

AUROVILLE TODAY

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Over the years, we've tried a number of times to explore the topic of Auroville youth. Without great success. One reason for this is that none of us on the Auroville Today team really has access to that particular culture. Consequently, when the possibility arose of having someone from that world as a guest editor, we jumped at the chance of looking at this topic again. Thanks, Jesse, for all your work as well as your unfailing good-humour among the coffee-cup chaos of our editorial meetings (Jesse's story is one of those featured inside).

In this issue we also profile a reluctant environmentalist and an extraordinary craftsman in bronze who, having moved recently to Auroville, is now training local people in a technique which has been practised in India for millennia.



Young Aurovilians at Certitude sports ground

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Young Auroville speaks

What is youth?

When Auroville Today first approached me about their youth issue it was just to do an interview, then later (for some reason) they asked me to write pretty well the whole issue! Stupidly I said yes and then had to begin. Where to start? The first most obvious question that occurred to me was, what is youth? The 1990 edition of the Concise Oxford defines youth as "1. the state of being young; the period between childhood and adult age; 2. the vigour or enthusiasm, inexperience or other characteristic of this period."

In Volume 12 of *The Collected Works of the Mother*, she writes the following:

"Youth does not depend on the small number of years one has lived, but on the capacity to grow and progress. To grow is to increase one's potentialities, one's capacities; to progress is to make constantly more perfect the capacities that one already possesses. Old age does not come from a great number of years but from the incapacity or the refusal to continue to grow and progress. I have known old people of twenty and young people of seventy. As soon as one wants to settle down in life and reap the benefits of one's past efforts, as soon as one thinks that one has done what one had to do and accomplished what one had to accomplish, in short, as soon as one ceases

to progress, to advance along the road to perfection, one is sure to fall back and become old."

Youth is obviously many things.

There are no guarantees the articles contained in this issue on youth reflect accurately all those things let alone Auroville youth, whatever that is. Here are interviews with young Aurovilians, articles written by young Aurovilians and photos and images of and created by young Aurovilians, but with no final definition or conclusion. Only a snapshot of Auroville youth.

In some cases the use of names is intentionally avoided in favour of free and more honest speech. The candid and revealing moments here are included to represent an accurate rather than rosy picture because in the end individual truths, regardless of their occasional negativity and criticism, are more heart-warming as they express what many of us feel but don't express. Having said that, it's not all negativity here: for some Aurovilian young people life seems pretty rosy and, what's more, even in those cases where some unhappiness or dissatisfaction is expressed, the general feeling is that Auroville is the place to be.

Jesse (guest editor)

To be Jesse

Jesse Fox-Allen. Mother's name Laurel. Father's name Johnny. Born Sydney, Australia. He first came to Auroville when he was nine but contracted tuberculosis and had to leave. He lived in New Zealand for seven years with his mother and then returned to Auroville. This time he stayed for six years, studied in "Johnny-school" in Fertile for most of the time but spent his last year in Kodai School where he was suspended for having too much fun. After that he went back to Sydney and attended a performing arts school and was later accepted into the University of Sydney, where he joined the dramatic society, organised a theatre festival, and was eventually employed co-ordinating the University's Theatresports programme.

Theatresports, an international craze, brings a sense of competition to improvisational theatre games, pitting group against group, a high-spirited, quick-witted competitive way to get the energy going, have some fun.

That's Jesse. High-spirited, quick-witted, full of energy. Fun. An actor.

In his more serious moments, he has played Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, Peer Gynt in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Tartuffe in Molière's *Tartuffe* and others. "I've always wanted to do Shakespeare," he says, with a gleam in his eyes.

And what about Auroville?

"Last time I was here it was a holiday and an experiment. I wanted to see if there was still place for me in Auroville and I felt there was. So now I'm here for another experiment, only this time a longer one. I want very much to have a positive impact on the community because, simplistic and corny as it may sound, you have to give to receive. Organizing Theatresports is one of my attempts to give."

"Theatresports has its magic moments. I enjoy very much watching a story being told on the stage whose end even the performers don't know. Sometimes you can watch ten-year old children, even boys, stop acting like idiots and suddenly focus all their energy and imagination to tell the story, for instance, of a sad princess who, having lost her favourite dog Lulu into the stomach of a ferocious dragon, chances upon a fireman who is an expert in dragon-talk. The fireman, accompanied by the princess, sets out in a tank to the dragon's lair. 'Leave this to me,' says the fireman when they approach the dragon. 'Ak snik uk buk oooh,' the fireman shouts in dragonese. 'Og snok iggle-biggie aaah!' roars the dragon in reply. 'What is he saying?' asks the princess. 'He says that Lulu is fine and that he ate her only because he was lonely and wanted a friend. But we can have Lulu if we give him the tank to be his

(continued on page 2)

To Be Jesse (continued from page 1)

friend instead.' The princess immediately agrees. Lulu appears from the dragon's mouth in a cloud of smoke. The princess is happy and the fireman is a hero... To be honest, I have to sidecoach these scenes towards positive endings because normally the dragon is only happy if he incinerates the tank and eats the roasted people inside. I have to say things like, 'what else could you do instead of killing everyone?' But at the end of a good story, you just want to jump up and clap and shout 'Wahoo!'

Why did you leave Auroville, the first time?

"After six years of being a child and teenager in Auroville, I just wanted to get out. I was dreaming of chocolate-chip ice-cream and white bread. I wanted to see new things and I wanted to see Mum again."

"So I went to Sydney and found that ice-cream world and loved it. Then I discovered that life in the ice-cream world can also be tough and boring. Despite the, theoretically, endless variety of fun activities there are to do in a big city in the West, the most popular activity seems to be turning your brain into ragi in front of the television. If you're not watching TV it can be just as difficult to entertain yourself over

there as here. But here I find you have more time, more space, and less restrictions. Auroville definitely has its share of restrictions, but eventually you discover all places have their limits and that there's no such thing as a pure state. Not on this plane anyway."

"I managed to come back to Auroville in 1988 for two weeks in my university Easter holidays. It was madness to make such a short trip, but at the end I told myself I'd come back as soon as I could. But every time I booked a ticket to India, something amazing would always come up and I'd postpone it for another year. Once a friend started up a travelling theatre company and wanted me to act in his first show. Another time I was offered a part in a film that was going to a groovy film festival. Then I got a job at the University of Sydney which at the time seemed too good to be true. After a few years of great excuses not to come, I realised that that's what they all were—excuses. So after working at the University for two years, I decided to return regardless of the obstacles and there were plenty. I sold my car, quit my job, put all my furni-

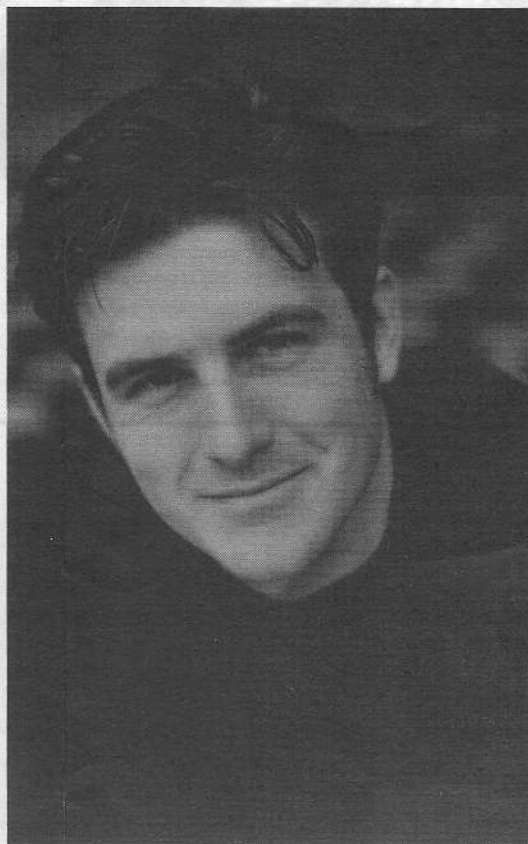


PHOTO: JOANNE

JESSE

ture and things in storage and left Australia." *And what holds you here?*

"I love this place because there is a sense

of community and to different extents, an ethic of helping one another. Auroville values entirely different qualities in people than in a big city like Sydney. Here we celebrate being together. Full moon on the beach, under the stars. Happiness. Our own energy. It's sort of a creative nirvana here. Cities in general are unhealthy. Here it's so... unspeakably beautiful."

"I can't help thinking that Auroville needs some sort of evening hang-out. A cafe with music and dancing open late on the weekends. But one of the many paradoxes of Auroville is this: there are many Aurovilians who yearn for things that could arguably only be supplied if the community was parked just off the edge of Paris or Tokyo or some big city so that they could live the 'best of both worlds.' Auroville's undeniable beauty and cosiness intermingled with night-clubs and an exotic selection of delicatessens. But would Auroville continue to exist in such a space? One could argue that Auroville exists by virtue of its location. Although the cohesive is first and foremost a spiritual magnet, it is aided by the fact that it is a cultural bubble. It intermingles with the surrounding India culture to some extent on all levels. But not to the detriment of either."

Interview by Jill

Jimi Hendrix uncorked: three dudes in Ami

Monday afternoon in the Auroville community called Ami. Taranti is downstairs in the kitchen making tea and Benet is just on his way out to get bread when I arrive. Upstairs, above the kitchen I find Enea, Teal and Kumba engrossed in loud conversation while Jimi Hendrix blasts in the background. "Hi!" I shout. "How's it going?" They stop talking and look up. There's a brief pause while they eye me suspiciously. "You guys want to be interviewed for Auroville Today?" Another Hendrix-filled silence. They look at each other, then back at me. "Sure." Someone turns down the music. "What d'you want to ask?"

What do you think of Auroville?

"Auroville has its problems."

For example?

"Auroville claims to be perfect and doing what Mother and Sri Aurobindo said but there are heaps of people with huge houses and businesses but there are no jobs to make money for things like travelling. A maintenance is barely enough to live on."

"If you've got a bad reputation like me it is so dif-

ficult to live in Auroville."

Difficult?

"To find a job, to work, to make money."

Money?

"Yeah, to travel. I want to travel because it's needed at this sort of age, you need the change."

Why?

"I'd like to see the world..."

"... because it's there..."

"and soon it's going to be gone."

What else?

"The Matrimandir is one big problem."

Oh yes?

"It's just a bunch of morons arguing over what the outer skin should be made of. Mother and Sri Aurobindo weren't specific about what it should be and now people are inventing how they want."

How would you change things?

"I'd put Goupi in charge."

"Close it to tourists."

"No way. But make them walk from so far away only the desperate ones get there."

"No really, on some days the Matrimandir should be available to Aurovilians only."

When was the last time any of you guys went to the Matrimandir?

"About three years ago."

Okay, so what about doing the yoga or seeking the truth, what does that mean for you?

"Finding something within yourself, finding something within yourself that you're happy with, so that you're a 'worked-out' person."

That's a fairly general interpretation.

"Now is not the time to make decisions; that comes later. It's a time when you're checking out the possibilities. You're experimenting."

Many people talk about the 'bored' youth. Are you bored?

"Yeah, sometimes, but I also work for my dad every morning."

What about you guys?

"I just did a computer course. But I'd really like to be racing cars. Formula One, they're

Kumba, Enea and Teal at Ami: "We'd all choose to live here."

the best. I like computers, they're fun. There are so many more possibilities if you can use a computer. I also do maths class three times a week."

And you?

"I do math class at Last School, French with a tutor and Tamil at the Centre for Further Learning, but I'd really like to be good at juggling. Being really good at anything would be great. I admire Enea because he speaks so many languages (four), I'd really like to be multilingual. I like to write..."

Would you like to write something for Auroville Today?

"... but I don't like journalism. People say I should be an actor. Who knows?"

What about your dreams of Auroville? What would you do if you could do anything?

"I'd like to go to Europe and scam loads of cash and start a huge community in Auroville."

What kind of community?

"A youth village."

What would be in it?

"There'd be loads of houses and kitchens and bathrooms..."

"...and a pool table..."

"There'd be a music system and a place for live music..."

"There'd be a cafe or restaurant staffed by youth..."

"... and a trampoline..."

"There'd be no age limit." They all agree.

"Just no 'corked' people."

Corked?

"Corked, you know, someone set in their ways, unwilling to compromise, narrow-minded."

"Corked people don't contribute, they just think their way is best."

Do you feel supported by Auroville?

"Yeah, but there are some people who are so judgmental, they're just into screwing you over. There are people like that everywhere in the world. You have to watch out for them otherwise they'll get the cops to bust you for some stupid rumour they heard standing in the queue at Pour Tous. I think many people are intimidated by the Aurovilian youth. They're scared to ask questions."

Would you want to live anywhere else?

"No," they firmly reply, "Auroville is pretty much better than the outside."

"I think we'd all choose to live here."

"We all have the feeling that Auroville is the place to be."

Interview by Jesse

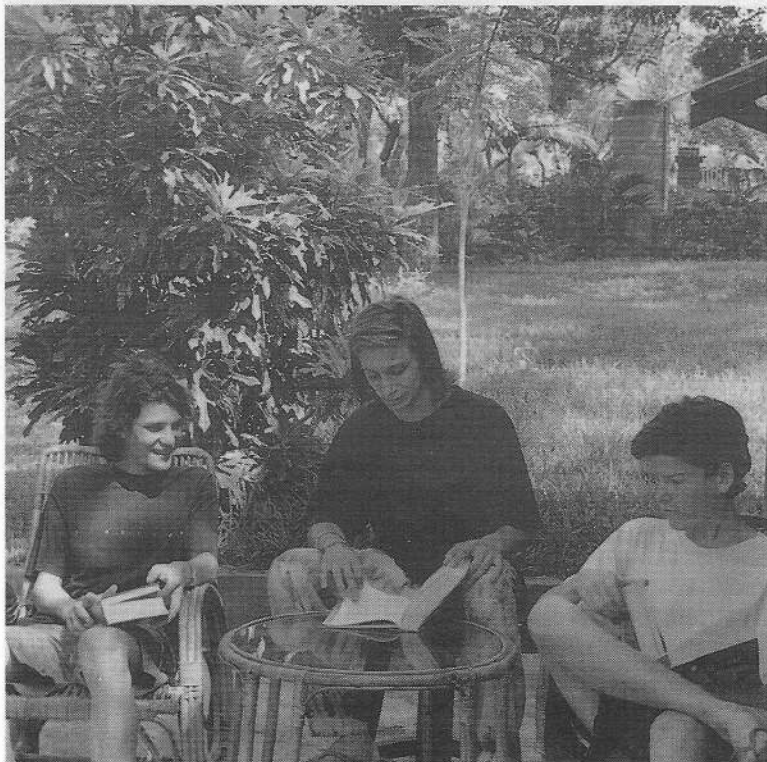


PHOTO: JONAH

The curse of complete freedom

Another afternoon, back in Ami, I run into Muni, walking slowly across the yard, looking tousled having just woken up from a nap. I stop him: "Can I ask you some questions for Auroville Today?"

"Sure man, I'll just get a cigarette," he says, and he disappears through a doorway, reappearing a moment later with a smoking Gold Flake and a bottle of water. We sit at an outside table



Muni: "Something's missing..."

and begin to talk.

"In blood I'm Indian, but in nature I don't feel I'm anything. Being Indian, like being any other nationality in the world, is more a way of being brought up than anything else. I don't think of myself as Indian, I think of myself as Aurovilian."

What is Auroville to you?

"As kids we were told that Mother could fly and jump from room to room and all that stuff, but I find I deal more with the day-to-day realities. In some ways it lives up to the dream and in some ways it doesn't."

In what ways?

"Well, we were taught as kids that we didn't need diplomas or certificates, but I think you do. As soon as that occurred to me I went to the States to go to school."

"I feel the young people in the 'West' are driven by many goals – the goal to make money, to get a job, to survive. Here there's not that necessity, so there's not that drive. It's the curse of complete freedom; too many choices. I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do."

"There's no guidance in Auroville, now it's all bureaucracy. There's still no real

attempt at alternatives to the West. Of course, there's alternative energy, but in terms of education, all the Auroville schools still follow traditional methods."

"There's definitely something missing in Auroville for me and also for young people. I don't think the Youth Centre will magically pull the Aurovilian youth together. I'm looking for something new, something completely different. This might sound strange, but a few years ago, I didn't believe in spirituality, but now for the first time in my life, something is poking at me. I used to go to parties because I enjoyed that vital pleasure, but now I just get bored."

What would you like to do?

"I'd like to work in a field where I really could help, that would make a difference, you know. I worked for two to three months in the Health Centre in their casualty section, but that ended when I decided to go to the U.S."

What about your dreams for the future?

I don't know, I'm thinking of leaving Auroville, but I'm divided in half. One side of me is calling spiritually and the other is saying, what about a career, what about making it big?"

Interview by Jesse

The Boys and Girls of After School

Dawn, Guna, Bhavani, small Selvi, Sarasu, Tamilselvi. They are between 15 and 19 years old. Teenage girls, sweet, smiling, joking, shy uncertain, easily bored. Like teenagers anywhere, they have things to say, but not the words to say them. And as village girls, they are usually shy about speaking "in public" and need to be drawn out a bit before they will respond. Who are they? What are they thinking? What are their hopes, plans for the future? What does Auroville mean to them?

"Right now, we are involved mostly with our studies and sports. Basketball. Volleyball."

"We often go to Pondy to play basketball. It's fun."

"We get to travel to different places. There are ten girls who play."

They enjoy being on the team. It gives them energy and self-confidence.

And your studies?

"Now we're at After School. It's more serious here than Last School."

"We have to memorise things more. And we're also writing more. That's a bit difficult."

How is it different from Last School?

"It's a different way of studying. Last School is too loose. There is a lack of discipline. Here, in After School, we are preparing for our future."

Sarasu wants to be a nurse. Dawn wants to be a doctor. They are serious when they discuss these plans.

All of them still have contact with their families. One or two even live at home, others are already out in communities like Aspiration and Pitchandikulam. They still remain connected to the village, but they see their role, when they are adults, being more public service oriented.

"We want to build toilets, do work which can help all the people. Be fair to all sides."

"Another toilet should be built in the middle, near the small temple. That way, everyone can have access to it."

How do you see yourselves in five years? They are thoughtful.

"In five years I'll be married," says one.

"I'll still be studying. If I want to be a nurse, I have to study for five years at JIPMER" (the government hospital near Pondicherry).

"I want to go outside to study," says a third girl.

Their plans definitely include studying. The rest is a bit unclear.

And Auroville? How do you understand the word "spirituality" as it relates to Auroville and your lives here?

"To be in Auroville means to fulfill Mother's Dream. To help it grow."

"Auroville is not just any place. It's an experiment where people work in a good spirit."

"It's not so easy to become spiritual. It's something internal."

"It's difficult to say what it is exactly. Maybe it means to become a better person. To transform."

I ask them, finally, to complete the sentence, "My life is..."

"My life is very different from life in the village. We live here with nature. Dogs, trees."

"My life is no problem."

"My life is very exciting."

"My life is 50/50. Happy. Boring."

"My life is peaceful."

"My life is happy."

"My life is a learning process."

(contd. on next page)

Still very idealistic

Aurotaranti (or Taranti as she is better known) and Nilauro, a young couple, both of whom were born here and returned to Auroville after studying in the US for a number of years, spoke to Bindu about their experiences, here and abroad.

"To me it is natural," says Taranti, "Auroville has always been home to me. Even though I have lived in different countries and in different cultures, Auroville represents all of these to me. When I returned after a period of eight years, I was so happy to be back... I grabbed a handful of this red soil and smeared it on my face. The contact with this red earth is so important to me. Auroville is a very special place."

"But you realize how special it is only when you have been 'outside,'" remarks Nilauro. "The youth don't realize what incredible opportunities they have here... Auroville offers so many courses in so many things – anything from massage courses to pranik healing to music – and almost all for free. And if something is not offered, you can usually organize it if you are motivated enough."

"In the West you are faced with the concept of unemployment. This does not exist here: all you need is some discipline," interjects Taranti. "When I first came back, I wanted to design clothes. And so I went up to Prema [head of the Auromode garment factory] and she treated me as an equal, even though I had no experience in the field. She trusted me and gave me full responsibility for designing the patterns, choosing the fabric, colour etc... It was such a gift, and I learned so much!"

"I think that it would be good for many young Aurovilians to go out and experience the West," continues Nilauro. "Some kids think they wouldn't be able to cope over there. They think Auroville is a handicap of some kind. But that's not true. All of us who have gone out have done great! Schools in Auroville may not seem very

official, but they certainly teach you what every student is expected to know. Academically I fitted right in with my age group in my American high school. I graduated with all the other 18 year-olds. And socially... well, it takes a while to adjust to the society. Once you get used to that, though, you are much better off than other kids because you know how to communicate with people in all age groups."

"I agree," says Taranti. "You see, chil-

ended up making friends with everybody," remembers Taranti.

"Some of the young people here really don't want to go out at all, you know," she continues. "They are totally satisfied with what they are doing here."

"Well, some of them are happy with what they are doing here," says Nilauro, "but there are more who are still searching... and this searching often takes kids out of Auroville which at times feels like a

very small and restricting village. That's what made me leave home in the first place. I was eager to experience more than Auroville had to offer. And even now, I want to go out again and study things like 'marine biology' together with photography and journalism. Or

maybe 'nature and culture.' I know I could do these things in Auroville if I really tried, but it's such a struggle to get it all organized. It is so much easier to go to a college where such courses are already offered."

"As for me, I want to stay here," says Taranti. "I came back after one of my friends was mugged and killed for his leather jacket. It was then that I realized that society valued money more than life. I came back to Auroville to find my roots wherever those may lead me. But I knew that wasn't the world I wanted to live in. I am still very idealistic about Auroville. I believe it will happen soon. I just wish that everybody would love and help each other so that Auroville may be."

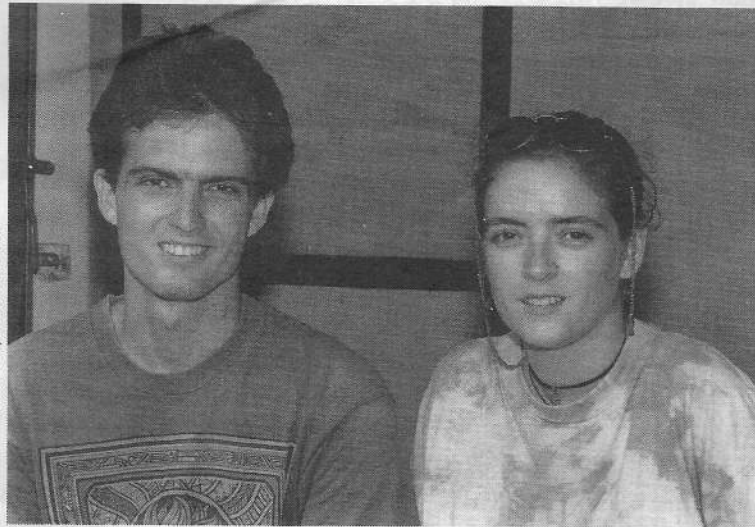


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

dren here are treated as adults. As a child I could do whatever I liked; Renu shaved my head for me; when my parents left for six months, I decided who I would stay with... My wishes were respected. This would be almost unheard of in the West."

"Perhaps, because they are treated as adults, you see more of an intermingling of age groups here. In the States, you tend to socialize only with your classmates or peers," adds Nilauro.

"And everything is so categorized! In the High Schools that I went to in the U.S. everyone was divided up into groups – football players, cowboys, socialists, communists, blacks and whites... I refused to be categorized into any of these groups, perhaps because I felt I did not fit in. But I

The Girls and Boys of After School (contd.)

The Boys ... are somewhat different. They are more used to speaking out. Also, they are a bit older than the girls, so more at ease with themselves. Murugan, Rajendran, Velu, Elumalai. They range from 17-21 years of age. Elumalai is working at the bakery, he plans to get married in the near future. The rest are still in school.

What's the most important thing for you right now?

"We are into exams this week. Accountancy. English. Maths. Physics. Biology."

"We are doing 12th standard. We attend school from 8 to 2:30. Then we do sports. Basketball. Football."

"I have a computer class in CSR (Centre for Scientific Research)."

What will you be doing in five years?

"In five years I'll be planting trees."

"I want to travel to the Andaman Islands."

"Working in a unit. Playing sports."

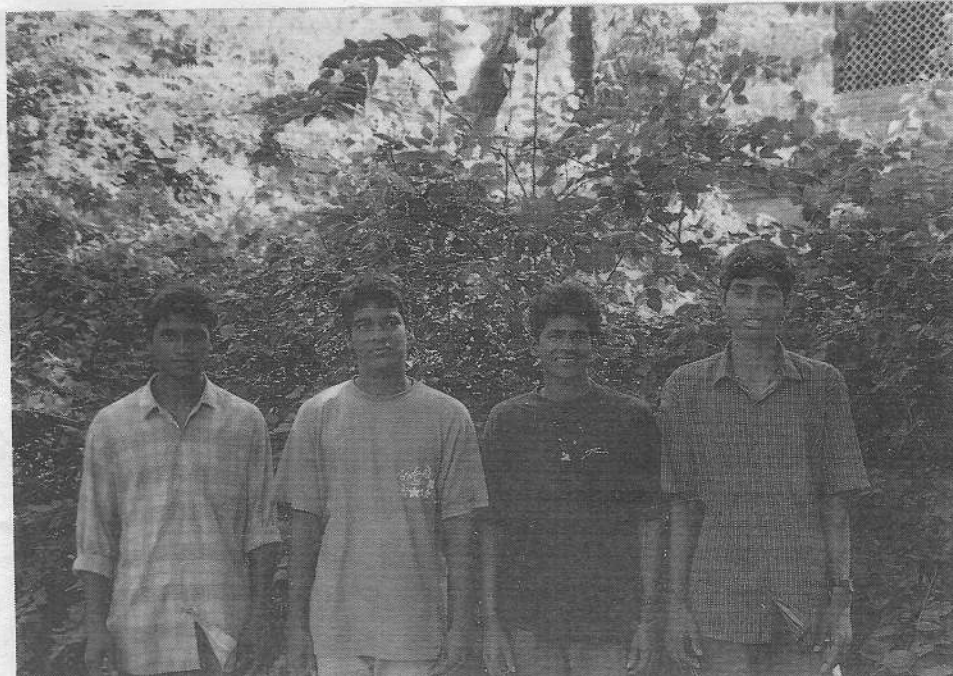
"Social work. Being a social servant."

"Artist. Architect."

The boys (from left): Murugan, Rajendran, Elumalai, Velu.

The girls (from left): Bhavani, Guna, Dawn, Tamilselvi, small Selvi.

PHOTOS: JONAH



I ask them about marriage and how they will get married. Traditionally, especially in the villages, the families arrange the marriage. But these kids have different ideas.

"We will choose our lovers. I prefer a love marriage."

"Yes, but if I don't find anyone by the time I'm 30, then my parents can choose!"

"I've already arranged it."

"It must be a rich girl!"

"I'll love one girl, very beautiful, with a nice figure. She has to be active."

How do they get along with their families? Most of these boys have good relations with their parents, although they can't talk to them easily when it comes to love and marriage.

"My father said he would die if I have a love marriage."

"I never talk to them about these things." At last, I asked the boys about the word spirituality, and what it means to them.

"It means united with people first, then God."

"It means to believe in God, that Force."

"The soul."

"Like to do yoga, meditation."

"Fraternity."

"Nothing."

And how do they come in contact with this feeling of spirituality, this belief?

"I go to Matrimandir. Then I can be calm. Energetic. Concentrated."

"If I want something, I go to Matrimandir and ask. It's easy. I say, 'Please, Mother, listen to me. This is your son speaking.'"

Interviews by Jill



"There's so much happening here"

HIMAL was born in Darjeeling and came to Auroville in 1979 with his father and brother when he was 8 years old. Since then, he's been involved in a wide range of activities. For example...

"I had my own horse and was always racing with the other kids in Auroville. Then somebody suggested I should train to become a professional jockey. I thought, O.K. So at the age of 14 I went to Madras to be trained. At the beginning it was boring—getting up at three in the morning just to learn the routine tasks. But then I got to ride these big racehorses, which was scary at first because I was small and they wouldn't listen to me. Finally, when I mastered them it became very interesting. But then, just when I was about to become a professional jockey, the Madras racecourse closed down and I had to come back to Auroville."

Himal was not unhappy to be back. "I'd been missing Auroville very much, the love that is here. There in Madras you were just told what to do; there was no real relationship between the people I was with."

Himal stayed some time with Johnny, picking up, among other things, the basics of metalwork. Later, he started teaching it to the schoolkids in the 'Pyramids' at Aspiration. There was a brief period when he worked at La Ventura restaurant and learned to cook, but then a whole new avenue opened up...

"From as far back as I can remember, every time I came across an old motor-

cycle I would spend ages admiring its beauty. I loved vintage machines. Then, when I was 17 years old, I read in the AV News that someone had a 1947 motorcycle for sale. It was big and yellow and locked in a storeroom." After some delicate negotiations over the price, it was his. "I didn't know anything about mechanics, so I got a motorcycle manual. And from that day the adventure of the Charler Garden began."

A "Charler", in the Auroville argot, is a vintage motorcycle (named after Charlie who had one of the first ones!). The Charler Garden is the compound, next to Ami, where Himal lives. As you walk in through the swinging gate, you encounter old motorcycles (14 classic models to date, which Himal has procured in different parts of India), novel arrangements of motorcycle and engine parts, a pizza oven, a kitchen in the making, and many sculptures and carvings.

"The carving began when a friend of a friend was given a carved dolphin. My friend wanted one so much I decided to make one. Then I teamed up with Yoshi and we started something of a production line in carving dolphins, turtles, whales etc. We were selling them all over, but the business part was no fun because I felt like a slave, always carving, carving, carving. So then I

stopped and I only take it up again now when I get new ideas."

"In fact," he continues, "what I'm really discovering now is the need to find a balance between different activities, to fit the different parts of my life together."

At present, the Charler Garden is still in the making. Sometimes, he admits, it looks like a junk heap. "But on certain days, we clean all the bikes, put them in the right places and invite people for pizza. And then it becomes a real garden." For the future he'd like it to become a place where young people can come, have pizza, enjoy the museum of motorcycles and various art forms, and get involved in different activities. "It will be spontaneous. There's still a long way to go, and we need funds, but already there's really something special here. When I come back to the Garden after being out of Auroville on an adventure trip I always feel, 'Wow. What a beauty place!'"

Himal, unlike many of his young friends, has stayed in Auroville. Why? "It's because there's so much happening here, there are so many different ideas around and you're free to take them up and experiment with them. I don't think it's like this elsewhere. In fact, I think that experimentation, trying new things, is even more possible in the Auroville of today than before. It's all a matter of having the right attitude, of being open to the unexpected..."

From an interview by Alan

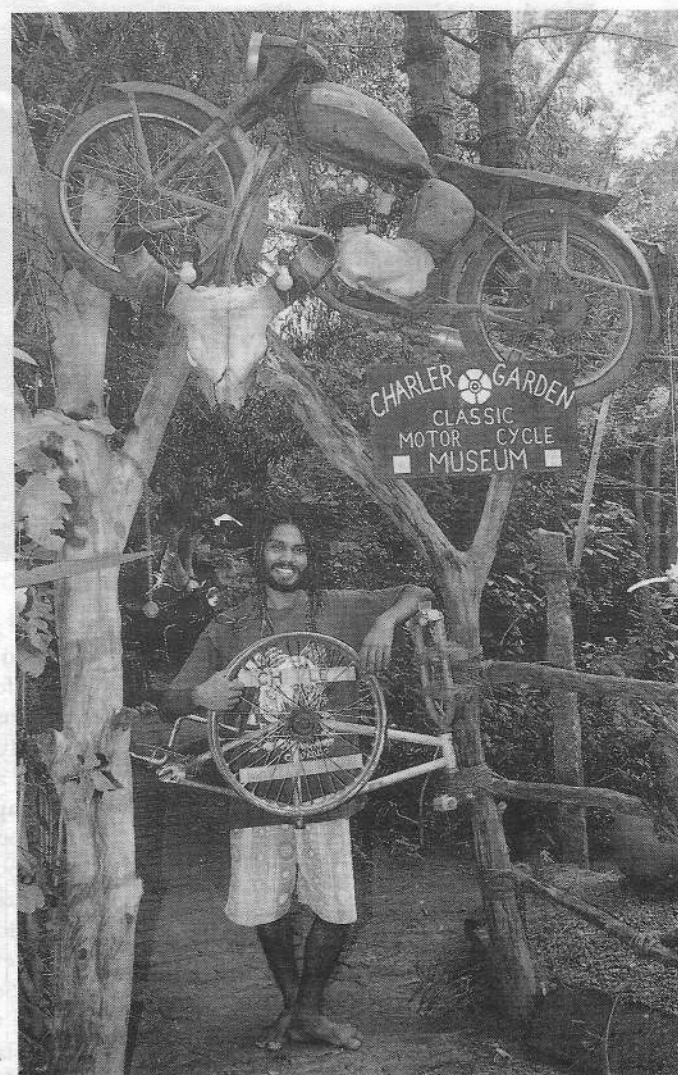


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Himal at his self-made entrance

Rebirth from an underwater world:

ONE OF MY GREATEST ADVENTURES IN BERIJAM

by Himal

We went with 13 people to set up the Auroville Summer camp. Like always we set up a kitchen, bathrooms and toilets, and pitched enough tents for about 50 people, and did all the small things to keep nature clean, which took about a week and was a lot of fun.

It was the fifth day at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and we had come to the end of our working hours. Some were cooking, fishing, swimming, showering and so on. I decided to go on an trek for only about an hour and a half, otherwise it would be too dark to come back to the camp. I set out on a hike around the lake, up and down hills, through pine forests and finally through a very dense chola (old forest). Just as I came out of this chola, suddenly there was a big and scary sound of hooves running in different directions. Here I was on a very narrow path, about a foot wide and super dense on both sides. There was silence for a minute or so, and then the cry of a big deer (I guess he was calling his herd back or calling me for combat). It shook the mountain, or for sure it shook me. I still did not see him but could tell where

he was in the bush. I did not have many choices on this narrow path. So I stood there for about five minutes, shaking every time the deer cried. Then I gathered my strength, and sent a telepathic message to the deer: "O big chief! who shakes the mountains, I must adventure on." Having this thought, I quietly and quickly continued on the path not knowing if he would come after me. But the deer still made the mountain shake even though I was far gone.

It was already a bit dark when I found myself on top of a hill. From here I had two possibilities. One was to crash through the forest until I reached the lake which I thought was an hour away, the other one to go around the hill to the lake and walk along the shore. This would be easier but much longer and still bring me to the same place. I chose to crash through the forest. It was not so bad till I found myself in the dark with tall bushes surrounding me so that I did not know which way the camp was or if there was a brother bison behind the trees. Crashing through the bushes took a lot of energy, so sometimes I had to stop to rest. After a while I came to the lake and

walked till I was on one side of the lake and the camp on the other side. Everyone was busy with dinner. I called out and said, "Hey I'm here, could someone come and pick, me up?" Some of them said "Hey hello" and that was it.

So I sat there thinking what a great adventure I had that day and that probably someone was coming to pick me up on a surf board. After about ten minutes, I called again but everybody was busy, so I sat there for quite a bit longer and tried again. No luck. Then I remembered I used to swim across the lake when the lake used to be more full. And now it had come down by five meters which made the distance much less. Not realising that I was quite tired from my long walk, I ran straight into the lake and started swimming. I must have been half way across when I realised that I had not thought of taking off my clothes or my shoes and that the water was super cold. Well, now the mind started working. My first thought was to try to swim back. But that was no good. While my thoughts were going in all directions, I took off my jacket and my shirt. Off they went into the lake.

Sure, I thought of taking off my shoes but at this point I needed all my strength to be able to stay afloat and breathe. I could have called for help, which would have panicked me and surely no one could have come in time.

Well, here I was slowly being sucked into the lake. I reached a stage where the body was still trying to swim in every way. it possibly could to reach its goal, and the mind no longer cared if it drowned. I must have been five meters from the shore when I took my last breath and slowly the lake swallowed me up. "This is it", I thought.

But then, after I been sucked down for about 3 metersI touched the bottom of the lake. I crawled along it under water until I came to the shore, where I lay half on rocks and half in the water for at least 15 minutes, thankful to be alive.

I thought that my adventure was already over when I was still on the other side of the lake. Little did I know that it was just beginning.

A spider at home

by Sukhamuni

Born and raised in Auroville, Sukhamuni is fifteen years old. He is absolutely crazy about spiders and snakes. He also enjoys reading comics, rock-climbing and camping. Here he presents his latest pet.

The very first time I put my hand in the terrarium, I must admit that I was really scared to handle the huge spider which I had caught. It slowly moved onto my open palm. Taking it out it stayed motionless for a while. Afterwards it started to climb up my arm, my shoulder and straight towards my face where it stationed itself for a long period. While walking up my arm I could distinctly feel each leg moving separately, while the tiny claws moving at the end of each leg were giving a tickling and rather funny sensation.

At the end of June, I, along with some other Aurovilians, went on a two-day seed collection walk in the hills behind Gingee. While out on a trek on our second day we stopped for a short while to rest by a pond filled with water next to a tree that had its roots in the water. The tree had two bunches of flowering orchids growing not far apart. I could not resist climbing the tree to look at the flowers. Near the biggest bunch of orchids there was some dead bark, which I moved out of the way. While doing this, suddenly a huge spider appeared and ran down the tree. In the excitement that followed, my brother and I managed to catch the spider and somehow guided it into a sack without hurting it.

Coming home that same day I gently put it in a terrarium.

In the weeks that followed, I became friends with that remarkable hairy little animal. For a spider, it was big. Big enough to call it "a monster". Measuring the spider was easier said than done, for it was in one of its bad moods on that day. One thing for sure, I wasn't going to put my hand with a ruler in that terrarium to get the size. I made him get on the glass so that we could measure him there. The total body length of the spider was 6.5 centimetres and the total length with the legs outstretched was 15.5 centimetres.

Within a few days I was able to hold the spider and even feed it geckos (small lizards) which I caught alive. I used to drop in a gecko in the morning and then come back after school in the evening and find the poor gecko

still alive and unaware of what was in the terrarium with it. The real fun started after it was dark and the lights in my room were off. A few times I was able to watch the spider eat but never once was I able to see it catch its prey. If the gecko was still alive then I would go to bed and in the morning find only a small round ball with silk wrapped around it and some bones sticking out. This was the fate of every gecko that went in.

After a while however, I was not able to hold the spider in my hands anymore for it took me to be an intruder and started to defend its territory. When the spider was threatened it would lift its front legs and keep its ground. It will only do this if it had no escape or if threatened. The fangs moved back and forth while making a purring sound, and they would strike so fast that it was hard to record the movement.

In the beginning I never moved it far from the terrarium, for if it took a flying jump I would never have seen him again. But once, I really wanted to see how fast this thing could run, so I got the net and put it on the floor. All of a sudden, it took off and started running very fast. But it had its limitations: it could run at such speeds only for a short time.

Five days after it ate its first gecko, it built its first web in captivity. That lasted for only one day before it broke it up. Three days later it built another one. That one lasted for two and half days. The web was nothing great to look at. It was just silk put together: but if you looked at it closely, you found it was like a hammock. The spider built this three or four centimetres off the ground and hid under it.

Trying to identify the spider was an adventure in itself. From the beginning I was told that there are no Tarantulas in India, but I kept on disagreeing. Then after a lot of sweat and almost being bitten several times, all the facts in my spider book pointed towards the Tarantula family. (A spider expert said that the spider could be an unidentified species of the Tarantula family).

My friends often asked me, "How could you a sleep



PHOTO: JEAN-MICHEL (AUROLINE)

in the same room with such an ugly creature?" To tell the truth, on the first night I was a bit scared of having this spider (actually a beauty of nature) staying within two meters of my bed but by the second night I felt completely safe.

A month after its capture, together with my friend Ravi who teaches me about insects and spiders, I brought it back to where I had found it and let it go. For a day or two afterwards I felt as if I had lost a very good friend and that no human could replace such a good friend as the spider. I was extremely sad in letting my spider go.

But some months later, I had the chance to go back to the same place and to my utter joy I found another spider of the exact same species, but smaller in size. This time I have big plans for it. Spiders have a life-span of 25 years. And I plan on keeping my spider for at least some years. Who knows what the future holds?

Last month, a group of Japanese businessmen from multinationals like Canon and Toshiba visited India. One of their main destinations was Auroville. Why? Because they had heard about the important work in environmental restoration and renewable energy research that is happening here.

The following two articles focus upon this theme. One reflects the perspectives of two knowledgeable visitors and reaffirms some of the achievements we can feel proud of; the other is a timely reminder that the work, particularly in our bioregion, has hardly begun...

Ajit's first love is architecture and he never expected to become an environmental activist. "I got pushed to the front and once there, I didn't want to give in easily," explains Ajit smiling. Recently, he was even roughed up, threatened with "dire consequences" and detained on the road to keep him from attending a meeting about the environmental impact of the East Coast Road. The road project did not even have the required environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests. "The Government will not implement its own laws," notes Ajit, "especially in relation to the environment. The Ministry of Environment is not effectively protecting the health of the country. On any hot issue, they do not want to see you. Environmentalists are seen as anti-development and are the suspects. Still, unless someone takes the lead, nothing happens. The problem is so huge that you go crazy if you think about it. I have to work against getting depressed

A Reluctant Environmentalist

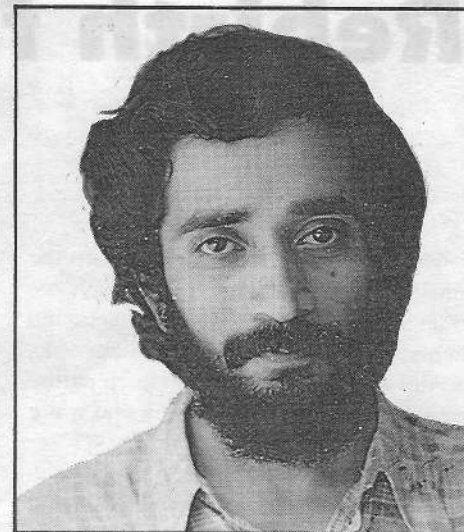
AJIT is a Gujarati architect who has been in Auroville since 1971, except for a stay in Germany from 1978 to 1986. In recent years he has become involved with INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage). His INTACH work in Pondicherry involves the saving and restoration of old buildings and traditional architectural styles. Through INTACH, Ajit and other Aurovilians tried to save the old trees that lined the coastal highway from being cut down. And this action led to a whole investigation of the environmental impact of a planned superhighway called the East Coast Road. Thanks to Ajit and others, parts of the road have now been built in accordance with acceptable standards but the trees are gone forever. The fight, however, goes on for the remaining parts of the road and for environmental safeguards along this stretch of the Coromandel Coast.

about it. For almost everyone, all these things are someone else's problem.

"Anyway, we have to use our influence to make whatever dent we can. Auroville has a reputation in the field of environment, deserved or not, and people do notice when we speak out. The environmental scene in India needs our input because it is not well organized and has no funding. For example, two hundred million dollars have just come for new tea plantations. Do you know what it means? Tea cultivation is a very environmentally destructive monoculture. Who will attempt to deal with the problem? Today's development advisors are all students of a past generation when unlimited development without ecological considerations was the vogue in the West. Now the West is trying to avert the disaster it has been creating for itself. At least we in India should learn from their mistakes and not try to make short-term gains from absurdities like processing their hazardous waste and marketing banned chemicals and drugs here. It's all moving so fast and the enormous amounts of money involved are such that even some environmental groups can be corrupted and influenced."

Can India have both ecology and development? "There is a way," maintains Ajit, "and Auroville has to be part of it. We have to show how people can improve their standard of living within eco-constraints. For example, we have to show how people can live and make money farming organically. In this area Auroville has a long way to go to demonstrate that organic farming can be economically rewarding. Most people are poor and there has to be a way that meets their needs. They have to be made to understand that nature is a valuable capital and that if it is destroyed they lose everything. On the East Coast Road project, I was surprised that the villagers along the way understood about the road and what it would mean if developed as planned. The road as it has been now modified demonstrates how low impact development can be good. Our strategy in environmental work has to include the economic betterment of the people. That is essential. At least, we have to keep a close track of our area from Cuddalore to Madras—not just our green belt or immediate bioregion.

"Along our coast now, prawn farming represents something even worse than



AJIT

slash-and-burn monoculture because huge amounts of salt water, laced with chemicals for feeding the prawns and with antibiotics to prevent them from getting diseases, are pumped onto the land. Our coast is targeted in the global shift away from the lands already ruined by prawn farming in the Philippines and South East Asia. Fortunately farmers and fishermen have some awareness that this process will be of no benefit to them and will leave them in a worse situation than before. This base among the people together with court orders will be the only way to stop such development. But who will do it? We need to be in closer touch with the local organizations and administrators for a consolidated alliance that will have a state and a national impact. We need professionalism in this work and that is hard to come by. The sustainability workshops that CSR (Centre for Scientific Research) offered for administrators, architects and officials from around India was a good example of what we must do. Still there is no clear answer about how to protect the environment."

Interview by Bill

"Auroville happily combines all models"

Sandeep Virmani and Sushma Iyengar are two dynamic, dedicated young Indians who have been involved, for the last seven years, in environmental and social work in Kutch, Gujarat. Sandeep heads the ecology cell of Janvikas, and works in the fields of water-harvesting, biomass and animal husbandry. Sushma's organization, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, works with 3000 women in 100 villages on issues of health, environment, legal support, education, handicrafts and finances. Both organizations have participated in conferences in Auroville.

Some time ago they passed through Auroville. And in between their hectic programme of studying waste-water ponds, mud-brick technology, afforestation projects and research on medicinal plants, Auroville Today cornered them for their impressions.

AVToday: What are your impressions of Auroville?

Sandeep: I am most impressed by what I have seen of Auroville in terms of community building and sustainable life-styles. I think this is one of the most cohesive efforts in India to have a sustainable life-style.

Sushma: On my first visit to Auroville a few years ago, I felt there was a lot of contradictions between the sustainable ideology that Auroville espoused and the life-style that Aurovilians actually led. These contradictions have not been eliminated, but I realize now that Aurovilians are working towards minimizing the gap.

How does the work in Auroville com-

pare with that of other organizations in India?

Sandeep: There are many organizations that promote alternative technology, such as solar and wind energy, but these organizations do not themselves test out the knowledge and technology that they sell. And so they remain unaware of the practical problems that come up in implementation. In Auroville people actually use and test such technology, and this gives confidence to others. Take ferro-cement channels, for example. The local villagers have taken up this alternative roofing material only after having seen Aurovilians successfully using it.

Sushma: I like the fact that Auroville uses both indigenous knowledge and for-

eign technology. Most non-governmental groups in India are split into two groups espousing one or the other. But Auroville promotes indigenous knowledge, like local health traditions, as well as importing technology from outside as in the case of ferro-cement, solar energy or mud brick technology.

Similarly, in the field of social development, while most organizations choose between one or the other developmental model—for instance, of living in the village and inducing development from within, or providing leadership from outside—Auroville happily combines all models.

Given the relatively high costs of alternative technology and environmental regeneration, do you feel that India can afford to repeat these experiments that Auroville has successfully carried out?

Sandeep: I don't think money is an issue. There are a number of non-governmental organizations which have access to huge sums of money yet, unlike Auroville, they do not have any results to show.

Sushma: There are a number of schemes that subsidise the costs of alternative energy resources so that people can use them. What people need is the proof that such resources are viable—and this is where Auroville's work helps.

What do you mean when you say you are impressed by Auroville's efforts at community-building?

Sandeep: The concept of a community, like that of Auroville, a community that is intentional in purpose and, unlike Ashrams, does not exclude family life, is fairly new in India. There have been some attempts by NGO's and like-minded individuals to live communally—we ourselves have been thinking upon these lines—but there are so many things, like family attachments, that tend to come in between. In Auroville I find it remarkable that, despite the diversity of their backgrounds, people are so united in their mission, so dedicated to their goal.

What role can Auroville play in India's development?

Sushma: Aurovilians should go out into India. There is some wonderful work going on here in Auroville but there's also good work being done elsewhere in India. Aurovilians seem to be ignorant of current development trends in India and an exchange of technology and knowledge would be healthy. I think Aurovilians need to understand and come more in touch with the Indian ethos and culture.

Interview by Bindu

Subsequently, it turned out that the role played by Aurovilians from Kuilapalayam village in the panchayat election was minimal. Nevertheless, it raises the issue of how local-born Aurovilians relate to the village,

Unlike most Aurovilians who have little or no dealings with their past lives prior to settling in Auroville, for Aurovilians who come from the villages it is virtually impossible to close the gates to the past. Nor is it desirable that they do so for they can be a major force to bring about a transformation in the villages. These Aurovilians have strong ties to the villages. Some of them still own land there, others, because of their family or position, are held in high respect by the villagers, and still others have relatives and friends they run into regularly and

And this is where the crux of the problem lies. For in its present divided state, it is difficult to execute any welfare project in Kuilapalayam without getting politically involved or taking a certain political stance. Attempts have been made to work towards unity—as with the establishment of the new Kuilapalayam school which tried to include all the differing groups in the village in its planning process—but it is by no means an easy task.

After the recent post-election incidents, the Aurovilians from the local villages seem more than ever resolved to try to steer clear of politics, but all of them feel that Auroville should come forward as a neutral third-party to try to bring peace and unity to Kulilpalayam village.

Bindu

After fairly moderate rains in October and November, the skies opened up in December for days on end. In one twenty-four hour spell, over 30 cms. of rain fell, breaking bunds, washing away canyon paths and wreaking general havoc. Almost 100 cms of rain fell in December alone (against an average of about 20 cms.) which brings the total for the year to over two metres. Aurovilians developed webbed feet, bandicoots invaded people's homes, birds wore snorkels and even badminton was briefly interrupted.

This is how Mauna reported the deluge to members of an international e-mail network:

Electronic Mail Message #96254. Date:
Tuesday, December 10, 1996, 10:15:40 PM.
From: IN:mauna@auroville.org.in

Topic: raining...

... so it is raining and raining and raining
and drizzling and pouring and squirting and
spouting and raining over roads turned into
orange streams meandering thru the town-
ship, rushing, gushing, washing out all big
ideas and philosophies and getting us down
to the elements, the grass roots, the fungus
and moist walls, the smell of cheese and
moldy blankets, moldy clothes all in the rains,
incessant rains and power cuts and hassles
to get wet letters to wet post offices, and
jumping between the leaks under the keel
roofs and more rain and waterfalls break-
ing thru the bunds and please let us learn to
bund properly so that our roads remain roads
and don't turn into thick muddy orange ankle-
deep rivers in which you lose your chappals
and get stuck and always under the wet wet
wet soaking poncho's or whatever you have
grinning at each other and marveling at
India's ancient eternal colours silvery lead-
en gray skies and green growth and golden
brown skins and sparkling eyes and psy-
chedelic plastic coverings and everywhere
these orange lakes and puddles and rivers
orange orange orange against gray orange
against silver and more rain and more driz-
zle and more downpour and it's a hassle but
my do we need the rain and the water and
when will it stop will it finally be the deluge
the final deluge apres nous le deluge and the
sound of rain taking away the sound of om
or is it om in another form of course it is and
it rains and it rains and it rains some more
and it rains and it rains and it pours and rains
and it rains and it rains and oh does it rain
and it rains and it rains and it rains and it
rains and it rains and it rains and it rains and
it rains and it rains and it rains and it rains and
it rains... ..

BRIEF NEWS

The Auroville Health Centre in Kulilapalayam has been donated modern X-ray equipment as a result of a combined fund-raising drive by Rotary International centres in Germany, France, the U.K. and India. The initiator of this project is Mr. Rudolf de Millas, a German who came into contact with Auroville several years ago when he was consulting engineer to the Neyveli power plant down the coast.

The inauguration took place on 3rd November in the presence of Mr. Millas, his wife and of Rotarians from Pondicherry.

On 6th December, Ms Akiko Tsubaki from Osaka visited Auroville to give a demonstration of Japanese calligraphy. Like most Japanese schoolchildren, she had begun at the traditional age of 6 years on the 6th of June to study this ancient art. "You can study characters (letters), but that's not calligraphy. Calligraphy begins with an image or emotion. Then you concentrate and suddenly a character comes. You then form the character."

This visit was a continuation of the Auroville/Japan link initiated by the flower-arranging workshop earlier in the year. Next year, a demonstration of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony is planned.

December is traditionally the time when the cultural scene begins to pick up in Auroville. Two popular events this year were "The Legend of Kaliveli Siddha", a play performed by the Auroville Theatre Group, assisted by the Revolutionary Flame Theatre Company, Kulapalayam, and the New Creation Children's Dance Company, and a dance performance of the Ramayana in Odissi style by the renowned Pandit Kelucharan Mohapatra and his group.

There will be more about both of these events in our next issue.

At the beginning of last year, the Auroville farms were dealt an unexpected blow by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board—they were told



Ms. Akiko Subaki demonstrating calligraphy

that the normal subsidy extended to farmers would no longer apply to our agricultural connections. The new rate is much higher.

Fortunately, not all Auroville farmers are dependent on State subsidized electricity. But this latest development has made the Auroville Farm Group even more determined to find alternatives to such an uneconomical source of power.

On a brighter note, the Farm Group is pleased to announce the release of its long-awaited "Auroville Farms" leaflet, which is available from AVI Centres.

Between 25th - 29th November, CSR hosted an international workshop on the local development of windmills in Asia. The countries represented were China, Vietnam, the Philippines and India, there were consultants from the U.K. and the Netherlands, and the workshop was sponsored by the Overseas Development Agency of the British Government.

This, the first truly international workshop to have taken place in Auroville, involved field visits to Auroville windmills, discussion

of developments and future projects in the participants' respective countries, and a resolution to set up an Asian windmill network which would link together the four countries through a newsletter and further meetings.

Subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, it. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by air-mail. 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.

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Young
Auroville
Speaks

IN THIS ISSUE:
YOUNG AUROVILLE
A RELUCTANT ENVIRONMENTALIST
PORTRAIT OF A MASTER CRAFTSMAN

EXP. # 109

KRISHNA TEWARI
AUROMODELE
AUROVILLE

January 1997
Number Ninety-Six



Parvati, consort of Shiva: sculpture by Rajan

PHOTO COURTESY RAJAN

True art comes only from the heart — a portrait of Rajan, master craftsman

One of the wonders of South India is the exquisite bronze images of gods and goddesses cast by the master craftsmen of the Chola period, between the 9th and the 12th centuries. Yet even today these images are being cast by the same methods under the supervision of a few master craftsmen.

Rajan is one of them. He has won many prizes for his work, and his commissions come not only from temples in India but also from museums and individuals in the U.S.A., France, Austria and England.

Two years ago, Johnny of Fertile visited his workshop in Swamimalai to learn about bronze-casting. Recently Rajan returned the visit, and stayed.

"I was born in Trichy, the eighth of nine boys. My father was a stone carver but he died when I was quite young, and I was not trained by him. However, when I finished my formal education I told my mother I wanted to learn a handicraft. She refused because she wanted me, like my brothers, to work in an office. When a family friend heard about my ambition he suggested I go to Swamimalai to learn bronze-casting. My brother told me, 'If you go to Swamimalai, you can never return here.' But I was determined. I left and since then, eighteen years ago, I've had no contact with my family.

"Swamimalai, which is on the river Cauvery near Kumbakonam, is the centre of traditional bronze-casting in India and is therefore the best place to learn the technique. However, I had a lot of problems at the beginning because the craftsmen and trainees had always been members of the same caste and I was an outsider. Some people tried to force me to leave, but I wouldn't give in and managed to be taken on as an apprentice at the Government Training Institute. After three of years basic training, I stayed there for another four years and then opened my own workshop. Because of my own experience as an outsider, I decided only to train boys from farming families, tribals and scheduled castes, because otherwise they would never get the chance to learn these skills and improve their lives.

"In this way I have broken with tradition. Yet the methods that we use are virtually unchanged since the time of the Cholas. For example, all the poses of the gods and goddesses are laid down in the ancient shastras or scriptures, as are the various dimensions of their bodies (there are 124 points to be measured for each figure). The figures are cast by the 'lost wax' process. This involves first making a wax model of the figure, then covering it in layers of clay. A small hole is made in the bottom and then the clay is heated, causing the melted wax to run out. Molten bronze (70% copper, 28% brass, 2% tin) is then poured in and, after cooling, the clay mould is broken. The rough image then has to be chiselled, filed and polished. A large image, like the two and a half metre high image of Dancing Shiva I sent to Chicago recently, can take four years to complete, with up to 5 or 6 people working on it almost continuously. It weighed 1500 kilos and the firing alone took ten tons of firewood. Casting is a risky business because so much can go wrong: if it rains, if the base metals are impure or if the mould cracks, months of work can be wasted.

"Most of the images we make in my workshop are for temples. When the almost completed image is taken to the temple, a final ceremony takes place. The craftsman 'opens the eyes' of the god or goddess by drawing in the eyes with a silver and a gold needle. The main donor and the priest will inspect the result. If the eyes are not drawn exactly, looking straight ahead, they will reject the image because it is believed that any imperfection will spoil the temple.

"Yet, even within the limitations of tradition, there is scope for innovation. Some years ago, for example, my teacher told me I should try something different and he suggested that I make a Shiva/Parvati (Ardhanari) image—where one half of the body is the god and the other half the goddess—in two different metals. This had never been



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

RAJAN

done before so I had to work it out for myself. It was very, very difficult, but finally, after many attempts and disappointments, I succeeded. I've just finished the latest one for a museum in London. I'm also experimenting at present with casting images from classical Rome as well as simple folk images drawn from everyday life.

"What makes one image seem 'alive' while another is not, even though they are both based on the same model? Since the traditional method of bronze-casting is based upon moulds which are hand-made, every piece is slightly different: master craftsmen can recognise at once the work of another by their 'fingerprint'. Also, true art comes only from the heart, not from the hand. If the craftsman is worried, he will not do good work. If he is happy, the image will be happy. This is one reason why the quality of work today is not as high as in the times of the Chola dynasty (whenever I have a new commission, I still go to the Thanjavur museum and sit in front of one of those original Chola images for two or three hours). In those days when the king wanted a new image made, he would send a chariot for the master craftsman and invite him to the palace. Then, for the duration of the work, he would look after the complete well-being of the craftsman and his family. So the craftsman could concentrate upon his work in a peaceful state of mind, taking many years over the completion of one important piece (in those days, unlike now, one man would be responsible for the whole process). But today the craftsmen have to take commercial orders in order to survive and the businessmen are always threatening to cancel orders unless very tight schedules are kept. On top of this, the government cheats craftspeople and Delhi workshops mass-produce inferior copies of our work and sell them at a much lower price.

"All of this has decided me to hand my workshop over to the boys I have trained. I would like to live in Auroville now, to become an Aurovilian, and to train local people in the skills of bronze-casting so that they can become self-employed. In fact, I've already started. We had our second casting last week..."

From an interview by Alan

Photo right: Casting of a bronze image buried under sand.

