

AUROVILLE TODAY

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Bridging the Worlds

At year's end I talked to Paolo Tommasi, the designer and architect to whom The Mother described her vision of the inner chamber of Matrimandir in a series of conversations in 1969-70 (published in *The Mother's Agenda*, Volumes 10-11). With the passionate intensity that the Italians have for beauty, he spoke of those early years, his meetings with The Mother, as well as his feelings about the now completed inner chamber.

"I came here in 1966, not as an architect, but in order to do yoga. Then in 1968, Mother sent me a letter in which she very kindly asked me if I would work together with Roger Anger, Nata and other friends of the time, for the foundation of Auroville. I tried to collaborate and offer the best of myself and I continued to be involved with Auroville following its foundation. After some time I was going around Auroville trying to see and get a feeling for what was happening and I observed many attempts being undertaken, but could feel a lot of uncertainty as well. It was then that I had the idea of going to Mother in order to ask her what she saw for the centre of Auroville: a place, a centre, that would be the space of the Great Mother, not only the space of Mother, but a symbol of That which she incarnated—the Great Mother of the Evolution herself. First I went to see Satprem and then together we went to see The Mother. She told us that she had had this vision which she described to us in a number of meetings over the next few days. It was in the second conversation that she described the crystal and the ray of light.

"When you're intensely involved with something, time is necessary for perspective. And although I've visited regularly it was only this year that I experienced the chamber not as an architect concerned with details but in an altogether new and different way. As a result I now have the strong urge and feeling to communicate—based on my memory of the feeling and the mood of what The Mother communicated to me in those conversations—that the Chamber is perfect. The help we asked of Mother at that time and the vision she gave us has been realised. It is here. It is now for us to try to feel and listen to that space. Spaces are non-mentalized states of consciousness that express themselves and speak to us in a non-mental way. Understanding space means taking it in oneself, absorbing it in a non-mental way. There is a lot one could say about that particular space: that it is essential, empty; that it is simple, the columns for instance are very important and yet they aren't really columns, but are like white sentinels and help intensify the concentration, and then simply vanish. And finally through one's contact with the ray there is everything: the universe, and one can proceed forward. If we can listen and come to gather and contain that space within ourselves I feel we would be given a great help, both for our personal yoga as well as in receiving indications as to Auroville's growth. Humanity as a whole has to learn to absorb and assimilate what that space represents. I also



PHOTO/RENO

think this is already happening in a conscious or unconscious way.

"The Mother gave us through her vision something no architect could ever have done. The Chamber is beyond and outside of time, it is in a time-dimension that awaits us and which we must prepare ourselves for, in our inner and outer work. If I wanted to synthesize my feelings about it I think of the Zen goal of 'eliminating that which is superfluous'. This is the task that confronts us all, wherever we are, in the West as well as here. We all live suffocated by the superfluous and we have to succeed in rediscovering both without and within, that which is essential, that heart, which according to me, is both the heart and the soul of Auroville, which is the Chamber. If we could concentrate and this is the task that awaits us—on its atmosphere and absorb it, then a lot of our problems would be solved. And above all, no more decorations, no masks—that world is finished!"

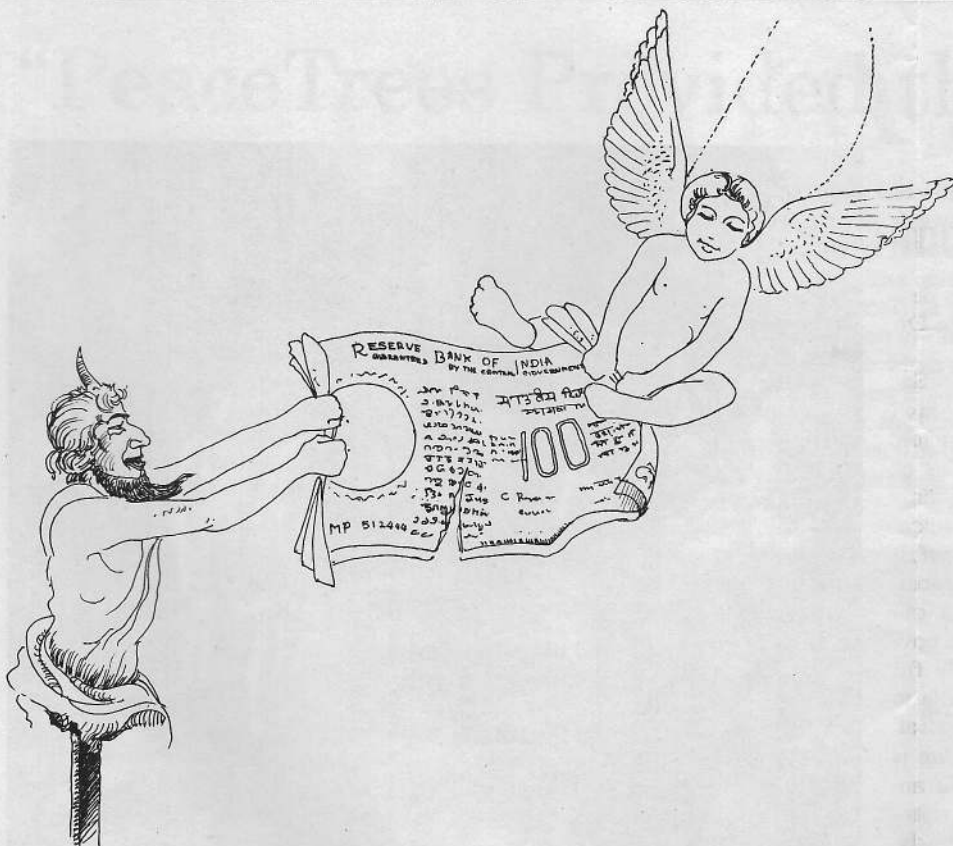
Outer events have at times a way of dovetailing and confirming one's inner concerns. A few weeks before meeting Paolo, I had one of those dreams whose symbolism was intriguing and not immediately evident. I was standing with quite a large group of Aurovilians below Matrimandir. Some dignitaries were visiting the Chamber, and we were awaiting their descent. Suddenly out of the Eastern sky, the Concorde flew in low and circled the Matrimandir twice, as if offering its obeisance. It then banked off in a northeasterly direction, and to my surprise proceeded to land

behind a nearby forest. The only element in the dream at present not part of our physical reality, were some four-to-five-storey apartment buildings just beyond the forest break. The feeling I experienced watching this was of surprise and intense jubilation. The meaning of the dream pursued me for days, during which I was quite identified with the line in the Auroville Charter that states that Auroville will bridge past and future realisations. Finally a week later while discussing the dream with a friend, the key to the Concorde's symbolism—which I felt was of collective and not only personal import—became clear: it lay in its name.

My battered Chamber's Dictionary defines "concord" as a state: of being of the same heart or mind. At the end of our conversation, Paolo remarked that he felt something in Auroville that was akin to a feeling of reconnection to the spirit of '68. Concorde—a symbol of distance bridging par excellence—had its maiden flight in March '69. The construction of Matrimandir began in 1971. Maybe it has taken us 24 years and some long but, perhaps, necessary detours to start consciously identifying with the one point that ultimately unites us behind all our outer differences.

Anchored to the ancient soil of South India, Matrimandir, symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection, cradles the silence, the future's light; bridges the millennia, bridges the worlds.

Roger



impossible to use coercion as a means of control in Auroville. This applies not only to Aurovilians amongst themselves, but also to the relation of Aurovilians to the Auroville Foundation. A clarification is necessary here to understand the matter.

When the Auroville Foundation came into existence, it became the owner of all the research, service and business units which previously had formed part of various independent trusts, societies and other legal bodies. The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation was made responsible to the Indian Parliament for the proper management of all these units. In order to secure such management, the Governing Board, through its Secretary, decided to officially hand back the management of the various units to the unit executives by means of a document called Office Order No 5. That document was very poorly received in Auroville. The unit executives did not appreciate being made officially responsible to an 'outsider' (the Secretary) for an activity which most of them had started with their own money and hard work and had for years already been managing. The legal language of the document, the word 'office order' and many of its conditions and sub-conditions were considered unpalatable and incompatible with the spirit of Auroville. Many executives signed under protest, some have refused to sign at all even now. For the executives of the commercial units the legal situation became even more complicated. They finally were organized into various Trusts, of which they themselves were the trustees, and had to sign an agreement with the Foundation along the lines of Office Order No. 5.

In addition, the Governing Board proposed that a so-called Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) be created, whose main function would be one of control, supervision and management of all assets of Auroville. Auroville was requested to propose 13 Aurovilians as members of this body. The Secretary of the Foundation and the Financial Adviser of the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development of the Government of India were to be permanent ex-officio members of this body. *Ad hoc* rules for the working of the FAMC, detailing topics such as tenure of office of the members and specifying its functions, were drafted.

Reactions to the idea of the FAMC were slow to develop within Auroville. One of the first responses was that the FAMC

should play a double role: one of purely internal functioning as a working group within Auroville without the Secretary's participation; and an official role, when it would function as a legal body of the Auroville Foundation along with the Secretary, and it was on these lines that a group of Aurovilians finally began work as the FAMC. However, after a year of strenuous efforts, the group had to acknowledge that it had not managed to become accepted within Auroville and finally ceased its activities, realizing that the proposed system of management had no chance of success. The community did not succeed in creating a second FAMC. The Chairman of the Gov-

Stuart: "Aurovilians fundamentally resist institutionalization in the form of hierarchical structures"

erning Board, faced with the need to fulfil the financial and administrative responsibilities flowing from the Auroville Act and the Rules and Regulations framed thereunder, wrote to the Auroville Working Committee with the urgent request that the Auroville Community come up with a viable proposal in keeping with the spirit of Auroville for a Funds and Assets Management Committee: "If no agreed proposal emerges, it is always open to the Board to unilaterally appoint a finance body to undertake this work, but that would only be a last resort". The Working Committee however, chose not to take it up again and wrote in the *Auroville News*:

"It has become clear that the way the FAMC was constituted and the role it was supposed to play was unacceptable to a large segment of the community. We have contacted representatives of most bodies dealing with finance in Auroville and have decided to establish the Finance Coordination Group." The Working Committee continues to propose that this group, together with the existing Auroville Board of Commerce and the Larger Development Group (also to be created) cooperate together for the finance and assets management. It adds: "These groups and their interaction with each other should be seen as an experiment and can be improved and reviewed as the need arises." In other words, the solution proposed is of a non-permanent and flexible

character. It still has to be seen if this proposal will work, let alone fulfil the requirements of the Governing Board and the Auroville Foundation Act.

Why does it all not work?

An outsider to Auroville might be surprised to read how often Aurovilians refer to 'Mother', 'Mother's Grace' and 'Mother's Force', and 'the spirit of Auroville' to explain their position. Nearly all Aurovilians take these terms for granted, and strangely enough, this might well be the reason why many of our proposals, though founded in Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's vision, do not work.

In his Master's thesis "The International Township of Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India: The Routinization of Charisma in a Context of an Inner-Worldly Mystical Orientation," sociologist Stuart Leard examines this dilemma. Stuart

spent nearly three years in Auroville studying the key social processes of the township including economic planning between 1988-1990. During this period Stuart became an Aurovilian himself.

His thesis provides interesting reading though parts of it, as might be expected, are not easily accessible for the non-sociologist. It bases itself on the work of Max Weber who distinguishes three types of authority: traditional, rational-legal and charismatic. The first two are common forms; charismatic authority refers to "instances of extraordinary leader-follower relationships in which previously held norms and values are challenged in favour

of those consistent with the vision of the charismatic leader." This type of hierarchy Weber considers transitional; the prolonged ab-

sence or death of a charismatic leader usually creates a crisis for his followers. This could be a crisis of succession but whatever it is, it almost always results in a gradual return to the traditional or a rational-legal type of hierarchic authority.

In conformity with Weber's views, Auroville went through a struggle of succession with the Sri Aurobindo Society after Mother's passing in 1973. But contrary to Weber's expectations, Auroville successfully resisted the effort to establish any kind of hierarchic organization. It not only resisted such an organization then, it has been doing so ever since, both against 'outsiders' and fellow Aurovilians alike. "There is an ongoing orientation in Auroville which is antagonistic to the usual process of 'routinization of charisma'. Routinization is defined as 'the turning of the charismatically initiated process into a more everyday existence,'" writes Stuart. Instead, we find in Auroville an orientation which can be identified as 'inner-worldly mysticism'. This is characterized by devotion to both individual inner development and social involvement; by attempts to fuse spiritual progress and engagement in society. Ideally, the individual's relationship with the Divine determines his or her activity with respect to the physical and social worlds. In Aurovilian terms, it is the fostering of 'Divine Anarchy'. Aurovilians fundamentally resist institutionalization in the form of hi-

erarchical structures, centralization and the concentration of power to the extent that such development would violate their primary inner values. There is a wariness towards patterns of life that could potentially stifle individual and social progress.

How then does Auroville function?

According to Stuart's thesis, Auroville does not function through a system of hierarchy, but through a network form of organization: "We see in Auroville forms of empowerment which, lacking the means of coercion, engender diversity. Moreover, we see that Auroville's value context can support Unity without Uniformity. Auroville's network form of organization is demanding for the residents; without a formal chain of command, decision making is time-consuming and participation is highly variable. But the lack of concern for efficiency has not eroded the effectiveness of the experiment." And he concludes: "The resistance to organization is not a negative act, but rather a positive consequence of the residents holding the values they do. Auroville is not going to let some form of organization take over which would result in harm to it. Aurovilians are prepared to back away from such emergent forms to look for something new, to engage in the process of trial and error and experimentation, until they find an organization that reflects their aspirations."

So much for Stuart's thesis. If we look back at the three problem areas considered, it can be well argued that Stuart's findings apply to each of them. In all three areas, differences of viewpoint based on spiritual orientation prevent implementation of economic systems which are perceived as a potential source of harm. But there are two aspects which Stuart has not discussed: if, as Stuart claims, it is the individual's relationship with the Divine which determines Aurovilian attitudes, the question remains to what extent is this relationship a conscious or unconscious one. And secondly, it is open to doubt if the "backing away from a form of organization that would result in harm" is ultimately for the good of Auroville.

"It is clear that all that has happened had to happen: it could not be otherwise—by the universal determination it had to happen," said The Mother who immediately added "but we can say so only after it has happened, not before. For the problem of the very best that can happen is an individual problem, whether the individual be a nation or a single human being; and all depends on the personal attitude. If, in the presence of circumstances that are to take place, you can take the highest attitude possible—that is, if you put your consciousness in contact with the highest consciousness within reach, you can be absolutely sure that in that case it is the best that can happen to you. But as soon as you fall from this consciousness into a lower state, then it is evidently not the best that can happen for the simple reason that you are not in your very best consciousness..." (Questions and Answers 1930-1931, *Collected Works of The Mother* 3 p. 154)

The question is then how conscious are we as individuals or groups. But there is another saying of The Mother which should be considered in this respect. She once said, in Sep. 1969 that "the city [Auroville] will be built by what is invisible to you The people who have to act as instruments will do so in spite of themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces." Is Auroville economy then run by puppets acting on a divine string?

Carel
(interviews with Alan)

PeaceTrees Auroville 1994

PeaceTrees, Auroville 1994 made its mark as one of the best PeaceTrees programmes ever held. All the people who were involved in it were touched by the love, warmth and unity that the programme generated. Below we reproduce a couple of comments made by the participants about the programme.

I was truly impressed by the honesty and enthusiasm of the young participants, their understanding of ecology, of integrated spirituality and that they could express it so well. What they spontaneously express today took us years of study. The total absence of conflict between them surprised me. The whole programme was carried by love and warmth and a very deep sharing. The programme of PeaceTrees is quite amazing and is going on all over the earth. It is what we need, it is what the earth needs.

Dieter, Peace Partner from Switzerland

Message in a handmade floral card:

To all dear Aurovilians,

The last fifteen days that we have spent here have been one of soul-filling love and peace. Never indeed has an influence crept into us so gently and so wholesomely. We shall cherish forever the all-nurturing spirit of Auroville and each and every one of the magical moments spent here. We thank you for all that you have done to make our stay here a most memorable one and from the depths of our hearts, we wish you a most joyous and blissful New Year.

love,

PeaceTrees contingent staying in "Ami" [the youth community of Auroville]



Planting Trees by the East Coast Road

Seeds for a Better World

PeaceTrees is one of the projects of the Earthstewards Network that gathers together people from different countries to plant trees and in the process "to heal the earth as they heal each other". The very first PeaceTrees Project was held in Auroville, six years back (see AVT No. 3) and brought together youth from the United States, the former Soviet Union and different parts of India. Since then there have been seventeen PeaceTrees Projects held in different parts of the world—in urban ghettos, in endangered wilderness areas, in war-torn countries, and in the so-called 'Third World' countries. Auroville hosted the latest PeaceTrees Project from 18 Dec. '94 to 1st Jan. '95. Rathinam, Aurora and Selvaraj, who were the main organizers of the programme, had themselves attended a PeaceTree project in Washington, D.C. in 1991 (see AVT No. 34). The present programme brought together sixty young people (8 from Auroville and surrounding areas, 12 from the rest of India, and 40 from other countries), aged mainly between 17-22 years and about forty adult members of the Earthstewards Network, called 'Peace Partners', who helped co-ordinate various events.

Yes, one could talk about the two Ivans, the pair of cousins from Croatia and Serbia who, separated by newly-drawn political boundaries, had to travel all the way to Auroville to be with each other. One could talk about the Bosnian who came to live with them in the same community, forgetting that the war was still going on. One could talk about Dave and his efforts to unite the fractured populace of Cape Town, South Africa by building a multi-purpose community park. Or, about Tashi and his desire to indicate Tibet on the world map. Or, about Jana from Estonia and Anjalai from a local village who communicated their feelings largely through smiles for they did not have an adequate command over English. One could talk about all this and much more, and yet the words would still be inadequate to sum up the love, the goodwill, and the intense feeling of fraternity that was generated by the programme, PeaceTrees, Auroville 1994.

The opening ceremony on 18th December was simple, marked just by the ritual lighting of a lamp by some of the PeaceTrees participants and gave little hint of what was to ensue in the following fortnight. The participants had arrived in Auroville just the previous night, and were still tired after their long journey by plane, train and bus. For most, it was their first visit to India and they were not quite prepared for the heat and the lack of material comforts. Also, they seemed wary, being strangers to one another and not having ever been exposed to such a mix of races and cultures. But as they participated in workshops, worked and played, lived and commuted together for two whole weeks, they forgot the differences of country, culture and race to become a single strongly united group of friends resolved to work for peace and for the environment.

Evidently what helped most to build unity among the participants were the team-building processes and the workshops on 'Essential Peacemaking' offered by Danaan Parry and Jerilyn Brusseau in the early part of the fortnight. The workshops, using the approaches of "collaborative listening" and "gender identification" showed the partici-

pants how to resolve conflicts harmoniously. Almost all the participants felt that the workshops led them to come to a better understanding of themselves and hence of one another.

The programme was primarily centered around planting trees in Auroville. Trees were also planted along a stretch of the East Coast Road as a symbolic gesture, as a first step towards the greening of the future highway. In a further step to stop the degradation of the environment, the participants also engaged in cleaning out an ancient temple tank in Periyarmudaliarchavadi, a local village. John, a teenager from USA, who is concerned about the extent to which each individual can pollute the earth, described the effect that their work had on the villagers: "They [the villagers] seemed ashamed that we should clean up their filth. They took the tools away from our hands and insisted on doing the work themselves."

The programme also included work at the construction site of the Solar Kitchen and planting trees in its precincts. It was hard, backbreaking work on a hot day, shovelling sand into pans, lifting up the pans, and pouring it into the foundations. But the work helped the young people to discover that it pays to work as a group: to form a chain to pass the pans from hand-to-hand; and to change places when a certain job gets too tiring. "It is funny," declared Matt, "but even if you start working on your own, people come out to help you. And the energy of the group helps you to keep going, to forget the heat and the fatigue..."

An introduction to Auroville by Alan and Bill, a talk on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother by Aster Patel, visits to the Matrimandir and the Ashram, meetings with Auroville youth and students from the Ashram school, concerts and shows presented by Aurovilians, a "Kris'mish'mas" Fair, a New Year Eve's party, the traditional bonfire and the community breakfast on New Year's Day, and the farewell ceremony which was attended by many Aurovilians allowed the participants a glimpse of the many facets of Auroville. One participant enthusiastically declared that

"the world would truly be an Eden if people followed the example of Auroville".

To get a feel of the local South Indian culture, the participants were taken on a tour to Tiruvanamalai, the Ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and on a visit to the nearby Irumbai village. Meenakshi regaled everyone with mythological stories and hymns about the deities that adorned the walls of the Irumbai temple. The young people also learnt to play local games like "kabbadi", "kho-kho" and "gulli-danda" and to speak some essential Tamil words, "Van-nakam" (Hello), "Nan Unnai Virumbugerain" (I love you) "Nandri" (Thank you).

It was indeed hard to say goodbye after such an intense fortnight of living, working and growing together. On the last day of the year, on the eve of their departure, the participants were required to evaluate in personal terms what the PeaceTrees had meant to them and to delineate future steps that they would take to keep the movement growing. Everyone had tears in their eyes, as they pledged to remember one another and to continue in their own milieu, the "healing work" that they had started in Auroville. There were proposals to host other PeaceTrees programmes, in Palestine, in South Africa, and in Holland this year, in Croatia in 1996 and in Tibet in 1997. Akash, from Auroville, proposed to start an international environmental magazine for the youth called "The Banyan Tree." Some wanted to join the Earthstewards Network to help them in their work. Others planned to teach other children and youth by holding talks and photo exhibitions about PeaceTrees, Auroville. And everyone unanimously agreed to celebrate May 1st as PeaceTrees Day and to plant a tree, wherever they were, on that day. Then, as they stood in a circle, holding hands, for the last time, Jerilyn spoke in moving terms that "they [the youth] were the future; they contained the seed in them for a better world and it was their responsibility to nourish that seed and to let it strike roots and sprout branches throughout the world."

Bindu

"PeaceTrees Provided the Catalyst"

Danaan Parry co-founded the Earthstewards Network, the organization which sponsors "PeaceTrees", in 1980 and has been helping run the programme ever since its first experiment in Auroville in December, 1988. His wife Jerilyn is one of the co-organizers of the project. They are internationally known for their conflict resolution workshops and individual empowerment programmes which have been conducted in many parts of the world.

AVT: The first PeaceTrees programme took place in Auroville 6 years ago. How does the second PeaceTrees in Auroville differ from the first one?

Danaan: There have been some major changes. Over the years, we've become more dedicated to giving the participants real skills to take back with them to their communities. So the conflict resolution element in the programme has increased. We also get each participant to commit themselves now, in front of the whole group, to utilising the skills and experience they've acquired here in a project back in their own community. And another innovation, the 'clans' or small groups which they formed from the first day here, will give continuing support to all their members in carrying out these commitments.

Jerilyn: The urban PeaceTrees programmes, which took place in inner city areas in Washington D.C., Los Angeles and New York, brought together kids from the inner cities with those from all over the world. It was during these programmes that we saw how important the gender issue could be in dealing with conflict. In one programme, everybody was in conflict with each other. So, instead of letting them keep focusing upon racial or generational conflicts, I took the women aside and Danaan took the men aside, and we asked each group to talk about what it meant to be a young woman or a young man in their culture. Then we brought the groups together to share their insights. And we discovered all the conflicts between them had vanished!

Danaan: It's a technique which we've used in trouble-spots all over the world. In other words, to get warring factions to talk, you have to find something more important than the warring. You'll never get Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland to talk about religion right off without a fight. But you can—and we've done it—bring groups of Catholics and Protestants together to talk about what it's like to be a man or a woman in that culture. And once you've achieved a level of trust and communication through this, then you can start dealing with the Catholic/Protestant issue.

What we're saying is that the really deep, charged issues between people often have to do with gender. And that if we are serious about global peacemaking, then gender issues must be addressed.

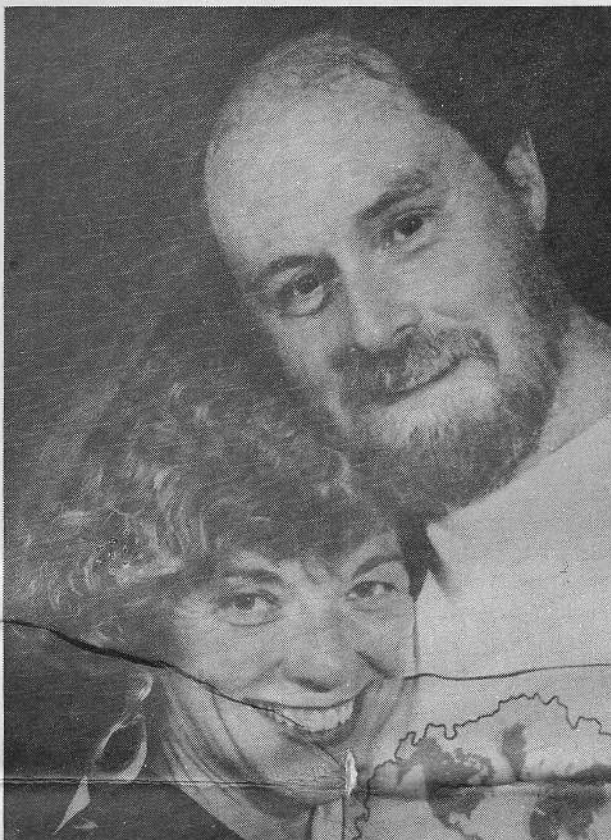
So you're working at a much deeper level now with the PeaceTrees participants?

Jerilyn: Absolutely. And some very moving moments emerged out of this. On the first day, for example, each participant was asked to come up and mark their country on a world map. But then a young man stood up and said, "I'm Tashi from Tibet. My country is not on the map...but I'd like to draw it in." At that moment, the whole room went very

silent. Suddenly, the others had a direct awareness of the Tibetan problem which they'd never had before. And it didn't stop there. Because the Tibetan participants, with the full support of the others, have committed themselves to creating two Tibetan PeaceTrees programmes: one in Dharamsala in 1996, the other in Tibet itself in 1997.

Danaan: Another vignette which stays with me is of a young Croatian woman saying to a young Serbian man, "I could never hurt my friends, and I could never let anybody else hurt my friends. And you'll be my friend for life."

And this is a very important step. Because what we see



Danaan and Jerilyn

leaders of factions doing in trouble-spots all over the world is making their enemies appear less than human so that they can allow themselves and their followers to do horrendous things to them. You'll never get a peace treaty to work unless these dehumanising attitudes have melted first. And that can only happen slowly, as two people at a time make contact and recognise their common humanity.

Did you notice any change over the two weeks in the Auroville youth who participated in this PeaceTrees?

Danaan: What I saw, in at least four cases, was the natural leadership in these young Aurovilians come alive. At the beginning, they were laid-back, "Yeah, yeah, what's all this?" But by the end, they were the leaders in their groups; they were the ones pushing to cut short the tea-break and plant more trees.

It's as if Auroville had prepared them to be someone—but they hadn't quite got it yet. And then Peace Trees provided the final catalyst so they got it!

Jerilyn: I feel that the Auroville kids are very comfortable with matters of the spirit, and that they are really connected to the earth, to nature. They have a natural affinity for that which is wholesome. And this helped other participants to go deeper into themselves, to feel safe in these regions.

The Earthstewards Network, which organizes Peace Trees, was founded in 1980, and since then you've been involved in conflict resolution and environmental restoration programmes all over the world. Are your ideas and approaches more widely accepted today than they were 15 years ago?

Danaan: That's a very difficult question to answer. But in general, in spite of the incredibly good—and unpublished—work that small groups are doing all over, I'd say that the concept of global unity isn't any easier to promote today than it was in 1980. And this saddens me. The dominant picture of peacemaking is still the UN coming in with tanks to stop people killing each other. We keep trying the same old ways to solve problems, even though they don't work. So I think we'll have to learn a lot of lessons the hard way. And this means, for example, that I don't think we'll be able to positively intervene in many of the conflicts in the world today—we'll just have to let them play themselves out, and then help to rebuild something from the ruins. I haven't lost heart. I'm convinced that real change takes place from the grass roots up, from individuals acting upon the realization that they can really make a difference. But this takes time.

AVT: But have we got time? Why not also bring these programmes to governments and high-level decision-makers? Wouldn't this help change things faster?

Danaan: Actually, we do bring programmes to some of these groups. We've just done an Essential Peacemaking programme for staff from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and we've run similar programmes for organizations like IBM. Still, it's true that our emphasis is upon the grass roots—which, from the point of view of funding and much else, makes my work much harder. Why the grass roots? Well, I believe that a natural process of decay happens at the same time as rebirth. And that this decay happens at the top. So I want to be sure that the work I'm doing is not interfering with that natural decaying process. My job, as I see it, is to nurture the new life so that some of the kids who are leaving here today can get on with helping create that future.

For me, too much energy today is going into healing the planet in such a way as to keep it comfortable, to keep it looking the way we want it to look. Whereas, we need to look at what kind of structures, attitudes, are appropriate for the 21st century. In this sense, governments tend to hold hardest to the status quo, to resist change. Which shows me that they will not be the agents for the great changes which have to come.

How far does the PeaceTrees programme reflect your personal paths, your inner growth, at this moment?

Jerilyn: This was the deepest PeaceTrees which I've experienced so far—it's moved me very deeply. During the closing meditation under the Banyan Tree, the candle was handed to me and I thought "There's a doorway inside me to a huge inner experience. And this candle is like a flicker of a crack in that door, inviting me to go in further." I know my life won't ever be the same after being here—I'm going to live it differently now—and I'm so grateful to Auroville for allowing me to understand this.

Danaan: In my life there have been cycles of outer work and inner growth. Right now, I feel I'm at a point where I'm going back inside again. Partly, this is because I'm writing a book, the working title of which is *Knowing*. And to do this, I have to go into that place of 'knowing' which is not a place of 'doing'—something which is very difficult for me! So it feels very good, absolutely appropriate, to be in Auroville at this time—to use this experience as a kind of launching-pad for going inside, for taking up a spiritual practice which I know will not be easy, but which is absolutely necessary, both for myself and for PeaceTrees.

Interview by Alan

Essential Peacemaking Workshop

During the Peace Trees Programme in Auroville, Danaan and Jerilyn, coordinators from the Earthstewards Network, gave a workshop in "Essential Peacemaking" that was open to Aurovilians and visitors. About forty people participated in the day-long session. Danaan and Jerilyn worked out the techniques based on their years of experience doing conflict resolution in various parts of the world. They found that the shared male/female leadership needed for planetary healing requires an open dialogue in a safe environment about miscommunication between women and women, men and men, and between women and men. With tested, simple exercises and a model of interactive listening, enough trust and synergy is developed between people to do effective work locally and globally. These one-day gatherings are not counselling or therapy but directed towards healing and cooperation between and within the masculine and feminine genders in our cultures and around the earth.

This one-day workshop is part of a larger strategy that involves two more steps, a two-day and a three-day workshop, for accrediting trainers who in turn do the one-day workshop and expand the network of essential peace worldwide. Danaan and Jerilyn did these advanced training workshops in a compressed form so that now there are ten accredited trainers in Auroville for conducting Essential Peacemaking Workshops. The workshops are an impressive and dynamic process that definitely help in forming a new world. Bill

AVT: What is the essential role of an architect?

Dirk: "My answer to this fundamental question has changed over the years: At first, I was very influenced by the principles of the Bauhaus School, for whom beauty was secondary to functionality. But then I read the German philosopher Georg Picht who believes that the sense of beauty is actually an instrument planted in us by a higher wisdom; and that this instrument allows us to recognize that which is essential for the evolution of the species. In other words, 'beauty' is that which is negentropic, which is contrary to the movement of increasing disorder we observe in so much of the material universe. Lately, I've gone further still. Because now I'm looking much deeper into the human psyche to try to come up with an architecture which furthers human fulfilment. And this is much more complicated!"

Do examples of such buildings already exist?

"In architecture, you cannot say that any one form is the ideal expression of something. The most important thing is the spirit, the motivation, behind the design. So when we talk about an architecture which helps individuals and societies to achieve their inner aims, I think of those wonderful Gothic cathedrals in Europe which were built with such love and enthusiasm. I also remember visiting a simple little chapel in Sweden which radiated great purity of intention. Matrimandir has this also, as well as a high degree of technical perfection. I'm continually finding new meanings in its

Towards an Architecture of Human Fulfilment

Dirk Bornhorst was for many years Professor of Architectural Design at the University of Venezuela, Caracas. He has written many books, including *Architecture, Science and Tao*, and his internationally acclaimed designs include the revolutionary 'Helicoid' centre, a spiral complex which is constructed around a hill in Caracas. Recently, he spent two weeks in Auroville, as part of a visiting group from the Findhorn Community.

symbolism, but what strikes me is that, through its process and form, it exactly expresses today's search for the Divine within, whereas the Gothic cathedrals—through their soaring spires—focused upon a God in heaven above."

If the spirit behind the design is crucial, what implications does this have for the process of planning and construction?

"It's important to take time. For example, the Helicoid complex which I designed in the middle of Caracas is still not finished after 35 years, and this is a blessing because if it had been finished quickly, certain important changes couldn't have been incorporated in the design. My process has changed radically. When I was young, I was obsessed by the purity of geometrical perfection, and often tried to achieve it in spite of the reservations of those who would live

in my creations! Whereas today I listen very carefully to what people want, I look at the surrounding landscape to see what kind of structure it will accept best, I see what materials are available locally. Then I go into a meditative state, and the shapes spontaneously emerge, sometimes in a few seconds, sometimes longer. Often, they take me completely by surprise. But the critical moments are those of inner balance that lead to a kind of vision."

So architecture is a form of yoga?

"Exactly. You have to constantly empty yourself of your preferences and desires, your baggage. You have to feel that every new building you do is your first, so that it becomes the perfect expression of those individuals who will live there, on that site, in that moment in time. At the same time, I believe that there is a superior intelligence, the archetypal 'thought-substance' of the

universe, which can guide us towards decisions and actions which are of permanent value in the physical realm. And that by quietening ourselves, and by observing beauty in nature, we can enter into resonance with that intelligence. The essence of this process has been defined by Gus Jacacci as 'Divine Grace revealed in natural order used for the planning and enhancement of human fulfilment'."

And Auroville? Architecturally, does it have something to offer, or is it merely a chaos of different conceptions?

"You can't say that a particular Auroville style has evolved yet—but that, as I've already noted, is not a bad thing. I've been very struck by the simple houses of the early years, as in 'Aspiration' and at Johnny's place, because they are perfectly designed to fulfil certain needs while not distracting their occupants from dedicating themselves to something greater—like building the Matrimandir, for example. You are losing this simplicity now. I also see that now you are facing the challenge of designing for a greater density of population, which is part of the natural evolution of a community from the pioneering stage to something more unified. Finally, however, the particular styles you come up with are not nearly so important as the spirit of inner harmony. And it is this, in the context of so many different nationalities and cultures, that I admire most in Auroville."

Interview by Alan

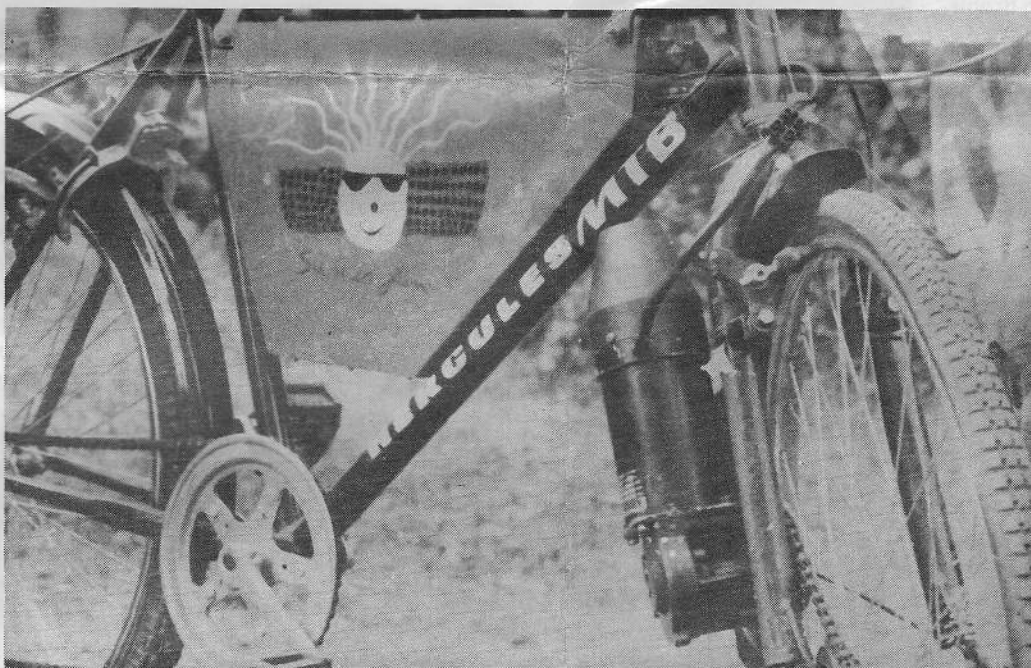


PHOTO ALAN

ELECTRIC BICYCLE GOES TO THE FAIR WITHOUT SWEAT

"SUN IS FUN" is painted across the battery pack on the new prototype electro-bike developed at the Centre for Scientific Research with support from Altec, Aurelec, and Aureka. Carsten organized the team of Stephan, Sönker, and Jörg, students from Germany, who built the bike as part of their diploma studies in a two-and-a-half month crash programme that ended only five hours before their return flight to Germany. The maiden voyage of the electro-bike was from CSR to the Visitors Centre on Christmas eve for the Kris'Mish'Mas Fair. Duly presented at the Fair, many Aurovilians and visitors had the chance for test rides. All test pilots survived and the bike was applauded.

The bicycle, a Hercules MTB bought in Pondicherry, has a compact battery pack under the crossbar and a 24 volt English wheelchair motor on the side of the front fork. The bike

can be pedalled normally, or with assistance from the motor, or driven exclusively by motor power. On level ground, without pedalling, it will go 15 km at a maximum speed of 13 kph. When the batteries are 40% discharged, it is time for the 5 hour recharge. The bike is designed for going to work within a range of 7 km. At work, the cycle is recharged with one normal solar panel (35 watt) and is ready for the trip back home and needs no more charging at home. The charge controller is built into the cycle. This prototype cost Rs. 10,000 (\$333) including the batteries. Anyone ready to do production?

Research continues for more efficient batteries and for an indigenous motor. The sun is fun, especially when it powers you along that sunlit path.

Bill

Through the Net

The downloading of electronic-mail (E-mail) messages to Auroville and uploading of Auroville messages to the world is finally happening. The electronic highway into Auroville isn't fully yet paved but the track exists and is fairly functional. Through the global systems of CompuServe and Internet to the electronic bulletin board in Aurelec, the first communiques are received and sent. This bulletin board is also used occasionally for exchange of information between Aurovilians and could become a very useful tool in education and communication within the community. The Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) does not have direct access to Internet yet. Thanks to Ulli at Aurelec, however, messages marked "Attention: Bill" are being sent to Ulli's E-mail address: 70610.2556@compuserve.com till CSR gets its own E-mail account.

Auroville receives a couple of interesting E-mail communiques from North America. One of them, called *Attempt*, is an electronic newsletter that was started by AuroArindam (E-mail address: Auro.Arindam@qleap.com) as part of his Auroville Liaison Office to help build Auroville. At the end of the Sixties, The Mother sent AuroArindam, along with Jean Maslow, from the Ashram in Pondicherry to Auroville. Following is an excerpt from an article titled "Yoga Primer: Yoga is a Process" that appeared in Vol. 2, Issue 1 (Jan 1995) of *Attempt*.

"Buying a computer does not assure an end result. One must learn to open an application or process. Yoga is the same. It is not enough to read the User's Manual, you have to turn on the computer and do something

(continued on page 7)

with it. Reading about the process [of yoga] is not enough. You must start the process."

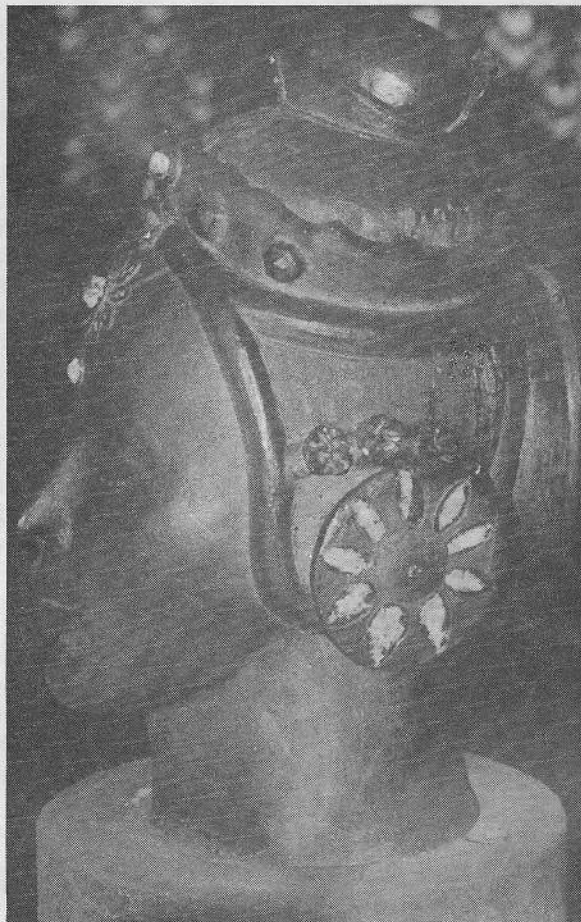
The other initiative is an "on-line sangha" that electronically meets and discusses Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*. This newsgroup is coordinated by David Hutchinson from California. (E-mail add: dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu). A separate article by David Hutchinson, titled "All Together Now," detailing how Internet can be used for collective spiritual benefit, was forwarded to Bill through E-mail by AuroArindam. Here are some excerpts from "All Together Now":

"The followers of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy now have the opportunity to work together as never before, via the Internet. What is the Internet? It is an electronic network that spans the globe, a global tool that can be used for people to come together...At the present time there are estimated to be 25 million people using the Internet...

"The Internet is remarkably benign, because it has so far been a cooperative creation among thousands of people whose main interest is the open exchange of information. The Net exemplifies the virtues of the higher mind—tolerance, flexibility, universality, inclusion of the individual within the whole....The Net has the capacity for worldwide nearly instantaneous communication. The Internet is a metaphor for the co-existence of unity and diversity, for the Oneness of all humankind....

"What will this connectedness mean in the future? As individuals we wake to the truth of interconnection gradually, through years or lifetimes. No person, no community, no nation is alone. To the extent that we wake to this truth, we feel universal compassion and the higher mind starts to act more openly. The spiritual truth of universality now has a reflection in the Internet; we can use the metaphor (and the technology) to transform our lives.... We have a responsibility to open ourselves to that higher force, to give it a voice, to allow it to work through this (technological channel) that has been created.

"For all the exchange of information and material benefits that we are gaining through the Net, the spiritual benefits can be much greater. The Internet is an invitation to participate in the interconnectedness of the Spirit, here and now."



Mahalakshmi, sculpture by Kratu

BRIEF NEWS

Auroville Information Directory 1995

The new, completely updated Auroville Information Directory, published by the Auroville Communication Centre, is now available. It offers concise information on many aspects of Auroville, including organization, population, communities, map, services, working groups and commercial units, guest-house facilities, telephone numbers, construction, renewable energy applications, publications, and much, much more. Copies in the new, user-friendly half-size format are available at Auroville Boutiques, price Rs. 75. The Directory is also available by post: in India, Rs. 85, abroad \$4, 2.50 pounds sterling, DM 6. Cheques should be made out to 'Auroville Fund', specifying Auroville Communication Centre, CSR.

Sculpture Exhibition

From the 18th of Dec. '94 to 7th Jan. '95, Aurovilians were treated to a sculpture exhibition at the Centre for Indian Culture (CIC). Kratu exhibited over thirty pieces of sculptures including heads, figures, vases and friezes. These pieces, the majority of which was the work of recent months, were mainly in unglazed or partially glazed clay and terracotta. The main attraction was Kratu's depiction of the four powers of The Mother—Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati.

Kratu has exhibited his work earlier in Pondicherry and in Bombay but had been unable to hold an exhibition in Auroville until now due to the lack of a suitable exhibition hall. Vaya helped with the interior decoration, creating platforms for the sculptures out of exposed bricks, selecting and arranging potted plants, in short, transforming the round CIC building into an elegant exhibition hall.

Also displayed on the walls were exquisite, handstitched quilts, in a variety of colours and patterns. These quilts, designed by Uma and Pushkar, are marketed by the unit "Grazia."

Exhibitions by Vahula

Soft pastels of young girls dreaming, groups of children busy with their schoolwork, cows sedately grazing, landscapes of South India shimmering in the heat—these are some of the subjects Vahula has portrayed in pen, pencil, and pastel crayon. This delightful collection of 30 drawings is in Pitanga and another, similar, exhibit has been installed at the Information Center until the end of January.

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The contribution for the next 12 issues of AUROVILLE TODAY in India is Rs. 150, for other countries Rs. 750, Can. \$ 30, French F. 150, DM 47, It. Lira 35,500, D.Gl. 52, US \$ 25, U.K. £ 14. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. **Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund**, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

Addresses of Auroville International centres:

AVI Deutschland, c/o M. Soerensen, Bleicherstrasse 60, 28203 Bremen, Germany.

AVI España, c/o Arjun and Anandi, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain

AVI France c/o Satyakam Karim, 14, rue du Colonel Grancey, 4500 Champigny Sur Marne, France.

AVI Italia, c/o Emanuele Scanziani, Via Mazzini 19, 24100 Bergamo, Italy.

AVI Nederland, c/o M. Berden, Lobelialaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag, The Netherlands.

AVI Canada, c/o Denis Henley, 847 Chemin Perry, Aylmer (Québec), J9H 5C9 Canada.

AVI Sverige, c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borgholm, Broddeb, S-59700 Atvidaberg, Sweden.

AVI U.K., c/o M. Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W.Sussex, PO18 8SP, U.K.

AVI USA, c/o Jack Alexander, P.O.Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA.

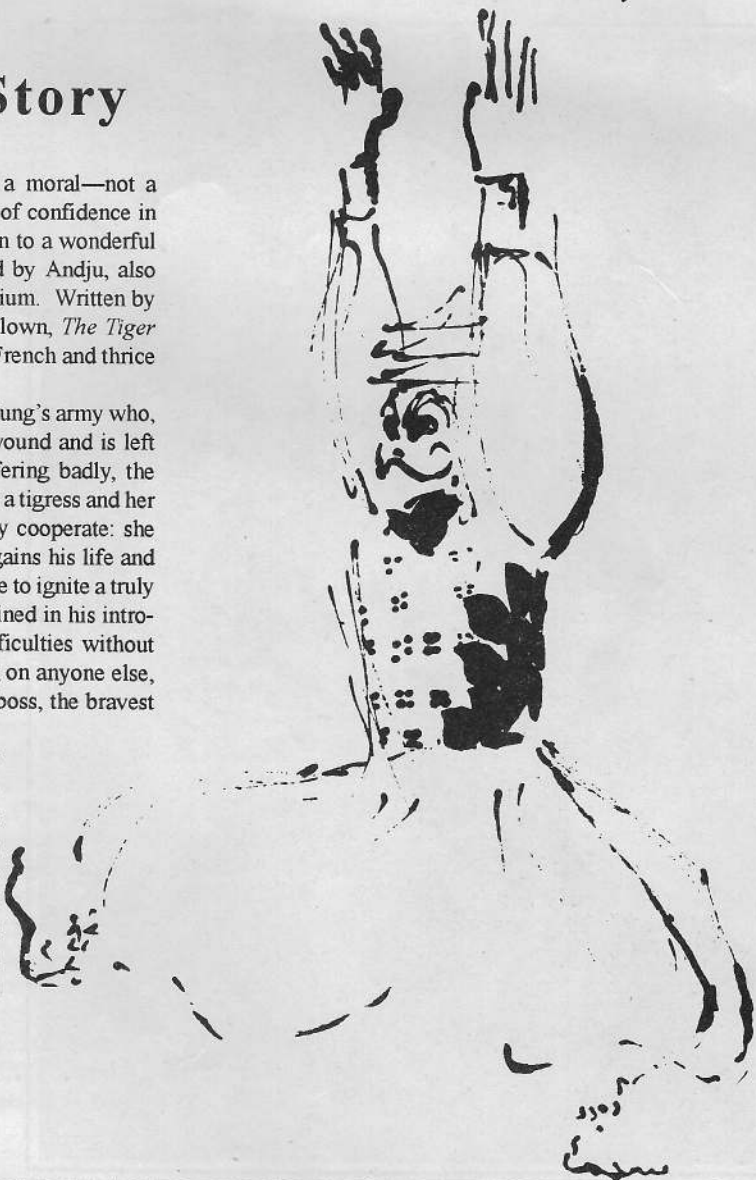
THEATRE: The Tiger Story

"The Tiger Story is a contemporary fable. It has a moral—not a conventional one, but one that is full of life and hope, of confidence in humanity." This was part of the text of the introduction to a wonderful one man/mask show performed by Toma and directed by Andju, also known as the Piccolo Kake Buke Ensemble from Belgium. Written by Dario Fo, a famous Italian playwright/actor/modern clown, *The Tiger Story* was presented five times in Auroville—twice in French and thrice in English.

Set in China, the story is about a Soldier of Mao Tse Tung's army who, while fighting Chiang Kai Chek's forces, receives a wound and is left behind by his companions. Undaunted, although suffering badly, the Soldier finds shelter in a cave which is also inhabited by a tigress and her cub. Through his encounter with this fierce beast (they cooperate: she licks his wound clean and he cooks their meals) he regains his life and rejoins human society. He now "has the tiger" and is able to ignite a truly revolutionary spirit in his companions. As Toma explained in his introduction, "having the tiger" means facing extreme difficulties without giving in and, perhaps more importantly, never relying on anyone else, not even the most respected leader, the most efficient boss, the bravest commander.

The show took place at Transition School, under rainy skies. Toma's performance was riveting. Using a *com-media dell'arte* mask created by Amleto Sartori, the actor escaped the confines of his own face to become Everyman—by turns foolish, full of pride and scared to death. Then, courageous, resourceful and able to use his common sense—in other words, quite human! Toma also brought to life the tiger and her cub whose foolish behaviour the Soldier must restrict with a well-aimed blow.

It was a delightful and engaging performance very much appreciated by everyone.



AUROVILLE TODAY

By
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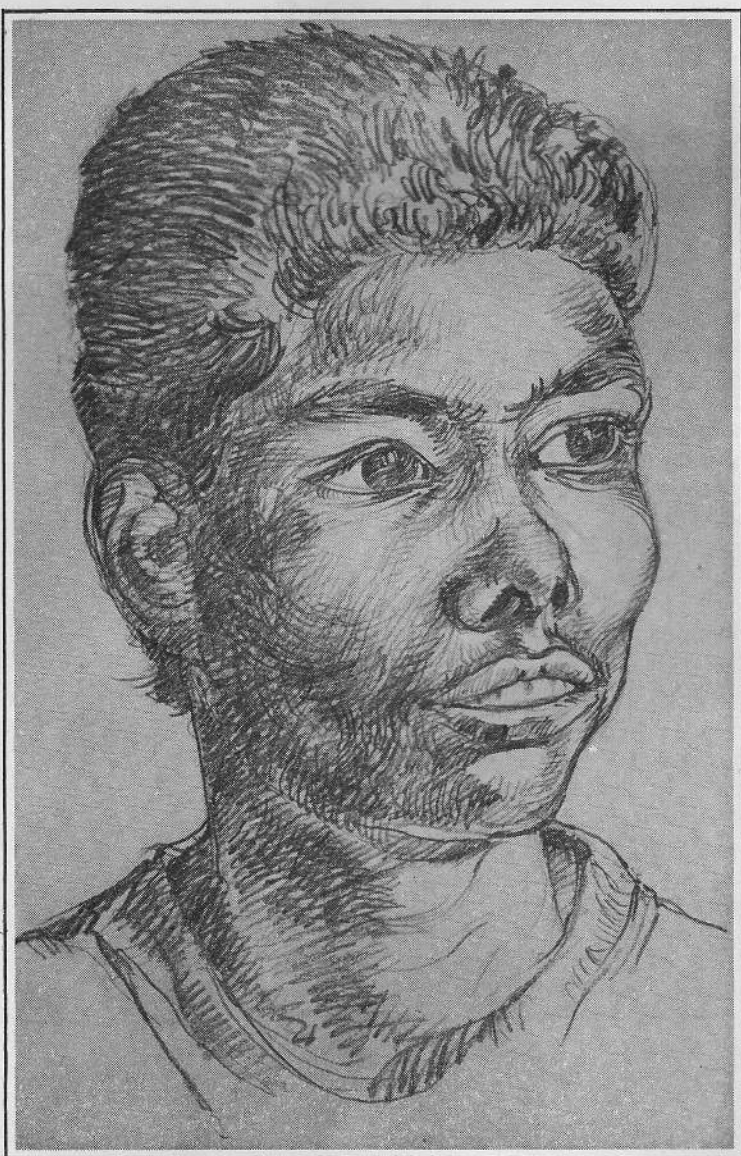
ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE



February 1995

Number Seventy-Three

In this issue (8 pages):
A talk with Paolo Tomassi; The Economy;
Peace Trees Programme; Brief News and a Portrait



Thanajayan, a portrait by Vahula

PORTRAIT

Thanajayan

How can I sum up my life in 1994 (and now we are already two months into the new year)? It is like trying to catch a dozen pigs in a pen—they are slippery and squeally and determined not to be caught. However, one person, with some cajoling, has accepted my request to sit for a portrait, if I promise to be quick and amuse him with music on the tape player. Thanajayan sits. So, while Thanajayan sits for his portrait, I will entertain him with a recreation of the story of how we met and start with the music of *10,000 Maniacs* on the tape player.

I first saw Thanajayan when I was working three years ago at Pitanga Hall. It was summer, and my friend Thenmurji, the singing amma, had asked for English lessons. On Saturday. After work. So every Saturday after work we would sit outside Pitanga and write the alphabet and talk in our "little Tamil-little English" way. Then up popped a skinny kid with a big smile to bother us and look over Thenmurji's shoulder so that finally I asked "Would you like to join us?" and needless to say he did (like to) and he did (join us). This was Thanajayan. Pushy. Demanding attention. Alive.

He has just left the tape player playing and two cassettes are without boxes and where is Thanajayan (but I leap ahead of myself) Do all teenagers have the power to disappear and reappear at will and without warning?

So there we were, Thenmurji, Thanajayan and me, all three of us every Saturday learning English until I stopped working at Pitanga and lost track of Thanajayan, and eventually Thenmurji stopped coming to my house for English lessons because she ran away and got married (but that is another portrait).

The next time—well, I saw Thanajayan on the road and waved as I rode by (big wave, big smile from the boy, slightly taller now) until—it was Pongal time two years ago and I was wandering through the Kuilapalayam village fair where you can buy shiny plastic bangles and sticky, sweet pastries and lose your hard-earned rupees at games of chance and listen to music and watch the women dance and suddenly—there was Thanajayan again, grabbing my hand and pulling me from stall to stall, plying me with cold drinks and spicy peanuts. Was this the day he showed me where he lived? He was sleeping in the cowshed of his uncle who employed him as a stone-carver, creating Ganesh statues and incense burners in a dim, dingy workshop on the road that goes past Aurelec. Except he couldn't work with the stone anymore, too much dust and he had trouble with his breathing after four years of that. He wanted very much to continue his English lessons and could he please, please come to my house? "When?" "My day free Sunday!" "Oh great. Yeah. Okay." So we made a date for next Sunday (my free day also) and he showed up at Aspiration with a friend, still grinning.

It's cold tonight and he's not back yet and the tape is still playing "Trouble Me". I hope he is wearing long pants.

So, then there were two boys—Thanajayan and Boobalan. And every Sunday we would talk and write a little English and take walks around Aspiration and look at

trees and flowers. Boobalan is more advanced in his English but no matter, they are enjoying the contact and so am I.

Pause. 10,000 Maniacs have stopped singing and Thanajayan has appeared and there is a big discussion about tapes without boxes and boxes without tapes. And he is not wearing long pants. Ah me.

So I went out for three months in the summer of '93 and when I came back I was not alone. I had a friend with me who fascinated Boobalan and Thanajayan with his super-duper computer/video game/music machine and I found my English lessons competing with the latest in electronic marvels. So for a while it was A B C tack tack tack and Thanajayan and I went one Sunday to Pondy and I bought him a T-shirt and a long-sleeved shirt. He was very particular about colour and pattern and style.

Then I left my hut in Aspiration to take care of Simone's house in Grace. Thanajayan's eyes lit up when he came to visit and saw the place, a charming keet house with a fridge and lots of room. "Why don't you come and visit me on the weekends?" I asked. "Okay, but now my friend is sick and I have to go to Edayanchavadi." So I didn't

see him for a couple of weeks, but then his friend got better and Thanajayan came back and told me some more about his life.

10,000 Maniacs have stopped singing and we put on Peter Tosh and the evening light is fading and the portrait is almost done.

It seems he was now sleeping in the workshop of his uncle and there had been some quarrels and he wanted to leave that place and come to Auroville. He was coming for English lessons and helping a bit with my moped when it needed repairs and we did get along. His parents were dead and he was a sweet kid in spite of all the rotten things that had happened to him, but was I ready for a teenage boy—full-time—in my life?

So we talked about this and was he ready to leave the village and come to Auroville and what did that mean to him. "I like Auroville. It is a peaceful place. I want to help [bring] peace." And he asked me, "Do you have anyone? Family?" "No," I replied, "I have no brothers and sisters and my parents are dead. An aunt and uncle, some cousins in California, but..." "Good," he said, "I have also no mother, no father. That means we belong together." Well, his logic was inescapable, but I needed some help so I put the question at the feet of Mother who told me to open my heart. And in this door walked Thanajayan who has been here ever since.

That was in June of 1994 and now the light is almost gone, we have switched to *Hall and Oates* on the tape player and Thanajayan must decide whether he wants a peanut butter and banana sandwich (toasted) for supper. Or not. So here we are in 1995, still together after six months and lots of adjustments on both sides. Can a Tamil boy from a small village in South India live happily with an Aurovilian theatre director from the jungle of New York? We ask this question every day and the answer is still "Yes."

Jill

Can a Tamil boy from a small village in South India live happily with an Aurovilian theatre director from the jungle of New York?