being affected by the transfer were allayed by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. The new team has met with the architect to clarify methods of communication. The team said that it is not for the Matrimandir management to use its executive powers to block the implementation of the architect's designs. The architect and the community at large have to come to an agreement on major issues such as lake and gardens and visitors' arrangements. The team called on the community to take charge of Auroville's "soul" and decide how it is to be used and accessed.

Auroville's History

In order to better understand our history the Auroville Council invites anyone with memories of Auroville from the 70's and 80's to write them down and send them to janet@auroville.org.in

International Zone

The International Zone group has made a compilation on culture from Sri Aurobindo's writings and organised a workshop on "Nation and Culture in Evolution" with guest speakers Ananda Reddy and Kittu Reddy from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Zone Group also published its Newsletter August – October 2003.

Contractors' code

The Working Committee met with Auroville contractors to discuss issues such as local employment, employers welfare, thefts and differences in costs of construction. The contractors agreed to work out policies and guidelines.

Snakes in Quiet

The fishing community of Chinnamudaliarchavady complained about snakes entering their homes from the side of the Quiet community. A snake charmer was hired to catch all the snakes.

AuroNet

The Kuilapalayam Browsing Centre (KBC), previously situated in the same building as the Travel Shop, has started its service nearby the Financial Service in the Pour Tous compound.

Auroville Guard

Attempts are ongoing to create an efficient well-functioning Auroville Guard system, consisting of a patrolling guard and a pool of volunteers who agree to be "on call" for whatever emergency comes up. The first regularly operating group would be trained in self-defence, first aid, fire fighting, emergency tree pruning, how to deal with and inform visitors, etc. The second group would be on call when needed. This group would attend a drill exercise weekly or twice a month for some guided training in martial arts, first aid, fire fighting etc.

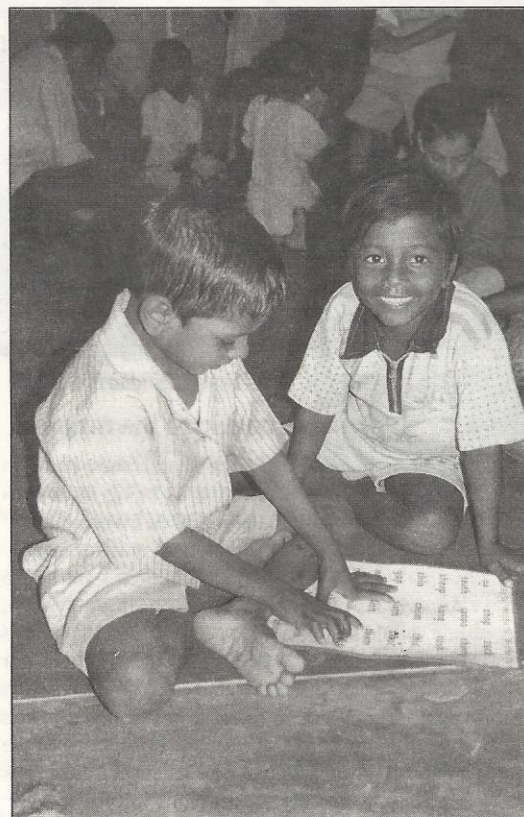
Space constraints

The Auroville Boutique in the Visitors' Centre announced that it is full and not any more in a position to expand due to site constraints. Consequently it will not be able to accept either new units or new products.

AUM Meeting

The 10th Anniversary of the Sri Aurobindo Center South East, Inc. and the AUM 2004 Conference are scheduled on July 29, 2004 to August 1, 2004 at the beautiful campus of Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. The theme of the conference is "Integral Yoga in Daily Life – A Practice & Approach." For more information contact the Centre at P. O. Box 8375, Greenville, SC 29604, USA, or email to aum2004@jhmhotels.com

Deconstructing the walls of separation



Enjoying a language class at Isaiambalam

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In this English-medium, secondary level school, exam-oriented education is provided for Tamil youth. While currently all students are from New Creation, in the past they have been recruited also from Udavi and Auroville's Transition School. After School thus has to some degree functioned as a meeting place for youth from the villages and from Auroville, and is one of the portals to Auroville for young Tamilians. Whereas some After School graduates have continued their studies at Auroville's Last School or in Pondicherry, most have found jobs in Auroville, often in key positions.

Still the enigma of co-existence and mutual learning and understanding between the two neighbours in the Auroville area is far from solved, and the educational needs are larger than the resources of Auroville. Says Sarasu: "Presently I'm happy with doing my work at the Financial Service and taking care of my mother. I don't have dreams. I know that if I get other dreams, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo will take care of that." Hopefully, neighbours on both sides of whatever walls that are experience share the faith she expresses. For when we identify with what unites rather than with what divides us, there are no walls.

Svante

Facts and Figures

The Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER) reaches some 750 individuals directly through its educational activities and Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) another 1200.

The biggest school for village children in the Auroville area, however, is the Auroville-built, but not administered, Kuilapalayam Trust School.

Over 600 pupils attend this Tamil-medium school which follows the standard governmental curriculum. Udavi educates another 250 children and youth (3-18 years), New Creation 230 (3-15 years) plus 40 in the boarding kindergarten (4-6 years), Isaiambalam 120 (3-15 years), Arulvazhi 100 (most 4-16, some up to 20 years), and After School 30 (14-18 years). Ilaignarkal Education Centre has 50 students, most of them adults.

AVAG, in addition to what was mentioned in the adjacent article, runs pre-schools in Kottakarai, Kuilapalayam, and Bommaiypalayam and holds meetings with the parents as well as with parents of children in the schools included in the PEP programme. Udavi is about to start educating women in literacy. A few years ago, Kireet, a Dutch Aurovillian, took a personal initiative to build and start a school in Bommaiypalayam, which now operates as a 'daughter school' of the Kuilapalayam Trust School.

Dehashakti's child-centred sports programme

Dehashakti is Sanskrit for "the full power (and perfection) of the body." In Auroville, it is the name of the organized physical education programme that strives towards the vision laid out by The Mother.

It is only 3.15 p.m., and already the Dana sports ground is beginning to be peppered with children from the nearby Transition School. A few boys careen in on dusty bicycles, hastily park, and hurtle past the gates letting out excited whoops. A little girl in pink shorts and T-shirt dropped off by her mother, purposefully strides in without a backward glance. Like a beehive awakening to daybreak, the sports field has already begun to buzz with activity – children in various stages of getting into sports gear and picking out the colour-coded waistcoats indicating the 'houses' they belong to, boys flinging themselves into the air over a high jump bar and landing excitedly on the padded mattress below, a few mini-games of basketball and football well in progress, a chattering group around the notice board which announces the activities for that afternoon, and amidst all this, the teachers bustling about with whistles and stop-watches hanging around their necks and note pads tucked under their arms. It is a tableau that could easily have come out of a Breughel painting, but it is only another regular day at Dehashakti...

Beginnings and philosophy

The Dehashakti sports programme began in the early nineties following the arrival of Yves, a professional tennis coach from Canada. It was at a time when the popularity of athletics at Certitude had hit an all-time low. "Both students and teachers were unmotivated," he recalls. "The students felt that the programme was monotonous, and the teachers had a hard time coping with lack of discipline and commitment." In this setting, Yves presented a proposal for improvement. His idea was to give the students the choice to participate. Once a commitment was made, regular attendance would be mandatory. And so in 1992 Dehashakti was born, its unique name borrowed from a Sanskrit mantra that Sri Aurobindo had received in the Alipore jail. As if waiting for a new structure to be created, funds started to come in regularly from that time onwards. With the vision of the school sports complex as a place for education, concentration, and discipline, the Certitude sports ground was found to be an unsuitable location due to constant disturbance from the road cutting through it. Dehashakti found a place near the Dana community in the Cultural Zone, a protected and undisturbed environment with plenty of expansion possibilities, and began constructing its new sports complex. In July 1996, the programme moved permanently to this location which now has a football field, a gymnastics floor, two volleyball courts, one basketball court, a badminton court, a handball field and a 300 metre running track.

The uniqueness of Dehashakti lies in its underlying philosophy and core values – that it is a place for education, concentration, and discipline. It is based on The Mother's view that physical education is an integral part of a person's development. Their brochure reads, 'The School Sports Complex is a place for physical education not a playground or sports ground for casual participants... It is solely a place of organized physical education for the children of Auroville, and later for adult Aurovilians who are willing to accept the aims and objectives of the programme.' Right now, it caters only to children. Its programme is child-centred meaning that physical activity is used as a medium to help a child explore his/her individual potential at a comfortable pace. This approach has resulted in a comprehensive programme that promotes a child's inner discipline and concentration.

Programme novelties

The Dehashakti team consists of three full-time teachers (Yves, Rajeev, and Anand) and twelve volunteers. Rajeev and Anand are former students of the Ashram school and graduates of its famous sports programme. "There are about 125 children from four Auroville schools who come to do sport every school day," says Rajeev. "Young children especially enjoy it because our sports are

not elimination-based." The emphasis is laid on a holistic approach to movement with importance given to mobility, body control, strength, stamina, skill, health and fitness. In team sports, the focus is not on competition or individual glorification, but on understanding the value of team spirit, cooperation, helping each other to progress, and giving everyone an equal chance to develop their abilities.

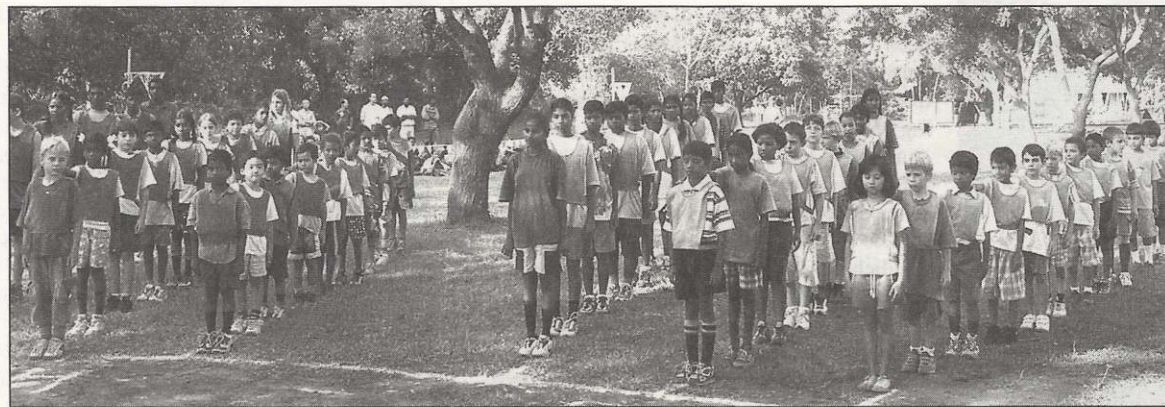
The team constantly experiments with new ways of keeping sports child-centred, aware that not all of its young participants are gifted or are natural athletes. One such concept is that of 'houses'. Until 4 years ago, children in the sports programme were segregated into three levels based on age – juniors, intermediates and seniors – with teams in each level competing against each other. However the teachers became concerned with a lack of communication between children of different age groups, and therefore decided to create 'houses' which would have children of all ages together. Houses are created every year based on skill testing of each individual child with attention given to the balance of genders, and a mixture in affinities like 'Western-Indian, tall-small, friends-not friends, energetic-not energetic, etc.' The concept worked. "There was greater interaction and camaraderie across ages," says Anand. "The junior kids even began to check and push the older



Yves handing out certificates to the participants

'house' members to perform better. It became common to hear them say 'Run faster' or 'Hey, do it properly!' The senior children were really tested as they now had to meet their responsibilities as older role-models. They could not mess up or miss showing up for sports!"

Skills-testing is another novel tool used by the Dehashakti team. Explains Yves, "Rajeev brought the idea of skills-testing from the Ashram sports programme. Each game is analysed in terms of the unique skills it demands from the players. In basketball for example, you need someone who is good in shooting, but there are also other valuable skills such as dribbling, lay-up, passing, or being a good team player. The intention is to recognise the special abilities of every individual, and to ensure



Line-up and concentration at Dehashakti

that every team has children with different skills. The children now understand that a team needs players of all abilities – strong, average and weak, and that each one is as important as the best player." For some of the teachers it has been a revelation to see that it is often the weakest players who bring the most to a team, "Probably because no-one ever cared about them before. They definitely show the largest margin of improvement."

The work of Dehashakti culminates in three events, the bi-annual Aurolympics and the Enduro race. "Aurolympics used to be a community event that existed well before Dehashakti made it its own" says Yves. Some old-timers remember the event as a one-day social for community members to run a sprint, play a game and have a chicken lunch afterwards. "But now, it is a serious Dehashakti activity. There is one in December, at the end of the school term, and one in April, at the end of the school year. These are one-week events that test the children's skills in athletics and games." Apart from Aurolympics, the team also conducts the yearly 'Enduro' race, whose objective is to help each child build up his or her cardiovascular endurance capacity while earning points for their house. The race, now in its third year, is very popular with a very vocal crowd of excited parents cheering on their children to complete the laps.

Challenges

Dehashakti also has its set of challenges, like everything else in Auroville. It runs on a limited budget and manpower. But the most prominent of its challenges is its alleged reputation for being rigid or strict. Not all school-going children participate in the programme, particularly many teenagers and some younger students too. The team attributes several reasons for this behaviour, most notably to attitude differences that exist between Aurovillian parents. "Culture seems to have a large role in determining whether a child attends the programme or not," says one teacher. "Some parents generally of Western background do not want to impose rules on their children, and feel that their child has to be free to determine whether he or she wants to attend sports – though those parents do not apply the same rule for sending their children to school." The team believes that this view of freedom is flawed and misunderstood in Auroville. "True freedom requires a lot of self-discipline," says one teacher. A first time visitor to Dehashakti cannot but notice that the greater percentage of children appear to be of Tamil origin. Explains another, "To generalize, most Tamil parents want their children to do sports as they like the discipline and the physical aspect." The problem also is magnified since most schools in Auroville do not insist that their students involve themselves in sports. "Sport is not a mandatory part of the curriculum, and often receives a step-motherly treatment." The Dehashakti team regrets that it is the child who ultimately suffers, lacking an integral development of the body.

While some teenagers at Future School explain their non-participation to the strictness of the programme, the Dehashakti team disagrees. "Over the summer break, we made a great effort to meet our students who were moving to Future



Running the Enduro race

received the idea enthusiastically, but did not follow it up in action. The team feels that this may be due to both the non-insistence of sports by the schools or parents, plus the unspoken but very real peer pressure that many teenagers succumb to – the idea that Dehashakti is for young kids. What makes it especially hard for the teachers is to see once-promising athletes who enjoyed sports at Dehashakti, now uninvolved in sports or 'involved in a very lackadaisical and superficial manner'. "But we have to constantly remind ourselves that the children involved in Dehashakti enjoy sports and that we are growing for the future – for the future parents and future children."

Village outreach

Apart from its work for Auroville children, Dehashakti has also begun teaching children from the surrounding villages. Originally this started in collaboration with New Creation School, an Auroville outreach school. More recently, a more ambitious outreach activity has been through a tie-up with the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG). AVAG approached the team asking if they could organize a sports programme in the villages. "But we felt that it would be more effective if they came out of their familiar setting into Auroville and experience something different," says Rajeev. "Now every weekend on both Saturdays and Sundays, we receive approximately 40 village boys between the ages of 12 and 17. We make them go through the same kind of programme as the Auroville children. There is a line-up, attendance, exercises, running laps and so on. The focus is on fitness and an overall development. And of course to inculcate the qualities of sportsmanship rather than just focussing on winning, winning, and more winning." The programme has been active for the past three months, and has been received with a lot of enthusiasm and positive response.

The programme also proved instrumental in breaking down many barriers. Explains Rajeev, "We have boys coming from several different villages – Kottakarai, Edayanchavadi, Irumbai, Alankuppam – and this encourages communication and friendships amongst people who may otherwise not meet one another. Also they are of different castes which in the beginning did cause some awkward moments but things changed as the boys adjusted." Rajeev believes that caste would have been a big barrier to overcome had the programme been held in the villages. However the team is cautious and believes that it is too early to celebrate the success of this programme. The absence of female participants is glaring, and has been attributed to the reticence of the villagers. "In time, we will be able to train the girls also," says Yves confidently.

Looking to the future

Dehashakti sees itself in the future as being more intimately linked with life in Auroville, not only catering to young children but to Aurovilians of all ages. "When one is ninety-nine, one should still be able to come to Dehashakti and use its facilities," says Rajeev. "That is our dream." In 1970, The Mother said, "We have been given a body not to reject it but to make it into something better. And that is precisely one of the goals of Auroville." And Dehashakti stretches slowly and steadily towards this lofty ideal with unflagging optimism.

Priya Sundaravalli

For the Love of Water

Slicing through the pools in Auroville

Swimming pools are not exactly a new phenomenon in Auroville. Which Auroville kid doesn't remember the plunges in Samata's pond or in New Creation's square community basin? But having 'your own pool' is another story altogether. "There was lot of resistance when I came with the idea of a pool as many Aurovilians consider it a luxury, while I think of it as a medium to exercise and keep the body fit," says Francis. The azure waters of the community pool he operates in Recueillement ripple under the crisp

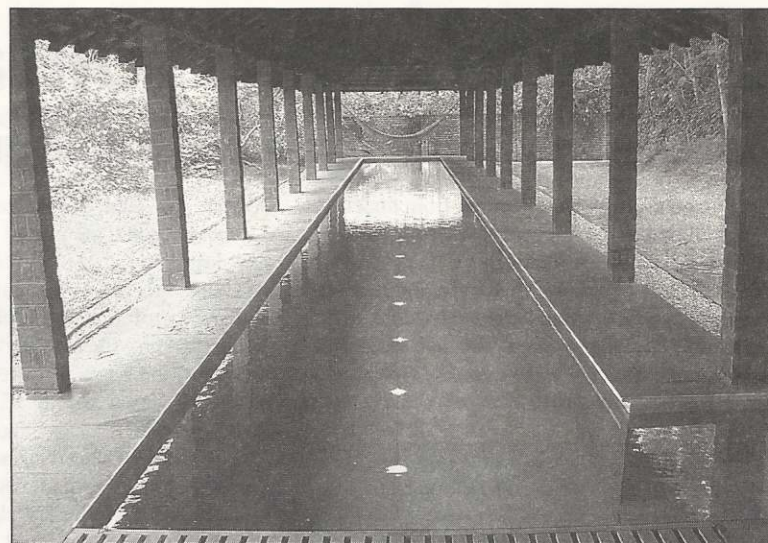
winter breeze. "Would you believe it if I told you that this water has not been changed for 4 years and 2 months?!"

Francis was an avid sportsman used to daily runs and swims in the ocean, a temptation many Aurovilians find hard to resist in summer. It is quite another story during the monsoon when currents are rough and the water turbid by the red run-off. But that was not the reason for Francis building his community pool. It was a hair-raising encounter that ended his tryst with the ocean. "It

was on the day I got stung by a jelly-fish. But I continued swimming. And then I bumped into a dead body in the waves. That decided it for me." The experience led him into dreaming about his own pool. "I saw then a movie starring Jack Nicholson in a lap pool – not a pool for recreation, but purely to exercise and train!" With great excitement, Francis scoured the internet, gleaning information about lap pools. "But then pools are expensive to build, so I had to make money first." He came up with the idea to make hammocks and

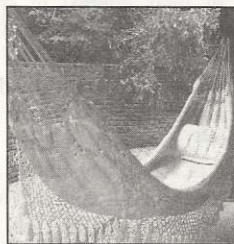
sell them in the USA. "But sales were not as brisk as we had forecast, and it took 6 long years for the profits to grow into a decent fund." Francis immediately quit the hammock business and began pool construction.

"We originally wanted to follow Olympic guidelines with a 50-metre long pool, but I did not have the money or the water." He settled for half the length. The pool is 2.5 metres wide with a depth of 135 centimetres at one end and 145 centimetres at the other, deep enough to do the 'Olympic turn-around'. "Its construction is very basic – a concrete rectangular bowl, tiled for waterproofing. Several



The lap pool at Recueillement.

architects put their brains together – Suhasini, Anita, Leon, Rolf and Brigitte – and it took just 3 months to build. That we all remained friends at the end is a miracle!" says Francis with a wide grin.



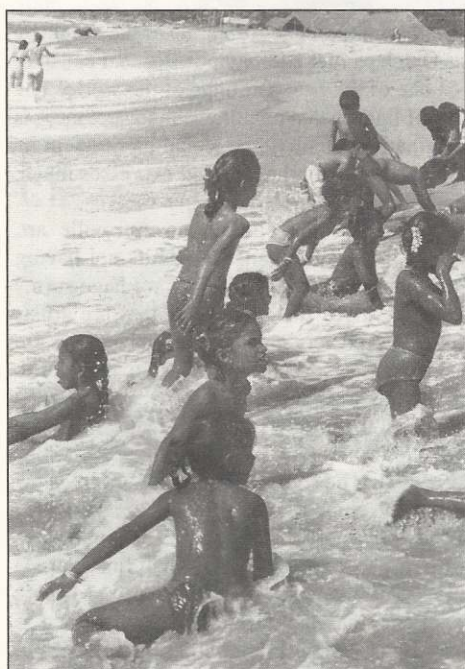
The hammock that made Francis' pool possible

A pool is high maintenance. Besides the daily chlorination, Francis uses a pump to rotate the water for filtering through its three systems. "This has given me an outrageous electricity bill." The swimmers who use the pool on a continuous basis contribute to the pool's maintenance. There is a great demand for its use with a long waiting list for a time slot. Children's classes also happen, with Clare as instructor. Opening daily at 6 a.m., the pool sees a steady stream of swimmers until 7 in the evening. About a dozen people show up every day in summer with the only a trickle coming in winter. "Only the tough and relentless Germans seem to brace the cold waters. There is one lady who does 1.5 kilometres 6 days a week, all year through!"

With the popularity of Francis's pool, a few more lap pools have been built. In Auromodèle, Maurice and Agathe opened an almost identical pool at the beginning of March this

year. This pool is also booked to its capacity with an endless waiting list. But the most ambitious community pool project yet is the one started by Savitri at the New Creation sports complex, with support from a few Aurovilians. Close to completion, the half-finished blue tiled 'hole in the ground' languishes, awaiting a last injection of funds. "We need only 10 lakhs rupees (US\$ 20,000) to finish it," says Savitri. "With the last lakh of rupees that remained after the land purchase and creating the initial infrastructure, we managed to erect a wall around the area." It is to be a larger pool, 25 metres long and 10 metres wide, and Savitri is excited about the possibilities it will offer to the Auroville community and the village. "We plan to have kids coming from the two sports programmes – New Creation and Dehashakti. We want to encourage and train those interested in swimming. So there will be a lot of integration and mixing. Naradi, an instructor in our programme, is certified in aqua sports. She will offer group classes in water aerobics." Savitri also feels that the pool will be a 'mini-economy' by itself as it will bring in the some employment opportunities for some youth. "It is all Karma Yoga, and this pool is in the 'now' – so why not make it happen now!" she asks forcefully.

Priya Sundaravalli



School children at the Repos beach

"Fred, Fred! Let's go back to India please!"

"I used to take a lot of young students from the villages to the beach; 10 kids to an adult. I remember one young girl 10 or 11 year old from Edayanchavadi, and she had these enormous eyes. She was standing at the edge of the sand while I was in the water. I called to her to come in, and she refused. Finally I managed to coax her in and she sort of jumped into my arms. The impact pushed me backwards into the water, and there I was looking on to the beach while she was facing the open sea. A big wave rolled over us and she got a little splashed. I still remember her words 'Fred, Fred! Let's go back to India please!'"

as recounted by Frederick

Body Awareness

A new generation picks up the baton

Seven girls are sitting in a circle wrapped in the silence of the glass-walled Super School. Eyes blindfolded with silk scarves and one hand dipping into bowls filled with textured materials – straw, feathers, sand, seeds, wood shavings, styrofoam beads – while the other hand simultaneously writes about the experience, still blindfolded. A girl cups her hand to gather a palm-full of white sand and lets it flow between her fingers in unbroken rivulets. The grains fall with a faint hiss. The vel-

aims at providing tools for children to expand their consciousness on the levels of the body, the vital being, and the mind. The body is trained through exercises that promote fluidity, space and expansion in joints and tissues; the vital being through games and exercises that help to differentiate and control energy, and – with older groups – through exploration of emotions and attitudes; and the mental being through attention, concentration and relaxation exercises.

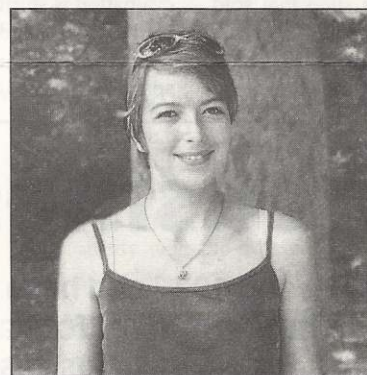
Bettina had been following their classes for 9 years in Transition School. She enjoyed it very much. "It was all about discovering myself by going through material things, to discover my inside being through the outside." Observing her interest and intensity and the fact that she was



Girls navigating obstacles in an exploration activity

never shy about demonstrating the movements or speaking to people who came to view the group, Aloka asked her if she would like to follow a training course. "I immediately accepted." For a year, Bettina followed their classes at Transition and the Kindergarten, observing them, taking notes, and learning how they dealt with children of different ages. On her own accord, she also prepared assessment reports of the classes "to see if I understood the aims of a particular class and to receive feedback. Slowly I began to understand how to

design a lesson plan, how to manage a class or a problem child." When her informal course got over, she was 'a little bored from just learning', and started to teach a class at Deepanam for a small group of 9-10 years old girls. "They knew me well so accepted me at once."



Bettina

Over the two years, she has observed a definite change in her students. "They are much more aware. When I ask them to go within, it is no more a problem. They know how to breathe and how to focus inside." Bettina is specially gratified to see how body awareness has been incorporated into her students' lives. "They often come to class and tell me 'Oh, this weekend, I did it! I couldn't fall asleep so I did that exercise to relax myself.' I also notice a greater openness in me. I have had to learn to widen out; whatever the kids did, I had to accept with a big smile and say that it is okay. But they are starting to become teenagers so I'll have to be more strict and demanding!" she says with mock exasperation.

Bettina's work is being noticed outside Auroville. "There is a possibility to teach in Brittany, France. A Yoga Association has contacted me to teach body awareness to small kids. They feel it will be a good activity before they are introduced to yoga. I am still undecided."

Priya Sundaravalli

A sportsman's soliloquy

A reformed sports junkie ruminates about the sports experience

"I stopped playing football about a year and a half ago," confesses the fit and athletic looking 37 year old. "It was the violence that brought the atmosphere down and ultimately pushed me off. At least, that is what I thought at the time when I quit."

I had been doing sports as a way to improve myself. But it was a forced drive, not a natural one. I was constantly pushing myself to do better, to exceed my own expectations. Only much later did I realise that dissatisfaction with my own attitude was the true reason for stopping football.

Sports can be a very direct mirror to understand oneself. People do sports for all kinds of reasons. If you observe how people play the game, you can easily read their motivations. There are those who do sports from an outer drive, for the recognition, for getting into the national championships, for beating the other team. There are others who don't need any of that. For them, sports is yoga – just the act of taking a ball and shooting at a basket is fulfilling. There is no need to prove anything external.

When I started playing again, it

was that attitude that I tried to keep: stay aware, concentrated, and never start mentally pushing myself. As soon as I feel I am not comfortable either with my body or with what ever happens outside, I let go and step out. Earlier, even if I was uncomfortable, I would just force myself to continue.

This different attitude gives quite a magnificent feel: you are one with the game. Some sportsmen have that naturally. There is a boy from the village, skinny and tall, who moves on the basketball court like a gazelle. In Alankuppam village I watched men without training doing the 100-metre dash. There were 4 or 5 amongst them who stood apart because of their beautiful technique and style – as if they were doing yoga without being aware of doing it.

If Aurovilians can do sports from that inner attitude, where the quality of the game and the dedication of each player is more important than the outcome, a great step will have been made. My dream is that one day football teams will play each other without the need for referees."

Name of the Aurovillian withheld on request

Ventures on a solitary quest

Canadian artist Robert Lorrain scouts Auroville to start a small development fund

And there he was, peeping from under the hood of the raincoat covering his stetson as we shook hands in the heavy downpour: Robert Lorrain, Canadian painter, sculptor, and, more than that, long-time sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga. We had shared an email contact many years ago, but little had I expected ever to meet Robert in Auroville — let

Ashram. In 1968 I went to Pondicherry. The Mother accepted me to stay in the Ashram for a few days and I started to read Her books in the Ashram library. I never met Her, but the 'contact' was profound and it changed my outlook on life." Auroville was just born, but the bare earth and the harsh climate did not encourage Robert to stay. He returned to Montreal from where he wrote to The Mother asking her if he could open a restaurant as he was very interested in food research — though he lacked any culinary skills. She replied in the affirmative, and so began 'Petite Oiseau', a vegetarian, more or less macrobiotic eatery, a very novel concept at that time. "It attracted many young people and prospered. Some of them had been, like me, travellers to India and Auroville because of their interest in spirituality. With some of the regulars we made Petite Oiseau into a cooperative, but as everywhere else, problems gradually developed. Food research became a minor issue. Drugs, living together 'in a new way' and the refusal to accept any authority became the new trends. In due course, I left."

About that time, in the early seventies, Robert and a few other people had started the Centre Créatif d'Elan Inc.. Quebec province was facing problems with youth, and the Canadian Government wished to help young people to start their own ventures and create jobs. The Centre received a government grant to do this work. "As I was inspired by the ideals of Auroville, we tried to develop a kind of communal living along the lines of what Mother outlined for

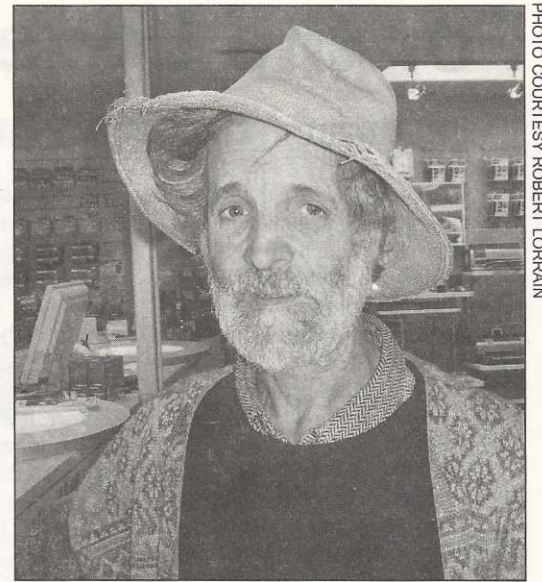
Auroville, providing people with their basic needs and some pocket money. It created a good feeling in the beginning, but later proved to be unsustainable, and the Centre too ceased to be operational."

Apart from these collective entrepreneurial ventures, Robert also opened a shop that sold products from the Ashram and Auroville, in particular clothing. The shop flourished and it allowed him to donate a lot of money to

Auroville. "In fact," he reminisces, "I had made the mistake of giving too much. Being a summer shop, it didn't earn any revenue in winter. One particular winter it was a bit tough for me to make ends meet." When asked what Auroville projects he supported, he replies "The Matrimandir, but only because Mother had underlined its importance. For in all honesty, its aesthetics never appealed to me. The architecture is too modern, the discs seem somehow a French Baroque influence, such as you find in the frames of paintings of that time period."

The conversation moves to art, which is Robert's essential vocation. He is largely a self-taught artist, describing technique as "only a necessity." "What truly marks high art," he says "is when you sense that beauty has been expressed through intensity of dedication." Reminiscing about the time he studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Montreal, he says, "There was only one teacher there whom I inwardly recognised as an artist, someone with a burning dedication which infused all his teaching." And passionately: "When you make a piece of art, you concentrate, you give the utmost of what you can. You ask a lot of yourself because you know that that is the only circumstance under which true beauty will manifest. It all depends on what the artist puts into the work." He believes that many artists don't go deep enough and avoid questioning themselves. "They should be asking themselves 'Is this work really beautiful?' There should be a burning need for continuous self-improvement. For only then does one get towards the spiritual aspect of art."

Robert emphasizes how essential it is for every artist to visit museums and study masterpieces "with an inner eye." "What I mean to say is that paintings should be evaluated not only on the basic of technique, but more importantly, with a spiritual knowledge and insight. True art evaluation is spiritual; the aesthetic appreciation is in a way secondary. It would be interesting to re-evaluate all the paintings of the past with a spiritual knowledge. Take for example the late-



Robert Lorrain

Gothic painting "The Adoration of the Magi" by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. I consider this one of the best paintings of the world. The play of light in that painting is fantastic; there is imagination, quality, and technique, each at its highest level. But the painting expresses much, much more."

Asked for his opinion on Auroville art, Robert is a bit hesitant. He admits not having seen too much of it. "But of what I have seen," he says, "gives the impression that the artists haven't asked very much of themselves. It is too much like art everywhere else in the world. They have to go deeper to discover the true way to express themselves and not get hung up on the ordinary level of consciousness."

Why has he come to Auroville? "To see how it has developed during this time, and also because I would like to make a donation to Auroville to start a revolving loan fund to help small entrepreneurs find their way. My life experience has taught me how important it is that young people in particular have access to small amounts of money to develop themselves. The type of ventures such a fund supports could be in any field, ranging from commerce to agriculture, food research and art. I intend to start with a small donation. If it works out to my satisfaction, I will be happy to donate more later."

In conversation with Caryl



Bronze sculpture of a young woman by Robert Lorrain

alone during the lashing monsoon rains. For he had not visited Auroville for many years.

His first visit was when Auroville had just been born. Then he was 28 years old, drawn to India because of his deep interest in spirituality. "Since my adolescence I have been reading books on Indian saints like Sri Ramakrishna and Ram Dass. In particular Ramakrishna used to speak about The Mother and it evoked in me the desire to see The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo

The two poles of business

Jack and Mary Alexander lived in Auroville between 1972 and 1977 and have remained actively connected ever since. Mary is a teacher and Jack runs a business in California. On a recent visit he talked about the early years of Auroville, his motivations for being in business and the necessity for the community to embrace it as a valid path of yoga and prosperity.

"I'd read the brochures and I'd met Navajata [then Secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society, eds.] when he visited California. The impression we were given was that Auroville was already a full-fledged operation. When we arrived in 1972, however, and bumped up the rutted roads in an old van to find, well, almost nothing, I realized with a shock I was not so much joining Auroville as being expected to build it pretty much from scratch.

Initially I was uninspired. I'd come with a strong background in the yoga — since 1968 I'd been connected with the Sri Aurobindo Center in Los Angeles — and the folks I was meeting in Auroville seemed more like a bunch who had haphazardly arrived here. In fact, while Mary and I had been accepted by Mother for Auroville, both of us felt a much greater affinity with the Ashram and we were quite happy staying there.

But then my old guru, Circumstance, took a hand. We ran out of money and I wrote to Mother asking Her what we should do. Shyamsunder explained to Her that not only were we bringing tools for Auroville but I actually knew how to use them. This was when there were many artists in Auroville. Mother told him it was time we went to live in Auroville, adding, 'At least he's not another artist!'

The Wild West

"As I was bringing machines and

had a natural mechanical ability I was immediately a hot item in Auroville. I had plenty of offers but finally I decided that the machinery should go to Matrimandir — which was closest to my heart, given my background — where they became the basis of the workshop in which I worked for some years. So I was thrust into pioneering but I survived, even thrived, largely because I had skills that were needed and I felt I could effect positive change. It was a bit like the Wild West, but great fun. There was plenty to do and there was a lot of scope to make decisions, to learn and develop.

In the summer of 1977, however, both Mary and I felt it was time to return to the U.S. We didn't know why, we hadn't a clue what we were going to do there. We'd burned our bridges, sold up everything when we left in 1972, and we were returning to the States with a child, just \$7 in our pockets and the clothes on our backs.

I managed to get a job as a cashier in a dump and later as a mechanic. Then an uncle who didn't have any children invited me to join him in business. I blew him off twice, but when he persisted I decided to take a look. I'd reached a dead-end in my job and felt I had nothing to lose.

It wasn't easy. In Auroville, service had come naturally to me: it felt good. I'd never in my life considered going into business. And then my uncle was an archetypal Conservative Republican.

But I listened to his rhetoric and tried to figure out what was of value and what was simply a mask for greed. What I learned was that business, as it's usually done, is a very different way of thinking from service, that capitalism, taken on its own, is pretty shallow. So I realized that if I was going to participate in it, I'd need an overarching reason for doing so. For me, that was sadhana.

Another way of doing business

"In other words, my experience of Auroville and the whole process of doing yoga gave me another motivation for being in business. The real value of business to me is that it's continually teaching me something: once it put the food on our table, it was all about education. I learned how to make money, but I also learned about my ego problems and about all the little stories I told myself to justify my decisions. I learned how to short-cut the greed aspect of business and to control the egoistic drive which can wreck the lives of all around you. I understood what constitutes sound business principles and that, while business can be practiced in many ways, if you do it in a way that respects others and that involves making ethical decisions it will eventually pay off.

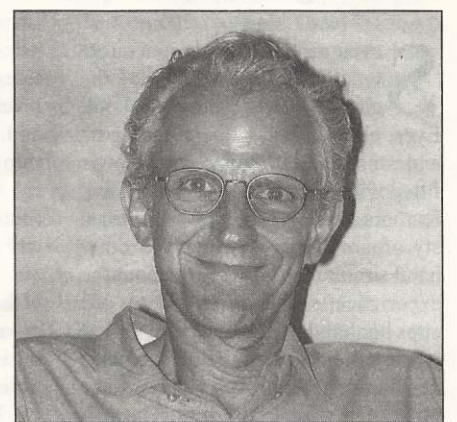
What I also came to see is that the vital is one of the main and necessary powers at work here. Hopefully it is the higher vital, but that power, that buzz, is

the key to the entrepreneurial spirit. The other side of the equation is what Mother said about winning back the money force for the Divine. I think these two poles — the vital drive and the need to offer the fruits — are the two poles of business as yoga. But how to keep the fires of the vital burning on the one hand while giving egolessly with the other? This is the crux, this is the challenge. This is the thrill.

The need to change attitudes in Auroville

"I've learned something interesting in business: that 20% of my customers provide me with 80% of my income, and that this principle can be applied to many other areas of life. I feel that if Auroville had 20% of its talented entrepreneurial types empowered to do business, then the other 80% could be free to do other things needed for the City the Earth Needs.

That's where education comes in. Because I think that the role of money and the role of the vital in relationship to work are often misunderstood in Auroville. If you think that money is unclean you constantly sabotage your hopes of success (apart from being in denial: at present business supports many community activities). We need to see that business is not ignoble, that if it's done in the right way it's a fine vehicle for an idealistic young person wanting to support Auroville. So we



Jack Alexander

need to create a situation in which, at an early age, young folks here can identify they have a propensity for doing business and then be given all the support they need. Business, for example, could be one of the many things students are exposed to at the High School. We could make a curriculum which explores not only traditional business administration etc. but also how Mother would run a business. And we could bring in people who've made a success of it, folks like Ulli, Paul Pinton, Alok, Angad and Michael Bonke, who can articulate, through anecdotes and personal experiences, what it's like to do business. I'd be interested to remain connected to such a project.

The main thing is to create an atmosphere in which it's OK to make money and OK to spend it, because this creates a flow. To put it another way, I see now it's alright to be rich if you have the right avenue to pour it into. As my friend Chandresh Patel put it recently when discussing business in Auroville, 'Once trees, now enterprises. Both need nurturing in a harsh climate. But the end goal is spiritual, not commercial.'

From an interview by Alan

Fourteen consuls visit Auroville

On Saturday 29th November representatives of the Consulates and High Commissions from France, Germany, Japan, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, The Netherlands, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and the USA visited Auroville to enjoy an informal morning of work-oriented presentations and visits to various parts of the township, following which they were invited to a lunch at the French Consulate in Pondicherry, hosted by the French consul, Mr. Michel Seguy.

The proceedings started with a welcoming introduction by Frederick followed by a short address by Mr. S.R.Sharma IAS, Secretary to the Auroville Foundation, and a Powerpoint slide show on Auroville. Later that morning the representatives were shown around in Auroville

In the course of these addresses, Auroville expressed its wish to have more regular work-oriented interaction



Frederick giving the welcome address at Auroville's Centre for Urban Research

between the township and the various Consulates and High Commissions and to encourage their involvement in Auroville's ongoing development process. This could take place through teacher and student exchange pro-

grammes; visits of experts specialising in fields related to Auroville's needs; the establishment of permanent pavilions conveying the genius and essence of each nation to the rest of the world; and through regular cultural events. It was also suggested that the aims and ideals of Auroville, and its achievements to date, could be of interest in other countries, and that exhibitions and presentations on

the township could be mounted or made at conferences and other venues in the Consuls' home countries.

It was an honour for Auroville to welcome so many dignitaries simultaneously. The guests also appeared to have enjoyed their day and their interaction with the Aurovilians in a relaxed, informal setting.

Tim

CULTURE

Shylock

A one-man play comes to Auroville



Shylock played by Gareth Armstrong

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is an odd play. Normally classified as one of his 'comedies' it has little humour and the denouement lacks the celebratory release of the great comedies. The main plot is simple. Shylock, a Jewish money-lender, lends money to Antonio – the Merchant of Venice – on condition that, if it is not repaid by the appointed time, the merchant will forfeit a pound of his flesh. The merchant is unable to pay and Shylock, deaf to the pleas of Antonio's friends, demands his due. Antonio's life is finally saved by a ruling which states that he can take the pound of flesh on condition that he doesn't spill one drop of the merchant's blood...

Shakespeare presents Shylock largely as a grasping, scheming, remorseless Jew, a caricature which offends and revolts modern audiences. "This is what makes playing Shylock today so problematic," says Gareth Armstrong, whose one man show, 'Shylock', was recently presented at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. Gareth has been an actor for over 30 years and has played many leading Shakespearean roles, "But Shylock is the most fascinating and challenging character I've ever played."

The first thing he realized was that for him, a non-Jew, to interpret Shylock he needed to understand the Jewish people and their history. He researched the Bible and also accounts of Jewish persecution through the ages. He also studied how Shylock had been played by different actors, and how the response to the play had changed over the past 400 years. The journey was so interesting Gareth decided to communicate it to others.

The result is 'Shylock', a 90 minute

dramatization which uses Tubal, a very minor figure in the play and Shylock's only friend, as at its central figure. Through Tubal, the only other male Jew depicted by Shakespeare, we learn about the situation in 16th century Venice – the setting for *The Merchant of Venice* – where Jews were confined to the ghetto, forced to wear large identification marks and only allowed to practice money-lending. We hear about early atrocities, like the massacre of the Jews in York, and learn that Shakespeare probably never met a Jew as they had been banned from England from the end of the 14th century. We discover that for almost 350 years Shylock was played as a stock villain – complete with ginger hair and hooked nose – before Sir Henry Irving for the first time played him as more sinned against than sinning. *The Merchant of Venice* was also one of Hitler's favourite plays. It was performed many times during the Third Reich but Shylock's daughter, who elopes with and subsequently marries a Christian, was made out in the German version to be the illegitimate child of Shylock with a Christian woman, thus avoiding awkward questions about inter-racial liaisons.

The theme sounds heavy, yet Gareth's one-man show is a triumph. He commanded the stage and audience from the very first moments and mixed humour, pathos and chilling news-style presentation in his dramatization of various roles in the play and of the actors who played Shylock through the centuries. Villain? Victim? Or rather, has Shakespeare's Shylock become simply a receptacle for the concerns and hang-ups of each individual and age which chooses to reinterpret him? Alan

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

All is revealed

On the occasion of reaching our sixteenth year of publication Alan divulges the secrets of our astounding success to an inquisitive subscriber

You are a monthly, yet you manage to be very up-to-date with your coverage of events.

How?
There's nothing new under the Auroville sun. As events repeat themselves regularly over the years, we simply pull out an old article and run it under another heading and dateline. Some of us have also acquired a certain facility in writing articles about events which have not yet taken place and then ensuring that they happen in conformity with the article. We call this 'proactive journalism'.

You are a very talented team.
Shucks.

How do you manage to attract such talent?
We like to think it's our rarified level of intellectual discourse, the cut and thrust of our brilliant repartee and the profundity of our collective wisdom. But it may also have something to do with the ridiculously light workload and generous maintenances.

Some of your team are not native English speakers. How do they manage to write so well?
They don't. Their awful copy is cleaned up by the one or two long-suffering team members who have a slightly closer acquaintance with the Queen's English.

Why don't you bring out Auroville Today in other languages?
It's been proven genetically that English was the original language from which all other languages sprung. So why bother with the rest?

Are there any issues you haven't yet covered?
Plenty. Next.

Why do the Aurovilians featured in your pages always look so young?
Welcome to Photoshop. This clever little software programme allows the painless removal of wrinkles and nips and tucks at the click of a mouse. In actual fact, most Aurovilians look far worse in the flesh than they do in Auroville Today.

You print 'exp 187' on my address label. What does it mean?

As part of our service to subscribers, we consult palm leaf manuscripts to ascertain the date of their demise. 'exp 187' indicates that you have 187 more months to put your affairs in order. Interestingly, the manuscripts suggest that the bulk of our present subscribers are expected to peg out in around 15 years. Consequently, we are preparing to launch a massive new subscription drive about fourteen and a half years from now.

How have you managed to survive so long?
Clean living, plenty of fruit and badminton and early to bed...

I mean, how has 'Auroville Today' survived so long?
We are as puzzled as you are. Possibly because we have no known predators.

Why don't you make Auroville Today available on the world wide web?
Surveys have demonstrated that our subscribers are a touchy-feely lot. They love to rustle our pages between their fingers, to inhale the unique perfume of the newsprint, to light fires when the weather turns cool.

How difficult is it to write about controversial topics when you're part of the same community?
The stitches are coming out tomorrow.

Why don't you have more subscribers?
Who told you...? The barrier-breakers in the evolutionary endeavour are necessarily a very small minority. It's even possible that a few of them don't speak English.

Well, thank you for your very revealing replies.
You think? Hey, wait a minute, you'll send me the draft before anything gets published?

Sure, sure.

In brief

Remembering ...

Savitri Bhavan organised another session on Remembering The Mother and Sri Aurobindo with Shri Jitendra Shroff of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram as one of the speakers.

GAP

GAP, a French artist who has exhibited her paintings in Auroville before, showed her "Photo Montage – Voyage Notebooks", a series of 63 Panoramic Photomontages entitled "One World" at Bharat Nivas.

Painting exhibitions

Vahula's paintings were exhibited in the foyer of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. The opening day featured a short Indian violin concert by Sri Kirupa.

"Transformation through Fire" by Louis was held at the Tibetan Pavilion. The exhibition was opened with a music and dance improvisation "Images come alive".

Young children from the surrounding villages presented their paintings done under the guidance of Sivakumar in Pitanga.

Enamel work

Shrimati Veenu Shah, an artist from New Delhi, who has specialized in 'enamel work' – objects, panels, jewellery – gave a talk, illustrated with slides, of her work at the Centre for Research in Indian Culture.

Odissi dance

An Odissi Dance Performance was given by Kanchana and her students Panimalar, Jyothi, Mangalakshmi, Kanimouzhi, and Suhasini in the Sri Aurobindo auditorium.

Ayurveda's way to healthy life

The Pharmacy Team of the Auroville Health Centre organised a talk by Dr Rangesh, an Ayurveda consultant physician and author working in Switzerland and Germany.

Audio-visual presentations

Aurofilm and Auroville Press gave an audiovisual presentation in the Town Hall of films and slides based on Sri Aurobindo's works "Rose of God", "Five Dreams of Sri Aurobindo", "Napoleon", "Genius of India", and "Sunrise celebrations".

Kiln-Formed Glass Art

An exhibition of kiln-formed Glass Art and Paintings in mixed media by Hans Isler (Agni) was held at Pitanga.

Belly dance workshop

Visitor Dana from Israel offered a 3-day workshop at Pitanga on belly dancing set to original Arabian music.

Japanese stamps

An exhibition of Japanese stamps, organized by the Philatelic Association, Tamil Nadu, was held at Aurelec Cafeteria.

Auroville's wildlife

A glimpse of Auroville's wildlife consisting of arthropods, fishes and reptiles, was given at the Last School campus. It was organized by the 6-15 year old students.

Music recital

Ladislav and Pushkar presented a violin and piano recital in Pitanga.

Italian Film Festival

Three Italian films with English subtitles were shown at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium – *Come Te Nessuno Mai*, *Branchie* and *Rosa e Cornelia*.

Lettuce and Lovage

A comedy by Peter Schaffer directed by Ellen was enacted starring Afsaneh and Srimoyi as Lettuce and Lovage.

Rangoli – a colourful experience

Self-taught designer Prema Isaac talks of her work at the Rangoli design studio and shares her experiences

The atmosphere at the Rangoli studio is young, lively and full of joy and colours – with salsa music playing in the background and customers and friends sitting on cane sofas, sipping their coffee. Prema loves what she's doing, and that's reflected in her work.

Twenty six year old Prema was



Prema wearing one of her creations: the Laxmi linen shirt

born and brought up in Auroville. As a child, Prema already had a great sense of style and elegance and was always complimented on the clothes she wore. In 1999, though she had had no professional education or training in the field, her passion for clothes prompted her to begin her career as a designer and she created her own label of women's clothing: 'Rangoli: a colourful experience'.

"I was having lots of fun designing clothes and getting them stitched for myself, just as a pastime," recounts Prema. "The clothes were very appreciated by people around me, and I was enjoying myself so much, playing with different fabrics and colour combinations, that I created a small collection consisting of a few skirts, shirts and pants, which was displayed at the Auroville Boutique."

This first collection sold out very fast, and there was demand for more, so gradually what began as a hobby turned into a full-time job. She started spending whole days in Pondicherry, buying fabric, coming up with new designs and working with a couple of tailors who produced for her...

A year later, Prema was allocated a space in the Aurobhakti building in Auroshilpam, Auroville. She rented a sewing machine, employed a tailor and three women to do

embroidery, put up shelves to store her fabric and started her very own design studio. "It was really an intimate, personalized space," she remembers, "it was bubbling with energy and life, and I loved being there, it inspired me."

At that time somebody had started a production unit in the same building, making use of the machinery, which had been an asset of the Aurobhakti unit. That is where Prema began to get her clothes produced. Some time later her partner took over the production unit, and they started working together. That went on for a few years until he stopped working there. By then, most of the production being done was for Rangoli, so Prema decided to take up the challenge and run the production unit as well.

Today, she employs twenty people, consisting amongst others of a cutter, a master pattern maker, tailors and women skilled in embroidery. She constantly creates new designs, while simultaneously managing the whole unit herself, as she is the one in charge

of all the administrative work involved, sourcing fabric and maintaining customer relations.

Prema sources her fabric from different parts of India, most notably Calcutta in Bengal. "I initially started using the sari, which was actually the inspiration behind my creations. The sari is so traditional and uniquely Indian, yet I designed modern clothes in Western styles and cuts out of it. In the very beginning I only used the Bengal sari, which is woven in fine tangail cotton, is very elegant, its borders are often soft, subtle and delicate.

I play a lot with transparencies, so I use different cotton linings and layers to bring out different colours and shades. Of course I also started to explore all kinds of different fabrics, silks, cottons, crepes. I have contacts to purchase surplus fabric of big export companies as well. That way I get very interesting fabrics to work with: some techno-coloured stretch, different denims, or the Irish Linen, out of which I created a line which is now much in demand. I've also been working with beautiful antique saris which I sourced in Delhi."

Prema finds great joy in the creative process of designing. "It's a passion," she explains, "I love playing with fabric, with layers, transparencies, and colour combinations. I also like to wear the clothes I design and to feel good in them, and I think it's important to dress well, it really gives

off with are still being produced, because they sell very well."

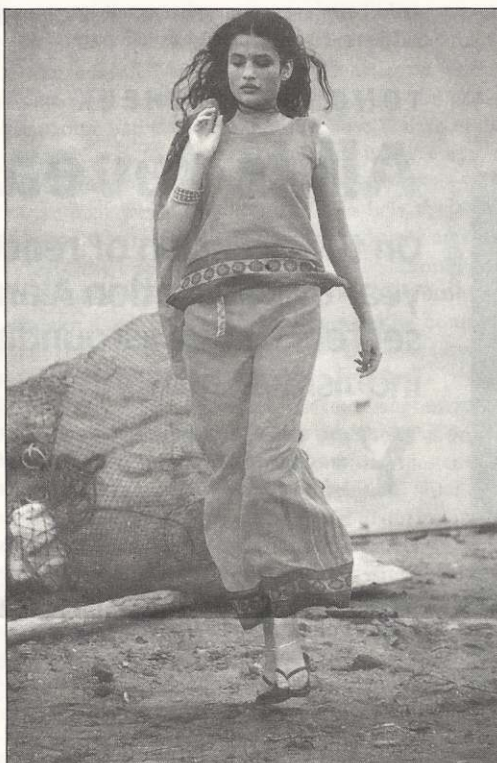
Different Rangoli collections are sold at the Auroville Boutiques in Auroville and Pondicherry, in Casablanca, and at the Amethyst boutique in Chennai. Prema also supplies the stores of the Casino group of hotels in Kerala. Exports are undertaken, with small boutique owners from Europe or the US coming to the studio and placing orders. "We do not do mass-production," explains Prema, "and some of my designs are unique in terms of fabric used and colour combinations, and often impossible to reproduce. Therefore I prefer to supply small boutiques with exclusive collections."

Asked if she feels her lack of professional education and training in the field of designing has been a drawback, Prema explains: "I'm basically working and learning a lot at the same time. I have to do constant research, and find out how it all works, just to be able to delegate work to my employees, which wouldn't be the case if I had had professional training. Of course I do make mistakes, and sometimes I have to make many different patterns and samples before coming up with a final design, I have to go through a whole process to be able to come up with a creation of mine. But it's a challenge and it's possible. The big advantage I have here is that I have the necessary set-up and I am able to employ

and work with professionals. I have a pattern maker, who can convey my vision into a very technical pattern, and from there it goes on to the production unit.

"Also, I don't actually think I could have taken care of the whole set up, sourcing all the fabrics, dealing with all my clients, if I had gone to a design school, and concentrated exclusively on sitting at my table and coming up with designs. But now I do feel the urge to learn how to do all that myself: not only the conceptualization of the design, but also the drawing of the pattern, the cutting of the fabric, and the actual stitching of the piece of clothing. So far, I never found the time to do that, but eventually I hope to have a better established set-up, so that I can delegate more of the work which I am at present managing. Then I will have more time to work on the designs, be creative and learn all I want to learn."

Emmanuelle



Bengal sari wrap-around skirt with matching blouse and top

one an inner sense of well being..."

Over the years, inspired by the vibrant colours of India, Prema has developed a unique and universal style, born of a fusion of cultures, a fusion of the East and the West, where the traditional and the modern, the ethnic and the chic meet and blend harmoniously.

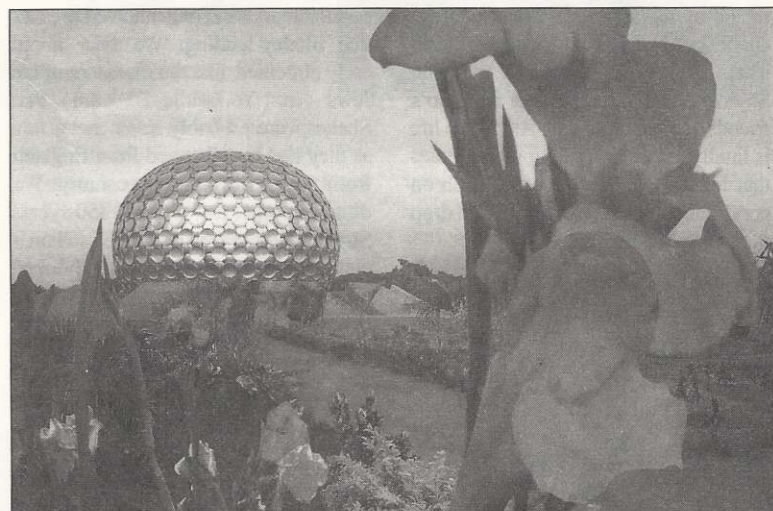
The Rangoli line of clothing comprises a number of different collections: elegant and sober, well cut linen shirts and pants, multi layered, fluid dresses made from the Bengal sari, twirling flamenco skirts, fun, funky pants and tops, classical embroidered kurtas, raw silk evening dresses, as well as accessories, such as hand and shoulder bags, scarves and sequin embroidered leather slippers. Recently, Prema has also added a collection of children's wear to the Rangoli line.

"We don't come up with whole new collections as such, but we keep adding new designs, and stopping to produce old ones throughout the year," explains Prema. "Some of the first designs I had created and started



Funky zigzag ensemble

Ireno Calendar 2004



The Auroville 2004 calendar by Ireno is a single photo calendar size 48 x 48cm (19 x 19 inches) with monthly sheets. Price in India Rs 70 plus Rs 45 for mailing and packaging charges. Price outside India Rs 70 plus Rs 100 for mailing and packaging charges. For orders contact: Auroline, Sangha, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India or email Ireno@auroville.org.in

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