

Auroville Today

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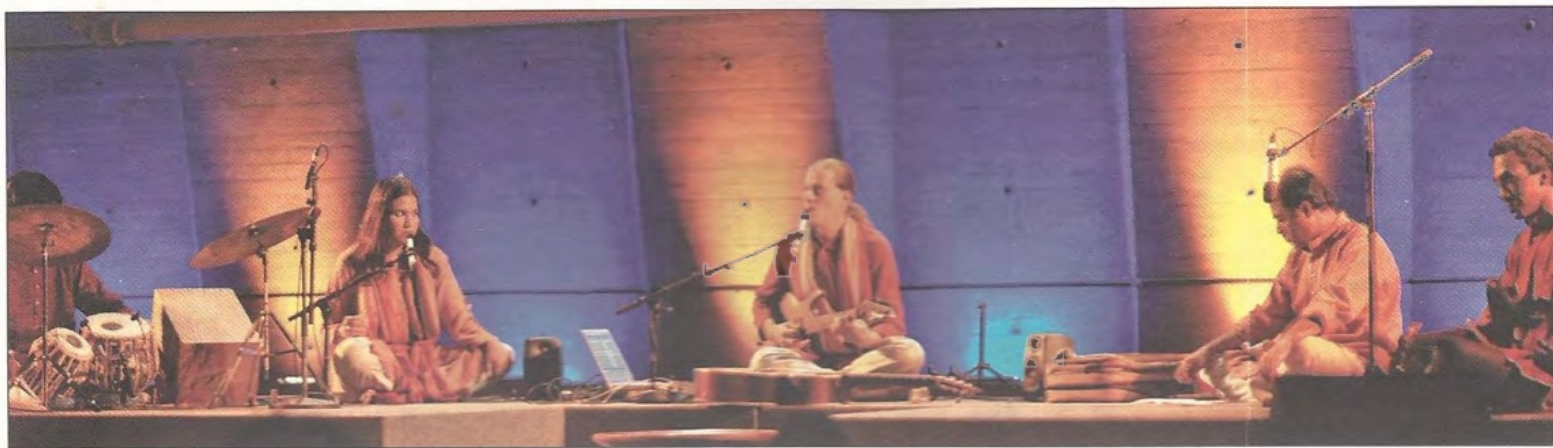
20th anniversary special

AUROVILLE

ARCHIVES

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988



Scenes from UNESCO House during the event to celebrate Auroville's fortieth anniversary. Clockwise from top left: Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan lighting the lamp as UNESCO's Director General Koïchiro Matsuura looks on; Round Table in progress; Working Committee member Carel presenting the Auroville plaque to Mr. Matsuura as Aster looks on; The Nadaka group in concert.

UNESCO celebrates Auroville's 40th anniversary

"Greetings from Auroville to all people of good will. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life." The Mother's invitation issued on February 28, 1968, was on the UNESCO invitation to celebrate Auroville's 40 years of collaboration with UNESCO.

Paris, October 10th. Conference Room I of UNESCO House on Rue Suffren was filled almost to its 1400 seat capacity. Ambassadors, permanent delegates and their staff, UNESCO staff, friends of Auroville, the international press, members of Auroville International and a handful of Aurovilians had answered the invitation to attend a Round Table on the theme of Auroville, An Emerging World: Its Future Horizons. This was issued jointly by UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura and Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO. The top three officials of UNESCO attended the meeting, two of them spoke. A Round Table, chaired by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, India's Representative to UNESCO's Executive Board, was followed by a cultural performance by Nadaka's group.

The Director-General gave the opening speech. "Over the last four decades, UNESCO has enjoyed a special relationship with this unique international township in South India." He recalled that, since Auroville's foundation ceremony, UNESCO has regularly reiterated its support for Auroville, as it embodies many of the principles underlying UNESCO's world-wide action "to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning as the basis for peaceful, sustainable societies." Since then, he said, Auroville has come "to stand out as an unparalleled human experiment in transforming these ideals into reality." Mr Matsuura went on to state that "Auroville's ability to survive and evolve over four decades

bears witness to the strength of the founding principles and the resolve and perseverance of its citizens. In today's globalized world fraught with regional conflicts and economic instability, it is especially reassuring to witness such enduring models of solidarity and humanism." The Director-General concluded by expressing his hope that the lessons learned in Auroville will inspire similar experiments in sustainable living in other parts of the world. "I look forward to continued collaboration between UNESCO and Aurovilians. May the alliance continue to thrive for many decades to come."

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan then read out a message from Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Expressing his regrets that it was not possible for him to attend the celebration due to his obligatory attendance at the Vijaya Dashami festival on October 9th in Kashmir, he conveyed his gratitude to UNESCO for its continuing support to the concept of Auroville. "In a world still torn by violence and disharmony, Auroville seeks to present an alternative paradigm based upon a creative pluralism and a collective commitment to certain higher values," wrote Dr. Karan Singh, and he expressed his confidence that Auroville would continue to flourish in the decades ahead.

The next speaker, H.E. Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, Chairman of UNESCO's Executive Board, wished "to see more copies of Auroville across the world and see more people think and act like the people of Auroville," and ensured the continuing support of UNESCO to Auroville.

The third speaker was Mrs. Françoise

Rivière, the Additional-Director General for Culture of UNESCO. Mrs. Rivière described Auroville as "a utopia in action in the real world, but also as a venue for experiments." She had visited Auroville 20 years ago, and gave an enthusiastic résumé of Auroville's achievements. "I remember being struck by the real humaneness of the people and this is something that I came into contact with once again when I started preparing this symposium." Explaining why UNESCO and Auroville were related, she said "Auroville embodies the principles that UNESCO has tried to promote for decades."

The next four speakers all came from Auroville.

Aster Patel spoke on the theme of the Round Table, "A new world is emerging and slowly begins to become visible, and old concepts such as money power, the notion of success, hierarchy, and education are beginning to be challenged. Also a new sense of spirituality is coming to the front which has its basis in matter and goes beyond religion."

"Auroville has generated a morphogenetic field of this form of experimentation, and UNESCO has lent it its powerful support."

Uma from the Upasana Design studio

and Hemant from AuroRe touched similar though more practical issues, namely how the research experiments of Auroville have benefited India. Uma gave examples of Auroville's outreach schools in the surrounding villages, the work of Auroville in the tsunami-affected areas and the birth and spread of the little doll tsunamika and the subsequent development of the gift economy. She also recounted the work of Upasana for the weavers in Varanasi; and Upasana's slow battle against plastic pollution through the *Small Steps* bag project.

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This issue is about two birthday celebrations.

In October, UNESCO, whose General Assembly has passed four resolutions over the years in support of Auroville, marked Auroville's fortieth year by holding a major event at its headquarters in Paris.

And Auroville Today itself is twenty years old: our first issue was published in the midst of the monsoon rains in November, 1988. We've always been averse to blowing our own trumpet, so we let someone else do it for us! In other words, we asked several long-term subscribers to choose their favourite or most memorable articles out of the three thousand or so we have published over the years. Enjoy.

The first issue



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Speakers at the round table: (Clockwise from above left) Koichiro Matsuura, Kapila Vatsyayan, H.E. Olabiye Babalola, Joseph Yaï, Françoise Rivière, and Aurovilians Aster Patel, Hemant, Uma, and Jean-Yves.

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"Auroville wants to be a role model for humanity. But for me the future is now. There is a lot happening which we can share with people. This is something which makes me proud to be Aurovilian," concluded Uma.

Similarly Hemant described Auroville as a living laboratory. He highlighted how experiments tried and perfected in Auroville have resulted in outreach initiatives throughout India and abroad. "The experience of Auroville is now available for sharing to the world." He mentioned in particular Auroville's environmental expertise, now used in projects such as the cleaning of the Adyar river in Chennai; the work on solar energy applied in pumping water in the state of Gujarat, and for solar lighting in the Himalayan region of Ladakh, where an elderly lady thanked the team with the memorable words "for you it is normal, but for us this is like giving light to the blind." Thanking UNESCO for celebrating its collaboration with Auroville, he expressed the hope that in the years to come this collaboration will become stronger. "We would like to share with you what we have done. We would also like to learn from you what is being done elsewhere in the world, for you are the repository of the world's experience."

Jean-Yves, addressed the topic of education in Auroville. He spoke about the concept of integral education – physical, vital, mental and spiritual education – and how to bring all these together under the control of "the sovereign entity" within the human being. "Our results are actually pretty good, when our children leave Auroville they fit into society. But we never pursue these experiments to the full, for we always have a tiny doubt about the teaching, organisation or whatever. Do we believe enough in our own dreams?" he wondered.

The presentations over, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan gave time for a lively question and answer session. The audience asked about Auroville's systems of education, organisation, method of decision making, financing, joining Auroville and whether one has to obey The Mother's ideals and teachings. The questions were answered by the Aurovilians, and also by Mrs. Rivière who joined in 'as a true Aurovilian'.

After the Round Table, the multimedia presentation "Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity" was shown in the auditorium. Then Ambassador Mukherjee introduced Nadaka's ensemble which gave a performance of contemporary Indian and World Music on the theme 'A Sense of the Infinite', made possible in part by funding from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Like the Round Table, the performance was a resounding success and the musicians received a standing ovation.

Carel

The General Assembly of UNESCO unanimously passed four resolutions in support (in 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1983) of Auroville, inviting "member states and international non-governmental organisations to participate in the development of Auroville as an international cultural township designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilisations in a harmonious environment with integrated living standards which correspond to man's physical and spiritual needs."

Utopia in action

The reaffirmation of the relationship between Auroville and UNESCO was a moving experience.

"Auroville doesn't belong to us Aurovilians." This was one of the strong insights that came to me while listening to delegates from UNESCO, the Indian Government and Auroville in the immensely large conference room of UNESCO House. The Auroville Charter says it, of course, in that famous first line: *Auroville belongs to nobody in particular but to humanity as a whole*. The UNESCO event showed that 'the eyes of humanity as a whole' are looking at Auroville and that our work is of a larger relevance than we usually assume.

The event was held in the best hall of UNESCO. The people at UNESCO did not know how many would attend. More than 400 would have meant a 'mega-success'. In fact, 700 attended the event, and over a 1,000 came to the evening's musical performance by Nadaka and his friends.

The speeches of Mr. Matsuura, Mr. Yaï and Mrs. Rivière did more than just explain the relationship between UNESCO and Auroville. They underlined the need in the world for experiments like Auroville – a need for 'utopias in action', as Mrs. Rivière called Auroville. Mr. Yaï cited examples of African attempts at utopias that failed, but which, he said, are of importance as they are powerful symbols. Doubtless, Auroville is another such symbol, and if it has succeeded so far, it is because its aims are higher and deeper than those of other utopias and because there is that powerful support from behind.



A spontaneous gesture after Uma's talk

them a standing ovation. But was it only for Nadaka's group? A long-time functionary at UNESCO, Antonella Verdiani, thought otherwise. "The ovation was addressed to Nadaka and all the musicians, but also, I sensed, to Auroville as a unique, living experience for Human Unity in the world."

Many individuals had worked behind the scenes to bring this event to fruition. We discovered 'Aurovilians at heart' inside the UNESCO staff and the staff of the Indian Delegation who worked tirelessly and inventively for the success of the event. Some had visited Auroville in the past and retained good memories of the experience. Members of Auroville International France played an essential role, not only in organizing the event, but also in helping out with accommodation and finances for the cash-strapped Auroville representatives.

In a corridor we met the ambassador of Laos who recalled his visit to Auroville many years ago and spontaneously invited the Auroville delegation to a dinner at UNESCO that evening – a dinner where each Asian-Pacific country-member of UNESCO brought two dishes of his or her country.

Auroville was all over Paris that week. There was a strong feeling of brotherhood among all; everything was going smoothly as if the success of the various Auroville events had been decided in advance. A very good article, *Auroville – laboratory of utopias in India* appeared in the French edition of this month's

National Geographic, and copies were made available to all the senior members in UNESCO. At the Salon Zen, Auroville International France organized a stand highlighting the work of the Auroville unit Aquadyn, which specialises in manufacturing water dynamisation machines. The Upasana team participated in the 'Ethical Fashion Show'. Auroville International took the opportunity to have a meeting in Paris.

The weather too was unexpectedly beautiful.

So was it really a coincidence when three Auroville delegates, boarding at different stations met each other in exactly the same compartment in the Parisian metro? There definitely was a 'Smile' in the air.

Carel



Uma participating in the Ethical Fashion Show in Paris to which Upasana was invited for its work with the Varanasi weavers.

That was the second experience – of the Presence. This became almost palpable when Uma spoke directly from the heart, in a pin-drop silence, about her work inside and outside Auroville. The speeches of the other Aurovilians were no less inspired. "We are sitting in UNESCO discussing concepts. These people are doing it," said Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan afterwards. Yet, no Aurovilian expressed pride in Auroville's achievements. "We are exploring virgin lands. We cannot wish to pretend to be something we are not," replied Jean-Yves in an honest answer during the question and answer session. It drew strong applause.

The concert of The Nadaka Group drew even more people than the Round Table. At the end, the public gave

CITY BEAT

This too can be sadhana

"Just chill out and be," is the motto of *The Living Room*, Auroville's latest community space.

Does the idea of cosy evenings promising friendships sealed over endless cups of tea, board games, and conversation sound appealing? Then perhaps its time to drop in on *The Living Room* – a bi-weekly event happening every Tuesday and Thursday evening at the Visitors' Centre community room.

It is the brainchild of Min.

"The idea is not new," says Min, who recently became an Aurovilian and works at Aurore, Centre for Scientific Research. "People have tried it out at different times and places – like at the Unity Pavilion, and Solar café, – but somehow they didn't last."

Min believes that *The Living Room* will work as long as there is need for a place for deeper connections in the community.

The inspiration, he says, came from several realities in Auroville. "Firstly, it is difficult here to connect with new people – most of us tend to move in our familiar circles of friends; secondly, spaces where people can meet socially, like restaurants or the theatre, are not really conducive to developing friendships." Min feels that the choice of furniture plays an important role in creating 'cosiness'. "From our initial feedback, people are in favour of low tables and large floor cushions."

But the third and more important reason, says Min, is that it is people-energy which keeps Auroville alive and inspiring. "I know many friends who are not in the habit of retiring early, and who miss the human contact. In fact one good friend left Auroville. He loved the work he was doing but he missed being able to meet people on a

social level. He said that he was not getting anything back on the human level and that he could not take it any more.

"You see, contact with like-minded people can be very inspiring, this too can be a part of sadhana!"

The Living Room opened its doors on October 2nd, on Gandhi's birthday. "There were old Aurovilians, second generation children, newcomers, interns, as well as guests. The energy was great."

The evening also saw the naming of the space, through democratic voting. *The Living Room* was the clear choice over other suggestions like *Mi Casa*, *Rendezvous*, *Masala*, *Jhaam*, and even *Happy Monkeys*!

While plans are afoot to get a satellite dish so that participants can watch live sporting events from around the world, Min and others are wondering how to face one challenge that has cropped up – how to keep the space lively and interesting for all with the right mixture of Auroville residents, volunteers and guests? "Because," says Min, "the atmosphere changes when guests are in the majority. Especially when one has to constantly explain to people what Auroville is about or why you have chosen to live here!"

Notwithstanding this concern, *The Living Room* continues, whatever the weather. "Thursdays especially seems to be a popular evening," says Min, perhaps because it is French movie night – with no English subtitles.



Kilian contemplates his next move

Tonight *The Living Room* is buzzing and alive with music, laughter and the low hum of conversation. Scrabble and the carom board seem to be popular choices. But at the centre of the room is an invisible sanctuary of silence – 7-year old Kilian is in deep concentration. He's playing chess against Dr. Ruslan.

Priya Sundaravalli

Turning Points: An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville

This new book is not primarily about Auroville's physical beginnings and development.

It's about how the pioneers were drawn here and what keeps them here today.

Christine, the editor, asked 24 Aurovilians the simple yet profound question: *How did She catch you and bring you here?* The answers are as varied as the Aurovilians. Jocelyn Shupack ('Big Jocelyn') was sitting in a room in Arizona

looking at a painting when it disappeared and she heard a voice say, "Come to India now!" Tim Wrey and family set off to explore Africa and India. They covered 25,000 kilometres without a hitch. Then their Land-Rover broke down...under the Banyan Tree. Francis came to Pondicherry looking for a good French restaurant. Charlie was virtually deported to India by his parents. Patrick initially stayed on because he was attached to his partner, Heidi, who was attracted to the Ashram.

While differing outer circumstances brought them here, most of the people interviewed were looking for something different. Andre Hababou was unsatisfied with his work in France. "I sensed there was a greater Truth, something in life to discover more important than the petty things my friends were talking about." Vijay, whose colourful background included fighting Franco's forces in Spain explains, "I could not live without a meaning in my life". Janaka wanted to be free "from the prison of myself". Paul Vincent wanted "to get hold of something worth living for – so that it would give me the strength to avoid being a bad person; so that I could transform my inner revolt into something positive and constructive".

So what did they find? What kept them here? It was the freedom to experiment, to create something from scratch, to be pioneers in a unique endeavour. Above all, it was Mother. The most interesting portions of this book describe the interviewees' meetings with her. What makes these accounts so moving is not just the overwhelming nature of the experience – the feeling of being known, accepted and unconditionally loved for the first time in their lives – but the fact that some of the Aurovilians initially struggled to resist it.

But *Turning Points* is also about what it meant to live in Auroville in the early years. Andre Hababou saw an

illustration of the Galaxy and thought the city was already built and that its inhabitants were transformed beings. The reality was somewhat different, as Vijay discovered. "I put up a hut, it cost me two hundred rupees at the time. There was nothing else. From here you could see the Banyan. Everybody thought I was mad. There was no road, no water, no fence, no nothing. I had a few books, a mat, a kerosene lamp (which was stolen the first day) and I lived

there for a year." And yet, as Shyama remembers it, "It was a wonderful time. We were so full of faith...For us it was sacred, this land. This was the divine city." "Those days carried so much force," says Jocelyn Elder ('Small Jocelyn'). "It was really like we were carrying the torch for her."

And today? Is the torch still alight? Christine has no doubts. "This collection of stories is not about the past. It is about a hidden source of water which has irrigated this land for more than 40 years [...] 40 years ago a Lady Diviner struck a rock and out of this rock water sprang. It gave life to this place, it gave life to the people and sustained them. It is still here and flowing. Its name is faith."

Yet faith is not necessarily always to the fore. In fact, the interviews seem to have provided some of the interviewees with the opportunity to recontact something deep within themselves. "It was beautiful to see," writes Christine, "how, while recounting their inner and outer journeys, at times they were seized by a deep and unexpected emotion which transported them (and the listener at the same time) into the domain of *agni*, the burning aspiration." It's revealing that when they remember meeting Mother the interviewees often switch from the past to the present tense: it is happening for them again now.

Some of the interviewees are critical of the present situation. Shyama laments "the smallness, the lack of generosity and faith". Small Jocelyn contrasts the joy of giving and sharing prevalent in the early days with the fact that "Now you have to fight the system in order to be able to give." Yet we should resist creating another Golden Age myth. The early years were not all paradisaical. The settlers also bitched and fought and lied, as some of Mother's messages from that time make clear.

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Extracts

On meeting Mother:

I felt she wanted to know me, to know who I was. But I did not want to show myself (of course all this was in silence). She looked at me and I did not want to be seen. I tried to escape but I could not. It was like a struggle, so tense that I almost passed out. So many negative thoughts assailed me, I had no control anymore. It came out of me continuously like a black cloud. Then I looked at her as if to say, 'All right, now you know what is inside.' At that very moment her face became the smile of a 14 year-old girl, with such a delightful smile. The atmosphere had completely changed and I realised that that smile was the same inside of me; the same smile. And I was bathing in an immobile white light.

Andre Hababou

I look at her eyes, and it is like an instant recognition: I know you! And you know me! And you know me better than I myself. And then you come to her and there she is, and of course one starts crying, because you are recognised...somebody, ah, truly knows you and accepts you. And you feel this overwhelming love, the power of her love, which kind of drowns you.

Shyama

I went without expecting anything, casually. The door opened, and...I have never been so astonished in my life, because I didn't see a human being there. There was a sari, there were two eyes, but it was like a window onto the infinite. The first impression was infinity, infinite space. I couldn't believe it. I had the impression I had lived all my life in a matchbox. And then wave after wave of love, like a tsunami of love. I had a very low opinion of myself... because I was very selfish and I didn't know what love was. So I thought, 'How can you possibly love

This is an inspiring book. It has its faults. It could do with tighter editing, Christine is occasionally over-enthusiastic in her questioning, not all the stories are uniformly interesting and it would have been nice to hear more Indian voices. But these are more than compensated for by the way it catches the vibration of those early years – the spontaneity, idealism and sheer craziness ("We were so naïve, we didn't have a clue") of that motley bunch of individuals that Mother scooped up and plonked down on an arid plateau in South India.

Above all, reading this book is a little like receiving *darshan* of the Mother. We experience how she approached each individual differently – now gentle, now amused, now penetrating – yet flooding them all with her light and unconditional love. We are reminded of her laughter, of her joyful unpredictability (When Big Jocelyn discovered that somebody had taken her hut she wrote to Mother asking what she should do. 'Find your psychic being' Mother replied!).

These stories make clear that something happened to those pioneers that utterly changed them; and that that experience still reverberates deep within them. Auroville would be a very different place if that reverberation, now muted, would ring out louder and louder.

This book is a wonderful beginning.
Alan

me? I felt ashamed, "Forgive me for bringing this piece of garbage in your room, I didn't know who you were!" She was loving me. I was feeling forever safe, safe..."

Vijay

She was sitting in her armchair. I kneel in front of her, with a bunch of withered flowers in my hand. Silence. She looks at you; you are like an opened book; you cannot hide anything. And then an amazing smile, a radiant smile, a big smile. She offers her hands like this (palms opened). I did not dare! But she said, 'Hey, hey!' (encouragement) so very gently and slowly I hold out one of my hands and place it in hers.

It was a very strong experience. From that instant it was decided.

Heidi

So I walked into her room, and I walked in front of her, and I am standing there, and all of a sudden somebody comes up behind me, a very strong fellow, and puts his hands on my shoulders and just pushes me down. I had this thing: 'Oh, oh, we've got a problem here', and I was about to get on my feet and give this guy a piece of my mind, and...the Mother catches my eye. And she is laughing. She seems to think that whatever it is it is very funny. I don't think it is very funny but she thinks it is very funny. And she kept on looking at me and talking to me, I presume in French. I did not understand a word of what she was saying, and basically from that point on I don't remember a thing.

The next thing I was standing outside the post-office, with this gigantic bouquet of blood red roses in my hand...I had no idea what just happened, but I understood something significant had happened. And I thought I had a great imagination and a great history of experiences that enriched that imagination. But I was wrong, because whatever happened went way beyond.

Francis

Turning Points. An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville. Auroville Press Publishers, 2008.

Rs. 245.

Available at the Information Centre bookshop and Pour Tous.

Those living outside Auroville who wish to purchase a copy may contact aurovillepress@auroville.org.in

AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

Governing Board reappointed

The Government of India has reappointed Dr. Karan Singh as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation for a period of four years starting September 6th, 2008. The Government also reappointed the former members of the Board Shri Ajoy Bagchi, Ms. Ameeta Mehra, Ms. Malini Parthasarathy, Dr. (Shrimathi) Aster Mira Patel and Dr. (Ms.) Mallika Sarabhai. In place of the late Mr. Roger Anger, renowned Indian architect and town planner Shri Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi has been appointed. The ex-officio Board members are Shri S.K. Ray and Shri Amit Khare, of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The appointment of the Board Members is for a period of 4 years starting October 29th, 2008.

PASSING

On 6th October 2008, Anuben Purani left her body at the Ashram Nursing Home apparently due to a fall and head injury. This was the apparent and physical cause of her leaving but a few months before she had dreamt that Sri Aurobindo was calling her, and another time that her friend Ravindra-ji had asked her what she was still doing here when Sri Aurobindo wanted her with them.

In fact at the age of 83 Anuben was leading a very active life of service. She was the Director of the Udavi School of Edaiyanchavadi to which she came out three times a week. She not only gave classes to the Udavi students but she taught Hindi and dancing at the Ashram and was already at work at 7am every day distributing fruit in the Ashram fruit room. She was also the editor of two Hindi magazines for which she wrote the editorials.

Anuben was the daughter of Purani-ji, the Gujarati revolutionary leader who joined the Ashram when Sri Aurobindo told him that the freedom of India was as assured as that the sun

Remembering Anuben



Anuben

would rise on the morrow. Anuben's first visit to the Ashram took place when she was one and a half, and crawled into Sri Aurobindo's room. She returned when she was six. There was no school then. It was Mother who directed her studies. She was the first child in the

only stopped at the time of the difficulties with the Society. In the early 80s she came out to teach dancing to the Udavi students with whom she fell in love. She used to say that she felt Sri Aurobindo waiting for her whenever she came to Udavi. She soon became so

Ashram. At the age of 12 she went to the Kalakshetra in Chennai to learn Bharatanatyam dancing for which she had a passion and at 16 she went to Bombay to learn with Uday Shankar, the brother of Ravi Shankar, who was an innovator in Indian dancing. She returned to the Ashram at the age of 20. The first work Mother gave her was in a boarding for children. Then she taught dancing to three generations of students and staged endless brilliant recitals and dance dramas.

In the very early days of Auroville, Mother asked her to come and teach dancing here which she did. She

involved with the School that she was asked to be its Director.

Once the Mother, on seeing a picture of her in a dance pose, said that the spirit of Beauty had wanted to descend in the Ashram and that it had found in Anuben its vehicle. This she brought to Udavi with her enriching background. She organized outings, concerts, brought the children to the Ashram exhibitions and opened a whole world for these children, some of whom had never seen Pondicherry or the sea. There were Christmas parties and a homeopathic dispensary to care for the children's physical and psychological health. With a team of conscientious and caring teachers which she led with tact, she saw to it that the children did well in their exams and advised them as to their futures. Many have done extremely well. Many are dedicated Aurovilians.

When the Udavi School children and her friends met the 10th day after her passing, a dance offering was held in front of a big photo of a smiling Anuben and then junior students of a French class paid tribute to her. One little boy said: "Elle adorait les enfants."

Oui, c'est vrai.

She will be missed. The School continues under her co-directors Sanjeev, and Charu. Her spirit remains.

Maggi

The most memorable of the last 20 years: readers' choices

To mark 20 years of Auroville Today, some of our long-term readers tell us which articles they enjoyed the most.

Tim: I have specially enjoyed the occasional appearance of the Colonel from his Club in the heart of St. James'. His contributions have always lightened my day, perhaps because his largely outdated attitudes and har-rumphing way of expressing himself can only be taken as a source of amusement. We need more such pieces in my opinion, if only to offset the seriousness of most of your other articles!

[Coincidentally, the Colonel has just sent us his latest missive.]

Sir,

I was enjoying my customary post-prandial nap when Hackett [Nurse Hackett] bursts in waving some paper or other at me. I was about to tell the old bat to bugger off – I enjoy my afternoon snooze, and I've earned it, dammit, I've done my bit for King and Country – but then she tells me it's Auroville Today.

Now I've always had a soft spot for your rag. It's one of the better reads since The Old Thunderer went aussie and The Telegraph stopped covering polo. Not that I read much these days, that's Hackett's province who, by the by, seems to take a special pleasure in reading me the obits.

Anyway, I like Auroville Today. Keeps me up-to-date with you chappies labouring away in a far-flung corner of the Empire. Damn hard work, what? Nothing but sand, flies and crocs as I remember, though there were also the tiger hunts. Oh, and the balls in Simla where those good-lookin' fil-lies up from the plains showed us a thing or two. Hmm. Where was I?

Now Hackett, who keeps a record of these things, god knows why, tells me your November issue will be your 20th birthday. Damn good show, chaps. Takes pluck, staying-power, kind of thing you need when hacking your way through the Auroville jungle or fighting them Afghan hordes.

Hackett also tells me that your Metro...Mitri...anyway your golden thingy in the centre is now finished and open for business. Great work! Bit like Las Vegas, what? Hope it pulls in the punters.

And colour, dammit, you chappies at Auroville Today have gone in for colour! Bit of a shock at first – I'm not one for change, like my kippers for breakfast, a sundowner or two before dindins – but got to admit it's brightened up the old rag. Maybe now you could run a few more pics of the female of the species? Just joking, what!

OK chaps, the Hackett approaches with her damn potions and infernal grin. Keep up the good work and remember the old Swahili proverb, 'When the bird flies south, face the goats to the wall'. Follow that and you'll never go far wrong.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

A.J.K. Buckfast-Smythe (Colonel, retired)

[As is customary with the Colonel's letters, we feel constrained to provide a glossary of terms that are not in common usage]

- 'post-prandial' – after a meal
- 'rag' – newspaper
- 'after The Old Thunderer went aussie' – after Rupert Murdoch took over The Times
- 'obits.' – obituary columns
- 'fil-lies' – young women
- 'pulls in the punters' – attracts the gambling fraternity
- 'kippers' – smoked herrings
- 'sundowner' – alcoholic drink consumed at sunset
- 'dindins' – dinner
- 'when the bird flies south...' – regrettably, the meaning of this proverb eludes us.

Priya: I choose three poems, all from the first issue, November 1988. The magnificent and grand lines from Walt Whitman as they underscore all that Auroville yearns for; and two others by Auroville Today's editors, Roger Harris and Alan, who speak of the love for the City of Auroville and for beloved India.

I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks
of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it
led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

Walt Whitman (1860)

City of Peace

City of peace and god's unguarded light
City of silence and the rich unfolding word,
City of love and the laughter of the Gods,
City of man his labour born of dream.
City of harvest born of canyon soil,
City of rich acres sown with strong-eyed toil.
City whose song the hidden soul shall sing,
City of lost boundaries – province once of kings.
City whose deep calm at sunset does recall
Ages when the earth stood golden-heaven tall
City on night's borderline outpost of dawn's light
City born of promise and a conqueror's delight.

Roger

India

The wonder of this country is
Return:
Always, it seems,
The same sun,
Winking off leaves and mud,
The same boys,
Splay-toed,
Chanting after dusty cows.
And always, somehow,
That twitch at the curtain –
Fine me! Find me! –
Before the setting sun
Bloods
The dying earth

Alan

Alain Grandcolas: I particularly liked this article since the interviewer has recreated in a lively manner the atmosphere of this working place where hi-tech products are being developed.

Hanging out with the Cynergy dream team (February, 2004, AVT 181)

"Basically at Cynergy, as the name suggests (somebody should tell him it's misspelled) we're doing a combination of everything," says Akash. "At the moment I'm mainly designing websites for people outside Auroville – that's the only way we can keep this place running – but Bas and I are also creating software and doing website design for units in Auroville."

Sukhamuni, sitting beside Akash at the improvised interview table, is getting restless – he's been away from his computer for five minutes and is experiencing withdrawal symptoms. I ask him where he fits in. Long pause as he works out what he can tell me. "Tell him about Linux," prompts Akash. "Right. Well, the nice thing about Linux, which is an operating system upon which you can run all your applications is that, unlike Windows, it is free. It was developed by a team of pro-

grammers who got together to do something different."

How long does it take to learn Linux? Akash waves an airy hand. "For a basic word-processing programme it shouldn't take longer than..." He eyes me closely. Clearly he's dealing with a dummy. "...thirty minutes."

What else are they working on? "Right now," says Akash, "we're doing interesting experiments with free energy and trying to build an n-machine." Pardon? Akash looks at his watch. This is taking longer than the 17 minutes he had generously allocated me. He speaks quicker. "It's about designing a machine which produces more energy than you put in." "Doesn't that violate one of the basic laws of physics?" I ask. Bad move. Akash launches into an involved explanation of how it's basically all about magnetic fields collapsing and recreating themselves while, in the process, generating electricity.

He gestures to a remote corner of the workshop. "We've already got a small

rotor running." I take a closer look. Unfortunately the eternal energy machine is not running that afternoon...

"All this working with computers. Does it change the way you think, behave?" "Definitely," says Akash. "As a programmer you tend to analyse things much more objectively in terms of efficiency. Not 'What do I feel like doing?' but 'What's the easiest thing to do?' And this applies to everything. For example, when I get up in the morning I analyse the most energy-efficient way of combining preparing my breakfast with going to the bathroom." Does that mean he prepares his breakfast in the bathroom? Perhaps he even sleeps there also? Now THAT would be efficiency.

Abruptly he and Sukhamuni get up. Clearly they've been programmed to terminate the interview at 4.57 p.m. "Well that's it, then. Be seeing you."

They're out the door in 12 seconds flat. Dust, brushed by the sun, swirls in their slipstream. Oh, brave new world.

Aryadeep: Carlos (Dr. Karl Pfauter), Germany's Consul-General in Madras for many years and a staunch supporter of Auroville, wrote this article in honour of Auroville's 25th anniversary in 1993 in full awareness that he would not be alive by the time it got published. This article reminds me of a typical statesman who was approaching the end of his life and opens his heart and speaks from the maturity of his understanding.

A Changed World (February/March 1993, AVT 49/50)

Auroville, you are celebrating the 25th anniversary of your foundation. Accept the greetings of an old friend who was present at your birth and inauguration and who has often returned to visit; who thinks of you with gratitude and longing. I greet all of you who live here in admiration of your effort, your courage and your constancy.

The turn of the century approaches, and the year 2000 waits with stern countenance. We are entering a changed world whose surface has been rent; an empire, founded for an eternity, lies shattered. The scourges of nationalism and fundamentalism are spreading contagiously. A sombre scenario has been staged, with interacting parts: global climatic change, the melting of the polar ice-caps and destruction of the rain forests; diminishing cultivable surface, in addition to which is the exponential growth of the world population...

In the meantime, will the tormented earth, whose primordial treasures we plunder, become restive and bring her seas to overflowing? An old voice says, 'I see a time coming when God, no longer taking pleasure in it, will again destroy everything to renew creation. I

am certain that everything is designed to that end, and in the distant future the time and hour are already foreseen when the period of renewal will begin.' (Goethe, 1829)

It is both tempting and simple to portray the end. The apocalyptic catalogue is sufficiently voluminous. But, Auroville dare not join in; it is bound to the future. 'The march into the unknown has to be traced step by step.' When we turn the Janus-faced future, we see another, brighter side.

A resonant 'What now?' rings out, clearly and insistently. Ardent search in ancient books of wisdom, and a new Gnosticism announces itself, '...a knowledge of man which leads to perfection, to rediscovery of a buried self'. These words uttered two thousand years ago sound familiar in the context of Auroville. Are we experiencing a new *kairos*? Will we recognise and take advantage of it? We would then have a long expanse of history before us...

I have received more in Auroville than I have been able to give. At an advanced age and after long, winding years of life and work, I was given a new youth, for there is in Auroville no harsh division between the generations, no discriminating separation

between young and old. In my own country, I would have sat on the waiting-bench of old age, in anticipation of death.

Only a brief rest is granted us on this threshold, a retrospect in joy and gratitude, for reflection and self-criticism, because 'Auroville will be the place...'

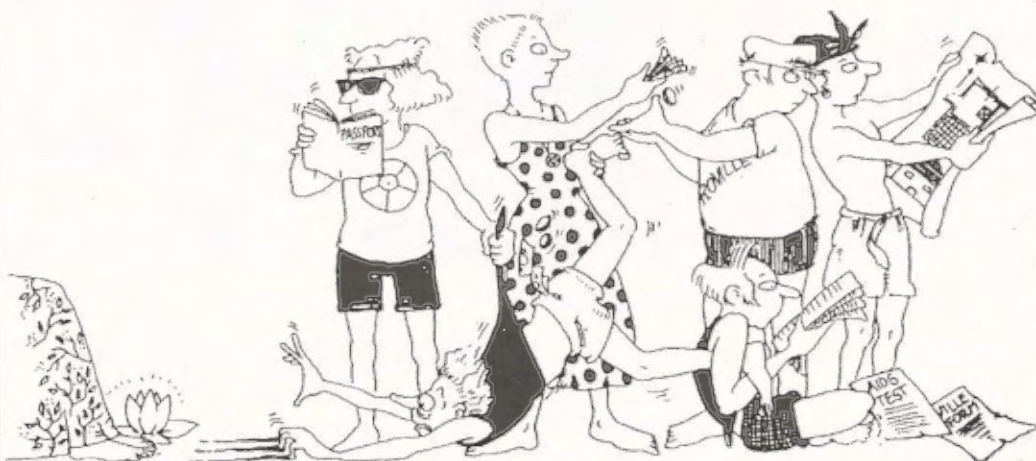
Let me reappear among you within an appropriate time, not more than twenty years, and be supple for the yoga, more concentrated in meditation – but better still, as a child, to be taught in New Creation and Last School. In whatever form, I hope to be mercifully accepted by the Entry Group and to find a decent work.

The Matrimandir will have been finished and its light will shine far beyond Tamil Nadu; the Inner Chamber will have had its effect. Conciliation, peace and harmony will rule...

Do not be troubled by reproaches of utopia. Man has never been without utopias and has always replaced the destroyed anew. But we no longer have time for future utopias, for ideal designs for a distant future. We must remain on earth and bring change. We live according to the principle of hope. Let Auroville remain our hope.

A bientot, goodbye, so long!

Joining Mother's Auroville... is not always straightforward.



CARTOON BY LAURA

Manoj: One of the articles that left a good impression on me was the one on the world of ammas. It touched me because you brought out a domain of life that is otherwise neglected or on the periphery of our collective awareness. Through this article, you highlighted the ammas with love and respect as an integral part of our collective existence.

The hidden world of ammas (December, 2006, AVT 214)

Ammas, literally 'mothers', are in Auroville parlance female household and community workers.

Their day starts, on average, at four in the morning. This is the time they have for themselves, when the men folk and the children are still asleep. It's time for some personal care. A short while later they go to the community tap to collect water – if they're lucky there isn't a long queue of other women. Back home, they light the firewood stove, and the cooking begins; breakfast and lunch for all. Soon the husband will wake up, and his tea must be ready. By seven, the children are prepared for school. Shortly afterwards the ammas cycle to their work in Auroville (a journey of up to one hour), which starts at eight or half past eight. Their cycles are loaded with a lunch box and often the family's laundry which they do during their lunch hour. Few Auroville employers object.

After their Auroville work is completed, the ammas cycle home. Then comes the cleaning of the house, the cooking of dinner, looking after the children and all the other household chores – the men never do any work in their homes. The ammas' day normally ends at ten or eleven....

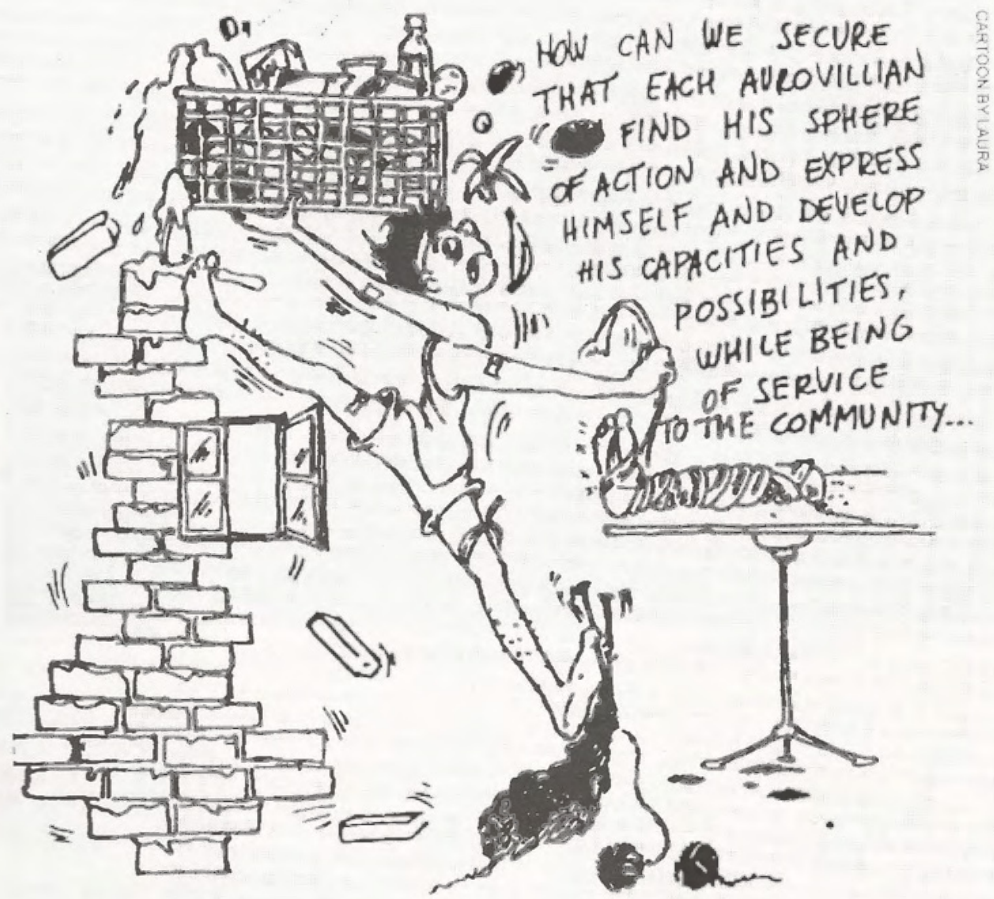
Are they happy to work in Auroville? The reply is unanimous. "Very much so." They all agree it is one of the better

things to have happened to them. Why? "Auroville is such a peaceful place to work in – we have *mana nimmathi* (peace of mind) when we arrive here to work every morning." "Here we have our own space to take care of, and we treat the houses we work in as our own houses, taking great care with things, sometimes even making *kolams* or arranging flowers," says Gowri. "Sometimes there are children in the house, and the job becomes even more enjoyable," adds Meenambal.

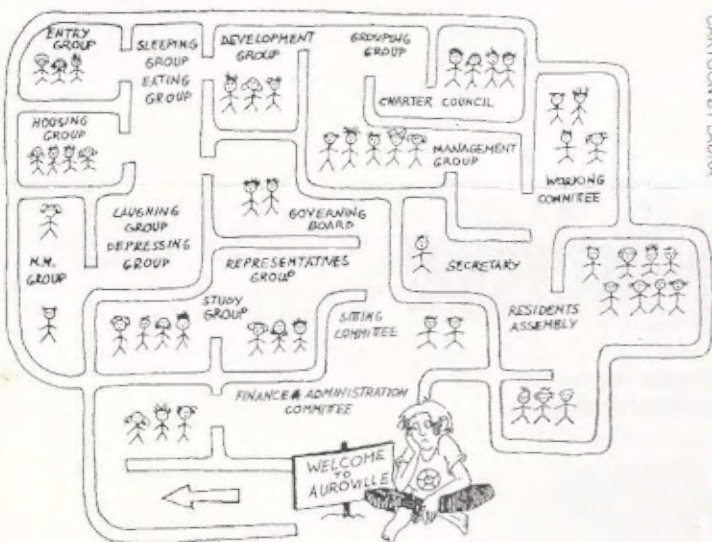
"There is a job security here that we don't have working outside. In the village there may be work one day and no work the next. And the regular salary that we get gives us an inner strength and confidence that we can do something extra for our children or meet a sudden expense without fear." The attitudes of their Aurovilian employers, with respect to bonuses, severance pay, the health care scheme and pension scheme are also much appreciated....

Watching the ammas go about their work, one cannot miss the special spirit of joy about them, despite their circumstances back home. "When we meet in Auroville, we can unburden ourselves and share our difficulties." There is an openness in the conversations and everybody knows each other's family life inside out. It is like a sisterhood.

Annemarie (ex-team member): The cartoons Laura drew for Auroville Today during the early 1990s are among my favourite items. With great skill, she managed to capture a number of peculiar situations which Aurovilians found themselves dealing with. Here, for example, is her 'multi-tasking' cartoon – I'm sure a lot of Aurovilian women (and men) will recognise themselves in it.



Laura's cartoon of a multi-tasking Aurovilian.



CARTOON BY LAURA

Alan: I've always admired this article. It's a marvellously evocative way of presenting the history of the bioregion.

Our Coromandel beach of time (January, 1991, AVT 25)

Three thousand years ago, people with skin the colour of new mango leaf played with gold, silver and copper and buried their dead in large pots amongst Albizia and neem trees on a thorny Coromandel plateau. After the rains, the scrub jungles would be covered with a blue haze, the flower that later was named by Mother 'Miracle'.

A thousand years later, homesick Roman masons made bricks from the laterite soil, and built watchtowers on which they waited for their boats to bring news of the far away imperial dream. Or were the ships over the horizon Carthaginian, Arabian or Abyssinian? Five hundred years later, the king told his mason to carve into a wall in Irumbai village that the land to the north, south, east and west – thousands of acres – were given to Shiva. For a week, the honeyed voice of the poet-saint Thiruganasamandar sang the praises of the Gods, the people and nature in the temples of Ozianpet, Thiruvakkarai and Irumbai. The paradise flycatchers dance in the Miracle scrublands on the Coromandel plateau.

Seven hundred years later, as ecstatic gopurams rose with the Chola dynasty throughout the plains of southern India, it is said that the 'great achiever', Raja Raja Chola, formed the massive miles and miles of bunds that created the four great lakes that catch and channel water flowing northwards from our thorny plateau. Migrating flocks still wade and rest among these reedy, misty acres of water.

The tides of peoples, creeds and dynasties have left their mark on our Coromandel beach of time. Travellers, traders and soldiers, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British came and went collecting spices, fragrant timber and taxes. More and more of the scrub forests of our laterite plateau were cut and cash crops like indigo were sometimes grown for the master's mills.

The last elephants were seen here at the end of the 19th century. Forty years ago, bears could still be found in the last wilderness near Edaiyanchavadi. Today girls with skin the colour of new mango leaves pick roses close to where the ancients were entombed and, on a misty morning, over land given to the temple thousands of years before, blue-eyed, fair-haired children gallop ponies into forever.

B (ex-team member Bill Sullivan): What pops spontaneously to mind is my very short spontaneous interview with Bhakti. It is so quintessentially her. Then she was seven and now she is twenty. She is still living the wisdom of the song that Nuria taught her, still singing, still dancing.

Under the sky (June, 1996, AVT 89)

Bhakti was born in Auroville. She is now seven years old. Bill asked her for an interview.

Bhakti: What is 'interview'?

AVT: Asking you some questions about your life for people to read.

Bhakti: I don't want an interview because I don't want people to know my things.

AVT: But can't you say something that you want people to know?

Bhakti: Yes, I have a song. (sings) 'All things are shining under the sky'. This song I learned in Nuria's class where we go for singing and dancing but first we had exercises to wake up and get the rhythm.

AVT: Anything else?

Bhakti: That's all I want to tell you. That is enough!



Franz: For me was the September issue 1993 was a very special issue. Nirodbaran was the first speaker from the Ashram who spoke to us and it was the beginning of Auroville's opening up towards the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo as I knew Him. A talk by Nirodbaran (September 1993, AVT 56)

On 14th August, Nirodbaran, one of Sri Aurobindo's personal attendants for many years, gave a talk in Pitanga Hall in which he shared his memories of Sri Aurobindo.

Your invitation came to me as a mystic surprise – I call it 'mystic' because I feel that this occasion has been ordained by Sri Aurobindo – and I readily accepted it. It has made me think of Sri Aurobindo very much in the past month, and to pray to him to give me the inspiration so that I can truly convey to you something of what Sri Aurobindo is.

What I observed of his outer life over these years [1938-1950] – for I had no inkling of his inner life – can be divided into two categories; the impersonal and personal aspects... He started revising *The Life Divine* for hours on end, without referring to any books, like a machine that had been set going. He did not notice us – we were like shadows – and he was completely impervious to his bodily needs or the intense heat. In

this way he completed the three volumes of *The Life Divine* before beginning to work again on *Savitri*.

This, then, was the impersonal aspect of Sri Aurobindo, which was the hallmark of his being and consciousness. But there were times also when he came down from his high consciousness, and would talk and joke with us; and these, for us, were the most beautiful times. We could ask anything, and he would answer slowly, in a few words, with a very sweet smile. But he would never look at us, and hardly ever call any of us by our name.

His humour encompassed everything. For example, during the war everything was rationed. And we, his attendants, among our other duties had to see that he cleared his bowels daily. One day we noticed he had passed very little. 'Sir', we said, 'What is this? Please try harder.' 'It's war economy!' he replied. He was not one of these stiff, high and dry yogis!

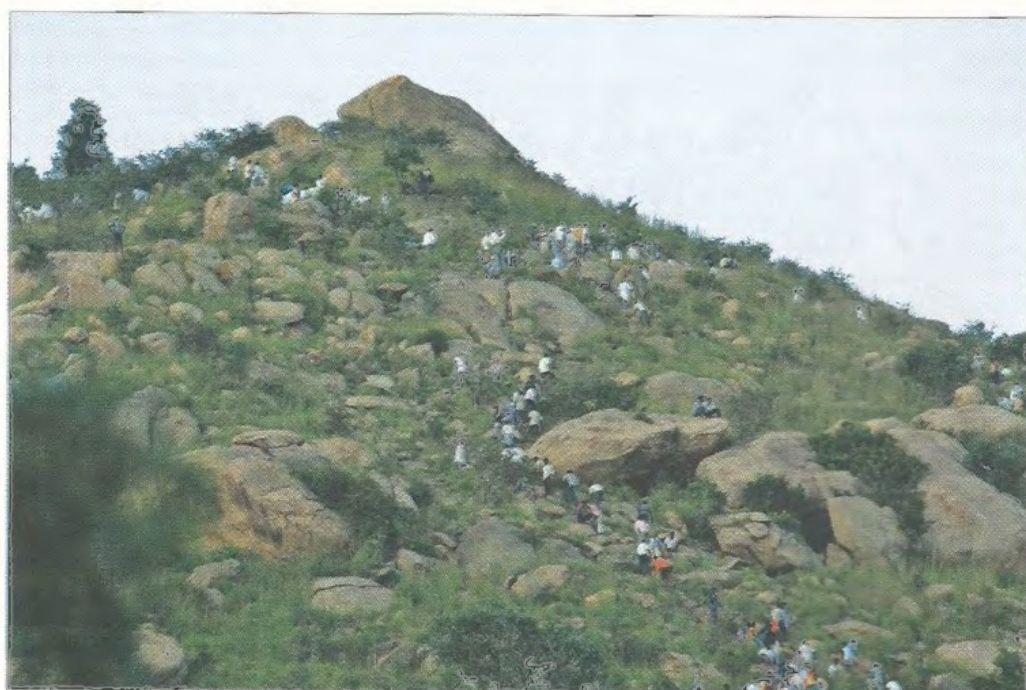
"At the very end his personal aspect was also there. Before he passed away he

embraced his great *bhakta*, Champaklal, three, four, five times in a vast recognition of his service. We were amazed. Then, a few minutes before the end, he called me. 'Nirod, give me some water.' It was the first time he had called me by my name, and those few, sweet words were imprinted on my soul....He was always poised, serene, above all attachments, perfectly free. He himself said, 'There is nothing human in me'. But it wasn't inborn. He told us he had had many faults in his nature, but he had transformed his nature by sheer *tapasya*, by the practice of yoga, by identification with the Divine. For nobody can become a perfect man by his own efforts.

"So, brothers and sisters, you are indeed very lucky to come to Auroville, to do Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's work through their Force. There are many wonders in the world today, but Matrimandir and Auroville will surpass all the other wonders because they are spiritual – and you will be the instruments of their creation."

Auroville and Ramana Maharishi

Robert Hessing finds peace at a sacred hill.



Devotees slowly make their way up to Arunachala's peak.

Approaching Tiruvannamalai the sight of the holy Shiva mountain, Arunachala, always fills me with joy and peace. Five years ago I drove up there for the first time, together with my girlfriend. We were testing out my newly refurbished Royal Enfield motorbike, a passion of mine. In 'Tiru' we wanted to experience the Deepam festival, but there was nowhere to stay. Asking around we finally found a place to sleep 8 kilometres outside of town, in a small ashram called Sri Anantha Niketan. We often go back there, and the caretakers have become good friends.

My favourite place for meditation is Skandashram, a small cave on Arunachala, and former home of the sage Ramana Maharishi (1879–1950). It is a 20-minute walk uphill, and there is a special place to sit and concentrate, both inside the small building which is built around the natural cave, and outside in the garden. Within the building the walls display photos of the sage, dimly lit by oil lamps. For me Virupaksha cave, another cave up the hill, and Ramanashram come next as places conducive to concentration. Ramana Maharishi spent his time at all these three places. People refresh themselves at a fresh mountain spring. The 'holy water', as it is called, flows out from the hillside. From the lookout nearby one can observe the panoramic spread of the town below with its main temple. However, mind your picnic box, for the ever-naughty monkeys have scant respect for personal belongings.

Over the centuries it has been said that the land within a radius of three yojanas (approximately thirty miles) of the Arunachala mountain is famous as *Shivabhumi*, which means the land of Shiva. It is believed that those who reside within this limit are certain to attain 'Liberation'.

The mountain Arunachala is considered to be the embodiment of Shiva. Ancient stories tell of a rivalry between the Hindu trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, about who was the most powerful. To show his power and put an end to all discussions Shiva created a vertical column of fire that had no beginning and no end. Each year on the full moon in December this event is commemorated as 'Deepam', when a fire is lit on the hilltop. On that occasion some Aurovilians walk the 14-kilometre path around the mountain, together with more than a million pilgrims from all over India. The circumambulation is said to release one's karma, especially if it is done bare-footed. (I did the walk once but in the end my feet were killing me). Going around Arunachala is said to be as effective as a circling the world. The whole world is condensed into this Hill.

There are plenty of legends about the mountain. Some old stories describe tunnels and caves within it. Ramana Maharishi had a vision in which he saw cities with streets and a whole world inside the mountain. It is said that great rishis work there for the benefit of the world. Tiruvannamalai, especially the area around Ramana's ashram, attracts self-realized masters, and many who say they are; come from all over the world. Each self-realized master has his own method of reaching the heart of the seeker. Many offer *satsang* against a donation. *Satsang* happens when a person with a higher or 'divine' consciousness shares information on how to reach this state of consciousness, sometimes through discourses, but often through singing songs together.

Ramana Maharishi taught self-inquiry. The purest form of his teaching was the powerful silence that radiated from his presence and stilled the minds of those attuned to it. Though he left his body more than half a century ago, his presence is still around. Tuning into his energy immediately makes me quiet. On both the mental and cellular level I feel the changes happening.

Better go to Ramana

The Mother as well as Sri Aurobindo sent members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to the Maharishi, sometimes just for a change of air, sometimes for following a spiritual path different from that of the Sri Aurobindo ashram.

"People would come to the Ashram, to Sri Aurobindo, and he would ask them what they came for," says Tatiana from Savitri Bhavan, who has studied Sri Aurobindo. "If it was just for peace he would say: 'better go to Ramana Maharishi. We are here for something else'."

Raman from the Working Committee often goes to Tiruvannamalai. "I feel connected to the mountain, but I also visit Ramanashram and Skandashram." Raman feels the presence of Shiva in the mountain. "It is the fire energy. I take an early walk around the mountain or go in the evening". Both Ramana and Sri Aurobindo represent for him the fire energy, the energy of the descent of the Divine. He considers himself lucky to be under their influence.

Other Aurovilians like to visit, like Veronica from Creativity. "Before I came to Auroville I had studied Indian philosophy. I found the idea of the Self and the ego fascinating. I read a few books on self-inquiry, on 'Who am I?', which is Ramana's main teaching." A year ago she stayed in Tiruvannamalai for two months. "I needed some inner peace to reflect on myself to see what changes I needed to make in my life. At 'Tim' I can access that state of peace more easily."

She adds, "Auroville is also a spiritual place, but living in Auroville there is a very intense interaction with the other community members. Dealing with this is not always easy. Sometimes I wonder what part of me is responding to an external situation. Is that me? Is that my personality? Is it my ego? Am I responding emotionally in the same way as I was approached? Spending more time in Tiru has really helped me not to worry and not to project into the future, to understand emotionally on a deeper level what it means to live in the moment. It teaches me on a cellular level to recognise that energy and to differen-

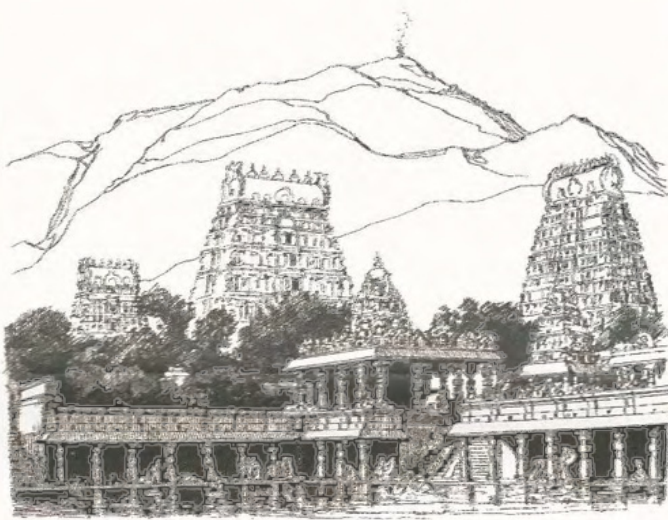
tiates, so that it goes beyond the intellectual. That's my daily practice."

"I have always had a fascination with Ramana," says Priya, my colleague from Auroville Today. "It is those gentle liquid eyes of his – so full of kindness, understanding, and a silent love. I have carried his photo with me since I was a teenager, the same time I got introduced to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. For me there is no conflict in being in Auroville and cherishing Ramana plus a few Others."

"I remember last year, a few days before my birthday, how I became so restless one day. It was as if some crazy thought had possessed me and I just wanted to drop everything and rush away to Tiruvannamalai to spend a week at Ramanashram. I called for a taxi and left that very afternoon – no room reservations, nothing! I remember a feeling of such elation and joy and a strange sobbing within, as we sped towards Tiru. And I had never stayed at the Ramanashram before."

"It was so beautiful when I got there. Strangely quiet but the whole place seemed soaked with peace. There was a gigantic tree in their sandy parking lot, knotted and ancient looking but so alive – it was like a huge motherly presence. Seeing it – I should say 'her' – I began to weep."

"I managed to find a place at their guesthouse. When the gentleman making the room-booking asked my reasons for being there, I just said 'I am from Auroville; and I just need to be here now.' He seemed to understand and didn't ask any more questions."



Sketch of the main Shiva Temple at Tiruvannamalai town by a 19th century traveller. Behind is Mount Arunachala.

Arul Ashram – Shanti Bhavan

A haven of peace and goodwill just down the East Coast Road.

I once told a friend I was going to stay for a few days in a place I loved. I described it as a small Christian monastery that cares for terminally-ill patients. It also has monks and nuns and a 'Rule of Silence', except for a chatting period of 10 minutes after lunch. My friend looked horrified at my choice for rest and relaxation.

I no longer try to explain why I go there. Many Westerners have a strong reaction to Christianity, especially to priests and nuns, that I find disturbing.

When I stay at Arul Ashram with its Christian statues of the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary I return to my own Christian childhood. I was born into a Catholic family in the north of England in 1940. My mother was the 7th child in a large Irish Catholic family and to them it was unthinkable to miss Sunday Mass or not attend the local Catholic School. Most of her sisters married Catholics or their future husbands, like my father, became converts. When my mother was 50 years of age she saw that none of her sisters, their husbands or children went to Mass anymore. In one generation religion seemed to have disappeared from England.

I have found my own spiritual path in Auroville but I feel twice blessed as I still have a strong reservoir of Christian faith and devotion, the depth of which I was not aware of until I stayed at Arul Ashram.

I spoke to Brother Vladimir, a German monk who has been there for four years after serving in poor African countries. "Our order of the Congregation of St. John was started in 1975", Brother Vladimir explained. "I guess a new order was created as the spirit likes diversity, and we now have houses in Africa and South East Asia. We have no special mission here. We try to live the life of the spirit in prayer and contemplation wherever we are, and respond to the needs of the situation. Here in the villages of Tamil Nadu things can be quite complicated." He points to a

SPIRITUAL SEARCH

Mother once said that a crucial first step was to make contact with the Divine. It didn't matter so much which path was taken as long as it assisted the individual in reaching this goal.

Here some Aurovilians speak about other paths which they feel complement the Integral Yoga and which help them in their spiritual search.

"That evening I sat in their spacious hall as the *satsang* was going on. It was soothing to watch all the devotees walking around the statue of Ramana – some of them flitting about so lightly, and to listen to their devotional singing. I felt like a fly on the wall, but I was so happy just watching all this."

"Later as I sat in Sri Ramana's room my heart feeling fulfilled, I looked at His eyes on the painting of his that is kept on a sofa. And then I distinctly heard a gentle voice speaking inside me – 'My child, your place is not here, it's there.' That was it. It was both a relief and yet embarrassing."

"When the office opened next morning, I went back to the same man and before he could say anything, I said, 'I have got my answer; now I have to return!' Again he seemed to understand and no questions! I rushed to catch the next available bus to Pondy, and as we were hurtling back towards Auroville, I never felt lighter or more happy."

Rolf from Petite Ferme likes to go to Tiruvannamalai because for him Arunachala is the centre of spiritual energy in South India. "From Arunachala lines of energy flow to Rishikesh and Mount Kailash in North-India, and abroad to places like Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia." Rolf goes every year for a one-week *vipassana* retreat near the mountain.

People from Tiruvannamalai also visit Auroville and the Ashram. Murali, a devotee of Ramana Maharishi, lives in a small ashram near Tiruvannamalai. "I never met the Mother, but I have sat at her *Samadhi* often. I remember four years ago that I received healing from just sitting there; it was healing of the body as well as psychological healing. I feel peace sitting at Mother's *Samadhi*, similar to the peace I feel being in Ramanashram. I would say that at Ramana Ashram the energy is more intense, at Mother's *Samadhi* the energy is very soft."

Robert

plaque on the wall of the little cloistered hospital for the male patients, "Look closely and you will see that originally the plaque given by the Bishop of Pondicherry said 'Hospital for the dying and destitute'. We have scratched that out as it is offensive to us. We try to give them a certain dignity in their death."

"We now have five Brothers staying here, four 'contemplative' Sisters and two Sisters who work with the patients. We teach novitiate Tamil young men who want to join the priesthood and are always available to help the local village people. It can sometimes be difficult to balance the religious life and the chaos of the Tamil villages!"

Brother Vladimir visits Auroville once a month to give Mass to a small group of Christian Tamils. A few Aurovilians go and stay at Arul Ashram as they love the silence and different perspective of another spiritual discipline. "I always come back completely refreshed" said one lady from Courage. "Being allowed to join in the beauty of their ancient yet very familiar tradition has a profound effect on me. It renews my perspective on the Integral Yoga and this is always very valuable."

The monks can sometimes be seen buying bread and cakes in the Auroville Bakery. They are very distinctive on the East Coast Road on their mopeds with their grey robes flapping.

On my last visit to Arul Ashram I was asked if I would like to join in their theology class and I sat there with half a dozen Tamil novitiates stumbling through Latin psalms. I then stayed on for their Tamil class and was very impressed with their dedication and proficiency.

I only visit occasionally, but am always deeply grateful for their hospitality and the presence of these lives spent in prayer.

Dianna

Vision Quest in a Cave

You might ask why anyone would want to sit in a hot cave for a month. Well, 'anyone' might not, but 'someone', especially if that person has been trained in Vipassana meditation; might, particularly if inclined towards radical ways of 'getting to know him or herself.'

And if that 'someone' is lucky they may have a friend who is fulfilling his life-wish by creating such a place with lots of habitable caves scattered over the landscape where he invites people to come and meditate, while providing the basic essentials so they can give full attention to this seeking.

This was my case when I decided to go and spend a month in Hampi at Horst's Island Sanctuary.

Although Integral Yoga does not advise a life-long renunciation of the world and escape into *nirvana*, it certainly does advise that sadhaks follow their inner guide on their own unique path.

So I thought that if I sat for a month in a cave, resolutely resisting normal distractions, I could perhaps train both the vital and my monkey-mind to quieten down, and perhaps obey the spirit.

I had a very good retreat. Of course, meditation is not in itself pleasant: one gets sick, bored, tired, discouraged, or obsessed – as I noticed I became – watching my body's heat, or the mosquitoes, or the itching, or my aching back, or worse, the preoccupations with food and bowel movements! But one just keeps working on developing

detachment plus the will to continue. The results one keeps for later.

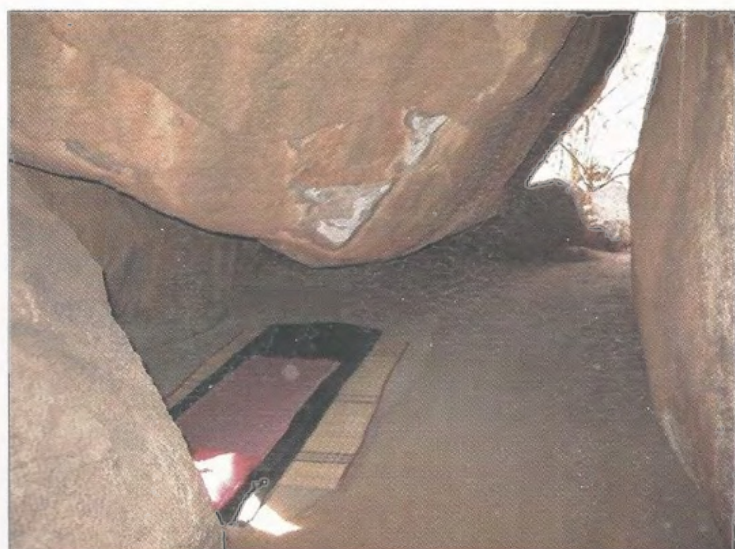
Now I have returned and my notebook is full of reflections. I also notice that physically I am fitter and, others tell me, even glowing and bright. Vitally I feel renewed and rejuvenated, and mentally I seem to have hit upon some inner confirmation of my direction at this stage of my life.

In all, it was a challenging process and a satisfying one. On the last day of the retreat, I gave myself permission to think. What I did was to review the various mental whirlpools that had been spinning persistently in my mind. Many were situations where I felt a strong urge to give someone 'advice'. I decided to use the 'Law of Projection' or 'mirroring' as it is called to see how this 'advice' would sound if I directed it towards myself.

What it revealed was striking.

To one friend, who is about my age, whose life is extremely balanced, and who seems to have reached the top, I wanted to say, "But you must not get stuck in the fineness and correctness of all this; there is now an emphatic turning inward which is called for." And so I said this to myself. I saw how beautiful and fulfilling life in Auroville and Verité had become for me, but I too had to turn 'emphatically inward'.

To another friend whose office is a picture of unimaginable chaos, I wanted to say, "Mahalakshmi is waiting to bestow all her wealth on you and what you are doing for Auroville, but she can't stand this mess! Please call in Mahasaraswathi plus any other help you



A rocky overhang becomes a meditation space at Hampi's Island Sanctuary.

PHOTO COURTESY ISLAND SANCTUARY WEBSITE

can get, and clean up your place so she can do her work for us all."

When I applied it to myself, I looked at the Vedic meaning of Lakshmi's wealth and saw that it meant the 'wealth of higher knowledge', while Saraswathi is 'study' or the 'organiser of the mind'. So I told myself it was important now to actively prepare myself to receive the higher knowledge, not just by studying Sri Aurobindo but by getting to know at every moment the planes and parts of my being from where I was acting.

Then to another friend I wanted to say, "Please stop thinking you can wriggle around this problem – you need professional help!" And to myself I said, "If you are serious about turning inward, then get a teacher – no more doing it on your

own which amounts to leaving your sadhana in the hands of your ego."

Then I noticed that all those I was addressing were men, and that it was the 'animus' in me, the mock-man in myself, who was needing so much instruction.

Then I remembered that there was yet another whirlpool of advice for one other friend. "Could you stop being the indomitable he-man, and allow your feminine aspect to develop and come forward? With this you can bring more beauty, tenderness, refinement and much else into your life."

And with that I heard myself tell myself, "Yes, Bhavana, you could drop a lot of your heavy-handedness, use art to explore the Eternal Feminine within, and intensify, deepen, your relationship with the Divine Mother."

Bhavana Dee

In search of the Goddess

Does one remember the exact moment one falls in love with the Goddess? I do. I recall a dreamy 7-year old creating her own. She was made of half a coconut shell with some wet glop of garden clay slathered over, and scarlet black seeds of the poisonous *abrus* for eyes... She was my own. And I worshipped Her in secrecy, under the shadows of the guava tree that dripped over a corner in the terrace of my home...

The Goddess, she has always been around – hidden but always waiting.

I remember when I left home at 18 to live in a city far away, alone in a hostel with no grandfather to confide in. There I discovered Gayatri – I had surreptitiously learnt Her *mantra* from an old Sanskrit prayer book. It was never meant for girls and I was angry about that, and that the elders had permitted this outrage. So in college between classes or the wards, I would silently chant Her invocation under my breath... And slowly, She came alive, my Gayatri, daughter of the Sun. I could see Her red ruby face glowing in the misty haze, full of love, kindness, and the sweetest smile.

I yearned to be like Her.

Then it was time to cross the oceans. And then for a while She abandoned me. Years later as I crawled naked into hide-covered kivas on full-moon nights and sweated in the dark steaming womb of Mother Earth, She touched me again. This time with eagle feather and smudging smoke of sweet grass...

She is mysterious, my Goddess. She teases me often and it gets unbearable, Her beauty and love.

Years ago, after I had returned to Auroville, and on a school trip when we had stopped by to see Her where the three oceans meet, She caught me once again unawares. It was one chill December evening, at a strange twilight hour circumambulating Her shrine alone having strayed away momentarily from my group, She revealed her glory.

This time, a fiery and explosive revelation as temple bells pealed, drums rolled, and the fragrance of camphor and sacred ash flooded my senses. All stood still – just the beat of my heart and the searing white light of the diamond on Her nose.

The damsel, Kanyakumari, She enslaved me then.

Two years ago, walking in Spain along an old saint's path, in search of Her again – this time as the Virginal Mary – slipping into chapels and cathedrals with breath-held, hoping, just hoping to get one moment with Her in the busy gilded retables, or perhaps glowing

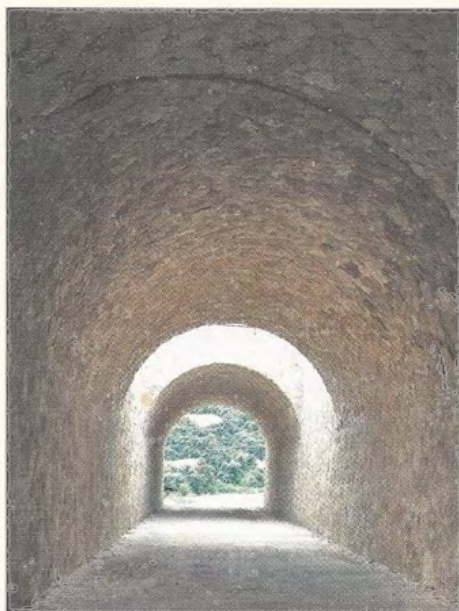
through stained glass.

And yes, She met me, my Magdalene; bare-breasted and regal in Viana, like her South Indian sister, smiling down in recognition. And later, in Estella, cradling the babe Born Jesus, her breasts now full and spilling with milk...

Finally at Finisterre, when my pilgrimage ended, the edge of the world where the shores of Europe disappear into the Atlantic, it was the wild spirit of the Celtic Goddess who greeted me. Hovering in the salt-laden air, her foaming medusa tresses lapping with the waves, she otherwise remained invisible.

Perhaps it was not yet yet my time, but I know She waits for me, in her aspect as the Crone...

Name withheld on request



On the pilgrimage trail in Northern Spain

2009 CALENDARS

For a preview, visit www.auroville.org

Matrimandir calendar

The theme of the 2009 Matrimandir desk calendar is The twelve meditation chambers. All proceeds from the sale of the calendar will go towards the Matrimandir. Order from matrimandir@auroville.org.in or from the AVI Centre in your country. Price: Rs. 160, packing and postage costs extra.



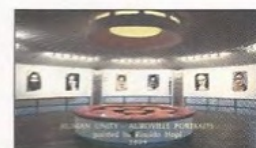
Auroville Youth wall calendar

The theme of the 2009 Auroville wall calendar is Youth of Auroville. All 12 photos were taken by Ireno Guerci at Transition School's annual costume day. Proceeds from the sales will support Education in Auroville. Order from ireno@auroville.org.in; Price: Rs. 300 (India), Euro 6.50 or \$9.50 (rest of the world), packing and postage costs included.



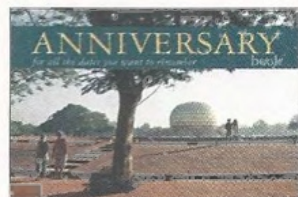
Human Unity desktop calendar

The 2009 desktop calendar, Human Unity – Auroville Portraits by Rinaldo Hopf has 14 months represented. In addition, the calendar contains 28 printed postcards which can be cut out and mailed. Proceeds from the sales will support village projects. Order from cosmic@auroville.org.in; Price Rs 250, packing and postage extra.



Auroville Anniversary Book

The anniversary book is a timeless calendar for all the dates you wish to remember. The photos are taken from in and around Auroville. Proceeds from the sales will support village projects. Order from cosmic@auroville.org.in; Price: Rs 280, packing and postage extra.



Auroville Planner

A 172-page Auroville Planner 2009 is in square format with 24 pages of colour photographs featuring life in Auroville. The profit from the planner will be donated to an Auroville project yet to be determined. For more information contact time@auroville.org.in



In brief

Sanitation workshop in Auroville

Auroville hosted a 1-day workshop on Sustainable Sanitation, an event organized by the Indian Water Works Association (IWWA-Coimbatore centre). Topics under discussion included Ecological Sanitation (Eco-San), and other technologies involved in sanitation. Participants from Tamil Nadu, India and Europe as well as Aurovilians attended the event.

No more smoking in public places

The Indian Government has banned smoking in public places throughout the country. All Auroville guesthouses, cafes, restaurants and public places are expected to respect and uphold the ban.

An earthquake-resistant school in Nepal

The Auroville Earth Institute has built a two-classroom school at Jantanager in Nepal at the request of the Backward Education Society. The school is earthquake-resistant, climate-responsive and has been built with community participation in 20 days after a pre-casting work of 5 weeks. The Nepalese Department of Education plans to send about 20 engineers for a few weeks training course to Auroville.

Joy

Joy is the name of a new housing project that is being financed primarily by the Government of India (GOI). The project is managed by the Housing Service. The new building, a block with 15 apartments plus some common facilities, will be located in the Habitat Area behind the Town Hall. Funding has been made possible with the help of the Secretary of the Foundation. It has been estimated that construction will take two years.

Housing contribution

The Housing Service has called for a public discussion on fraternal housing contributions, the amount to be paid by the builder of a new house to the community. At present the contribution is calculated as a percentage of the value of the house. Though the Housing Service is not particularly happy with the system, it observes that it enables a modest sharing among the "haves" and "have-nots". The system has been challenged by some as a "tax" that should be abandoned. The Housing Service now calls for alternative solutions.

When I'm sixty-four

The Auroville Health Services has started a survey to find out what serves Aurovilians aged 64 and older expect in Auroville. Auroville has presently some 150 people in this age group and in the coming years those numbers will increase.

On Auroville Radio

Auroville Radio has started the live broadcast of a programme titled Dialogue with a Dream. In it current topics of interest in Auroville are discussed. Issues covered include water, specifically the proposed lake at Matrimandir, and the issue of sustainable mobility for Auroville. The program is on www.aurovillerradio.org



PHOTO: J. K. KIRK



PHOTO: SVEN

O Thou, who rousest the voice of the thunder,
And biddest the storms to awake from their
sleep,
Who breakest the strength of the mountains
asunder,
And cleavest the manifold pride of the deep!
Thou, who with bountiful torrent and river
Dost nourish the heart of the forest and plain,
Withhold not Thy gifts O Omnipotent Giver!
Hearken, O Lord of Rain!

by Sarojini Naidu
Excerpted from 'Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain'



PHOTO: KIRK



PHOTO: MANOJ



PHOTO: KIRK



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEN/AUROVILLE TODAY ARCHIVES



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