

AUROVILLE TODAY

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The Workshop Wave

At this time of the year, the major growth industry in Auroville appears to be in workshops and training courses—given by both members of the community and visiting teachers—which offer an assortment of skills and experiences to Aurovilians and guests. Within the past two months, for example, there have been workshops in Kathak Dance, afforestation and land reclamation, permaculture, voice training, conflict resolution, ferrocement, earth construction, sustainable development and 'intensive enlightenment', as well as several introduction to Auroville programmes for visiting groups. And all this in addition to regular, ongoing courses offered on topics as diverse as dream interpretation, African dance, massage, creative writing and language skills.

These training programmes can be categorized in different ways. Subject-wise, for example, they range from the technical—training in earth construction or ferrocement techniques—to the esoteric. Participant-wise, the workshops may be offered exclusively to Aurovilians, or to Aurovilians and guests, or exclusively to a group of 'outsiders'. Again, some courses are organized and run by Aurovilians, others by outside individuals or organizations, and some are joint enterprises.

Given Auroville's development on the material level and the increasing openness of Aurovilians to drawing from a wide variety of paths for their personal development, it's a safe bet that more and more people, from both within and from outside the community, will be attracted to offer or to participate in courses in Auroville in the future. The question is, how should the community respond to this?

Concerns

Predictably, responses in the community to the growth in workshops differ widely. Few Aurovilians today, perhaps, would oppose the offering of any kind of workshop in the community—although in the recent past there was a school of thought that felt that workshops merely diverted scarce energy and resources from the 'real work' of building Auroville. In fact, the work of many Aurovilians has benefitted from professionals coming in to train us in subjects and skills like permaculture and the education of dyslexics. More generally, there is also the incalculable benefit of being brought into contact with new ideas and fresh perspectives which can not only fertilize us but also challenge us to reevaluate old assumptions. Added to this is



the goodwill that Auroville generates when it offers its experience and technical skills to individuals and organizations working in allied fields like afforestation and appropriate building technologies.

In fact, the most radical supporters of workshops and training programmes in the community would encourage Auroville to host almost anything that anybody wishes to offer, on the grounds that Auroville 'belongs to humanity as a whole', that we need to take advantage of 'all discoveries, both from without and from within', and that as a site for experimentation, it would be wrong to eliminate certain ingredients at the outset. The assumption behind this is that Mother's force, or the experience of Auroville, will sift out that which is inappropriate. And, anyway, it is argued, even if it was felt desirable to decide upon which activities could take place here, who is able to judge the value—or danger—of any particular workshop to either individual participants or to the community as a whole?

On the other hand, as the number of workshops and trainings increases, certain concerns are beginning to be expressed in the community about both the content of certain courses and the motivation of those who organize them. There are two main concerns. Firstly, certain workshops have

February—and Auroville is fully into the guest season; a season characterised by new faces on the roads and by a host of workshops and courses on topics as various as ferrocement and Kundalini yoga. But what facilities are available to guests? What does it feel like to be a guest in Auroville today? And how consonant are some of the courses and workshops offered with the ethos and ideal of Auroville?

In this issue of AUROVILLE TODAY we address these issues. We also give a brief overview of important new constructions in the community, we interview an Aurovilian sculptor who recently exhibited his work in Pondicherry, and we profile three of our local birds which, like our visitors, seem most in evidence at this time of the year.

been organized and run by non-Aurovilians, the participants have been 'imported', and the considerable money sometimes generated by such workshops has not found its way into the community, except indirectly through purchases by participants in the Boutique. Although Auroville should be able to offer itself as a venue for certain 'closed' trainings—particularly when the organizers are known and trusted—it's difficult to avoid the suspicion that in certain cases the community's name and facilities are being exploited. In fairness, such cases are uncommon, and, given the one or two bad experiences we have had, likely to remain so.

The second concern is more serious—and more controversial. It questions the appropriateness of certain activities—like, for example, occasional workshops in rebirthing or kundalini yoga—being offered in Auroville which, prima facie, appear to be inconsonant with, or even, in certain cases, contradict the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. The root fear is that on a subtle, 'vibrational' plane, such activities will dilute the action of Mother's force, that the uniqueness of Auroville's path will be lost

in a 'soup' of contending therapies and spiritual offerings that will turn Auroville into a spiritual Disneyland, and that the work of personal and collective transformation in Auroville will be delayed or even arrested. In support of this view, it's pointed out that many Newcomers—and some Oldcomers!—have only a very limited grasp of the nature of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga, and therefore might be easily seduced into thinking that all paths and therapies are basically similar or complementary.

It's also sometimes implied that those Aurovilians who follow courses in 'pranic healing', psychosynthesis, rebirthing or other fashionable therapies are simply demonstrating that the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is too difficult for them, and that they need some kind of diversion or short-cut. For, it is argued, as Sri Aurobindo and Mother have covered everything more comprehensively and deeply than anybody else, why should anybody look anywhere else unless they were either ignorant or lazy? Finally, it is argued that the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is unique in the experience of the Earth. How, then, can anything be of assistance in understanding or preparing for something which is so to-

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Sharing the inner work: Vérité's approach



VÉRITÉ is a relatively new community which takes as its focus the creation of conscious community through shared discussions and activities among its members, and the sharing of its experience with other members of Auroville. Over the past three years, it has also run and hosted a varied programme of courses and workshops, mainly utilizing psychotherapeutic techniques, which have been attended by over 170 Aurovilians and many guests.

Recently, AUROVILLE TODAY spoke to two members of the community, Rabiya and Thymian, to find out more about what Vérité is offering—and to put to them some of the tough questions that some Aurovilians are asking about the relationship of certain workshops and courses to the Integral Yoga.

AVT: What kinds of courses and workshops do you offer in Vérité?

Thymian: Basically, there are two different types. There are courses we run ourselves, and there are courses given by other Aurovilians or outside teachers. The courses we run ourselves grew out of our feeling that all guests who stay in Auroville are potential Aurovilians—but that many guests who stay in conventional guest houses find it difficult to get in touch with and experience Auroville. So we decided to offer our guests an experience of close community living—through sharing the work with us, for example—while giving them the maximum space to experience Auroville in their own way. These are our ordinary guest weeks.

Rabiya: In addition to our ordinary guest weeks, we plan to run two programmes for guests. 'Living in Community' is a week-long exploration of the issues and skills associated with living in a close community, and 'An Experience of Auroville' is a general introduction to the community, including visits, presentation of the history and discussion of the issues involved.

Do you give them background on Sri Aurobindo, Mother and the Integral Yoga?

Rabiya: There's no formal presentation on the yoga, but we have a weekly 'satsang' when members and guests come together and read and discuss something relating to the yoga. At the moment we are reading 'The Mother' by Sri Aurobindo. We also have a very good library of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's books which guests are free to use.

Thymian: But some of us feel that the Integral Yoga cannot be taught, it can only be experienced through work.

What about the courses that you host in Vérité?

Thymian: Each year for the past three years, two visiting teachers have been bringing groups from the West and offering courses here in inner work. And last year Arya Maloney, who is well known to Auroville, has also shared his skills in process-oriented psychology with us.

There are some misconceptions in Auroville regarding these courses. For example, some people are concerned at the high fees being charged and imply that these teachers are exploiting the community. But when participants come from France or Germany, they pay as a package for the whole trip. It sounds like a lot of money, but this includes the air ticket, accommodation etc. as well as course fees. And all of these teachers open their workshops to Aurovilians completely free so that Aurovilians can benefit from their skills.

Thymian, you just completed one of these two day courses. What was your experience?

Thymian: I was positively surprised. The approach was based upon Ramana Maharshi's question 'Who am I?'. We sat in meditation for 40 minutes, allowing this question to sink within us, and then we communicated our innermost experience to a partner. We would then meditate again on the same question and share with a different partner, and so on. It was very intense, there was an amazing atmosphere of dedicated search, and after two days I experienced a tremendous stream of compassion flowing towards my fellow human beings. It was wonderful to share this with other Aurovilians, and to feel totally supported and cared for.

One of the concerns expressed by some Aurovilians about psychotherapeutic workshops is the danger of importing practices and vibrations into Auroville which are not consonant, or are even contradictory, to the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and which can dilute or 'muddy' the atmosphere here. Do you feel this is a valid concern?

Thymian: This question has been with us for two years. In fact last year, when Arya and Henner Ritter were here at the same time, we had an open discussion with about 20 Aurovilians on whether or not psychotherapy was compatible with the Integral Yoga. The clear conclusion was that such techniques do have a place in the yoga.

Rabiya: We should clarify that the term 'psychotherapy' covers a wide range of different practices. At one end of the spectrum there is Freudian psychoanalysis, which is usually intended to adjust the individual to the world so that they can function without pain. I don't think such therapy is relevant here. But psychotherapy also includes Jungian analysis—which is based on connecting with one's true Self—and transpersonal psychology, which deals with the levels of the being beyond the small ego. I feel that the latter two approaches are very compatible with the Integral Yoga.

Thymian: Basically, I feel that the teachers who come here have skills which they want to offer to us, and I don't see it as being so different from architects offering their skills. It's only trickier because psychotherapeutic practices touch an inner dimension. My experience of the recent course, however, is that the aim was definitely spiritual, and that the psychotherapeutic techniques were simply aids on the journey, a way of helping people through difficulties on the way. These techniques don't replace the Integral Yoga; they are more like kindergarten tools to help us at the beginning.

Thymian: "These psychotherapeutic techniques don't replace the Integral Yoga; they are more like kindergarten tools to help us at the beginning."

I think that for most of us the initial contact with the yoga is mental, through books. But one aspect that is underdeveloped here is the vital connection with the yoga, something which Nirodbaran stressed the other day when he talked about the importance of Westerners offering up the vital to the Divine. It is here that I see that many of us need help—and the tools that these teachers bring with them can definitely assist in this, as long as they are used in a spirit of surrender to Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

Nevertheless, the question arises of discrimination. At the moment, anybody in Auroville can invite in anybody to run a course here. Aren't there dangers in this?

Rabiya: Yes. But I don't think the answer is to create a committee or guidelines. Rather, I'd like to see all those Aurovilians who have experience of putting on courses getting together and sharing their experiences, so that a broader section of the community would be involved in deciding which courses should be run.

In terms of Vérité, we have three criteria that we use to decide whether a course can be run here. Firstly, we look at the content of the course. Is it consonant with the yoga? Will it be well taught? Recently, we refused to host a course here because we had doubts about the proficiency of the teacher. Secondly, we won't run courses if Aurovilians are not allowed to participate, and thirdly we won't run courses if Aurovilians have to pay for participating. Overall we always ask ourselves, when examining an application to hold a course, will this contribute to Auroville and is it compatible with the Integral Yoga?

One point of view is that everything we need to know, all the help we need on the way, is contained in the books of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and, allied to this, that Their yoga is so new, so utterly distinct from any other, that no other yoga

or therapy can really assist us on this path. How do you respond to this?

Rabiya: One point all Aurovilians seem to agree upon is that, in terms of the Integral Yoga, each person's path is unique. To me, this means that different individuals have certain aspects which are stronger and certain which are weaker, and therefore that certain tools, techniques, may be of assistance to one person but not to another. So perhaps those people who are saying, 'These techniques have no place in the yoga' are really saying, 'These techniques have no place for me'. If we stop people from using certain techniques simply because they are not useful to us personally, we'll turn the Integral Yoga into dogma, into a religion.

Thymian: I think that Aurovilians should be able to experiment with any kind of therapy and then see what works and what doesn't, because in the Integral Yoga each one has to find their own way, and all possibilities must be available. After all, the Charter talks of 'Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within', and Mother constantly stressed that Auroville is a place for experimentation.

But is it just a matter of individual choice? Is it not possible that, on a vibrational level, what is practised here by an individual has its influence upon everybody? For example, a course is being run in Auroville at the moment on kundalini yoga which, on the face of it, appears to be in clear contradiction to the approach of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. May this not have an effect upon the occult level for the community as a whole?

Rabiya: I think that on the occult level many destructive things are happening in Auroville which have nothing to do with courses! We refused to hold that particular course here because we were unsure that it would be well taught—and in the wrong hands, such an approach can be very dangerous. However, while I appreciate that the community as a whole is concerned about what belongs in Auroville, I find a level of censorship is possible here that makes me nervous. There's a tendency to err on the side of 'Let's not do it'. I'd like to see more of a spirit of adventure.

Thymian: Basically, I think that what is involved when people keep saying 'No' to such things is fear. I've been in contact with many different techniques, and I've discovered that if the attitude, if the surrender to Sri Aurobindo and Mother is pure and total, then nothing can go wrong. In fact, I see that They are offering these tools to us and saying, 'This can help you. Try it.'

Nevertheless, I think that a very important criterion is that the people who are offering courses in Auroville should have a connection with the Integral Yoga and be on the same path. Arya, for example, has had 25 years contact with the yoga. And when he gave his 'Relationships' course here last year, it was wonderful to see how much space for grace he allowed, and what a beautiful synthesis occurred between the psychotherapeutic tools that he offered and his awareness that it's She who is doing the work, and that all of us are merely the instruments.

Interviewer: Alan

The Workshop Wave (contd. from p. 1)

tally new? Rather, what is needed is a total opening to the action of the new Force.

Against this, it is argued that Auroville has always been a 'soup' of different vibrations, and that any approach or contact that can help individuals to grow in consciousness cannot be harmful to the community as a whole. In fact, many Aurovilians who have participated in workshops which have not specifically been focussed upon the yoga have reported that the experience has brought them a deeper contact with Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Again, none of us are Tibetan Buddhists, but didn't the visit of the Dalai Lama bring much-needed joy to the faces and hearts of so many Aurovilians and friends? Proponents of the 'open' view argue that Auroville at present lacks a certain spiritual intensity, and that contact with living masters, with age-old spiritual techniques like Vipassana meditation or specific therapeutic techniques developed recently in the West, can help raise the level of individual consciousness, and that such techniques are merely tools to help us on the way. It is also argued that whereas the old yogas were exclusive—and disciples were cautioned against following more than one guru—the new spirituality is integrative, acknowledging one Reality yet drawing its inspiration from many sources. Finally, it is argued that Sri Aurobindo had stressed that sincerity is the great safeguard, and that a path pursued with sincerity—even if the teacher should prove false—will bring benefit to the follower.

Options

The debate is endless and, ultimately, rather arid. What can be said in relationship to the minority of courses and workshops which are controversial is that both Sri Aurobindo and Mother stressed the need for discrimination in this yoga, and that true discrimination only begins when the psychic comes forward. How many Aurovilians would claim to have reached this stage? At the same time, the pressure upon the community to host workshops and courses is increasing enormously. So what do we do? Leave it up to the integrity and judgement of the Aurovilians concerned as to which course can be run? Trust in the protection of the Force or of our sincerity? Or create yet another set of guidelines or another committee to screen courses and teachers? Perhaps this would be a case of the cure proving more fatal than the disease...

Again, proponents of free choice argue that the needs of individuals differ, and that everybody should have the opportunity to develop themselves in their own way. But in terms of what Mother has said about shared vibrations, doesn't the old distinction between the individual and the collective fall away as each of us, necessarily, is participating in the experience of all the others?

One way of understanding the present situation is that it compels us to look at the limitations of our present level of discourse on the subject. For as long as we continue to argue on the basis of preferences and fears we will continue to generate reactions in those who disagree with us. What is needed is for each of us to reach the level of true insight and discrimination, for this will generate its own inevitability of action.

One final observation. In all the plethora of courses offered in the past months, not one—with the exception of Nirodbaran's talk—has been on the yoga and the significance of the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother...

"We should not be dogmatic"

Nolly is in charge of the maintenance of 'Pitanga', the cultural centre in Samasti. She is also part of the group that decides upon which programmes and workshops can be run there. AUROVILLE TODAY talked to her recently to find out more about their policy in regard to the courses and workshops they offer.

AVT: What kind of courses are offered in 'Pitanga' at present?

Nolly: The main focus of our activities is upon body work. The regular courses being offered at present include Hatha Yoga, dance, T'ai Chi, gymnastics, massage and African Dance.

Are all these courses open to guests as well as Aurovilians?

In principle, yes, although it is best that guests check first with the person running the course. The courses are free for Aurovilians and newcomers, but guests are required to make a contribution. This contribution does not go to the teachers but entirely for the maintenance of 'Pitanga'.

In addition to regular ongoing courses, do you also offer weekend or week-long workshops on particular topics?

Yes. Ursula has run some training workshops in massage, and recently there

was a weekend workshop on 'Pranic Healing'.

One can imagine that many people would like to run courses or workshops in 'Pitanga'. How does your group decide upon what type of course you will allow to run here?

Although the main focus is upon body work, we don't want to allow body work practices which involve aggression. At the same time, we don't just want to say 'no' to someone who wants to put on a course, but give ourselves a chance to see if it fits. So, even though I have my reservations, we've just allowed a martial arts course to start here.

Verite community was approached to run the 'Pranic Healing' course and they refused because Aurovilians would have had to pay to participate. Yet you ran it. Why?

Because the people putting on the course insisted on being paid. Actually, we try not to let Aurovilians pay for attending workshops, but sometimes there is no other possibility if the workshop is to run. In this situation, we should not be so dogmatic that we deprive ourselves of the opportunity of attending interesting workshops.

Verite will also not allow any courses or workshops to take place there if Aurovilians cannot participate. Do you have the same policy?

No. In fact, next month a group is coming from the West who wish to use 'Pitanga' for hatha yoga sessions which are not open to Aurovilians. I think it's fine that a group from the West which is doing intensive

body work and development, and which is interested in Auroville, should be able to enjoy our facilities for a few hours a day and take something of this place back to where they come from. Of course, we have to be careful not to allow outside groups to exploit Auroville...

Another concern is that certain courses or workshops may not be appropriate for Auroville. Some doubts have been expressed, for example, about the place of certain psychotherapeutic practices...

We won't have that kind of thing in 'Pitanga'.

But you are allowing space for a course in Kundalini Yoga. Is this appropriate, in the light of what Sri Aurobindo has written about the dangers of such a practice?

That's true, and I'm not happy about this course. As I've said, we decided to allow this group to try it, but I've had complaints and I think they will go out soon.

There has been a suggestion that an informal group, comprising Aurovilians who are involved with putting on courses, should form to discuss what kinds of courses and workshops are appropriate for Auroville, and to deal with any problems which may arise. Do you think this is a good idea?

Yes, the broader the participation, the more we can share things, the better. But it's important that the group should not try to impose something, but simply give advice.

Interviewer: Alan

A Letter

Dear Friends,

I have a few comments on the article "Organizing ourselves... Again" which appeared in your December issue. You were right in your observation that we do not address the underlying factors about why we refuse to accept any organization and that one of these factors is that our collective consciousness is not well developed. I would go even further and say that Aurovilians lack both the drive and discipline for serious inquiry and research into how we function as a community.

The proposal that the Study Group on Organization made, was that Auroville make the experiment of giving a group, which would be accountable to Aurovilians alone, the power to implement policy decisions. This has never been tried in Auroville. Aurovilians responded to the proposal characteristically, that is to say, with well-worn clichés and half-truths.

"Democracy doesn't work."

"We didn't come here to repeat the past."

"We can't organize ourselves until we know which Auroville we want."

"We must wait until we know what Mother really wants of us".

This habit is more than evasive. It is tremendously destructive.

As I understand the ideal role of the journalist, it is to observe and describe processes in society in order to facilitate collective self-awareness. While you try to do this, you also lapse into using the evasive clichés so typical of Aurovilians.

The problem is not that we haven't reached that point where seeming opposites find their harmony. The problem is that we have the habit of using any excuse

whatsoever for our unwillingness to try anything new.

The real challenge is not to take the time until we clearly understand what Mother wants from us in terms of organization. That would be like waiting for Godot. The challenge is to make for the first time a real experiment which includes keeping records, analyzing data and being objective. It does not matter whether the experiment

succeeds or fails. What matters is that we will have begun the collective journey. We will learn many things on the way and each thing that we learn will determine our next move. On the other hand if we stand forever afraid to take the first step, our collective consciousness will not develop and we shall not learn how to become a responsible community.

Truth, Janet, Auroville

A new baby: It's E-Mail!

Finally, after awareness-stimulating articles in the *Auroville News* and *Auroville Today*, and a lot of work behind the scenes, Auroville has its own Bulletin Board System (BBS) with Electronic Mail (E-Mail) capabilities. The BBS offers free (apart from phone charges) services not unlike a postal service, FAX, information centre and public broadcasting station combined, but its real strengths and applications are much, much more than the sum of all those. If you have a telephone line, a computer and a modem, you can access this new wonder of technology on (+91)-413-86-2298, 24 hours a day, at speeds up to 2400 bits per second, with the usual communication parameters, which your software will most likely already default to. The services currently provided are:

- private routing of mail to anyone who's also using the system
- posting of public messages to discussion forums
- posting of messages to be published in the *Auroville News*
- downloading of the *Auroville Information Directory*.

Future services could be:

- paperless FAXes to anyone in Auroville.

- weekly electronically published *Auroville News*.
- public access for non-computer/telephone owners at sites like Centre Guest House, etc...
- simultaneous access by several users making on-line 'live' discussions, meetings and conferences possible.
- connecting up of the Auroville network to global data communications networks, allowing cheaper worldwide communications.
- improving the speed and storage capabilities of the central system.

When accessing the system for the first time, please register yourself as a new user. This procedure is actually initiated by the system itself, so all you need to do is follow the instructions on your screen after you've successfully connected. Once fully accepted by the system, have a look in the Users Registry to find out who you can leave messages for, or just browse around! Feedback on how to improve the system should be addressed to the System Operator (USER-ID 'Sysop' on the system). We would love the Auroville International Centres from all over the world to try the system out if their resources allow it.

Lawrence (System Operator)

Visiting Auroville

GUESTS AND GUEST-HOUSES

In order to provide a sampling of guest facilities available in Auroville, Jill (AUROVILLE TODAY) and Martin (Auroville International U.K.) visited a few of them. They also conducted two interviews with guests, extracts of which appear on the next page.

Our trek took us along the bumpy back roads of the Greenbelt through guava groves heavy with the first fruits of the season, and at each guest-house the person in charge made time to talk to us. It was interesting to visit with some people one doesn't usually get to meet, to learn something about their work and the atmosphere they are trying to create for visitors. Along with an expression of the inevitable frustrations and problems, there was a sense of liking and wanting to share Auroville with the outside world; and that the work of hosting guests has a significance for Auroville at this time, as we struggle to define our connection with the outside.

As a member of Auroville International, used to advising many prospective guests on places to stay, it was an opportunity for Martin to see the various guest facilities available in Auroville, and more than that, to broaden his experience of the many Auroville communities, to savour their varied atmospheres and to meet many new people.

Auroville now has more than 30 guest facilities with accommodation for about 160 guests. A broad range of styles of accommodation are provided, from the luxurious, for those needing some comforts, to the rustic capsule for the more adventurous. For the guest, the choice of where to stay is an important one as this often provides the basis for their earliest experiences of Auroville. A *keet* thatched hut in the Green Belt may be appropriate for some intrepid explorers, but others may find this experience more than they can cope with, fleeing back to more 'civilized' surroundings within days of arriving.

Besides accommodation—a bed, meals and a laundry service—the guest-houses in Auroville all in some way offer an introduction to Auroville life. In some cases, this may only be through their being located inside a community which provides a chance to communicate with Aurovilians living and working nearby. But for other guest-houses, an introduction to living in Auroville becomes their main preoccupation, stimulating the guests' active involvement within the settlement or their participation in courses designed to introduce them to Auroville life.

Compared to the facilities offered by hotels and guest-houses in the West, those found in Auroville are necessarily more basic, reflecting the lifestyles found in the community and in India as a whole. Guests need to be aware of the difficulties to be encountered in a rural environment and a sub-tropical climate. Transport requires a sense of adventure, as most people prefer getting around by bicycle and motorcycle. The roads are mostly dirt tracks, and can be difficult to negotiate, particularly during the rainy season and after dark. There is however an Auroville Transport Service which can provide taxis and a mini-bus for transport outside Auroville.

The rural setting provides a contact with nature, and is particularly popular with children. Guests should be aware that mains electricity is not available at all guest-houses. Many facilities, however, use solar power to provide basic lighting.

The following is a brief description of only a few of the guest facilities and their settings:

ASPIRATION

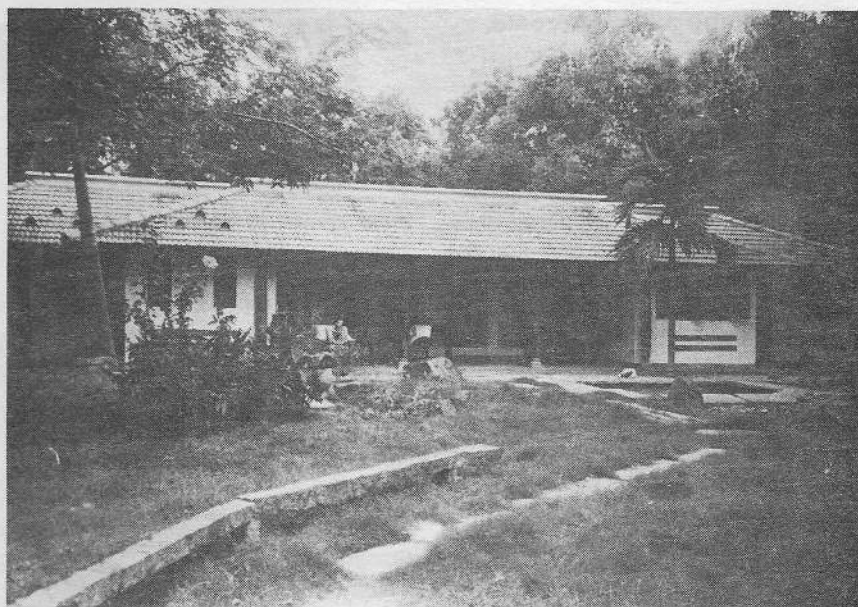
One of the oldest communities in Auroville, Aspiration is conveniently situated near the State Bank, Pour Tous and Last School and not far from the beach. It is a large community, with 40 people of many different nationalities (including many Tamil Aurovilians). A feature of the community is the common kitchen, where residents cook the meals, and often guests participate. A family atmosphere prevails, with many children. The rooms are simple, with thatched roofs. Single, double and family rooms are available.

SHARNGA

Amidst, natural surroundings with ponds and gardens which form a tropical oasis, Sharnga is situated not far from Matrimandir. The residents live nearby, and many families have made this community their home. The guest-house is ideal for families and young people and has a lively social life, with music, games, a small swimming pool and horses for those who can ride. The accommodation is simple, with single and double rooms, some with attached bathrooms. Cooking facilities are provided, or guests can join other guests for the evening meal.

CENTRE GUEST-HOUSE

Located in Centre Field, this facility is very close to Matrimandir, Bharat Nivas and the Visitors Centre. Guests and Aurovilians mingle for meals (the food is very good), and it's a good place to find a lively conversation. There are meeting rooms where workshops and classes are offered. It's a busy location, good for groups and visitors who want to find out about Auroville without living in a community. The accommodation offered varies from a simple *keet* hut to comfortable, attractively decorated rooms, some with their own bathrooms.



KOTTAKARAI GUEST-HOUSE

VERITE

Located near the village of Kottakarai (and some distance from the Centre), the spirit of Verite is one of active participation. Guest programmes are designed so that visitors can take part in the daily life of the community, sharing work which includes organic gardening, vegetarian cooking, and other chores. The community encourages a healthy life style with fresh raw food being served, and has a Yoga Hall for meditation, tai chi and hatha yoga. There is an emphasis on being ecologically aware, and the energy sources are solar and bio-gas. Rooms vary from simple *keet* thatched huts on stilts to modest double and single rooms with shared bathrooms.

KOTTAKARAI GUEST-HOUSE

A lovely, gracious facility in a garden setting, with pleasing architecture. Although it has the appearance of luxury, the rooms are quite simple, and the food is mostly vegetarian (Indian and Western styles). It is a generally peaceful location, where guests may come for quiet reflection. Although it is not attached to a community, a few Aurovilians find it a useful retreat, and often join the guests for meals. The guest-house provides single and double rooms.

FORECOMERS

This rural community is situated on the edge of Auroville, amongst about 100 acres of woodland planted over the last 25 years. It is one of the earliest settlements and is a working community, keeping cows and horses and involved in tree planting (there is a large nursery there containing thousands of young trees). Three meals are provided, mostly vegetarian, but guests are expected to help with the preparation. Guests are also encouraged to participate within the community. Accommodation is generally basic, with shared outside toilets and showers. There are rooms suitable for a family and for two people sharing.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is a farm situated in the Green Belt, well tended, with cows, chickens, and

fruit trees. There are two guest facilities; one, a double room with outside bathroom, the other, "gingerbread rustic", a small attractive, cottage style double room also with outside bathroom. All facilities are equipped with solar power. The location is quiet and is some distance from the centre. Food is simple, with a combination of Indian and European styles.

NEW CREATION

An education-oriented community, with facilities for 190 village children, 20 of who live in the community. Situated close to Kulilapalayam village, New Creation offers accommodation for seven people, including a family room. Rooms are simple and comfortable, and all meals are provided in the community kitchen. This is a lively place, particularly suited for those interested in working with children. Long term guests are welcome if they wish to work in the school.

SAMASTI

This is a comparatively new and growing residential community, situated in pleasant surroundings near to the centre of Auroville. The guest-house accommodates 6 people. The rooms are simple, but comfortably furnished, with attached bathrooms. All meals are provided. The facilities are most suitable for those preferring a more Western style accommodation. Pitanga Hall, a Yoga/dance/physiotherapy centre is close by.

FERTILE WINDMILL

This is a Greenbelt community, with 9 members, including two children. Tamils and westerners live and work together here, maintaining the fruit orchards (guavas, and mangoes) and the cashew trees. A rather primitive guest facility is offered here. There is no electricity, but plenty of cats! One guest cottage can sleep four and there is a *keet* capsule for a further couple. Vegetarian meals are provided, with many raw foods. This is a no-frills community, with the bare minimum of luxury.

Report by Martin and Jill



DRAWINGS by LAURA
TEXT by BILL

Tallechien: "I learnt that you have to take your own initiative"

Tallechien is a 19 year old Dutch student, who stayed in Aspiration for three and a half months. She has been teaching in New Creation School.

AVT: What were your first experiences of Auroville?

Tallechien: I remember that Auroville was totally different from what I thought it would be. I expected it to be more westernized, because people say that Auroville is not India. Then I saw the kitchen here with the palm leaf roof. But I really liked it when I saw I was to live in a real Indian hut! It has a real nice atmosphere. And when [in the community kitchen] I was given my own plate, it reminded me of a school trip where everybody has their own cup with their name on it. It took a while to get used to.

What were your first impressions of the people?

When I first came here I found people quite reserved. I found people staring at me. It is still a little like that; it is much easier with guests than with real Aurovilians. After that I started playing cards and that is always good as an icebreaker.

How well do you think Auroville deals with guests?

At the beginning I was quite unsatisfied. They gave me my keys and showed me how the house opened, and that was it. I was just sitting there and doing nothing. Then I was sick, and it was terrible because it felt like you could just lie in your bed without anybody knowing! But later when I was sick again, everybody was coming asking what was wrong, because I knew a lot of people. In the beginning it was strange, I had to ask for everything. I learnt that you have to take your own initiative, and after a while it was totally OK.

What about the facilities provided for you?

There are so many things that you can do here; there are the performances and plays at Pitanga... And then there was the visit of the Dalai Lama. There are so many things to do!

What brought you to Auroville?

I just finished my studies and have my diploma and can go to university, and I decided to take a year off to go to a foreign country. I was thinking of Germany, England or France, but my mother was talk-

ing to a friend and she suggested that I should go to India. But if I had been asked to make a list of all the countries that I would wish to go to I would have scrapped India. I was never attracted to India. Then I went to visit our friend, and she talked to me about Auroville, showed me some books and a film (I think it was the Peace Trees video) and it was interesting and quite familiar, as I had gone to the Waldorf school. But I did not want to go alone, so I planned to go with a friend, but in the end it did not work out and I went alone. It was quite a big step for me.

I remember from the film that there were lots of young people, but when I came here there were two or three people here of my age and the rest were much older. I expected many more young people.

Will you come back to Auroville?

I can imagine coming back as part of my studies, to do something practical, medicine or biology—something in the sciences.

What is your understanding of the purpose of Auroville?

It's a place where people can live together in peace and harmony, without violence, and it's very important as a City of the Future, and a place to protect the environment.

How well do you think that Auroville is living up to that purpose?

It is strange, but sometimes I feel that it is going as it should be, but other times totally in the other direction, that people have lost their purpose. And now that I have some experience with the youth here, with people of my age, sometimes they have such good ideas, but they don't really do anything, and nothing really happens. But other times I feel, wow, things are really going as they should be! What disappoints me is the garbage disposal here [in Aspiration]. There is just a big hole. It is not right for Auroville. Some of the basic needs here are not provided.

But I like it here!



ASPIRATION GUEST-HOUSE

Chiara: "I see that there is a wonderful possibility"

Chiara and Michael, a British-German couple living in Scotland, stayed in Auroville as guests for about three weeks. The following is an extract from an interview with them.

AVT: What brought you to Auroville?

Michael: We have been looking for a new living space for some time, and in Scotland we were talking to our friends Shraddalu and Anita who used to live in Auroville. They suggested that we take a look. They were very enthusiastic about it. It sounded like a good idea and they gave us a few videos to look at. Anita told us such wonderful stories... One was about a friendly snake in the bathroom, and it sounded as if it was a friendly spider!

Has Auroville met with your expectations?

Chiara: I think more than that! It is more beautiful than in the videos, it is more lush, and there is a lot of vegetation which did not come through on the video [the video had been produced in 1985]. The individuality of the houses, the individual people... It is very interesting to see how each person

expresses himself. People seem to be exploring their dreams through the architecture that they create in their spaces.

Michael: I did not have very clear expectations of what Auroville was like, and I think it would take a much longer time to find out how it would be to live here. You meet the same kind of people here as you meet outside—the Germans are very German and the Spanish very Spanish—but I find it wonderful that so many nationalities work together.

How do you feel about the response you have had from Aurovilians?

Michael: Some people are very busy. People live their life here; I don't expect them to drop everything to talk to us. One gets the feeling that it is a hard working place. But Menaig who is in charge of our guest-house talks a lot to us, about all sorts of subjects.

Chiara: We get wonderful breakfasts with Menaig, lovingly prepared. When I saw the room I was really bowled over, but then I noticed that it did not have much privacy. At night, to go to the toilet is difficult because the night watchman is just outside, and the windows are exposed, so I go with my torch and sit in the dark. Another problem is the security of your possessions—you are told that you cannot leave anything, not even under your pillow. But it is such a beautiful place, it's like an oasis, and we really appreciate that. The house is charming, it is like a gingerbread house, it is fantastic.

What is your understanding of Auroville's work and its purpose? How would you describe it to somebody outside?

Chiara: The first thing I would describe is the greening of the desert. When you see the greenwork which has been done here it is just mind-blowing, the planting that has been done and the love that has been put into the work is wonderful. Also, I now realise that The Mother has had a vision of the potential for man not to be... isolated in his nationality. I was very moved when we went to the Amphitheatre, there were tears coming down my face. I talked to a Tamil man and he was so proud of it. It was so moving to hear what he was saying about the earth from each country, [having been placed together] in the urn. I see that there is a wonderful possibility.

Interviewers: Jill and Martin

Visitors to Auroville: Some facts and figures

In the month of January there were approximately:

11,500 visitors to the Visitors Centre
1000 visitors a day to the Matrimandir Gardens
120 visitors a day to the Chamber

It is estimated that between 160 and 200 guests are staying in Auroville during the peak season (Mid December to the end of February).



A new Kindergarten

This story starts in 1981. The scene is Center Field. A couple of small huts and one larger building are turned into a primary school. Suitable? Yes. It had to be. Lack of funds prevented any other solution until 1985, when the primary school moved to new school buildings in Transition.

A few tins of whitewash and some patching up were considered sufficient to make the Center Field huts fit for the next occupant: the Kindergarten. Suitable? Yes. Again, it had to be. And so it was for quite a number of years.

There is something profoundly depressing, however, about teaching in buildings that gradually decompose over your head and around you. The thatched roofs of palm leaf decay continuously, leaving a thin film of dust on the desks and floor every morning. The termites do the rest to undermine the walls and devour the doors and the window frames. Last but not least, the Kindergarten compound, beautiful though it was with blossoming trees and shrubs, was simply too large. Too much time was wasted in chasing the children out of the trees back into the classrooms. A new building became necessary.

The teachers met to discuss the requirements. For how many children was the building intended? Was a silence room a necessity? What about a crafts room, and a

hall for dance and theatre? What resulted was a large project, with an impressive price tag of US \$150,000. Potential donors in the U.S.A. welcomed the idea of a new kindergarten, but apart from some generously donated 'seed-monies', the project did not generate any more interest.

As the old kindergarten quietly continued to fall apart, the need for a new kindergarten became more pressing. Suhasini, an Indian architect who built Auroville's Visitors Center and a number of private houses using low cost materials, proposed a similar technique for the new kindergarten. This proposal was accepted, the requirements were scaled down and when Auroville's "Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research" obtained a grant from the Government of India for the building of new schools, the kindergarten project was ready to be materialised. And on November 12, 1993, the new Kindergarten, built with compressed earth blocks and prefabricated reinforced concrete rafters supporting a tiled roof, was opened for the public.



The school is unique for Auroville. It is the first building that is situated in the Educational Zone, and it is the first school where all the classrooms are interconnected, creating a feeling of warmth, so necessary for the education of young children. The colourful interior decoration by Chantal stresses this need.

There are three large classrooms, suitable for 20 children each, a craft room, two halls (one for collective activities such as games and one for assembly), a teachers' room, a dining hall, sanitary facilities and storerooms. During the construction more donations were received, in particular from individuals in Germany.

"Within the tremendous cultural and social diversity of Auroville, our aim is to foster the children's inherent capacities and bring them out to their full, individual potential", said the first project description. There is general agreement that the new Kindergarten building is one more step in the realisation of these high aspirations. As one of the teachers put it: "The time for patch-up work is over—not only for the building, but for the education too. Now, I feel, we can concentrate on how to evolve the coherent system of education we wish to give to Auroville's children."

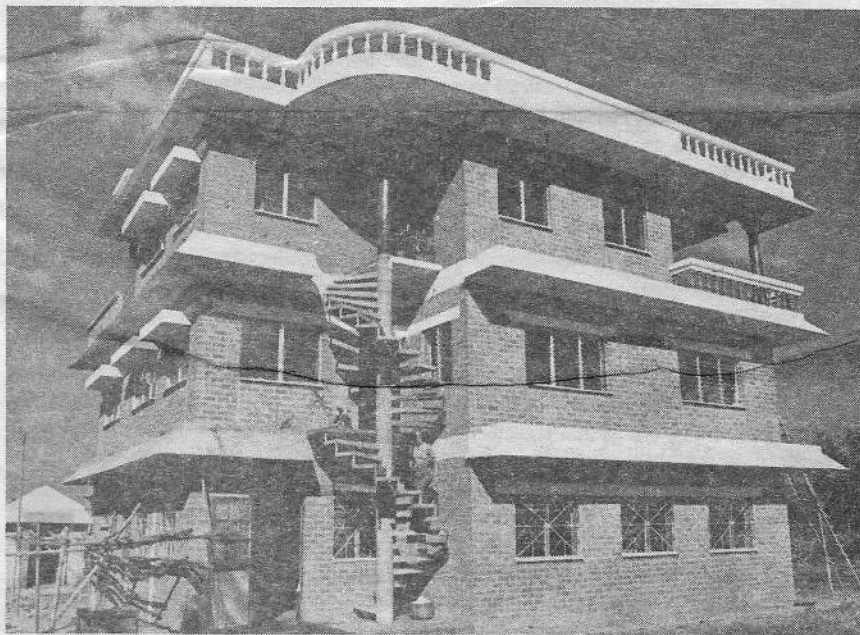
Carel

Staff quarters for the Health Centre

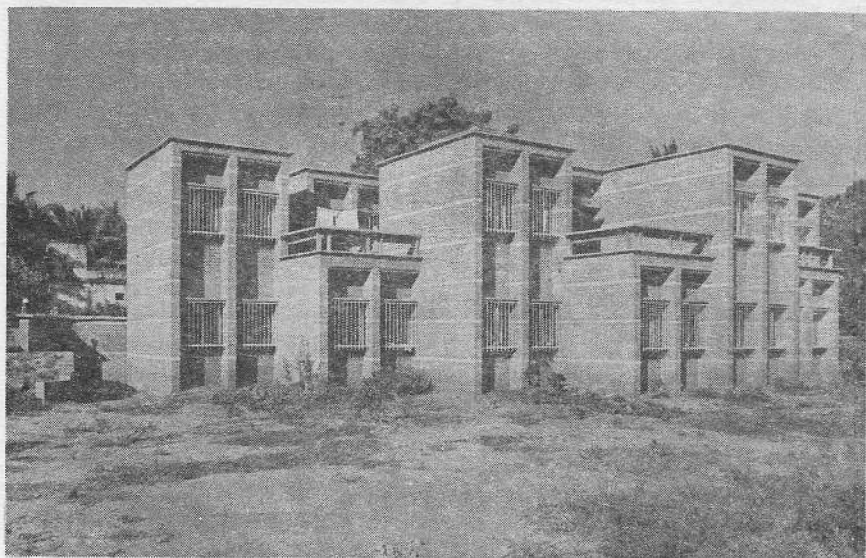
The new Health Centre staff quarters are located in a rather inconspicuous building. Many Aurovilians wouldn't even know where to find it, which is strange because it is located right behind Pour Tous, Auroville's food store. The small entrance, opposite the State Bank of India, and the even less visible track through the gardens of the neighbourhood, are the causes of the building's anonymity. "The access situation will soon be improved" says Dr. Lucas, whom we approached for background information. He added, "The Health Centre staff quarters became necessary as we had a situation where staff members lived in very shabby houses and it was neither possible to receive visiting students, nurses and doctors, nor to increase the staff. As an

exception—as normally they do not like to spend their funds on bricks and mortar—the German Caritas Association agreed to sponsor the building, which has cost approximately Rs 15 lakhs including site preparation and landscaping.

The attractive building has been designed by Helmut and built by Rolf with stabilised mud bricks. It consists of two floors. Downstairs there are six single rooms with common bathrooms and a kitchen. Upstairs there are four apartments. The building will house anyone related to the Health Centre activities, Aurovilians and co-workers alike. Two rooms are available for visitors, and the income generated from this will enable the Health Centre to maintain the building.



The new Altecs building



The new Health Centre staff quarters

A new building for Altecs

Altecs has moved from Ami to a new building located in the industrial zone, between Auromode (formerly Auromodele Atelier) and Filaure. Altecs, which was located in Ami before, manufactures solar devices and 'uninterrupted power supply' (UPS) systems. The new building was built in record time at a very low cost, using stabilised earth bricks and ferrocement. The ground floor houses the production department, administrative offices are found on

the first floor along with Penta Services (desktop publishing) and on the top floor are attractive living quarters

Photos on this page: John Mandeem

Out in the OPEN

It is always birdwatching time...

It is always bird watching time. But now that the heavy monsoons have abated, leaving pools of water and overfilled lakes everywhere, this time is special. Many Aurovilians enjoy an early morning rise to go to the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary or, closer to home, to Kalaveli tank. Vedanthangal offers a close view of nesting migratory water birds such as storks, spoonbills, egrets and ibis. Kalaveli tank is a stopover place for flamingos and a great variety of ducks and wading birds.

In Auroville too, bird life after the monsoon becomes more varied. Here we would like to introduce three well appreciated and highly visible members of our forests and gardens: the drongo, the golden oriole and the paradise flycatcher, birds that are listed as protected species.

The drongo or King Crow is a full time resident of Auroville and one of the most well loved birds throughout the Indian countryside. The romance of the drongo's superior character is documented in ancient and modern Indian literature. He is portrayed as bold, energetic, devoted, fearless and a protector of the poor. Even his jet black feathers are referred to as refulgent, luminous and shiny. Though the intrepid little bird is only 33 cm (12.5") from the tip of his bill to the end of his deeply forked tail, he seems, unlike most legendary creatures, to live up to his reputation in fact and deed.

Villagers still believe that when one sets out on a mission and a drongo flies across your path from right to left, it is an augury of success. His is the first pre-dawn bird song heard, a strident two note ti-tui, interspersed with cheece-chichuk, called from a tree top, a telegraph wire or fence post. From such a lookout he swoops to the ground for prey or launches aerial pursuits taking insects on the wing. He is fondly dubbed King of the Crows or King Crow because, in defence of a nesting tree a pair will attack and put to flight large birds such as crows and even raptors. "With angry war cries and much ferocity, the pair maneuvers in concert, shooting straight into the intruder from below and the side, like fighter planes tackling a bomber, leaving the outraged visitor nonplussed and defenceless."

The first Golden Orioles and Paradise Flycatchers join our resident drongo already in late September, depending on monsoon rains. Both of them fit into all of the categories of the difficult-to-define Auroville vocabulary which refers to status as: tourist, visitor, long-term guest or part-time resident. In other words, many come but few stay to build nests in Auroville. They come from as far away as the Himalayan range, spreading throughout the Indian plains and foothills, joining up with more local migrating members of the same species. Their numbers peak in Auroville in January and February.

The Golden Oriole is usually heard first and seen later, announcing himself with a sweet, clear, flute like call for which the British nicknamed him "the whistling schoolboy". It is a bright yellow bird, 25 cm (10") long, with black in wings and tail and a well defined black streak through the eyes. Hard to see, more discreet and retiring than the drongo, he prefers to remain aloof amongst the denser forest canopy. The few individuals who stay on to nest here can be seen as late as May or even June.

The Paradise flycatcher is an elegant, small bird, about 33 cm (10") long. Females

and young males are rufous red above, greyish white below, with metallic black heads and crests. Older males have two rufous red tail ribbons or streamers in their tails. A dramatic transformation occurs when the male flycatcher reaches his fourth year. His normally red plumage turns pure white, including his two absurdly long tail ribbons. He retains only his black head and crest. The first time one sees him you think he is a ghostly vision and it usually requires a second or third sighting before one is convinced he is real. His spectral transformation from red to white is also mysterious for ornithologists, as it does not appear to relate entirely to courtship display and pair bonding. Red male flycatchers have been observed turning white only after a nest had been established and they were helping to feed the young.

During mid morning the drongos, Dorioles and flycatchers join up with other small birds to form social hunting parties and go foraging through the undergrowth. The three have complimentary food habits. The drongo is wholly carnivorous, a fact seldom mentioned, probably for sentimental reasons. Our black hero sometimes even becomes a clever pirate, snatching prey from another bird in midair ...returning to his perch to calmly devour it, leaving the pirated victim unsure of what happened. The fly catcher is a strict insectivore while the oriole prefers fruit but is one of the few birds that find hairy caterpillars fit to eat.

The trio have the same bathing preference, taking their baths on the wing, plunging and dipping at the surface of a pool, then returning to a nearby perch to shake off the water and preen.

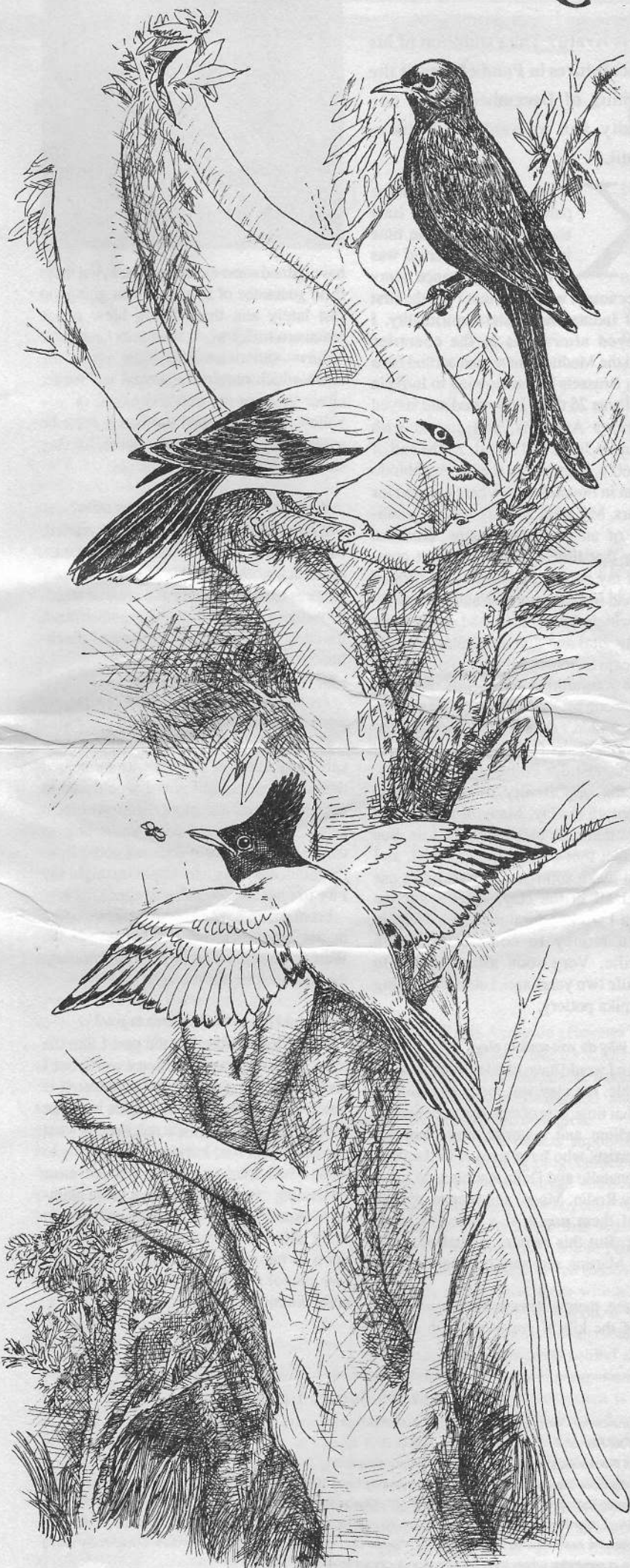
In late evening the three birds return to the same tree. The oriole and flycatcher take advantage of the drongo's vigilance and more pugnacious nature. They can both defend themselves but the oriole, being a refined and polite bird, only indulges in aggressive behavior if pushed, then can be almost bellicose, swiftly and fearlessly routing an intruder. The ethereal flycatcher is courageous but tends to become confused, flying frantically back and forth, flipping tail ribbons and making a lot of noise.

The guardian king crow stations himself on a top branch usually with another drongo or two and proceeds to carry on a lively conversation with a strongly pronounced 'Auroville accent'. "The birds will sit close together or face to face and talk loudly at one another in harsh, scolding notes, raising head and forepart of the body, bobbing violently up and down, with fluttering wings as if to emphasize some important point." Then they break into a rollicking duet, each bird singing a phrase or two enlarging the theme, telling one another 'how fine it all has been'.

Dietra

*Quotes are from "The Complete Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan" by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley.

** Ongoing research of bird song has found that birds sing and speak with well defined regional dialects which are understood and recognised by the birds. It is hoped that the studies will help to unravel some of the mysteries of bird migration.



From top to bottom: Black Drongo or King Crow (*Dicrurus adsimilis*), Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) and Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*).

Drawing by Kratu

AUROVILLE TODAY

C.S.R. Office,
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In this issue (8 pages):
Workshops; guests and guest-houses; new buildings;
birdwatching; clay sculpture.

By Airmail
Bookpost

Exp. # 63

ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
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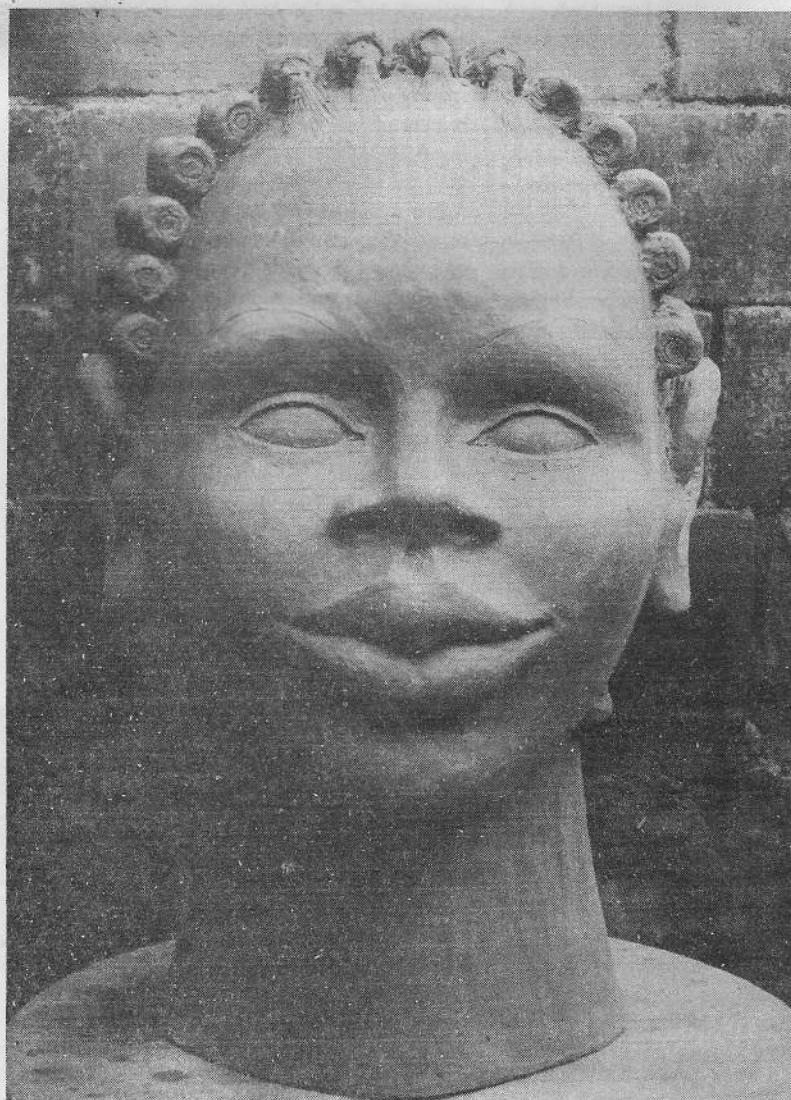


PHOTO IRENO

SCULPTED HEAD, by Kratu

ART

That surprise element

This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY contains two examples of the work of Kratu. They are the drawing of the birds on page 7 and the photo of the clay sculpture on the back-page.

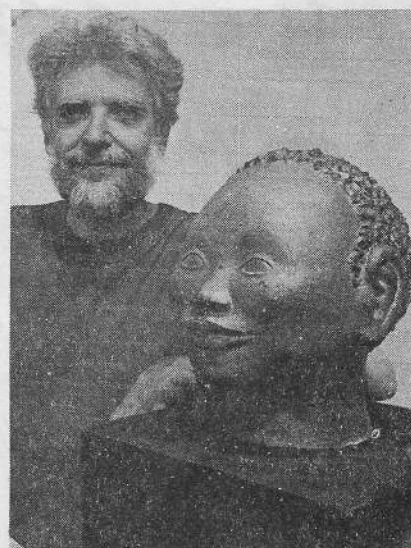
Who is Kratu? The exhibition of his clay sculptures in Pondicherry at the beginning of December raised our curiosity, and we went to Sangha to find out.

Kratu: Originally, I am a painter. I come from Italy and worked for some time in France. That period was of capital importance in my life, because it was there that I got the first hint of Indian and Eastern spirituality. I journeyed afterwards in the countries around the Mediterranean and settled for a year in Brussels before coming to India in 1968. I was 26 then. I travelled and stayed in various Ashrams, and stayed with Tibetans in India and Nepal. At the end of the 1960's, I settled in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where I stayed for 17 years. My main activity was the publication of an Italian magazine, *Domani*. During that time I stopped almost completely my painting and drawing. I found that I had to change my manner of expression, which up to then had been quite strongly vital and dramatic, characterized by an expressionist vein belonging to the then new figurative style—lots of movement, strong bright colours... It was something I couldn't do anymore once in Pondicherry. Thanks to Deborah and Ray of the Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry, I had the opportunity to do some experimenting in clay. Many of the things I made at that time blew up in the kiln, due to the fact that I was inexperienced, as I used to make solid pieces and didn't use grog at all in the clay. After I left the Ashram I worked for three years in Spain to earn money to come and live in Auroville. Very soon after coming to Auroville two years ago, I started working in Shilpika pottery.

AVT: Why do you work in clay?

Kratu: I would have liked to work in stone or marble, but clay was made available to me at that time. It is of course a very beautiful medium and material, and there are many artists who have used it in the past, like Donatello and Della Robbia; and more recently Rodin, Moore and Manzu, though most of them use it as a base for bronzework. But this century an Italian artist, Arturo Martini, did very original work in clay.

You see, there is always that surprise element of the kiln if you work with clay. I



have gained some experience now, but there is no guarantee of success. I was going too fast lately and three heads blew up. It remains a tricky work; the heads have to be hollow—otherwise they blow up in the kiln—which requires a special technique; either you use the coil technique, or you hollow them out. And the heads must be made as homogeneous as possible, for clay shrinks quite a lot in the kiln.

You seem to have a preference for faces?

Kratu: My inspiration is very varied. More recently I have concentrated on faces, in particular those of black women. Their features have a plasticity and volume which I consider very beautiful: the roundish head, the curly hair and the strong lips and cheekbones.

You mentioned that you had to change your manner of expression.

Kratu: Yes. In the past I used to paint large canvasses in bright colours with tormented dramatic figures. But now I would like to express something more from within, a peace, a calmness... I don't know how to convey it to you for it does not come from the mind, it is more a feeling. You might say I try to open to something deeper...

From what I have observed it seems to me that at the present not many artists in the West try to express beauty, on the contrary, they are looking for the ugly.

What did this exhibition mean to you?

Kratu: Exhibitions are the part I like the least. It is necessary to sell my work, but I do not enjoy it. In one way however it is good, for you come into contact with the people, and you see their reaction to what you are doing. And I saw people reacting to what I had tried to put in. But the most interesting experience was that I sold mainly to Aurovilians. "You have no right to bring this out of Auroville", said one of them to me about one of the black heads (see photo) and that was actually the best compliment I got.

Interviewer: Carel.

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