

# Auroville Today

NOVEMBER 2001, No.154

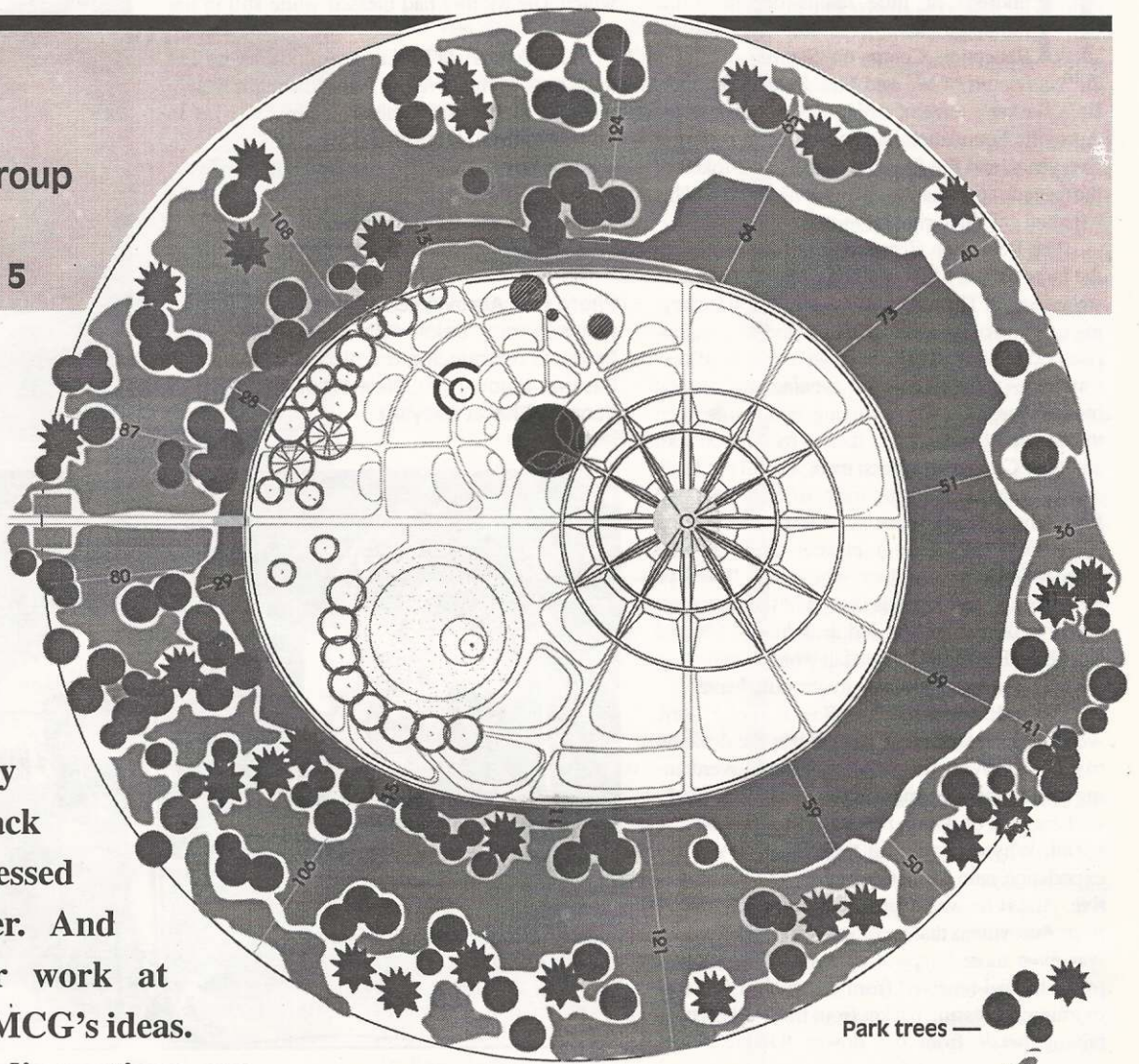
## SPECIAL THEME: Matrimandir

- The process of work reorganisation
- Interview with Matrimandir Co-ordination Group
- Safety aspects need consideration
- "I am working for The Mother" pages 1, 4, 5

The Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, is close to the heart of many Aurovilians. This much was evident from the large turnout of the community at the series of meetings called to discuss the work reorganisation at the Matrimandir.

The issues raised at the meetings, both by the architect Roger Anger and by the Matrimandir Co-ordination Group (MMCG) were multi-faceted and complex. Many in the community strongly disapproved of the policies of the MMCG and their lack of communication with the community. Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the designs of Roger Anger. And some Aurovilians who recently laid down their work at Matrimandir find fault with both Roger's and the MMCG's ideas.

While meetings to reorganise the work at Matrimandir continue, we present a few perspectives on this complex issue: an interview with the MMCG, the views of Vladimir and Andrej who both recently resigned from their work at Matrimandir; and an overview of the meetings held in the past few weeks.\*



Map of the Matrimandir area that shows the lake around the Oval as has been agreed upon by all parties after the mediation of Dr. Subash Khashyap, member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. (see page 4) The indication of the trees is only illustrative and does not correspond to the ground reality.

## The process of work reorganisation

The month of October 2001 has been characterised by a large number of hastily-called meetings held to discuss the work progress at the Matrimandir and the need for reorganisation.

The Governing Board's decision to redirect both Roger Anger's complaint about the lack of progress in the work at the Matrimandir and the progress report of the Matrimandir Co-ordination group (MMCG) to the Working Committee for consideration by the Residents' Assembly [see AVToday # 153, October 2001] kicked off a series of general and other meetings. The first meeting was held on September 24th. In the period of four weeks, it was followed by not less than nine other meetings.

### The meeting processes

The General Meeting of September 24th did little more than make people aware of the nature of the problems and of initial proposals to solve them. Roger Anger's complaint stated that there had been insufficient progress at Matrimandir, and that a number of people had stopped working at Matrimandir due to problems with the MMCG. He proposed to reorganise the construction work by creating separate working groups, each headed by a person qualified in the respective field, and to abolish the present system where a small group of people (the MMCG) is empowered to decide on all aspects of construction, decoration and fitting out "in view of their lack of competence and qualifications." He described the present situation as de-motivating.

The MMCG responded to this letter in the meeting. Acknowledging that differences of opinion on design aspects of the Matrimandir and its

gardens had blocked positive co-operation, the MMCG invited the Aurovilians to make a community decision on the issues under dispute. It said that Roger Anger is not properly oriented toward the importance of the gardens as expressed by The Mother, and that the disagreement on this issue had also blocked the resolution of other issues. The Aurovilians who recently had stopped working at Matrimandir did not speak up in the meeting. But due to the haste with which this meeting had been called, the proposals were not really addressed.

A second meeting called by the those supporting Roger's proposal for a work reorganisation, was – once again in haste – called 6 days later, on September 30th. A work chart was presented, identifying 15 work areas, and a proposal for reorganisation was read out. This proposal, once accepted, would imply the replacement of the MMCG by a Matrimandir Completion Team, consisting of the co-ordinators of the various areas. The former MMCG members were invited to join any of the new working groups. However, as none of the MMCG members were present in this meeting, little headway was made.

Then the Working Committee (WC) and Executive Committee (EC) together decided to call for two meetings at once: a general meeting to further discuss the proposed re-organisation was called on October 7th, and a meeting of the Residents' Assembly on October 15th, to ratify any resolutions which were agreed upon in the

previous general meeting. The call for a Residents' Assembly meeting was made to find a speedy solution of the problem. In fact, however, it amounted to a circumvention of the accepted principle that Residents' Assembly meetings be called two weeks in advance with a clear agenda of the topics for decision, so that the residents have time to make up their minds. The call went equally against the nascent understanding that meetings of the Residents' Assembly, as decision making bodies, are unsuitable as many people do not attend those meetings, and that they should be replaced by referendums if consensus cannot be reached.

The meeting of October 7th however failed to realise its objective. No final decision on the reorganisation proposal could be reached, many questions for clarification needed to be answered and the proposal was consequently sent back to the organisers of the September 30th meeting for refinement. At the same time, the combined WC/EC decided on a new general meeting to be held three days later on October 10th.

### Call for unity

While the initial meetings repeated much of the old experience in which differences of opinion were strongly expressed, the meeting of October 10th provided something new. Stressing the need for unity and harmony, long-time Aurovilians said they were fed up with division and strife, with the inability or plain unwillingness to resolve prob-

lems together. "To replace one group with another won't solve anything," "I won't vote for someone against someone else," "We have come here to manifest the Sprit of Auroville, unity in uniformity," were some of the observations voiced in the meeting. "The urgency is not to complete the Matrimandir at all costs, but to build unity. We should all try to see the conflicts as something from the past and take the opportunity to transform this in something new – united around the soul of Auroville, the Matrimandir" was the strong call made. There was agreement that this type of meeting was more a brainstorming session than a process of refining a specific proposal or for taking a final decision. It was therefore accepted that all concerned Aurovilians sit together in a spirit of goodwill and examine the various aspects of the problem with an inclusive attitude. A group would be formed to study the issues involved, and it was decided that the proposed meeting of the Residents' Assembly would be postponed.

However, this was not to materialise. Shortly after the meeting of October 10th, a petition signed by more than 83 people was presented to the WC/EC with the request that the Residents' Assembly be re-instated. The group calling wished to present their re-written proposal for the creation of a Matrimandir Completion Team, consisting of the co-ordinators of the now 20 (instead of the previous 15) work areas.

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\* Unfortunately this issue does not carry the views of Roger Anger as he did not agree to the publication of his interview.

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# Farewell Bala Baskar

On October 20th, 2001, the Auroville community waved goodbye to Mr. N. Bala Baskar in the Visitors' Reception Center with choir songs, dances, cabaret and a speech.

Hundreds of little lamps decorated the buildings and trees of the Visitors Reception Centre on Saturday October 20th in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Bala Baskar. Mr. Bala Baskar's term of office as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation had ended after a period of five years, and the farewell party was a token of the respect, appreciation and love which he and his wife had gained during his term in Auroville.

The Reception Centre was overflowing with the large crowd of Aurovilians who had come to say goodbye. The audience was packed, the carrying capacity of the rooftops was tested by unauthorised occupation, while on stage a variety of performances were given. The evening was opened by the Auroville Choir singing two songs; then there were Bharat Natyam dances by After School and New Creation students; there was a Tamil folk dance by senior students from After School and Last School, and a dance by senior students from New Creation. After a cabaret show by the Akademik Genius Brothers, whose ditty 'Bye Bye Bala Baskar' reflected the mood of the house, on behalf of the community Judith addressed Mr. and Mrs. Bala Baskar with heartfelt words, expressing the community's regret that they would leave.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bala Baskar spoke a few words. Mr. Bala Baskar recalled that the decision to go to Auroville five years ago meant overcoming doubts and going against the advice from well-wishers, one of whom had said "But you are my friend. Why do you want to go there?" Yet, the experience, said Mr. Bala Baskar, had been positive. And if he was happy with the warm wishes from Aurovilians that accompany his departure, he was even more happy with a small unexpected token he had received from a casual visitor that morning: a blessing packet from the Mother, containing petals from the flower 'Divine Love'

which The Mother had blessed while still in her body.

Then Mrs. Bala Baskar spoke, expressing her happiness having lived in Auroville and giving a pledge that they would always help Auroville to the best of their abilities.

"Until we meet again may God hold you in the palm of His Hand" was the farewell song of the Auroville choir to a remarkable couple who have been of great help to Auroville's unfolding.

Photo top: Auroville Choir singing the farewell song. Below left: Akademik Genius Brothers announcing the ditty 'Bye Bye Bala Baskar'. Below right: New Creation children dancing Bharat Natyam.



PHOTO: PINO



## A Vote of Thanks

On behalf of the Auroville community, Judith addressed Mr. and Mrs. Bala Baskar and their son Suchin.

Mr. Balabaskar,  
Mrs. Balabaskar, Suchin,

It is just five years ago since I was honoured to stand more or less in this same place and make the speech of welcome to you when you first arrived. I take it as a great honour to be asked this evening to make the speech of thanks and farewell on the occasion of your leaving us, though I suspect it is meant to be more of a punishment than an honour; an obligation to eat my former words in public.

It hardly seems possible that it is five years since you arrived for as the saying goes, "time flies when you are having a good time." There is no doubt that we would all feel very happy if by some magic another five years, at least, could be added. And why should you go at all? To us you all seem so much members of our family and we are very sad to see you leave.

At the same time it feels like a long time ago. It seems strange today to remember that Auroville at the time of your arrival was reeling from the impact of the expulsion and threatened expulsion of some of its residents and that on that occasion I spoke out strongly about our apprehensions of the roles of the Auroville Foundation and the Secretary to the Foundation in the life of Auroville and Aurovilians. But if Auroville was in a state of unrest and apprehension, you and your family came bearing the much greater grief of the loss of your son. These five years, I believe, has brought healing to us all. On that occasion, you said you hoped that when you left people would think as well of you as they were saying then. Mr. Balabaskar we think so much

much more highly about you now.

Mr. Balabaskar, you have managed to give a very humane and gentle face to the bureaucratic tasks that you came to perform. It is a testimony to the personal qualities that you have brought to the role of Secretary that the preoccupations and fears of those days have so much receded that today the Auroville Foundation is a widely respected part of our collective life and the Secretary is seen as a trusted friend and helpmate.

We have seen on so many occasions that, while discharging your administrative duties, you have consistently shown the spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act, which lays down that the residents of Auroville must be given the freedom to organize and develop Auroville. Rather than taking the simple expedient of administrative orders in some difficult situations, you have patiently sought to find consensus solutions so that we could learn the difficult art of self-regulation. I would further say that on many occasions it is you who have maintained the spirit of Auroville. While we have, each in our corner, been battling for the Truth, it is you who have reminded us of our ideal of human unity and offered us the higher solution to which we could all agree.

We have so much appreciated your simplicity as well as your deep sense of humour. Indeed it must have been only your innate capacity to see the humorous side of things that helped you not to take offence on occasions where other people might have. In fact the only occasion I can remember you taking offence was when a new and rather over diligent Working Committee tried to regulate the access of the other residents to you. For one of your great gifts to us

has been accessibility. Anyone wanting to see you only had to knock on the door and pop their head round to be greeted with a welcoming, "Come in, come in." And how many of us and how often have we popped into your office as it has become more and more the first reaction when faced by any kind of administrative problem to say, "Go and ask Mr. Balabaskar."

We are also very grateful for your tireless efforts to present the positive face of Auroville to the officials you have had to deal with at all levels of Government, local and central. We are quite aware that you have had at times to face awkward questions about various aspects of Auroville's life and we know that you did your very best to protect Auroville in all circumstances.

At the same time you have helped us to conform to many of the legal requirements that somehow we had managed to avoid when Auroville was smaller and more informal. By your willingness to explain things clearly to us and by your mediation with the relevant authorities to be gentle with us, you have helped us to swallow some rather large bureaucratic pills relatively painlessly.

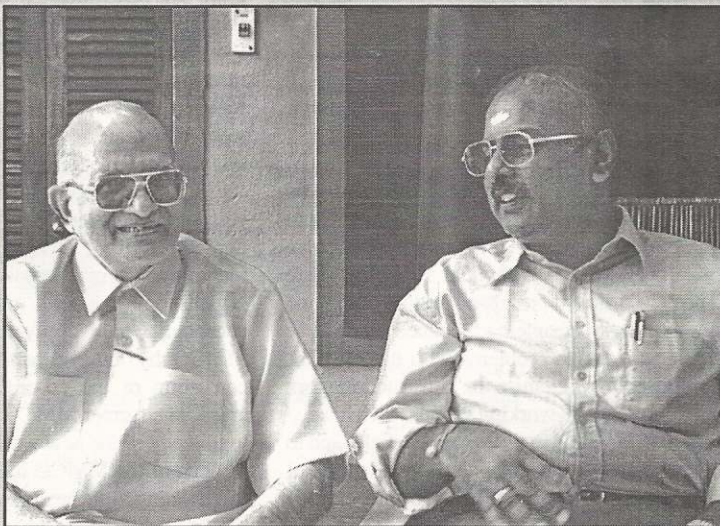
I am personally also filled with genuine admiration that as a senior officer in the Indian Administrative Service, you are able to carry and convey the inner spirit behind the work. It is this capacity in yourself and some other officials of the Indian Government that is one of the characteristics that makes India such a very special country, where despite all the problems of the modern world, Her dharma as the spiritual leader of the world still shines through.

Mr. Balabaskar, your presence in

Auroville over the last five years has been a blessing and a grace and we are very deeply grateful. Your tenure here will always stand out in Auroville's history as one of the happier times. We wish you and your family all the very best for the future, you in Chandigarh, Mrs. Balabaskar

keeping the home fires burning in Chennai and Suchin in his studies and future career. You will be sadly missed. We all want you to consider Auroville as a home away from home and please come and see us whenever you can. The welcome mat is always out for you."

On September 29th, Dr. Kireet Joshi, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, heaped praise on Mr. Bala Baskar. "During his tenure Mr. Bala Baskar has helped Auroville in many ways to further develop itself. Instead of acting as king, as so many I.A.S. officers are used to do, Mr. Bala Baskar has been acting as



servant of the community, working hard to harmonise viewpoints. In so doing he has been opening himself up to become a receptacle of the Divine Grace, for only when supported by a supreme Grace acting from above can one deal with the situation in Auroville in the way he has done.

I have to congratulate him on his remarkable achievement and want to thank him for his generous self-abnegation in agreeing to serve a longer term in Auroville than was originally foreseen," said Kireet. And he asked Mr. Bala Baskar always to remember the love and gratitude of all the members of Auroville and the Governing Board and not to sunder his connection but to keep in touch.



# "We will miss you"

**Mr. N. Bala Baskar I.A.S. has been the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation since October 24th, 1996. His original term of office was three years, it has been extended twice. How was his experience as senior civil servant working in the Auroville atmosphere?**

**AVToday:** Mr. Bala Baskar, you are known to have strong views about what's happening in Auroville and how it could happen better...

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Yes, like every Aurovilian I also have strong views on many things...

**AVToday:** ...but what is remarkable is that you have never chosen to impose those views. Why didn't you do it?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** For two reasons. One is that the Auroville Foundation Act does not envisage that anything should be imposed either by the Secretary or the Governing Board. The other is a purely pragmatic reason. If you want to effect a change in the administrative functioning, it never helps to impose it all of a sudden, it has to be introduced slowly for the same to be accepted. I think that I have achieved many things in this fashion rather than dictating the ways in which something has to be done.

**AVToday:** Can you give an example?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Take the recommendations for the issuing of visas. The Government had written that visa recommendation should not be issued by the Auroville community through its Visa Service. The Auroville community felt very strongly that it should be sending the recommendations and that it should not be left to the Foundation. It took a long time to convince them, but when they saw that things were working out well, they no longer had any reason for objections. This has resulted in a very smooth cooperation: the visa service sends me a recommendation letter on the basis of which I return them my recommendation. It happens that we disagree at times, and in those cases there is a dialogue and I explain the reasons. It has worked out beautifully.

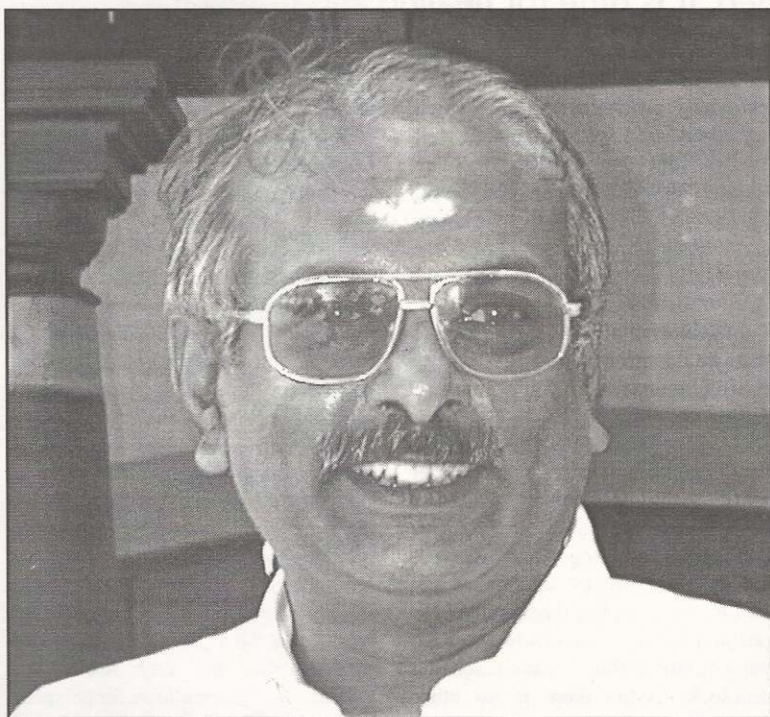
Similarly, I have been working on a system to replace that much objected-to Office Order # 5. It has become clear to all that some type of document is necessary to transfer authority from the Foundation to the units and trusts. We have created a large number of pretty independent trusts, and some of these trusts have a large number of units. But there is not much of a connection between the units and the trustees. The units have been grouped under the trusts for reasons of administrative expediency, the unit executives function independently from the trustees and the trustees in fact prefer not to take responsibility for the units, their ways of functioning or their losses. But some way of assigning responsibility needs to be found, so in the Funds and Assets Management Group (FAMC) we are working to find a solution for the problem, taking into account all perspectives as well as the legal necessities.

**AVToday:** Contrary to your predecessors, you have had a regular interaction with Aurovilians by your participation in the FAMC. How did you experience those meetings?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** I see the FAMC meetings as important occasions for interaction with representatives of many working groups. I think this interaction has been beneficial for both sides, for us to better understand the difficulty the community faces, and for them to get instant feedback from us, including our assessment of possible outside responses to the problem. We have been able to solve or anticipate many problems across the table. It has become an essential point for interaction for us as well as for the Aurovilians.

**AVToday:** You have always stressed on the need for the community to get itself organised...

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** The community, in fact, has a lot of power. But unless



there is some kind of framework in which this power is exercised, it will remain difficult for the community to assert its will. Some framework of regulations is necessary. Someone who wants to have a decision taken should know that framework. Clarity should be there for each individual. The absence of a framework will lead to mistrust and to people seeking other ways to solve their problems such as contacting me as Secretary with the request that I intervene in a situation. Very often I had to tell people that it is not my role to take this kind of decision. Other instances are when representatives of working groups come and ask me to act on their behalf. My question is always: "How am I to know that their decision is in accordance with the will of the community expressed in a resolution of the Residents' Assembly of Auroville?" So I feel very strongly that a framework is necessary for Auroville's own good. Some individuals think that rules imply a limitation of individual freedom. But individual freedom is completely compatible with a set of rules laid down for the community, and I have the impression that an increasing number of Aurovilians already agree with this view. The work done by the Unity Committee with their so-called 'Divine Anarchy' document describing such a potential framework shows that there is more acceptance. I do feel that a Divine nature can certainly sustain anarchy. But I do not quite see how an anarchic nature can lead one to the Divine. That is perhaps why Mother put 'Divine' before 'anarchy'.

**AVToday:** When you first talked about the need for regulations, you stressed that without them the Government would never step out of Auroville. Do you consider the Government stepping out of Auroville as feasible and desirable?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** I think it is feasible, though it won't be very easy. You would have to give intimation to the government that you are capable of managing everything on your own, and that point you haven't yet reached. But I doubt whether it would be beneficial for Auroville at the present moment. The presence of the government gives many types of protection and facilitates many things, which you may not realise. Without the governmental umbrella, the Auroville Foundation may find it difficult to get exemption from paying income tax, for example.

Instead, Auroville should look at the present situation as a tool for progress. For example, Auroville hardly made

any use of the goodwill of the members of the various Governing Boards and International Advisory Councils to further Auroville's cause. Dr. Swaminathan, the previous Chairman of the Governing Board, for instance, was ready to find donors for Auroville's projects and he gave many hints to people in this direction. But except for the two earth movers which were donated to Water Harvest, in my view his offers went mostly unattended.

**AVToday:** You have a certain double function, being both Secretary of the Auroville Foundation as well as representative of the Government of India in Auroville.

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Yes, that double function is there. The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation is not really the agency for deciding on visa matters and in these cases I deal with the immigration officers.

In some cases Aurovilians themselves came to give me information about somebody considered undesirable, which information I took into account to decide on the matter. In some cases I have told the person concerned as well as the Auroville visa service about my reservations or objections. There was never any need for secrecy about these things between the Secretary and the Visa Service.

**AVToday:** When you came in 1986, there was the unhappy situation that a few Aurovilians had received Leave India notices and as of today one person has not yet returned. You yourself have worked hard to solve these matters. Do you see any general improvement?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** No, not really. The government has certainly not taken the view that Aurovilians have a right to any different treatment. India doesn't have a green card system such as the USA, and the Aurovilians who happen to be foreign nationals are only residents of India, not its citizens.

If a foreigner is insecure about the possibility to continue living in Auroville, he or she should apply for Indian citizenship. Not many Aurovilians have done that. My office has issued only two recommendation letters so far for someone to acquire Indian citizenship. There is also a possibility for persons who are born in India to apply for Indian citizenship. But this implies that one loses one's nationality, as India doesn't recognise the right to have a dual nationality.

**AVToday:** The community has always refused to create a so-called 'exit-group' which could expel Aurovilians. Are you in favour of such a group?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** How can I not be in

favor? The Auroville Foundation Act describes specifically that the Residents' Assembly has the power to terminate persons in the Register of Residents in accordance with regulations made by the Governing Board. At present you have no such regulations in place and you depend on the government to evict a person by recalling his or her residential permit or visa. And how do you evict Indian people? You need a regulation even if you want to expel a person temporarily.

**AVToday:** You have repeatedly told us that in certain circles of the Government of India, Auroville still has a bad name.

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Yes, that is sadly true. It has already changed in many areas, but negativity about Auroville is still prevalent. It is a relic from the past, from the fights with the Sri Aurobindo Society. The Society has a large network of associations of India, and I do not think they ever bothered to create a good image of Auroville. Dr. Kireet Joshi is very aware of this and has been fighting a lone battle against this for a very long time. Not too many people have come to see for themselves the reality of Auroville as it has been developing. Many continue in their negative impression of the past. But some change has taken place over the years.

**AVToday:** What would you advise Auroville does to improve its image?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Auroville has to do a vast public relation exercise. For example, Auroville is not very good in hosting important people and does not create any occasion for those people to come. In India, you just cannot invite a VIP for a visit and a cup of tea, there must be a formal kind of occasion: organise a conference and ask them to give a lecture, or inaugurate something. Auroville seems to find it difficult to do that kind of thing. And it is not a question of money. Money for these things can always be found.

**AVToday:** When you came in 1996, you mentioned that you had a Saivite [connected to the god Shiva, eds.] background. Now you have been exposed for five years to an atmosphere that is based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Has it changed your views?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** It has certainly widened my views. Working in the Auroville atmosphere was a complete novelty. I doubt very much if I will ever be working in such an atmosphere again. These five years have changed a lot of things for my family and myself. When we came, we had just lost our eldest son, and we went through a period of depression. Gradually we got acclimatized to Auroville, my younger son went to school in Auroville - though my wife and I had some initial misgivings about that - and we made friends. It was a very enriching experience, we came to know many wonderful people. Though my son has lost a year by going to school in Auroville, the experience has been very good in general, for all of us. And as is the case for my kind of people, just when we are nicely settling in, we are posted again somewhere else. That's a pity.

**AVToday:** Do you know what the future is going to bring to you?

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** No, I still have nine more years to go before my retirement. I hope I will get a posting with the Government of India once again.

**AVToday:** I think the community will miss you.

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** We will miss the community also but we hope to be visiting often.

*Interview by Carel*

## In brief

### Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

Boosted by a US \$ 20,000 donation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the construction of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture has made substantial progress. The forms which give the Pavilion its architectural particularity have been executed using ferro-cement technology. They not only protect each room from the monsoon rains or the summer's sun, but also give the specific Tibetan look to the building. Part of the pavilion is already being used by a Tibetan doctor for his monthly consultations and for exhibitions. The caretaker's rooms will be finished in October and Kalsang, Dolma, and Namgyal will shift there to become the "guardians" of the Pavilion. It is estimated that US \$ 30,000 will be required to give the last Tibetan touches to the rooms. Those who are willing to help manifest a center of Tibetan culture in Auroville can contact [tibpav@satyam.net.in](mailto:tibpav@satyam.net.in).

More info on [http://www.auroville.org/thecity/tibet\\_pavilion/index.htm](http://www.auroville.org/thecity/tibet_pavilion/index.htm)

### News from the Circles

Over the past six months the circles (the collective income and expenditure sharing experiment) have run into an accumulated minus of approximately Rs. 7.5 lakhs, out of which Rs. 6 lakhs were covered by the 1-lakh/month donation by Maroma. To deal with the minus, limits have been put on the expenditure of those people who consistently spend more than they put in, and suggestions have been made to generate more income.

### Code of Conduct

A study group is meeting to explore the feasibility of creating an Auroville code of conduct applicable to Aurovilians and newcomers alike.

### IZ Effluent Plant

Six units have agreed to share the costs of a common effluent treatment plant in the Industrial Zone. A partial funding request has been submitted to the Central Pollution Control Board. The work is expected to start soon.

### Cremation building started

The construction of a provisional cremation building in the Adventure community has started so that in the near future cremations can take place with beauty and decorum. A set-up that would help the passage of the soul according to what has been described by The Mother will have to wait for more funds to materialise.

### Creativity takes off

The Creativity housing project has begun construction. It is planned to accommodate 50-60 persons in modest living spaces with common facilities. Creativity is a social experiment based on active community participation. The total costs are estimated at Rs 143 lakhs (US\$ 300,000) which amount has not yet been fully raised. For more information write to [housing@auroville.org.in](mailto:housing@auroville.org.in)

### AVI 2002 meeting

The AVI 2002 meeting will be held in Sequoia, California. The seminar will last from July 19th to Wednesday July 24th, 2002. For info email: [info@aviusa.org](mailto:info@aviusa.org)



# It's time for healing

The Matrimandir Co-ordination Group came into existence in 1989, as a solution, proposed by the then Auroville Council, to better structure the work of completing the Matrimandir. Over the years, various aspects of its work and policies have drawn the animosity of individuals and groups in Auroville. An impasse has been reached. It is time for healing and renewal.

“What gives you, the Matrimandir Co-ordination Group, the right not to execute the designs of the architect of the Matrimandir appointed by The Mother,” is the first question fired at the members of the Matrimandir Co-ordination Group consisting of Amrit, Arjun, Divakar, John and Walter. We are seated outside in the shade. John takes up the answer: “There are actually three criteria which have to be satisfied before we agree to execute any of Roger’s designs. Is the design in conformity with The Mother’s wishes; can the design practically be realised; and is the design in accordance with safety standards, as the Matrimandir is a public building.

“Regarding the first criterion we have quite some differences with Roger. The Mother has spoken a lot about some areas of the Matrimandir, notably the Inner Chamber and the Gardens. Other areas She did not speak about, or only in general terms.

We have observed that Roger’s wishes sometimes go against what The Mother has expressed. And in those areas where The Mother has only given general orientations, we feel that some of Roger’s designs do not express their spirit. Then we have noticed that Roger’s approach to perfection is different from ours. In all these cases we have been interacting with Roger, asking him for his views and to modify or to change his designs. When we could not come to an agreement, we have not gone ahead with the execution of the design. We have never implemented any design of ourselves.”

Says Amrit: “Examples are aplenty. Take for example the old issue of the columns for the Inner Chamber. In the late 1970s there was a controversy whether or not there should be columns in the Chamber. From the beginning Roger did not want them even though the Mother said that She “saw” them in her vision. After 1973 that controversy went on. It came to a point when the then Matrimandir workers made the decision that Mother’s wishes had to be followed, and against Roger’s wishes the decision to have columns was made.” If we had followed Roger’s plan, there would be no columns in the Inner Chamber.”

Arjun: To illustrate John’s remark about the standards of perfection we can give you the example of the first fibreglass reinforced polyester discs that were gilded by the Gohard brothers from France. In this process the gold leaf was applied directly onto the discs. We had 17 such discs on the structure for about 1 ½ years, but we decided against continuing with this process – very much against Roger’s wishes who judged that it was all ok – when we saw how the birds had damaged the gold leaf. We insisted that more research had to be done, even at the costs of the waste. Finally Michael Bonke came with the solution of using gold tiles consisting of two layers of glass with gold leaf inside.

John: With the inner skin we had a similar experience. A production process had started using salmon-orange coloured fibreglass reinforced polyester triangles. The material was fire hazardous, the triangles warped after some time, and they lost their colour. We objected. Roger did not want to accept that his choice was wrong. It took a long time before we could stop the production process and remove the installed triangles, and by that time all hell broke loose. The experiment had failed at a cost of Rs. 30 lakhs (US\$ 62,500), and most unfairly, the MMCG was held respon-

sible for the mistake. For quite a number of Governing Board meetings afterwards we had to answer to the negative observations in the auditors’ reports. The question was even tabled in the Lok Sabha [the lower assembly of the Indian Parliament. eds.]

Arjun: Then there are the areas where Mother hasn’t given any specifications. One such area is the second level. During the days of a functioning Matrimandir Forum (1995 until 1997) there were long discussions on what type of ornamentation would be acceptable on the second level. The majority of those who attended the forum expressed themselves against the water in the ribs flowing into still water bodies and against statues with live flames at the beginning of the ramps. Today there is an idea to replace the medium water by a kind of oil, and there was a discussion on having a Sanskrit mantra executed in neon letters at the base of the East and West ribs. Then there is the issue of the incomplete symbols of Sri Aurobindo in each of the four pillars. The symbol consists of an ascending and descending triangle, with a square at their junction in which there is a representation of water and a lotus. Roger does not want to put the water and the lotus inside the square. But Mother was very explicit about Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, indicating the meaning of each part, and to a lot of people it feels not right to play around with it.

Many people, not only the MMCG, question the kind of leeway that the architect has. And for some of us, another question has come up as well. Is it right that the inside of Matrimandir, the House of the Mother, should have such a personalised imprint of the architect? Many public buildings have a personality hallmark of the architect, and Matrimandir has that in the discs and the petals. But is adding all this at the second level not too much an imposition of an aesthetic signature?

Walter: Another issue is the shape of the entrance which leads from level one to the spiral staircase. We told Roger that the shape designed by him would result in a dangerous access as it

forum collapsed, we were left on our own. And that has placed us in an extremely awkward position, which, we admit, we have not handled well. We thought that through dialogue, through insistence on interaction with the architect, we could solve the issues. But that has proven to be not possible. We should, instead, have called on the Auroville community.

Divakar: But we were hesitant, as that would mean taking the road of confrontation, which would politicise the matter.

Arjun: We have at present a long list of outstanding issues, which Roger refuses to discuss. Contrary to the early days, when there was a lot of positive interaction with Roger and we were together searching for solution, at present he seems to feel threatened in his position as the architect whenever we put a question. But we have reached a deadlock. Today there is no other option than that the community gets involved in the issues.

## The gardens

Walter: A main point of confrontation is the shape of the gardens and the lake. This has a long history. The Mother has stated very explicitly that the Matrimandir will be surrounded by a lake. But between 1998 and 1991, when, under Roger’s guidance, I designed the Park around the Matrimandir Oval, we reduced the lake to a 10 metre wide water channel, because we had no idea how to fill it. Pumping underground water was not intended.

Earlier, in 1987/88 Asha and myself had already developed the Inner Gardens design, which was prepared for the large 15<sup>th</sup> October 1987 meeting. In that meeting the community had decided to execute Roger’s design of the discs, the petals and the contouring of the Inner Gardens.

Twenty years earlier, in 70s, the plantation of trees in the Park had been started by Narad and his people and letters show that their work was in accordance with Roger’s ideas.

When the German engineer Harald Kraft suggested a few years ago that a large lake around the Matrimandir

and the Governing Board then requested its member Dr. Subhash Kashyap to mediate and find a solution. Mr. Kashyap did a fantastic job. He took our objections and Rogers ideas into account, studied the map and came up with the pragmatic and for us completely acceptable solution that a big lake would be created at the east side of the Matrimandir, where no gardens have yet been planted, and that the existing outer gardens would be separated from the oval by a small water body of approximately ten to twelve metres wide (see map on page 1). This solution satisfied the demands of both parties: a water body encircles Matrimandir, the present outer gardens continue to exist. Both Roger and we have accepted this design. It also partly satisfies the demand, strongly held by Roger, that the Matrimandir should be visible from the city itself. Dr. Kashyap’s solution allows for perspectives, vistas, from within certain areas of the city onto the Matrimandir as ‘discoveries’: sudden openings with long views.

Amrit: And then there is the story of the gardens inside the oval area. The first garden ever to get ready was the rose garden. Walter had made the plan, Roger had approved it, and we executed it in a record time of three to four months. When Roger saw the rose garden for the first time he was very complimentary. During his next visit, he observed that there were too many colours, that it was too much of a flower show. The visit after that, he suggested to cut many plants and explained that a rose garden could also manifest its beauty with a few single roses.

This concept of single potted plants in austere settings, creating a kind of concentrated symbolism, seems now to be the guiding idea which Roger would like to implement in each of the 12 gardens. But this is not what we understand Mother wanted. For us, Roger’s designs are not gardens but artistically designed areas with a few living plants. But Mother spoke extensively about real gardens, comparing them particularly to gardens made in the “Japanese way”.

Arjun: Then Roger invited Paulo Tommasi to design the gardens. Please note that the MMCG had nothing to do with this invitation, and that we have made no attempt whatsoever to convince Paulo of our views. Firstly, because there was no such thing as an MMCG view of what the gardens should be – we had no idea, apart from the fact that we did not like Roger’s ideas – and secondly because Paulo is a person who holds strong opinions of his own. Like us, Paulo has also studied everything Mother has said about the Matrimandir gardens, what She said about the beauty of Japanese gardens, and he has even gone to Japan to study Japanese garden architecture.

Divakar: Paulo very sincerely has gone ahead trying to manifest what Mother indicated. He has meanwhile designed eight of the twelve gardens, and the opinion of all the members of the MMCG is that we find his designs very beautiful and corresponding to what we understand Mother wanted, even taking into account the terrible constraints of the gardens such as the small sizes and the shapes, which Roger calls ‘volumes.’

We had begun to study on the ground one of Paulo’s designs – and this trial conformed to Roger’s earlier request to make one “sample” garden – and for this we chose the smallest of the 12 gardens, the garden of “Power”, cutting into the “volume” so as to inte-



grate a flat bed of gravel. Roger stopped the work, as he could not agree to Paulo’s design. And so this area of work too has come to a standstill, and with it the possibility to design the infrastructure of the gardens.

## Towards a solution

Arjun: We believe that a time has come in Auroville’s history where instead of throwing one group out to solve the problem, we have to get everybody back on board. The community still suffers from its decision made in 1987, which resulted in a section of the community leaving Matrimandir. All those who have a genuine connection to the Matrimandir should come and participate once again. It is a time for healing, for actively searching for unity.

“The Matrimandir wants to be the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection,” wrote The Mother. That perfection has to start at the level of the human interaction.

John: We have made a compilation of everything the Mother has said about the Matrimandir, both that which is on record and what is recorded from memory. This is available for those who would like to help finishing the Matrimandir. We ask the community to get involved and take a decision about the pending design questions. Ultimately, there is a need for a larger group, which can serve as a permanent buffer to evaluate and ultimately decide on aspects of design and execution.

It will certainly not be easy to come to a decision. For we have to find a solution that is beyond personal preferences and in-dug positions. Mother has given us the most difficult agenda. But we have to come together. It is the only way to proceed.

In conversation with Carel



After more than 20 years of service, the crane on top of the Matrimandir is dismantled.

had many sharp corners, and on his encouragement, we “suggested” an alternative design of which we made a plywood model. Roger dismissed our alternative, stating that this was similar to an old idea of his, and insisted on the execution of his design, belittling our objections regarding safety. Well, recently, I had to accompany a group of deaf and blind schoolchildren upwards to the chamber. It was a difficult job, but it would have been a disaster with the type of entrance designed by Roger.

Arjun: When the Matrimandir

might be necessary to solve the future water requirements of the city, Roger suddenly changed his views. Instead of the Park, he now wanted a big lake surrounding

Matrimandir. Notwithstanding the fact that Harald Kraft’s suggestion has never been seriously studied and that many experts question its feasibility, in 1999 Roger tried to have it turned into law by incorporating a design of Matrimandir and its oval, surrounded by a large lake that replaced the outer gardens, in the Auroville Master Plan.

Divakar: We strongly objected,



# Safety aspects need to be considered

Vladimir, who was chief engineer of a Russian technical research institute before joining Auroville, has been working at Matrimandir for the last four years. In September, he stopped his work for many reasons.

Vladimir was in charge of Matrimandir's electrical department and also took care of the monitoring and maintenance of the heliostat on top of the Matrimandir, the air-conditioning system and the telecommunications. He spent two years working on the air-conditioning to make it absolutely silent and more cost-effective. Persistent conflicts with the Matrimandir Co-ordination Group (MMCG) and lack of clarity on design issues are his reasons to lay down his work.

Vladimir's most important complaint is a consequence of the fact that the Matrimandir is not like a normal construction site where the design is ready for implementation and every engineering and building department knows what it has to do and when. "It is as if there is no project," says Vladimir. "I have to go out to find something I am able to complete. And if I figure out what has to be done, more often than not I won't get the funds. None of the MMCG members has any technical expertise and they cannot act as a sparring partner to discuss an idea. They do not understand why something is necessary for technical reasons, and to not take into account the regulations and standards that I as a professional have to follow. Instead of accepting my technical expertise, as they themselves have none, they fund my requests only whenever they are in accordance with their own policies. Otherwise it is difficult to get funds.

The latest development that greatly upset me was the MMCG's request that I design the infrastructure (the electricity supply, the water supply and telecommunications) of the entire Matrimandir area including gardens, parks and lake on the basis of my own ideas. From the professional point of view this request is nonsensical as there is no planning clarity whatsoever on this area. Seen from the political angle it is a clear attempt to put me in direct confrontation with Roger and with the town planning department, because of their



Monsoon clouds gather behind the Matrimandir. The scaffolding necessary to remove the crane is still in place. The last remnant of the crane, the triangular structure on top, is the last piece to be removed.

ideas on the Matrimandir area. And last but not least, none of the ideas on the gardens, neither Roger's nor those of the MMCG, have been checked on their technical feasibility. The gardens will need daily watering. How much water exactly will be required? And where is that water to come from? If it is to be ground water, where is the calculation showing that such ground water extraction would not deplete the wells elsewhere in Auroville?"

"The lack of plans is detrimental to the progress of the work. Judging as a technical expert, I must further state that some of Roger's designs which have been executed have resulted in a building that is not in accordance with internationally accepted safety regulations. Take for example the four mechanical entrance doors which Jean has designed on request of Roger. These doors slide underneath the Matrimandir, but they cannot open quickly in the case of an emergency.

If something happens inside the building, it must be possible to evacuate the people immediately. Two years back a German security expert made a report on the safety aspects of the Matrimandir. The report stated that Matrimandir, as a public building, does not fulfil European security standards. But I have never heard that any discussion on this report took place leave alone that proposals were made to follow up on its recommendations."

Concludes Vladimir: "A reorganisation of the work at the Matrimandir is absolutely essential and the present group must go. The presence of a site engineer is a necessary. I also recommend that the final plan of the Matrimandir area is presented to the community together with a calculation of its water and energy requirements and the costs, so that the community is aware of the future running expenditure of the Matrimandir."

Carel

## The process of work reorganisation

Continued from page 1

As this proposal had not yet been properly discussed in the previous meetings, the WC/EC agreed to call another general meeting, and if any consensus was reached in that meeting, to turn it into a meeting of the Residents' Assembly and invite those present to give a yes or no to the proposal. If a majority would say yes, the proposal would be presented to the community for a referendum. This meeting was called for October 15th.

Understandably, agitation at this point reached another peak. While there was a general call for re-organisation, there was at the same time active support expressed for the MMCG. Three members of the Unity Committee had written a letter expressing the need for unity, without exclusion.

In the meeting of October 15th the re-written reorganisation proposal was criticised as it created the impression that the various working groups were to execute the designs of the architect, and that those designs were unquestionable. Then the MMCG presented its own proposal, in a nutshell that a study group be created to study all the design issues which have hindered a speedy completion of the Matrimandir. This would imply a community participation in the design choices to be made. This proposal was equally challenged as it appeared that it left the final authority of the MMCG unquestioned.

At that point the Matrimandir workers gave an account of a meeting held that morning at the Matrimandir, where it was mentioned that the MMCG no longer existed and that all decisions would henceforth be "taken together."

The MMCG were then asked to state their position unambiguously. "Have you dissolved?" was the question. Arjun, rising to the occasion on behalf of the MMCG, then answered: "We will dissolve if all will dissolve. We will all dissolve together." And thus the meeting ended joyfully, with a decision that all abdicate and give up any position held, to come together as seekers of the Truth, for a beginning of transformation.

The next meeting was held in a different venue, under the hallowed branches of the Banyan tree nearby the Matrimandir. There was general acknowledgement that the imposition of a new organisational structure would be artificial. Two decisions came out of this meeting. One was that the areas of work where there is no dispute should continue as speedily as possible, and that those wishing to participate in these work areas should meet separately. Another decision was that the community has to create a client body, whose task and composition need to be further elaborated. At the time this article was written, further meetings are being held.

For anyone not intimate with the Auroville process, this flurry of meetings may indicate an absolute confusion. But the large turnout at all meetings showed that Matrimandir is indeed close to the hearts and minds of many Aurovilians. After a long period where the community seemed to have lost its contact to the Matrimandir, the present process is nothing but a healing so that Matrimandir can once again take the place where it belongs as Auroville's soul.

Carel



View on the Matrimandir from the discs workshop. Less than 50 discs still need to be clad with the golden glass tiles. The fixing of the discs on the Matrimandir can be finished by June 2002.

## "I am working for The Mother"

Andrej, who hails from Siberia, is Matrimandir's marble specialist. He has been working for Matrimandir since 1998, but recently stopped. "Temporarily only!" he stresses before explaining why a change of scenario at the Matrimandir is necessary.

"Working at the Matrimandir is my way of doing karma yoga," says Andrej "and up to last year that has been an extremely happy experience. I love to work with marble, I love to be at the Matrimandir." A year ago Andrej went out to Makrana in Rajasthan to purchase Matrimandir's entire marble requirement, 45 tons in all. [see AVToday # 140, September 2000]. While it was a joy to bring "the purest marble in the world" to Auroville, that joy did not remain for long. "Politics started to intervene and I decided to stop my work until the situation has changed," says Andrej. "The last drop that made my cup run over was when the Matrimandir Co-ordination Group (MMCG) one day decided that I had to stop my work on Roger's design of the marble blocks that are to be placed at the entrance of the spiral staircase, supposedly as they would create an unsafe entrance. Personally, I don't see their point. I rather feel that the execution has

been stopped because of political reasons, a fight about many design aspects and ultimately about control, of which the story of these blocks is just one example. But the fact that the MMCG and Roger have not been able to co-operate is only a victory for ignorance. Nobody managed to stay on higher levels of consciousness, and that of course includes also us," says Andrej.

A lot of work for the marble section awaits execution. Now that the marble cladding of the spiral staircase is finished, work can start in the twelve meditation chambers in the petals and for the pond below the Matrimandir. "I can start anytime, that is not the issue. The issue, sadly, has become one of control. And that is not acceptable. The MMCG is acting like a governing board of the Matrimandir; those who support Roger expect me to follow them. But I am not working for the MMCG, and I am also not working for Roger. I am working for The Mother. And nobody has the right to prevent me from doing that work." Carel



# Building Invocation and Arati

Building denser areas with row houses and apartments instead of individual mansions is the emerging trend in the Residential Zone. Sumark (a unit under Auroville Fund) recently finished the apartment building "Invocation II," and is constructing additional apartments in Arati. Tineke talks to architect and builder Rolf and project holder Francis.

Invocation is located in the Residential Zone, just adjacent the large water tower. The building, which has fourteen apartments, looks quite western with its common entrances, doorbells and mailboxes with the names of the inhabitants on them. In spring 2001 Invocation's extension, popularly called Invocation II, was finished. Five of the six apartments are meanwhile occupied by Aurovilians, one by a long-term guest. In Arati, Sumark is building 16 two-bedroom apartments. "They are assets of Auroville. After completion, they will be allocated to interested Aurovilians and Newcomers against a donation to Auroville," says Rolf. "If someone expresses an interest during the construction phase, we will take the suggestions about materials and colours into account, otherwise the apartments are as they come." The second phase of Arati is different from phase I – which consists of six split-level

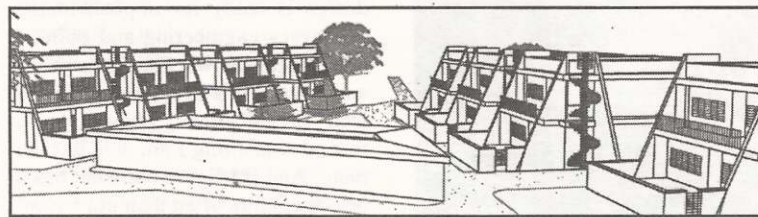


The completed Invocation building (photo top).  
Below, the drawing of the new Arati layout

row houses – due to the preference of people interested in housing in this area.

Both Rolf and Francis believe that the trend of building individual houses with large gardens is something of the past. The disadvantage of a big individual house is the cost of maintenance, safety, and the time and energy you spend on keeping it up. "Like in my case: when I go out, I have to put someone in," says Francis. "But I would advise families with children to live in a house with a garden," says Rolf.

The advantage of living in an apartment is that you do not need much outside help. Life can be much simpler. But for Aurovilians it is quite a change from living individually. Though caring for your



neighbours is a must, in an apartment building anonymity can be secured by simply removing your nameplate from the mailbox.

## Water problems

The main challenge for the development of the Residential Zone is making people conscious of their water usage. Rolf and Francis see the availability of water as the next big problem. Recently a new well was dug in Courage. At the time of drilling it gave 20,000 litres per hour. But recently the output dropped to 4000 litres due to the two consecutive monsoon failures that affected the water table in Auroville and the region. The new well near Kailash is also not expected to be a big provider. The present elephant water tank near Prayathna supplies water to

the communities of Arati, Invocation, Surrender, Prarthna, Prayathna, Sailam and a two new communities under construction, Creativity and the Line of Force. While the average water use per person in Europe is approx. 100 litres per day, here in the tropics in Auroville some people use at least eight times as much, gardens being the main guzzlers. Unless another good water source in the near future is found, or the Aurovilians start limiting their water usage consciously, the development in the city area will have to come to a halt. Some communities are considering building underground rainwater catchment tanks, which would be filled during the monsoons. But according to Rolf and Francis, those tanks are not only expensive to build, but they also would not be able to provide water for a long enough period of time. A proper water assessment study of the whole Auroville region is being made, and its results are eagerly expected. Unless we all become extremely aware of how we use our water, we might be in for big trouble very soon. Do we really want to turn our lush and green Auroville back into a desert?

## BECOMING AUROVILIAN

# Entry Process re-studied

Formulating Auroville's entry process has never been easy. Though a new Entry Policy was accepted in November 2000, not all the dilemmas have been resolved, in particular those relating to the entry of people from the surrounding area.

A couple of months ago, a new Entry Group was formed, along with a large group of 'contact persons' whose task it is to facilitate the integration of newcomers into the community. New members taking up the work implies taking a fresh look at the challenges of the entry process: which individuals to accept as newcomers and Aurovilians, which to reject, and what are the criteria to apply.

If only the aspect of a person's good will to join 'an experiment in human unity' was all that had to be taken into consideration, things would be so much simpler. Yet, sadly enough, today, because of Auroville's present economy and housing situation, the ability of a newcomer to support him/herself and to build some sort of accommodation has become a prime concern. This is highly discriminating towards young people, who usually did not have the opportunity or time to save up, and to people with limited financial means in general. The latter mostly come from developing countries, such as India, where no matter how hard they work, they will never be able to save as much as their western counterparts because of the latter's currency advantage. Increasingly however, there are also western people with limited funds seeking to join Auroville.

The new Entry Group is presently studying the situation. Over the last month, two meetings were called on the topic of the admission and integration of local people from the surrounding villages into Auroville. The first meeting was attended by a dozen Tamil Aurovilians and some members of the Entry Group. The second meeting, held a week later, was open to all interested individuals, Indian as well as western

Aurovilians, and was attended by thirty odd people. While the first meeting was exclusively focused on the main topic, in the second meeting many more related and unrelated points regarding the entry process were brought up.

Some people expressed that many individuals from the surrounding villages may be wanting to join Auroville for an easier life and its material benefits, and not for the ideals. Acknowledging that this holds true for some people, the question was raised why this situation should arise at all. The local people have seen Auroville prosper over the years, and they consider those from the village who joined Auroville as 'privileged'. It is quite understandable, on the human level, that this stimulates others to follow the example, to also take advantage of the better living conditions Auroville has to offer. Would it be possible that Auroville put more work and energy in the betterment of the living conditions of the people of the surrounding villages, so that the 'economic' attraction would diminish or disappear? It was underlined that the development of the surrounding villages is an integral part of Auroville's own development. Another idea put forward was to introduce an 'Auroville Membership' system, which would make the material benefits provided by Auroville's services available to those working for Auroville.

Joining Auroville for economic reasons, however, is not restricted to people from the surrounding villages. Some people from other countries, western included, also are known to come to Auroville for the wrong reasons. A conclusion was reached that this problem must be approached from a much wider perspective and

that an entry policy trying to deal with this issue should apply to all those wanting to join Auroville, regardless of their country of origin. The fact that two types of entry forms are in existence, one to be filled out by local Indian applicants and the other for westerners, was felt to be incorrect, particulars as the application to be filled out by Indians, while not containing the administrative paperwork necessary to westerners, contains many more questions relating to the applicants social and financial status, family background, etc. Western and Indian applicants shouldn't be differentiated in this way and the same criteria should be applied to all. The Entry Group consented to discontinue the practice and introduce one single questionnaire. At the same time, the Entry group will study the possibility of how to make the ideals of Auroville accessible to those who are not conversant in English. Language education is essential in order that those wanting to join Auroville, local or foreign, understand the aims and ideals of Auroville before joining.

The Entry group will continue its open meetings to obtain community feedback on issues relating to the entry process. For one thing should never be forgotten: Auroville is in the land of Tamil Nadu and hundreds of Tamilians from the surrounding villages have, since its beginning, been actively participating and are involved in the growth and development of Auroville's society and township. Without their work and energy Auroville could never have become what it is today. It is not only normal but gratifying that many of them wish to join the township to which they are contributing so much.

Emmanuelle

# To be a true Aurovilian

On June 13, 1970 Mother wrote a statement what it means to be a true Aurovilian. Recently Franz discovered that after its publication a line had been added by The Mother which was ignored.

When I was working on the artwork for new Matrimandir cards, I found out that there are two versions of "To be a true Aurovilian" circulating in Auroville. We subsequently checked with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives in Pondicherry. They gave us a copy of the "Gazette Aurovilienne" Vol. I No 4 p.5 (1971), which was seen by the Mother. This issue carries the full text plus an extra line, which, according to the editors, was added by Mother after reading the proofs: "The only true liberty is that obtained by union with the Divine. One can unite with the Divine only when the ego is mastered."

Franz

## To be a true Aurovilian

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At our inmost centre there is a free being, wide and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the acting centre of our being and our life in Auroville.
2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free of moral and social conventions; but this liberty must not be a new slavery to the ego, its desires and its ambitions. The fulfilment of desires bars the route to the inner discovery which can only be attained in peace and the transparency of a perfect disinterestedness.
3. The Aurovilian must lose the pro-

prietary sense of possession. For our passage in the material world, that which is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we should occupy there. The more conscious our contact is with our inner being, the more exact are the means given.

4. Work, even manual work, is an indispensable thing for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not inject his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let one's consciousness organise a bit of matter by way of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself, helps to bring order within oneself. One should organise life not according to outer, artificial rules, but according to an organised, inner consciousness, because if one allows life to drift without imposing the control of a higher consciousness, life becomes inexpressive and irrevocable. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter persists without a conscious utilisation.
5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to consciously work towards hastening that advent.
6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species should be, and meanwhile the best measure to take is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.
7. The only true liberty is that obtained by union with the Divine. One can unite with the Divine only when the ego is mastered.

(13.6.70)



# Remembering Shri P.N. Ojha

It is unlikely that we will ever know how much we owe to his efforts to provide Auroville with a secure foundation during a critical stage of its evolution.

With sadness we learned of the demise of Shri Paras Nath Ojha, former Deputy Administrator of Auroville on October 7th, 2001.

Shri Ojha held sensitive postings in some countries neighbouring India during his years as a police officer before being appointed Officer on Special Duty in Auroville under the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act 1980, passed by the Government of India. Soon afterwards Justice L.P. Nigam, a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court, was posted to Auroville as Administrator and Shri Ojha was designated as Deputy Administrator.

Together they formed a wonderful team to help and guide Auroville through the stormy years of its adolescence. During the years when the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act was being challenged by the Sri Aurobindo Society in various courts including the Supreme Court, Shri Ojha played a key role and was instrumental in guiding Aurovilians during those sometimes difficult days when things took violent turns.

Many of us will remember his early morning visits in the company of Mr. Nigam and his booming 'Morning-morning' outside our window. When, with sleepy grins on our faces, we invit-

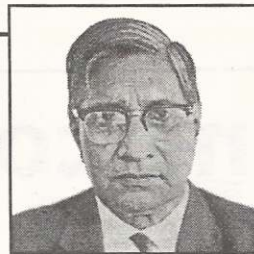
ed them in for a cup of tea, they would accept and thus get to know the concerned Aurovilians, their families and also catch up on all the goings-on in Auroville.

There was little going on around Auroville that Ojhajii was unaware of. He knew every Aurovillian and many people from Pondicherry and the surrounding villages too. He always did his best to help Auroville's development along the lines of the Charter. That was his mandate and he gave himself wholeheartedly to the task. His hard work and wise advice endeared him to all who had the privilege to work with him. Following a two-year

extension of his original five-year term, the Auroville Foundation Act replaced the (Emergency Provisions) Act. He stayed on once again as an Officer on Special Duty until he handed over, in 1989, the set-up to the Secretary to the Auroville Foundation.

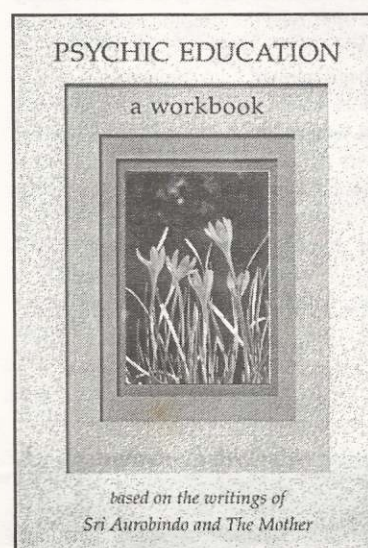
After leaving Auroville he went to Lucknow where he built a house for himself and his wife. He and Mr. Nigam, who also lived in Lucknow, continued their early morning walks together for many years. But he kept in touch with many of his friends in Auroville and never ceased to be keenly interested in Auroville's progress.

Barbara and Krishna



## BOOK REVIEW

### Psychic Education



While compilations of the works of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo abound, few books give practical help in how to change oneself progressively. Recently the Sri Aurobindo Education Society, New Delhi, released such a book written by Neeltje Hubbes. "Psychic Education," subtitled "A Workbook," was written as a book for teachers, though many parts of it will be suitable for anyone in search of the psychic being. Apart from having a wealth of texts from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the reader is invited to introspect on the basis of questions asked. Worksheets and checklists offer further assistance to help one to remain focused on the inner discovery in the midst of daily life.

For some of those who are familiar with the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life, the book may have little new to offer. Others may leaf it through and suddenly get caught by one or more of its paragraphs pregnant with meaning which clarify a previously held vague understanding. For teachers who sincerely wish to provide their students with a psychic, vital, mental and physical education as described by the Mother, this book provides a wealth of useful information, practical hints and exercises while the book's second part "The Integral Classroom" will give the information required to build a 'psychic classroom environment'. Neeltje Hubbes, in publishing this book, has certainly helped the educational world by providing a practical means of implementing Mother's views on education to help one "to know oneself" or, in other words, to make The Great Discovery of one's psychic being.

Carel

Available from the Sri Aurobindo Education Society, Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Delhi Branch), Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016. E-mail: aurobindo@vsnl.com

## AUROVILLE AND INDIA

### Visit Tibetan Men-Tse Khang team

In July, a team of the Materia Medica Department of the Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute (Men-Tsee Khang), Dharamsala, visited Auroville for two weeks to do a field study of the medicinal plants of South India.

The cultivation and propagation of medicinal plants of South India is one of Auroville's research projects [see AVToday # 148, May 2001]. Two units, Pitchandikulam Forest and Shakti Nursery, are involved in the preservation of local healing traditions in the area around Auroville. It was an old idea to share this knowledge with members of Men-Tse Khang in Dharamsala and invite them for a field study of the flora of South India to see if some of the medicinal plants locally used could be of any use in Tibetan medicine.

Soon after their arrival the team, headed by Dr. Dawa and including Dr. Tsering Norbu, Dr. Tenzin Thaya and Dr. Tsultrim Kalsang, proceeded to Pitchandikulam where Joss and Anita together with botanists Dr. Loganathan and Armugan, guided them through the forest. Loganathan, with his great expertise in medicinal plants growing in the Eastern Ghats especially around Pondy and Auroville, is in constant contacts with traditional folk healers; his own father is a well-known local

eye specialist who uses plants to cure most eye diseases. A lively interaction followed. During the next ten days, the Tibetan doctors visited different places where research is conducted in Auroville. They also went for field visits to some of the primordial forests in Auroville's bio-region, and met with local traditional healers who have a deep knowledge of the flora growing in the area and the plants' potencies. Dr. Dawa commented: "Without their help it is hard to find the medicinal plants since the Eastern Ghats have thick and wide forest resources. We had some discussion with them about the uses of medicinal plants and they shared with us how to diagnose [the disease] through their traditional way. At the same time we also shared our medical views." This kind of exchange can only be beneficial to both sides.

One of the most interesting parts of the visit was the sharing of Men Tse Khang's list of traditional plants with Auroville's list. It was found that some 50 medicinal plants listed in the Tibetan scriptures are growing in

Auroville and its surrounding areas. There are locally known to have the same potency as described in the Tibetan texts. On the last day of the team's visit, Dr. Dawa gave a lecture on "The Use of Tibetan Plants in Tibetan Medicine" to interested members of Auroville at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. He and his colleagues then left for a meeting with Dr. Darshan Shankar, the Director of the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore, which is the most prestigious institution engaged in preserving medicinal plants in India. We understand that their two days in Bangalore were a good continuation of their field visit to Auroville and very fruitful for future collaboration. We hope that this visit will be the first step of a collaboration between Men-Tse Khang and Auroville. We are particularly keen to explore the possibility to cultivate some of these plants in an organic and natural way in Auroville so as to prevent over-harvesting these plants in some parts of Northern India. Claude

### Women win in panchayat elections

On October 18th Panchayat [village government] elections were held in the villages around Auroville. Panchayat elections are often marked by corruption with the wealthy seeking to buy votes, usually spending tens or hundreds of thousand of rupees. Women normally do not contest these elections. If they do, they are merely puppets in the hands of men.

This year, in an unprecedented move of their own accord, 22 members of the women groups organised by Auroville's Village Action decided to contest the elections in 22 villages. Auroville's Village Action encouraged this move of the women towards reclaiming their political rights by having discussions with each of the women groups,

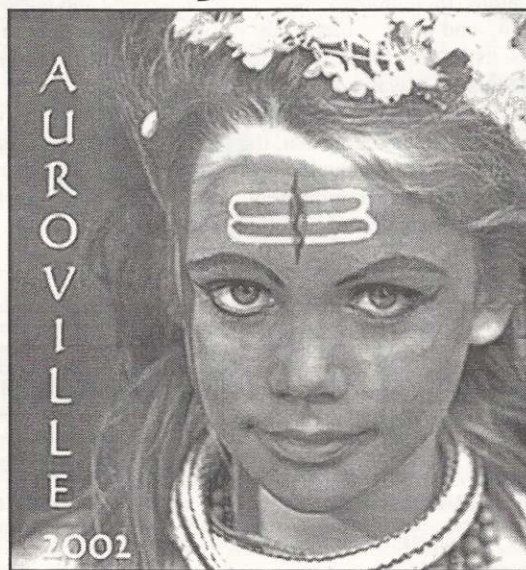
which together comprise over 1000 women. The women groups unanimously decided to support the contestants. Each contestant spent only Rs. 1,000 (US\$ 20) for their registration and the printing of posters. Part of this money was donated by the Savings Federation managed by elected representatives of the women groups. The posters that the contestants chose to make were simple: they detailed the work that their women group had already undertaken in their village and asked the people to vote for them as it would help their groups to continue their work more effectively. The election result was striking: fifteen women were elected as panchayat ward members and one woman as panchayat vice president.

Bindu

### Auroville 2002 calendar by Ireno

We often forget how close lies the extraordinary to the ordinary, how thin is the veil between the magical and mundane. In Auroville, where the future is taking birth among one of the oldest civilizations on earth, where unity is woven out of diversity and matter is a gateway to the spirit, the unexpected is always just around the corner. It's the roiling steel of monsoon clouds, the dancing light of a solar bowl, a thousand oil lamps transfiguring unfinished concrete and steel, the simple gesture which suddenly defines a friendship. It's an old banyan reaching out to a gold-clad sphere emerging from the earth. It's the many, many faces of youth. Doorways...

The Auroville 2002 calendar, with photos by Ireno, can be ordered from Auroline, Sangha, Auroville, 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: ireno@auroville.org.in. The calendar size is 28 x 28.5 cm., price in India Rs 240, abroad Rs 270 sent by (air)mail. It can be ordered through cheque, demand draft, Bank Cheque or Postal Money Order.



## In brief

### Auroville-Kuilapalayam Cultural Centre

The former carpentry building opposite the bakery is being renovated to house the Auroville-Kuilapalayam Cultural Center, envisioned as a meeting place for Aurovilians, inhabitants of Kuilapalayam and visitors. The Center will hopefully contribute to a harmonious and fraternal relationship with Kuilapalayam village.

### Himalayan Journey

An exhibition of 12 exquisite aquarelles by 19 year old Aron, the son of Veronique and Michel, who spent a couple of weeks in the Himalayas and meditated in front of the majestic peaks of Lahoul valley in Himachal Pradesh, was held in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

### Painting Exhibition

Visiting artist Ritam Upamanyu from Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, exhibited some of her mixed media paintings (pencil and water) at Pitanga. The paintings are inspired by the spiritual significance of flowers as given by The Mother.

### Odissi Dance

A 3-weeks Odissi dance workshop by guru Shri Ramesh Chandra Jena was held at the Bharat Nivas auditorium.

### Theatre

Sri Atul Kumar, Director of The Company Theatre, Mumbai, conducted a four-days theatre workshop in Auroville. Together with Sheeba Chadha and Shakeel Khan he gave a highly appreciated performance of Ionesco's "The Chairs" at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas.



### Garden training

Annandana seed production gardens, located opposite CSR, are in the process of setting up a training centre for seed production and tropical agro-ecology. It offers, together with the botanical garden, workshops on making compost, soil preparation, sowing and transplanting seedlings.

### Tortoises

A number of tortoises (geochelone elegans), seized by the Chennai customs under the endangered species act, has been released in Pitchandikulam. "This type of tortoise is a landlubber," was the warning in the Auroville News, "so don't expect it to enjoy your pond."

### Guest programmes

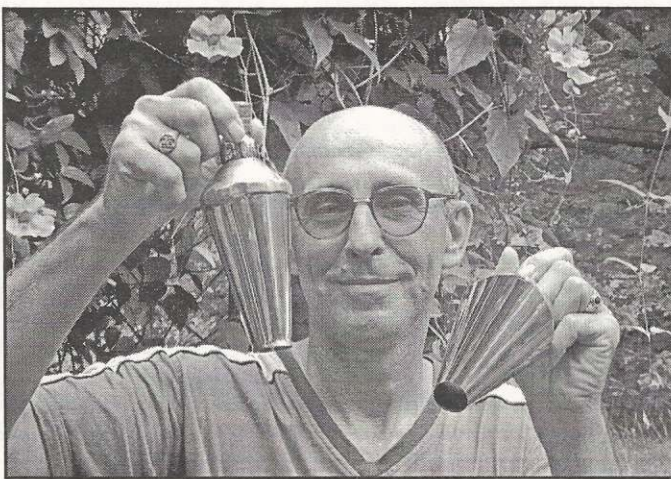
An ideal way for guests to interact with Aurovilians and be a part of Auroville is to participate in the Auroville guest programme which runs from the end of November to the beginning of March. For more information, write to: avguests@auroville.org.in



# Harvesting cosmic energy

Tomatoes lying in the food safe for three months keep their freshness due to orgone energy treatment, claims Rolf Brokmeyer, who has been doing research on cosmic energy for many years.

“When I came to Auroville in 1993, I started working for village development together with Lisa, a teacher from Germany,” says Rolf. With money from German donors, he helped build a village cultural centre in Peryamudaliarchavadi. “I find it very important to be involved in working for our neighbours, but my main interest is working with cosmic energy,” he continues. Before joining Auroville, Rolf was selling so called ‘levitated water’ in Germany. With a special machine the molecular structure of water gets changed so it can be used for healing and for removing toxins from the body. “The water which we pump through our water pipes, gets such a pressure that it loses its ability to swirl and turn like in rivers, thereby losing its life force and energy,” explains Rolf. Through contacts with water specialists like the German Plocher and the late Austrian Viktor Schlauberger, he learned to treat water. “In Auroville we first started cleaning up the waste water treatment plant in the Vikas community which was smelling badly. We added specially treated quartz powder and Plocher’s oxygen tubes and after three months there was no more bad smell. Unfortunately nobody followed it up and the smell came back.” The Plocher tubes have also been installed in the therapy pool in Quiet and the water quality there is very good. “I had asked Plocher whether we could sell his products in India, but the price was too high for this country. Then we tried to make them with a license, but Plocher does not want to share his secret, so I ended up trying to figure it out



Rolf showing two water swirlers in which the water moves both left and right, thus energizing it.

myself! And now I have developed my own tubes which work equally well.”

One of the first products Rolf made were meditation cloths and energy cushions, which were charged with the energy of lotus seeds. “I am building accumulators according to Wilhelm Reich’s instructions. These attract the energy from the atmosphere, which he calls ‘orgone’. I started out by transferring this cosmic energy onto quartz powder, which I use on vegetables. And the results are good – they grow better and give bigger fruits. Then I developed a special fertilizer, using not only the quartz powder as carrier of materials, but also the leaves, fruits and oil of the neem tree, magnesium, copper and zinc, and oxy-

gen. All these components are first treated in my energy tower”. The energy tower is an eight-meter tall structure, made out of woven palm leaves, that stands in the back of Rolf’s garden. A long pipe, funnel shaped on the top, and narrow on the bottom, made out of zinc and insulated with 30 layers of specially shaped material, catches the cosmic energy from all sides. When I walk under the tower and stick my hand under the pipe, I can feel a soft but firm tingling on my hand. “That’s it, you now feel the cosmic energy,” Rolf explains. On the bottom it hits 2 glass plates. Here any material, like the ingredients for his fertiliser or the lotus seeds, needed for his energy cushions, can be placed between the glass sheets and then exposed to the cosmic energy.

Another of his products is the showerhead swirler. Inside it the water turns to the right and the left, thereby changing the molecular structure of the water and energizing it. Also plants like to be watered this way. Another product is the small energy accumulator. When a glass or pitcher of water is put under it, it causes an increase in the positive enlivening energies of the water.

Some people in Auroville are suffering from geomantic stress or from stress related to electro-

magnetic fields. Rolf got into contact with the ideas of the late Austrian Erich Koerber, who rediscovered the old knowledge and power of symbols. Unilateral crosses in different sizes, applied in a certain order on a piece of cloth can absorb negative earth energy. According to Koerber’s instructions, Rolf made a cloth and used it successfully under the bed of someone who had sleep disturbances. He also used it in one of the therapy rooms in Quiet. “Afsaneh, who was working there, complained of tiredness. When we placed the cloth under the carpet, her tiredness disappeared! It does not work against electro magnetic stress, but it does work in the other case. Now, when people have sleeping or working problems, I come to check out their space and try to help them. This is my service to Auroville, and I do it for free,” smiles Rolf.

The next project Rolf would like to start is the production and distribution of levitated water to improve buildings materials for Auroville. Twenty years of research in Germany has shown that levitated water (according to the Hacheney system) has improved the strength and density of building materials like clay and cement. Wood, which has been painted with the levitated water, becomes more insect repellent. Levitated water is energised water that is obtained from normal tap water with the help of an electrical high-tech machine. Someone in Germany has donated such a machine to Auroville. “And so we continue. Auroville is one big laboratory for me. And I hope that whatever I make will also be useful to the villagers,” concludes Rolf.

Tineke

## SPORTS

# Galloping through childhood

The Pony Farm is well known to many children who grew up in Auroville. Emmanuelle is one of them. What is the future of this children’s paradise?

I will always carry with me vivid memories of the long hours of my childhood spent galloping on pony back, with friends, through open fields, the wind blowing in our hair. Those moments were an initiation into the joys of belonging and being one with nature. Today, some twelve years later, a new generation of Auroville children has replaced ours in spending many happy hours at the Pony Farm with their friends, the ponies.

The Pony Farm in Kottakarai, was started in the mid-eighties by Gaya and Achilles. The first ponies to find a home there were those that had previously belonged to individual Aurovilians. Gaya and Achilles left for Germany, and Nicolette took over management in the mid-nineties. One month ago, Nicolette in turn left, and Lea, with her twenty year-old daughter Sara, were appointed caretakers.

Today, the Pony Farm is home to eighteen ponies and horses of different breeds. About twenty-five children of Auroville, from the age group of 7 to 12 years, come to the Pony Farm a couple of times a week to take riding lessons.

Lea, not only runs the place but also gives riding lessons to the children, while Sara and Madeleine, a long term guest, take them on ride-outs.

Lea, in giving her riding lessons, follows the Hemphill Method: “It is about following the soft way: natural, bareback pony and horse riding.” This is a method that has always, to a certain degree, been followed at the Pony Farm, and it stresses the importance of the relationship and communication between the pony and rider. “There are two ways of dominating a pony,” continues Lea, “either you break its will through classical training, or, by developing your own personality, you gain your pony’s respect, and from that point it listens to you. This is the method I want to follow with the children, although I am still learning it myself. This method is also about working on oneself, and with time, the children will see the results.”

During the school holidays, the children spend their days at the Pony Farm. This September, for the mid-term two week holidays, they were there from 7 A.M. to 4 P.M. almost each day. They would groom the ponies, brushing their coats and cleaning their hooves, help to feed them, and then either take riding lessons in the corral, or go for long ride-outs. If it was a particularly hot day, upon returning the ponies were given a bath, and after that, the children themselves went for a dive in the Pony Farm swimming pool.

It wasn’t much of a holiday for

Lea, though: “To have some fifteen children shouting for your attention all day is quite exhausting. At the end of the day, I basically had to chase them out to have a bit of peace and quiet. But we did have a great time: we often rode to the Solar Kitchen to have lunch together, and the children really enjoyed themselves.”

They sure did. They are all very happy with Lea, who has so much energy and so much patience (which is essential if you’re dealing with that age group!), as their new ‘riding teacher’.

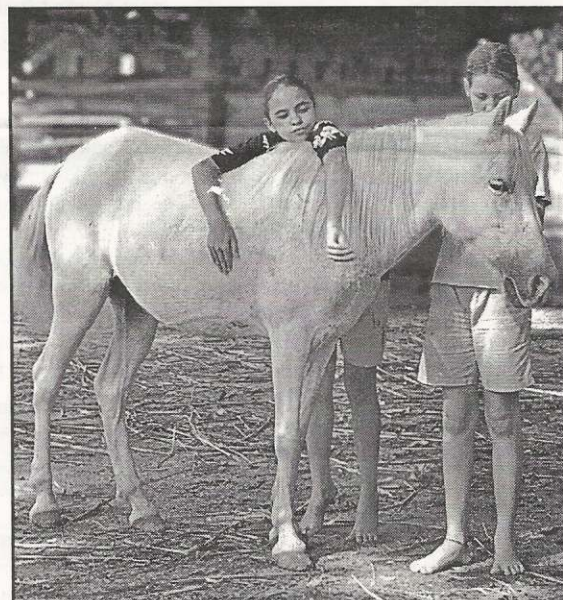
A new riding school, The Red Earth Riding School, was started in Auroville some eighteen months back. The approach of this school is classical, and more ‘professional’. The children are taught to ride with saddles and are trained to take part in shows and competitions. While the Red Earth Riding School has become equally popular, there will always be those children who continue riding at the Pony Farm and who are more attracted to bareback, free and natural pony and horse riding. And of course there are those families who cannot afford to pay for an individual pony/horse, as the Red Earth Riding School mostly works on that basis.

Almost continuously the Pony Farm has faced financial difficulties. In the early days, SAIIR (Sri Aurobindo International Institute

for Educational Research) paid a big part of the Pony Farm’s expenses. Then that funding stopped. For Gaya and Achilles, who had to continue feeding and taking care of the twenty-odd ponies, this period was quite a struggle.

In the mid-nineties, the children’s parents paid for the riding lessons. Since a few years, Auroville’s Central Fund is contributing towards the expenses with Rs. 6,000 a month. This helps, but it only represents a fraction of the monthly expenses. The parents of the children contribute Rs. 600 a month, which leaves the Pony Farm with the recurring challenge of having to cover a deficit of about Rs. 10,000 each month. It would be a great help if some well-wishing individuals or Auroville unit holders could contribute a monthly sum.

Many of the ponies at the Pony Farm have been there since its beginning, and some of them are getting very old, and cannot be ridden any longer, yet they still have to be fed and taken care of. Many of the ponies are also only big and strong enough



to carry children up to ten years old, and as the children grow up and continue wanting to ride, that becomes a problem. Lea has been thinking that getting a couple of ‘Katavari’ horses, a local breed, which is sturdy and resistant, could be a solution. However, the present financial situation makes it impossible.

In spite of the present problems, the Pony Farm continues running and Lea is still positive and optimistic about the future and sure that things will work out.

Says she: “I think the Pony-Farm should be like a second home to the children, where they feel happy to be with their friends, the ponies.” To the children it is already very much a ‘second home’.

Emmanuelle

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