

AUROVILLE today

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Critics and lovers of Auroville alike might argue that Emanuele Scanziani's drawing (left) symbolises the actualities of Auroville today. Castles in the air, warriors of the vital plane, children seated amidst smiling flowers in a lotus bud, a phantom opposing every inch of progress, and behind it, the ever present sun. If you like symbolism, take your pick. Tempting though such interpretations might be, Emanuele's drawing wasn't made for this purpose. Rather, it was made to illustrate "Beyond Asleep and Awake", the two-and-a-half hour children's opera written and composed by Holger, performances of which are planned at the end of June and beginning of July.

The opera is truly a highlight of these hot summer months, with temperatures ranging around 40°C. It features twenty children, aged 9 to 13, amongst who five soloists sing about 90 percent of all songs. Minor roles are reserved for four grown-ups. A piano, two violins, a traverso flute, a guitar and a trumpet serve as the orchestra. A small army of adults is building props, designing costumes, solving lighting problems, teaching singing, teaching acting, and making sure that the children's voices can be heard everywhere in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Rivas. A compact disk with highlights of the opera will be produced later this year.

In this issue of AUROVILLE TODAY we tell the remarkable story of the opera, interview the composer and shed some light on the process of preparing for the opera production. We also provide a portrait of Emanuele, the stage designer, and give updates on issues we have reported on during the past year and on ongoing projects in Auroville.

The magic of music, the thrill of theatre, the voices and play of children and the dream of Auroville: put them together and what do you get? An original and innovative musical that reaches beyond the realms of the everyday world. The musical "Beyond Asleep and Awake" is based on the story of an epic journey through lands beyond those we walk upon in our waking hours or even our dreams. It is a story of friendship and adventure, of children searching for a guarded truth, the immanent Divine.

The prologue unites three children from three different countries and time zones. Though their backgrounds couldn't be more different, they are at a similar stage in their understanding of the world they live in. The stage opens with the morning dawning in India, Argentina and the USA and the children are unified by the dawning of consciousness. Each of them greets the new day with a similar uneasiness and each is depicted questioning, wondering, musing about the uncertainty that this day may bring to their lives.

Shanti, an Indian village girl, wakes up to fetch water and break firewood, preparing to cook for her family. She wonders if her father will bring home anything, if the day will be filled with happiness or sorrow. Back from the well her earthen water pot breaks. In an flood of emotions she prays to Shiva and faints.

Anibal, a street boy from Buenos Aires, begins his working day selling newspapers. When he looks up from his work at a familiar soap advertisement on the wall, he finds to his surprise that the picture changes into a Viking soldier. Rubbing his eyes in disbelief he takes a second look and once again the warrior appears. Anibal is awestruck and passes out.

In a skyscraper high above the streets in a city in the USA Sharp opens his eyes and turns on his computer. Trying to reach a higher level on his computer game, yet actually bored of the software he has, Sharp ignores his mother's call to breakfast and chooses the micro-chips of computer over cornflakes with milk. Mesmerized by the flashing screen, Sharp manages to break his own record but in the process falls backward on his chair in trance.

At this point, the prologue ends and the journey begins.

The opera's first act begins in a strange land.

Independently from each other, the three children wake up: Shanti finds herself in a white room; Anibal awakens in a unfamiliar world dressed in a strange Viking garb and Sharp wakes up to find a huge computer system. All three hear incomprehensible words, strange and yet familiar, as if ...

When the three children meet,

their different traits are displayed. Sharp is a thinker, Anibal is more vital-physical and Shanti emotional. They all want to go home, and argue that it is perhaps all a bad dream! Hoping to wake up in their normal surroundings they all fall asleep again and darkness grows around them.

But it is a threatening darkness in which a voice is heard singing a lamentation about the pain of every day, the pain everyone wants to run away from. Slowly a black wind starts blowing and a number of children are seen fleeing away from it. One of them, Maya, awakes the sleeping trio and urges them to come along. But the three mistrust her and think she is a ghost, especially when she tells them that she can fly. They have chosen the wrong time for arguing, however. Suddenly Maya realises that the black wind has become very strong, and exclaims that the wind will take them all to No-World. But the voice they have been hearing all along suddenly becomes clear. It advises them to search for a divine form. The children escape from the black wind by standing closely together, as, by chance, their posture resembles a divine form.

The voice tells them to rejoice that they have met and that they have gained a safe passage home. But that is not acceptable to Maya, whose daily life is one of constant flight. She challenges the voice and calls for a god to explain what the darkness and the desperation is all about.

In answer to her call an oracle arises from the ground. He tells them

MAYA

*I want to know what this is all about,
The darkness and the desperation.
Desperation is what we went through
Home you'll never send me anymore
I'm leaving for another shore.
If there is anywhere a god for me,
Then you may help, I'm calling thee.
In the whole creation! Any god will do,
I'm calling you, I'm calling you!*

that they can either go home (which they already knew) or go to No-World, the place where the black wind comes from (which the children knew as well). In No-World everything is wrong. Atoms refuse to move, and there is no light. Maya decides that she has no choice but to go to No-World, and in spite of their fears the others, out of a newfound

loyalty, compassion and friendship, decide to accompany her.

The journey starts, and on the way the children enter Birdland, a land of beauty where they meet a number of birds who come to teach them. An owl tells them to use their senses more acutely to see beyond and through, to listen to their hearts and tune in to loving vibrations. Paradise birds teach them to tune in to harmony and feel at one with their destiny. An eagle tells them to see the worlds within worlds, and a dove advises them to rest in the peace of their heart and warns them not to enter a futile fight against the evil which they will never win.

Though beauty prevails, birdland is not free of nastiness. Two vultures try to trick Maya, promising a short cut to the Land of Harmony "just you and me, just do it", but to no avail. And then they hear the soldiers from No-World coming their way. Realising that it is no use fleeing, the children confidently pray for help. In response to their prayer a lotus flower miraculously closes itself around them. The army of the soldiers passes by unheeding, leaving destruction in their wake.

When the lotus bud opens again, the children find to their surprise a blind girl, called Moon, sitting next to them. Moon explains that she has learned to see with the eyes of the flowers, and that her stay with the flowers has given her an extraordinary sensitivity, a psychic sight which adds to the power of the group. They decide together to go on towards No-World, as "together we are stronger than our fears". The journey continues. With Moon's help they pass a land of black holes and shifting sands. Then they meet a warrior who agrees to go with them to the battlefield... a sad place where many characters fight endless battles which no-one ever wins. Above the battlefield, hanging in the air, they see an enormous castle, the castle of Zero-Be, the ruler of No-World. His frightening figure is seen watching from a window the fighting below. Sharp suddenly realises that Zero-Be delights in anger and feeds on the emotions of those on the battlefield, and that there is no way to win the bat-

tle. But Maya doesn't agree. "The way out is the way up" she says, and together with Moon, who is weeping as there is no sun in this place, she flies up to the castle of Zero-Be.

The castle of Zero-Be is guarded by a fearsome warrior called Zorn. Feeling the enemy approaching, he prepares himself for battle. His disappointment when he sees only two small girls is considerable, and the fact that they see through his tough demeanour—"his heart bleeds when he speaks", says Moon, "he is only a little crumbled light"—adds to his discomfort. Zorn takes the girls to Zero-Be. It is an enormous, slimy, many eyed monster who growls at Zorn for disturbing his evening meal. But Zorn, enraged at his disappointment kicks him and Zero-Be disintegrates before them. As the monster falls to pieces the scene behind him is revealed. A small, balding man sits at a desk by an illu-

minated window with a thick book in front of him. It is an accountant. He berates Zorn for having kicked Zero-Be, and then turns to the children, explaining to them that they have arrived at a very special place. Moon sees the light surrounding this man and becomes trusting and calm. Suddenly the voice speaks again, this time to advise them to go beyond. When Maya asks where this voice is coming from, the accountant replies that it is always there, that it is her own. Seeing the incomprehension on the face of Maya, the accountant then proceeds to tell her the 'why' of it all. "Zero-Be, the one you have hated and feared so much, is one of the things that do not change. You can only leave him behind you. And that is what you have done. I am just the keeper of the book, keeping accounts of all the progress that people make on their way to the Land of Harmony, the land beyond No-World".

Moon exclaims that she feels harmony closer than ever before. The voice speaks again, saying that this is the aim, the secret and inmost flame. From a window they see the Land of Harmony and the accountant explains that it wouldn't be the Land of Harmony if each person brought their personal cares, opinions, emotions, hopes and fears with them to it. That has all to be left behind, and they have to pass through No-World first be-

BEYOND ASLEEP AND AWAKE



fore they can enter the Land of Harmony. Zero-Be (the One Who Is Not) is just a puppet, kept up by higher forces, "higher than me". Then the children are shown out.

Down on the battle field the fight had raged on. When Moon and Maya return and explain to their friends all they saw and learned, the fighting gradually subsides. In front of their eyes a door suddenly appears. "This is the way" says the voice. "It is beautiful", exclaims Moon, "it is so bright!" At that moment, the door swings open and a blinding light appears through it. With a cry of delight Moon runs

through it and disappears. The other children are startled, shocked. But before they can grieve, the voice explains "this is the way we all go. Do not weep for Moon, she is beyond, eternally true. There are many things waiting for you Maya, and for Sharp and for Shanti and for Anibal, all of you have your own story to play. But I am always there, in sleep and awake, always, and one day, you too will go to the land of harmony. Sleep now

and find yourself at home, and remember that beyond asleep and awake, I am always there". As the voice falls silent, the four children gradually fall asleep. Lights begin

to fade. The children are picked up by the warriors and, one by one, all the characters of the opera go through the door into the light...

Siân and Carel

Meet The Composer

You'll find an interview with Holger in the March issue [# 74] of AUROVILLE TODAY. In brief: He is 36 years old, German, settled in Auroville in 1990. His profession: Violinist, with some experience in composing. Together with Pushkar he started a children's choir. Though it seemed a good idea at the time, he despaired later repeatedly about the quality of the choir in general and that of himself as choir director and inspirer in particular.

That changed when the Indian composer Param Vir visited Auroville and showed what could be done with all those unruly children. "It was more than an eye opener," recalls Holger. "Param Vir taught me that the children can do much more difficult things than I imagined they could, that they can contain much more energy than I thought possible. It changed the world for me. Since that time I know that I have to ask a lot to get a lot. And I have been writing increasingly difficult songs ever since I discovered with what ease the children were able to pick-up the difficult melody lines and intricate rhythms. There is a tremendous joy to see the glowing faces of the children singing with fervour, and I gained more confidence as a composer. The opera 'Beyond Asleep and Awake' was the result, though I must admit that I got carried away, as songs kept coming. The incredible good response I received from many individuals made it possible to realise this project. In this place I really learned to believe in guidance and rely on miracles!"

The music of the opera is light. It is certainly not classical but neither is it jazz or rock or pop. Nor is it 'new-age', though the text, with its central theme—the search for the immanent Divine—might be considered as such.

The genre 'children's opera' or 'children's musical' is a rare one, hardly to be found in either classical or in pop or rock music. "Beyond Asleep and Awake" is certainly new, in many respects, not in the least for the underlying story.

"Words can have a mantric value", explained Holger, "and that was my main motivation to write a really good series of songs. What do you remember of the songs of your childhood? With some of these songs I hope to give the Auroville children something which may come back in the times when they need it."

Holger's words still echo in my mind when, with five children from the choir in the back of the car, we go off for a weekend. "I am not moving, I am always there", the song of the Immanent Divine, resounds, followed by other favourites such as "The Secret Flame" and "Look Inside!", the eagle's song. The children obviously enjoy them and so do we, musing about the eagle's advice to "Look inside and you may wonder".

Carel

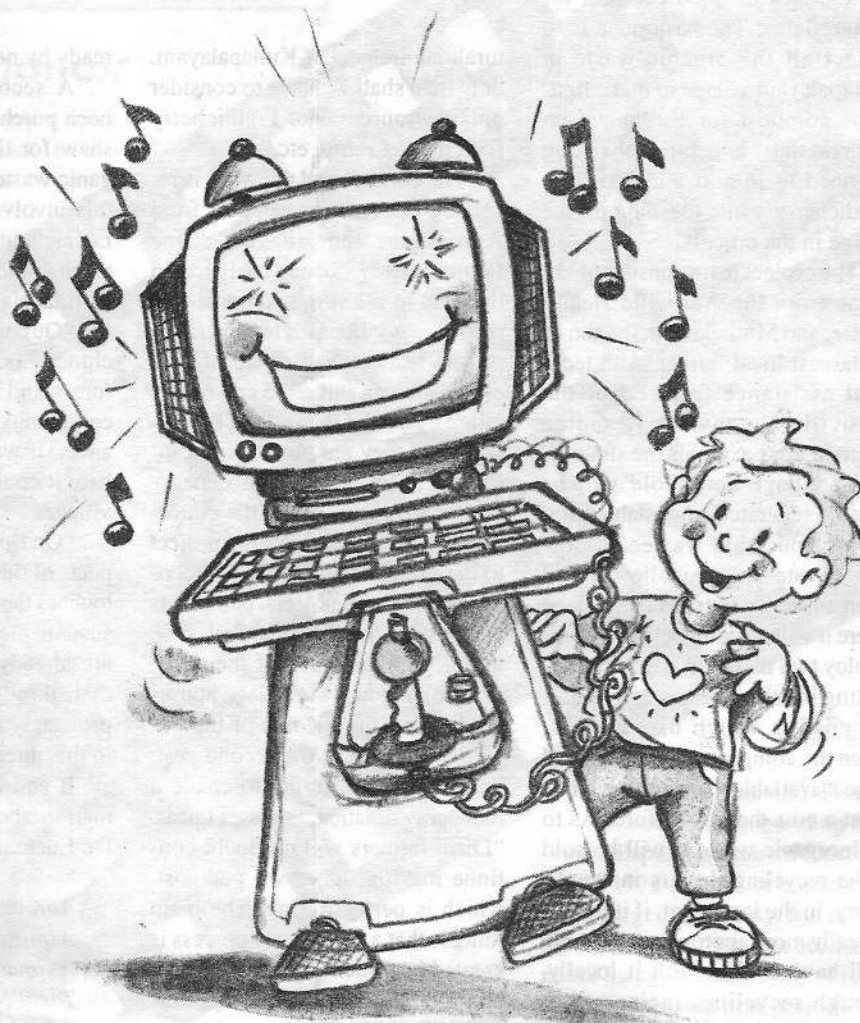
THE CHOIR

*Never, no never you are at this journey's end.
Beyond, beyond,
Yes you can go beyond ev'rything,
You can go on
You always walk,
Yes you walk through unknown land.
Beyond, beyond,
You just keep learning,
No matter how much you know
I am not moving, I am not moving.
I'm there, I'm always there.
Wherever you go - I'm always there,
Yes I'm there
I'm always there, always there.*

Right: Sharp wakes up to find a huge computer system.

Bottom left: I am just the keeper of the book.

DRAWINGS: EMANUELE SCANZIANI



A Collective Activity Par Excellence

An opera is something extraordinary. It is a synthesis of the arts, which integrates music, song, dance, drama and poetry with artfully designed and crafted scenery, costumes and lighting. A children's opera adds an extra challenge: to work with children. Aurovilians from all kinds of backgrounds have come together to realise "Beyond Asleep and Awake".

It has been Holger's tireless energy and persistence which has provided a model of stamina and courage for all involved. He wrote the story, part of the libretto and the composition and has steered the children's choir, the pianist and other musicians through the mazes of the opera's 41 songs and interludes. Subsequently he inspired others: designers, decor builders, theatre directors, as well as those with no special expertise but a lot of goodwill, many of them venturing into new areas of work. They all came together to offer their energy, putting aside their individual pursuits for some time and joining heads, hearts and hands in the collaborative effort to realise a text, to breathe life and art into ideas.

As a collective activity par excellence, the opera reaches into many corners of Auroville. Homes all over Auroville ring to the sound of children's voices rehearsing their songs and speeches, as well as those of the four adults practising their parts. Parents have been helping children to arrive at rehearsals on time, units have been donating materials, schools have loaned out props and countless people have contributed in diverse ways. Between the weekly meetings those involved kept in touch giving one another feedback, support and progress reports. Everyone took time to experiment with different methods and materials in search of perfection. There is a generally acknowledged feeling that we are all doing something really special for the children, a feeling which kept many people afloat through the usual difficulties and distractions and the moments when the whole thing seemed either too complex or too difficult to be realised, or when the work to be done appeared too much for the

seemingly short time available. We all had to find confidence in ourselves and in one another.

"The show must go on". To some this is a cliché, but for anyone who has ever worked in theatre this saying has surely struck a deep chord on more than one occasion. For everyone there are times when the work is met by resistance from within. Whether the work takes "too much" time or concentration, or requires research into new fields, or work in areas that have long since been left to gather dust in the sometimes painful halls of memory, we all have bridges to cross within ourselves. We all have egos that writhe at the prospect of hard work, anonymous work, work that is begun by someone else, work which carries no fame. In such a group work our hidden difficulties are often exposed.

Nonetheless, after some time, one realises that the show will go on, with or without one's own input, and then comes the real work. Without considering what one is not doing or could be doing, one simply concentrates on giving everything one can. One tries simply to stay in tune with what is happening and act accordingly. It is the work of nobody in particular but a work for all. Adults, children alike have played and worked on the realisation of a dream—or rather, a narrative from somewhere beyond dreams, sleep or wakeful consciousness, original to Auroville and very much close to home in its references.

For the children, the opera is a high-level educational experience which is taking place during the hottest months of the year because the period needed for continuous rehearsals could only be found in the summer holidays (May and June). The choir had already been working on some of

the songs since last October. But now the strain increased. The month of June was earmarked as "opera rehearsal month" and joining the opera meant abstaining from holidays and instead enrolling in a musical summer camp. Learning lines and lyrics, melodies and cues was only a first step. None of these things is as simple as they may sound, as learning implies understanding.

The children from the choir do not have any deep musical training. Most can read music, but there are still some who cannot. Part of the rehearsal time was therefore spent on basic music theory, along with learning how to develop mastery over the voices as a tool of expression, practising voice training and breathing exercises, becoming aware of body position and the effects of relaxation. Acting a part was another challenge. The children talked through the text and answered questions on it in a tutorial fashion to research their characters, using visualisation. Then came the first steps on stage. "How does a warrior walk. Do birds of paradise like to show their feathers off? Can you sing and move your legs and arms at the same time? Aye..!"

"The show goes on". We all hum the melodies, and like a mantra they work their way into the depths of our being as we work our way through a profound and beautiful, musical adventure. The show goes on, inspiring and delighting us all.

Siân

OVERHEARD

"I thought I heard a drunkard last night making noise in the neighbouring cashew field. But when I went out the door I realised that one of my own songs was being rehearsed."

(Holger, illustrating that his songs are practised any time anywhere)

Light at the end of the garbage tunnel?

In two previous issues of AUROVILLE TODAY we have reported on problems associated with the importing into the area of raw Pondicherry garbage. In brief: for various reasons, the cattle and goat population of Kuilapalayam has declined sharply over the last fifteen years. A consequence of this is that villagers have much less organic matter to turn into compost for use on their fields. As inorganic fertilizers are costly, the villagers began importing free raw garbage from neighbouring Pondicherry instead. However, this garbage contains not only inorganic materials like plastic and batteries, but also untreated hospital waste. The local farmers store this raw garbage on land adjacent to the village and neighbouring Auroville communities before taking it to their fields.

The result? Flies, which can breed the typhoid bacilli in their intestines, feed on the garbage and then become effective vectors of this and other diseases. In 1992, the first year in which large amounts of Pondicherry garbage were stored on village land adjacent to New Creation school, there were 14 cases of typhoid among 800 Aurovilians—technically, an epidemic: since February, 1994, Kuilapalayam Health Centre has registered 5 cases of typhoid a month among the local villagers. A further health risk is posed by the possibility of toxic elements in the garbage polluting surface and groundwater sources in the area.

Auroville's immediate response was to obtain a court injunction preventing Pondicherry exporting its garbage across the State border. This, not unnaturally, caused anger among local farmers who were suddenly deprived of a ready source of organic matter. Some Aurovilians then offered to assist the Pondicherry municipality in turning its garbage into saleable compost—as has already been done in Bangalore—but a suitable site in Pondicherry has so far not been found. Eventually, due to protests from local farmers, Auroville asked for the court ban to be lifted... with the result that Pondicherry garbage is once more piling up on land near the village.

In March, however, a new project

was initiated which may solve the twin problems of the health-risk associated with Pondicherry garbage and the lack of good compost for village fields. The basic idea is to collect all the organic waste in Kuilapalayam village to make first-grade compost for Kuilapalayam farmers, thus, hopefully, obviating the need to import garbage from Pondicherry while cleaning up the village in the process.

The project team consists of Dr. Lucas from the Auroville Health Centre, and Muthukumar, the son of the largest local farmer, with technical assistance from Ed of the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre. Lucas explains the strategy. "Each village household will be asked to separate compostable from non-compostable waste. The organic waste will be collected and taken to a site outside the village where it will be composted. We will employ two methods: aerobic composting in raised heaps, and vermicomposting which uses worms. When the compost is ready, we will make it available to the village farmers at a cost they can afford. As to the inorganic waste it will be sold to the recycling dealers in Pondicherry. In the long term, if it is ecologically more appropriate, then we shall have to deal with it locally, through recycling, incineration, pelletization etc."

But is there enough organic waste in Kuilapalayam to produce sufficient compost for the local farmers? "It's not clear yet. But it's quite possible that many sources of organic waste in and around the village have been neglected so far, and we will try to tap them. For example, I am asking larger kitchens and food processors in the area—like Aurelec, Aspiration and Pour Tous—to provide us with their food waste; 'La Ferme' is already supplying us with all their cow manure. If the amount of compost produced cannot cover the agricultural

tural requirement of Kuilapalayam, only then shall we have to consider outside sources like Pondicherry food market refuse etc."

The concept and the work is receiving encouraging support from Aurovilians and villagers. "One farmer already stopped me twice on the road to ask if the compost was ready," says Lucas. However, the project team is well aware of how easily such an initiative can be derailed by vested interests in the village, and they are proceeding cautiously. A lot of the team's energy at present is going into the educational aspect, explaining the project to the villagers through direct contact and through posters, pamphlets and a street play. In the first year, the project has set itself the target of involving half the village households, covering the rest of the village by the end of the second year. "And we're not trying to create a monopoly situation," stresses Lucas. "Local farmers will no doubt continue making their own compost, which is perfectly fine. The main thing is that a sustainable process is created by which organic matter in and around the village is hygienically converted into good compost—and there's no longer any reason to import Pondicherry garbage."

Composting has already begun outside the village on private land. Another piece of land has just been made available to the project for three years; significant quantities of good compost should be

ready by next monsoon.

A second-hand shredder has been purchased and a bicycle rickshaw for the collection of the organic waste has been ordered. "All this involves some expense," says Lucas, "but in the long run we hope, through the sale of the compost, to be financially self-sufficient."

"Our whole approach," concludes Lucas, "links together the forces and resources of one village community, and it aims at self-reliance. If we could make it succeed here it could be replicated in other villages."

"One of the most exciting aspects of this compost work is that it touches the essentials of organic and sustainable agriculture. And there are already some promising signs that, through the impetus of this project, real change will take place in this direction in this area."

If you would like further information about this project, contact Dr. Lucas at the

Auroville Health Centre,
Aspiration,
Auroville 605101,
Tamil Nadu, India.

24 Frames

Seen from one perspective, Auroville is ever changing, like a film that flashes through the projector at 24 frames a second. In these pages we try, to freeze these frames for one moment and pro-

New building for Mirramukhi school

Mirramukhi School is getting a new building. It is situated on the edge of the Matrimandir gardens and forms part of the educational corridor in the Cultural Zone, together with the Kindergarten and the Creche. Auro-Satprem designed the new building, using rammed earth and compressed earth blocks.

An interesting feature of this complex is its amphitheatre with a seating capacity of 200. Its stage will be covered by a huge vault spanning 10 metres, made also of compressed earth blocks.

At present an additional 6 lakhs are needed to be able to complete the construction.



Photo 1: Child to Child health education.

Photo 2: Model of Surrender housing units.

Photo 3: Physiotherapist Angelika at work in the new Children's Home.

Photo 4: The collective kitchen under construction.

Photo 5: Martina and her food processing team.

PHOTOS: MARTIN B. (1), JOHN MANDEEN (2-5)

Transition extension

New buildings are being added to Transition, Auroville's primary school which caters to the age group 7 to 13. The new buildings will house the library, two classrooms, a computer laboratory and an Access Centre for the teachers. Extra classrooms are needed because Transition hopes to extend the age-base of its students to provide higher education to children up to the age of 14 from the next academic year, and to be able to take in children from the age of six from July 1996. The computer laboratory, which will consist of about 10 computers donated by Aurelec, will allow for more interaction with computers and facilitate education through computers.

The Access Centre, a project long desired by the teachers, will maintain a data base of professional books and other educational materials, as well as provide a working space for teachers to meet and exchange ideas. Like the other buildings in Transition, the new buildings have been designed by Piero and are expected to be completed by January 1996.

a Second

vide snapshot updates of projects, challenges and initiatives that we have touched upon in AUROVILLE TODAY. Knowing, of course, that the film never stops ...

A golden moment for Matrimandir

All the gold necessary for the covering of the concave and convex disks which will decorate the outside of the Matrimandir, in all about 18 kilos, has been bought in Germany and handed over to the company which will process it into squares of gold leaf of about 85 x 85 mm and a fraction of a micron thick. The production of the disks themselves is scheduled to start in July. They will consist of a stainless steel frame covered with fibreglass, on which the gold will be applied. In a later phase a specialist of the German factory will supervise the application of the gold leaf in Auroville.

The Solar Kitchen is arising

Auroville's future collective kitchen (for a full report see AUROVILLE TODAY no. 72) has now got a ferrocement channel roof, and preparations are underway to cast the concrete slab around the solar bowl. The dining room has been redesigned to provide additional seating and now includes both indoor and outdoor dining space for a total of 300 people.

HUDCO (Housing and Urban Development Corp., Govt. of India) has sanctioned Rs.10 lakhs (\$30,000) for the buildings and there is a very good chance that some additional help will be received from the Ministry for Non-Conventional Energy Sources, which is interested funding the solar bowl and a fully automatic hybrid boiler. As soon as the HUDCO grant is received, work on the dining room will be started. In addition, almost all of Auroville's larger commercial units have promised financial assistance. Gilles and Suhasini hope to open the collective kitchen in July '96, for the start of the school year.

From time immemorial, there has been a food processing unit attached to Pour Tous, but until three years ago the production was limited to tofu (soy bean cheese), peanut butter and some jam. When Martina took up the work, she gradually increased the variety and scope of production and established a hygienic atmosphere in spite of the primitive conditions there. When a better equipped location became available at Bharat Nivas, she wrote a project proposal that was funded by the Dutch Foundation "Stichting de Zaaier", and also took out additional loans.

On November 15th, 1994, the food processing unit shifted to its newly renovated premises. A clean and spacious work area now pro-

vides a happy working atmosphere for the four Aurovilians (of who two work full-time and two part-time) and five local women employees. The main aim of the unit is to be an outlet for the Auroville farms; it works in close contact with the farmers. This year even the soy beans for the tofu are being grown in Auroville.

Martina's guidelines for running the place are cleanliness, harmony and social support for the women workers, who undertake regular health check-ups and are well-paid. The Tamil women get working saris, sandals, nutritious food items like tofu, and an extra bonus for their school-going children. It is important that the women can feel proud of their work.

Something's cooking

Plans for the future are: Six more apartments for guests and a residential area for therapists working in the centre.

So it seems that for quite some time there will be a lot of noise in Quiet.

Quiet?

More than thirty years ago The Mother gave the name Quiet to a serene stretch of beach. She wanted it to become a therapeutic retreat. But there's something special about the names of Auroville communities. Often the actual situation there seems to indicate the opposite of what the name stands for. Quiet is such an example.

"You have to imagine that all this stuff will be removed, there will be a nice garden and you will have lovely view of the beach." It is very difficult to catch what Jürgen says through all the hammering and shouting on the huge construction site. It is even more difficult to imagine that one day there will be flower gardens instead of store-rooms, piles of bricks, steel and sand. "In one and a half, maybe two years, the first part of the construction should be over", promises Jürgen, one of the caretakers of the healing centre project. The main building is more than halfway up. One can already see the domes typical of architect Poppo's style. The mason work of the hall (100 sq.m.), the multi-functional rooms for individual treatment and consultation like acupuncture, physiotherapy, psychic healing etc., and the section for water-birth and underwater therapy are almost ready. Nine guest apartments (each 30 sq.m. including bathroom and pantry) are also under construction.

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Health Centre is expanding

Since the Health Centre's main building next to Kulapalayam started functioning in 1972 it has been improved and enlarged constantly. But during the last months there has been a series of inaugurations, laying of foundation stones and new projects:

- A medicinal plant garden within the Health Centre compound was started with the objective to cultivate locally grown and known herbs from which useful remedies can be prepared. The staff of the HC kitchen will grow their own local herbs and vegetables. The whole compound should be designed in a beautiful and useful way.

- A pharmacy, located in the premises, has been inaugurated. This enables patients to buy medicines without having to travel for another hour to the nearest pharmacy. And it enables the doctors to prescribe medicines to those patients who can afford to buy them. Free medication is a big cost factor in the Health Centre budget. This service will help to cover the costs.

- A foundation stone ceremony for a sub-centre building in Rayapudupakkam village and the inauguration of the completed sub-centre in Kottakarai took place in February. The third sub-centre is located in Edaiyanchavadi. Three additional villages have applied for

sub-centres.

- Also in February the Children's Home was completed after twenty-two months of construction. It includes a physiotherapy hall, a ward of seven beds (four are occupied at present), a nurses' room, a doctors' room, a kitchen and two multi-purpose rooms. In the physiotherapy hall Angelika takes care of a group of thirteen handicapped children ranging from three to fifteen years.

- A programme of "child to child education" has been started by Dr. Assumpta in five village schools. Children are shown how to do clinical check-ups on each other. In this way, the children become aware of health care and health problems in a playful way.

- The first issue of the "Kuyil", a quarterly newsletter, came out in April. Its purposes are communication with the friends of the Health Centre and fund-raising.

Ongoing activities (besides the "regular" work in the Health Centre) are: One room for X-ray has been renovated (the equipment is expected by the end of this year); collaboration with specialists from Pondy; upgrading the medical lab; construction of toilets and drainage in the villages; and Health Education through Theatre (Director L. Srinivasan joined the Health Centre Team full time).

A fashionable idea

Auromode (situated in Auroshilpam, the Industrial Zone of the town) fashions garments for export, and is one of the leading business units of Auroville. About a year back, Auromode created four additional workshop spaces for other business units within its compound. These workshop spaces are rented out at the rate of Rs 750 a month for 25 sq.m. on a temporary basis for one or two years to new and upcoming business units. Prema, the head of Auromode, explains that providing workshop space and facilities such as water, electricity, watchman, phone and fax, allows new units to develop and establish themselves without having to immediately face the burden of investing in infrastructure.

Three of these workshop spaces, ranging in area from 25 sq.m. to 75 sq.m., are presently occupied by Grazia, the quilting unit, Sunlit Lane, the ceramic beads unit, and Auromirayan, the leather-goods unit. The workshops, designed by André Hababou, constitute a welcome addition to the Industrial Zone.

Collective housing - the time has come?

A new collective housing project has begun in the Residential Zone and several others are in advanced stages of planning.

Recently, the land was cleared for the beginning of the 'Surrender' project, which is located to the west of Grace. André Hababou, the coordinating architect, explains that 16 units will be built in the first phase of the project, and that the final population density will be 190 people. The housing is not uniform—different size units cater to different needs—although there is a unifying style. Prices per square metre range from Rs 3,500 upwards.

One interesting aspect of the project is André's decision not to provide communal facilities for its inhabitants from the outset. "I'll provide the space for them, but what manifests is entirely up to the residents themselves." This represents the opposite approach to Vikas community, where communal facilities were provided from the beginning. It will be interesting to see how each version of community planning works out.

Just to the south of Surrender an even more interesting collective project is being planned. Interesting, because it represents a collaboration between five Auroville architects, the majority of whom, until now, have worked independently. 'Invocation' is the name of the project, and while each architect will build a sector of the community in his or her own style, the four architects have agreed upon certain common architectural principles.

Another collective project on the drawing-board is Helmut's 'Arati' ("offering"). Located to the south of Grace, the completed project will consist of 47 houses and flats located around a terraced pond on a plot area of 12,000 square metres. The pond, which is part of a comprehensive water conservation system, will collect rainwater from roofs and other surfaces for the purpose of irrigation: in the dry season, the pond can be used as an amphitheatre. Another noteworthy feature of Arati is that sewage and other waste water will be biologically processed, passing through the root zones of reeds and rushes, so enabling the water to be reused for irrigation purposes. The first phase of Arati, which will see the construction of 13 houses, the water tank and sewage plant, will cost Rs.70 lakhs (approx. \$ 210,000) and Helmut, who wants to pre-finance the project, is looking at innovative ways of raising this money.

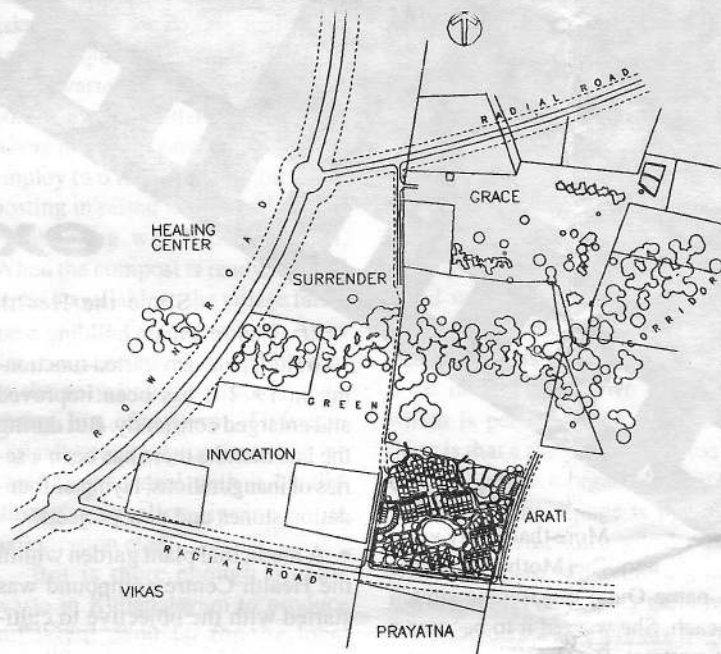
Another interesting initiative is a plan to integrate the water systems of all the communities in sections 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone. This would include Samasti, Prarthna, Prayatna, Vikas, Grace, Sharanga and Sangha, in addition to proposed projects like Surrender, Arati, Invocation and the Healing Centre. Harald Kraft, who designed the system, estimates that if the present wells in these communities are

linked together in a system involving a large underground tank at the highest point of land and underground tanks in each community, the amount of water available today would provide for 600 inhabitants at 333 litres per person per day. (The average daily per capita consumption in up-market areas of Bombay is between 130-200 litres.) One of the main aims of the proposal is to avoid disparities of water supply between communities as well as providing an uninterrupted water supply even during repair work on individual wells.

While on the subject of architects and architecture, it's worth not-

ing that the Auroville architects are now meeting together regularly. They keep each other up-to-date on new information, inform each other about their projects while inviting creative feedback, and also make recommendations concerning projects which have been referred to them by the Development Group. So far the Forum of Architects, as they call themselves, have been consulted in this way on designs for two projects—the Tibetan Pavilion and Holger's music centre.

Meanwhile land purchase, which is crucial for developing the infrastructure of Auroville, is continuing apace. This year, for example, Auroville Land Service has already purchased 15 additional acres in the city area and another 8 acres in the Green Belt.



New collective housing projects in the Residential Zone

AXIS No 2 : Better late than never

"In this issue we feature", the inside front cover of the magazine proclaims brightly, "Sian and Himal in a discussion on art; Akash on a motor-cycle tour; Sydo describing the strangest person he knows; Angiras, Chali, Luc, and others [the Kodai kids] in a discussion on education; Manikandan waxing poetic; some readers who offer feedback; sundry News and Notes; an interactive commentary on the governing of Auroville; and an exciting new addition."

Yes, sir, as Auroville would say, the long-awaited, much-despaired-of second issue of *AXIS*, Auroville's youth magazine, has finally hit the stands of Pour Tous. And the regulars at Pour Tous Snack Bar all affirm that the second issue is much, much better—more light-hearted, better designed, and more varied in its features—than the first. Little wonder, then, that the magazine is catching the imagination of the youth, with more and more of them coming forward to join the editorial team.

While financial contributions too have come in with the second issue, the magazine still needs plenty more subscriptions to be financially independent. Chali, one of the founding editors of *AXIS*, gratefully acknowl-

edges the support and encouragement that she got from young and yet not-so-young Aurovilians, especially Serge, Christianne and Olivier of the Auroville Press, to push the second issue through. She hopes that the magazine will gain wide circulation among young Aurovilians abroad, especially now that *Exile* (the magazine Auroville proposed to start last year at the Auroville Youth Meet in Paris) has joined forces with *AXIS*. We now await the release of the third issue, "the work for which," assures Chali, "is progressing satisfactorily."

Copies of the first two issues of *AXIS* may be had for Rs. 15 (within India) or US \$ 2 (outside India) each. Cheques should be made out to Auroville Fund specifying 'AXIS' and sent to: *AXIS*, c/o Chali, Akashwa, Auroville 605101, India.

Toujours Mieux

Readers may notice that AUROVILLE TODAY has at last managed to improve the printing of its photographs. The secret? Before sending them to Auroville Press, we have them computer scanned in Madras. John Mandeem, our main photographer, has never looked so happy...

Water: Counting Each Drop

It sounds like the refrain of an old song: the environmentalists' cry of "Water tables falling down, falling down, falling down." But by exactly how much and due to which factors is the water table falling has never been fully studied. The present Development Group hopes to be able to correct this situation by carrying out a detailed study of water resources. The study which was authorised upon the advice of Mr. G. K. Bhat, an eminent hydrologist from The Action Research Unit (TARU) in New Delhi, seeks:

- To document the stocks and flow of ground and surface water in Auroville and in its immediate neighbourhood;
- To quantify the ground water draft at present and likely changes with different scenarios of development and management.
- To identify possible ways of sustainable management of water and possible constraints on water availability with different population sizes;
- And to establish mechanisms for long term monitoring of water re-

sources.

The study will be done in two stages and take a total of six months to complete. The first stage will monitor water resources for two months during the pre-monsoon period and two months during the monsoon. The second stage, consisting of two months, will cover the post-monsoon period. Data for the study will be collected by conducting primary scientific and social surveys, analyzed by the computer-based Geographical Information System, and as far as possible, geographically referenced reports will be produced. The study which will be carried out with the collaboration of TARU requires a budget of about Rs. 9 lakhs (\$ 30,000) and a qualified team of hydrogeologists, civil engineers, socio-economists and trained field assistants. At present, money and manpower are the major constraints in carrying out the study, but Nick, a visiting hydrologist from Britain, assisted by a hired graduate from the village of Edayanchavadi, has already started working on this important project.

A Soldier's Voyage of Self-Discovery

Major General Krishna Tewari (retd.) has written a book about his career in the army (which included the wars India fought against Pakistan and China), his experiences of being a Chinese prisoner-of-war, about how he came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and why he decided to live in Auroville after his retirement. The book, entitled *A Soldier's Voyage of Self-Discovery*, is based upon diaries which he kept from 1938 onwards, and is motivated by "an urge towards self-discovery... to find my real self working behind the scenes". The book is available from the Auroville Boutiques, price Rs.95, and from the distributors: East-West Affiliated Press Private Ltd., Ormes Rd., Kilpauk, Madras.

A New New Creation Corner

New Creation Corner, everyone's favourite snackbar on the road, was shut for a few weeks while being remodelled. A larger kitchen is being built with (possibly) a new oven (for better pizza) and fridge. Fixed tables will be installed for inside seating, and the outdoor seating area will now hold 10-12 more people under the trees. Why is the Corner so popular? "People come here to relax, to talk, especially the youth. They love to eat bacon and fried eggs or *croque monsieur*, read the newspaper or *India Today*", says Agnes, one of the friendly Aurovillian faces behind the counter. There is a staff of three, including Moorthy and Balou, with Selvi and Pokkilai helping in the kitchen.

TO SUBSCRIBE

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

Addresses of Auroville International centres:

AVI Deutschland , c/o M. Soerensen, Bleicherstrasse 60, 28203 Bremen, Germany.	AVI Canada , c/o Denis Henley, 847 Chemin Perry, Aylmer (Quebec), J9H 5C9 Canada.
AVI España , c/o Arjun and Anandi, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain	AVI Sverige , c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borg-holm, Broddeb<179>, S-59700 Atvidaberg, Sweden.
AVI France c/o Satyakam Karim, 14, rue du Colonel Grancey, 94500 Champigny Sur Marne, France.	AVI U.K. , c/o M. Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W.Sussex, PO18 8SP, U.K.
AVI Nederland , c/o M. Berden, Lobellalaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag, The Netherlands.	AVI USA , c/o Jack Alexander, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA.

AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Martin B., Jill, Carel, Bindu, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. All photos (unless otherwise credited): John Mandeem. DTP: Annemarie, Martin B. Proofreading: Barbara. Printed at Auroville Press.

Subash tells the story of the *Birth of a Brochure*

There's usually not much fuss made about the publication of a brochure on Auroville. By now quite a few exist, in various languages. But there has not, until recently, been a brochure on Auroville in the language of the land that hosts it: Tamil. Varadharajan, Meenakshi and others, all fully involved in the many challenges that Auroville life brings, had done preparatory work but then got bogged down by too many other responsibilities. Therefore the appearance, finally, of a high quality brochure in Tamil is a great achievement, due in no small part to the efforts of Subash. Subash came originally from Madurai, but lived in Pondicherry for 17 years. There he was part of the Mother's Service Society, which is working for the realization of Mother and Sri Aurobindo's ideals in Tamil Nadu.

When he joined Auroville in August 1993, he offered to help Varadharajan in his educational work. But the latter advised him first to get acquainted with Auroville, and to work with the material already gathered for the Tamil brochure on Auroville and complete it. He gladly set to work. From then on it would take one and a half years until the brochure saw the light of day. Here is his story.

I stayed in Ilaingnarkal and started the work. Varadharajan and I decided to have 12 chapters in the book, dealing with: Sri Aurobindo; The Mother; the Dream; Auroville's inauguration; the Auroville Town Plan; Matrimandir; Auroville's spiritual basis, Auroville, the world and India; Auroville and Tamil Nadu; Auroville's development and the problems it encounters; education in Auroville and some practical information about Auroville.

The first five chapters were written quickly and easily. In the chapters on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the

clear to me why it is so and what really one should try to do in Matrimandir. I started visiting the Chamber every day. During my first two visits to the Chamber, I could neither meditate nor concentrate. I developed only a headache. I was baffled. I did not go there for four or five days. I inwardly offered the matter to Mother. Then a few occasions came when I happened to get involved in some sort of continuous physical work for an hour or two, and it was so for three days. On all these days, when I went to

On the 9th or 10th day, it became clear to me what I should write on Matrimandir, and it was written in a day. First the plan of Matrimandir and its structural details were given. Next its essential purpose was simply stated as follows: if one wants to find out the truth of his being, to discover his psychic being, to realize the Divine, concentration in Matrimandir will help him realize that wish. After this, an explanation in Mother's own words of what she meant by religion was given. Then it was explained how religions tend to become rigid by insisting on the following of religious rites only, obliterating the uniqueness of each one's path towards realizing the Divine, becoming an obstacle in their paths and thwarting its own essential aim. As each one has to find his own psychic being and realize and live on the basis of that realization, he has to acquire the concentration needed for this and make it normal in the context of daily life, which is the *raison d'être* of Matrimandir.

Real achievement of human unity is not possible without realizing the spiritual unity, that is to know and see the Divine in oneself and others. So essentially, the chapter 'The Spiritual Basis of

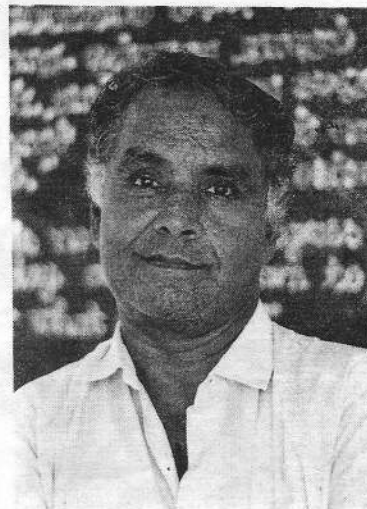
piration can become conscious of the Divine in a few months.

Meenakshi and Varadharajan provided almost all the material for the chapter, 'Auroville and Tamil Nadu'. But the main theme became the development of a thought of Karmayogi, who is the founder of Mother's Service Society and is instrumental in making an increasingly large number of people from Tamil Nadu become aware of Mother's Grace and derive from it immense material and psychological benefits. In one of his articles Karmayogi raised the question of why the Avatars, Sri Aurobindo and Mother, happened to pursue their supramental yoga in a Tamil region and if there was anything favourable there for the fulfilment of their yoga. He himself answered the question. He has written that the psychic being and its *bhakti* are essential elements in Purna Yoga. The realization of a large number of Tamil saints like Alvars, Nayanmars, Ramalinga Vallalar, Ramana Maharshi etc. was achieved through their psychic being and *bhakti*. As the Tamil region had such a tradition of psychic development, it was a favourable situation for their yoga. I felt like stressing this point in the article as I considered it very important.

Now to the printing process. There were difficulties and it took a long time to print the book because of our lack of familiarity with the printing process which included computer composing and layout and offset printing. But inwardly it brought me the experience of breaking habits both physical and mental, an increasing recognition of an inner guidance in the context of this work and a growing ability to follow it, an increasing perception of Mother's presence, and a gradual acquirement of a quiet, inner mastery of the situation.

First my physical work habits were broken. I had never gone to a work place in rain so many times. The compositor in the Ashram Press could do the work only for two hours in the evening, and I was to be with him. The rainy season was in full swing when the layout work started. On almost all the days of the work, I had to cycle in the rain, with a raincoat on, from Auroville to Pondy and be back by night. On all these days I visited the Samadhi and stayed there for some time. During this time, gradually, an alertness developed in the body.

Then the mental habits. The computer layout at the Ashram Press was over on the 17th of November, 1994. I wanted the book to be printed by New Year. But then, Varadharajan proposed to include Mother's facsimiles and their Tamil



translations, which meant more inclusions, a new layout and a consequent delay. Even though I was not mentally prepared for it, the idea was too good to reject. I gave up my wish for the New Year release.

But, in the next round of work, we did not want to go back to the Ashram Press and hence were searching for an alternative place, where the particular Tamil type we were using was available. It was then I started recognizing the inner guidance and following it implicitly. After failing to find the required Tamil type in four places, I happened to stand on the road near Ajantha theatre, when a bus bound for Gurumedu stopped by me. On this route lay Gurudakshina Printers who were using this type, but could not undertake our work earlier because their Tamil software got corrupted. I felt a peace inside and an inner push to board the bus and go to Gurudakshin. I did so and learnt from the printer that they had been able to replace the corrupted software with a proper one. They accepted the work. That acceptance was the turning point in the work. It picked up pace, became increasingly perfect, and the end was in sight. For me also it was a sort of turning point.

After the matter had been given to the Auroville Press, exigencies of a different kind arose. But the one thing that was markedly noticed from the beginning of the printing process was that whatever was prepared by or fixed in our minds beforehand had to be put aside and we were always made to respond in a fresh manner to every situation that arose during the work. And always it was possible to do so. Until the last moment, this characteristic of the work remained. During the later stages of the work we started learning to attend the work with a blank mind but endowed with a certain alertness and full attention. At the same time, imperceptibly we were learning to follow the inner guidance based on a certain inner certitude that developed. On two days in February and March, I felt very strongly, when I was in my room, as if Mother was intensely present in the Auroville Press. On one of the days, the mounting work and on the other the printing work were in full swing there. And a further experience was that when following the guidance, we felt as if the work was going on by itself and we were in it for name's sake only!

Subash



Subash with students at New Creation

spiritual content of their lives was emphasized. The external details of their lives were so chosen and presented that they showed their relevance to the spiritual purpose for which they were born.

When I wanted to write the sixth chapter, on Matrimandir, I did not know what to write. Many people were asking why the Matrimandir is being built, what purpose will be served by it. The English brochure and other pamphlets stressed simply the fact that it is not there for a religious purpose, that it is not going to be a temple to perform religious rites; but it was not

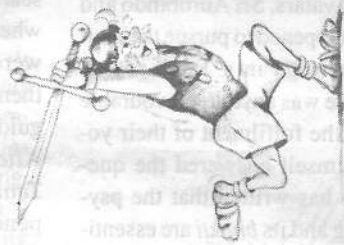
the Chamber and tried to meditate, I succeeded, and concentration was possible. At the end of the concentration, the aspiration lying dormant inside emerged fully with the needed intensity. As long as I tried to concentrate and persisted in it, that aspiration emerged at will. This was the first breakthrough for me. Later, whenever I happened to consecrate my activities of the day while doing them, whether physical work or reading, concentration in the Chamber was easier and quicker and deeper.

Auroville' is about what is meant by 'All Life is Yoga', what the psychic being is, the necessity of finding it, what one should do to find it, doing work as Yoga as an indispensable means for it, and Mother's explanation of all these things as expressed in 'To be a true Aurovillian'. Some relevant excerpts from Mother's published works were also given. One of the excerpts mentions the fact that never before has the Divine Presence been so accessible to humanity as now and another excerpt notes that in such a situation, one who has a very intense, deep as-

AUROVILLE TODAY

By Airmail
Bookpost

CSR Office,
Auroville 605101
Tamil Nadu, India

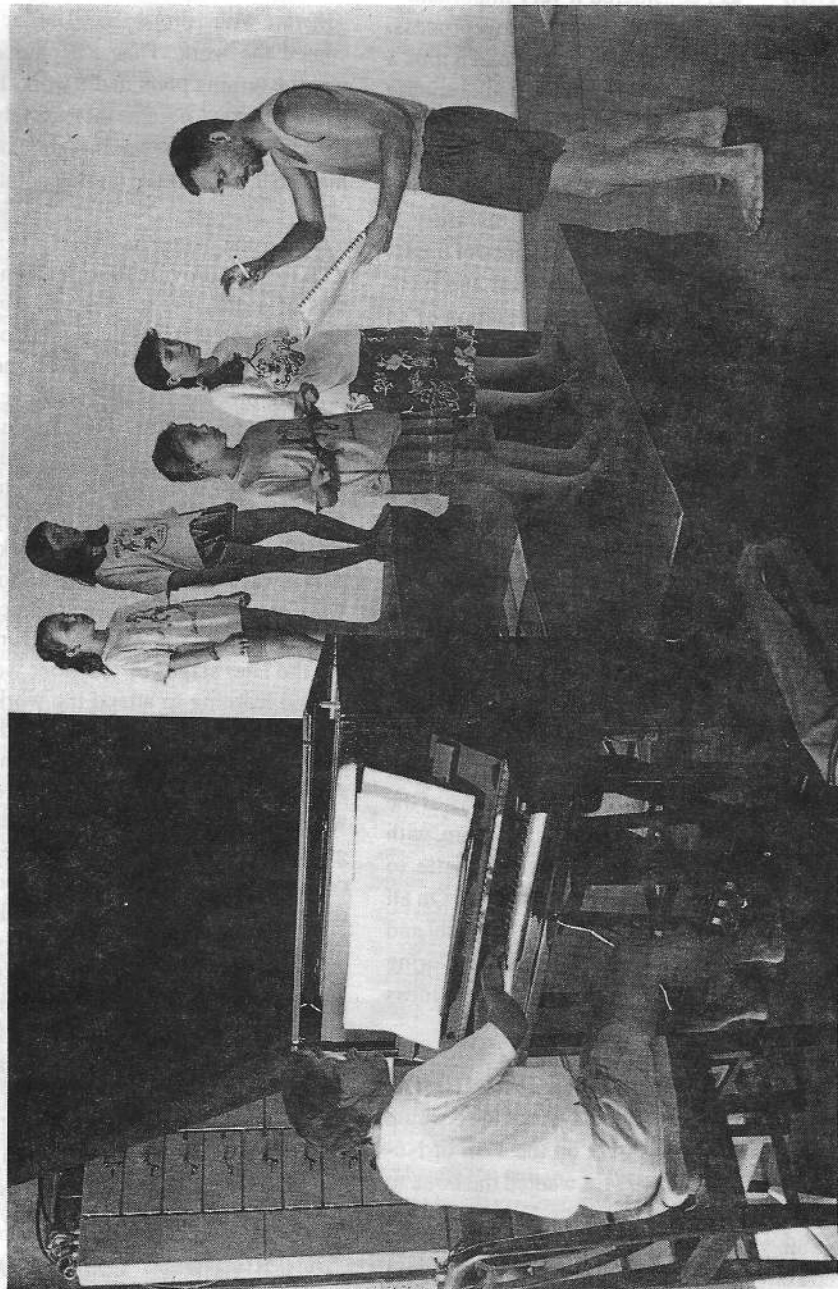


Exp. # 85

KRISHNA TENARI
AUREMOELE
AUROVILLE

July 1995
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IN THIS ISSUE:
BEYOND ASLEEP AND AWAKE - A CHILDREN'S OPERA; 24 FRAMES A SECOND -
UPDATES ON AUROVILLE PROJECTS; THE BIRTH OF A BROCHURE; A PORTRAIT



Beyond asleep and awake - total concentration during rehearsal

A colourful life

Bindu paints a portrait of the artist Emanuele

Emanuele, hey Emanuele," Chris calls out, "I am running out of brown paint." As I enter Bharat Nivas, young Chris is standing, brush in hand, among open tins of paint. Beside him is a half-painted, evil-looking volcano made of styrofoam and sacking cloth.

It is the first of June. Barely ten o'clock in the morning. But the heat is already on. The count-down to the staging of the opera has begun. And Bharat Nivas is a beehive of activity. Onstage, Siân and Joy are rehearsing the play with the children. Backstage, artists, carpenters, sound and light technicians are working full swing to have the sets of the opera ready. 'Beyond Asleep and Awake' calls for elaborate props: a computer with a screen flashing yellow and green; a fridge that emits fire; sinister looking mountains (that Chris was busy painting) of No-land; a lotus bud that conceals five kids within it, etc. Sketches and working diagrams of all these sets are stuck along the length of the notice-board with notes, instructions and questions scribbled all over. Emanuele, the artist and main set-designer, answers Chris's call and quietly rummages through the tins of paint, seizing upon a half-finished tin of brown oil paint.

"Here you go, Chris, VRRRRROOOOOOM" he says imitating the noise of an engine revving up, as he vigorously stirs the paint.

Now that the problem at hand is solved, I corner Emanuele for an interview. I had heard about Emanuele: a commercial artist from Italy who had come here for the summer, got roped into the opera by Holger, and then decided to try out Auroville as a newcomer. I had seen his drawings, those wonderful pictures of sweet, smiling children which had been featured on more than one occasion in AUROVILLE TODAY. I had never met him. He was young. Barely 28. Slim, with dark wavy hair brushed back. But his eyes were his nicest feature: a soft, smiling brown, they naturally exuded a certain aura of peace and joy.

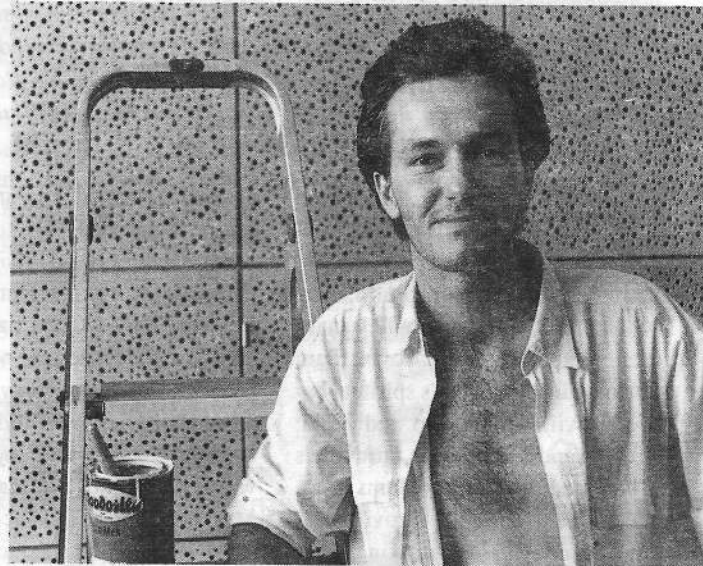
Emanuele and I retire to the dressing-room to escape from the hub of the activity. I throw question after question at him: What is your main line of work in the artistic field? Have you designed sets before? What was it like to grow up in Italy? How did you become acquainted with Auroville? What do you think of Auroville? What made you decide to become a newcomer?

But Emanuele smiles enigmatically at me and replies: "Do the answers matter? The answers lie in the past. Everything I have done, including designing these sets, is in the past. And to me the past does not matter. They were experiences that I needed to go through." Yes, indeed. Why should the details of Emanuele's life matter? To me, or to anyone else? I could sum them up though for the curious reader:

Emanuele Scanziani was born and brought up in Italy. He had a natural gift for drawing which expressed itself even in his childhood. And before he came to Auroville, he used to work as an illustrator for children's books and a designer of greeting cards. Though he refrains from calling himself an artist, he has occasionally done a few paintings in his leisure. As a teenager, Emanuele excelled in snowboarding, representing Italy in that sport in European and World championships. His grandmother, Yudi, who lived for a year in Auroville in 1972, probably was the greatest influence on Emanuele's life. It was in her li-

brary that Emanuele discovered the Bhagavad Gita, Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, and also, Richard Bach and Kahlil Gibran. Emanuele also dabbled in poetry and worked on an Italian translation of *Savitri* for two years. He first visited Auroville in 1985 and has been coming back regularly ever since. At the behest of a friend, he took charge of AVI Italy for four years. And now he is here.

What matters, are not the actual events of Emanuele's life but what he got out of them. And Emanuele acknowledges that almost all of his experiences were intense. "It is, as though once I touch the inner core of a happening, I don't feel the need to experience it



Emanuele, the artist and main set-designer of the opera

anymore. Now I try to live according to Sri Krishna's advice, offering everything to the Divine consciousness without caring about the results."

But Emanuele," I persist, "when you talk about offering all your actions to the Divine, is it a prayer that you express mentally or is it something more?" He softly answers, "As a child, I once had the experience of Pure Existence. I try to relive that experience in all that I do. To me, all that matters is to live and act according to the Truth-Consciousness."

"Is that why you are here then," I ask, "to experience and live the Truth-Consciousness?" "Yes and no," Emanuele answers after a pause. "It can be experienced anywhere. Actually, I daily ask myself, my inner spiritual guide that is, why I am here. And so far, I do not have an answer. All I know is that I have to be here for at least a year. I remember that in 1990, I badly wanted to join Auroville and perhaps it is the remnant of this old desire that has brought me here."

I further probe, "Don't you think that Auroville is a special place?" "Yes. Of course it is," he replies. "In one of my visits, when I was just walking out to a friend's house, I was brought into contact with an aspect of the personality of the soul of Auroville (I believe that souls can choose to incarnate not just into human beings but into places, into paintings etc.). I felt that Auroville was an old soul that had been on the earth before and had now come back to try and manifest a new consciousness. It was a very nice experience, as though I had chanced upon an old friend, and I guess, that is why I like this place."

My mind searches for more questions to ask Emanuele, for more definitions with which to pin him down. But the quiet of my thoughts is suddenly ruptured by shouts of "Emanuele, hey Emanuele." Chris needs his help again. Emanuele turns to leave. And though I already have a good guess at the answer, I quickly shoot one last question at him: How do you define yourself?

"I am a living need for Truth," he replies with a last, sweet smile before he merges with the ongoing *lila* of his work again.