

# Auroville Today

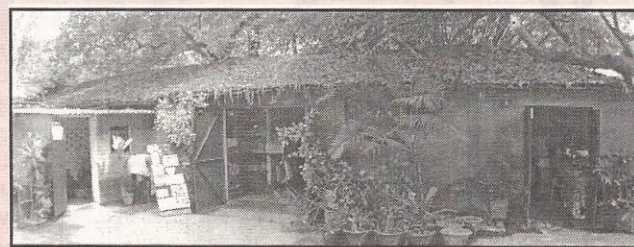
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## COVER STORY Lifeline: food

- The Solar Kitchen success story
- Organic food: the challenges
- Upgrade the farms
- Spotlight: Pour Tous

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**Food. It's our lifeline. But where does it come from? In Auroville some of it is grown by our farmers, but much more is imported from outside.**

**Should we be growing more? If so, what stops us? How are the Pour Tous stall and the Solar Kitchen organized, what are the challenges they face, and what are their policies regarding the types of food that they provide?**

## Cooking in Mother's kitchen

Nine o'clock in the morning.

Entering the heart of the "Cuisine Solaire" or Solar Kitchen, the scene is one of intense activity. Steam boilers emit gusts of steam, groups of people cut vegetables at long tables, someone stirs a large drum of milk, another watches pieces of eggplant being fried, women with small trolleys ferry food products from place to place, a pasta machine extrudes long strings of spaghetti.

The day at Solar Kitchen starts early. By 7.15 a.m. the first workers come to prepare the working space. At 7.30 the preparation of the lunch meals, which have to be ready by 10.30 a.m. for transport to the schools, Kindergarten and the Pour Tous outlet, starts. Then it is time to fill the tiffins (a set of shallow metal food containers which fit into each other), which will be collected from 12 o'clock onwards, and to prepare the lunch to be served in the Solar Kitchen Dining Hall. At 12.15 there is already a queue of hungry Aurovilians and visitors.

The anchoring rocks in this pandemonium are Andrea and Angelika. Their heads wrapped in cloth like the others, they decide on the day's food variety, supervise the cooking, handle the incoming food products, organize the cleanliness and strict hygiene inside the kitchen and dining room, and generally deal with the hundred and one small or major problems of the day. They head the team of 45 people which prepares the food, providing 900 lunches a day — 410 for the schools and Pour Tous, 130 in tiffins, the rest to be served in the Dining Hall. Since December 2000 it also provides a tiffin service for dinner to 70 people.

Apart from the cooking area, activities in other work-related spaces like the machinery section, the dining hall flower arrangement, the caretaker house, the booking and accounts section are simultaneously going on. Altogether 60 people are working at the Solar Kitchen, of which 31 are Aurovilians from 7 different nationalities and 29 employees from the surrounding villages.

Making pasta on the imported Italian pasta machine.



The Solar Kitchen is one of Auroville's success stories. But there have, of course, been plenty of teething troubles. For example, only a month ago Gilles heaved a sigh of relief as the solar bowl finally started to generate steam — until now diesel had been used. Also in the kitchen itself the work and the organization had to develop. "In the beginning there were no guidelines, no cookbooks, just a huge amount of things waiting to get organized," says Andrea. "So we started to concentrate on the few indications the Mother had given about the preparation of food, like 'cooking must be done in silence and harmony' and 'no quarrels'. During the last two years the team became well structured, which is necessary for good teamwork." "Every new member to the overall team challenges us to find his/her appropriate place inside the whole picture," adds Angelika.

The kitchen's huge popularity brings its own problems. "The kitchen was designed to prepare a maximum of 1000 meals," says Andrea, "but I think nobody imagined that, just two

years after its completion, it would be serving 900 meals per day consisting of 6 to 10 items each! The Mother envisaged several kitchens in Auroville serving the different needs of the people, but for the moment we are the only community kitchen open to all Aurovilians, Newcomers and their guests. We prepare food for children from the age of 3 years onwards and for adults. As they all come from different cultures, our task is not easy. As a consequence, we serve on most weekdays two different meals, Indian and Continental, plus two salads for those relying on raw food. But in spite of the choice we cannot serve everyone's needs."

"With the 900 meals we are at the limit of our capacities," says Angelika. "The kitchen area proper is already crowded, yet we still lack some essential equipment like an oven and a dishwasher. Also our storage capacity is absolutely insufficient. Every square meter of our cold storage room is being used and our dry good store-room is simply overflowing." The dining hall, where on average 350 people come to have lunch every day, is also too small. Some people have stopped eating there because they felt the space was too crowded and too noisy. As there is only one serving counter, people sometimes have to wait a long time in the queue, part of it outside in the midday sun.

### Financial aspects

"The kitchen recently increased the contribution requested by 20%, or from Rs 500 to Rs 600 a month. For 26 lunches/month this comes to Rs 23 per meal. The contribution does not include a reserve for building expansion or major repairs," says Ilse, who together with Claudine organizes the financial aspects of the kitchen. "But not everyone pays the new rate. The Central Fund, which pays for the nutrition for the Auroville schools (380 meals in all) contributes only Rs 500 a month for each child and



Chopping up organic vegetables for over 900 lunches

teacher. And the additional subsidy the Central Fund pays for those who take part in the 'Nutrition for Auroville' scheme is equally limited to this Rs 500 a month," explains Ilse. Under this scheme all the Aurovilians who cannot pay at all or only a part of the contribution requested can have subsidized lunches in the Solar Kitchen, the Central Fund covering the remaining amount."

"At present our monthly budget is approximately Rs 400,000. Nearly half of that comes from school nutrition, about Rs 80,000 from the 'Nutrition for Auroville' scheme and the rest from individuals and guests. We would really appreciate it if the Central Fund could pay us the full amount for school nutrition and the nutrition scheme," says Ilse. "At present our running expenditure is only just secured. And the kitchen already has a deficit of Rs 500,000, as a building extension to house the gas bottles could, for reasons of safety, no longer be postponed. We lack money for expansion, and expansion will be very necessary in the near future."

One way of providing healthy meals is to use organic food products coming from the Auroville farms.

"The farms are getting better organized and there are more of them now. There is good cooperation," says Angelika, "and we prefer Auroville products. Firstly because in Mother's vision, the city of dawn should ideally provide all the basic needs for its citizens, and the most basic need is food. Another reason is that we try to avoid artificial chemicals in the food, which is nearly impossible with conventionally grown products like the vegetables from Pondicherry. Lastly, we should not forget the subtle 'qualities' inside the Auroville area because of the Mother's concentrated Presence, which we can also experience in the plants we eat."

"Whenever Auroville Farms cannot supply us with needed produce we are open to other organic sources as well," adds Andrea. "Here, Auro-Annam is of help for us. For example, they provide us with rice from the Hare Krishna Farm in Bangalore and a choice of organic spices. Other high quality goods, like pulses, are also offered to us but generally they are too expensive for the Solar Kitchen's budget."

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# "Begin by learning to listen"

How can Auroville's outreach programmes be more effective in assisting social change in the villages? Gerald Frape, a long-term friend of Auroville who specializes in communication strategies for social change, talks about his efforts.

"When I was considering offering communication workshops in Auroville, I was told 'Don't mention anything about persuading or influencing people. It will press all the wrong buttons.' But it's important to understand that there's a huge difference between propaganda, which tends to be a one-way communication from authority to others, and dialogue communication in which you begin by asking your audience questions to understand what matters to them. This approach is democratic and empathetic, and it's the one I use in promoting social change."

When Gerald visited Auroville two years ago, he went on a tour of all the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) projects. He was impressed by what he saw, and he offered to teach a communication course to AVAG's staff of development workers to enhance their people's participatory approach. People's participation is the cornerstone of AVAG's social development programme. AVAG offers an intensive two-year training in this field to its staff before hiring them as development workers and also provides in-service training whenever possible. So, at AVAG's request, Gerald ran a three-day workshop for its team of trainees and development workers. "I began by asking them what they thought were the three most important social issues in the villages. They told me caste, gender inequality and alcoholism. I didn't think we could do justice to the first two issues in a three-day workshop, so we decided to focus upon alcoholism which, incidentally, AVAG has not really tackled yet through its programmes."

## A learning experience

Gerald began with an exercise of sending the development workers out to talk to villagers — young women and kitchen employees at AVAG — to get their stories. "My main direction to the development workers was not to argue or persuade their interviewees, but just to listen." The development workers, who also hail from the local villages, were already familiar with the effects of alcohol abuse on the family. Yet, they still found it heart-rending to hear the stories of their interviewees.

They heard that women were sometimes forced to drink alcohol by their husbands, that children were being given alcohol by their parents, that alcohol abuse often led directly or indirectly to suicide, and that illicit alcohol distillers were putting toxic chemicals and battery acid in their brews. The toddy shop, they were informed, was the one place in the village where there are no issues of caste — the democracy of drinkers — and that young people thought alcohol would make them strong, while heavy addicts thought they would die if they stopped drinking. Above all, they learned that many

materials to their peer groups as well as to the people they had interviewed. "That was another learning for some of the development workers, because what they thought were great ideas were not always liked by their audience. For example, with the drama, the audience gave the feedback that the language used was too 'educated', and the impact of the drama was lessened by the facts that the story line was too cluttered. And so the development workers learned in a practical way some of the basic principles of communication: try to ensure that you communicate in a way which resonates with



Gerald explaining communication strategies to village Action workers

people, including some of the alcoholics, wanted a solution to a problem that was tearing families and the community apart.

"In other words, we discovered there was a huge need in the area for a professionally-run campaign. One option was to follow up the contact that AVAG had already established with JIPMER to run de-addiction camps and campaigns. But in the meantime, and as part of the training, we decided to see what we could do." On the basis of the data they had collected the AVAG workers, under the guidance of Gerald, developed some materials — songs, a drama and some posters — to highlight the problems of alcoholism to the villagers. Essentially Gerald divided the participants into 3 groups each to collectively develop one set of materials. Each group then presented these

the inner values of your audience, keep your message clear and simple, suggest a practical step which can be taken, and pretest your material before taking it out to a wider audience."

## Mother of all campaigns

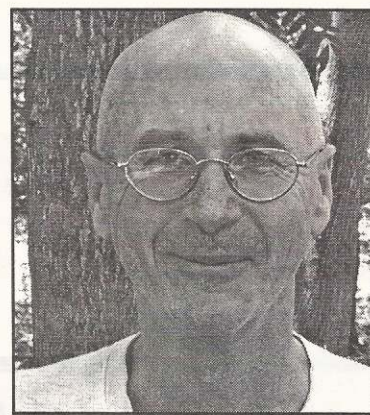
Gerald also worked with Dr. Devashish and Srinivasan from the Auroville Health Centre on what Devashish calls "the mother of all campaigns" — getting the villagers to use toilets. "It makes very good sense," says Gerald, "because what really changes the health status of societies is sanitation. Devashish and Srinivasan had already been championing the use of toilets through posters and a video that they had made, but they felt that their campaign had not been very effective, and hence sought Gerald's intervention.

Gerald used the same approach with the female health workers as he had done with the Village Action workers. They discovered that nobody liked to use public toilets because the lack of maintenance and knowledge about how to use them meant they were usually filthy. But they also discovered that, with the erosion of public spaces due to the population explosion, it was becoming increasingly embarrassing — particularly for women — to use the fields as an open-air toilet. In fact many women were deliberately not drinking much fluid to avoid having to go to the toilet, a practice which leads to urinary infections. In other words, what medical professionals perceived as a health issue was perceived by the villagers as a privacy issue.

Dr. Devashish is now making up two new posters — one describing the health and other benefits of using toilets, the other describing exactly how to use a toilet (and debunking myths like you can fall down the hole, or a snake may come up from below and bite you) — while Srinivasan is making a video which shows villagers who already have toilets explaining their benefits. "In communication theory, this is termed the concept of 'similar others'," explains Gerald. "In other words, you are more likely to listen to and be persuaded by your peers than by distant authority figures." The next step will be pre-testing the materials upon both men and women because "women are pushing the issue of household toilets, but it's still the men who make the decisions." There is a project in the offing where the Health Centre and AVAG will collaborate to put individual toilets in houses through funds from a development agency.

## Intervening at the power structure level

Gerald also worked with Cecilia, who is trying to reduce noise pollution in the villages, and Dr. Lucas, who is concerned by the health risk posed by the waste which is being transported from Pondicherry to be put on village fields as compost. "Whereas the approach regarding alcoholism and toilets was grassroots, because this is the level where the decisions will be made," says Gerald, "in the cases of noise and dangerous waste I advised



Communication specialist  
Gerald Frape

Cecilia and Lucas to identify who holds the power — which may only be a few people — and to concentrate upon persuading them. One very effective way of doing this is media advocacy. You brief a journalist, then get them to do an investigative article about the issue, identifying what is happening, who is responsible and who has the power to effect change. Politicians, in particular, are very responsive to this kind of pressure because they are afraid of losing votes. In other words, as a communicator who wishes to effect social change you need to think strategically: to understand who holds the power, and then decide how best to influence them."

## Communication within Auroville

While Gerald has not worked upon communication issues within Auroville itself, he has some interesting observations. "Generally I've observed that Auroville has a large informal communication system but a very small formal communication system: the formal channels, like the AV News and AuroNet seem to be very much underutilised. It would make sense to do a communication audit of Aurovilians to find out why this is, what kind of information Aurovilians want and how they would like to get it. Auroville, however, is not a place where you can apply mass solutions. There are so many clusters of different groupings and interests that it's unlikely that you can come up with any one means of communication which will suit everybody. That's a challenge for communicators. But it's that diversity which is also the character and strength of this place..."

From an interview by Alan

(Gerald has worked in Australia, Asia and Africa on issues as diverse as road safety, environmental protection and AIDS prevention, and he teaches post-graduate courses in advocacy and communication at two Australian universities.)

## MATRIMANDIR

# There is enough work for years to come says Laxminarayan about Matrimandir

With his long hair and beard, sweet smile and soft voice, he looks more like a yogi than one of the executives of the Matrimandir. Laxminarayan is one of those quiet Aurovilians whom you can see cycling down the road, reading Savitri at the Savitri Bhavan, or at work on the building site at Matrimandir.

He was born in Andhra Pradesh, where he studied civil engineering. During one of his college vacations, he came across a biography of Sri Aurobindo in his father's library. He also read an article in The Hindu on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and after finishing his studies at the S.V. University in Tirupati, he went straight to Pondicherry, never to return. He joined the Ashram and started working on the construction of the building which houses the Cottage Guest House and incense and other

small-scale industries. There he met Roger Anger and Piero. "Already then Roger was responsible for the outside of the complex, and Piero for the inside", Laxmi smiles.

Laxminarayan came into contact with Matrimandir during the excavation of the foundations and the many all-night concretings. Many Ashram volunteers used to help out on the night shifts during the major concretings. In 1978 he asked Nolinida for permission to work on Matrimandir. A few times a week he would cycle out to Auroville for work. He then asked to live in Auroville and after a long wait he was provided with a small room at the Center Kitchen where he lived like a hermit for years. His first work was chipping the roof of the Chamber. "I'd never worked so long in my life, looking up all the time." Then there was the work on the space-frame, fixing beams and con-

creting the nodes. "Once the Chamber was finished, many of my team mates left. For me the work had to go on."

At present he is a general supervisor, looking after the construction of the meditation rooms, and the finishing of the marble work. Every day at 5 a.m. he opens the Chamber.

When he was living in the Matrimandir Camp he used to read Savitri under a large tree near his room. Then, along with his friend Mahindra, he started reading Savitri under the banyan tree. More people joined and a small study circle was born. After shifting localities many times, with the workings of Mother's Grace, a site was found where at present the Savitri Bhavan is being constructed. Laxminarayan became one of its project holders.

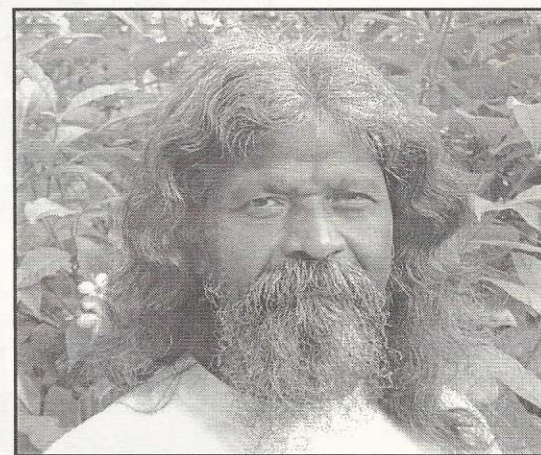
Laxminarayan is also a photographer. What started out as a hobby during his student years, came back into

his life by chance.

"One day a guest gave me a couple of rolls of film, but I did not own a camera and had to borrow one. I started taking photos of Matrimandir.

Cameras were given to me, and now there are twenty photo albums of shots which I have taken over the years. At the moment I take most of the photos which are used for leaflets and brochures on the Matrimandir and for official purposes."

I asked him when he thinks the Matrimandir will be ready. "In five years! But we have been saying that

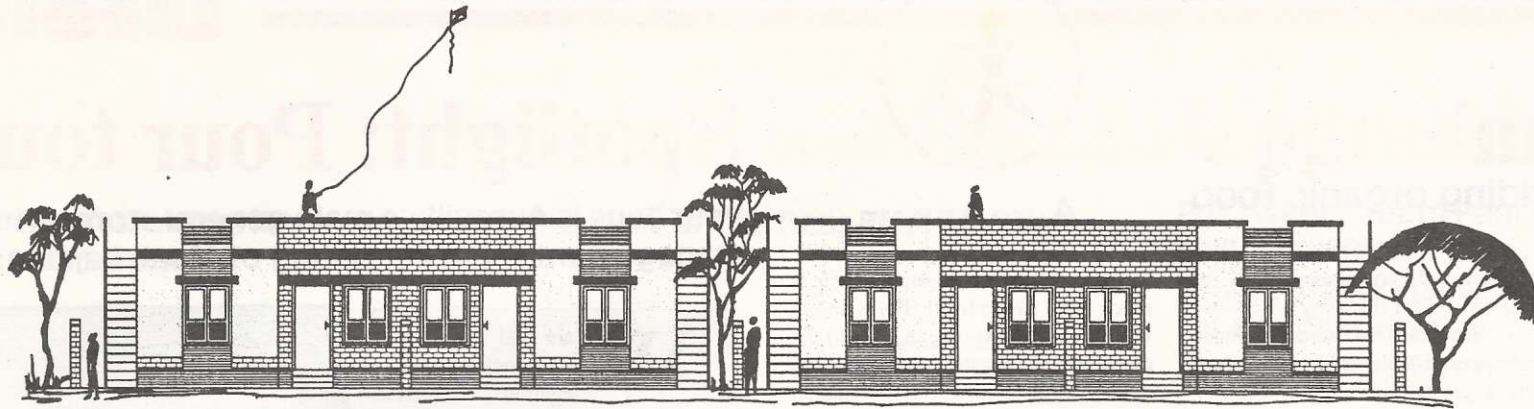


Working for Matrimandir since the early days:  
Laxminarayan

for years now," he laughs. "Actually I hope that there always will be some work here in which I can participate."

Tineke





Front elevation of proposed Sangaman houses

## Sangamam

An experimental housing project for Auroville workers and other people from the villages.

In one of the Mother's sketches of Auroville, there is a section marked "Labourers Colony", which the Mother intended as housing for Auroville's workers. This concept was never addressed formally until 1995, when the "Auro Workers Scheme" was started up with the aim of creating accommodation for villagers working for Auroville. One house was built to accommodate a family on a piece of land near Utility. However the project didn't move any further, mainly due to lack of funds. Since then, the concept has changed. The term "Auro Workers" has been dropped and the project has been enlarged to include people from the surrounding villages. "Today the term 'Labourers Colony', as it was labelled in the Mother's sketch, has a different connotation. We needed a new dimension, a new terminology. So we named the project Sangamam, which means confluence, like where the rivers meet the sea — a meeting place for the cultures, for the villages and Auroville. Sangamam will be created for all those people who wish to be closer to Auroville, without actually becoming Aurovilians, while retaining their family ties in the village," says

Meenakshi, who has been working to improve the living standard in the villages ever since she joined Auroville. "With this project," says Joseba, one of the fund-raisers of the project, "we also want to explore something like a prototype, or model village, which later could be replicated on a larger scale to further sustainable development in the surrounding villages. We would incorporate all the alternative technologies that Auroville has developed in the fields of architectural design, low cost housing, construction, etc. Environmental sustainability, water management, wastewater treatment, energy management and waste processing will be very much encouraged."

### Planning and Architecture

The project was inaugurated on the previous Auro Workers site near Utility in January. The complete project envisages 65 houses. The plan is to build a community centre and 25 houses in the first phase, with green areas to eventually comprise a common fruit orchard and vegetable garden. The planners have tried to adhere to the standard norms of a village in Tamil Nadu, in terms of density and

living space for an average family. The estimated cost of a unit will be Rs 170,000 (US\$ 3,700)

Last year a grant of Rs 2.8 million (US \$61,000) from a government agency in Navarra, Spain, was received through Aurofuture City Networking. This sum will be used for the infrastructure (water and electricity connections), and for the building of the community centre and the first six units. "Active fundraising continues and new funding agencies are approached in order to raise the funds necessary to complete the project," says Joseba. Anupama, whose architecture unit Kolam designs Sangamam, points out that, "While we want to help those who are very deserving, we do not want to create a clear segregation between low and high income groups, as in normal urban or rural societies. Ideally, Sangamam would include people from various economic classes."

### The Social Aspect

The first residents have already been selected by an advisory council. They are people who are dedicated and closely connected to the work being done in Auroville's various

fields like education, green-work and the services. "They are very important for the future development of the village, they will be the leaders," says Meenakshi. "Especially among the Tamil population, there are many castes, creeds and ways of living. The ideal of this project is that the people try to move beyond caste, religion and social class. They should learn to live in peace and collaboration though they come from different communities," she explains.

One interesting aspect of Sangamam will be its community centre, where collective activities can take place and the residents can meet each other. It will include a tuition centre for children or adults who wish to continue their studies. Meetings would be held regularly. "Some qualified residents would help foster community, and carry on educational programs. They would be a liaison with Auroville," says Meenakshi.

Although the scale of the Sangamam project is limited at present, its completion and success could greatly benefit the future development of the surrounding villages.

Emmanuelle

## EDUCATION

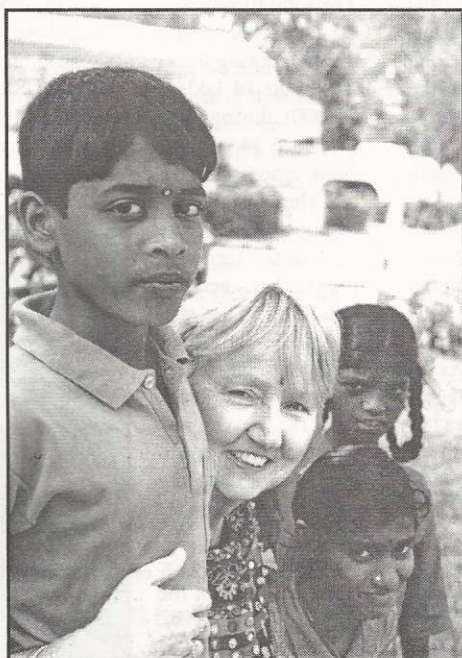
## Working with Tamil children

Becky Pillai, a visiting teacher at New Creation speaks of her experience

I first saw Auroville in 1966, after Mother had designated the area as the site of the future township. I made a trip out there and was very surprised and perplexed because the environmental degradation was so severe. Since that day I have had a kind of life long relationship with Auroville. At one point I thought I was going to come here to live. In 1967 we completed an application, myself, the daughter I was then carrying, and her father. Mother wrote, "Yes, all three" on the application. Then we sent some money, as was part of the process at that time.

As things developed, I decided not to come. But I remained very interested in the project and I always felt within myself that the dream of world unity and universal brotherhood was something I could try to live as best as I could wherever I was. I stayed in touch with developments in Auroville, through publications and friends who had come and gone. So, just about all of my adult life I have had some association with this place.

In 1998, through a mutual friend, I was introduced to Roy. When he discovered that I was a professional educator, he invited me to come and work at the school. I had been aware of New Creation prior to that, but I never came forward because I am here only in the winter months and I thought that as such I couldn't help the children. I didn't want to be like some socialite who helps serve lunch at a homeless shelter and then rushes off to a pedicure! But



Becky Pillai: each winter New Creation school is the focus of my activity.

Roy encouraged me to come. I was delighted. From that point forward I got involved and when I am here in the winter the school is my primary focus of activity.

I have worked with children at different levels, wherever the classroom teacher invites me. My area is the whole spectrum of English language arts, including literacy acquisition, oral English, reading and writing. Currently I work regularly with the 4th and 5th standards. What I do is

not only with the aim of serving the children, but also to model some techniques for the teachers so that they can expand upon their methodology.

I have found that my past, diverse professional experience has brought much to bear upon my work at New Creation. I have taught in a number of states in the United States, for two years at the American International school in New Delhi, and even a season at the Udavi school in Edayanchavadi. On the one hand, I have taught the children of governors and movie stars. On the other, I have taught those who come from illiterate, Latin American immigrant parents. All of this has helped me here, especially my past work with underprivileged children

with limited English.

What I love most about my work is how eager the children are to learn. They are very responsive and affectionate and so easy to teach. In part this is because in their lives outside of school they haven't been saturated with so many material things. As a result, even the smallest kind of lesson or material you provide for them is exciting. This makes it all the more joyous for me in being able to bring some valuable materials with me from

the United States every time I come, thanks to some small donations from friends.

It's clear that there are numerous challenges for such children, however. For example, some have health problems. Others come from homes where they are distressed. These challenges compromise their abilities to take advantage of some of the opportunities.

The New Creation School also faces its share of challenges. First, the school always has to scramble to put together the finances for materials, supplies, and classrooms. Another thing that must be there, and fortunately is, is ongoing teacher training. As teachers hone more and more their professional skills, the children will benefit. If you have a good teacher, you can sit under a tree with a slate board! Of course, it's better to have a classroom and all the materials, but pedagogic skills are very critical.

In spite of numerous obstacles, however, I can say that New Creation is a cheerful place and that the children who come there love coming to the school. As for myself, I really can't imagine myself teaching in any other school at this point, because I prefer working with Tamil children. I adore them! To me the local Tamil people are Aurovilians, whether anyone realizes it or not. It is very critical that those children, as the next generation, get every advantage that we can provide for them.

Shanti

## In brief

### ● Master Plan approved

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025) has been approved by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) after a meeting on February 15th attended by the Secretary, HRD ministry, the Chief Planner, Town and Country Planning Department, Union Ministry for Urban Development, the Special Commissioner Town and Country Planning, Government of Tamil Nadu and representatives from Auroville. The approved Master Plan carries a message from Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister HRD, a foreword by Shri Jagmohan, Minister for Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, and a preface by Dr. Kireet Joshi, Chairman Auroville Foundation.

### ● Fund-raising for Housing

Recently there has been an impetus to find solutions for the most urgent housing needs. Donations from UK and elsewhere have helped to construct new houses. Also the challenge for local Aurovilians to generate funds for housing has been recognized, and a Tamil Housing Fund, part of the larger Housing Fund, has been started. During the Birthday Week, volunteers offered T-shirts and key rings at public stalls to those who contributed towards the Housing Fund. Monthly contributions have also been requested of Aurovilians and Newcomers to support Housing Fund. To help with this venture, please contact: housing@auroville.org.in

### ● Flea Market for Land Purchase

Capitalizing on the success of earlier such ventures, a flea market was held one Sunday morning in the Eucalyptus Grove, a favourite spot with the youth, to help generate funds for land purchase. Plants, pottery, patchwork and painting were among the items given, sold or exchanged. Creativity, love and joy were to be had for free.

### ● Economy Seminars

February saw a spate of seminars on the economy. French researcher and activist in the field of money and alternative economy, Gilbert T., shared his ideas with Aurovilians in a two-day workshop. Participation was somewhat limited because the language in which the workshop was conducted was French. Later in the month, a five-day Economy Seminar in English was held. Margrit Kennedy, alternative economics scholar and community activist, gave two talks while the Economy Group made a presentation on the present economy of Auroville, and an interactive exploration into creative economic environments and finding new directions was conducted. It remains to be seen what changes will materialize in Auroville from these efforts.

### Invitation to St. Petersburg

The Mother once said that the Russians are as spiritual as the Indians and that Auroville could have been founded in Russia as well. This year, for the first time, the Auroville International meeting will be held in St. Petersburg, Russia from June 17 to June 23. The AVI meeting will coincide with meeting the Sri Aurobindo centers that exists in Russia and participants may also attend the inauguration ceremony of the Russian Peace Table at the Academy of Arts, Moscow. For additional information please email avi@auroville.org.in.





AuroAnnam

## AuroAnnam

The challenges of providing organic food

AuroAnnam was started by Lucas some years ago to promote organic cultivation of cashews, a predominant crop of the region. In recent years, AuroAnnam has developed an experimental organic farm and also distributes in Auroville a number of high-quality organic products such as rice, wheat, lentils, kidney beans, whole sugar, gourmet teas and coffee at affordable and fair prices. These products, some of which cannot be cultivated in this region, are procured by AuroAnnam from selected farms all over India. Promotion of organic cashew cultivation in the Auroville region, however, remains one of their main objectives.

AuroAnnam encourages organic cultivation by paying premium prices for organically grown cashews. Last year, AuroAnnam got 187 acres of cashew plantations in and around Auroville certified by SKAL, an internationally accepted Dutch certification agency. The farmers who had their fields certified were happy, for AuroAnnam guaranteed purchase of their produce and paid them 10-20% more than the market price. Word of this spread and more farmers approached them wanting to go organic. Unfortunately, much as they would like to, AuroAnnam was not in a position, financially speaking, to accept them. For contrary to their expectations, AuroAnnam has had limited success in selling organic cashews.

### Larger malaise

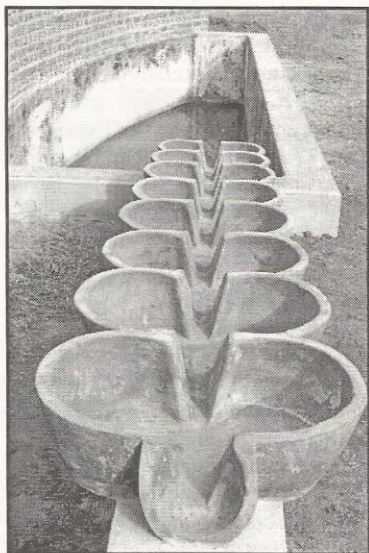
The problem in selling organic cashews points to the larger malaise in the distribution and consumption of organic produce within Auroville. Despite the fact that the Mother wanted Auroville farms to be organic, despite evidence that wholesome organic food leads to healthier living, there are no comprehensive community policies that support the cultivation and distribution of organic produce. At Pour Tous, the community store, organic produce from Auroville units have to compete in price and shelf-space with chemically-grown goods. Restaurants in Auroville, barring the Coffee Shop, show no interest in using organic produce, even though it is available at attractive prices.

Says Lucas, "Aurovilians are quite unconscious about their dietary habits. They care about the way their food is cooked, they care about the taste, the spices that are used, but they are oblivious to the poisons that they consume with their chemically-grown food."

Perhaps there is a lack of awareness amongst consumers as to how poisonous inorganic food actually is. To give an example, recent tests done by the Centre of Science and Environment, a nationally reputed environmental organization on twenty brands of commercially available flour, including those processed by

multi-national companies such as Pillsbury, reveal that they all contain toxic chemicals in amounts much above permissible limits. "If there were a greater demand for organic, then supply and cultivation of organic food would automatically increase. Lack of demand is the biggest challenge AuroAnnam faces," explains Lucas.

"As it is, matching supply to the demand, especially in this fluctuating initial stage of business can be quite



Flow forms for the preparation of dynamised bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides at AuroAnnam.

tricky. To give an example, we recently procured two small batches of organic wheat. We did our best to promote sales in Auroville, but it moved slowly. Then finally the Auroville Bakery decided to go organic and wanted 500 kgs a month. But for us to monthly procure and distribute wheat in this relatively small quantity is difficult. Ideally, we should be buying a year's supply after each harvest. But at the moment we do not have sufficient storage. And then there are problems in storing organic produce for the risks of bug-infestation and spoilage are very high. Even if we were to solve these problems, we would not want to take the financial risk of investing in tons of wheat. If the demand were to suddenly drop, we would become bankrupt overnight. Such problems are faced not just by us, a fledgling unit, but by all organic food distributors in India. Organic produce needs to come into the mainstream of the food business for the demand and supply to even out.

"In marketing organic tea, for instance, it is much easier to cope with

demand, for the whole supply cycle is much more streamlined. Tea is one of India's biggest exports and due to the demand from Western markets, high quality organic teas are available. Similarly, coffee and spices, due to demand from abroad, are beginning to be organically cultivated on a large scale. The organic market for staple foods like grains is slowly growing and can only continue to grow, but it will be at least another three to four years before it is commercially successful. We had hoped to make enough profit on our luxury items such as the gourmet teas, select coffee, cashew and spices to be able to subsidize the staples, but so far, this has not worked."

### Pricing policies

Despite the financial crunch it is currently facing, AuroAnnam stays committed to its ideal of fair prices. The sales price on their products has an average mark-up of only 10% over the cost price. This 10% margin, however, does not cover the costs incurred by the unit, and the business runs at a net loss. This pricing policy of AuroAnnam stands out in sharp contrast to that of other food businesses in Auroville, especially those that have a monopoly on their products, who are able to charge arbitrary prices given the lack of a central pricing control. "Such arbitrary price hikes," says Lucas, "are unfair to the consumer, especially Aurovilians who live on a limited maintenance, and promote the belief that organic food is only for the rich."

"Another policy that we follow is to not enter into competition with Auroville farms. Ideally, locally-grown foods should be locally consumed. There is an additional environmental impact when we import food from outside. But essentially, data collected by the Solar Kitchen (Auroville's community kitchen) shows that Auroville procures 65% of the food items from outside. It is this market that AuroAnnam targets. In the long run, we would like to replace this inorganic food with wholesome organic food."

However, in the short run, AuroAnnam has no choice but to scale down their venture and cut their overheads in order to make ends meet. It remains to be seen whether Aurovilians will now switch over to organic products, thus promoting environmentally-sustainable organic agriculture and helping AuroAnnam to succeed.

Bindu

**"Aurovilians are quite unconscious about their dietary habits."**

## Cooking in Mother's Kitchen

continued from page 1

The effort of the kitchen to use organic food is evident from in the figures. During the last financial year, an average of 35 % of the food expenditure was used to purchase organic produce. The non-organic foodstuffs came mainly from Pondicherry.

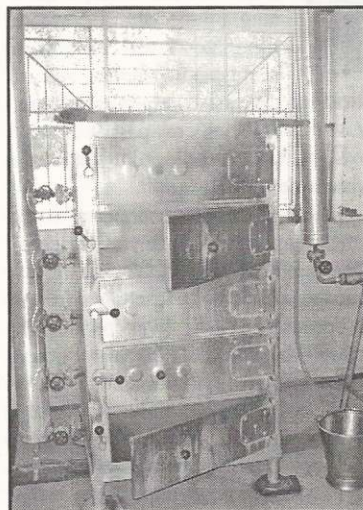
Challenges abound in the Solar Kitchen. Are Angelika and Andrea personally affected? "Definitely," says Angelika, "Now and then we have sleepless nights when we try to solve certain problems, for example

problems of harmony and communication between team members. Nonetheless I am happy to work here. For me the Solar Kitchen is Mother's Kitchen." "I love to work here," corroborates Andrea. "It is a means to grow, a super chance to progress, to learn to work together in a harmonious atmosphere."

Carel

For further information contact: solarkitchen@Auroville.org.in

The solar bowl generates the steam which is used for cooking in this steam cabinet.



## Spotlight: Pour tous

Pour Tous is Auroville's main general store. What are management team consisting of Mani, Rajamani, San

"We are and have been the subject of many allegations," says Mani opening the discussion. "If there is truth in them, we do our best to deal with it. But many of the allegations are unfounded, or simply based on insufficient knowledge about Pour Tous." Sipping coffee outside the somewhat dilapidated Pour Tous stall, the management team explains.

### The debt from the past

Until about three years ago, Pour Tous ran on a budget from the Central Fund, allocated by the Economy Group. The budget was used exclusively to cover recurring expenses. Money for stock was advanced at zero interest by the Financial Service. Products were sold at wholesale prices without overhead or profit margins. There was no possibility to expand, let alone maintain the premises. This explains why the stall looks run down.

Three years ago that policy changed. Pour Tous became a self-supporting service, responsible for its own income and expenditure. The advances accumulated over the previous 10 years, totalling 23 lakhs (US\$ 50,000) were booked as an interest-free loan to Pour Tous. The new policy implied that Pour Tous had to make a profit in order to repay the loan, pay for all its running expenses and carry-out long overdue building maintenance. An average margin of 10% (varying from 5% on Auroville products to 25% on plastic household products) was added. As a result, the debt has meanwhile decreased with Rs 5 lakhs (US\$ 10,750), and there is a small profit, which, however, is insufficient for any major building improvements.

### Loss-making baskets

Pour Tous consists of 4 different sections: the stall, the gas bottle service, the home delivery system called 'the basket service' and the snack bar. The total turnover is between 18 and 20 lakhs per month (US\$ 39,000 - 43,000) during the visitors season but it dips to 14 lakhs per month (US\$ 30,000) during the summer. In all, there are 34 people working at Pour Tous, among which 8 are Aurovilians.

The stall is responsible for about 75% of the turnover, the baskets account for 25%. The stall and gas bottle service run at a small profit, and so does the snack bar. The basket service, however, is running at a loss because there is no charge for delivery and the product prices are the same as those in the stall.

The basket service dates from a now distant past when the food was collectively purchased, evenly divided in cane baskets, and then delivered by bullock carts or temperamental van to the homes of the first Aurovilians who lived in widely scattered settlements. In those times the bicycle was almost the only means of trans-



Self-service in the vegetable stall has still to be introduced

port. Now that the population has increased and motorbikes abound, the basket service can also become self-supporting by adding a charge for delivery. "There is no reason why those using the stall should indirectly subsidize those who receive a basket. But the community should have a say in this decision," says Sunny "for after all, Pour Tous is a community service."

### Prices too high?

The average 10% margin is realized by buying wholesale and selling at the maximum retail price, printed on the manufacturers label. One of the major complaints is that products sold in Pour Tous are not cheaper than those sold in Pondicherry. "Pour Tous is a retail outlet. We would like to become a wholesale organization," says Mani, "so that prices can be lowered. But specialists have advised us that we are still too small for that step. That's why the prices at Pour Tous are often the same as those in Pondy."

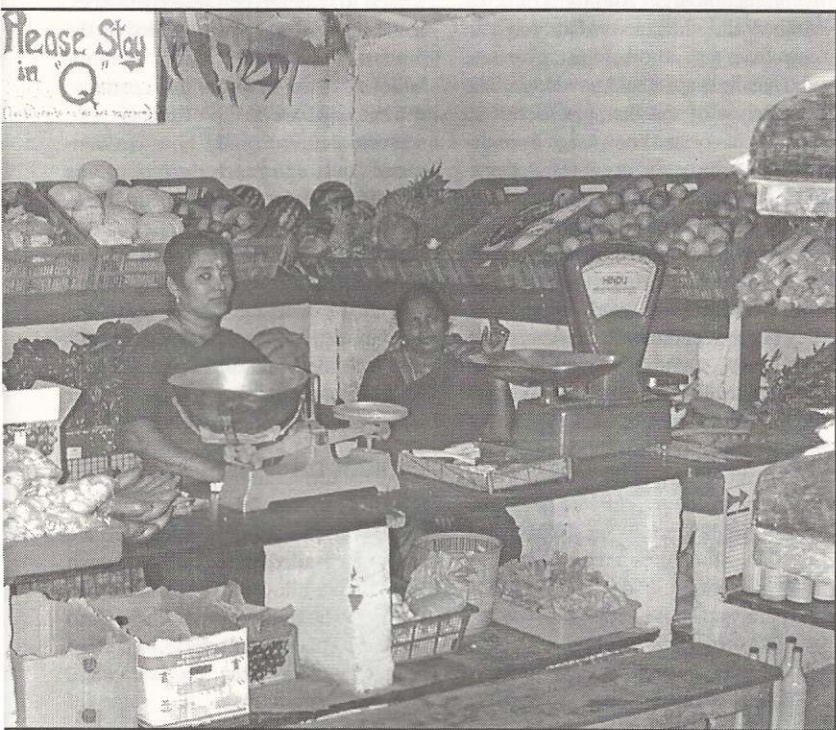
Another persistent complaint is that the vegetables at Pour Tous are too expensive and that you can buy better quality veggies at cheaper



Narrow corridors in the Pour Tous stall do not give much space to shop



the challenges? Auroville Today sought the view of the Pour Tous to, Sid and Sunny.



The Pour Tous management team.  
From left to right: Santo, Sid, Sunny, Mani and Rajamani

prices at the shop in Kilapalayam. Sid explains: "We buy from one of the largest wholesalers in Pondicherry, who knows that he has to check the quality of all the products before sending them to us. He selects the best quality from the often more than 30 different varieties of tomatoes, onions, potatoes and fruits that are available. Santo goes three times a week to Pondicherry to check prices and product quality. As we need a steady supply of certain vegetables and fruits, we cannot purchase from individuals who might sell us a few kilograms whenever they have stock. But the man in Kilapalayam can, so he buys from home-growers and for him it doesn't matter if he is sold out. So it is possible that the Kilapalayam man can offer a better product quality. But he cannot offer the same quality in the quantity we need."

Says Santo: "Concerning the prices: we have made frequent comparisons with the prices paid by the Solar Kitchen for what they purchase in Pondicherry. The discrepancy is often only with one or two items, for the rest, they are identical. But the Kitchen has an enormous advantage: they have cold storage and can process the vegetables and fruits immediately. We have no cold storage, and even if we had, the vegetables would be spoiled within hours after putting them out of the storage on the shelf. As a consequence, we do not want to stock too many perishable products."

"We attempt to offer as much organic produce as possible," contin-

ues Sid, "preferably grown in Auroville. But here we have a price problem. The prices of the Auroville organic farm products are fixed by the farm group, and to this we add a small overhead of 5%. Because of the farms' high overheads, their prices are high, often twice or three times the price of comparable non-organic products from Pondicherry. For that reason their organic products, which are mostly of a very good quality and taste much better, are often beyond the reach of many Aurovilians, particularly those who depend on a community maintenance of Rs 2,500 - 3,000 (US\$ 53 - 64) a month. The same goes for the organic products we purchase from the Auroville unit AuroAnnam. Their organic cashews, for example, sell well but mainly to Aurovilians who do not depend on the community for their maintenance or to visitors."

#### Providing all demands

Adds Sunny: "Many people ask us, passionately, why we waste shelf space on lower quality foods such as Maggi noodles and instant soups. The answer is because many Aurovilians want these foods! As Auroville's main food store, we are under constant pressure to meet all the varying demands. Sid even goes regularly to Madras to purchase imported articles such as soaps and shampoos, as there is a demand for these products."

The low level of community maintenance is an effective barrier to adding an extra margin of a few rupees on each product, so as to be able to

finance necessary building renovations, for example. Mani recalls the problems when the price structure at the snack bar changed. "Until two years ago, the snack bar was running a loss of Rs 5,000 (US\$ 107) a month. When we increased the prices, we got a lot of criticism. But now it runs at a small profit which allows us to improve the cleanliness and food quality. The Pour Tous snack bar is still the cheapest place in Auroville for a simple meal."

#### Cases of shoplifting

Were the losses only due only to serving refreshments below cost-price? "Sadly no," says Mani. "There were also many cases where people 'forgot' to sign their bills or add the account number." Here Mani touches on a sore point. One of the major criticisms of Pour Tous is that there is corruption and theft. "But strangely," says Sid, "Aurovilians rarely come forward with these allegations to our face, so that we could defend ourselves or do something about them. It is a kind of character assassination which badly affects a hardworking Auroville management."

The facts are that goods to the tune of Rs 15,000 a month go missing. On a turnover of Rs 18 lakhs a month this amounts to less than 1%. Part of this loss has to be attributed to mistakes in stocktaking and part to fact that some products have a limited shelf-life, and can no longer be sold. "It is a perk to our employees that they can take those products home," says Mani. "To try to eliminate stocktaking mistakes, we have the stock checked and cross-checked three times," says Sid.

"The balance has indeed to be attributed to theft," continues Mani. "There have been cases of shoplifting by staff as well as shoplifting by Aurovilians, newcomers and visitors, percentage-wise about 25% was by insiders and 75% by others. While we have dealt with our employees, it has been much harder to deal with Aurovilians. Shoplifting, it appears, is done by people from across all nationalities and age groups. If they are children, it isn't that difficult. But if it is an adult, we always have problems. What can you do? Paste the name of the offender on the wall? We talk to them individually, gently remind them that they have 'forgotten' to pay for an item in their bag — no fun, really."

To reduce any further incidents, there are now two ladies who watch the purchasing, and in future all shoppers may be asked to leave their bags at the entrance. What about the accusation of corruption when purchasing food products? "Santo has been doing the purchasing for the last four years. This allegation is baseless," concludes Mani.

The future plans of Pour Tous include a building renovation and extension for which the drawings are ready. It is now looking for sponsors. Also planned is a future outlet in the city area. Sunny has recently started publishing regular information on Pour Tous and its products on the notice board, as a first step towards a more active interchange with Aurovilians. Says she: "Those who shop at Pour Tous should know about Pour Tous, what we do today and how we plan to improve this essential Auroville service so that it can serve Auroville better. After all, that is what Pour Tous — 'For All' — is all about."

Carel

## Upgrade the farms!

For twenty years Paul has been farming organically in different parts of the world.

As a professional who has farmed in Auroville for the past three years, he gives his views about organic farming in the community.

"The first thing which struck me when I came here was the lack of a supporting structure — outlets, marketing skills, finance etc. — for organic farming in Auroville. This was a reflection of a certain neglect of agriculture in Auroville. This is still the case, although the Solar Kitchen has become a very important outlet and support for our products. They've proved, in fact, that it's not difficult to get Aurovilians to eat locally-grown indigenous food, so much so that we can't grow enough to keep up with the demand. Yet I discovered that certain crops which grow very well here were not being grown by our farmers because they didn't know about them, or how to grow them on a larger scale. In fact, I would say there is only a small group of farmers in Auroville who have developed a certain level of professionalism. For the rest we have a number of enthusiastic and idealistic farmers, but often they lack production and management skills."

"If the Solar Kitchen is to be supplied regularly with the quantities it requires, then crops have to be grown in a professional way. This means, if we are supplying vegetables, there have to be successive plantings of the same crop every few weeks in a very systematic fashion. But for many Auroville farmers this seems unattractive. They have strong ideas about monoculture, mass production and a capitalistic approach, so they do not want to work with nature in a way which involves intensive and volume production. The consequence is that, while we have more than enough land — an area of 40 hectares (100 acres) could supply all the vegetables we need in Auroville at present — we're not farming it in a way which makes the most out of it."

"There are other circumstances which make it difficult for the farms

to become more efficient. For example, the farms are collectively owned by the Auroville community: the money that is put into them is not 'earned' by the farmer having to compete with other farmers. There are dangers with private enterprise and market economies, but I also see that everywhere in Auroville there is a definite relationship between the possibility of making personal profit and increased enthusiasm and responsibility. Profits or losses, after all, are a means of measuring how well you are doing, something which can be obscured in a subsidized farming system like ours. The reality is that most of our farms are loss-making.

**"Efficiency does not mean giving up ideals."**

"But attitudes are changing. More and more of our farmers are aware of the necessary changes to be made. The Farm Group office in particular has made big efforts to improve the quality of the farm scene through streamlining information collection, and the Farm Group now asks the farmers to come up with a proper business plan if they want a loan or a grant. Moreover, the Farm Group has recently decided to call upon the services of a professional external consultant to undertake a comprehensive and time-bound study. The objective of this study is to analyse the present farms and local consumption patterns, to identify necessary changes to be made (policy, pricing, farming methods, infrastructure, land, etc.), to prioritise these changes, and to detail an action plan for the future."

"Perhaps the key to upgrading the whole farm scene in Auroville is in understanding that becoming more business-like and efficient does not mean that we have to give up our ideals. In fact, it might even speed up the realization of those ideals!"

From an interview by Alan



Paul cultivating gourds and pumpkins at Discipline farm.



# Integral bridge-building

In early January, the second International Conference on Integral Psychology was held in Pondicherry and Auroville. Presenters included academics, psychologists and psychiatrists from India and overseas. Aurovilians also made presentations.

The aim of this conference, in the words of its coordinator, Matthijs Cornelissen, was to "encourage the study of consciousness in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother." This involves "the building of bridges between the work of Sri Aurobindo and Psychology as a science". To a layman like myself, with a partial knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and even less knowledge of psychology, this seemed like a prelude to a dense intellectual immersion in unknown waters. However, by the end of the conference even I felt able to swim a few strokes.

## What is Integral psychology

Integral psychology is a relatively new discipline and practice which evolved out of a dissatisfaction with the limitations of conventional psychology. Much of conventional psychology bases itself on a methodology akin to that of the natural sciences in an attempt to come up with universal, rational, objective and value-free laws of human behaviour. In a world which recognizes more and more the relativity of knowledge, such an attempt appears doomed. Traditional psychology embraces a wide variety of approaches — psychoanalysis, behaviourism, cognitive therapy etc. — but, as one of the presenters at the conference put it, each approach deals only with a small area of the totality of the human psyche. In fact, for some areas, particularly the areas of higher consciousness, classical psychology has no tools at all.

Consequently, integral psychology emerged as "a psychological system concerned with exploring and understanding the totality of the human phe-

nomenon" (Bahman Shirazi). This involves, among other things, integrating Eastern and Western explanations of the human psyche and acknowledging and working with the higher as well as the lower planes of consciousness.

Integral psychology, like classical psychology, has a number of different schools, but three main ones can be distinguished. In the 1940's Indra Sen coined the term 'integral psychology' to describe a methodology based on Sri Aurobindo's writings. In the 1950's Haridas Chaudhuri, the principal exponent of Sri Aurobindo's work in the U.S., created a system of psychology which combined Sri Aurobindo's wisdom with insights from other traditions like Buddhism and Taoism, as well as with various systems of Western psychology. More recently Ken Wilber has attempted to create a grand map — a kind of unified theory — of various psychological systems which he also terms 'integral psychology'.

## Sadhana or psychotherapy?

The majority of the psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists attending the conference appeared to be more sympathetic to Sen's and Chaudhuri's approaches than to Wilber's: indeed Wilber was regularly criticized for misquoting or misunderstanding Sri Aurobindo. Yet one of the major questions that arose out of this conference was the relationship of integral psychology and psychotherapy to integral yoga. Some of those in attendance were sadhaks of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and a few of them felt strongly that integral psychology, while it may have relevance for those leading an 'ordinary life', had nothing to offer those who are following a spiritual path.

Brant Cortright, Director of the Integral Counselling Psychology programme at the California Institute of Integral Studies, disagreed. He pointed out how almost everybody has suffered 'emotional wounding' and that integral psychotherapy, unlike spiritual practices, is specifically designed to heal such wounding. Integral psychotherapy and spirituality, he clarified, have similar goals — which he defined as 'the opening of the heart' — but they take different routes. The spiritual path encourages one to reject negative feelings, whereas psychotherapy tries to open the heart by exploring and working with negativity, with what is closed, so bringing awareness to the individual of what blocks his or her evolution. Psychotherapists have observed, he noted, that one can't go high without going low; that one's capacity for positive experience expands through learning to tolerate negative feelings. He warned those on a spiritual path of the dangers of 'narcissism' — of feeling that one is special, chosen, — and of 'spiritual bypassing', a way of avoiding dealing with psychological blocks through suppressing or denying them under the guise of sadhana. A well-developed ego, he concluded, is more able to surrender to a greater self, and therefore "for most people spiritual practice is accelerated by psychological work".

## Harmonising the being

Alok Pandey, a psychiatrist who is also a devotee, pointed out how many people who are practising the yoga have breakdowns because the planes of their being are not harmonized. "The inner being often develops faster than the outer being," he said, and he

offered some practical advice: "Invoke the protection of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and then see what you can learn from a psychotherapist, even one who has little spiritual knowledge. The importance of the therapist is not so much in his or her knowledge as in the role which he or she occupies. A therapist, through listening to you carefully and reflecting back what he hears, acts as a mirror for the unconscious movements of your vital. As you become aware of these and work upon them, they become part of your sadhana."

He also noted how vital it is that the therapist has practical knowledge of the different planes of being. In particular, he spoke of the importance of the psychic contact; "If the therapist has contact with his psychic, he is able to bring into play the forces of peace and love." Another presenter put it even more succinctly: "The integral psychotherapist needs to be a yogi."

## Re-examining assumptions

The final question and answer session returned to this issue. One participant noted that the term 'integral psychology' did not necessarily imply a spiritual dimension and suggested we should adopt the term 'integral yoga psychology' to clarify the distinction. Another practising therapist was critical of many psychotherapeutic practices because he felt they took as their goal merely the freeing of the vital ego to express itself. Matthijs concluded that it was time that integral therapists re-examine some of their basic assumptions. He noted, for example, that Sri Aurobindo never makes any reference to the child-parent relationship being responsible for subsequent psychological problems. In other

words, the soul already incarnates with a need to undergo certain experiences, some of which may be provided by the parents. The real issue, Matthijs believes, is not what our parents did to us, but what we make of our circumstances, and especially how we transcend our ego and overcome the defects and deformations of our instrumental nature. Similarly, noting Sri Aurobindo's observation that the lower consciousness tries to drag the higher down to its own level, he expressed the need to move away from a preoccupation with the small, inferior aspects of the being and to focus upon our larger identity and potential.

## Evaluation

How successful was this conference? One shortcoming, I felt, was the lack of detailed case studies which would have allowed us to understand precisely how theory translates into practice. This is particularly important in understanding how, for example, a therapist works with the different planes of being. This would also have helped us grasp how, as one presenter hinted, a neurosis or psychosis will be treated differently depending upon whether the patient is centred in his vital ego or has contact with his psychic being. It was also striking that the two experiential sessions encountered some opposition, suggesting that some participants found it easier to present their subject than to express something of themselves.

Overall, however, the conference provided a ferment of thought-provoking concepts and insights, which may have done more than a little to bridge the seemingly antagonistic worlds of science and yoga.

Alan

# Getting up to speed in the U.K.

Martin Littlewood describes how Auroville International UK became professionalized.

"For some time I had had a dream of working full-time for Auroville in the UK. As it happened, the company I was working for at this time was going through difficult times, and redundancies seemed inevitable. But where was the financial support for my dream to come from? Not knowing quite how it could happen, I decided to put a job description down on paper. The job could include applying for grants for Auroville projects, improving the service to our members with a more regular newsletter, making contacts with research organizations and businesses which might assist in Auroville's work, and organizing Auroville gatherings and presentations in the UK. When I revealed my dream at the next committee meeting of AVI-UK, out of the blue one of our committee members said, "Yes, I think I could arrange that, how much do you need?" Simultaneously my next door neighbour offered me a part-time job working with him as a management consultant. All of a sudden, my dream was becoming a reality.

Auroville International UK was started around 1981 by Joy and Edith, two elderly ladies, both long term devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who had visited Auroville for the first time in 1971 after meeting the Mother. They lived in a beautiful fourteenth century farm house in the Essex countryside called Boytons. It was an idyllic place and became a second home for many visiting Aurovilians, as well as the first centre of Auroville International UK. Edith

was the Chairperson, Joy the Secretary. They answered the occasional letter from those seeking information about Auroville, and published a twice-yearly newsletter, typing it themselves and photocopying it on a very slow copier in Edith's bedroom. AVI-UK meetings at Boytons were a joy, with not much business being done but with long meditations in Krishna's garden, and walks in the beautiful countryside. We all left at the end of a weekend feeling refreshed and renewed. When Thakor and I took over the jobs of Edith and Joy, and John took the job as Treasurer, the work of AVI-UK continued much as before, with the only difference being a more professional newsletter, printed on a computer, and more efficient accounts. Joy and Edith remained part of the team as Trustees, overseeing the work of the organization.

## Moving house

Following the death of Edith and the sale of Boytons, the official AVI-UK address moved to my house, where we could never match the delights which Boytons had to offer. But time marched on, and Auroville began to be better known. Correspondence increased, and our mailing list grew larger each year. We were able to regularly fund certain projects in Auroville through the interest received on one moderate donation, our favourite projects being afforestation and organic farming. We also collected a number of regular donations to New Creation School. But all this was still a very small con-

tribution to Auroville's work.

With my new job, we set out to change that. We hired the services of a development consultant, Greta Jensen, and decided to make an application to the European Commission for a grant for Auroville work. We chose village education for the first application, as we knew that this would be the most likely to be successful. The project took several months to write, with cooperation from the three groups in Auroville whom we had identified as having suitable projects for funding. At the same time, we decided to make another application to the EC for a tropical forest project. The village education project needed co-funding, so we decided to apply to the National Lotteries for this. We were quite new to this work, but with the expert help of Greta we became more adept.

After a year and a half, the agreement with my generous benefactor was coming to an end. We were ready to send two projects to the EC, and another to the National Lotteries. Did we have to abandon the projects because of my need to seek other employment? No, the Mother had made other arrangements. Ulli, an Aurovillian, had donated a substantial amount of money to Auroville. He had set up a group in Auroville to identify projects and to manage them, and he wanted one of the AVI centres to manage the money. Thus the Gateway project was born. AVI-UK was to receive a sum for administering the money and monitoring the projects in accordance with the requirements of the British Charities

Commission, and a bit more to enable us to improve our own capacity to do our work for Auroville. The projects were to continue for two years, during which time AVI-UK would receive enough money to enable me to continue to do the work I loved.

## Becoming a big charity

But a cry of alarm went up from our committee. Our income was to increase some twenty times, and from being a "small charity" as defined by the Charities Commission, we suddenly became a "large charity", overnight! No one would find us dishonest, but we were certainly not up to scratch as a "large charity". So we set to work to put this right. Firstly we found out how we ought to operate by reading the Charities Commission guidelines. Then we wrote our own set of procedures, laying out how we should operate, gradually putting these procedures into practice. Our Trust Deed was also woefully out of date; it referred to Auroville only in passing! We set to work at this too, with the help of a newly appointed trustee who is a senior lawyer.

The organisation was beginning to professionalize. We began holding more regular meetings, with proper minutes being taken. Accounting standards were improved, and a high standard annual report produced. We invited new trustees to join us, building up a dedicated team to advise and support the work.

Although our first EC contract was a long while coming, we were gradually beginning to see other benefits. A number of larger donations

were coming our way, for land purchase for Matrimandir and for other Auroville projects. It seemed that the energy we were putting into the organization was having unforeseen results; perhaps it was in some way attracting these donations. The Gateway project itself was a challenge. We were aware that as a British Charity, we could not just pass on the money to Auroville without ensuring that, to the satisfaction of our trustees, it was being properly spent. Working with the Gateway team in Auroville, we insisted that all new projects were properly thought out, and their objectives and plans of action documented. After some initial resistance, most project holders seemed only too happy to oblige, often going out of their way to help meet our needs.

## Personal perspective

Perhaps the most important result of the work we have been doing, from my own perspective, is the feeling of being increasingly connected with the work of Auroville. There is no more the sense of a separate organization doing work for Auroville, but more of being part of a larger team, working for the same goals — the only separation being a few thousand miles. Aurovilians may be focused upon constructing a small city in South India, but, in reality Auroville, is manifesting as a result of the Mother's force acting in a collective effort from around the globe. To be part of that wider collective is a real joy, sharing the experiences of friends who care just as passionately as I do about this work."



# Ned Rothenburg comes to Town

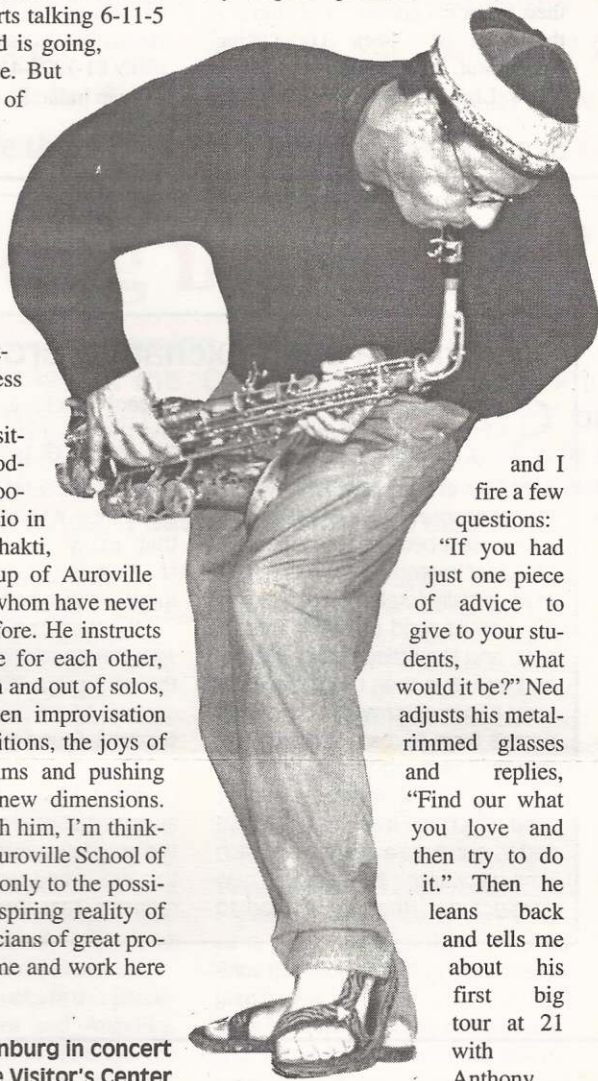
A celebrated New York musician conducts a workshop at the embryonic Auroville School of Music.

Take cutting-edge sounds from a consummate New York experimental composer. Mix it with a shakuhachi flute, sax, and bass clarinet. Add a rapt audience of Auroville musicians listening as names like Cannonball Adderly, Steve Coleman, Miles Davis, John Coltrane roll off the tongue. And get a flurry of excitement as we discover new dimensions in music and sound.

When I learned that a celebrated avant garde New York musician was giving a workshop, I felt shy and a bit intimidated about joining. I'm okay following a rudimentary 4-4 or some clear 3-3-2 rhythms, and then when Ned Rothenburg starts talking 6-11-5 beat shifts, my mind is going, whoa, wait a minute. But Ned's exploration of musical genre, his creative research into the myriad sounds that musical instruments can produce, his integrity and enthusiasm had me engrossed and forgetting my uneasiness within minutes.

So there's Ned sitting calmly on a wooden stool in a bamboo-and-keet music studio in neighbouring Adi Shakti, orchestrating a group of Auroville musicians, some of whom have never worked together before. He instructs us in creating space for each other, moving gracefully in and out of solos, the interplay between improvisation and written compositions, the joys of exploring polyrhythms and pushing sound into totally new dimensions. And as we work with him, I'm thinking, yes to the new Auroville School of Music. And yes not only to the possibility, but to the inspiring reality of having outside musicians of great professional calibre come and work here in Auroville.

Ned Rothenburg in concert at the Visitor's Center



So one morning I'm sitting having coffee and interviewing Ned at Pascal and Elsa's place in Sharnaga. Actually Pascal is the unsung hero in this story. Having followed Ned's avant-garde music for years, Pascal clicked onto Rothenburg's website and sent him an e-mail inviting him to come to Auroville. Ned, who plays a lot in Europe, the US and Japan, had heard about Auroville, but he had never been to India, so this was a new one. And for Pascal, there was the challenge of raising the money, or course. All those inevitable but essential details.

So now Ned's sitting here in our dry tropical paradise

and I fire a few questions: "If you had just one piece of advice to give to your students, what would it be?" Ned adjusts his metal-rimmed glasses and replies, "Find out what you love and then try to do it." Then he leans back and tells me about his first big tour at 21 with Anthony

Braxton, the celebrated drummer. Braxton was sitting next to him on the group's bus after a gig and said, "Ned, whatever you do, give blood. Mean it. Don't be tentative. Go for it."

Ned has had a number of teachers, including the Japanese Shakuhachi master — Yamaguchi Goro. "It was an interesting experience. He plays, you imitate. It's like sitting with the Buddha. Nothing else is going on. He taught me stillness."

Ned is both a composer and leader of several groups. "I don't believe in perfection," he says. "There are pieces of music that I think are practically perfect, but people don't just sit down and say we're going to do something perfect. You're going for magic, not perfection. Perfection is about answers. I don't believe in answers, I believe in questions."

Maybe Ned doesn't believe in perfection but he's a technician par excellence. His wind and reed techniques are impressive and his circular breathing and controlled overblowing leaves some of us breathless. There is a gutsy fierce, but lyrical quality to his playing. His multiphonics, overtones, and odd rhythmic contours work in an innovative way as he creates a whole new landscape of sounds.

How does Ned feel about Auroville's musicians? I ask. "People here are very sincere and open. In Auroville a workshop like this is basically free to Aurovilians. But even though they don't pay a fee, people take it seriously. They have a hunger to learn."

What do you get out of teaching? I query. "Teaching constantly puts you in touch with what's fundamentally important. It helps you to see the big picture and reminds you of the basics."

Upon arrival in class one day, I hear Ned encouraging us to stretch our limits. "The challenge could be to play a lyrical song like Misty as if you're going to kill someone and then to play free jazz like you're in love with a beautiful woman."

Ned is an explorative craftsman, counting out rhythms, showing us how

one base player can work in 3-4 and another in 5-8 simultaneously in the same piece of music. Afterwards he has us listening to phase patterns. "Can you hear it? That's 6 fives and then 5 sixes. You see, music is mathematics at its most soulful."

Whether with mathematics or pure emotion, Ned is a source of inspiration. "I like the way he teaches," says Fanny, one of our female youth vocalists. "We get to listen to different styles, all play together. We start to really understand something about music."

"I couldn't play odd meters before. Now I can," says Nicco, one of our young Auroville drummers.

On Elsa's boom box, we listen to the Red Hot Chilly Peppers, Steve Coleman, Latcho Dro, Romanian gypsies, Inuit Eskimo women, a bit of Miles, a touch of this, a long piece of that. Ned is counting out rhythms for us. Sometimes we must look a little lost. "Remember," he says, "there will always be people who will get things faster and others slower. You have to be patient."

Basically, there are two paths: intensive study, and listening and being open and seeing what will happen next. Somehow Ned's own music is a balance between the two.

On the last day, we are having a tea break and conversation turns on his up and coming concert at the Visitors' Centre as if it were a gig in some big New York club. And then somebody asks the final question that's on everybody's mind, "Hey, Ned, when are you coming back?"

Marti

(Ned has fronted and composed music for the electric funk ensemble, Double Band, and for the acoustic chamber group Power Lines. He's a founding member of the groundbreaking reed trio, New Winds, and another group, Tri-Sync. Ned has played with key figures in the music world, among them, John Zorn, Fred Frith, Shelley Hirsch, Elliot Sharp, Sainkho, Evan Parker, Paul Drescher, Samir Chatterjee and others.)

## The twelve qualities of the Divine Mother

Auroville exhibition in New Delhi

Saturday, January 13th: eight Aurovilians alight at Delhi railway station with an enormous amount of luggage — cases, boxes and an assortment of parcels, all necessary for the Auroville exhibition in the Visual Arts Gallery of the India Habitat Centre. Porters and taxis materialize to transport us and our luggage to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, where our accommodation is reserved.

The title of the multi-media exhibition is 'Auroville — The City the Earth needs'. The theme is 'The Twelve Qualities of the Divine Mother'. The aspiration is to create an atmosphere that will give visitors an experience of the soul of Auroville: the inner Chamber of the Matrimandir. The India Habitat Centre very generously donated to Auroville not only the exhibition room, but also the Palm Court Conference Room and a large covered area.

That Sunday, in the exhibition room, Dominic, Ganesh and Rajendra start assembling their part of the exhibition, which tries to communicate the spirit, the ideal, and the sense of the art and aesthetics of Auroville. When we arrive next day early in the morn-

ing, we are struck by the quiet beauty of what is taking form. Linking the exhibition room with the Palm Court conference room is a large covered area where Bhaga, Namah, Aikya, Thillai and Lourdes build the information part of the exhibition. To complete the multi-media aspect of the exhibition, Vladimir installs a computer in the Palm Court conference room, which will show a selection of videos on life in Auroville. Three separate talks are planned for three successive evenings towards the end of the week.

The exhibition opens on Monday at 5 p.m. Subtle lighting illuminates a number of panels containing pictures and texts on Auroville. On a dais Shruti chants an invocation to the Divine Mother. Huge bowls of glorious flowers along with candles and incense help to evoke the ambience of Auroville.

The week goes by and the number of visitors, who at the beginning were not numerous due to poor publicity, increases. On Tuesday we hold a press conference. On Friday, Doordarshan unexpectedly comes in to film the exhibition for the Indian TV. The closing ceremony, officiated



The exhibition room in the Habitat Center

by Dr. Karan Singh, former chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, is touching. Many people came who had already visited the exhibition. Shruti enchanted the audience with her hymns to Shiva accompanied by beautiful readings from Sri Aurobindo's works. It was a cornucopia of flower garlands, presents, speeches and goodbyes.

Enduring impressions are many. In the forefront stands the large numbers of school children who came to see the exhibition, and the smiles,

generosity and support extended to us by the India Habitat Centre and by Tara from the Ashram. Next there is a feeling of a triumph. For we had struggled for months to get the exhibition financed, the cold biting winds of Delhi and the long working hours took their toll, and there were the typical frictions between us Aurovilians. And yet, throughout, there was the feeling that we were being carried by something higher, that She wanted us there, that this was Her exhibition.

Anne

## Short news

### ● Kratu exhibition

Kratu held an exhibition of ceramic sculpture at the prestigious Artworld art gallery in Madras at the end of February.

### ● Along The Road

Eva, an Aurovilian artist, mounted an art exhibition entitled "Along the Road" of collages, oil paintings and sculptures at Pitanga. Eva's works, mostly abstract, have a subdued and thought-provoking quality to them.

### ● Winterreise

Carel, one of our chief editors, took to a different keyboard in February when he accompanied visiting baritone Leonhard at a moving concert of Schubert's "Winterreise" (Winter Journey).

### ● AVAA Vandhi Theatre

Auroville Village Action Arts (AVAA) presented their work to the community in February. AVAA has been working for a few months with 100 village children, once a week, in selected fields of art, dance, music, theatre and painting. The youngsters, mostly aged around 10, performed before Auroville and villagers with admirable panache.

The show was followed by a hilarious slap-stick Tamil comedy, "Vandhi Theatre" by Aurovilians Paul and Wazo which lampoons Westerners. Paul and Wazo aim to mount performances in the neighbouring villages.

### ● Village Youth Festival

It was an event to remember. After many years, 35 Youth Clubs started by AVAG in the surrounding villages jointly celebrated a Village Youth Club Festival at the Visitors Centre. Over 500 young men belonging to these clubs put up stalls exhibiting their activities and regaled the audience with a repertoire of skits, songs, and dances that dealt with social issues. Sri N. Bala Bhaskar, Secretary, Auroville Foundation, presided over the function.

### ● Remembering the Mother

In the pleasant ambience of Savitri Bhavan, under the trees, some Aurovilians and others who used to meet with the Mother in relation to the development of Auroville shared their reminiscences. Most, especially those who never had the opportunity to physically meet the Mother, felt a sense of quiet joy at the sharing. It was especially revealing to learn how much detailed care that the Mother took in all matters pertaining to Auroville. It was touching to see individuals who had had differences in the past sitting alongside and listening to each other.

### ● Passages

On Monday, February 12, Alan Klass, an early Aurovilian who worked in the Matrimandir Nursery and was responsible for building the magnificent orchid collection, passed away at his home in Crestone, Colorado. Alan's love of orchids was unparalleled with him devoting many hours a day to their study and cultivation. An excellent guitarist, who without any formal training learned much of the classical repertoire, Alan will be also remembered by the early Aurovilians for having played his guitar to his plants. Few however perhaps know that it was Alan's generosity that funded virtually all of the plant collecting trips undertaken by the workers at the Matrimandir Nursery.



# "The Mother - the Story of Her Life"

In 1997 HarperCollins India published Georges van Vrekhem's *Beyond Man, the Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*. "After that book appeared I realized I had to write a biography in homage to The Mother," says Georges, "for too many people are unaware of what She stood for and has done. In India only Sri Aurobindo is known, not The Mother of whom Sri Aurobindo has stated, 'The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two bodies because that is necessary for the play'. Amongst the published biographies, I could not find any unbiased or complete one."

HarperCollins has now published this biography, titled *The Mother: The Story of Her Life*. Like *Beyond Man*, the book is based on the premise that whatever Sri Aurobindo and The

Mother have written and said is unquestionably true — and who can question statements which are beyond the normal human consciousness?

Compared to the material already published in *Beyond Man*, the biography stands on its own. Making use of all that has been published on The Mother, Georges has written a biography that reads like a novel — not surprisingly in view of his background as a dramatist before joining the Ashram in 1970, and later Auroville in 1978.

It is typical of this biography that the events in the Mother's life have been set against their historical background. The Paris of the Mother's youth with its circuses and artistes, her sojourns with the occult masters M. and Mme. Théon in Algeria, her first arrival at Pondicherry and her meeting with Sri Aurobindo, the years in Japan, and her life after her return to India in

the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: it all comes alive, sketched with a sense of detail and sprinkled with a pinch of humour. The description of the people around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is also interesting, for "the Avatar," writes Georges, "never comes alone".

The biography contains much new material. For example, the meaning of the church murals in Pau which Mother painted together with her first husband Henri Morisset; the activities of the Théons before they moved to Algeria; the writings of Mother's second husband, Paul Richard, in Japan; and the refusal of some of Sri Aurobindo's disciples to accept a French lady as their guru. In the chapter "Explorations of the Occult", one reads that in the beginning of the twentieth century the Mother established the "pathways for the dead", whose existence has now been documented in



the records of near-death experiences.

Another chapter concerns the Mother's previous incarnations. The Mother explicitly mentioned some of them and the biography gives details of these incarnations and puts them in their historical context. The stories of the lives of Queen Tiy, "King" Hatchepsut, the Maid of Orleans, Mona Lisa, the Virgin Queen, and

Catherine II of Russia, are intriguing and reading them alters one's view of history.

But the main value of the book is that it provides an insight into what The Mother came on earth to manifest. The descriptions of the descent of the Supramental on earth in 1956, the Mother's work on the cells of the body, the manifestation of the consciousness of the Overman in 1969 and the realization of the Supramental in a new subtle body are among the most fascinating parts of this biography.

Carel

*The Mother, The Story of her Life*  
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by Georges van Vrekhem  
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## ENVIRONMENT

# Creating a living seed bank

Why are Auroville greenworkers replacing the exotic species in Auroville forests with indigenous ones? And what hope is there of reversing deforestation in India as a whole? Walter gives his views.

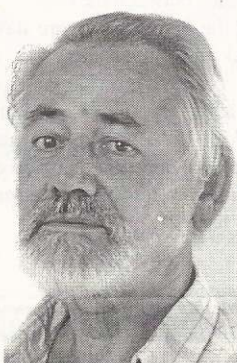
**AUROVILLE TODAY:** You've been involved in a movement to plant more indigenous trees in Auroville. Why is it important to plant indigenous trees?

**Walter:** For some years, a number of Auroville greenworkers were concerned about the state of the indigenous vegetation in this part of India. Until a few centuries ago, the coastal plains all the way from south Tamil Nadu to Andhra Pradesh were covered with tropical dry evergreen forest — an almost unique ecosystem comprising more than 250 species of trees, shrubs, climbers and herbs. However, less than 1% of that forest survives, mainly in small temple groves which, until recently, were fairly well protected. Now even these groves are being increasingly disturbed.

We wanted to do something to preserve the species of this type of vegetation, and when the Foundation for the Revival of Local Health Traditions agreed to fund the research, Jaap, Paul and myself began to survey the remnants of this evergreen forest and to collect seeds to propagate in Auroville. Now we are raising seedlings in Shakti and Pichandikulam and interplanting them in the greenbelt.

**AVT:** Can you really recreate the tropical dry evergreen forest? Haven't conditions changed over the years?

**Walter:** I think it's impossible to recreate the original forest. For one thing, the destruction of much of the indigenous flora in their original habitats has allowed many exotic species to find a niche, and some are here to stay. Secondly, in terms of our efforts in Auroville, the area of our greenbelt is far too small for us to talk about creating a real forest. However, we can preserve the species and create in Auroville a kind of living seed bank. In the future botanical garden we will also have an area devoted to this ecosystem — we have already planted 5,000 specimens — so that visitors can



Walter: working to preserve the tropical dry evergreen forest

appreciate what has almost been lost.

**AVT:** So you hope that the Auroville botanical garden will raise environmental awareness in those who visit it?

**Walter:** Yes. It will probably take about seven years before it's open to the public, but we plan to have, in addition to the area devoted to indigenous evergreen species, an arboretum of both indigenous and exotic species, a formal garden containing flowers, shrubs and cacti and facilities for research. The latter is important because there are still many studies to be done on the dynamics of the dry evergreen forest and the interrelationship between its species, and we need to map the exact location and assess the status of the remaining stands of indigenous forest in Tamil Nadu.

**AVT:** Do you think the destruction of India's forests can be reversed?

**Walter:** There are some hopeful signs. For example, the Tamil Nadu Forestry Department is now committed to planting indigenous trees, and the awareness of the need to save the forests is spreading. But the trend is still going in the wrong direction — during all the years of our survey we never came across a patch of remnant forest which had improved since our

last visit: everywhere there is destruction — and we are running out of time. The main problem is the sheer numbers of people. Outside of the cities, most these people are dependent upon firewood for cooking. How can you tell them not to cut?

**AVT:** You sound very pessimistic!

**Walter:** Not really, otherwise I would not be taking up these projects. Perhaps I'm not being realistic in trying to reverse the tide. However, since my work in Belgium before coming to Auroville involved destroying forests — for a certain time I worked for big contractors who built highways — I have to repair some of the karma I've built up!

Alan

## HUMOUR

# A rose by any other name...?

Some Aurovilians seem to change their names as regularly as snakes slough their skins. For Westerners with an itch to shed their old names, Sanskrit names are *de rigueur*. The Mahabharata and Ramayana in particular are a treasure trove of unpronounceable nomenclatures which even their proud new wearers need to practise extensively before sallying out into the Auroville boondocks. Of course, once they've mastered the half-strangled exhalations of their new Sanskrit name, woe betide anybody who mispronounces it. For they will be met with the arrogant stare of the new-born pandit.

In other parts of the world changing one's name is not unknown (marriage is perhaps the most extreme length to which some people go to effect such a transition). Aurovilians, however, tend to do it in a unique way. You need only pick up the AV News to learn that one Polly Potluck, who was

bathed in bliss after cutting her finger on the bread knife, will no longer answer to any name but Aurorotinanda.

Why do Aurovilians change their names? Mother gave new names on the basis, it seems, of her knowledge of an individual's essential identity and aspiration. In this sense, the new name was a mantra, a means of evoking and recalling an essential truth. Today, those Aurovilians who rename themselves often seem to have a similar objective. But sometimes also there seems a desire to close a page on the past, to shed with one's old name the burden of birthright, nationality and history in order to stride into the dawns of the future.

The renamers are not always successful in this. Just stand outside Pour Tous and watch someone whose new Sanskrit name means "Absolute Love for all Humanity" haranguing a beggar, or observe Auromahasaraswati, she of

be sent to botanical garden abroad, and then sent back with the seeds we requested to Delhi. Eventually Delhi would send them to us, but frequently it would take so long that many of the seeds which reached us were impossible to germinate. It also proved very costly.

We struggled on for some time with this arrangement but then, in the wake of the Rio Conference and concern about patenting rights, we suddenly found it became very difficult to export seeds to other countries. So we gave up. It was disappointing because we were one of the very few centres in India doing this work, and we received many requests from abroad for seeds.

the skill in works, trying unsuccessfully to wrestle a light bulb out of its socket. In other words, an individual's proud new name more often indicates a conspicuous lack of a certain quality rather than an established fact.

And for the future? Should we constitute a Naming Committee ('interim', of course) which will democratically allocate the remaining names in the Hindu pantheon, and establish a quota for the number of times an Aurovilian can change his or her name? Or better still, if we wish to transcend the ego, familial and nationalistic ties which encumber our old names, why don't we drop names altogether and simply call each other by our Pour Tous account numbers? Among other advantages, this would give a more business-like feel to many of our social interactions, divesting them of those regrettably human tendencies...

PT: 530223 (a.k.a. Alan)

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