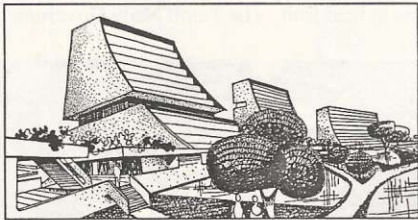


Auroville Today

DECEMBER 2003, No.179

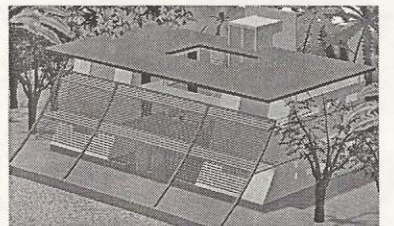


Drawings of the administrative buildings, 1967

MAIN ISSUE: Auroville Today is fifteen years old

- Developing the city
- The arts of Auroville
- The evolution of education

pages 1 – 7



Drawing of the ACUR (Auroville Townhall) building 2000

Towards a township

The long journey from isolated settlements to urban living

Here's a conundrum. Auroville, as the name suggests, is intended to be a town. Yet, 35 years after its inauguration, it is still little more than a scattering of settlements with a few outposts of urbanization. This summer Auroville schoolchildren were invited to imagine the city of the future. What did they draw? Nothing resembling a city but rather an Auroville of rivers, forests, reindeer, snowmen and giant ferris-wheels (and, of course, Matrimandirs) over which rocket-powered Aurovilians flit like drag-onflies.

Why is it taking so long not just to build, but even to imagine the town? The answer lies partly in external circumstances but also within the Aurovilians themselves...

In 1965, when Mother invited Roger to design the township, the energy for manifestation was high. Mother began by making a few rough drawings indicating four zones and their orientation. In March, 1966, Roger submitted two proposals to Mother. One was a fairly conventional grid-type town plan, the other a circular concept reminiscent of Mother's symbol. Mother enthusiastically

people were searching for new forms to embody a new consciousness. But it proved, like other dreams of the 1960s, very difficult to materialize. True, by early 1972 construction had begun on both Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir. However, much of the land in the area designated for the city had still to be purchased. Moreover the countries of the world had not come together to build this city of the future, as Mother had intended (*"The completeness and the beauty of the town depend on the generosity of the world"*), and consequently the vast funding required for the construction of the Galaxy did not materialize. At the same time, doubts about the wisdom of constructing it at all began to surface. Why? At that time, many Aurovilians were in close contact with the land and the local villagers. As they began to learn about that land, and as their rhythms attuned more and more to natural cycles and the slow pace of life in rural Tamil Nadu, the futuristic Galaxy with its huge buildings and moving sidewalks appeared more and more like science fiction, the product of another world which knew nothing and cared nothing about local realities. As one Aurovilian starkly put it, "The Galaxy is an imposition on nature, on the villages and on the Aurovilians".

Other factors militated against early completion. The Galaxy would be highly energy-intensive both in terms of construction and maintenance. This hadn't seemed a problem when it was first designed, for energy was cheap and plentiful. However, the first oil crisis in the early 1970s and the rise of the environmental movement made such town plans look increasingly profligate and irresponsible. Meanwhile the pendulum was swinging away from macro-housing projects: cities like Chicago were demolishing large, multi-storey housing complexes because of the social problems they engendered. Then again, no manual, no guidance existed concerning the phasing of the construction. It looked very much as if the main lines of the Galaxy would have to be realized in one go, which would create huge logistical problems. Add in the fact that some Aurovilians were fleeing all forms of urbanization as well as hierarchical structures where the architect (or anybody) is king and one begins to realize why it was so difficult to get the Galaxy off the drawing board. For some Aurovilians the most trenchant criticism was expressed by another architect, Joel. "I think almost everybody in Auroville would agree that the primary thing is not a 'finished product' but a certain inner process of consciousness, and the forms will evolve from that process".

However, perhaps the key element in the failure to materialize the original vision was the fact that Mother was no longer physically present. In March, 1972, she told Satprem that for her plan for Auroville to succeed not only would she have



Final galaxy town plan (1971) with the banyan tree, the amphitheatre and the Matrimandir and its gardens in the centre

to remain in her body, but she would also have to become strong. If the city was to be built fast – and she repeatedly told him she wanted it to be completed within 15-25 years – it had to be centrally planned and built. Only Mother's authority would have made that possible. When she left it became inevitable that subsequent development would be more piecemeal, more 'organic'.

Not surprisingly, Roger grew increasingly frustrated. Finally in 1974, fed up with what he termed "conservative opposition" unwilling "to push the future forward", he resigned from the committee of organization. Subsequently he left for a long self-imposed exile in France. The increasingly vicious and disruptive struggle between many Aurovilians and the Sri Aurobindo Society which characterized much of the later 1970s seemed the final nail in the coffin of the Galaxy...

Not yet dead

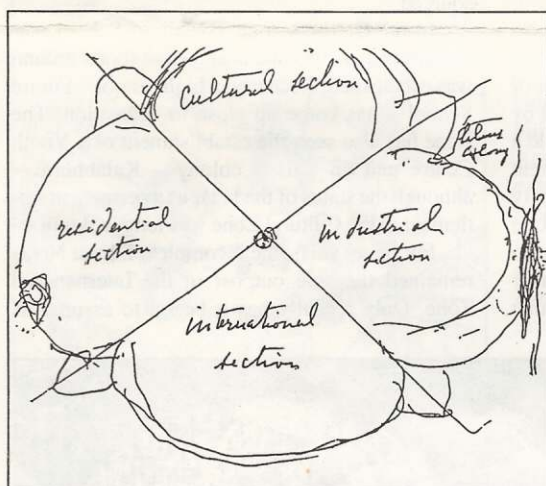
Yet the idea that Auroville would eventually be a city was not completely dead. Land already purchased in the central area (in 1982, 50% of the city area had been acquired) was planted out with trees, but the general understanding was that this was a temporary measure: one day the city would be there. But what kind of city? Roger said that Mother gave him only two initial parameters: one was the division into four zones, the other was the figure of 50,000 inhabitants. Now both of these parameters were questioned. It was pointed out that in conventional

town planning the strict zoning principle had fallen out of favour because of its tendency to create 'dead' zones. *continued on page 2*

continued from page 1

As to the 50,000, the early Aurovilians had grown used to inhabiting wide open spaces, and many couldn't imagine how another 49,500 could be shoehorned into the area without the carefully restored environment once again being

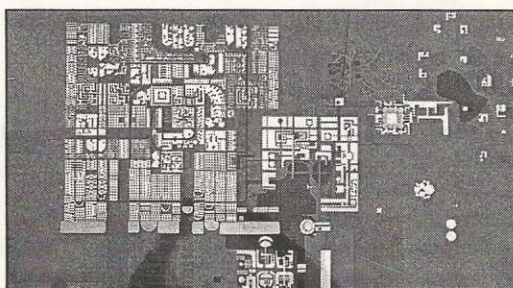
In this issue we continue to mark our 16th year of publication by providing historical overviews of three other major areas of the Auroville experience: building the city, education and the arts. The Auroville process is difficult to comprehend – there is rarely a neat line of development in which A leads to B – and all these areas portray the typical characteristics of our seemingly chaotic journey: bright departures, missed turnings, dead ends, indecipherable sign posts, the emergence of a new path, doubts, doublings back, tentative fresh explorations. And always, everywhere, those interminable road works. In spite of this, 35 years on there's a sense that in education, art and city development, as well as in so much else, important lessons have been learned and strong foundations established. Now it's time, as one of our contributors once put it, "for the main act to begin". Auroville Today hopes to be there to cover it.



Sketch of the town plan made by Mother in 1965

accepted the latter, saying "He received my formation, my old formation which I had left asleep". This became known as the 'Nebula' model. Roger reported, however, that Mother wanted the concept to be made dynamic. In November, 1967, Roger returned with a new model – the so-called 'macrostructure' model – in which two huge buildings swirled around a central core. Mother did not like huge buildings blocking the view of the centre, so Roger started splitting the macrostructure model into smaller elements. Finally, in February 1968, he presented the first 'Galaxy' model. Here the long curved sweeps, which give the impression of centripetal and centrifugal forces radiating in and out of the centre, were defined by what Roger termed 'lines of force': long, curving buildings, some of which ascended, some of which descended as they approached the centre. At the centre of the original Galaxy model was a massive sculpture of a flame surrounded by a vast, circular lake. By 1971 that centre had been redesigned as an oval island encompassing the Banyan tree, the amphitheatre and the site for Matrimandir and its gardens.

The extraordinary Galaxy plan was an inspiration for many. It came at the right time: the youthful idealism of the 60s was strong and young



The conventional grid-type townplan rejected by The Mother

- Meeting the needs of each child
- Education in retrospect

page 7

- Eco-consciousness through fashion – a design workshop by Upasana

page 8

- Whatever happened to... The seven deaths of Karna
- Modern dance reviewed

page 9

- California Institute of Integral Studies
- A workshop on co-creation

page 10

Towards a township



The nebula model, 1966

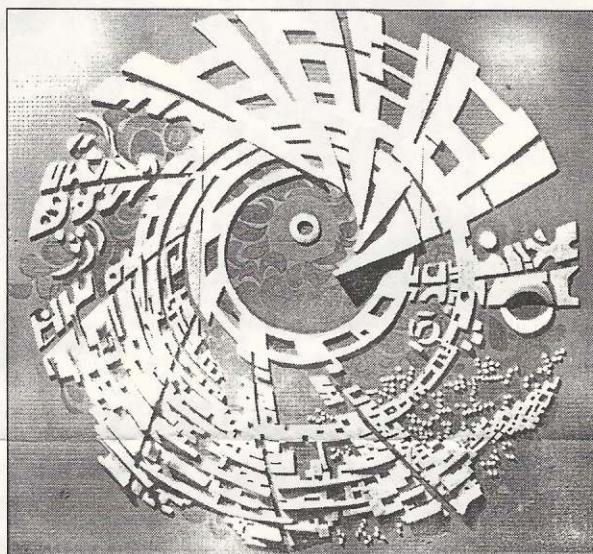
devastated. In fact one senior Auroville architect suggested that 10,000 inhabitants was the absolute maximum which could be accommodated.

Others, while accepting Mother's guidelines, doubted that the Galaxy concept was the best way of achieving them. Ajit's study of historic city architecture in India and abroad led him to believe that 50,000 could be accommodated in the designated township area not through massive lines of force but through high-density, low-rise constructions which utilized local materials and people-friendly spaces and perspectives, all unified by a common 'pattern language'. Others didn't agree. In the circumstances, as Joel Goodman expressed it in 1982, the feeling was that "we are simply not yet ready to start the city".

Some Aurovilians wouldn't accept this. For them the city was an integral part of Mother's vision for Auroville and shouldn't be postponed into an indefinite future. In the mid 1980s, Paulette and Gilles Guigan made studies to ascertain exactly what Mother wanted for 'the city of the dawn'. When these were circulated widely in the community they helped generate a new appreciation of her intentions. Meanwhile some old-timers, exhausted by the daily battle with goats and high-maintenance greenbelt living, were beginning to look afresh at the advantages of apartment living, while many newcomers tended to have professional backgrounds and lacked the hang-ups regarding urbanization which burdened some of the hard-core pioneers. But where were these new arrivals to live? For it was becoming very difficult to find accommodation or a site to build in existing settlements, newcomers were discouraged from starting new settlements and the

and cooperation in the air. "We must become practical dreamers", said Luigi, one of Roger's closest associates, while Ed, a long-term greenbelter, mused that Sri Aurobindo's symbol might provide the key to a new way forward: the ascending aspiration of the earth meeting the vision descending from above within the square of integration.

Meanwhile the first priority remained obtaining funds. In 1989 Auroville sent a portfolio of funding requests for land purchase and infrastructure development to the Human Resource Development Ministry to be forwarded to the Planning Commission, Government of India. The total requested was 56.6 crores rupees (\$38 million). The Planning Commission politely requested further details. As such huge wish lists without any kind of context were clearly not going to get us anywhere, and as the community urgently needed to agree upon development priorities, it was decided to draw up an Auroville Development Plan for the next five years. In 1991 a Development and Planning Coordination Group was formed to prepare this plan for approval by the Residents Assembly. The Group, which was constituted of people with widely divergent views, made some progress in defining priorities and came up with the Auroville Development



Preliminary galaxy model, 1967

Perspectives document, but eventually the gulf between the 'visionaries' and those who favoured 'organic' development proved too wide and the experiment collapsed.

In 1992 a Development Group was established with more specific objectives: to make recommendations regarding the location and density of constructions in the Residential and Industrial Zones. The urgency of the need to evolve guidelines for development in the city – where construction had at last begun – enabled them to come up with practical recommendations.

Nothing is fixed

This new spirit of pragmatism was evident in May, 1994, when the first 'Master Plan' was approved by the Residents Assembly and the Governing Board. What is striking about this plan is that, as one of its drafters explained, "It only defines what is necessary and widely agreed upon at this stage of Auroville's development, giving ample space for everything unfolding. The report says that nothing can be considered as fixed, final and determined until it has finally been put into matter." In this plan there are no lines of force, no densely urbanized cityscapes. And while the geometricism of the Galaxy is still evident in the perfectly circular Crown and outer ring road, the dynamic sweeps are now defined by four city parks which divide the zones, while the original radial roads have been reduced from twelve to eight. The mantra now was 'green city', 'sustainable city'.

However, as construction activity exploded, particularly in the Residential Zone, there were the beginnings of a backlash. Even opponents of the original Galaxy concept conceded that it represented a unified vision of development, whereas now every new settlement reflected the taste of

the presiding architect rather than any attempt to attain a larger synthesis. Meanwhile supporters of the Galaxy concept became increasingly concerned that the last vestiges of it would be snuffed out by architects and individuals more interested in realizing their own visions. In 1998 a Development Group with strong loyalty to Roger assumed responsibility for granting or denying building permission within Auroville. Their somewhat inflexible approach soon made them unpopular. Meanwhile the Planning Group, which had responsibility for issuing development guidelines, continued to affirm they were open to anyone working with them. The proviso, however, was that Roger's was the final authority, a condition which alienated some potential collaborators.

Exactly where Roger stood in all this is hard to say. When he returned to Auroville in 1988 he stated that the Galaxy concept "contains in its entirety the message of Mother and the dream She had for us." At the same time he stressed that, "I am not here to impose anything – it is up to Auroville to find it, to define itself." Later he was to affirm that nothing in the town plan was fixed, with the exception of the lines of force, the high-rise buildings which, he explained, "are essential for the silhouette of the city and for integrating all access to the city centre". While his statements

over the years about the town seem somewhat confusing, even contradictory, the reality seems to be that he remains faithful to certain features of the original Galaxy – like the lines of force and the fact there be no visual separation between Matrimandir and the inner city – while being willing to modify the original plan. Recently he mentioned that he no longer wants to be seen as the architect of the city, but rather as an advisor. Whenever there is a problem, he stated, "I am willing to be the final judge to keep Mother in the reality of the town."

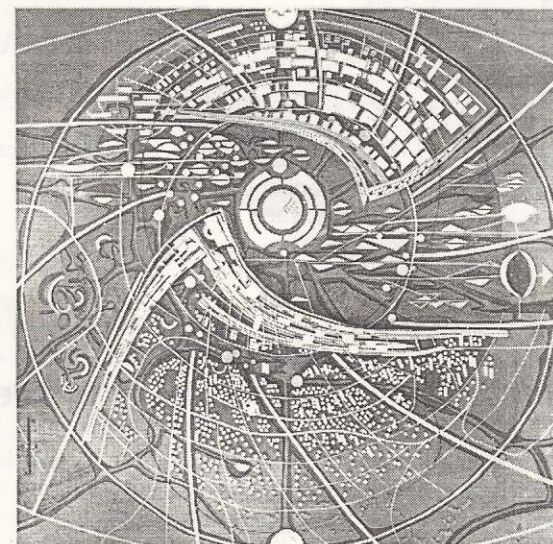
Land speculation

In early 1999, a new element entered the equation. A large plot of land in the Green Belt was bought by speculators who threatened to build a big housing colony. This new threat to Auroville's geographical integrity led to the establishment of a Land Use Coordination Committee with the brief to draw up a land use plan. This, a visiting town planner explained, "is the main part of a Master Plan that shows how the land is reserved for specific purposes. Once there is an approved land use plan for Auroville we can request the authorities concerned to protect the land for Auroville against speculators and unwanted development." In July a revised Master Plan, incorporating land use, was approved by the Residents Assembly and sent to the Governing Board. The latter approved it in principle, but requested that experienced town planners be consulted prior to sending the document to the Central Government. Two very senior town planners with experience in metropolitan urban planning offered their help.

The result of this collaboration was the drafting, in early 2001, of the first phase of the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan. This was a 25 year 'perspective' plan containing the broad concepts for the town's development. In April, 2001 this was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The second phase is a more detailed 5 year development plan. "We start," explains Lalit, a member of Auroville's Future, the town planning service, "by making assumptions about the population growth of Auroville over the next five years (they assume a population of 5,000 by 2006), and from that we estimate the likely patterns of consumption for water, transport, energy etc. Then we make surveys to establish present consumption levels and come out with a blueprint suggesting what kind of development could take place in the near future." Lalit's colleague, Pashi, believes that Aurovilians' attitudes to urban development have tended to be based upon emotion rather than hard facts. "So we

need to come to statistic-based and data-based thinking to see what is practically possible and what is not."

On 20th January, 2003 the efforts of the town planners and Land Use Coordination Committee began to bear fruit. The Tamil Nadu Government



The macro-structure model, 1967

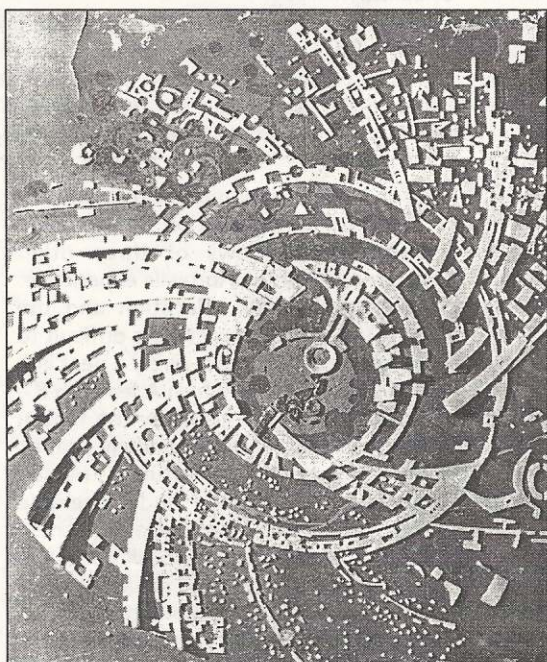
issued a Government Order stipulating that, in future, layout approval on private land within the Auroville Township Master Plan area would require a 'no objection' certificate from the Auroville Foundation.

Zone by zone

What is the reality of the township today, zone by zone? In the Industrial Zone development has been relatively slow: today less than one third of our productive units are situated in this zone. Development has been hampered by water scarcity, poor access and lack of suitable land. The latest idea is to rename this zone the Auroshilpam Economic Zone ('Auroshilpam' was Mother's name for the Industrial Zone): while offices would be located here for administration and research, the bulk of manufacturing would be outsourced.

In the Cultural Zone Transition School was constructed in 1985 and later a large sports ground was established. Recently, a high school – Future School – has come up close to Transition. The Zone has also seen the establishment of a Youth Centre and an artists' colony – Kalabhum – although the status of the latter as a permanent settlement in the Cultural Zone was long in doubt.

For many years, the incomplete Bharat Nivas remained the sole outpost in the International Zone. Only recently has it begun to assume its



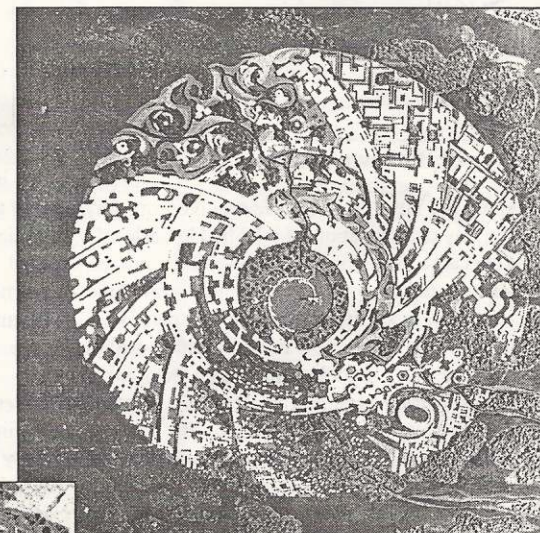
Preliminary galaxy model, late 1967

city area remained off-limits.

Practical dreaming

1988 was something of a watershed. The Auroville Foundation Act was passed, marking a new period of stability, and Roger had returned, stating "There is more fraternity and more authenticity than before." Now he clarified that he had never intended the original Galaxy plan to be manifested in all its details; the details had only been included "to give a sense of completion".

Suddenly there was a new spirit of flexibility



Galaxy model, 1968. At the centre is a sculpture of a flame, surrounded by a vast, circular lake (insert, left)

true role as India's pavilion. Simultaneously its international character has been underlined by the construction of Sri Aurobindo World Center for Human Unity in its midst. Other major developments in the International Zone have been the Visitors Centre complex, which was inaugurated in 1991, and Savitri Bhavan, a study centre for the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

However, one of the key components of the International Zone – the pavilions of different nations and cultures – have taken much longer to manifest. To date, in addition to Bharat Nivas only the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, the Student Guest House of the American Pavilion and the first phase of the Unity Pavilion have been constructed. There are various reasons for this. Cost is

one factor, but the slow pace of development is also due to ambiguous responses to the pavilions' concept from the Aurovilians themselves. Some feel that, in an increasingly internationalized world, it is an outmoded concept which would merely encourage chauvinism; others fear that nations with the most resources will dominate the space available. Many others are unclear about what 'their' pavilion should display as expressions of the soul of their nation. Even the suggested grouping of the pavilions in the International Zone has undergone radical changes over the years. The present plan is to group the pavilions by continent, each continent having a central plaza or campus round which its nations and cultures will coalesce.

Residential explosion

By far the most activity in the city area over the last 15 years has taken place in the Residential Zone, driven by an increasingly serious accommodation shortage. From the late 1980s onwards major new settlements came up in the south east sector of the zone. Each project was a learning experience, both for architect and clients. The advantages for the architects included the ability to express their ideas on a wider canvas and the savings in energy

ity. For example, while the 'Creativity' project is still not completed, its future inhabitants have been meeting regularly for almost two years to discuss their needs and agree upon guidelines for

cept for a pedestrian-friendly, pollution-free transport system within the city. All of this has introduced a new spirit of professionalism into our town planning process.

What are we building?

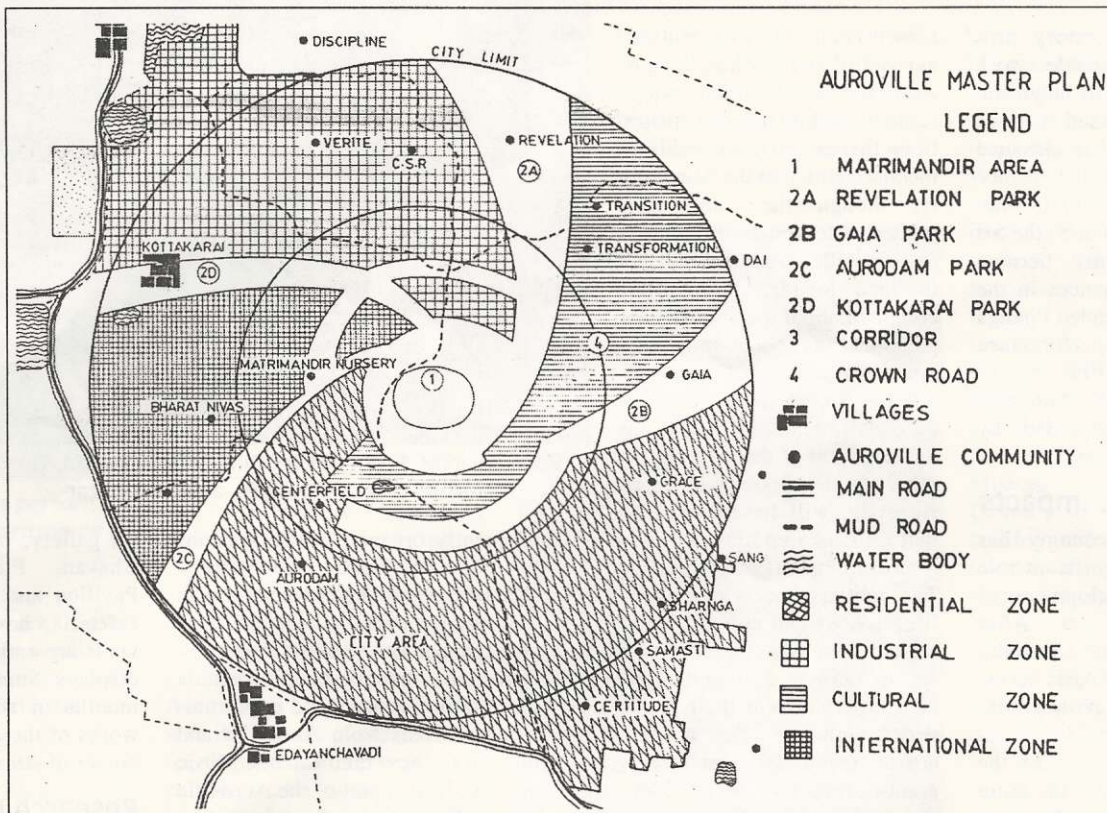
Various people, including India's pre-eminent town planner, Mr. Doshi, have remarked that in Auroville we're building much more than a physical township – we're trying to build a new consciousness. And this requires not bricks and mortar, master plans and subsidies, but goodwill, honesty, transparency and, above all, a willingness to open ourselves to another reality. For Mother said more than once that the town is already built: we merely have to bring it down, to materialize it.

How do we go about this? More than anything it implies a surrender – of our hang-ups regarding urbanization, of our pre-conceptions concerning what a city should look like, of our suspicions regarding the motives of fellow

Aurovilians – along with a full commitment to make Auroville a town, not a snooze of suburbs.

The last thirty five years have not been wasted. Instead of the Aurovilians moving into a ready-built city – the original concept – Auroville became a laboratory for the organic working out of many problems. We have learned much – about the land, about construction in the tropics, about the needs of the bioregion and its people, about ourselves. Today, we have a chance to take the next step. A new group, the Auroville Planning and Development Council, has been constituted to work on all issues relating to planning and development. Its membership is diverse, its size, perhaps, unwieldy. But if they can pool Auroville's collective experience of the last 35 years and then listen, not only to each other but to Mother's voice as it speaks through our defective instrumentation, perhaps, just perhaps, we'll be able to pass at last beyond the either/or right/wrong monotony of our argumentation to that space where Mother's city – whatever that city may be – flashes like the morning star, calling us to a brand new day.

Alan



First Master Plan of Auroville, 1994, showing the city area

harmonious living. Another experiment in high-density community living is the Line of Force project, the first part of which was completed last year.

Recently, in spite of a continuing shortage of accommodation, the apartment boom has ground almost to a halt. Developers like Rolf point out that the demand has slackened because costs have escalated (he estimates that the cost of construction doubles every 5-6 years). At the same time, developers find it difficult to get the up-front money they need for apartment projects as they cannot obtain conventional loans. One possibility being floated is that Auroville business units extend loans which could be repaid through renting out the completed apartments to community members. However, this is still a controversial topic.

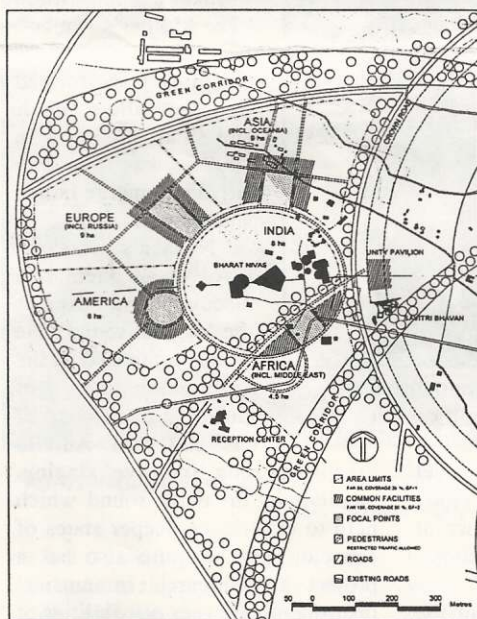
Other development constraints include uncertainty about water resources in the Residential Zone and a lack of coordination, even competing agendas, between the various groups and individuals responsible for housing matters. Projects like Kailash and Courage have almost foundered on disputes between the Development Group and the architects involved, while newcomers seeking accommodation frequently recount harrowing experiences of being bounced back and forth between the Entry Group, the Development Group and the Housing Group.

A little help from our friends

For many years, the Aurovilians involved in town planning were amateurs with much enthusiasm but little expertise. As the problems became more complex, so their shortcomings became more obvious. Crucially, they were unable to come up with basic principles of urban design, described by the architect Helmut as "the ground rules for building up the city – rules which are clear enough and flexible enough to carry over to a new generation of designers, builders and users."

In the late 1990s a young town planner offered his help, and subsequently we have had the assistance of two very senior metropolitan town planners. A German traffic planner has also offered his help in evolving a con-

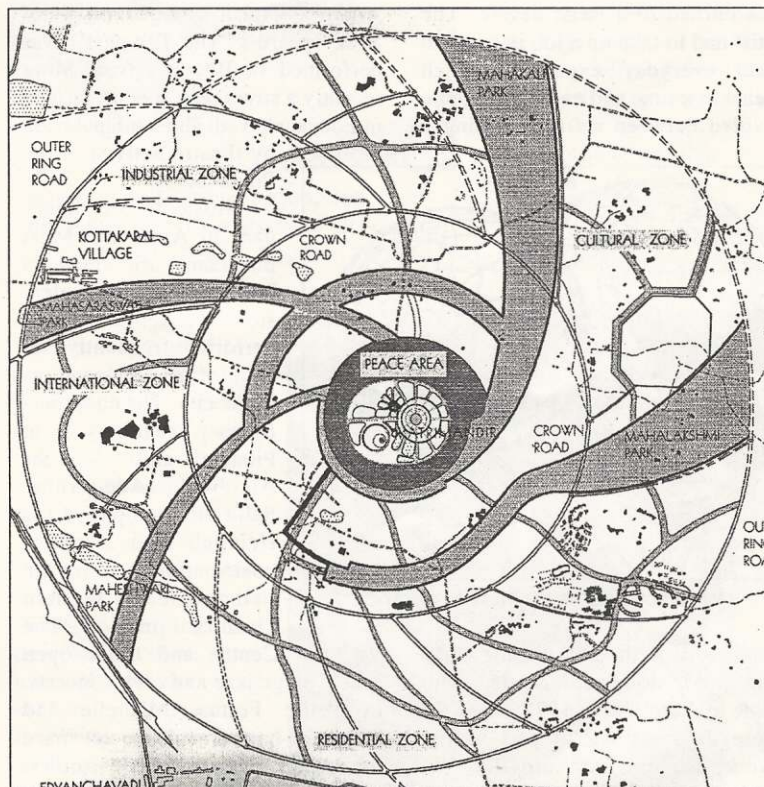
The other main fillip to the development of the town in recent years has been Auroville's participation in the Asia-Urbs programme. This idea behind this European Commission-funded project was for European cities to transfer their best practices in urban governance, sustainable energy generation, waste disposal etc. to city partners in Asia. Auroville at present is far from being a township, let alone a city, but the enthusiasm and drive of Aurovilians like Luigi and Sauro, and the fact that Auroville was still something of a *tabula rasa*, something which fascinated many town planners, managed to convince the organizers that Auroville should be included. Under one Asia-Urbs project, Auroville was partnered with Venice and Cologne. Not only did it receive valuable town planning assistance from each municipality, it also received major funding from the European Commission for the Auroville Centre for Urban Research (ACUR). This, the first building in Auroville's administrative zone, opened recently and presently houses Auroville's town planning and development groups, along with many other key working groups. In effect, ACUR is our first town hall.



Map of the International Zone, 2000

and, theoretically at least, costs accruing from modular construction techniques (actually, construction costs on almost all these projects ended up wildly exceeding original estimates). Meanwhile the inhabitants of these new communities were saved – to a greater or lesser extent – the energy-sapping experience of being responsible for the construction of their own accommodation.

The two main criticisms directed at these new settlements relate to aesthetics and lifestyle. For while each settlement tends to have its own architectural language, little or no attempt has been made to relate this language or to connect in any way with settlements nearby to create the beginnings of an 'urban fabric'. As to lifestyle: many of these settlements were presented as opportunities for Aurovilians and newcomers to experience community. However, living in proximity to others does not automatically make for community. In recent years there has been a movement to construct settlements that will foster greater collectiv-



Final lay-out as presented in the Auroville Universal Township Masterplan Perspective 2025, approved by the Government of India

In brief

SAIER administrative changes

SAIER is undergoing a process of organisational changes. It has been divided into a number of faculties, e.g. the Faculty of Education for Human Unity (comprising the existing Auroville and outreach schools), the Faculty of Studies in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the Faculty of Indian Culture, the Faculty of East, West and Human Unity, the Faculty of Ecology, the Faculty of Arts, Crafts and Technology and the Faculty of Perfection of the Human Body.

SAIER development grant

Under the SAIER Development Programmes, the Government of India has sanctioned Rs 134 lakhs (US \$ 280,000) for construction projects in the year 2003-2004. This money will be used for a hostel for visiting youth and trainees; an extension of the Visitors' Reception Centre with a video and exhibition hall; a new kindergarten nearby the existing one; staff quarters to accommodate teachers and researchers at Transition school; and classrooms, a workshop and a library for Ilaingarkal school. The grant also includes Rs 21,45 lakhs (US \$ 45,000) for equipment and Rs 19 lakhs (US \$ 40,000) for research programmes.

Population growth projection

The Auroville Development and Planning Council reported that, assuming a yearly growth rate of 5% progressively increasing to 10% at the end of 2018 and then stabilising at 11% and remaining at this level, the target population of 50,000 people would be achieved by the year 2038. By 2017, probably no more than 5,000 people will be living in Auroville, i.e. 10% of the targeted population. This growth projection is important for the planning and development of the zones, but does not affect issues such as land purchase and circulation and access, as roads are also used by non-residents. The projection does not take into account uncertain factors such as the pull of Matrimandir; the potential development of Auroville as an educational campus, and the development of the villages around Auroville.

Nirodbaran 100 years

On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary of Nirodbaran on November 18th, sweet parcels were distributed in the Ashram and Auroville.

Auroville International Spain

A travelling exhibition on Auroville was opened on November 10th in Bilbao (Spain) with an Odissi dance performance by Devasmita. On November 20th the Spanish translation of the Sri Aurobindo's book "The Ideal of Human Unity" was presented by Dr. Ananda Reddy.

Rainwater harvesting

The Government of Tamil Nadu have issued orders that rainwater harvesting systems are mandatory for all new constructions, reconstructions, or additions to existing buildings. Auroville is actively following up.

Silence space

Acting upon the outcome of a mini-survey, the Solar Kitchen has allocated a few tables in the northern wing as a permanent 'silent space'. Once every week the entire northern wing is reserved for those who prefer to eat in silence.

The arts of Auroville

Notwithstanding a boom in artistic activities, the support for the arts from the community is not yet sufficient

In February 1999, Auroville Today observed: "Today, there is a tremendous increase of cultural activities in Auroville. Serious research is going on in all fields...How can we create funds and support systems to encourage research and development of innovative art projects? What could we do to reduce the 'artistic deficit' so that our artistic concerns become an economic priority? How can we keep in touch with artistic developments elsewhere?"

Auroville has had an impulse for art right from the beginning. Yet the 'tremendous increase of cultural activities' dates back more than fifteen years. With Auroville's growth being consistent but uneven, the impact of the economic changes has closely influenced the development of the arts of the city. Perhaps, comparing the last 15 years with the earlier times may give a clearer picture of things.

Glimpses of the early days

In the early days, Ashram-

Auroville Dance Laboratory produced some commendable work with something new in its language, perhaps because it fused various dance idioms from Indian classical with modern dance forms. Dance perked up also when the auditorium at Bharat Nivas (later named the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium) became accessible for performances in the 1980s. The privately-funded Pitanga hall opened for public performance in February 1991. Yet, as late as 1988, Auroville was still regarded by some as a cultural desert.

Economic impacts

The economy has played a significant role in the development of Auroville's arts. After Mother's mahasamadhi, the supply of basic necessities to Auroville gradually stopped. The 'prosperity' system made way for the 'envelopes' first and later the more individualised system of 'maintenance'. All these factors directly influenced the arts in Auroville. Now, because of economic constraints, the freedom of the artist to devote him/herself totally to the arts

have become compartmentalised as 'useful' and 'useless.' Many Auroville artists today would resonate with Mayaura's frustration that an artist is considered inconsequential to the community, though they are often requested to donate their works to Auroville to raise funds for the land. Resident artists often complain about the almost complete lack of community support. "Auroville still treats an artist as a commodity. There is no equal attention given to the development of the arts and the other fields. Sooner or later, Auroville will have to realise that art is as important as the environment," opines musician Aurelio. The subtler aspects of community life, like art and cultural activities, are not seen as a community priority, nor is there a support system to help artists market their work to a wider audience. The notion that artists could be sustained from grants for the arts from the Government of India was not acceptable to all artists because, besides being inadequate, the grant would oblige them to be accountable to an authority.

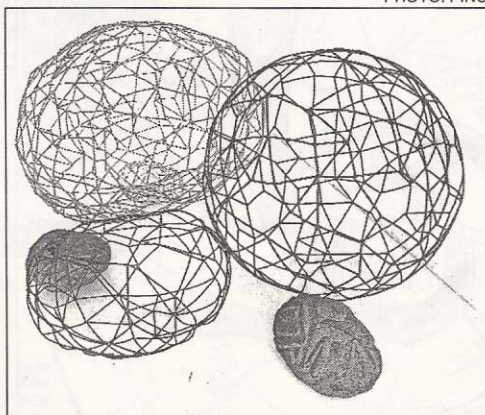
These factors have had an impact on the artists. Some have left Auroville because they felt that the community was drifting away from the 'Auroville ideal'. Others have made a temporary shift by diverting into the craft arena. But some artists refused to let outer changes hamper their artistic growth. These are the fortunate few who do not need to depend on the community for their maintenance, as they have their own resources.

The art scene today

At present, in a community of roughly two thousand people, there is a steady stream of artistic activity, both at the professional and the amateur level.

Theatre, for example, is an entirely amateur activity. In the year 2002, five plays were performed. Some have seen repeat performances because of public demand. In general, plays in English are the norm; very rarely a French play is enacted. Tamil theatre is also an occasional occurrence. In the mid 90s, Parathasarathi's 'Iruthi Attam' (an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest') was performed in Bharat Nivas. More recently a street play was performed in Edayanchavadi and Kulapalayam by theatre activists from Pondicherry.

PHOTO: PINO



Wire sculptures by Pierre Legrand

livelihood. Remembering the early times, Monique Patenaude, who came to Auroville in 1977, says, "In those days art was a part of the 'work' we did for Auroville. We cooked art, ate art and were totally committed to art. But today, things

Visitors' Centre and other open spaces stage jazz and rock concerts. In Petite Ferme, Michelle and Moricette have created a quiet space for Indian classical music soirées. Communities like Svedam, Bliss, Vérité, Félicité, Ravena, and Ami



Vocal quartet. From left to right: Eliane, Martin, Tina and Gundolf, with Holger, acoustic guitar

frequently organize music sessions by guests and newcomers. Workshops are held whenever an opportunity arises. 'Celestial Arts', an organisation recently started by Celestine, endeavours to create a more intimate space and opportunities for artists from Auroville and outside to show their talents. Music and art are also part of the Auroville schools' curricula. Two recording studios and a film school – the latter

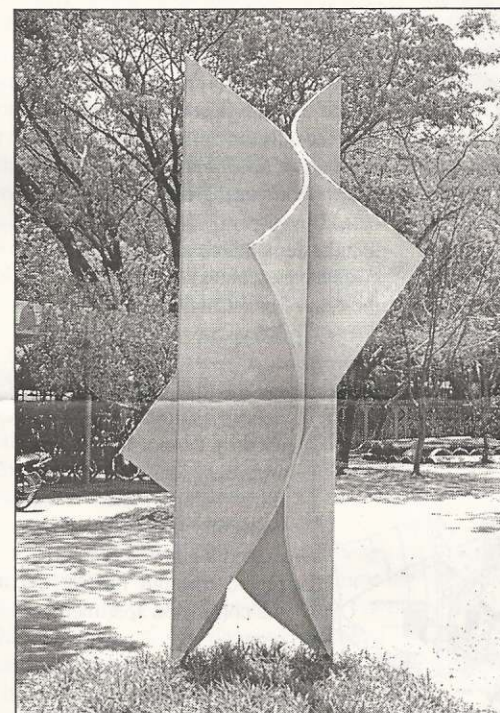
art gallery, places like the Savitri Bhavan, Pitanga, the Tibetan Pavilion and recently the Aurelec cafeteria, have realised that their walls are eminently suitable for art displays. Some of them are booked months in advance. Many of the works of these shows end up in the homes of Aurovilian patrons.

Research in the arts

Much research is going on in the arts. An early example was the 2-hour children's musical 'Beyond Asleep and Awake', written and composed by Holger in 1995. The music for choir and small orchestra, performed on New Year's Eve 2000, was written by a Swedish friend of Auroville, Johannes Jansson. Pushkar's composition "The Mother's symbol, Part 1, The Twelve Qualities" performed by Auroville's choir and small orchestra in 2002, was another attempt to merge Indian and western music.

Nadaka's research involves an attempt to discover and express the 'original sound'. He is also interested in the cross-pollination of musical traditions of east and west. Aurelio organises group 'intuitive' singing, meditations in 'pure' sound which help to experience deeper states of consciousness. Aurelio also has a project for research in musical instruments. He sees possibilities of designing musical instruments which will enable everybody to play music.

In the fine arts, for a long time Pierre Legrand has been doing research on something deeper which 'captures the being on a cellular



Ferrocement channels turned into art by Cornelis, at the CSR compound

more in name than in content as yet – are in place. Aurovilians can enjoy weekly films and video shows at Bharat Nivas and the Visitors' Reception Centre.

'Kalabhoomi' – the land of the Arts – is an artists' community in the Cultural Zone. When the amphitheatre of the new music studio is completed, it will host life performances.

Regarding the fine arts, although Auroville does not have a dedicated



Pushkar (piano) and Marcello (violoncello) rehearsing for a concert

PHOTO: PINO

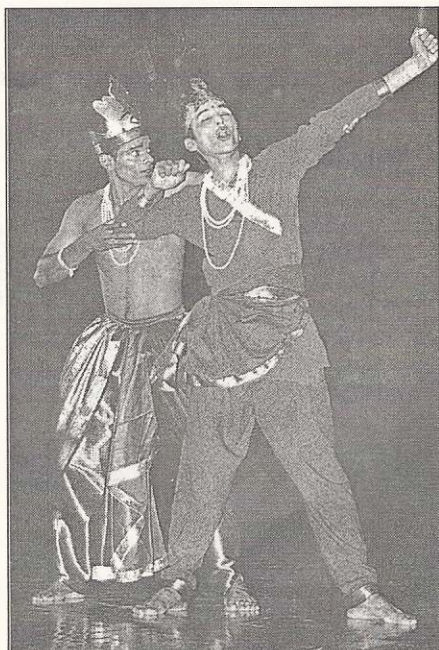
PHOTO: IRENO



Kanchana and Grace performing 'Speaking in Tongues' choreographed by Anu, 2002

Auroville relations being convivial, the interaction between the two was beneficial to both. Ashram artists came to Auroville to work together with Auroville artists. In those days there was no auditorium or other purpose-built space fit for performance. In 1970, Deborah and Bob performed a play in the canyon of the Forecomers community. Auroville musicians, individually or in groups – Narad's choir, for example – performed wherever a suitable place could be found.

During the seventies, after the Last School amphitheatre was built, Aspiration and Last School became art venues. This was a time when the artist could 'devote him/herself totally' to the arts because the community provided the basic needs. About that time Croquette started a theatre group called 'Théâtre d'Expression d'Auroville'. The group performed French plays in Auroville, Pondicherry, and abroad. The early 1980s saw the arrival of Brazilian dancers Aryamani, Ila and Paulo which gave Auroville's dancers a shot in the arm. The



Partha and Muthu in a performance of 'Harichandra', a play written by Partha, in 2000

level'. His installation work 'Light-Matter', exhibited in Auroville in February 1999 is the culmination of "a decisive experience triggered 15 years ago".

Research in dance has been a normal feature ever since the Auroville Dance Laboratory started. 'Crossroads' (1994), 'Mantra' (1997), 'Savitri' based on music by Sunil (1997), 'Dancing in Tongues' (2002), are some of the well appreciated in-house choreographs by Paulo and Anu.

Original theatre is rare. In 1997, a play called 'The Legend of Kaliveli Siddha', enacting an

work of The Akademik Genius Brothers, can be termed as research in cabaret. Last but not least, there have been attempts to educate villagers through theatre, such as 'Veervasam' which showed how farming can be done without polluting the environment.

A true Auroville art?

Auroville's artscape looks promising today. But has Auroville developed an 'idiom', a language, or even, a 'style' of its own? To what extent do its arts reflect its ethos?

Many artists hold that three decades are inadequate to answer these larger questions convincingly. "A culture is slowly evolving, but it's too early. Something is trying to manifest. There are some hints which I sense but cannot define," says Mayaura. In the early 90s, an Auroville artist exhibited 60 paintings by various Aurovilians in Germany. What was the impact of Auroville art on the German viewers? "The paintings", he says, "stood out because of the aspiration but also because of the light and brightness in colour." Aurelio thinks that "Auroville offers an ideal playground for artistic experimentation, more so in Auroville as we do not cater to commercialism. We can develop art that is 'meaningful', art that 'emerges from inside'. Here we can truly explore deeper." Another

ning to relate to it," she feels.

Art appreciation

The responses to various forms of art expression in Auroville are almost always based on what Aurovilians consider to be the level of inspiration of the art expression. For instance, the Japanese Butoh dance performed a few years back by a Japanese guest artist received a strong disapproval because it was seen as an expression of the 'lower



Bass-relief in clay by Kratu

vital'. Pavitra's 'les Roses du Ciel' was considered 'too dark.' Beckett's 'Endgame' staged by Jill in March 1986 was strongly deprecated for its 'harsh, existential' overtones.

Visiting artists

Interactions between Auroville and the outside world are better today than in the past, thanks in particular to the efforts being made by Tapas Bhatt through Kala Khoj and Kalamitra. These organisations invite artists from outside to perform in Auroville. Auroville is now on the world cultural map. Kalamitra (Friends of the Arts) was formed by



Painting by Monique Patenaude, from her exhibition 'Few Invisible Cities and The Quest', held in Pitanga, 2002

a group of Aurovilians to stimulate Auroville's cultural life. It promotes theatre and dance, music, literature, painting, sculpture and cinema. It also tries to support upcoming artists in Auroville. Kala Khoj (A Search for Art) is an offshoot of Kalamitra. It aims at helping the development of an international network of exchange programmes involving artists from India, Auroville and the rest of the world wishing to deepen their research

in the arts. In support of this aim, Kala Khoj has become an affiliate member of the international 'Res Artis' network.

Over the years many many famous artists from India, particularly dancers and musicians, have had the Auroville experience and some have conducted workshops here. Dancer Sonal Mansingh has performed a number of times, and so have Chandralekha and her group. Oddissi master Pandit Kelucharan Mahapatra has staged a spectacular dance recital. Tibetan dance was performed by members of the Tibetan Students' Association, Chennai. Modern dancer Astad Deboo's solo performances and his performance with a troupe of dancers with impaired hearing and speech stunned the Auroville audience into respectful silence, appreciating their breathtaking co-ordination of movement and rhythm, despite their handicap.

Many reputed Indian classical musicians have also performed in Auroville - Uday Bhavalkar, Pandit Jasraj, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Ustad Rashid Khan, Pandit Birju Maharaj, Samjukta Panigrahi, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Ustad Zakir Hussain - to name just a few. Jazz saxophonist Ned Rothenburg has been here. The Bauls, wandering musicians from Bengal, and other traditional performers, as well as Altérités, an organisation based in France which blends different cultures and music, have enthralled the Auroville audience with their magic.

Theatre artists too visited Auroville, such as Atul Kumar and Sheeba Chadha who performed and directed workshops.

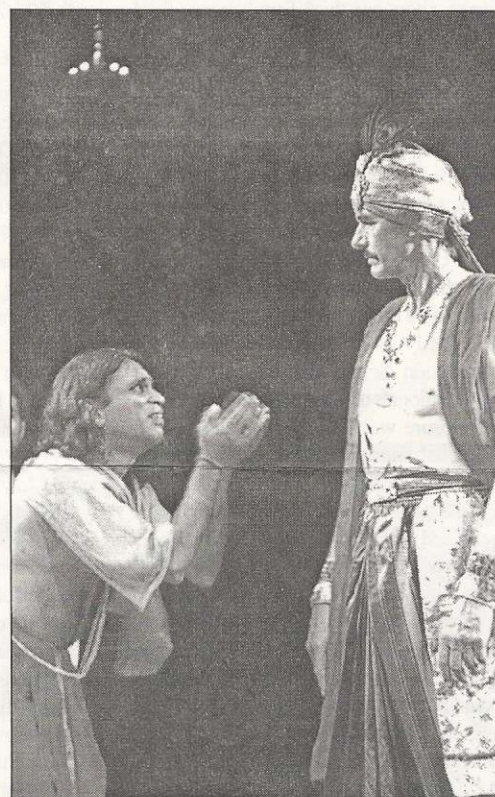
The graphic arts are being stimulated through 'A.I.R.', the 'Artist In Residence' programme of Emily and Dimitri. Under this programme visiting artists are offered free residence and the possibility to work in the studios provided on the condition that they give a workshop to Aurovilians or in other ways interact with Auroville. This programme brought, amongst



Painting by Stephanie Bussmann, exhibited in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in November 2003. The proceeds from this exhibition went to cover the medical expenses of an Aurovillian.

others, Western painters such as Jérôme Mesnager and Jean-Louis Dulaar, who have left their mark in Auroville.

Aurofilm is another Auroville institution that endeavours to pro-

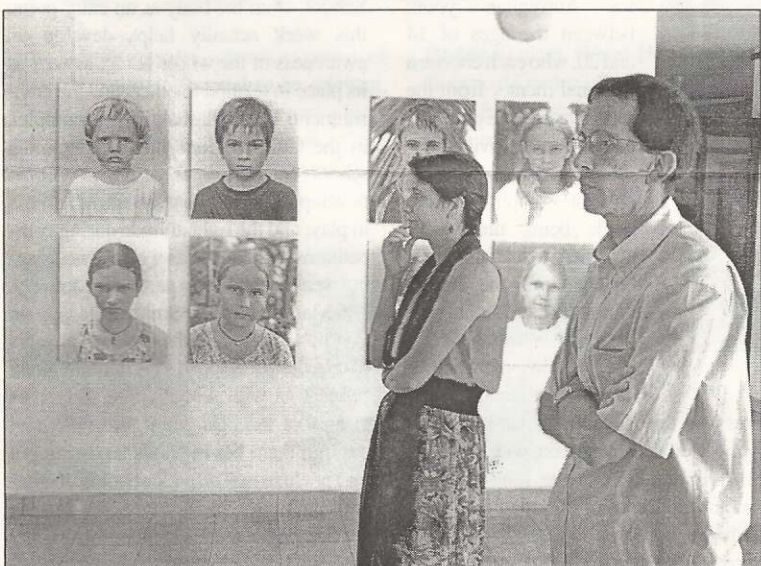


Charudatta and Nico in Tagore's 'Sacrifice', February 2003

mote the arts. Apart from organising weekly shows in Bharat Nivas, it has also organised film festivals featuring renowned Indian film makers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan. In April 2000, Aurofilm organised a seminar on Indian film making led by P.K. Nair, former director of the National Film Archives of India.

Years ago, when the Mother was asked how Auroville would be known to the world, she is reported to have said, "Through her arts." A start has definitely been made.

Charudatta



'Aurovilians', a photographic exhibition by Ireno in the Savitri Bhavan, December 2000

ancient Tamil legend about a yogi who had actually predicted the genesis of Auroville, was put together by Jill and others. Last year, a French play written by Aurovillian Pavitra called 'les Roses du Ciel' was staged. 'Nishta' was a theatre production based on a play written by Seyrill Schochen, a friend of Auroville who lives in the USA. The

musician, Holger, has a similar view: "It is a blessing to be in an environment like Auroville because the subconscious suggestion for utility is considerably less. Besides, art is a path for one's sadhana." However, Holger thinks that a population of barely two thousand people can hardly have a level of interaction with the artistic community and function on a similar wave-length of creativity, which is vital for any significant language or style to develop. He gives as example how in Buenos Aires, within less than three decades, one of the world's most sensual art expressions sprang up - the tango - because, he says, "the need for art was raised to the level of the need for food." Is that need missing in Auroville? "I am disappointed in the community," says another painter. "Also the artists in Auroville are shy. They don't dare to do anything. Perhaps Auroville is not ready for the manifestation of its aesthetic being." Is this another way of saying that the receptivity of Aurovilians to art is still in its embryonic stages? For Mayaura, it definitely is. "The artists are there, the Auroville culture exists, but the community as a whole is only begin-



Painting by Shanta. The proceeds from sales went to the Land Fund



Left to right: Srinivasan, Srimoyi, Otto and Liliana in 'A Jubilee' by Chekhov, 2002

The evolution of education in Auroville

Through a succession of educational initiatives, Auroville keeps on educating itself in how to educate.

“Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.” These words from Auroville’s Charter and the principles of education outlined by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are shining beacons for Auroville’s attempts to organize its education. Along with the vision, however, constraints and obstacles are part of the reality from which education in Auroville is being created. In this article, we take a look at how the challenges of shaping Auroville’s education have been met from the early days till today, and glance into the crystal ball of the future. A future article will deal with the development of the education for children from the surrounding villages.

The history of education in Auroville can be broken up into two periods, before and after the creation of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (SAIER) in 1984. The first period saw Auroville’s first school, Aspiration School, being born in 1970, live and change during a little more than half a decade, and close in 1976. Aspiration School had more than 150 students, about one third Tamilian, one third from the rest of India, and one third Western. Shraddavan, one of the teachers, in 1990, remembered: “I think there was a lot of honesty between the adults and the children. Whenever a child came from outside, it was immediately obvious: in other schools the lesson they had learned was to deceive their teachers. Here they didn’t have to, and partly because of this the children’s individual capacities were really able to develop.”

Partly as a reaction to criticism of Aspiration School having become too conventional, the period which followed its closure was mainly characterized by informal educational attempts. The best known of those was Johnny’s initiative in Fertile. His educational philosophy is reflected in his idea, expressed in 1992, that credits for croissant-making, or bicycle maintenance or tree planting, for instance would be equally valid as academic credits, and together with these serve as the basis of an Auroville diploma which could slowly gain international respect. Despite Johnny’s initiative, and the primary education provided from 1981 in Centre School, many children were never offered formal schooling and came to be called ‘the lost generation’. One of them was Binah, who was seven when Aspiration School closed. In the absence of schools within Auroville, she was sent by her mother to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram school in Delhi. “This

the help of funding from the Government of India, Transition School started in 1985, and has since then been the main school for children up to 14 years of age. The rickety Centre School buildings at Centre Field received a coat of whitewash and new keel roofs, and became the Kindergarten. As the first organized initiative of secondary education, Last School began in January 1985, in the Swagatham and Last School buildings next to Aspiration. The adjacent, dilapidated and unfinished buildings of the Pyramids were eight years later to become a place for art classes. The start of Last School came about due to the demand from the frustrated youth themselves, who were longing for a ‘real school’. A necessary prerequisite was the fact that SAIER was granted financial support from the Ministry of Education, which has been providing a substantial part of Auroville’s educational budget ever since. The Kindergarten obtained new buildings in 1993 thanks to government money, and so did Miramukhi (now Deepanam). Some buildings at Transition, the entire Future School, and the re-building of the Pyramids were, however, financed by private donations.

The free soul of Auroville

As Auroville is a unique place, this could be expected to shine through in its children. Deepti at Last School commented in 1990 on her experience of Auroville children as “deeply honest and frank, direct and giving immediate feedback”, with a “sweetness and soul quality just beneath the outer crust”. In contrast, a teacher at the Kodaikanal International School, said in 1994: “The main problem of Auroville’s children is lack of discipline.” She was quick to add, however, a comment about their “wonderful free spirit”. These statements give an idea of the range of adults’ perceptions of Auroville children throughout the years. Growing up in Auroville, close to nature, immersed in the cultural variety of a community aspiring for unity, and with more freedom than in most other places, appears to foster certain qualities, and these are enhanced by the teaching methods practiced.

Teachers ought to “suggest and not to impose” as “the idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant

which is transmitted even in the most traditional kind of classrooms. The children must feel that.”

The notion of Auroville as a ‘university’ where everybody is taking part in a lifelong learning adventure, has been a powerful ideal since the start. Many of the first settlers in Auroville were children of the sixties, a decade which saw a deep-seated revolt against the established norms of the West, and the prevailing ideal of early Auroville was that youth has to grow up without losing contact with their souls. In addition, according to Deepti in 1998, Auroville was a typical example of a pioneering society which settle on inhospitable terrain, where the typical first phase is one where the ‘man of action’ is the role model. It was also a place of co-existence of strongly contradictory attitudes lacking the stabilizing factors of established societies. These facts, taken together, go a long way towards explaining the resistance against formalized education and enthusiasm for experimentation of the early days.

But the picture has changed since then. Suzie, who has been living and teaching in Auroville since 1980, observed in 1999 that the mandate of education in Auroville had shifted from experimentation as the first priority to a more formalized academic system with the consequence that, in her view, Auroville is sliding away from the man-



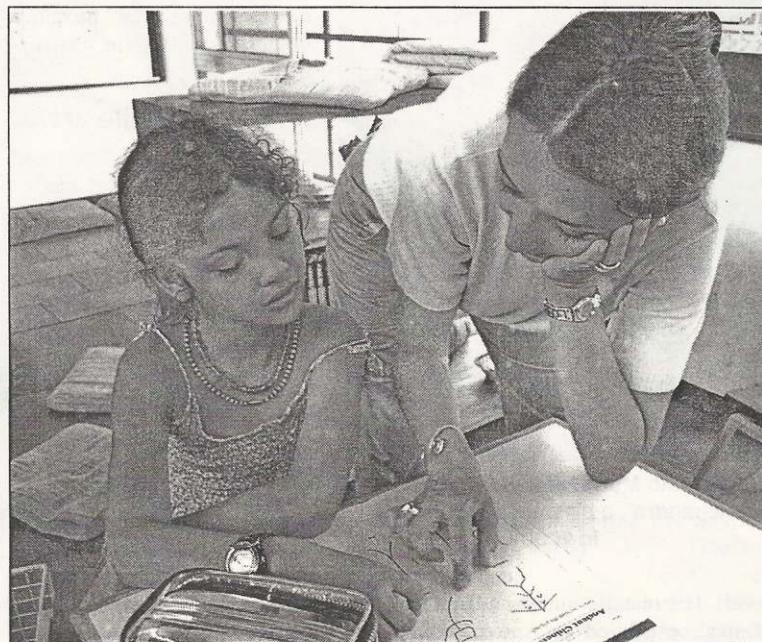
On the way to school

date of soul-centered education given by the Mother, a mandate to aim for “what others cannot even conceive of”. Suzie identified two main reasons for this development: an insufficient level of collaboration between different educational initiatives, resulting in a badly integrated educational system, and “the push towards examinations”.

Diplomas or not?

For many years, discussions about examinations and certification focused upon Last School, as it was the only high school in Auroville. In October 1994, an Auroville Today article heading articulated a question which was hovering in the collective mind of Auroville: “Last School – lost school?” The issue boiled down to many children having turned their backs on Last School in favour of secondary level studies at the Lycée Français in nearby Pondicherry, or at Kodaikanal International School, or other schools offering formal certificates. The question of how Auroville schools could find an acceptable way to offer diplomas that would open the door to higher education elsewhere has remained central to this day. Since non-Indian passport holders won’t easily get admission to Indian universities, they have to study in their country of origin, or elsewhere. The French ‘baccalaureate’ and the international ‘baccalaureate’, offered at the Lycée Français and the Kodaikanal International School respectively, guarantee admittance to most universities in Europe and the USA. But on the Auroville educational scene no similar opportunity has been offered – until some years ago.

In January this year, the Center for



Individual tutoring at Transition

Further Learning (CFL), created in 1996, was transformed into Future School, and moved into a newly erected building near Transition School. While a possibility of examination through correspondence courses has been offered for some years at CFL, Future School now gives Auroville teenagers the choice to study for British ‘O’ or ‘A’ levels, the Indian National Open School certificate or to study mainly

subjects of their own preference. The school wants to provide a student-centered, integral education for Aurovillian youth between the ages of 14 and 20, who each choose a personal mentor from the school team. The goal is to achieve an Auroville educational program of international standing which, while being universally accepted, would also be in keeping with the unique Auroville educational philosophy. Whereas different opinions of whether formal certification inter-

feres with the educational mandate given by the Mother may remain, with this policy of Future School the long-standing issue of ‘diplomas or not’ may finally be ready to be taken off the agenda of Auroville’s educational discussions.

Education of the whole being

It can be claimed that Auroville schools offer a curriculum which caters for the development of more parts of the being than most present-day educational systems. Attempts are made to provide an education not only for the mental, but also the vital, physical and psychic aspects of the being. Traditionally mental education, like language learning, is given another tone in Auroville, where children are exposed to several different languages from an early age, and ‘creole languages’ such as Tanglish (a mixture of Tamil and English) develop. Already at the Kindergarten, the children learn songs in English, French, Tamil and Sanskrit. While language education continues at all school levels, it is given a scientific form at the Auroville Language Laboratory, which has existed in a more organized form since 1999. This laboratory not only offers individual language teaching in many languages, but also researches new teaching methods. It intends, for example, to import a special machine called ‘the electronic ear’, developed by the French scientist Tomatis, to enhance language learning in Auroville.

Education for the vital is emphasized in places like the Pyramids Art Center, where art is recognized as a means to develop the personality rather than as an end in itself. Through art, children from all Auroville schools are invited to develop

their aesthetic sense and their concentration, as well as train their endurance to manifest an idea. To the teenagers of Last School, who are the ones allowed most time at the Pyramids, the last point is often the biggest challenge. Education of the physical being, the body, which was strongly emphasized by the Mother, is pursued in the ‘Awareness through the Body’ programme of Joan and Aloka. Since 1992, they have been offering their work to children as well as – more recently – adults, and since 2000 they do it in a specifically designed hall in Transition School. With the body as an entry point, this work actually helps develop an awareness of the whole being, as well as its place in relation to others and the environment. The Dehashakti sports complex in the Cultural Zone has been training school children since 1992, aiming to develop qualities like team spirit, fairness in play, and the right attitude during competitions and games, as well as encouraging weaker children to participate actively.

Marguerite Smithwhite in Pondicherry has, on the basis of 22 years of research, developed a curriculum for an “education with a soul”. She welcomes groups of teachers from Auroville, and through them her methods are being put into practice in Auroville schools. In general, attempts to provide education for the psychic part of the being are – presumably – greatly helped by the largely individualized system of education. At the Deepanam and Transition schools, for example, on average two teachers run a class of maximum 18 children. At Future School, the ratio is often as low as one teacher to two students. Then, not to be forgotten, a few Auroville parents prefer not to send their children to school, but to take care of their education themselves, naturally entailing a very close contact with the learning process of the individual child.

Voices from outside

For many years Auroville has been receiving visiting teachers and educators both from India and the world at large. Aurovillians engaged in education have also directed their attention outwards, for example taking part in events such as the 1992 international conference on experiential learning in Pondicherry, or special teachers’ trainings. For most teachers in Auroville lack professional qualifications. Is this a limitation? Heidi Watts, perhaps the person with the deepest insights into Auroville education from an outside perspective, considers it a “great advantage that they have not been spoiled by professional training”. In a comparative study of education in Auroville, Montessori, Waldorf, and other progressive schools, written on behalf of SAIER, she concludes that the Auroville Kindergarten has something of all the other kinds of school.



Group singing at the Kindergarten

was really hard and very disciplined”, she recalled in 1993, and added that, upon returning to Auroville, she found that “the children of my age group (‘the lost generation’) had turned into quite a rowdy bunch”.

SAIER, with its role of coordinating education and generating educational research, slowly brought an increasing number of educational initiatives. With

superstition”, said Sri Aurobindo. Heidi Watts, an American teacher trainer from Antioch University, has been visiting Auroville more or less yearly since 1993 to share her deep knowledge and passion for education. Already during her first visit, she felt how Sri Aurobindo’s words were very much alive for the Auroville teachers, saying: “I saw a sense of wonder and delight and respect for childhood

Meeting the needs of each child

While Transition school has been meeting the demands for primary education since 1985, the possibilities to pursue higher education within Auroville are on the increase

Transition school has witnessed great changes and developments over the past years. There were sixty students in 1993, and this has doubled to one hundred and twenty today spreading over eight classes from grades 1 to 8. The expansion has also been physical: new classrooms, a library, a computer room, a hall for 'awareness through the body' and a new dining hall have been built, greatly improving the learning environment.

"There has always been a strong feeling of working as a team in Transition school," says Clare who has been a Transition teacher for the past ten years. "But we had to become more organized to deal with so many more students. As a result, we became more consolidated and clearer about our guidelines. The teachers are very supportive of each other and take decisions as a group. At present we are working on setting-up a general curriculum, detailing certain basics which should be taught to the students in each grade. We have also developed a teacher training programme. Yet within the structure, every teacher has, and will continue to have the freedom to develop his or her own curriculum and teaching methodology. For example, my own curriculum developed over the years, using the

resources available and the ideas from different teachers. This resulted in a personal system of working where I use a combination of certain traditional but valuable methods along with innovative approaches."

Clare loves her job, and feels that teaching is also a great learning experience. "As a teacher, you are always learning new things which you haven't dealt with before. And when questions are asked, it's a great thing for a teacher to just be able to stand there and say: 'Well, actually I don't know, let's go and take a dictionary or an encyclopedia or search on the internet and find out.'"

Clare feels that one of the great challenges in education is to continue meeting the individual needs of each child as the number of students increases. "I've got eighteen students in my English class and there are children who need extra help. We can't let these children fall through the gaps. Transition is doing its utmost to meet the challenge by offering individual tutoring. This is teacher-intensive but essential, and it has to continue. It implies that more people are needed to do this work. But Transition will only accept people who are committed to teaching."

In the past, many students left Auroville schools to pursue higher

education at the Lycée Français in Pondicherry, or at the Kodaikanal International Boarding School. But this is not to everyone's liking. "I would be so happy to see the students from Transition school continue their studies in Auroville," says Clare. "These children have been together in a group for many years. A very special dynamic has developed between them. They all know each other well, and accept and understand each other. They can all work out their problems together. Think of what that would mean for the future of Auroville! I think it would be the best for them to continue their education in Auroville."

This possibility exists at Future School, where Clare gave English lessons for a year to students preparing for their O-level examination. Asked about her views on the issue of studying for diplomas she replies, "The impetus for Future School came from the children who grew up in Auroville and were asking for the opportunity to continue their higher studies in Auroville. Studying to pass the 'O' or even the more advanced 'A' level examinations is just one aspect of the school's work. More important-



Clare teaching a small group

ly, the students are treated as individuals who have the right to decide for themselves which educational system they want to pursue. They actively participate in the way they are being taught. The students have the opportunity to take exams, but it is not compulsory, and they can still participate in the programme the school offers even if they choose not to. The team at Future School ensures that each student's curriculum is well balanced and that it includes many other subjects

aside from the examination-oriented topics.

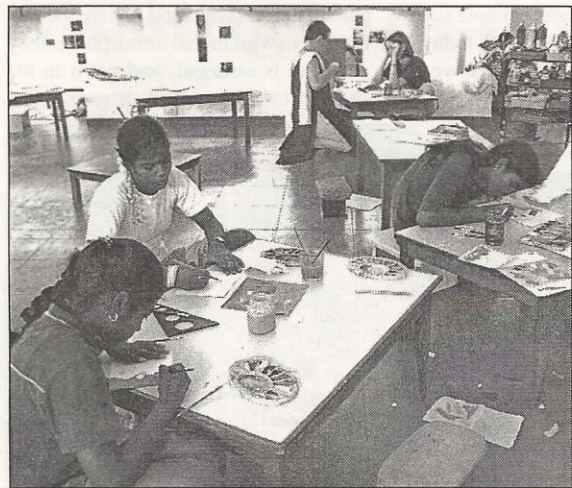
"One of the things I enjoy most about teaching in Auroville, and which has brought a lot of richness into my life," says Clare, "is the relationship that builds up between the teacher and the students. These contacts and friendships extend outside the classroom and continue to develop and evolve through the years, as the children grow up and become young adults."

Emmanuelle

◀ As in progressive schools, experiences are carefully constructed to be relevant, developmentally appropriate and educative, the whole child is addressed, there are many opportunities for choice, and children learn from an active engagement

Pitchandikulam, Water Harvest, and the Botanical Garden offer training and education in subjects related to water management, organic farming, and the protection and use of medicinal plants, reaching out to the bioregion as well as to India as a whole. Auroville has recently been hosting workshops ranging from one for Indian fashion students learning to design with waste materials to those on 'creativity' and 'innovation' held for people in the field of rural development.

Apparently, among these examples of educational initiatives, as well as the diverse research projects conducted in Auroville, seeds of



Art education at the Pyramids

with the environment. Similarities with Montessori schools are found, for example, in the development of the senses, and with Waldorf schools in the spiritual approach. Heidi finds that the Auroville Kindergarten resonates well with the three principles of education enunciated by Sri Aurobindo: "Nothing can be taught. Work from the near to far. Mind must be consulted in its own growth."

Outreach and higher education

Auroville is today a place where many students, such as budding architects and engineers, come to explore their subjects in practice. Since 1991, groups of students from India and abroad have been spending study weeks in Auroville. The first group of students from the Gaia Education Outreach Institute (GEO) in USA, for instance, came in 1991, and now GEO sends two groups every year. Professionals, voluntary organizations, and students take part in the courses of the Centre for Scientific Research in environmental and sustainable technologies, where knowledge based on field experiments in Auroville is transferred. Palmyra,

higher education can be found. Lacking so far are the central structures to let them grow into complete educational programs to be offered in and by Auroville. The Center for International Research in Human Unity project (CIRHU), with its roots as far back as 1986, this year, through SAIER, received substantial funding from the Indian Government [see AV Today June/July 2003]. It has an ambition to become a synthesizing center for research and higher education.

Daniel Greenberg, the executive director of the GEO program, says: "Auroville is a real-world model of sustainable development experimenting with integrated human-scale solutions. ... I believe that Auroville will continue to host international educational programmes like ours and also that it will eventually develop its own university." And so, Greenberg – presumably unknowingly – echoes the Mother: "The permanent university will be the key to Auroville's raison d'être." Thirty four years after those words were spoken, many steps have been taken towards the beginning of their manifestation.

Svante

Education in retrospect

After twenty years of involvement in education, Suzie has started on a new path

Although she had no previous experience or training in the field, on the day after she arrived in Auroville in 1980, Suzie started teaching at Centre School, beginning an involvement in education that would last for over twenty years. She taught in Centre School until 1985, then in Transition School for the next eight years and afterwards in Last School and at Deepanam. She worked with children from the ages of four to sixteen, teaching subjects such as English, social studies and theatre. She was also involved with administration – as a member of the SAIER coordination group and as secretary of the Auroville School Board, a forum of exchange for the different Auroville schools.

Recently, she withdrew from education. "I really felt it was the end, like the completion of a cycle," she says. "Now that I've left formal education, my views on the subject have shifted somewhat. I've been looking at Auroville's Charter, and been thinking of what is meant by 'unending education.' The greatest challenge is to manifest a society where education is an ongoing process that involves all its citizens, not just students. In The Human Cycle Sri Aurobindo wrote: "...Athens was the supreme achievement, a life in which living itself was an education..."* And I feel Auroville is going in that direction. There are a great number of individuals of all ages here who have gone back to studying, or are pursuing different interests in a concrete way. There is a lot of learning going on in this society, it is not limited to the school context."

Suzie feels it is very important that the children realise that education is not limited to the years they spend in school. They have to realise that they will carry the skills they are taught into their lives. "One of the great chal-

lenges for us teachers is: what skills do you teach to prepare the child for the new consciousness, for the new world? How does one find ways to touch and work with the inner being when one is working with class structures and subject matters? Then, as a teacher, you look for tools. I myself found journal writing to be a great tool for self-discovery. Theatre was also such a tool – it wasn't about mental skills and training, but the children learned how to deal with people and with spontaneous situations which arose."

When it comes to freedom in education, there is always the struggle to find the balance. "I believe that ideally, children should be quite free to choose their program, like it's being done in Last School at present – the whole 'free progress' concept. It doesn't mean that you cannot have a certain structure and discipline, but when the children are willing and when they choose, they make a kind of commitment that they wouldn't make when it's all planned out. Any real progress comes from within and requires freedom. For me there's no question about that."

Suzie feels that during a couple of years in the child's life, say from the age of eleven to thirteen, education could be radically different. She proposes that during those years, a team could take the children out into India, travelling and doing life-related activities with them, for which the children would have to find resources in themselves. "Afterwards they could go back, refreshed, to the more 'mental' education. Of course, it would require a lot of trust on the part of the parents to



Suzie

let things happen that way." But she cautions that as every child is different and has different needs, it is important to have parallel streams of development in education – to have different schools with different approaches, so that each child can find what's best for him or her. "It would also be good if schooling and work could be connected, for example if students would have the opportunity to go out into the real world for a while and then return to school. Ideally, Auroville units should be open to take in students as apprentices. And if all Auroville adults saw themselves as teachers, Auroville would be a different place for the children, for they would really feel held and supported by the community which would be involved in their education."

Coming back to the concept of unending education for the society as a whole, Suzie says: "In Auroville, everyone, not just the children, should be given the possibility and support to progress. And all the inhabitants of our bio-region should be included in this quest for personal development. Seeing Auroville as a university centre in which everybody takes part is an idea that is spreading rapidly in Auroville."

Emmanuelle

*Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, Page: 360, CWSA Vol. 25

Eco-consciousness through Fashion

Upasana, an Auroville business unit whose focus is on representing India through its textiles and clothing, hosted a workshop on recycled couture for students of the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai

The Gandhi top creates zero waste." Uma's authoritative voice pierces the dimly lit seminar room; the projection screen flashes a still of a well-fitted lavender-shade upper garment mod-

hold an answer to that.

The event was set in motion by an unexpected e-mail to Uma from a designer from Amsterdam. Katel Gelebart, is a French eco-activist who had branched into the world of fashion in order to bring her activism to a new audience. She had heard about Auroville and of Upasana through a friend, and wondered if she could intern at Upasana. Two weeks later and much to the surprise of Uma, she arrived in Auroville along with samples of her work. Creations fashioned out of recycled material –



Left to right: Kakoli, Uma and Katel

elled by an Aurovilian beauty. Twenty seven young faces appear to be hanging on her words, listening in rapt attention. She is referring to the newest product on Upasana's line. "No waste at the first level when the piece is cut from the bolt." She is speaking about the wastage of fabric that is cut 'on bias' (diagonally). Uma's voice takes a reassuring tone. "You are the ones who will be doing the design. You are the ones who will be telling the industry – this is it. This is going to sell, and that is the process. It all depends on you."

In an interview in early May, Uma confessed that she was still 'trying to find her unique mantra in textiles' [AVT issue 174]. Has she perhaps hit upon it now? A recent four-day workshop titled 'Recycling, Fashion, and Creativity' hosted by Upasana for the graduating class of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), the premier educational institute for fashion and design in Chennai, may

inner tubes, tyres, old parachute canopies, ships' sails, army blankets, French and Dutch post bags, Turkish towels, men's ties, recycled wool yarn knitted by babushkas in Ukraine – all turned into products that had found successful niche markets in Japan, Italy, Belgium and France. Products that hung comfortably in boutiques next to designer labels, under their personal brand name Art D'Eco.

Katel's arrival created a stir in Upasana. Immediately sensing the significance of the work, Uma felt it her duty to share with her colleagues in the Indian design world, the wisdom that Katel brought. With Katel's approval, invitations were sent out to a select group of young designers to participate in a Fashion Recycling workshop at Upasana. Everyone showed up. Recalls Uma, "At the

beginning of that workshop, I presented the philosophy behind Upasana, and for the first time I said in public, 'There is only one user; the divine Self who dwells in all.' This is the line I have been constantly trying to translate it into our products, and upon which my business is based." The workshop was a resounding success, and everyone was affected deeply. Final creations, such as the subtly stylish patchwork bags, made their way into Upasana's summer collection.

A professor of design from NIFT, Chennai, who attended the workshop, at once felt that an exposure of this sort would be an invaluable experience for her students. It was something that the regular curriculum did not provide – a sensitivity to waste in the fashion industry (on average 30%), exposure to concepts of sustainable development, and ultimately, a more holistic approach to design. With Uma's encouragement, she submitted a proposal to her institution to have the graduating class participate in a hands-on workshop in Auroville as part of the practical off-site training requirement. It was approved. And so, the first week in November saw the arrival of a bus-load of young twenty somethings in Auroville for their four-day stint at Upasana.

"From the beginning, their enthusiasm was boundless," says Uma. "Besides hundred percent attendance on all days, students were pleading that they be allowed to work beyond the hours we had slated – until 10 p.m." Uma's goal was to get the students 'intoxicated and immersed' in the Auroville experience. "Once in a lifetime, everyone should get this experience, especially when they are most receptive and idealistic and when they are not yet in the system. These students in their final year of college are ready to step into the world, and you are putting in the final seed into them. For me it was a very precious moment, and I was very conscious of it. We took care of them very nicely, we filled them with our love, and the whole arrangement was very down to earth but pure in its substance, and they learnt something too." Anandamayi, an apprentice at Upasana and part of the organizing team says, "The atmosphere became suffused with an intense concentration and energy. The enthusiasm of the students was so contagious that even Surabhi, our PR person, forgot her duties and got down to making a few pieces herself!"

The workshop had begun with three professional designers, Katel, Kakoli (a visiting designer from Delhi), and Uma sharing their deepest motivations and aspirations as practitioners in the field. Though they shared an overall philosophy, each of their approaches was unique. Katel's work was focused on giving waste material a second chance or a longer lease of life, Kakoli's leanings favoured an ideal where the creation of the fabric would happen simultaneously as the garment took shape, and Uma believed that the absence of waste at the very thought

level would inevitably lead to an absence of waste in action.

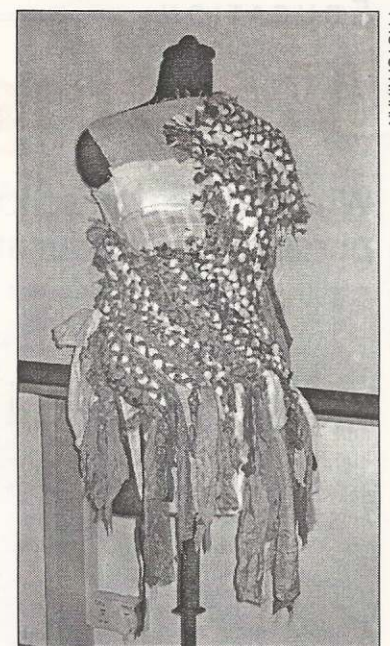
Results of the workshop

Considering the students had only three days to design and create their products, the output was staggering, both in number and the sheer novelty of the creations. Shirts were turned into skirts, coca-cola bottles into trendy pouches, old t-shirts into moccasins, Upasana's silk wastes into braided stoles and drapes and magazine holders... The final day saw the students presenting their work in 10 minute slots. They were evaluated by a three panel jury of Katel, Kakoli, and Uma, based on four considerations: how they responded to Auroville, how they understood the concept of recycling and reusing, the creative process they journeyed through, and the aesthetics and finish of their product(s).

"We kept asking them the first question throughout their stay," stresses Uma. "What it is for you to be in Auroville? Do you think that Auroville has influenced your state of being at any level? We wanted them to let go of the designer part; we would come to that later." So how did Auroville affect them? "You could see that all of them had been touched by the environment and it has had a big impact on them," observes Katel. "It helped them concentrate, open their minds, and I'd go even so far as to say to find themselves! On the last day, there was a student, Elizabeth, who said: 'People say I am always too emotional. Well, today I am really emotional. And I have a poem to share!' And she read her poem



A haute couture skirt where the designer has used knots to merge waste cotton voile and silk fabrics



Art to wear – waste strips of silk chiffon braided together to create a piece which can be used in many different ways – as clothing, as a wrap or to throw over a sofa

community for teaching them the real team spirit. And we Aurovilians – some of us who were listening to this – wished we had it."

What it means for Auroville?

So what did this all mean for the Aurovilian participants? Uma comments, "Three of our trainees, Anandamayi, Leah and Vidya, who have been witnessing all this, have used all the waste of Upasana and created carpets, cushions, and coverlets! – functional office décor with a fine aesthetic sense. We use these here now, and we are already having people coming in to photograph them!" Uma believes it is essential to let the young generation of Auroville, including children, get maximum exposure to fresh ideas through activities hosted in Auroville. This can be done with a lot of dignity," she explains. "They can be made part of the host team, so they get to do the background work, and participate in the activity. And just by the fact that they swim in that atmosphere, they get what is essential; and get it in the shortest time. And then there is still a



This model, one of the participants, makes a chic statement in garments and accessories all made of waste cloth

Origins of Upasana

A professional fashion designer comes to Auroville – what happens? For many months and days she feels isolated. There is nobody to talk to. Nobody to listen. She sees a lot of creativity in Auroville where beautiful things are happening. But to her, it doesn't make sense to get into fashion in Auroville. She feels it's the last thing one should be doing there...

Uma's story tumbles out. "In Auroville, for the first time in my life I was haunted by the fact that I am Indian. Never in my life had my identity been an issue. It was something I had just taken for granted. You are born in this country and that is it. But then, you come here to a small patch of land where there are people of at least 35 nationalities who are living all together, whom you interact on a day to day basis, and suddenly you realise that there is something fundamentally different about yourself. It took me a couple of months to realize that I am Indian.

"It was in Auroville where I was put in a situation where I felt that India has not been understood. For some, India represents the country of cheap labour, of very low quality goods – for example in clothing, things which run colour or have poor finishing, or are ill-fitting. And one day I heard someone say, 'What else to expect – it is like that! One does not and cannot expect great things from the India – it is like that!' It was so painful to listen to, and that was the moment I decided that I had to represent the country India to Auroville – through its textiles and its clothing.

"And for the first time, I realized that I could not do it. I did not know the clothing or the textiles of my country! The best design school in India that I had graduated out of, the National Institute of Fashion Technology, hadn't taught me that. I could whip up a jacket or a pair of trousers in a minute, but not my country's own clothing. I didn't know how a salwar-kurta pattern looked, or how the ubiquitous sari blouse was made! And I was supposed to be the best student in my class in the area of 'Patterns'. And there I stood saying 'I can't do it.' I felt so empty and the big certificate that I had seemed so meaningless. It was a raw reality I had to face. And Upasana was born out of that."



Student designers at work in the CSR garage

where the last lines ended with how she found herself in Auroville! Another girl observed that she felt that there were no rules in Auroville, and that Aurovilians did not seem to speak much. And if one stopped and really looked at the Aurovilians, there seemed a kind of quiet dignity amongst them."

Uma adds, "And almost all of them were constantly repeating as if mesmerized – 'Maam, Auroville was a barren land. And a bunch of people from all over the world came down over here and transformed the land into a thick forest. What other proof one needs in life that there is nothing that is impossible!' And this was from somebody so young from deep within their heart; and you knew they got it. Then they were expressing their gratitude to the entire

whole life ahead to decide what they really want to do."

Upasana does its bit in incorporating this attitude into its way of business. When Uma is invited to exclusive events in the fashion industry, she takes the entire design team from Upasana with her. "Now with the people who invite me beginning to understand Auroville, they are telling me that I should let them know in advance how many from Auroville would like to come – they will issue that many passes!" Uma strongly believes that this is the level of connection that Auroville has to have with the outside world, and it is here that Auroville's true potential lies.

Priya Sundaravalli

Whatever happened to...?

Searching through the dusty archives of Auroville Today, old stories jump out at us, demanding that they be retold. New beginnings, novel experiments by the pioneers, ideals and dreams that sought to materialize... Whatever has happened down the years? How far have they blossomed from the fires of initial enthusiasm? Did the harsh realities of Auroville prove overwhelming them? So, whatever happened to...

The advent of the super fungus

A long long time ago, a special 'fungus' whose origins reportedly lie in remote Siberia, found its way into Auroville. [AV Today Archives #17 May 1990] Since good things generally happen in threes,



A kombucha culture

three spawns carried by unrelated Aurovilians but all originating from the same grower in Holland, arrived from Belgium, Holland, and Australia. It was called Kombucha. Not a true fungus, it is actually a colony of yeasts and bacteria that live symbiotically (benefiting each other) in a jelly-like matrix made up of cellulose. And so the underground Kombucha movement began in Auroville over 13 years ago. Alleged to be a panacea that overcame illnesses and brought super-fitness to those who consumed it, it soon became a serious contender to the Ashram's indigenous concoction, the Power Syrup. What ever happened to Kombucha?

Marie-Ange, a familiar face at the Solar Kitchen, has an impressive Kombucha colony. A pale pink disc almost 10 centimetres in diameter and a

centimetre thick, it floats benignly in a giant glass jar. Beneath it, several litres of non-alcoholic aromatic tea steeps. Marie-Ange reveals that the Kombucha movement is very much alive and continues to brew under many kitchen counters in Aurovillian homes. She and her husband Don were introduced to it by André and Bobby who served it as a regular drink in their coffee shop. Marie-Ange started her culture from a spawn from the coffee shop. For those timorous of venturing into the phantasmal world of yeasts and bacteria (it is not much different from making yogurt at home), Kombucha is commercially available at Pour Tous in several flavours. Martina of Naturellement handed over the Kombucha bottling enterprise to Anandi of KOFPU. Business is brisk.

Give me your garbage, ma'm

Two years ago, Auroville Today reported on a village cleaning and beautification project. [Auroville Today Archives #152 September 2001] Run by the popular Exnora movement that began in Chennai, the scheme was begun in the villages of Kuilapalayam and Lakshmipuram to collect and dispose household garbage. Gillian, an Aurovillian of Australian origin, coordinated the efforts and got it off the ground. The residents were asked to separate their domestic wastes into two categories, organic and non-organic, which was then collected regularly. The local State Bank of India located in Kuilapalayam, stepped in to support the project by donating a brand new tricycle for garbage collection. However the project could not sustain itself and experienced a quick demise hardly three months into its founding. Residents who



Garbage surrounds the last Exnora waste bin on the Kuilapalayam main road

would benefit from the programme balked at the monthly household contribution of twenty rupees that was necessary to pay for the two waste collectors

who would come door to door to collect the sorted refuse. The tricycle is now used by the Kuilapalayam Cultural Centre.

THEATRE

New World Theatre

On October 25th the New World Theatre group staged its second play in Auroville, 'The Seven Deaths of Karna'

It received a warm response from a mixed crowd of guests, Aurovilians and people from the neighbourhood. Although a tragedy, it was marked by mirthful patches of unintended humour triggered by the element of the unexpected. Over thirty Aurovilians participated in this play. Karna was the first of the Pandavas from the Mahabharata. His life was a series of tragedies, seven of which are considered virtual deaths. Hence the title, 'The Seven Deaths of Karna'.

The play opens with Kunti's chanting of a mantra which entices Lord Surya to court her. Their liaison brings about the peculiar birth of Karna, who is born with a dazzling kavacha (armour) and kundalas (earrings). When Surya puts the infant in her lap, Kunti is panic-stricken. She sets the new-born baby afloat in the waters of river Ganga, to save herself the ignominy of being an unwed mother. From here on, the play is a saga of tragedies: Karna overhears that his foster parents whom he loves dearly, are not his real parents. Sage Parashurama teaches Karna 'Brahmastravidya' - the use of the most lethal weapon - and curses him the very next moment on Karna's admitting to not being a Brahmin. Then he is humiliated at the Kuru court for being neither a Kshatriya, nor a Brahmin. His alliance with prince Duryodhana forces all kinds of crisis upon him. Karna gives away his protective 'Kavacha-Kundalas' to Indra as alms despite Surya's forewarning. When meeting his mother Kunti for the first time, she makes him promise that he would spare all her sons - the Pandavas - except for Arjuna. He is finally killed, not as much by the arrow of his younger brother Arjuna, as by the unfeeling manipulations of Lord Krishna. The gradually increasing tempo of tragic sequences is threaded together by the dialogue between Vyasa the narrator, Lord Ganesha the scribe, and 'the man' who queries.

Apart from the more known Aurovillian actors, the play had a cast of over twenty five others, some of whom were first timers. Karna and Krishna, the two names in the Mahabharata famed for their strength and nobility of character, were por-

trayed rather tentatively by Kaliamoorti and Padmanabhan respectively, but they got strong support from the subordinate cast without which it might have been difficult to save the day.

There were some delightful moments throughout. In particular Kunti chanting the 'Surya-stotra' in praise of Surya accompanied by Odissi mudras coupled with recording of Joy's chants in the background scored high points. The sequence where Kunti hands over the infant to the river Ganga was touching. The power of music as a vital concomitant that can uphold a scene was apparent here. The battle of Kurukshetra, though chaotic as choreography, was good as drama. The other gripping sequence, choreographed with some fine Kalaripayattu movements, was that of the competition in the Kuru court. The energy put in by Kalyani, Bosco and the boys got a rewarding round of applause. Duryodhana, the jealous, self-willed Kaurava prince was the most convincing of all the characters in this play because of some admirable and sensitive acting by Ruslan. Kaliamoorthy's rendition of Karna, the main character, was good in patches, but generally weak and unsure. The character of Krishna was rather featureless, portrayed too flatly, and Arjuna, the other vital character in the play, was too ordinary to be the hero of Mahabharata. Sergei, playing 'the man', kept people entertained throughout the play with his colloquial quips, which contrasted sharply with the overall sombre tone of the play. The intention of the playwright behind introducing the 'narrator gimmick' was precisely to off-set the tragedy against something lighter. It worked wonders when the spoken word was audible.

Jean Legrand and his stage management team did a good job with the light and sound. Srimoyi and Nadaka put the music together with Partha, who directed the play with Ananadamayi's valuable efforts in getting the script fine-tuned, the rehearsals on schedule and a huge cast of thirty Aurovilians organised. It all made for a very enjoyable evening.

Charudutta

DANCE

Musings on an evening of dance

The crowd eases in the seats, the flip-flop of feet dies down; the murmurous auditorium hushes up as stage left is spotlighted. A chair and a microphone have been placed there already. We are supposed to anticipate music.

A figure rushes onto the stage - Pavitra, a male cellist. He feigns bewilderment and retreats into the concealing wings. We are supposed to laugh, are we? Nobody does.

He returns, surer this time and places his instrument carefully, almost reverentially, upstage. It's a vintage violoncello. Its patina glints in the Caravaggio-like light. Expectations soar higher.

Then a skin-hugging black lycra clad dancer Tina, plants herself, spectre-like, on the stage right. The concert begins without fuss. For the next thirty minutes I concentrate, acutely aware of my unfamiliarity with the domain of modern dance. The cellist and the dancer create audio-visual patterns before me. The music almost seems to rhyme with the dancer's movements. Her feet move slowly, her gestures are unforced. I look around. Everybody seems engrossed. Obviously, the dancer is doing well.

At one point she walks up to the cellist and stands there looking, just looking at him. The rhythm has changed. Telepathy? Parapsychology? Magic? There is a nonverbal dialogue between the two. Or are they, quite simply, well acquainted?

'Nothing to hide' is the title of one of the dance pieces in the second

part of the concert. A strong orange spotlight illumines the white screen across the stage. Five female silhouettes cast curvaceous shadows onto the screen. There is recorded background music. For about five minutes, the music plays. Nothing happens. But at the end of five minutes, those curling female shapes have stretched, more or less standing, looking up towards a string of women's garments, blue in colour, five in number, drifting overhead across the stage. Modern dance - anything goes...even the absence of dance! Throughout the latter half of the performance, the dancers in white dresses saunter across the stage with suitcases in hand, except in places where they run, or jump.

What a strange thing this modern dance is! Perhaps the idea is to break all notions we might harbour about 'dance'. Was it supposed to be 'anti-art'? Or something 'new'? No, to my susceptible mind, it was not, unless the existence of something called 'Neo-Dadaism' (prevailing here and now, in our times) is admitted.

Tea and cookies followed the performance. Thereafter, the congregation gathered under the pipal tree in Bharat Nivas to meditate, on the occasion of The Harmonic Concordance - an astronomical event believed to produce a significant planetary alignment, which happened to have occurred at the precise moment of the total lunar eclipse on Saturday, November 8th.

Charudutta

In brief

TV documentary on Auroville

For the first time in Auroville's existence, Doordarshan (India's National TV, Pondicherry dept) has made a two-hour documentary on Auroville, mainly presented by Tamil Aurovilians. The first part was aired on Darshan Day, Nov. 17th, and the second part on Siddhi Day, Nov. 24th.

CACRC programmes

The Celestial Art Cultural and Research Centre, which is devoted to creating open-air programmes in a homely atmosphere, is actively organising cultural events in Parthna. Devi Prasad gave a well-attended sarod recital, Mohan Mistry and his group gave an evening of Dhyana, devotional songs on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother; Kirupa gave a violin recital; Selvaraj and his party did a Nadeswaram recital and B. Kumar Shastri and his group gave a Vedic recital.

Modern Tamil poetry

The Tamil Heritage Centre and the Ilaigarkal Youth Centre, in collaboration with the Kiranam literary circle of Pondicherry, organized a one-day event of modern Tamil poetry reading at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium.

Codex Alimentarius 2003

The Codex Alimentarius 2003 is a document that aims to provide guidelines for safe food production. It is being authored by Marc and Martina, who are drawing on the work experience of all food facility managers in Auroville.

Energy globes?

Francesca Drago exhibited a series of curious digital photographs at Pitanga. The photos contain inexplicable 'spheres' or 'energy globes' as Francesca prefers to call them. Particularly photos taken by her on Auroville's birthday, February 28th 2003, show these 'globes', though they are not seen on digital photos taken by other people. Francesca explains that this may be because of her 'channelling capacity'. A scientific explanation of the phenomenon has not yet been given.



Milk pricing

The Auroville Farm Group (AVFG) announced that the Auroville price of Rs 16 a litre for milk (US \$ 0.33) allows the Auroville farmers to just break even. As its labour costs are higher and there is a better infrastructure, the farms cannot compete with the price of the milk produced in the villages. The AVFG welcomes the development of the village dairies, but points out that it would be good if village farmers eventually are able to meet bio-dynamic and modern standards, which would mean they would have to charge higher prices.

Corrections

The printer's gremlin created two mistakes in the November issue. The article 'Struggle for Organisation' lost its last word and author. The last line reads "Therefore we are at a critical juncture, and we have to succeed." The author was Carel.

Regarding the Matrimandir 2004 Calendar, the price should be Rs 150 excluding mailing costs.

David Nightingale, mentioned in our October issue as architect of Courage, has clarified that he was not involved in the final manifestation of the project and doesn't want to be known as its architect.

The California Institute of Integral Studies

The California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) was founded by the Indian philosopher and educator Haridas Chaudhuri in the same year as Auroville. Chaudhuri is believed to have been chosen by Sri Aurobindo, at a request from Dr. Spiegelberg at Stanford University, to go to the USA to bridge the gap between the East and the West. Haridas came to the States in 1951, and in 1968 the California Institute of Asian Studies (later to become CIIS) was inaugurated.

CIIS today offers graduate education in a wide range of subjects, not all directly connected with the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Yet some of them, like 'integral psychology', are talked about in this way on the CIIS web pages: "Integral psychology is an emerging field which seeks to integrate western psychology with the Integral Yoga and philosophy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo... The term 'integral' is in vogue these days, and many different thinkers are applying the term in their own ways. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, however, were the first to apply this term to evolve a new system of yoga which they called Integral Yoga."

Jorge Ferrer, a core faculty member at CIIS, recently visited Auroville. We took the chance to have a conversation about CIIS, Auroville, an experiential, exercise-based approach to Integral Yoga, and the possibility of future collaboration.

Auroville Today: How do you see the relation between Auroville and CIIS?

Jorge: Well, there is this curious fact that CIIS and Auroville were born in the same year, like twins. They have historical and spiritual connections through Sri Aurobindo, but they haven't kept much in touch. There have been other occasional visitors from CIIS in Auroville, for example three years ago in connection with the Integral Psychology Conference in Pondy [and a group of students in 1996], but in general there hasn't been much exchange. Nine years ago someone from Auroville gave a talk at CIIS. Recently, however, I have noticed a growing interest in Auroville at CIIS, mainly inspired by students. I have three students in my program, 'East-West Psychology', doing dissertations on Sri Aurobindo's work.

So you do see some common aspects, even though CIIS is an academic institution and Auroville is a city?

Yes. At both places there is an attempt to find and manifest unity-in-diversity, as well as to bridge this spiritual intent to a transformation of society and the larger world. There are other institutions in the world, like the Buddhist oriented Naropa Institute, with similar goals, but I think both Auroville and CIIS stand out from the rest just by their size and scope. The number of people they attract is quite unique. The difference between CIIS as an academic institution and Auroville as a city,

I think may be less evident in coming years. I see that Auroville is starting to reclaim its original aim of offering high level education, looking at CIRHU, for example.

When it comes to educational projects, we shouldn't forget the connection with the Ashram. It is a tremendously rich resource. I had very inspiring conversations with Dalal and other Ashramites, and I am currently reading an exceptional book on the practice of Integral Yoga by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, a sadakh who has spent 53 years at the Ashram.

You held a weekend workshop in Auroville during your visit...

Yes, it was based on an approach to integral growth developed by my colleagues Marina Romero and Ramon Albareda. I called it 'Holistic Meditation and Embodied Inquiry into Integral Spirituality'. It seeks to provide a context in which every individual can get an experiential sense of how much his or her different worlds – body, vital, heart, mind, etc. – are porous to the energy of consciousness and the force of immanent spirit. Many of the exercises are based on respectful physical touch, simply because the body is the natural doorway to the deepest levels of those worlds. Everything is carried out at a calm pace, so that the participants can take their own responsibility for all they do and experience. This is the kind of experiential approach to integral growth – or Integral Yoga – which I feel is so essential, but yet so often neglected, even at an institute like CIIS where everything tends to be filtered through the mind.

WORKSHOP

A feeling of co-creation

Terms like 'conscious evolution' and 'co-creation' may appear vague. Yet, those are the terms which best illustrate the common thread connecting a group of 18 Americans who visited Auroville in October. For most, it was their first visit. A link with Auroville had been established through the internet course 'Gateway to Conscious Evolution', which encompasses the seminal work of the American futurist and author Barbara Marx Hubbard, friend and colleague of many in the group. They came here to meet Aurovilians for an exchange of ideas and mutual learning. And to hold a workshop based on the tools and ideas of 'The Co-Creator's Handbook', co-authored by two of them, Katherine Roske and Carolyn Anderson.

These tools and ideas are applied in the 'intentional community' (a community whose residents are committed to learning deeply from each other on all levels) of Hummingbird in New Mexico, where some of the visitors live.

What kind of response did you get from the Aurovilians who participated?

A very positive response from most of the 18 Aurovilian participants. I have been talking to some of them about the possibility of my coming back to offer them the opportunity to go deeper into this work. I hope that I can do that, and then bring Marina and Ramon with



Jorge Ferrer

me. I feel touched by the very special human quality of Aurovilians, and I think they are especially well prepared for this kind of work. Here, there are so many people who have worked for a long time with the clear orientation towards a fully embodied integral spirituality. The experiential work I facilitate may offer some potent and concrete tools to foster a fuller actualization of that potential. It is very different at CIIS, where

people just pass through for a few years. Auroville is a very unique collective in this respect.

Do you also see openings for collaboration between CIIS and Auroville at an institutional level?

Yes, I see CIRHU as the project which could give a context to future cooperation. It wouldn't be impossible to create a joint curriculum on integral spirituality; classes from CIIS could come here to be exposed to Integral Yoga in practice, there could be a scholar exchange program, and so on. Joe Subbiondo, the president of CIIS, is actually coming to Auroville in December, and he is very excited about exploring the possibilities of collaboration.

Any particular experiences in Auroville that you will take back to California...?

There are many. The quality of embodied presence and energy in Matrimandir; it felt as if someone was doing the meditation for me! The sense of community I experienced in Adventure where I have been staying; very wholesome and nourishing. And the new Creativity project, seeing how the flow of connectedness is already facilitated by the physical structures of the building. And then, Aloka's and Joan's work on body awareness. Really original and exceptional. There must be many equally original projects in Auroville I haven't yet got in touch with. It's a remarkable place!

Svante

The Athenaeum
London

Sir,

As a loyal subscriber, allow me to add my congratulations on your reaching your sixteenth year of publication. That's a damn long time for an Auroville publication. Jolly good show, chaps.

It's also sixteen years since I last wrote to you, expressing my concerns about some prehistoric bird that I thought I sighted at Matrimandir on my one and only visit. Happily that turned out to be a case of mistaken identity due, perhaps, to my imbibing one sundowner too many. Since then I've followed Auroville's triumphs and tribulations with great interest from my armchair in my club. Forgive, then, an old buffer if he offers one or two comments on the Auroville which has passed before him in your esteemed pages. Firstly I'm happy to see that you're still planting those trees. It's the only way to bring the wildlife back, particularly the tigers which everybody knows are indispensable for a good shoot. Then you chappies seem to be hard at it, building your town halls, swimming pools and sawmills [we think he means SAWCHU eds.]. Good show. However, I was a bit alarmed when I read the other day that Aurovilians are queuing up to park their yachts at a new marina. Nothing wrong with a yacht or two – damn pleasant way to spend a day – but who's going to plant the trees and build the city if you're all swanning around at sea? Something to think about, eh?

Also I remember when I visited in the early days everybody went round practically in the buff (and there were some damned attractive fillies then) and cycling was de rigueur. Now it seems you've all got air-conditioned 4-wheel things. Nothing wrong with a bit of comfort, particularly in darkest Africa. [wrong continent? eds.] But may I suggest that with your twenty varieties of soap and imported truffles you may have gone a wee bit soft? I remember my time in Burma during the war. In the jungle we had nothing to live on for weeks but leeches and pondweed. Can't say it was my favourite diet – give me roast beef and yorkshire pudding any day – but I can tell you when we finally emerged there wasn't an ounce of spare flesh on our bodies. Makes you think, doesn't it?

Which brings me to my modest suggestion. Why not help your new recruits shape-up by giving them a taste of those early days? Provide them with the basics – a tarpaulin, mat, piece of soap – then set them to breaking rocks, building railways and cleaning out latrines for the first four or five years. It might sound a trifle rigorous but, believe me, in the end they'll thank you for it because they'll have learned something of real value; they'll have learned what makes a man a man (and, of course, what makes the weaker sex the, er, weaker sex). And, on top of that you'll have lashings of roads, railways and toilets.

Thanks again for giving this old codger space to air his views. No doubt I'm old-fashioned, not DC as my granddaughter puts it [we think he means not PC eds.] but if I've ruffled any feathers put it down to an old man who, like the black chappy, loves your place "not wisely but too well".

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Brigadier J.M. Smythe-Buckfast
(retired)

Subscription information

◆ One year subscription rate: India Rs. 250; other countries Can \$51, € 37, US \$38, UK £25.
◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 450; other countries Can \$92, € 67, US \$68, UK £45. Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact Auroville Today for information on reduced rates. Auroville Today does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

There are two ways to subscribe

◆ Send your contribution directly to Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to Auroville Today should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.
◆ Send your contribution to one of the following Auroville International Centres:
◆ Germany: AVI Deutschland, Danziger Str.

121, D-10407 Berlin; tel. (0)30-42803150, fax (0)30-92091376; Gls Gemeinschaftsbank Kto. 8019 389 200, Blz 430 609 67.

e-mail: info@de.auroville-international.org
◆ The Netherlands: AVI Nederland, c/o Harrie de Koning, Generaal Knooppaan 85, 5623 MV Eindhoven. Postbank 3948138, email: info@auroville.nl

◆ U.K.: AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, 30 The Green, Surlingham, Norwich NR14 7AG, tel. 01508-538300, fax 01508-537122, email: aviuk@compuserve.com

USA: Make checks payable to AVI USA, and send to either:

◆ U.S.A. (1): AVI USA, P.O. Box 877, Santa Cruz CA 95061; tel. (1) 831-425-5620; email: info@aviusa.org ; or to

◆ U.S.A. (2): Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, email: avinfo@aol.com, tel: (1) 845-679-5358, fax: 5853

Visit our Website:
www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday

Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Charudutta, Emmanuelle, Priya, Sundaravalli, Roger, Sunaura. Guest contributor: Svante.

Proofreading: Navoditte. All photos, unless otherwise attributed, have been taken by the editors. DTP and Photo editing: Matthia.

Printed and published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation, and printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Auroville Today publishes small advertisements. For details about sizes and rates please write us or email us at avtoday@auroville.org.in

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.