

Auroville Today

SEPTEMBER 2005, No.200

"It's not easy to be a teenager here"



Preparing pizza at the Youth Centre

Jean-François has been closely involved with Auroville youth since he came to live here in 1998. Here he gives his views on the present youth scene in Auroville, the important role that youth can play and the challenges facing them.

"Almost my whole adult life I've been working with teenagers," says Jean-François. Born in Grenoble in the French Alps, at the age of 17 he was already working in a summer camp, looking after young people. There was a brief diversion into business, "but even then, during my holidays, I was working with children. So I thought, Why am I lying to myself? If I'm happy working with kids, let me just do it."

He got a job in a home for children. "Half were there for their own protection because of violence in their families, the other half were there because of delinquent behaviour. We, the adults, had to take care of them in the morning – get them up, make breakfast, get them to school – and in the evening when they returned. We were caring for them in the same way as would happen in ordinary families. The other part of the job was to take care of the relation with their families, because the aim of the project was for the children to be able to return to their family. Sometimes we could achieve this relatively quickly. In other cases, when the problems were very deep-seated, it could take up to five years for the children to return."

After two years, Jean-François began studying for an appropriate qualification and finally received a diploma as an *éducateur spécialisé*. "It meant I was trained to work with people with every kind of handicap – mental, physical and social." What was the most important lesson that he learned from working in the home? "The main thing you learn is that you're not in charge of the situation, you are just a

tool. As long as you think you can change things by yourself, you're doing a bad job. But when you grasp that you are a tool to help the kids understand what they can do for themselves, you start to be more effective. For, ultimately, the only solution is their own. Similarly, with violent parents it's useless to come with judgements. You have to enter a process, to ask them why they are behaving like that and then help them to see the patterns and how they can break them."

Jean-François spent six years working at the children's home. Some years later, to broaden his experience, he worked in a drug rehabilitation centre. "The approach with the children and with the addicts was the same. You don't judge, you don't force anything upon them. With addicts, you ask them what they think their problem is and their solution. Even if you think the solution won't work, you let them try it. Then, if it's obviously not working, you begin presenting them with alternatives. But the right solution has ultimately to come from them."

While studying for his diploma, Jean-François met fellow student Kripa, who had been born and brought up in Auroville. After further work experience in the West, they now live together in Auroville. Jean-François began his Auroville career by giving maths lessons in Last School and the Centre for Further Learning (CFL). "One day some kids from CFL came to see Kripa and myself and said they wanted a residential youth community in Auroville. Would we help them make it happen? We said, OK, but because we're trained as social workers once we commit ourselves we

won't just create something and then withdraw. We'll carry on the work. They agreed to this. So for two years we worked with their core group, making plans, raising money, finding somebody to do the construction. And in 2001 Kailash opened."

Kailash, explains Jean-François, is based on a statement of The Mother: that young people, after they reach 14 years, should take decisions by themselves and only receive adult guidance if they require it. "We are not yet there because the adults still have an important role: we are the final authority if there is a big crisis. But the intention is to allow them to go as far as they can with their own process." The Kailash project has rules and regulations which are agreed upon by everybody living there. "The rules, which we worked out with the original teenage core group, are that the age limit is 14 – 21 years, that all residents should have a daily activity, that they should respect their neighbours and participate in the collective life of the project. And no illegal drugs are allowed in the building. These rules are not open for discussion. The regulations, however, can be modified according to the age and evolution of the residents."

"As long as the rules are respected, I try to stay in the background. I'm often there, giving personal support, attending weekly meetings, liaising with the schools etc., but I've no more rights than anybody else. Working there, I've had very few conflicts because we work with the basic principle that if you respect others, they will respect you in return. It's also true, of course, that the youth of Auroville don't at all have the same problems as the ones we were working with in Grenoble. We don't have the problem of violence and I'd say we are quite safe in Auroville regarding drugs."

What, then, does Jean-François believe are the main challenges facing Auroville's teenagers? "Adolescence is the time when you want to search, it's a quest for yourself. And all quests need opposition, the need to go against something to discover your own strength. So Auroville teenagers, like teenagers everywhere, do things which are not accepted by their parents or by society to test the limits. But discovering the limits is not easy in Auroville because it is not a society which reacts very fast if you challenge it."

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200 NOT OUT

When Auroville Today began, back in October, 1988, a senior Aurovilian opined that we wouldn't get beyond six issues. Today we reach 200. So perhaps he'll consider taking out a subscription...

But what's much more interesting than this somewhat arbitrary landmark is what our 200 issues represent in terms of the areas we have covered. Here there are some surprises. For example, over the 17 years of Auroville Today's existence by far the most popular category has been culture: 234 articles in all (I'm indebted for most of these figures to Jan Lohman, who has faithfully kept up the Auroville Today index). This is a little misleading – 'culture' can include a 50 word book announcement as well as a full-blooded article – but it does rather nail the lie that Auroville is a 'cultural desert'. Environment (216 articles) comes next. This is also a little surprising as the impression in the community is that landwork receives much less attention today than it did 20 years ago. However, the new emphasis on taking our afforestation and water management skills out into the bioregion seems to have compensated for this.

The next most popular category (179 articles) is economy and organization. Paradoxically, this preoccupation with our structural navel seems to have resulted in few radically-interesting results as yet. Next comes profiles: the fact that no less than 130 articles have been profiles of, or personal pieces by, Aurovilians is a source of great satisfaction. One of our original aims was to give a voice to as many different Aurovilians and perspectives as possible and, while certain cultures or age groups may still be under-represented, over the years Auroville Today has presented a rich palette of personalities and views.

Matrimandir, education, commercial units and architecture/town planning have each had about 100 articles devoted to them. However, these bland figures disguise interesting trends. For example, town planning has come more and more to the fore in recent years, while there was a sudden dip in articles on Matrimandir between 1993-7, perhaps reflecting increased difficulty in obtaining information from the management group of that period.

As always, some statistics are misleading. The record shows, for example, that only 46 articles are devoted exclusively to yoga and spirituality. But the 'other dimension' is woven into our daily lives here in a way that prevents it being teased out or examined in isolation. Mother, after all, characterized Auroville as a place of karma yoga, and of all the spiritual paths this is probably the least visible to the outer eye.

There are, however, some less satisfying statistics. For example, it seems we have run relatively few – 63 articles – on the local villagers and the villages, and the trend is declining in spite of

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EDITORIAL

"Auroville Today", O.K.: It's not the most exciting title in the world. But we felt that Auroville Today was a little, well, premature. And "Auroville Today" does focus us on the here and now, which is always the most difficult place to be. Difficult, yes, but also challenging. Perhaps upon the diverse activities of the Auroville Foundation Bill, we enter a new era. Therefore it is appropriate that in our first published projects, but the 'hidden' Auroville of quiet implication of this crucial Bill. Yet what is Auroville today? It's not easy to answer. Ask around and you'll get many different replies. But always, it seems, filling in the blank spaces, we

recent coverage of post-tsunami reconstruction. This certainly doesn't reflect the importance the team ascribes to this issue; it may be due to the fact that we don't have close contacts in this area. Auroville International, which was the catalyst for getting us started, has also received less than generous coverage, although the fact that we've covered 90 different topics in the 'Auroville and the world' category perhaps demonstrates that Aurovilians are not so in-turned and parochial as is sometimes believed.

Finally, the biggest disappointments – only 33 articles on Auroville youth and a measly 31 which qualify as 'humour'. Of course, given the fact that only two and a half of the present editors can claim English as their native language there may be a great deal of unconscious humour in the way we phrase our articles (our Welsh proof-reader does his best but, well, he's Welsh). But if any place is God's gift to humorists, if any place cries out for the cathartic cleansing of laughter it is Auroville and here, I fear, we have failed miserably. (As tardy compensation, in this issue we feature articles on youth and even a smattering of lighter stuff.)

In spite of all this, Auroville Today remains unique. For nobody else has documented the ideals, quirks, achievements, struggles and failures of this community, this consciousness-in-the-making, between 1988 and today. Of course, we haven't always got the balance right and, of course, we've missed a lot. But, hopefully, by our 300th issue we'll be a little closer to perfection.

And that Aurovilian will finally have subscribed. Alan

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"Will the youth of Auroville be banned?"

Why does the Youth Centre always draw flak from the community? A personal view from an 18-year old.

It seems that Auroville was planned excluding youth. In Auroville, youth are not meant to exist and many residents seem to think that youth should just disappear. Somehow the people who complain the most about the youth are the people who either don't have children or young relatives, or people whose relatives, who are youth, aren't here, or people who don't realize that one day their own children will grow up to be youth. Because the youth in Auroville are a minority, they are readily ignored. They cannot respond to whatever they are accused of because, naturally, who is going to listen to or believe them?

The focal point of criticism, of course, is the Youth Centre, where a lot of youngsters gather. Those who criticize are however unaware that a lot of physical effort has been put into the Youth Centre and that quite a few youth have taken the responsibility to make this happen. The place has been undergoing a major change, both in atmos-

phere as in construction – though the construction hasn't changed much except for one new building, a store room, since there are barely any funds available for any more construction. But there has been a lot of repairing and maintaining of the other structures there. In the process several different things have happened that have been great learning experiences, such as making charcoal, building the storeroom and an oven, painting, cooking, cutting down dead trees for fire wood, fixing up the basketball hoop and board, growing a vegetable garden, and lots more. The Christmas fair was held last year at the Youth Centre and a huge amount of people showed up, a majority of whom were Aurovilians. The whole scene was run by the youth and some helpful Aurovilians who weren't afraid to be alongside them.

For the past year or more the Youth Centre has also been organizing regular pizza and barbecue evenings, twice a week for the community – not just for youth – as well as an Indian dinner on Sundays with a movie afterwards, open to the community. But only a few brave people who are not youth have actually dared to try it out and see how these 'wild and horrible' youth make food. From my experience, the result has been pretty positive – the people who came actually ended up enjoying the food. And maybe they changed their opinion of the Youth Centre.

I believe that the bad reputation pinned by some members of the community onto the Youth Centre causes unwanted characters to show up. Then undesired things may happen indeed. But these bad things are caused by people (not only youth) from Pondicherry or the neighboring villages and sometimes even from as far away as Chennai. It is not the Auroville youth's fault. But because it happens at the Youth Centre, then of course it is a bad place and the youth stand implicated.

After a certain incident, security at parties in the Youth Center was organized, in which the youth themselves took turns in providing security. This however did not keep some community members happy for long. The music had to be turned off at eleven or twelve. Do they expect parties to start at 4.30 in the afternoon so that everyone is home before dark, maybe with a little treasure hunt towards the end? One 'non-youth' resident (at a meeting with the youth at the youth center) even suggested that if the youth wanted to party let them go to some other country; let them go to Pondicherry, just as long as they aren't in Auroville. If they have an accident along the way



From left to right: Virya (author), Angelo and Vikram taking a break from wheeling bricks at the Youth Centre

because some drunken lorry driver crashes into them, it's their problem. I mean they are only youth, who cares what happens to them as long as they are not in Auroville? This 'nice' person's plan was to expose the youth of Auroville to things that happen that are not so 'nice' – as long as he is not disturbed by some occasional loud music.

The Youth Centre, a perfectly safe place in Auroville, is the only place available in Auroville for its youth. It is the only place the youth have to hang out. They run it themselves, they do everything themselves, they do not bother Auroville in the least and Auroville does not have to worry about finding someone to run the place. But still certain people want to see the place closed down. Proposals were submitted for the Youth Centre project to try and get funds to build and make it a better place, one of which included the construction of a sound-proof room in which parties could be held so as to not disturb the community. This didn't exactly seem to work.

The Youth Centre is meant to be a place for the youth, not only of this generation but for those to come. But without the support and approval of the community, it will never work out – there will always be problems. The main issue is that the community has not accepted the

youth as being part of it. They are despised or at best ignored by the community and seen as only bringing problems. But this attitude has to change – if progress is to be made.

The youth need a place to hang out, where they can be together and go about their stuff without being bothered and without bothering – it isn't that crazy. The solution is not simple but it is possible to work one out together, supporting one another, and putting some effort into it. Or is this too much to ask, too much a waste of time and energy for the community? Here is a reminder: right now there may not be very many youth, but the city is planned for fifty thousand people, and there will be many youth – many more than the few today. What is to become of all those youth? Will they be banned to other countries or cities? Or are they expected to be sitting at home all night, being serious and becoming enlightened?

Virya

Virya is of Spanish-Italian origin, and ready to graduate from Future School. He plans to go to university and continue his studies outside Auroville. He enjoys playing basket ball in the afternoons besides hanging out at the Youth Centre.

What the Youth Centre means to me

Youth is the age of exploration... That's why we need a place like the Youth Centre, a place where we can feel comfortable without oppression from the adult world, outside, and all around us.

Excluding the numerous activities taking place there, such as the thrice-a-week cookings; regular movies on the big screen; organized Christmas fairs; the Youth Centre is also a place where the youth meet and occasionally sit around the table and help each other out with their home-work.

It's the place where young people learn responsibility and volunteer creative contributions towards the community. The room is always filled with laughter and excited chatter.

The Youth Centre is definitely a place that cheers me up.

It's good to feel that there is a place for the youth of Auroville, and that people are concerned about us.

Inge

16 year-old French-Dutch Inge studies at Future School and lives in Kailash. An avid horse-rider, she hopes to pursue journalism in the future

"It's not easy to be a teenager here"

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"At the same time, when the teenagers experiment, they are in such a small community here that everybody will know about it; there's no privacy, no secret garden to go to. So it's difficult for them. It looks as if everything is possible here, but at the same time everybody seems to be looking over their shoulder.

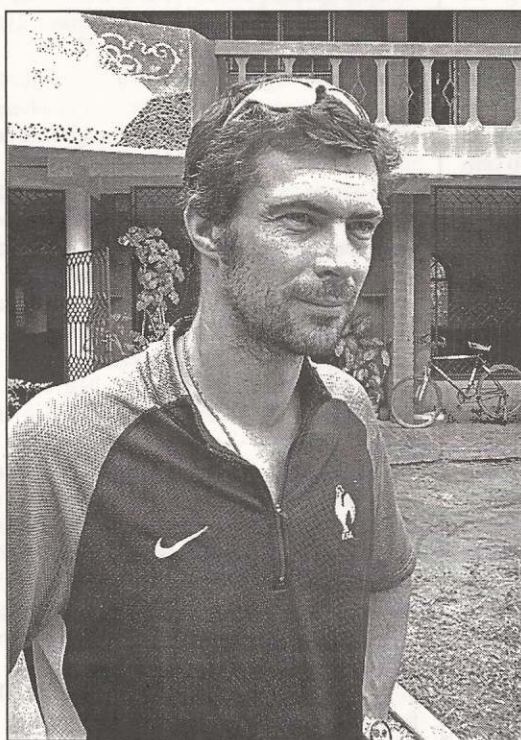
"The other main difficulty is that the Auroville society provides no clear reference for them. Here we live in a mixed culture where many things are difficult to define. For example, if you claim to be an Aurovillian, what does that mean? So they get confused, they don't know exactly how to behave, they don't have something solid they can model themselves on or fight against. It's not easy to be a teenager in Auroville!"

How does Auroville respond to its youth? Is it supportive of their personal 'quests'? "I believe," says Jean-François, "that Auroville – with the fine exception of the schools – has never done much for its youth. Even when we wanted to start Kailash, the Development Group told us to build far away near Edayanchavadi village: they wanted us out of the way. It was only because Kireet Joshi, the then Chairman of the Governing Board, insisted that youth should be put at the centre of all activities in Auroville that we were finally able to build near the middle of the town. Then, when there was an incident involving a few

Auroville youth at a New Year's party a few years ago, this created bad publicity for the community and people became scared. Suddenly they realized that the youth could affect the image of Auroville but, because they had been neglected so long, nobody had much control over them. So what to do?

"Some Aurovilians seem to think that youth between the ages of 13 – 20 have no place here: they should make their experience elsewhere. But I think there is a misunderstanding. Auroville is not meant to be an ashram. Auroville is a community, a society which includes families and children and, if we have a problem, we have to face it and solve it together and not just think of sending somebody away as the first option. Of course, the behaviour of our youth is not always nice, not always 'spiritual', but that's part of the reality. If we as adults decide that acceptable behaviour is here (lifts his hand) and the youth are here (lowers his hand) then we all have to find ways of reducing the gap. But how?"

One of the ways being considered at present appears to be the closing of the Youth Centre or adults organizing activities there for the youth. The Youth Centre, which is run by the teenagers themselves, has had a che-



Jean-François at Kailash

quered history. At present the core group is successfully bringing new energy into the Centre through organizing dinners and film shows, but a recent party reopened old controversies. "I'm not involved in the organization of the Youth Centre," says Jean-François, "but while it's not ideal it's better than having no Youth Centre at all. Now, if there's inappro-

priate behaviour, I or any other adult who is there can intervene. But if the Youth Centre closes, some of the youth will go to Pondicherry and you'll have absolutely no control over what they are exposed to. It's also wrong to assume that the young organizers are not concerned or capable of changing things. They are very open to discussion, they've met the Council twice and come up with their own proposals which, by the way, are not popular with all their friends or easy for them to implement. They need all the time and support that we can give them to evolve their own solutions. But instead of that there's now a move to let the parents and teachers decide what will happen to the Youth Centre. In other words, we are telling the youth that they are not capable of taking care of the problem themselves. This shows a total lack of respect and trust."

What, then, is the importance of youth to Auroville? Are they a constant challenge to the adults to re-evaluate their standards and the progress they are making as individuals and as a society? "I'm not sure about this," says Jean-François, "because the youth here, like youth

everywhere in the world at present, are not really rebellious: they are not really fighting against things they don't like. I think the importance of having kids in Auroville is the hope that they will grow up with a certain spirit: that even if Auroville is not yet materialising many of its ideals, the youth will understand how it should be and, eventually, will take up responsibility to make this happen. This is not happening at present. Those who return to Auroville in the 25-30 age range don't get much involved in the community process. They have a very bad image of the working groups as never-ending talk-shops but, more than this, there are the personal attacks – most of the youth are far more polite and respectful of minimum standards of discourse than some of the adults in these groups. Then again, the young people are often confronted with the judgement that Auroville youth are 'immature'. This is not just disrespectful. It also blocks all possibility of communication.

"If we leave space and time for the youth to express themselves, if we are listening because we want their input and we use it as often as possible, then we are working with the youth. But as long as the approach is that we'll talk to their parents when we have a problem with them then, sorry, I think we're on the wrong path."

Alan

A capital of connections

Introducing the Universal Citizens of Auroville initiative

"Is Auroville only the 2000 people who live here, or is there a larger, invisible Auroville made up of all those who feel connected to this place?" The questioner is Enzo Fazzino, who has visited Auroville a number of times over recent years. Enzo is sure of the answer. "Since its foundation in 1968, thousands of people have developed a relationship with Auroville through visits, the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or through strong personal contacts with Aurovilians. Auroville is a capital of connections and heart linkages that represent a strong presence beyond the physical City."

Enzo's idea is to make this invisible Auroville more visible, and to strengthen the relationship between those who live here and those who are part of the larger Auroville, through an initiative which he provisionally terms 'Universal Citizens of Auroville'. The benefits would include giving those who live outside Auroville a sense of belonging to the family and of being able to participate in Auroville's development, while Aurovilians would be able to call upon material and non-material support from this larger circle in developing Auroville and disseminating its ideals. "Of course," says Enzo, "the Auroville International (AVI) Centres already perform this function to a certain extent. But I'm convinced that there are many people out there who have a strong connection to Auroville and yet do not belong, for one reason or another, to the AVI

movement. In France, for example, there are only 100 members of AVI, yet I'd guess there are at least ten times that number who have some relationship to Auroville."

The first step in realizing this initiative, as Enzo sees it, is to recognize that the 'invisible Auroville' exists. He stresses, however, that the

replies, a simple organization can be created to exchange and share energies."

Enzo sees good communication as being the key to the success of the initiative. As the man who coordinates the website portal for the whole of UNESCO, he knows what he is talking about. "My experience is that

when you try to communicate to the general public, most of whom may have no interest in your project, you lose focus and energy. It's much better to tailor your communication tools to a particular public which you know is already interested. This way you can make them feel more and more part of the family." He suggests that universal citizens could receive a monthly email newsletter which would focus on a different area each time, plus a short news and events calendar. Unlike in Auroville Today, however, the information would be very condensed; websites and other linkages would be indicated for those who want further information. What about those who have no internet access? "There should be a simple printed version that could be translated into local languages. This could be carried out by AVI centres, among others."

"Better communication to the outside also implies better communication and coordination inside Auroville. For example, my impression is that you have good communication resources here but that they are rather scattered at present and not really communicating with each other. So another possible benefit of this initiative is that it gives you a chance to 'cross the border', to step

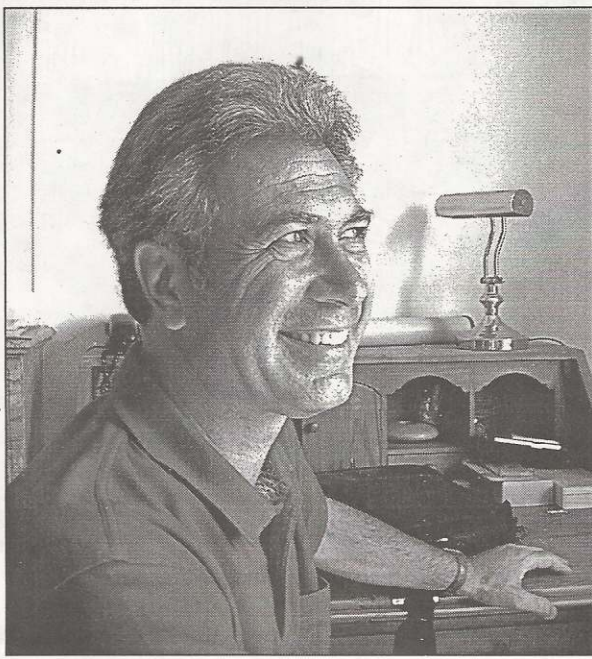
beyond the interests of your particular group, to exchange with others, and to reorganize Auroville's resources in more efficient ways."

In terms of organization, Enzo believes in a minimum of structure. Nevertheless, a small group would be needed to coordinate the 'energy-sharing', serving both Aurovilians and universal citizens. "The group would match up offers from universal citizens with needs in Auroville. For example, the Auroville Press is at present looking for a chemist specialized in paper production and preservation. The core group would also ensure the quality of the exchange: you can't invite somebody to come and work with you if you cannot provide the proper facilities. As to finance, this has to be discussed in more detail, but personally I'd have no problem in paying a subscription to ensure that such a service exists."

Enzo has floated his idea in a number of different groups over the past two weeks in Auroville. What has been the response? "There is consensus on the idea of opening up Auroville to those who have a 'heart' relationship with the community, and there's a feeling that now is the time to begin something. My role in all this was simply to set the ball rolling. Most of the details have still to be worked out but, hopefully, this will be done by a group which has already expressed interest in developing the project."

Alan

Enzo Fazzino has worked for UNESCO for the past 18 years. He has worked on heritage protection and on the Culture of Peace project, which saw 75 million people commit themselves to practising peace in their daily lives. Today he coordinates the UNESCO internet website portal.



Enzo Fazzino

people who make up this larger Auroville "have a deeper 'quality connection' with the community. It's not simply anybody who has passed through." One way of identifying them would be through asking Aurovilians and AVI members to give names of those whom they know have such a connection. "The next step would be to contact these people and to ask them, through a small questionnaire, what their interests are, what they would like to contribute, how they would like to be connected etc. On the basis of these

CULTURE

A Magical Mystery Tour

It is exciting to live in Auroville, in the City of Dawn, and we need to tell the world about it. Sometimes, though, cultural life is lacking topicality, so one has to go to the city next door, Pondicherry, for some entertainment de-luxe.

Last month huge advertising posters announced the show of Jadugar Anand and his colourful Mayalak. Headline: Blink your eyes, elephant vanishes!!!

This was not to be missed. So one fine evening we went to get our dose of magic – the girls, the boys, the kids and my pottery teacher (who vanished miraculously during the interval).

It was hilarious!

The guys started to make fun of the whole enterprise already on the way. We were seated somewhere in the middle front, tickets ranged from Rs 50 to 200. It was hot and when the show began, the volume of the music reached helicopter decibel.

Finally, there he was, in his silly old-fashioned magician's outfit with turban, cape and all. Huge, kajal-lined eyes with a hypnotizing gaze. It took his entourage quite a while to get started and grasp the attention because the dancing girls were on the level of school performers and the helping boys were stiff as rulers. Every American cheerleader team has more power.

But this is India and everything has its own charm. Everyone was wearing nice costumes and after some of the usual magical tricks the

ice was broken and fun began.

Emma, next to me, was experiencing her first magic show and was fascinated: "I just love it," and applauded till her hands blistered.

Adil and Bobby tried to get to the bottom of the tricks, imagining all kinds of invisible ropes, platforms and hidden trapdoors. The master sensed the silent suspicion and enlightened us: "Ladies and friends, this is a Government building; we are not even allowed to hit a nail into the wall, so forget about cutting holes into the stage."

After the break the master asked people from the audience to come on stage and assist him in his magic, black art as he called it, not to be mistaken with black magic.

And up went Mahila, an Auroville teenager. Till then I and probably many others thought that these so called audience co-workers are also part of the whole show like the clappers and animators. I interviewed Mahila later and she told me that she was asked beforehand, in the intermission, if she wanted to come up and assist. She agreed, so we witnessed the following scene.

Mahila explains: "He told me to look into his eyes and count till 10 – and he had huge eyes. So I counted and closed my eyes. It was really

weird, I didn't feel a thing, and I didn't know what happened until my parents told me later." The spectators saw the magician put a square sort of necklace around her neck and stab her through the throat with a sword-things. Front in, back out. No blood, no screaming in pain. She was relaxed like all the other girls before her who were being chain-sawed, quartered and tortured. So it seemed. After waking up she was asked to get ready for the next trick – floating in thin air – but she refused and was accompanied to her seat, jelly-legged.

Mahila says: "My parents were a bit worried. I was still dizzy and queasy. I had felt something hitting my throat and even some days later that red mark was visible on the skin. I have no idea how he did it and I would not do it again. Then, when I saw the second trick safely from my seat I thought, well, I should have stayed on. But anyway, I received a photo that shows him and me together on stage. A nice

memento."

We adults would rather watch from a secure distance and question the real magic, rather make fun of it than believing, trapped in our plain reality, having lost the wonderful imagination of our childhood. If only we sometimes could still see

with the eyes of a kid. Then it wouldn't matter if Lakshmi, the elephant, disappears every evening into the realm of fairytales and re-appears

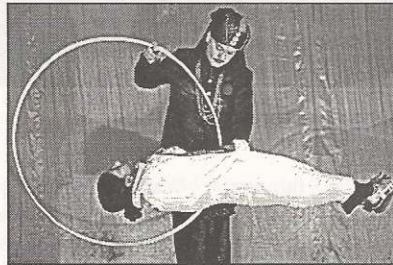
stoic in the next magical show. For now she is gone, vanished, and we don't know and don't need to know how and where she went. Adil suspects: "Everyone who disappears is forming a new species, somewhere, over the rainbow."

Maybe they all emerge in the City of Dawn. Who can really tell?

And who can tell for sure, who I really am – maybe an elephant in disguise?

I am definitely very good at treading on everyone's toes.

Julietta



In brief

58th Independence Day Celebration

The Independence Day of India was celebrated on August 15th, 8 am on the Bharat Nivas premises. Kumari Shyamala hosted the National Flag of India and children of Auroville Schools sang patriotic songs, followed by short cultural events. In the evening there was a cultural performance at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas.

Sri Aurobindo's Birthday

On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birthday a number of activities were organised at the Amphitheatre. The birthday on August 15th was celebrated with the traditional early morning bonfire and the Peace and Equality meditation rooms in the Matrimandir petals were open the whole day. The sunsets of the next days could be contemplated listening to The Mother reading a part of Book VII of Savitri; to Fabrice, a visiting friend, playing his bamboo flute 'Meditations on five ragas' at the rising of the moon; to a number of Aurovilians reading selections of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, accompanied by flute; or singing Mother's Mantra Om Namo Bhagavaté.

News & Notes 100

News & Notes, Auroville's weekly bulletin, celebrated its 100th issue. As a celebratory gesture, a little doll named Tsunamika was attached to each issue. [www.tsunamika.com]. Congratulating the News & Notes team, the Working Committee recollected how often in the old times of the Auroville News, the News & Notes predecessor, Auroville's relations within and without would be affected due to inaccurate or insensitive or outright unpleasant sharing of information and opinions. It thanked the team for its important work reviewing whatever material is offered for publication by evaluating it from the truest perspective of Auroville.

Meetings with Village headmen and Panchayat leaders

Members of the Working Committee and the Auroville Council met in several sessions with village leaders of Edayanchavathi and Kottarakai to discuss troubles that have arisen between Auroville and its neighbours. The discussions were frank and candid. An idea of channelling all the support for projects in each village through a central body, where the village is also represented, was also discussed.

Sydo Murder Case

The court case regarding the murder of Sydo van Loo has started on August 2nd in the Fast Track Court II in Tindivanam. The Security Task Force and Working Committee have been requesting permission to get the deposition of the main Auroville witness, who now resides in the USA, by video-conference.

Visa Policy

The Home Ministry has made a new visa policy for Auroville. The process to regularize the over 150 pending cases has been completed. The policy is a broad and generous frame within which Auroville can set its own internal procedures and regulations. A process of study of these procedures and regulations has been started between the Auroville Council, the Working Committee, the Entry Group, the Residents Service and the Auroville Foundation Secretary.

Co-evolution: Palmyra's work in the bioregion

Jürgen Pütz talks of his work in the bioregion and shares his views on various matters.



Jürgen Pütz has been in Auroville since its early years. He arrived in 1973 and started work at the Matrimandir Nursery. He then established a new community with some others in the green belt, and that was Dicipline. After a few years, he started to work in the Aurogreen area with Charlie, Jean, and some others, who had been working at Auro-orchard and had learned tropical agriculture from a specialist. Slowly, they started to build up the farm, where they planted trees, practiced agriculture, horticulture, and later kept cows. "In the beginning," remembers Jürgen, "I often drove a tractor to the Matrimandir and back, to get the water necessary for the farm. Later we dug our own well." Then, as an offshoot of Aurogreen, there was the community of Nilatangam, where Jürgen worked from the late 1970s, and where his two children, Ancolie and Miles (Yashasa), were born.

In the beginning of 1990, Jürgen, together with his wife, Sabine, moved to Aurobrindavan. When they arrived, the land was almost barren, with the exception of some trees which had been planted as part of an earlier afforestation project. "There was not a blade of grass," he remembers. "It was at this time that the first of a number of larger afforestation projects was sanctioned, and we used this place as a

the bioregion on land reclamation and health related projects, as Sabine is a nurse by profession and had been working at the Auroville Health Centre for many years. Nowadays, taking all aspects of their work into consideration, Palmyra works in 62 villages in the Kalivelli watershed area, in the Vanur and Marakanam blocks of the Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu, an area of 800 square kilometers.

Palmyra's objectives are to promote ecological concepts of land use as well as rural development programmes. Palmyra's work in the bioregion extends to many different fields: land reclamation, afforestation, tank rehabilitation, water conservation and management, as well as women's empowerment, education and sports.

In 1998, Palmyra started getting involved in larger scale projects. One of the most important ones till date has been the ICEF (India Canada Environmental Facility) funded Tank Rehabilitation Project, which has been implemented by Palmyra in twenty five villages in the Kalivelli watershed area and is now in its last year. With the

groups (see accompanying article). "Our objective is really to strengthen the village-based organizations, so that they can become self-sustainable and develop on their own in the future," stresses Jürgen.

Another project Palmyra has been implementing is the Integrated

are one of the top two. We have been very efficient and our work is like a showcase. We are often being asked to conduct training and exposure visits for other departments in our line of work."

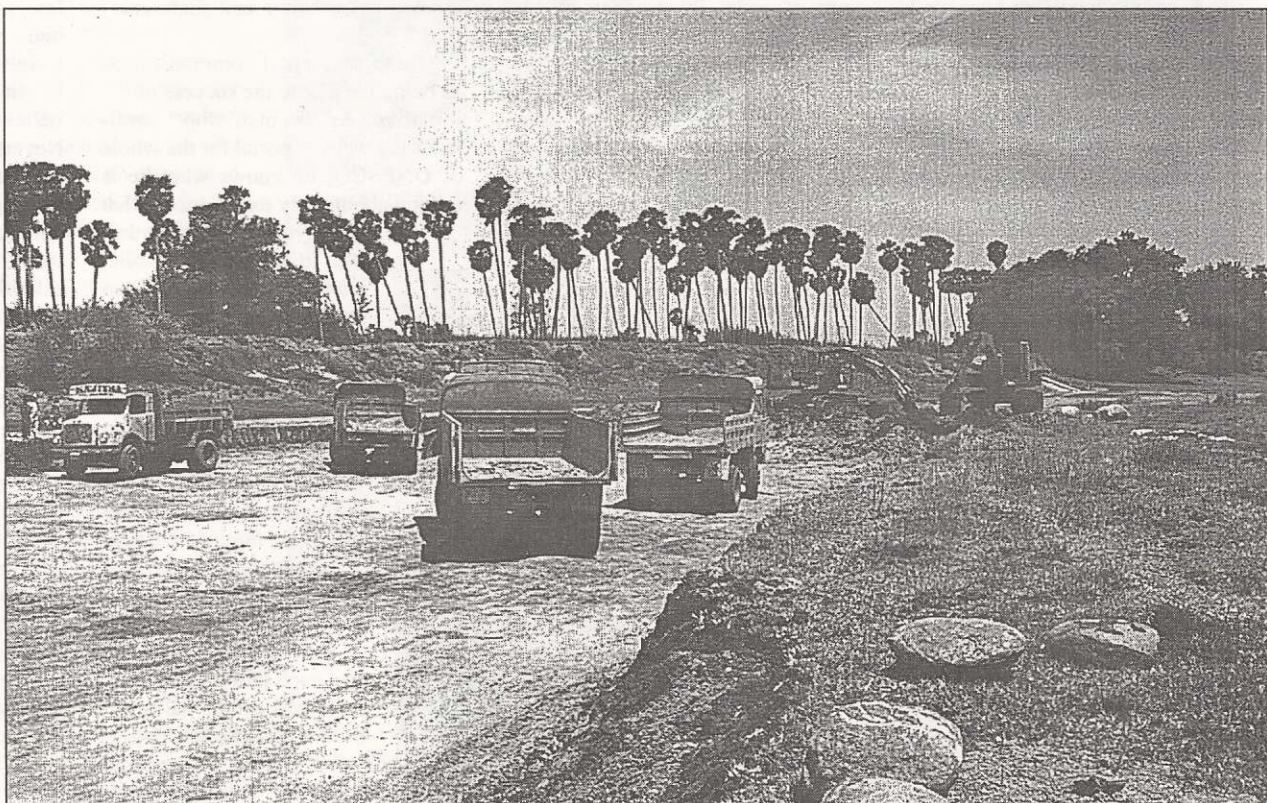
In the field of Education, Palmyra has been supporting, amongst others, the Kulapalayam Higher Secondary School (Kulapalayam School Trust) for more than ten years now. It has helped build up the infrastructure of the School and is today responsible for about 90% of its financing and maintenance. The funds for this project, which are channeled through Palmyra, have mostly been donated by the German and Austrian Indian Children's Fund. Today, there are one thousand students from the surrounding villages attending the school, which provides government recognized education up to the 12th standard in Tamil medium. The subjects being taught are varied, the teachers qualified and efficient and each year, the 10th and 12th standard students have passed their exams with very good results. "The quality of education the school provides is very high," says Jürgen, "We are

with equipment and organize matches on the Palmyra cricket ground. They are also working together with the different cricket clubs in Pondicherry. "For the past few years, we've organized some very high level cricket matches on our field. And recently we held a training camp with the Indian Cricket Association. According to some of the international Indian players who were here, some of the local youth performed extremely well. It has shown them that hard work and dedication really pay off, and that they can become good sportsmen if they put their energy into it."

Palmyra is also very much involved in providing health services in the villages. Sabine and Michael, who joined Palmyra some years ago, offer their health services in the Kilkoopathakkam village near Kilianur. Presently there are between 30 to 35 patients treated at the centre per day. Serious cases are referred to the major hospitals.

Some eighty children, as well as ailing patients who come to the centre for treatment, also benefit from Palmyra's nutrition programme on a daily basis. The food consists mostly of indigenous nutritious grains such as ragi and kambu, dried fruits, palm sugar and ayurvedic food supplements. "This goes a long way in supporting the healing and general health of the people who need it most," says Jürgen.

Another of the many projects Palmyra is presently engaged in, in collaboration with the Pondicherry



Rehabilitation work going on in the Thenkodipakam tank



The Nanakalmedu channel after rehabilitation.

base. We planted trees, worked on water retention, and slowly and gradually transformed it into what it is today. It certainly needed a lot of hard work, but it paid off." "We are considered by quite a lot of people to be somewhat outside of Auroville," he says, "but that is not how we see it. In fact it was in this area that the first land had originally been bought by the Mother to develop Auroville."

From there on, slowly and progressively, the Palmyra Centre for Ecological Land Use, Water Management and Rural Development, which was founded in 1990 by Jürgen and Sabine, developed. They started working in

assistance of Palmyra, farmers, especially those depending on those tanks for irrigation, formed Water Users' Associations. They have been in charge, assisted by engineers from Palmyra, of identifying the problems that have to be dealt with (such as the necessity of desilting a tank, or the clearance of the inlay or distribution channels) as well as carrying out the work. The farmers have also been asked to contribute 30% of the costs incurred, while Palmyra contributes the remaining 70%. As part of this project, a lot of different training camps and activities have also been initiated by Palmyra, as well as the formation of different women

Wasteland Development Programme, a project which was originally sanctioned by the Central Government. The work involves tree planting and the erection of water-retention structures, such as small earth or concrete check-dams, as well as awareness creation and community mobilization. "For this project, we are an official implementing agency," explains Jürgen, "In most instances, the government agencies themselves implement these projects, and in the whole of India, there are very few NGOs like us doing so. According to a survey which has been made in Tamil Nadu, out of the fifty implementing agencies involved in this work, we

dealing here not only with one thousand children, who attend the school, but also with their parents, we want them to be involved and conscious of the educational needs and development of the children."

The Palmyra team is also involved in organizing sports activities, mostly cricket-related, for the local youth. They encourage the young players, provide them



Sabine treating a patient at the Kilkoopathakkam village health centre.



Jatropha nursery

Government, is an Energy Plantation Project (for the "Promotion of Bio-Energy Plantation and Bio-fuel Extraction"). Fifteen villages were selected to implement this project on common lands, and seedlings of Jatropha, Neem and other oil-giving plants were produced in nurseries by the local self help groups.

"The oil extracted from these plants can be used to run engines," explains Jürgen. "Through this project, we are trying to produce a maximum of plants, in various locations. We are also exploring the possibility of getting an oil producing plant, so the oil can be extracted. There's a huge potential in alternative sources of fuel, and every time the international oil prices go up, there's more justification to increase the plantation of such oil giving plants. Of course, to grow the plant is relatively easy, but we have to find ways of making the whole process of producing oil and bio-fuel economically feasible."

Jürgen strongly believes that the co-evolution of Auroville and the surrounding villages of the bio-region is of utmost importance. "Co-evolution means that two things exist separate from each other, but they are going to evolve, simultaneously, into something that in the end will be a combined evolutionary factor," he explains. "Since we are in the same area, the same natural phenomena affect us and are

outside, whether social, economic, or political. And so the challenge that we are faced with is how we undertake this together. I think that's the real meaning of the whole future that we have, that we find ways and means of evolving together, not only with the different Aurovilians who are there, which is already difficult enough, but also



Cricket coaching camp organised by Palmyra

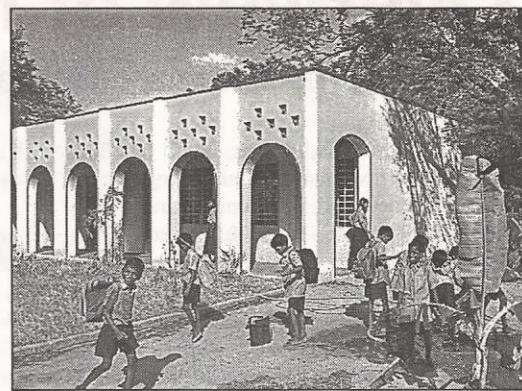
with the people from the different villages. For that we also have to become more aware of the ground realities and of the differences prevailing in the various villages."

"I have thought a lot about the recent land acquisition controversy," he continues, "If you look at Auroville's growth rate, from its initial stages until today, the figure is between 2.4 and 2.6%. However we don't have a critical mass to sustain our growth and make it meaningful in the next few decades. And we are talking of buying a few hundred acres more of land. Of course there are certain land developments going on, which we would like to prevent. But we also have to be aware of the growth rate of the surrounding villages, like Edayanchavady, for example, which has a greater number of inhabitants than Auroville. Their population is growing and they also have the need to develop further. So if we don't take those ground realities into consideration and plan together with them, we are never going to get anywhere, there will always be a conflict situation. This is something that one doesn't see reflected in the Auroville Master Plan, and it is a pretty serious matter according to me."

In response to criticism from some members of the community that Jürgen is not inclined to work together with other Auroville groups or individuals, he explains: "The thing is that if you want to

realize something in Auroville, you have to be a strong-willed person and really know what you want to do. I have an excellent working relationship with certain Aurovilians, who are also strong individuals, and at times they are also being criticized in the same way. We have had difficulty with certain members of groups like the FAMC, for example, who have tried to interfere in our work without actually even knowing what we're doing, how we're doing it, why we're doing it, and the successes we've had." Palmyra has never received any funding from Auroville for the work they do. Since the beginning, they have

been funded by the activities they run, and the funding agencies they work with. Those funding agencies are very strict in their financial management, and ask for regular, detailed expenditure reports, as well as sending independent observers in the villages themselves to evaluate the work which has been done and report on it. It is the same with Government-funded projects. "If we wouldn't have been so successful in the work we do, we wouldn't have received all these grants," he says. "With time, I've gotten pretty disillusioned with certain processes in the community, so I decided to focus and concentrate on my work. But if something interesting comes up that would be beneficial to Auroville and this area in general, I'll always be open to work



The Kuilapalayam School Trust

on it with others.

"All the work which we are doing at Palmyra right now and the work which we plan to do in the future is entirely to support and sustain the very foundations of Auroville," he concludes. "It is for the larger benefit of the entire community and also for the people of the surrounding villages who are living with us."

Emmanuelle

Women's groups in the villages

Mrs. Dhanam, an associate of Jürgen Pütz in the Palmyra – ICEF project, talks of the different women's groups which have been formed in the villages.

"In the beginning, it was mainly the land-owning farmers who benefited from the ICEF Tank Rehabilitation Project," explains Mrs. Dhanam, "So over the years, we have formed almost 100 women's groups in the area, the majority of which are made up of landless members." The Palmyra team forms the women's groups, helps them assess their needs, the available resources, natural as well as human, and based on that the women's groups take up different income generating activities. Palmyra is also working in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Development Corporation for Women, and implementing some of their schemes.

Originally, most of the women's groups were encouraged to open savings accounts. Then those savings were utilized in different ways by the different groups. Certain groups purchased milk-giving animals, others bought farming machinery, like tractors, paddy threshing machines, or power tillers, which they then



Women at work in the fields

was used to irrigate their crop. Now they are able to assess how much water is really needed, and they only use 2.5 centimetres of water. They have learned that by irrigating less water to the crop, one actually gets a better yield." Mrs. Dhanam says, with a smile, that the male farmers of the area have been highly impressed by the high yield produced by the women. "They have shown great interest in adopting those new agricultural methods themselves."

"Whenever we talk of farmers, people always think about men farmers, but it's always been mainly the women practicing most of the agricultural activities," she concludes. "The planting itself is done by them, and then the ploughing and the weeding and even the harvesting, it's all mostly done by women. So all the hard work is done by the women, but in most instances, the produce is sold by the men, because the money is handled by them, and most of the decisions are taken by the men also. But slowly, things are changing."

Emmanuelle



Women group preparing bio-fertiliser tonic

rented to the farming community. "Some of the women's groups have also begun to take some acres of land on lease," says Mrs. Dhanam, "They cultivate it for three years, working on the land themselves, and not hiring any outside labour. When they sell their crop, a part of their profit goes back into repaying their loan to the bank."

"With our assistance, these women are developing their own strategy, and working on it amongst themselves. Slowly they are taking up small micro-enterprises, as well as natural resource based income-generating activities, and through increasing their income, they are really improving their livelihood, as well as that of their family."

A few women land-holding groups have also been formed. "We have encouraged them to adopt innovative agricultural practices," she explains, "Presently they are producing and using bio-fertilizers, as well as vermi-compost. They have also adopted the SRI (System of Rice Intensification) method, and got an incredibly good yield." Palmyra has also conducted a water management training programme for the women. "In the past, between 5 to 7.5 centimetres of water



Mrs. Dhanam (second from left) with women in a field where the SRI method of cultivation is being practised



Jürgen (second from left) interacting with Endiur farmers.

there for us to deal with. If it rains, it rains for everybody, and if it doesn't rain, it is the same. And there are a lot of other factors which also have to be dealt with and tackled from the inside and from the

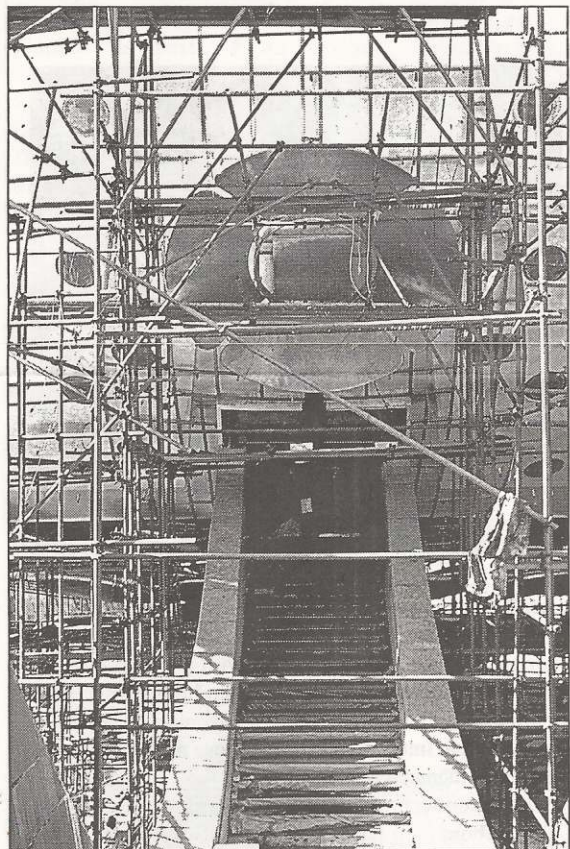
Overview of major ongoing works at Matrimandir

A report by the Matrimandir Management Group

The Inner Chamber was closed in March for improvements; we are trying to complete the work in September, and re-open it for limited access. Johnny & his team of volunteers are working there with great care, following Piero's plans. The crystal and its stand haven't been moved and are well protected as are Mother's symbol, the carpet and the columns. A large aluminium scaffolding (15 m high) stands in the middle of the chamber to give access to the central hole in the ceiling which is being modified. This work includes the re-painting of the entire ceiling. Vladimir & team will soon commission the new more efficient AC plant.

Top of Matrimandir: Gerard M. and his team are executing Piero's modifications. Though much of the work has already been accomplished, there is still a lot to do – such as installing a new crane (custom-made in stainless steel, in Germany), which won't be visible when folded.

Other works inside Matrimandir are also progressing well. Pierre & team are completing the final detailed marble work while Perumal, Sukrit & team are working on the twin spiral ramps and Sergei & team are progressing steadily with the inner skin. As the temporary handrails and floor panels of both spiral ramps have now been removed, a new temporary staircase had to be built to access the Chamber and area above it.



The model disc with the square in the middle, above the Mahakali entrance

Outer face: Dirk & Walter's team will complete the water-proofing membrane on the North half before the end of August and will then shift to the SW quadrant. Paneer & team are re-installing the discs in the NE quadrant and are about to start removing the discs from the SW quadrant. Saravanam & team keep on moving scaffolding to enable the two other teams to carry on with their respective work.

Outer face, below, between the 4 pillars:



The circular pathway between the large and small petals nears completion

Victor, Dorothee & team are working on a large symbol of the Mother, which will hide the central hole of the central staircase from below. Peter T. & team are fixing marble tiles around this symbol, and Paneer & team have installed most of the discs.

The four golden disks above the entrance doors

Very large flower-like four-petalled disks will be hung above each one of the four entrances. At the centre of these disks, there will be a different shape (covered with golden tiles) indicating the particular 'Aspect' of the Mother: hexagon for Maheswari, square for Mahakali, circle for Mahalakshmi and triangle for Mahasaraswati. A first stainless steel disc for the Mahakali entrance (North) has been manufactured. Is in the process of being installed for checking and will then be removed and then sent to the Goldinglass factory in Pondicherry to be covered with golden tiles. When it returns, it will be installed for good. Order for the three other discs is about to be placed. Victor and his team are working on the golden 'shield' and the golden discs. Jean, Vladimir and their respective teams will provide the sliding door and its automatic mechanism.

Twelve Large & Small Petals

Two meditation rooms, 'Peace' & 'Equality', are open for meditation and a 3rd, 'Sincerity', is almost ready. Pierre, Pashi, Shanta, Carlos & team are busy completing the nine others. They are all at a very advanced state of completion and should be completed before the end of 2005. The last of the 12 small petals, 'Perfection', was completed 3 months ago.

Space below Matrimandir, at ground level

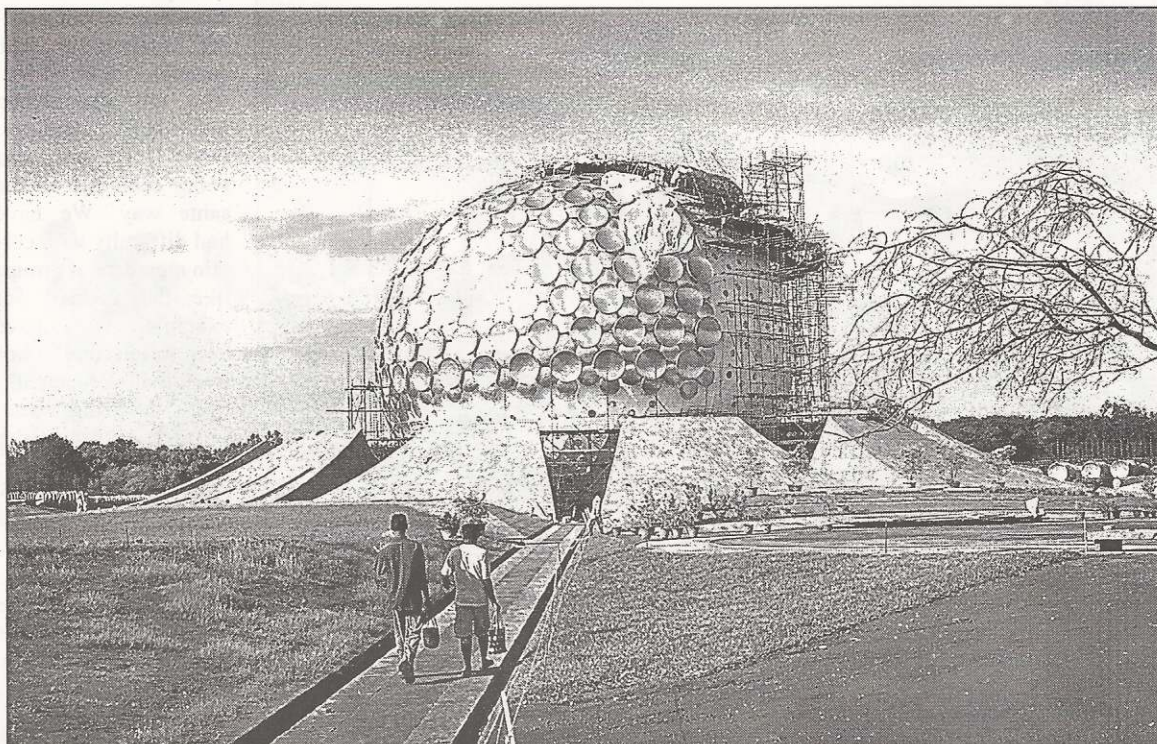
The white marble Lotus Pond is being completed by Fabrice, Pascal & team. It already looks very beautiful. The surrounding area is also almost complete thanks to Alain, Somu & team.

Pathways on the future Island

By August end, Somu's team will complete the 1st circular pathway, and most radials within it. They will then carry on with all other pathways on the future Island except for most of those in the west side, which won't be paved. Peter's team cuts all the stones.

Infrastructure of the future oval island (water & electrical system)

Irrigation system of the future Island: 3 quotations for the main components of this system have been received and the order is about to be placed. This highly-sophisticated system will incorporate maximum flexibility and the latest water saving techniques. Sprinklers and drippers will be placed only when the designs are finalised. Some of the funding will come from the money left by the late Rosa (Arati) in a Trust for the Matrimandir Gardens. A new (140KVA) diesel generator has been



The water-proofing membrane on the north side has been fixed and the discs are being re-installed

ordered and will soon be commissioned.

Contouring the Gardens of the future Island

In May, Tom & Selvam supervised two excavators to contour the Gardens of Harmony, Perfection & Existence and to raise to zero level the area by the old 'Camp' (Roger hasn't finalised yet his plans for this area). Somu, Selvam & team have rebuilt outside the oval some of the buildings in the workshop and 'Camp' areas. Gaje's team is busy completing manually all contouring.

Alain's team contoured the Garden of Unity (next to the Banyan tree, NW of it) as per Roger's revised plans. It differs a little from the original 'rosewood model' (to create 12 mini gardens), but the spirit remains the same. They also made, on one side of the 'Unity Pond', a mock-up of a mini-amphitheatre, which Roger designed (but hasn't finalised yet).

More on the Gardens

Creating the proper atmosphere: There is a growing awareness at Matrimandir that, for the 'destined' garden designer(s) (whoever they may be) to be able to do their work, we need to create a harmonious atmosphere and be open to what She wants.

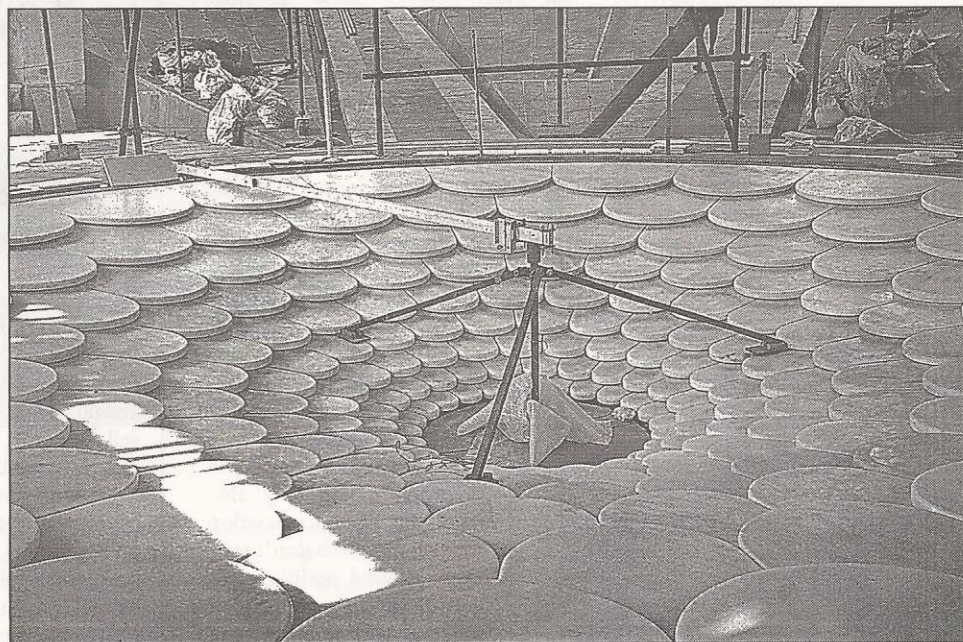
Invitation: A new Garden brochure will soon

Experimenting: The 'Garden Reflection Group', which was constituted around Roger, has allocated some seed money to test some ideas in 4 Gardens: Nadja's design (Bliss), Marc's design (in part of Light and in part of Power) and Leonard's design (in part of Unity). (Nadja's concept was selected out of five proposals.) These are only experiments, done with low-cost materials to give a clear visual idea to everyone of what a particular designer proposes. Models of all proposals can be seen at Matrimandir Office. More proposals – hopefully inspired – are required, and several other Aurovilians (Poppo, Mona & Nevi, Gnagnavel, Kalya and André H.) have already shown a real interest. Narad remains committed to Mother's request that he design the Unity Garden by the Banyan tree.

The Matrimandir executives are committed to involve the community in the decision making process of the Gardens. Probably sometime in late September the 'Garden Reflection Group' will be ready to review the situation publicly, and to present its recommendations on how to proceed.

Future Lake

It will probably take some years before some proposal for the final Lake can be formulated because of the difficult water situation.



The white marble pond below the Matrimandir is almost completed

be published to give all the relevant information to all potential garden designers. The addresses of potentially interested parties are welcome.

Preparing the ground: There is also the feeling that, by preparing the ground for the Gardens (we hope to achieve this before the end of 2006), we are actually helping them to 'come down'.

Collecting flowers: Tina, Kireet & Narad are collecting those plants they consider most likely to fit in each of the 12 Gardens and display them in 12 'collection plots' (located between Matrimandir Office and the former 'Camp').

However, possibilities for an intermediate water body around the future Island are being studied. Here again, Matrimandir executives are committed to follow a suitable approval process as soon as a clear proposal starts taking shape.

Time Schedule

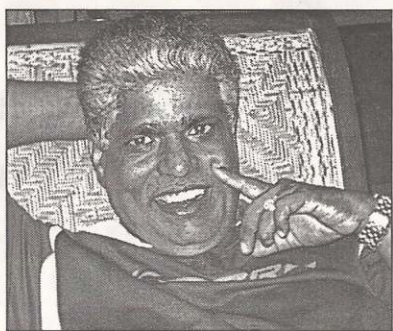
Almost everything on the future Matrimandir Island (including pathways and infrastructure, but excluding the Gardens themselves) should be complete during the second half of 2006.

V. Rajamani

On early morning of August 13th 2005, V. Rajamani, in Auroville known as Big Rajamani, passed away at the age of 55 after suffering an acute heart attack. His body was cremated the same day in the Kuilyapalayam burial ground close by his house in Douceur.

Rajamani was a long-time Aurovilian, having been trained in Aspiration's 'Toujours Mieux' workshop and growing along with it. When the workshop evolved into 'Aureka', Rajamani became one of its executives, specifically taking care of coordination of the work load and workers. Throughout the years, Rajamani grew to be very instrumental in the growth of the unit towards its present stature.

Being a family man, Rajamani took care not only of his own five children, but he and his wife Kasthuri also raised his younger siblings as well as the three children of his brother and sisters. His house in Douceur was open to all. He will be sorely missed.



Jehuda Szlezzynger-Nam

On August 17th or 18th Jehuda

passed away in his house in Kottakarai due to a massive heart attack at the age of 51. Jehuda, who had German nationality, joined Auroville early 1997 and has worked here, in collaboration with his wife Jung, as an independent psychologist ever since. Surrounded by his wife and friends, his body was cremated at Adventure's mandapan on Sunday, August 21st early morning. His quiet and concentrated presence was a beacon for many looking for help on their path.



Margaret Fletcher

For many Aurovilian or Ashram visitors, their first experience of England was of being met at the airport by a briskly-efficient lady who would ask them, in a kindly, cut-glass accent, "Did you have a good flight?" Margaret Fletcher, 'Aunt Margaret', who died last week at the age of 95, was a long-term supporter of Auroville and wonderful friend and helper to the motley bunch of Aurovilians who, somehow, washed up (sometimes unwashed) at the door of her beautiful flat in Queen's Gate, central London.

Margaret was unique, but she also belonged, along with her friends Joy Calvert, Edith Schnapper and Mary Aldridge, to an increasingly rare and endangered breed of Englishwoman (Edith was Swiss by birth but English to the marrow of her bones) – refined, eminently well-bred, yet always willing, in their quietly courteous way, to leap barriers and challenge conventions. I think that was one of the reasons Margaret loved – and somewhat idealised – Auroville: the fact that here lived a bunch of nonconformists who, in their messy ways, were trying to realize something utterly different.

Teatime at Margaret's was always an occasion: out came the silver teapot, the china cups, the napkins, doileys and exquisite nibbles and

cakes (she was a cordon bleu cook). And the conversation – once she had asked after the health of your mother – would immediately turn to what was happening in Auroville.

Margaret was always very modest about her own abilities to do the Integral Yoga. She said she found books by Deepak Chopra and Eckhart Tolle more accessible than the works of Sri Aurobindo. Yet she was a wonderful example of an integral yogi because she was convinced that consciousness work, consciousness evolution, was the only work worth doing, and she was always exploring and eager to talk about the latest developments in the field.

For several years now, she'd been telling us that she so longed to move on, that she couldn't understand why she was still with us. It wasn't simply tiredness – although since she could no longer get around her beloved London perhaps a little zest had gone out of her life – it was more her feeling that the next adventure for her lay beyond, so why couldn't the train just leave the station! "After a long and wonderfully fulfilling life I am so, so curious, as you know and would love to be able to continue sharing my adventures," she wrote in a letter read out at her funeral. "I do hope it's going to be as big an adventure as I



had hoped. Whatever happens to me, however, I want the future to be full of joy and wonder for you all and, if there are any means available by which I can encourage this, you can be sure I shall seize the opportunity with eagerness."

Dear Margaret, you welcomed and hosted so many Aurovilians, Ashramites and friends of the yoga over the years, you were the still, refined point of their whirling world. Now you're on your way – first-class, I'm sure – and Mother is awaiting you at the next station.

God bless.

Alan

Our true life lies at a great depth within us. Our restlessness and weaknesses are merely stirrings of the surface. We must daily retire in silence far into the depths of our spirits and experience the real life within us. If we do this, our words and actions will come to be real also.

Poem by Rabindranath Tagore selected by Margaret to be read at her funeral

REFLECTION

The dragon's tail

The terrorist attacks, now roundly and aptly described as outrages against humanity, since 2001 in New York, Madrid, Bali, London or elsewhere, could well represent less a defining sign of things to come, as had initially been suggested by some commentators in the mainstream press, than the last desperate thrashings of a dying dragon's tail. The dragon whose shadow fell on the many million slain for ideological or nationalistic reasons or for reasons cynically masked as such throughout the twentieth century. Today's attacks carried out in the guise of a rigid religious fundamentalism are a carry-over of the same.

"The horror, the horror" the dying Kurtz exclaimed in Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* – a theme which could sum-up or encapsulate the lies and much of the sophisticated or less sophisticated savagery from the heyday of the age of empires through to the killing fields and the terror attacks of today. Yet humanity's future lies in the sunny uplands not in the valley's shadows, despite what the 'merchants of fear' would have us believe. But the ascent or journey out of that valley is a collective one, akin to a rising

or a global awakening that might well be already underway. For forces and mindsets that are at one point appropriate, given the world balance of powers of the time, can even, while remaining in the foreground for awhile, rapidly outlive their necessity and become anachronistic in the evolutionary scheme of things – particularly in these accelerated times we now live in. The mind-sets born of the ideological divisions of the Cold War and policies that they spawned are an example.

Nationalism is another one. A revolutionary force in Europe and elsewhere at the end of the nineteenth century it has now become a retrograde one, particularly when motivated primarily by self-interest. If this sense of nationalism remains resistant to change; particularly in the case of powerful nations it could easily become a stumbling block to the emergence of forums or institutions that are truly representative of the combined or mutual interests of the earth's peoples. Scrutinizing and questioning such rigid and narrow-minded or, at best, nostalgic forms of nationalism or patriotism – the most easily manipulated of emotions in an age dominated by the power of the media – does not in

any way imply a lack of pride, attachment or love for one's country and the values and the ideals it represents. On the contrary it would be a higher, truer form of patriotism for as Albert Camus wrote to a young member of the German resistance "I love my country too much to be a nationalist."

But there remains the more and more pressing and daunting challenge at hand which lies in forging a unity in mind and soul, or at least a shared common belief in the necessity of enshrining not only in institutions but in our hearts those ideals born of the enlightenment of liberty, equality and fraternity of all races and peoples of the earth. We are also the guardians of the earth and there is an increasingly urgent need to protect and safeguard our increasingly endangered environment (the damage to which is now even observable by astronauts in outer space) – and the species it contains for the generations that are to come. Our faith should be in a future where the values of the spirit and a new evolutionary emergence of a global mind uniting man and womankind will ultimately prevail over the forces of ignorance, terror and tyranny. The unity of nations would

almost demand a new definition of nationhood and this might well be one of the challenges facing the United Nations on the upcoming 60th anniversary of its foundation.

The dominant self-interest of nation states might well have to give way to a growing recognition and awareness that the ultimate self-interest of a people and therefore of a nation is mutually dependent and interconnected with not only other peoples but all the other species that share our planet. For as Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity* "Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret spirit, a divine reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine spirit upon earth."

Roger

In brief

Mother's Aspirations and Prayers

An exhibition of rare and well-known photographs of The Mother was held at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. The exhibition also showed some photocopies of Mother's original Prayers and Meditations, and Sri Aurobindo's original English translations of Mother's writing, loaned by the Ashram Archives. Mother's Museum loaned some beautiful, fragile, 90-year-old Japanese writing materials and other things, including Mother's Japanese writing box, all of which Mother brought from Japan when She came to Pondicherry.

Registration matters

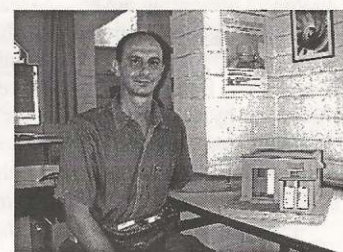
The Residents' Service requested all Aurovilians for their cooperation in informing whenever a change in address or workplace takes place or when a new child is born in the family. It warned all foreign Aurovilians and newcomers that they are responsible for their own paper work regarding their registration in India and that blasting the Residents' Service for mistakes is not cricket. However, it promised that "If you are very nice to us, we'll try to help you out."

Royal Express back

Just when we thought The Royal Express was to disappear forever into obscurity (see short news Auroville Today of August 2005), the Royal Express has been given a rebirth on Monday, 15th August and is back on the road.

First prize for Earth Institute

The Auroville Earth Institute has been awarded the first prize in the "Hazard resistant house design contest", organized by Gandhigram Rural Institute, Bhoomika Trust, and Indians for Collective Action (ICA) from the U.S.A.



Two models presented by the Auroville Earth Institute shared the first place. The models integrate a staircase, enabling an easy extension with a first floor later on. The houses have been designed keeping in mind how people live in the surrounding areas, and further adapted based on the feedback received from the villagers around Auroville.

Smokers wanted

The Quiet Healing Centre has called for volunteers to test an herbal concoction developed by a French homeopath to eliminate the craving for tobacco within nine days. Volunteers should normally smoke at least five cigarettes or beedies per day, have a genuine desire to quit smoking and have a history of failed attempts to quit.

Truffaut Film Festival

Aurofilm organized a 4-day film festival; featuring films of François Truffaut, an influential film critic, leading New Wave director and heir to the humanistic cinematic tradition of Jean Renoir, at the Aurofilm building in Kalabhum.

The Return of the Colonel

For our 200th issue, we were delighted to receive this letter from a faithful subscriber who is one of the most acute observers of the Auroville scene

April 1st, 2005

The Athenaeum,
Pall Mall,
London SW1

Sir,

I was enjoying a postprandial nap at my club when Carstairs brought me the latest issue of 'Auroville Today'. Damn good little rag. Only thing I like to be woken up for these days. Well done, chaps.

Anyway, while perusing the latest issue I was reminded that I'd been meaning for some time to share a few thoughts on organization. Now, I know you chappies have a hard enough time of it out there in darkest Africa [wrong continent, eds.] without having to listen to some silly old buffer chuntering on from his armchair, but I'd like to share the one or two nuggets that this old soldier has wrested from life's ore (rather good that, what?). For me, organization can be summed up in three words: discipline, discipline, discipline. Without discipline, as my old C.O. used to say, you can't even put the dog out at night. With discipline, you can conquer the world.

Now, far be it for me to suggest that you chappies are a wee bit lacking in the aforementioned article, but one or two of your scribes do suggest that Aurovilians could do with a certain stiffening of the sinews. So here are my suggestions. Discipline requires a clear chain of command, so the first thing you chaps need to know is who's in charge. Now I know you all want to be number one – damn good thing, ambition and all that – but stands to reason you can't stand on top of the pole at the same time. If it's all chiefs and no injuns, who's going to do the legwork, who's going to dig the latrines? So first thing you need to do is create your officer corps, the chappies who will lead the cavalry charge, the ones who will fling their lives in the faces of the enemy, like socks at a goat. [don't ask, eds.]

But in the midst of battle how will you know them? How will you know each other? Answer: uniform. Ergo, it's time you chappies got into uniform. Now I know what you'll say. That where you live it's a touch on the warm side and nobody wants to spend the day sweltering in khaki woollens. But that's where discipline comes in. We couldn't have won the War wearing what Nurse Hackett calls strainers ['trainers'? eds.] We couldn't have won wearing loin-cloths. Fact, we only won because we were wearing uniforms. And damn good ones, too. So get your designer chappies on the job. Get them to run up the Auroville uniform that you'll be proud to wear any time, anywhere. Mark my words. Once you're turned out properly, with your webbing blancoed, your boots dubbed and your brass buckles gleaming, the natives will look at you quite differently.

But uniforms are no good if you don't know how to wear them, if you don't know how to wear them together. So next thing you need is a parade-ground. Nothing too grand – just take your machetes and hack out a clearing in the jungle where everybody can practise drill twice a day. Drill? I hear you ask, why the baden-powell should Aurovilians drill? But dammit, if you're warriors of a new dawn you have to learn to march in step, to wheel, to present arms, even if all you're presenting are banana leaves.

Finally, gongs. Some of you chappies have been out there a damnably long time, beyond the call of duty and all that, so it's only right you get some kind of recognition. I propose an annual ceremony where the C.O. raises the spirits of the troops by awarding medals for long-service, good conduct, bravery in the face of enemy fire etc. Nothing too elaborate, mind, just something to show your grandchildren as you dandle them on your knee and regale them with tales of derring-do in the city of the dawn.

I see she-who-must-be-obeyed, Nurse Hackett, approaching, so it's time for this old buffer to sign off. Just remember, chaps, you can't go far wrong if you live simple, shoot straight and keep your leggings dry.

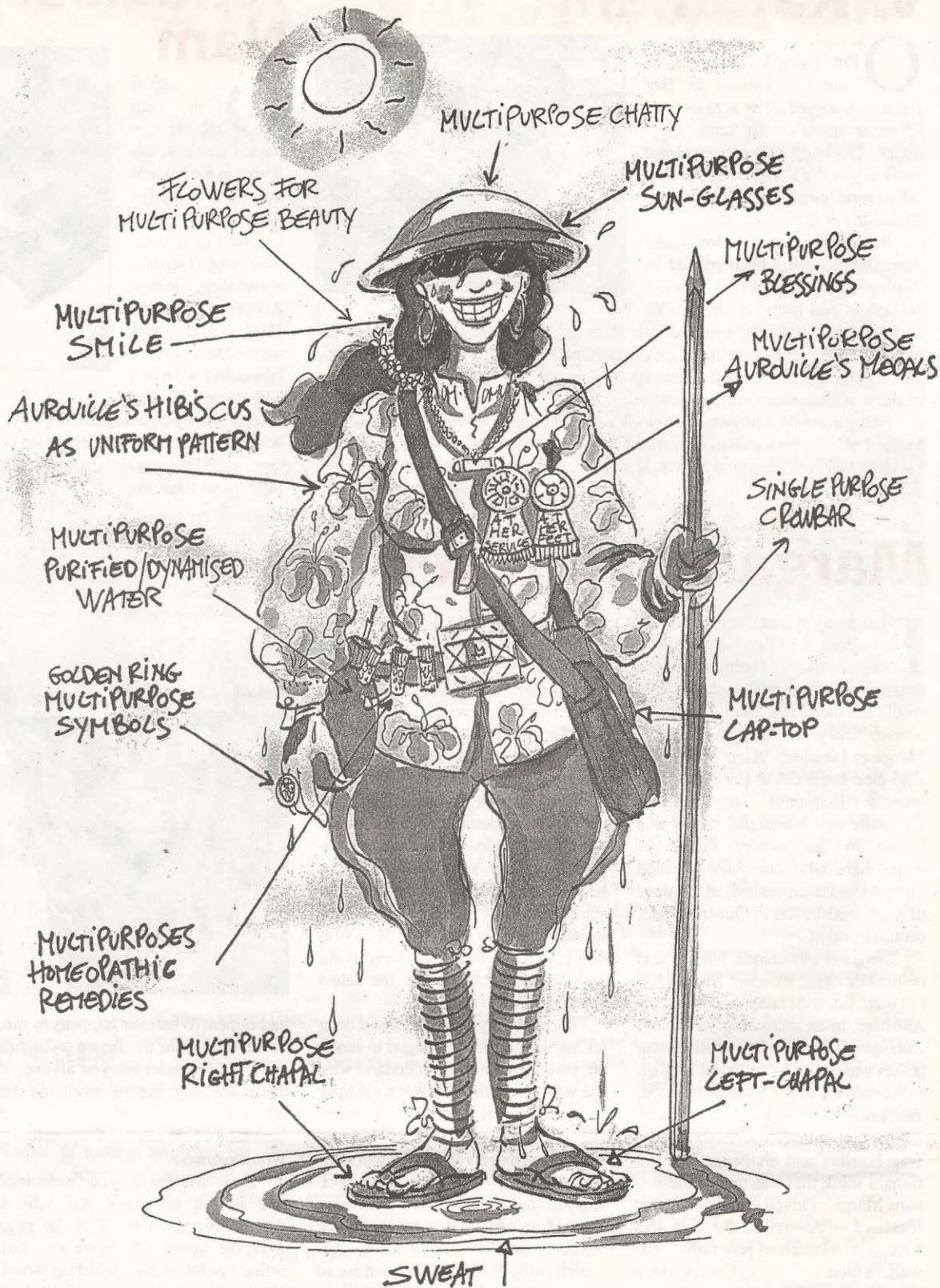
I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Alastair Henry Lucius Buckfast-Smythe (Lieutenant-Colonel *retd.*)

[Alert readers will have recognized that the Colonel has spelt his name in different ways over the years. We also wonder how Nurse Hackett gained admission to the indubitably masculine preserve that is the Athenaeum Club. We put these inconsistencies down to the effects of his medication. And the port. We also enclose a glossary for those readers who find the Colonel's epistolary style a trifle opaque. eds.]

postprandial – after lunch or dinner
injuns – native Americans
webbing – belt
blancoed – a white substance for whitening belts
dubbed – a grease for softening and waterproofing leather
baden-powell – British general who founded the Boy Scout Association.
gongs – awards
derring-do – heroic courage

Alan



One of the possible Auroville uniforms as proposed by Emanuele

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

Notes on the Way

On a recent morning I was able to commute to the News office without crossing or being overtaken by any racing buses, lorries, vans, cars, motor-rickshaws, fat-back-tyre bikes or large-footed beings while on the dirt road. As I was driving at a cool non-dust-raising speed, I was reminded, despite the exhaust pipes, of the paradise Earth actually is: The beauty of nature, the glory of the light, the essential quietness of things natural. (I'm not really sure now whether all this happened or if I just imagined it – which comes pretty much to the same...)

Needless to say, dirt roads will always remain the mean of transit on terra firma most in harmony with the surroundings, they being nothing else than cleared up, reinforced and

rammed passages on the surface of dear Earth. If only all could understand the common sense and fairness of driving slowly on them... But ok, we are building a city and given the general state of affairs – notwithstanding the laudable efforts of Nikolai to goad us on the Royal Express way to true progress – we can expect non-self-regulated motor traffic to be with us for quite some time more.

As a solution, the test portion of paved road at the entrance of the Matrimandir seems promising and I am eagerly waiting for the results of the feasibility study (probably after the monsoon). The one question I have, though, is where and how do we intend to find the funds for paving the whole dirt stretch?

One possible way could be to

collect a dust tax, at least from the Aurovilians. To make sure no injustice is committed and everyone is charged her/his due share, some laser camera-cum-dustometers would be positioned at regular intervals along the main dirt roads. Those would be linked to the Financial Service's main computer, the number plates' specs for each vehicle having been entered into its database alongside the owner's account number. Not an attractive proposal? Ok, forget it...

But not to worry! If, as hoped, the crossroads experiment turns out to be conclusive, surely the means for large-scale implementation will follow such a noble aspiration – for indeed, as we all know by now, the way to paradise is paved with good intentions.

Adhara

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