

AUROVILLE

TODAY

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untitled

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Full - that is the predominant word throughout January and February. Guest-houses and private homes are full of visitors, friends and family members. Working groups receive important contact persons. The Governing Board comes for its bi-annual and the International Advisory Council for its annual meeting. Cultural activities abound. Full. And everybody is very busy. In this issue of Auroville Today artist Pierre Legrand presents his work and musician Holger Jetter talks about the relevance of music

education in Auroville and the need for a small performing hall. The chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation gives his views on the past 4 years, and Hanne Strong explains why she joined the International Advisory Council. The chairman of the Dutch foundation De Zaaier explains why it generously contributes to Auroville and where Auroville should shape up. Gilles and Guy present future requirements. Jill talks about masks and Philip about facing each other openly. This issue too is

Full

In the late sixties and during the seventies a new artistic current proved that pure concept art was not the end of all. "Body Art" reinstated flesh and bones and life at the heart center of the artistic scene. The body, most of the time the artist's, was the object of diverse rituals: disguise, deformation, aggression, etc., according to pre-established scripts. Establishing the contact between the artist and usually a very small audience, the only trace of this event was a video or a film.

Now the term "Body Art" refers to such events. Here, I would like to explore another version of this term and present an extension of its meaning.

Yes, the body is a field of inquiry. But what is the body? According to me, the above examples still refer to the surface: the flesh, the interaction between the artist's body and the social body, psychological and social issues, the different functions—breathing, food assimilation, digestion, excretion, reproduction, etc. all these aspects have been more or less taken as the field of research for many "Body Art" artists. At a deeper level, however, the body is constituted of cells: hundreds of millions of them. As Whitman proclaimed, we do all contain multitudes. How to experience this "zoo"?

When we experience extreme fear (when our hair stands on end) and when we experience the most intense joy, we feel as if thousands and thousands of mini-needles were pecking prickling deliciously and simultaneously all through our being. Pleasant or unpleasant, the two experiences above seem to mark the limit of our sensibility. Yet, these experiences shared by everyone are still quite superficial: they only mark the limits of our daily routine.

Imagine...

There are moments, in life, when we are catapulted out of that routine: in moments of intense crisis when everything collapses or in moments of extreme physical suffering. We face a sudden wall and we have no choice—we have to face it. And either we die or we go through. usually, in the case of extreme physical suffering, we go to the doctor. And doing so, we miss the opportunity of crossing an energy barrier. Namely, by resorting to an outside agency, we do not let the body go through using its own knowledge.

There is a method: it is to remain quiet. To trust one's own strength and armed with patience, to call light, peace and joy into the affected area, and to go on and on relentlessly until the crisis is over. Suddenly one enters a new territory, as if we had been living all the time on the surface of our physical being. Suddenly, we dive deep inside and reach "the octopus garden" where at last we can "feel safe with all our friends"!

Progressively we take joy in these little escapades, and after sometime we become so engrossed that we live as if under water, more and more immune from the outer shocks of life—aggression, noise, disease, etc. It is a long process, most probably a life-long one. But, after all, isn't that what life is all about! Then one becomes aware of sudden invasions, circulations, sudden tremors, strange thrills, etc. Such experiences, which after a few major crises, opened a kind of million osmotic gates, have become my field of research and main lever in my present artistic endeavour. Since the first "major" experience which occurred more than twelve years ago (when suddenly it felt as if all the cells were rising and rising until they reached a new "normality"), I have been trying to find a way to "describe" that experience which I longed to re-live.

All these attempts at description sound crazy. I decided thus not to use words lest people think I am mad, but instead turned to painting. People would be free to see only abstract patterns and unnoticed I would continue my research.

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Imagine... (continued)

I met with a certain amount of success. My first expo in a small gallery in Cologne (not famous but quite spacious) sold quite well. And contacts were established to make a similar expo in another German town one year later.

Everything was simple: I had found a trick. I just had to go on. Success was guaranteed: my work at that time happened to be sufficiently "decorative". But that was without counting the "inner necessity" of which Kandinsky speaks so clearly. More and more, the repeated experiences were pointing towards new dimensions: there was a certain POROSITY I could feel in my own substance. There were gaps, holes (and these seemed more important than the surrounding matter!). How to remain faithful to these experiences? How to describe them with painting? Suddenly I saw myself in horror punching holes in my paintings. Then, in order to make the holes more organic, burning them partially, then I felt like working with mosquito nets, the strange networks of knotted ropes. The deadline for the expo was fast approaching. I sent whatever I had done. And the expo was a total flop.

But I went on and slowly some patterns emerged. A strange coherence (if not beauty yet) was taking shape. And that became the expo of "Resonances" in Auroville in 1993. I could not speak about it. I was too much in the flow! The expo went to Paris, to the UNESCO. As usual only those who liked it spoke to me. Some gallerists came and expressed their interest. Nothing materialised. I was too unsure of myself. I did not know what it was...

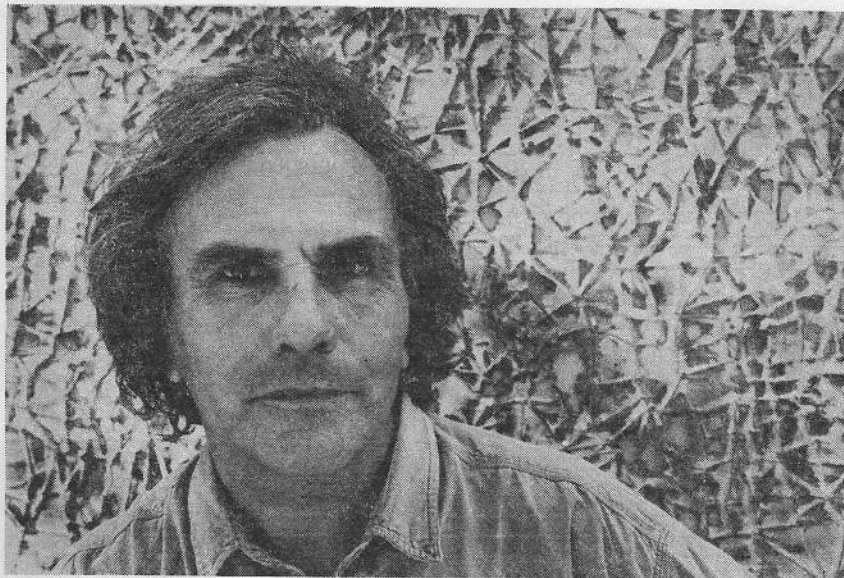
Back in Auroville, the work went on. Mountains of incredibly messy canvases, structures or whatever. They all had to be burnt. It still did not "click." (At that time, I thought a lot of Coltrane who had worked sleeping and waking up with his saxophone... until he touched something that no follower has been able to duplicate, something that reaches right at the center of every bone...)

Then suddenly, after a trip to the Himalayas, I got it. A new technique or rather a series of techniques that allowed me to get a closer rendering of this sudden outburst of a million energies, these impulses of a super electricity, these instant and simultaneous flashes throbbing out of a extremely complex "soup".

Then came the sign I had been waiting for all these years: finally, some works/pieces (how should I term them: they are neither painting nor sculpture) had the power to give back some major experiences I had more than ten years ago. The bridge was made. At least for me. Now I could start to really work.

Pierre Legrand in front of one of his works

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN



It was at this moment, about five months ago, that I felt the need to "verify," to check whether I was mad or not. And what could be a better testing ground than an expo in Auroville?

At the moment of writing these lines, the expo has been going on for three weeks. And the result is just overwhelming.

Not everyone came. And not everyone responded. Far from it. But among those who responded—there have been a number of individuals who stayed for hours, in silence. Who came, day after day. And looked. And felt. And experienced. And were taken by surprise. And expressed their joy, their gratitude, their recollection.

*I was not mad.
Or, if I was, at least,
I was not alone*

Yes. They knew these patterns. They knew the experience. It was physical. Cellular. Yes. And it was objective. No. I was not mad. Or, if I was, at least, I was not alone. Not anymore.

The picture gets clearer: if these experiences are borderline states, if we have to grow, to evolve, we have to experience them. We have to cross threshold after threshold. And for that, we need energy.

And in the same way that Indian Classical Art managed to establish all over India a palpable spiritual atmosphere and managed to remind generation after generation of the discovery of the Self, we can now imagine a new art whose function would be to remind us, again and again, of the task ahead: to go deeper than the routine life, to plunge at a deeper level of life, to move beyond a threshold of a physical barrier to bathe ourselves at the source of primal physical energy.

Let us imagine an environment, a city whose every garden, every building, every object would radiate that new vibration? Imagine...

Pierre Legrand

Outside the Web

Pierre Legrand's recent work, exhibited for one month at the C.I.C. in February, acts like an invocation and has the effect, when it surrounds you in a room, of creating a sense of parallel physical spaces and realities. "An osmotic threshold of interstitial space," as he describes it. What interests him most is the interactive experience his work creates with other Aurovilians. "The work is not what you see, but lies in the effect and interaction it creates with other Aurovilians. The work is a pretext for that. The layered webs are like a mantra on the physical, and the interaction that results is silent, rich and rewarding, almost like a performance."

His work reflects a series of threshold experiences: for example, feeling the total solitude of every human being led into an experience where he felt his cells rising until they touched a threshold and entered a state of bliss. Once while trying to forget the pain of a kidney stone he visualised the earth and suddenly saw humanity as caught in a net and linked on a web of suffering and pain. And yet behind, outside the web was the experience of bliss. "One can be in and outside the web at the same time. Another time I was projected into a space where I suddenly experienced unity with my fellow Aurovilians. There was no judgement of others involved just the experience of being part of one body. I made this exhibition to try and verify that experience and to touch the essential Auroville. Achieving human unity means to reach that state or level where we all are automatically one."

Comments of those who have seen the exhibition are varied: "This is new, really new and it gives me instant joy," "It goes straight to the body," "It touches the whole being," "The mind is immediately put out of work," "interesting, but I prefer infra-red NASA photography," "This is Auroville," "It could be African, Oceanian, Western, it is universal".

Art goes Ferrari

On the 18th of February Holger presented his plans for a small performing arts center, nicknamed "The Ferrari". Songs by Tine and Eliane and the children's choir and soft fiddling by Savitri and Holger gave a taste of the myriad of possibilities this centre will provide.

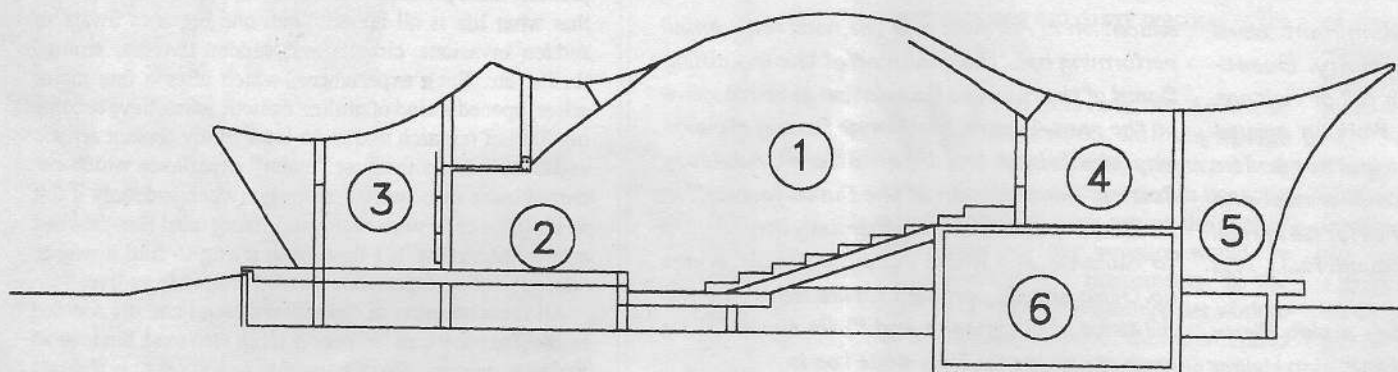
"There are many reasons for this performing arts center" says Holger. "In the first place there is a great need for a good performing space. The room in Pitanga and the stage of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas are fully booked; moreover, that stage is often too big. Then there is the need for air-conditioned rooms so that the musical

instruments can be well taken care of. There is a need for practising and teaching rooms. And last, we need a room for recording and for practising loud instruments such as drums and trumpets.

The Performing Arts Center will have a seating arrangement for a maximum of 100 people, but the design is such that also 10 or 20 people will feel comfortable. Small music performances, little theater plays, poetry readings, puppet plays, magic shows and so on can all take place here. Three backstage rooms, two of which will be equipped with upright or grand pianos, will serve as practising and teaching rooms.

There is a control room with all the technical equipment for shows and recording sessions. And there will be a specially sound-proofed room where one can not only make study recordings of one's work, but also record concertos from visiting artists. Such a quality recording could then be donated to them as an expression of thanks for their performance. This room will also be used for recording very fragile pieces, as in any recording presently made in Auroville the frogs and birds and cicadas take a too prominent place. Finally, the Performing Arts Center will have an outdoor stage, in case someone wants to do something under the open sky."

Concludes Holger: "I am convinced that the Performing Arts Center will be a important contribution to the development of Auroville's cultural life, its cultural zone and to the realisation of Auroville's ideals. The plans as envisaged are way to big to be carried by myself. I hope that the community will give them a lot of support."



**PERFORMING ARTS
CENTER AUROVILLE**
(Section along central axis)

- 1 AUDITORIUM
- 2 MAIN STAGE
- 3 PRACTISE ROOMS
- 4 CONTROL-COMPOSITION
- 5 OUTDOOR STAGE
- 6 RECORDING STUDIO and LIBRARY



Violinist Holger changes identity

Watering the Cultural Desert

He came in 1990 together with his wife, four children, and a violin in his backpack which was to remain there during the first two years of his stay, while he was busy 'landing' and building his home. But then the scene changed and Holger got involved in a multitude of activities such as teaching violin, composing music for modern dance and songs, performing classical Western music and jazz, and conducting a children's choir, on top of being a father and husband. Recently he introduced his plans for a performing arts center and started composing an opera. *Auroville Today* talked to Holger about the relevance of music, music education, performing and the Arts Center.

AVT: When you visited the Entry Group in 1990 you were warned about Auroville being a cultural desert. You answered that you planned to water it, and it seems that you have been doing so consistently. What is the state of the desert at present?

Holger: It is changing very fast. Since about two years there has been a quick and strong response from many sides and all age groups. A lot of adults want to trace back their cultural personal history, and lots of younger people, in particular children, are happy that something interesting to learn is being offered.

You have a professional background in jazz and Western classical music and are one of the very few professional musicians in Auroville? Is this work rewarding?

In the beginning it was tough. But about a year ago I stopped practising, cutting a habit of 20 years in which I spent several hours on the violin every day. But I discovered that the cut gave me a great relief, and opened up a lot of space for other developments to happen. And the strange thing is that I am now improving on the instrument without much working on it. I do not know why, but I think it is because I gave up on the idea that "I am a violinist". There was suddenly place for another identity to come forward. Before, I would see in the mirror every morning a violinist shaving himself...

And what do you see now?

Well...let's say a man who tries to follow a yogic way, and uses amongst other things music as a means.

You occasionally give performances of jazz and Western classical music. How is this 'yogic way' influencing these performances?

There are two aspects. One is to express in the art the utmost perfection possible. This implies craftsmanship, sincerity in the approach, aspiration to evoke the vibration which the composer of that piece received. This is common to all serious musicians all over the world. The other aspect is that the particular piece of music I perform should contribute to my - and if possible the listener's - inner development. There is great art which I do not want to play or even listen to anymore because it does not contribute to my inner development. To give examples: music which expresses a deep depression; or music which is composed mainly to show off technical virtuosity.

Indian musicians nearly always publicly dedicate their performances to their guru or the Divine by lighting a lamp. Do you consider 'dedication to the Divine' a necessary aspect for performing artists?

I am not sure I can answer this. Certainly, some great Western composers, for example Bach, had this inner dedication to the Divine. In my personal experience the dedication is sometimes there, but extremely difficult to keep up during the entire performance. Publicly lighting a lamp is ok, but it is no guarantee against the ego creeping in during the performance. Inwardly lighting a lamp would be much better. I would say: yes, ideally dedication should be always there. But it all depends on the inner level of the

individual. For some people it is better to show off their ego than to repress it and perform 'religiously'.

You see, the stage is a place which can polish your ego extremely well. That is why art is often misunderstood as being designed for the development of one's ego. You go on stage to show off. But how can one expect anybody to do the opposite? You have to start to be aware of the ego. The best way to overcome this barrier is to invite the ego to show itself. The people will clap to it. But gradually the performer will start realizing that they were not clapping for him, but for something which they designed in their own being. It has nothing to do with the performer's self. And this experience can mature to the point that the performer will see: oh, that is not really for me.

I am speaking from my own experience giving concerts for 10,000 or even once 60,000 people clapping and shouting 'fantastic'. And I felt alone. That which is really me is something that cannot show off, it is not possible, because that part does not distinguish itself from the

Then, when they are there - and some of them are because they do not have that many blockages and just feel great to sing - I can try to enhance the higher parts of their being to say: ok, now look at it from that part, look at what is there in the music. Because then it is not the ego busy asserting itself - it knows already that it is doing so - but the other parts can concentrate on what is really happening in the music.

That is, by the way, also one of the reasons why I am writing a children's opera; the children can be really proud and say: I am doing something, you know!

That brings us to your opera. It seems like a one-man show as you have been writing your own story and are composing all the music. What is it all about?

Writing my own story was imposed on me due to lack of cooperation at the time, not by choice. I am not a writer. But since, to my knowledge, there exists no appropriate children's musical or opera, I had no choice. Finding a story proved to be quite tough though. I actually wanted to avoid the usual confrontation between good and evil, but it was not possible. How to make something catching and interesting for the children which would interest them for months without boredom coming in? The solution has been to create a story which includes good and evil, but where the evil in the end turns out to be not what one thought it was all the time. The title of the opera will probably be 'Beyond Awake And Asleep' and is basically about the final non-reality and non-existence of evil. Once the story was found, the libretto was written together with Jill and many other Aurovilians have come forward to cooperate as well.

The story has been influenced by Sri Aurobindo, I guess?

Yes, that was more or less unavoidable.

How do the children respond?

The children are picking up very quickly, and many parts which I consider to be difficult are learned with an amazing speed and ease. Param Vir, the Indian composer (see AVToday #68) of modern opera who spent a week with them in August did a remarkable job. So I am very happy. The choir consists of around 20 children, 5 of whom are soloist. Some adults will perform the few adult roles. We plan the performance in summer this year and the children have all been asked not to go out for summer holidays.

Talking about the need for music education in Auroville. Why do you consider it to be so important?

There are many reasons. I spoke already about the usefulness of bringing out the ego. That can be considered as a first level. Then there is the training of concentration, the awareness of the flow of the time continuum (some types of sports have that too), the awareness of the body consciousness and the harmonisation of the left and right sides of the brain. There is also the

help music offers to understand one's emotions and to create a detachment from them.

Another reason is that music is a very good means of direct communication. I can play music with a lot of people and be in contact with them much easier and much better than by talking to them. This is similar to sports. In this way music is a very real and practical step towards the ideal of unity in diversity, which in music finds its extreme expression in an orchestra or a band. A good orchestra is a unity and it is complete diversity at the same time. And a last level of course is that music can be a help to exceed the ego towards spiritual growth.

In conversation with Carel



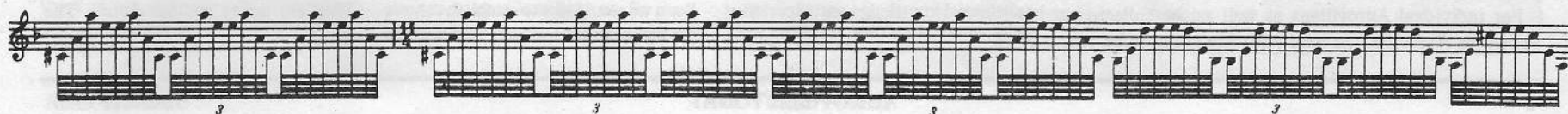
PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

listener. The part of me which is real is not different from the part of the listener which is real. So then, who claps for whom?

But to arrive at that we can also do the opposite and carve out the one who is distinguishing himself from the listener so he can stand on stage and say: I am a great performer and that is why you admire me. Finally the result will be that the performer is not touched and not happy. On the surface perhaps, but not within. And then change can happen.

Teaching Aurovilians and in particular Auroville children, you try as it were to force a shortcut through this tangle. How do you stimulate them for instance to sing for the joy of music and not for the joy of show if you allow the show to go on?

If necessary I show them the joy to show themselves.





Members of the Governing Board (GB) and the International Advisory Council (IAC) on January 18, 1995. From left to right: Mr. Ajoy Bagchi (GB), Prof. Ervin Laszlo (IAC), Mrs. Bilkees Latif (GB), Mrs. Kapila Vatsyayan (GB), Mrs. Aster Patel (GB), Mrs. Hanne Strong (IAC), Dr. Karan Singh (GB) and Mr. John V. Kingston (representing the Director General of UNESCO on the IAC).

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Dr. Karan Singh:

"Extremely Rewarding Years"

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation finished its first four-year term at the end of January 1995. Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Board, gave some of his reflections on this period:

I found the last four years extremely interesting and rewarding. This was the first Governing Board so we had to put into position structures which did not exist earlier but were required under the Auroville Act. We were immediately faced with the problem that people had not been used to structures during the ten year interregnum when they did pretty much what they liked. Administrative and fiscal requirements, the transfer of the assets taken over by Government, the relationship between the commercial units and the Foundation, all had to be attended to. Considering that, considering the inherent problems, I think we have some substantial achievements to our credit.

Maybe some people resented the fact that I laid down a time schedule for Matrimandir, but without that, the outer work would have suffered. The inner work, of course, is not susceptible to a time-frame. So we were able to dedicate the inner room to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in February 1993. We've also set a deadline for the completion of Matrimandir by 1998. The Bharat Nivas was lying virtually in shambles and we were able to complete the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium with a grant of twenty-five lakhs (\$80,000) which I got from the Government of India. So you have the Matrimandir which is dedicated to the Mother and the auditorium dedicated to Sri Aurobindo. Here are two tangible and concrete achievements of these four years. In addition there has been land acquisition and a lot of work in the community. On the negative side, we have not been able to work out a mutually acceptable structure for the relation between the commercial units and the Foundation. It isn't from lack of trying.

We've tried very hard and been in dialogue with successive Working Committees. We've had legal opinions but have not been able to come to any agreement. We had worked out a Finance and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) which the current Working Committee says is unacceptable. We have to start again to re-negotiate. A new group has been set up but the relationship with the Foundation has not been accepted. It is still a suggestion. The community is always able to set up new groups which it should do in fact, but the problem is not just the groups within the community but what is the relationship between these commercial units and the Foundation. Is it through the Working Committee? This is still open.

The community is getting used to the fact that the structures are not meant to stifle them but to help them.

The last four years have been very significant and there are some remarkable people on the Governing Board. They have given a lot of time and energy. The International Advisory Council also now consists of some very eminent people of world renown.

For individual Aurovilians as well as the collectivity known as Auroville, the next years are going to be very

decisive. Aurovilians should continue to work on their individual spiritual growth which I presume they are doing, and work outwardly more actively and I think they should take more interest in community affairs. Less than 10% attend meetings of the General Assembly.

The future is very exciting. Auroville is one of the international communities, small groups, that are working for

the higher consciousness. Here there should be more intensity because it is directly flowing from Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Mother's vision. My interest in this higher consciousness, the evolutionary movement will definitely continue for the rest of my life.

Interview by Bill

Hanne Strong:

"Grateful to join"

Hanne Strong joined the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation in July 1994. She is the President of the Manitou Foundation which is based in Colorado (USA) on the 250,000 acre Baca Grande. She has been instrumental in organizing many global conferences including the first United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1976. In 1992 her husband, Maurice Strong, a prominent Canadian industrialist who was serving as U.N. Secretary General to the Environment, organized the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. At that Summit, Hanne presented to the world her idea for an Earth Restoration Corps. A person well acquainted with the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Hanne had earlier paid two visits to Auroville. The ninth meeting of the Governing Board and the first meeting of the International Advisory Council (IAC) in Auroville at the end of January, occasioned Hanne's first official visit. Despite her busy schedule of official meetings, tours and dinners, Hanne took time to personally meet the youth and the women of Auroville in informal gatherings around bonfires, visited the Success Canyon and the outlying pioneering settlement of Hermitage. When interviewed by Auroville Today, Hanne spoke passionately about the need for a spiritual change or, as she put it, for "a spiritual revolution by the youth." Here are excerpts from the interview:

AVT: What was your reason for joining the International Advisory Council? What role do you expect to play in this board?

Hanne: The main reason for my joining the IAC is simply gratitude. What I have learnt from here, from The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, has really helped me to create a spiritual community. If I had not witnessed the creation of this community and studied the philosophy behind it, I would not have had the knowledge to create Baca Grande in North America. I would thus like to try and help Auroville in an official capacity. I visualize my role in the IAC as being that of a spiritual adviser. I have substantial knowledge and experience in spiritual communities having been

involved in one of them for seventeen years and thus I may have certain insights into the working of Auroville which other IAC members might not have.

Could you elaborate on your project at Baca Grande? How does the community there compare to that of Auroville?

The Baca project, started in 1978 on 250,000 acres of land, aspires to become a "Valley of the Refuge in Truth" where all the spiritual traditions of the earth could live in demonstrational communities as an integral experiment in human transformation. Just as in Auroville, you are planning to have a Pavilion for each country, in Baca we would like to establish centres for the different spiritual traditions of

the world. There are already about twenty-five centres encompassing spiritual traditions from that of the Native Americans to that of Tibetan Buddhists. The Sri Aurobindo Learning Centre is right in the middle of it all. Seyril Schochen who lived in Auroville for many years set up this centre and now plans to set up a Savitri Solar Village in Baca. At present, however, we too have our share of problems. For the young people in Baca, for instance, there are no facilities for good high school education and they seem confused and lost. They are faced with some of the same problems as Auroville youth.

What exactly are you seeking to achieve with the Earth Restoration Corps?

The Earth Restoration Corps is a vehicle for the coming generation to accomplish a spiritual and ecological revolution on earth. In the next ten years, two billion young people are coming into a job market with no jobs. You can't provide jobs in factories and mines and forests to further destroy the earth. How do you use the energy of these two billion people coming in who really have nothing to look forward to? How to turn that whole situation around?

Our programme is to save or restore the earth by re-teaching the great natural and spiritual laws that have existed in all traditions for thousands of years. If you don't have a spiritual foundation nothing will happen in the right way. Most of the restoration projects now are totally inappropriate. They are going against nature. The

Continued next page

About seventy people gathered at the Bharat Nivas for the last meeting between members of the Resident's Assembly, the International Advisory Council and the Governing Board, whose first four-year term was at an end. This was the ninth interface between the community and the Governing Board and the feeling, if fairly positive, was definitely low key. The fourth Working Committee, in their meetings with the outgoing Governing Board, had presented a working paper supported by the Resident's Assembly, that underlined and stressed the need for Auroville to be a self-organising experiment.

It contained proposals worked out in consultation with the services and business units regarding the formation of groups that would be accountable for the management of the community's finances and assets in line with Auroville's ideals. The setting up of internal self-regulating groups responsible for the management of the community's assets was accepted by the Governing Board as worth trying, but for some members of the Governing Board, the necessity under the Act of the equivalent of an FAMC could not be avoided. The group could, however, be constituted when necessary by these groups themselves with the Secretary as a special invitee.

Ashok Chatterjee of the Working Committee welcomed the gathering and introduced those present. Unseasonably overcast weather and gusty winds punctuated the themes of change, transition and choice that most of the speakers addressed. Hanne Strong, who was on her first official visit to Auroville as a new member of the International Advisory Council, quoted the Vedas and struck an ecological note in her brief talk: "We are extracting everything out of the earth and what are we giving back? Garbage. What can this earth take? The world is on a suicidal trend. This is why a place like Auroville, where a simple life is dedicated to developing the highest aspirations of the spirit, is so important. There are absolutely magnificent experiments and work, particularly in the area of earth restoration and tree planting, going on here. Auroville is one of the most important experiments going on any place, anywhere in the world. That is why I'm here, that is why I want to help."

Ervin Laszlo spoke of the tremendous non-linear evolution of consciousness that was underway. "Many prophecies speak of the next evolutionary step. We are at the beginning and we have a responsibility to man

and to the galaxy. Consciousness is not an accident and we don't know all the relationships that exist in the cosmos. A growth of consciousness is important, not only for yourselves but for humanity. You have come together here through what you do and what you do here could have an important impact.

Generate this new consciousness here and you can contribute to the evolution of humankind. We must go forward to a new stage of evolution where we can be as one, act as one. We must go forward, or we fall. This is where Auroville's importance lies. This is perhaps your destiny, and how you can be of service to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother." Sir John Kingston, the personal envoy of Dr Federico Mayor (the Director General of UNESCO), referred to the social and educational programmes his organisation was supporting that were aimed at moving away from a culture of war and towards a culture of peace.

Dr. Karan Singh referred to the seminar held last year in Auroville on

the theme of "Humanity at the Crossroads" and expressed his feeling that "the global society exists but a global consciousness has yet to emerge. The texture of time has become denser but our minds still bog us down. Unless there is an inner change in the texture of human consciousness—at least in some pockets—we will fumble on for another century before dissolving into chaos. Auroville—which is experimental in nature—is part not only of the Aurobindonian but also of the broader evolutionary movement!"

Referring to the experience of the first Governing Board he pointed to the completion of the "magnificent" inner chamber and although a satisfactory agreement as regards the problems of the commercial units had yet to be worked out, he nonetheless observed that "the imposition of rigid bureaucratic structures is a self-defeating situation and the last four years, despite conflicts, have been very rewarding and provided an understanding of the meaning of collective sadhana."

He expressed his gratitude to his fellow members of the Governing Board and to the Auroville community at large: "We have tried our best to be open. It has been for us an extremely interesting and challenging experience. The Board has had a marvellous time. Thank you." The proceedings ended with Karan Singh reciting Sri Aurobindo's poem "Who".

TALKING HEADS

continued

greed for power and money is universal and you can only eliminate that by basing yourself on a strong spiritual foundation. When I discussed my plan for the Earth Restoration Corps with Sergeant Shriver, the founder of the U.S. Peace Corps, I thought he was going to say it was too spiritual and far out but instead, to my utter surprise, what he said was "you don't go far enough." He said that the time will come when people will realize that there is no other way.

Do you see Auroville as playing any role in this work?

Auroville is perfect for the Earth Restoration Corps because the latter involves everything that you are doing—afforestation, renewable energy research, mud-brick and other alternative technology and so on. The communities of Auroville can participate in helping to train the trainers who will go out and multiply the training.

What is your assessment of Auroville as a spiritual community?

People here in Auroville have made a conscious choice to be part of the new world. Elsewhere in the world, there is not only unemployment but also mal-employment. People work at

jobs that they hate. Here, you can choose what you want to do with your life. You can follow your inspiration, your gift. That's what's so beautiful about Auroville. But one has to think about the rest of the world too. How do people in the world perceive Auroville? There are a number of people who see it as a place of escape for an easy, quiet life. Then so many Indians perceive a western arrogance. There's so much mixed feeling out there about Auroville. Aurovilians have to set the record straight: we are not arrogant, we don't know better, we are here to learn—this has to be shown.

I think the problem is that spiritually, Auroville is at a bit of a stalemate right now. The whole transformation process is going too slowly. People are too tied to their egos and I know what the human ego can do to destroy human unity. Auroville needs a push, Aurovilians need to do more intensive spiritual work and this was my suggestion to the Board—that everyone who comes to Auroville has to commit to do two hours of spiritual work every day. We need to have teachers, guides and gifted people to come to Auroville to help us, for very often, when people are left alone to

do their spiritual work, they get stuck or collapse. I agree that "the age of the guru" is finished but sometimes one needs guidance since there are big pitfalls on the spiritual path. Auroville should make use of the resources available in the Ashram. I know there was friction in the past but that is the past.

Now whatever is there, be it anything, knowledge of the Vedic traditions, of Sir Aurobindo's philosophy, traditional medical expertise, it should be shared. And you can share what you have learned with them. We have to act fast, the earth is running out of time. Every Aurovilian has to make a real leap and say that they are in this for the whole, the whole of Auroville, and the whole of humanity. Look at the investment the Divine has made in Auroville!

Interview by Bindu and Bill

New Governing Board

Through the daily newspaper The Hindu, Aurovilians and some members of the Governing Board learned on the 29th of January of the re-nomination of Dr. Karan Singh as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation and the re-appointment of Mrs. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Mrs. Bilkees Latif, Mrs. Aster Patel and Mr.

COMMENTARY

"Extremely rewarding years", so Dr. Karan Singh judged the first four years of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Quite a few opinions in Auroville, however, are less positive. Even those who hailed the Auroville Foundation Act in 1988 as "a sense of miracle" (see AVT #1) have developed second thoughts. Why?

One reason is certainly that many expectations have not been fulfilled and that the Governing Board's accomplishments are not impressive. Dr. Karan Singh's statement that it was his time-schedule for the completion of the Matrimandir which caused the work to progress is, if not incorrect, most certainly incomplete. The Governing Board has not been able to materialize any donations for the creation of the city's infrastructure, with the exception of the Rs 25 lakhs (US \$ 80,000) for the upgrading of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas. Neither has the Board been successful in solving the persistent visa problem, pending since its first Board Meeting. Another reason is that the Board's attempts at structuring, in view of the requirements of the Foundation Act, be it through Office Order No. 5, the creation of a Funds and Assets Management Committee or other endeavours to control the commercial units, have actually failed while inspiring a fear among a section of the community that the outsider's influence will endanger the freedom of the Auroville experiment.

The creation of the Foundation itself is generally considered more positive, and many Aurovilians are grateful that the Indian Government has taken the trouble to pass a special act of Parliament for Auroville. Which other government would have done so? The Foundation has given a clear uniform legal status to Auroville, recognized both within India and abroad. On this basis a unique income tax exempt status could be obtained; on this basis it became easier to obtain a continuous power supply and a modern telephone exchange. Many more of these types of advantages can be expected, and would not be possible without the one legal body "Foundation".

Questionmarks are put at the internal structure of the Foundation. Is it fitting that the Governing Board, which formally holds all the powers in Auroville, is appointed by and mainly from amongst outsiders to Auroville and that no Auroville resident has any say in its composition? Can the International Advisory Council really become a functional body, or will its chief service to Auroville remain the fact that important people lend their names to the experiment? Is the Auroville's Residents' Assembly not too much like a parliament or an ordinary democratic set-up, open to misuse or non-use? Would Auroville be better off with a Governing Board consisting fully of Aurovilians next to one or more bodies of external advisers?

There is no one who can answer these questions. Auroville's history is full of attempts to create workable hierarchical structures, but none of them has really been a success. Neither have we been able to make a success of the Residents' Assembly. So few Aurovilians take an active interest in its meetings that it can be safely likened to a dead doornail. Or be misused by groups of Aurovilians who wish to obtain a rubber stamp for their views. And we should get clear about what exactly we want. We cannot complain that the Governing Board is not active enough if we actually resent their activity. We cannot ask for support from the Government of India if we actually are not prepared to comply with the conditions of such government involvement.

The resentment a section of the community feels towards the Governing Board took some nasty turns shortly before and during this recent meeting. A paper, hastily pushed through a meeting of the Residents' Assembly, factually proposed to the Board that its role would be minimised to a round zero, ignoring the stipulations of the Foundation Act. The reception of the paper by the Board was mixed; though one member liked it, others felt upset and disinclined to continue their board membership. One member even felt psychically attacked. The negative vibration found expression once again in the report of the Working Committee of its meetings with the Governing Board which appeared in the Auroville news.

It is a pity that the Working Committee, which is supposed to be the bridge between the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board, felt it necessary to behave this way.

If Auroville wishes (and does it really?) to have another form of organization, it should work towards agreement on such a form and present it to the Indian Government. In the meantime it would be wiser to make use of the Governing Board to the maximum extent instead of trying to estrange its members.

Carel

As you sow, so shall you reap...

... is an old Biblical saying. But in order to sow, "seeds" have to be provided. Auroville has been lucky: from 1987 onwards the Dutch "Stichting de Zaaier" (literally translated: Foundation The Sower) generously started to provide assistance to many of Auroville's activities. This year its chairman, Prof. Dr. Henk Thomas, who teaches employment and labor relations at the Dutch Institute of Social Studies, visited Auroville for the second time after a short stay in 1991, to judge for himself the effects of De Zaaier's sowing. Has Auroville reaped well? He talked to *Auroville Today* about his impressions.

Henk: The main objective of Stichting de Zaaier, of which I am the chairman since 1992, is to help projects of an innovative nature which combine the spiritual and material side of life. Auroville amply fulfils this description. In 1994, a 4-year financing phase ended. I came to see how Auroville had fared in projects funded by us, and how our future funding could take shape. My general impression is that Auroville certainly has answered to our expectations. Our trust implied in the long term commitment has been fully honored. We are happy with this, the more so as our relation with Auroville is not an ordinary bureaucratic donor relationship, but a personal one which we treasure very much.

The Auroville Project Coordination Group, through which Auroville's projects are submitted to us, has compressed about 27 official meetings into four days, next to some social gatherings. My meetings were therefore very brief and I can only give some personal impressions which can not be considered as decisions of 'Stichting de Zaaier', as our Board still has to meet. I would like to express positive feelings of praise and positive feelings of criticism, both with the best intentions.

To start with the criticism: in the fields of education and town planning I take some question marks home. Concerning education: I am worried about Auroville's high school level. It has not reached a stage of stability where a certain category of young Aurovilians can be provided with the guidance they need. There is a high degree of commitment to pass on the ideals and spiritual concepts of Auroville, but at the professional level there seem to be challenges that are overwhelming. This is a major responsibility and challenge for Auroville and also for our Foundation, which by giving money for this programme, shares this responsibility. Here I feel uncomfortable.

My other concern is with the town planning. We have been asked for a considerable involvement. But Auroville is at a stage where you cannot just continue from the relatively unprofessional, somewhat ad-hoc approach of the past into the present and so towards the future. A quantum jump has to be made. I have suggested that Auroville should create a think-tank consisting of outsiders with a sympathetic view to the objectives of Auroville. This think-tank could visit Auroville, say, once every six months for a week to provide top-quality input from different disciplines: town planning, environmental issues, public

transport, infrastructure development, including the social side of life, and so on. In India there is outstanding expertise available. Connected to this is the land survey project which was submitted. This project does not take into account the new technologies such as satellite surveying and instant location determination, some of which include recently developed water surveying under the surface. It is very important to find out what the current state of affairs is and to get access to the latest techniques in order to get a comprehensive assessment of the problems. I have suggested to reconsider the current projects along these lines.

I take some question marks home ...

Positive feelings of praise need to be expressed in many other areas. It appears that the Village Action Group as well as Auroville's Greenwork Resource Center have strategically changed perspectives. In 1991 their main focus was on Auroville itself with an outreach to the villages. Now the wider regional development has been taken as a frame of reference; one speaks of the bio-region and the wider labour and work situation. If Auroville succeeds in tackling this challenge it will make a major contribution to a sustainable socio-economic development.

Another good development is SEWA, Auroville's "Small Employers Welfare Administration", a social security and welfare fund for the many people who are working in Auroville. SEWA operates very much like a provident fund. With contributions from workers and employees, a small capital fund for old age or emergency needs for each Auroville worker can be secured. The team managing SEWA has also created a scheme to insure against the risks of accidents. In addition there is an interest to look after the welfare of workers, in particular by offering additional educational facilities in the evening. I have suggested to undertake a socio-economic or household-labour survey so that on an annual base one knows how many people are working in Auroville, what their background is and how they are linked to the wider regional labour market.

Stichting de Zaaier would like to make a special donation to this project in memory of Yoka (an Aurovilian who passed away in 1992 and who was board member of

Stichting de Zaaier) as we feel that this project will honor and keep the memory of her alive in a manner commensurate with her personality.

The collective kitchen is a fascinating project. The solar bowl—I understood it will be the fourth largest in the world—is impressive. That its energies will be used for a collective kitchen instead of being supplied into an "abstract" energy grid makes this project even more attractive. But the main positive point is that the collective kitchen will provide this community with an informal meeting place for which I presume there is a great need.

I was impressed by the development of the Archives, by the work done in Shakti for the Index Seminar and for the re-introduction of Auroville's original plant life, and with the work done in the Auroville library. The library should really become a maintenance and development priority for the community and I have suggested that it should acquire a CD-Rom. I was less happy with the project for the Auroville guards. The safety on the roads, particularly in regard to women, is a very high priority for the community at large. This responsibility cannot be handed over to an outside organisation like our Foundation. It should be dealt with by the community itself as a priority.

There was one major lack in the presentation of the projects: the cultural side. I experience the connection of the spiritual with the cultural in personal and collective life as a very close one. But in this area no project was presented, though I am aware of many cultural activities going on. By accident I heard about the existence of a Performing Arts project (see elsewhere in this issue) and I hope that the Project Coordination Group will consider it so that Stichting de Zaaier can also consider to give attention to these type of initiatives.

Apart from my work for Stichting de Zaaier I would also like to make an observation which has to do with my work. As an economist I have long been studying alternative communal types of organizations, as neither the capitalist model of economy nor the "command" type are sustainable propositions for the future. During this visit I have come to realize that Auroville will be, and maybe is already today, earning a place in history. The development of Auroville's economic system holds some lessons that at a later stage may be very interesting to research. In spite of the collective ideals a large degree of individualism is being maintained. In spite of the tensions there is a sincere search for harmony. Many Aurovilians openly discuss the shortcomings of Auroville's economy. There is a common ground that gives a psychological strength to the individuals. Maybe it adds up to something where the whole is more than the sum of the separate units.

I would like to conclude that I am touched by the central place which spiritual life has in this community. To put it cautiously, it would be very strange if an observer would not respond to the spiritual challenges being offered, whether by spending some time in the Matrimandir or by visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. This spiritual presence is not found in many parts of the world. I have picked up some of it, and feel very much that in the process I have become a friend of Auroville.

Based on an interview by Carel

Two years ago, Gilles and Guy, published on behalf of the Development Group the "Auroville Development Perspectives 1993-1998: An Invitation to Participate," a 96 page document providing an overview and basic data on Auroville after 25 years and outlining Auroville's development for the next five years. In the following article, first printed in *Auroville News* (No. 568), they further detail some of the objectives of the community.

Matrimandir and its inner gardens will be completed by the turn of the millennium; we expect that this will change Auroville significantly and also attract a lot more people to come and live in Auroville. We need to be ready. This is an attempt to formulate what should be achieved by the turn of the millennium. We have tried to be both optimistic and realistic.

* Purchasing all the remaining lands within the city (390 acres) by raising more funds and by borrowing the balance amount: Rs. 6 crores or US\$ 1.9 million.

* Protecting the immediate greenbelt either by exchanging remote plots for nearer ones and/or by seeking the imposition of a Land Use Plan by the Tamil Nadu Government:

For The New Millennium

Rs. 2 crores or US \$ 645,000.

* Launching a model development programme, designed to enhance the ecological and economic sustainability of Auroville, the surrounding villages and the bioregion. The programme should include education, health infrastructure, environment, self-employment, women's issues, etc.: Rs. 10 crores or US\$ 3.2 million.

* Building accommodation for at least 500 new residents and for 200 Aurovilians who are presently in need of better accommodation (on the basis of a present population of 1,000 residents and a projected growth rate of 7% per annum): Rs. 8.5 crores or US\$ 2.75 million.

* Expanding the community's existing infrastructure, our collective facilities (for education, health care, sports, art & culture, etc.) and our services to take care of the needs of our growing community: Rs. 10 crores or US \$ 3.2 million.

* Creating new services (collective kitchen, laundry, etc.) to manifest an economy closer

to Mother's ideals and vision: Rs. 2 crores or US\$ 645,000.

* Supporting existing farms and developing new ones to increase Auroville's food production: Rs. 2 crores or US \$ 645,000.

* Creating more offices, design studies, workshops, industries, etc. to provide work opportunities to our growing community keeping in mind Auroville's ideals of self-sustainability, research and unending education: Rs. 2 crores or US \$ 645,000.

* Establishing a proper high school: Rs. 30 lakhs or US\$ 97,000.

* Launching a new phase of development in the International Zone, establishing the Centre of International Research for Human Unity, completing Bharat Nivas and starting other Pavilions: Rs. 3 crores or US\$ 970,000.

Looking at the massive amount of work to be done, it is obvious that we will only succeed if we also improve our organization:

* Evolve better ways to coordinate Auro-

ville's activities and manage our community resources. Those of us whose dharma it is to take up these tasks should rise to the occasion, accept to serve in difficult circumstances and do the work.

* Establish a cooperative economy providing for the basic maintenance needs of all community members.

* Become much clearer as to what is expected from Aurovilians, and create different types of relationships with the community where each one of us would naturally find his/her own place.

* Launch a comprehensive and dynamic fund-raising campaign, supported by a new communication strategy and a strengthened network in India and abroad.

All this will only be achieved if we all learn TRUE COLLABORATION: between ourselves, with the "authorities" of the Foundation, with all other children of Mother, with our neighbours the local villagers, with our employees, with the Government (from Vanur to Delhi), with the Auroville International Centres and with all our other partners in India or abroad.

Guy and Gilles

Thirteen people in a room with masks. All together, discovering how to play without our usual face. Trying another face; discovering what lies behind the mask.

Toma and Andju, two guests from Belgium, have been in Auroville for six months. They entertained us with their presentation of Dario Fo's *The Tiger Story* (with a mask created by Amleto Sartori). This one man/mask show was enthusiastically received, and prompted several Aurovilians to ask them to do a workshop. For two weeks, we were given a chance to penetrate the world inside the mask, to wear another face and tell our own stories.

The first week we are all shy, awkward, a

bit skittish: do we dare to play? A lot of physical warm-ups preceded every improvisation session, lots of time to get in tune with the space at Pitanga Hall and with each other. We run, we move alone and as a group. We begin to take risks, to dare, to

trust. This is not theoretical, it is real, physical—physical risks, trusting the other person will be there to catch you. Around and around we run, up and down. We sweat a lot. We are afraid. We don't understand. We get confused and sometimes nothing

works. We resist the freedom and the discipline. Whenever we create our own obstacles, Andju and Toma are there to encourage, guide and dare us to do more. Sometimes it is pure magic.

The mask is like a door into another world.

Masquerade

With each commedia mask (Harlequin, Tatania, the General etc.) you can be old and pompous, strong and arrogant, mischievous, cruel, absurd, naïve. Each mask represents a well-known type, but we are not playing to type, as that would be

too limiting. We simply let ourselves meet the mask and see what happens. Sometimes it is very poignant. We work on extremes: we live life and play it with a passion—we learn that in the extremes lies the truth. Stretching through the mask allows us to reach and reach until we think we can reach no more, we have gone far enough, and then to build from there.

You put on the mask and your body adjusts. The energy flows downward into your fingers and toes. You are transformed. You can be anyone because you are everyone, at least potentially. For example, one early improvisation involved a fisherman and the fish that got away, but instead of disappearing, this fish came up on land to attack the fisherman. What we could see were the possibilities for outrageously absurd scenes that exposed an essential truth, whether it was a moment of joy or anger or whatever. In fact, it became easier to go more deeply into the story when you wore a mask, because physically everything else—the rest of your body was made to work at a higher level, and you could draw more deeply from your own emotional well. The second week, a bit more familiar with the technical aspect of wearing a mask, we were ready to explore character. We were told to choose a famous person to play, or rather, to use this famous person as a basis for action—a place to start. For example, picture this: Carlos Castaneda as the renowned terrorist Carlos and his friend Mahatma Gandhi in a boat together playing a Kalashnikov "flute". Or, Joan of Arc taking very private singing lessons from Mozart which ended in a hilarious seduction scene. Einstein meets the Grand Inquisitor and the Inquisitor is transformed by a magical machine which gives him a heart. The whole human comedy to chose from and a mask. And this was very liberating. The mask gave us a chance to play and to explore the power of freedom and the strength of discipline. With a passion.

Jill



Comedia del arte masks designed by Amleto Sartori

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Meet and eat

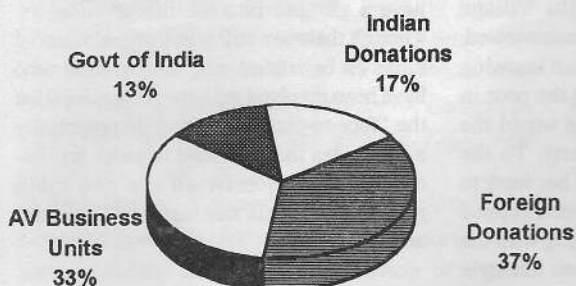
Evenings at Auroville promise to take a different hue with the opening of two new restaurants. One is the Auromodel Cafeteria, recently renamed Uphar (meaning "gift" in Sanskrit) which apart from quality lunches offers a la carte suppers six days a week. The other, Crown Road Cafe, located in Centre Field offers a congenial place to meet and hang out with people in the evenings. To that end, it hosts a wide variety of activities from "Face-to Face" interviews (see elsewhere in this issue) to "Newcomers Meets" and comedy and chess clubs. It is open six evenings a week, and offers a standardized menu.

NEW NET NUMBER

Last month's *Auroville Today* reported on e-mail activities along the electronic highway of Internet. A temporary number (courtesy of Aurelec) was mentioned but now the permanent Auroville number is in use for all under the umbrella of the Auroville Communication Centre (ACC). The Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), donated the fee for the Internet connection and AVI USA arranged the details. The system is in use and will expand into a community service soon. "The city the earth needs" is in cyberspace at: 75757.2546@compuserve.com

Auroville income

Auroville's income in the period April 1993-1994 was Rs 653 lakhs, or approximately US \$ 2.1 million. The division was as follows:



Mahasaraswati's freestore ready

Another attempt at collective sharing has started. Next to the existing free store which deals primarily in clothing and the Caring Service which deals with personal requests, Mahasaraswati's free store intends to deal with all that is left such as kitchen wares, home appliances, cycles and motorcycle parts and all other stuff which isn't to close to resembling garbage. Clean up your stores and cupboards! Decide to part with your clutter for the welfare of all! A pick up service is organised. Mahasaraswati's free store is located in the old post/telephone building in Kulilpalayam.

Birthday week

The last week of February, the Birthday week, is undoubtedly the busiest time of the year for Aurovilians. As this issue goes to the press, Aurovilians are engaged in a number of workshops, seminars, discussion-forums and other activities that are being offered as part of the Birthday Week celebrations. This year, the theme for the Birthday Week is human unity. More in the next issue.

New Children's Home

The Auroville Health Center's newest building—the Children's Home—is completed. This facility is for handicapped children and includes a ward of seven beds, a nurse's room, a doctor's room, a kitchen and two multi-purpose rooms.

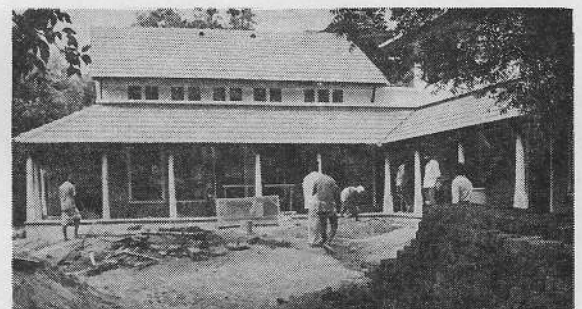


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

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Addresses of Auroville International centres:

AVI Deutschland, c/o M. Soerensen, Bleicherstrasse 60, 28203 Bremen, Germany.
AVI España, c/o Arjun and Anandi, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain
AVI France c/o Satyakam Karim, 14, rue du Colonel Grancey, 94500 Champigny Sur Marne, France.

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

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

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

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March 1995
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In this issue: Art and culture; the Auroville Foundation; Stichting de Zandier; development needs; masks and "face to face"

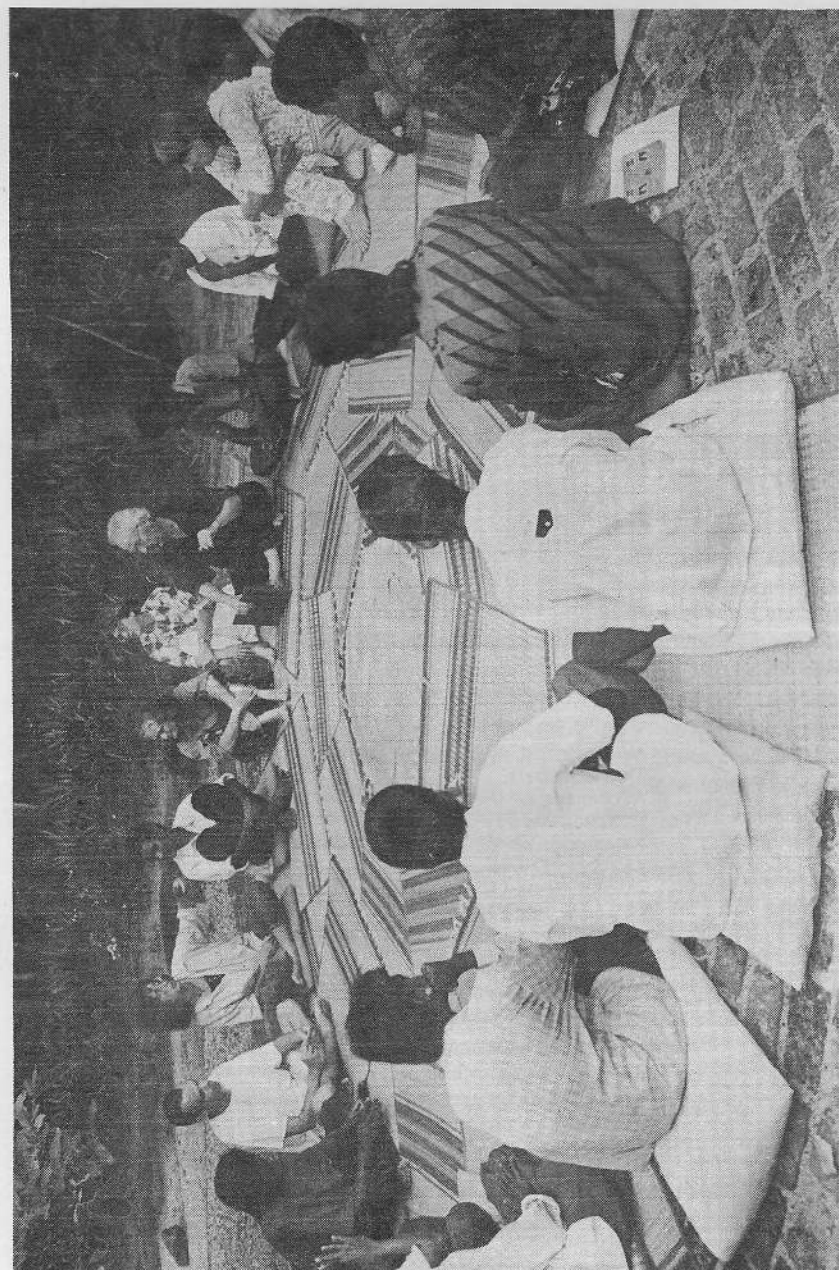
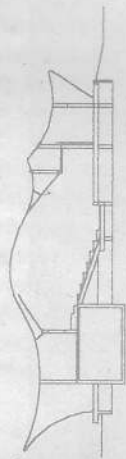


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

"Face to face" at the "College"

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Face to Face

The words "college" and "interviews" sound stiff, formal and institutionalized. The ambiance of the "face-to-face interviews" at the "College" however is just the opposite. The chiaroscuro shade of the neem trees, the breeze rustling the bamboo, the brick pathways and the pebbled yards, the thatched open hut that provides shelter during rain, the round stone tables and stools, the kitchenette that has been transformed into a friendly cafe all contribute to a pleasant air of meeting, talking, sharing and learning together. Once a week, on Thursday evenings, The "College" brings together people from three to four diverse groups—Aurovilians, local villagers, visitors from both India and the West—for, no, not exactly an interview, but a discussion centered around a particular person from one of the above groups. "The idea", says Philip, one of the coordinators of the programme, "is to bring together these different groups of human beings into a semi-organized setting with the purpose of better understanding themselves and the society that they represent."

The "College", Philip reminisces, "was started in 1993 as an effort to improve relations with our Tamil neighbours, and it comprised of daily lectures, on almost every subject under the sun, in English and Tamil (see AVT # 53). This year, this "face-to-face interview", or you may even call it a talk show, seems to be the form that the "College" has taken. Each interview consists of an hour or so, and is conducted in English with a running translation in Tamil."

Generally, some days before the actual interview, the interviewer meets the interviewee at a more informal setting to acquaint

herself with the work of the latter. This prevents the interviewer from asking questions in the dark and leads to a more focused discussion. The interview itself follows a standard format: first, there is a round of introductions, then the interviewer asks some basic, biographical questions about the person's life or work after which the interview is thrown open for the audience to ask questions, and the interviewer turns into a mediator to ensure participatory discussions. If time permits, the interviewee also gets a chance to question different members of the audience. The range of questions can be quite wide, reflecting as it does the varied mix of people in the audience. For instance, Abdullah, a student of economics and a Tamil Muslim, was questioned by an European economist in the audience about the current liberalisation of the Indian economy while a girl with a Hindu background queried about marriage and dowry practices in the Muslim culture.

When Bhavana, an American who works with the Village Action Group, was interviewed, local villagers were interested in knowing why she chose to work among the poor in the villages and what measures would she recommend to alleviate poverty. To the surprise of many who assumed her work to be a charitable mission, Bhavana replied that she was interested in working with the poor because she learnt from their life-style how to make do with the minimum of

Earth's scarce resources. "Most people are repelled by poverty but I am fascinated by it," said she. "For me," she continued, "poverty is more a state of the mind than an indicator of material wealth. Hence, in the Village Action Group, we try to fight poverty by implementing innovative methods of education that would train and enrich the minds of the village children." When asked about her dreams for the future, Bhavana replied, "I wish to see, not just Auroville, but the whole of this hinterland—from Kaliveli tank to Pondicherry—rich. Not merely materially rich, but culturally rich and spiritually rich."

The tone of the interview is always friendly and affirmative, "Auroville-oriented" as Philip puts it. The purpose behind it is educational—to give the mix of people that live here a chance to meet one another, to have an awareness of one another's work or culture, and to thus relate better to one another. "These interviews", Philip clarifies, "are not conventionalized educational procedures where learning is regulated by strict question-and-answer routines. They are more participatory in character, akin to the form of group workshops where learning is a more holistic process. The interviews are based on the assumption that human unity, to a certain extent, can be brought about by the application of human skills of communication". Often after the interview is over, people linger around, sipping tea, talking and finding out more about one another.

"More harmonious relations between Tamilians and Westerners"

Before "face-to-face" went public in mid-December, by an announcement in the *Auroville News*, Philip and his team had an "experimental run" of about two months. During this practice session, the present format of the interview evolved. Even minor details, like seating arrangements, were discussed and determined by experiment. So far, "face-to-face" has introduced five veteran Aurovilians (two of them Tamil) and one villager from nearby Alankuppam. The present team of interviewers are all people who possess certain communication skills and have experience in dealing with groups. The original idea to interview in English a non-Tamil-speaking person one day, and a Tamil-speaking person in Tamil the next day, has been hindered at present due to the lack of trained Tamil interviewers.

The audience turn-out has, so far, been about twenty people, an appropriate number for a group discussion. More importantly, as desired, by the coordinators, the audience comprises of visitors, new-comers, Aurovilians and villagers. For guests and new-comers, the interviews have offered an opportunity to get to meet some "old-timers" as well as to have a glimpse into the life of villagers. Though there are still a few organizational kinks to be ironed out, Aurovilians who have been involved with the project feel that the "face-to-face interview" is potentially a great idea that can lead to more harmonious relations between the two main groups of people in this region—Tamilians and Westerners.

Bindu