

# Auroville Today

DOUBLE ISSUE: JUNE-JULY 2001, No.149-150

**COVER STORY :** **ART SPECIAL** **Pages 1-9**

- Probing the Auroville Choir
- Awakening interest in music
- Auroville, a performers' utopia
- Recording musical creativity
- Is Auroville's culture materialistic?
- Flower power in the Solar Kitchen
- Art as a way of life
- Reflections on dance
- Visiting artists
- A new music salon in Auromodèle
- Mother on the worlds of creation
- Artists residency program

## Art in Auroville

"It is in the service of spirituality that art reaches its highest expression"

Sri Aurobindo

Art has played a role in community life from the very beginning. Auroville, for many old timers, was not just a desert to be afforested, but also a play of light and space and austere beauty, a place of magic and creativity, a cradle, in Mother's words, for the creation of a new world. Ever since, many Aurovilians have been inspired to evoke this new world and to explore themselves through the medium of art. Efforts to promote the arts, however, were for a long time retarded by the need to first deal with the rudimentary requirements of subsistence. As late as 1988, Auroville was still regarded by some as a cultural desert.

Auroville has come a long way since. At present, many Aurovilians are involved in one or more art forms. A multitude of expressions in dance, visual arts, poetry, music, theatre, and sculpture, enhanced by the rich interaction of eastern and western cultures, have become a normal part of the daily life. More than sixty Aurovilians are pursuing the arts either on a full-time or part-time basis. Kalamitra (Friends of the Arts), formed by a group of Aurovilians to promote cultural life in Auroville, has brought many top artists over the years to perform in Auroville. More recently there have been two initiatives – Khala Koj and the Visiting Artists Residency project – which aim to bring artists from all over the world to Auroville for brief or extended periods of time, and to promote artist exchange programmes. For this purpose Kala Khoj has become an affiliate member of the international 'Res Artis' network which is represented in over one hundred and twenty countries.

These positive developments notwithstanding, resident artists often complain about the almost complete lack of community support. The Maintenance Fund, struggling as it does to provide a minimum maintenance to those working for community services, has hardly any artists on its maintenance list. Neither is there a support system to help artists sell their works.

### What do artists find in Auroville?

What, then, attracts many artists to Auroville, or, as is often the case, turns Aurovilians into artists? For the majority, the vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is the most powerful inspiration – the vision of a new world based upon a new consciousness. In fact, many Auroville artists view their work of artistic creation as a vehicle of their yoga. Mother spoke of an ideal place where the exigencies of existence would be removed in order to allow the individual the freedom to discover him or herself, and this is another important factor. As one artist puts it, "One of the greatest things that happened to me was finding this place and environment where I can spend time and space to search for the inner self, in my case through the arts." Another attraction is the sheer diversity of cultures and individuals represented here which, through the cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives, creates a ferment of creativity. And Auroville also offers the possibility of continually reinventing oneself, of taking up new ideas and activities without having to conform to social or 'professional' norms.

On a more prosaic level, for a community of 1500 people there are a surprising number of venues at which artists can perform or present their work. Visual artists can exhibit at the Savitri Bhavan, the Centre for Indian Culture, at Pitanga Hall, the Information Centre, or at the Solar Kitchen. Musicians and other performers can use the open-air stage at the Visitors' Center, the large auditorium at Bharat Nivas, the dance room in Pitanga Hall, or the recently opened music salon Salle Auropax.

On the flipside, Auroville artists

have to deal with a number of discouraging factors. There is, of course, the climate which plays havoc with musical instruments and other sophisticated or sensitive equipment and materials. Then again exhibitions, while frequent, are not always well-attended.

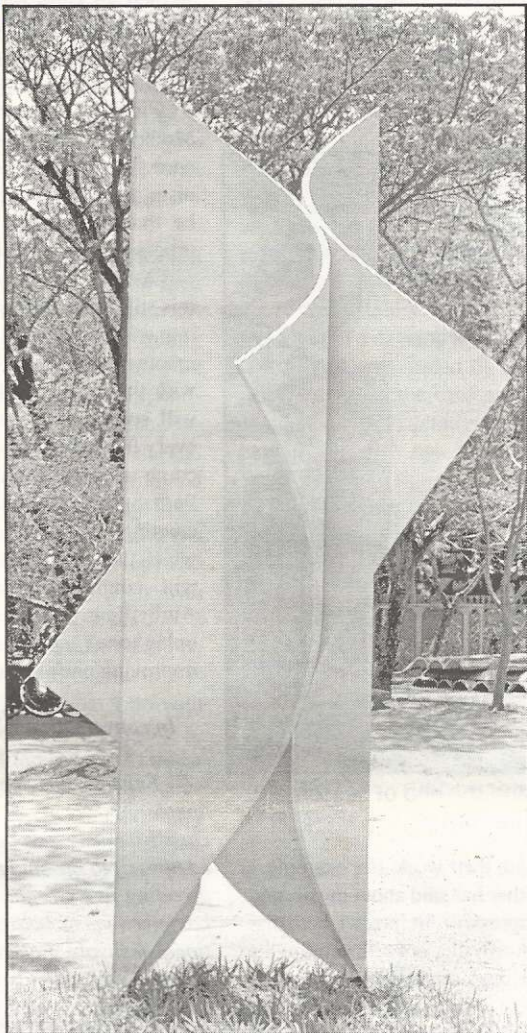
**"Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, then, are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character."**

Sri Aurobindo

Additionally, few Aurovilians have the means to act as patrons or supporters of the arts through purchasing or commissioning new work, although a few commercial units have commissioned public art. Consequently, full-time artists have to market their work outside Auroville in order to survive, a job for which most artists are badly equipped. Some Auroville artists also resent the fact that their work only gains public recognition when it is used to promote Auroville at a public relations event or for fund-raising efforts.

Another problem is the fact that only a small number of outstanding artists or aficionados of the arts reside here – after all, artistically we are still a very young and undeveloped culture. For artists like musicians, it is hard to achieve greater perfection or explore new territory without regularly playing with other musicians of high calibre. For visual artists it may be difficult to see things in new ways if one is not able to challenge one's own thinking through seeing the works and conversing with numerous others.

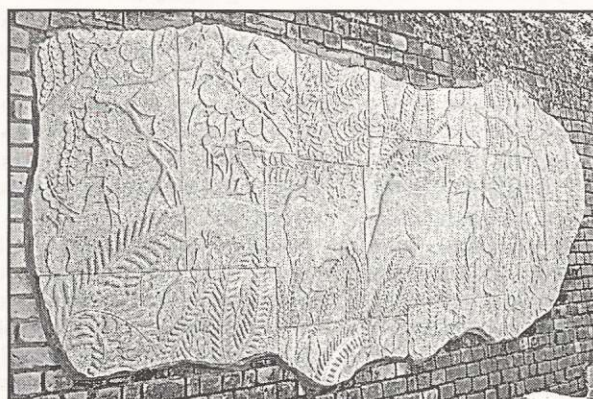
(continued on page 2)



Ferro-cement art by Cornelius in the CSR compound

Evaluations of Auroville's progress in relation to Mother's vision often focus upon pragmatic concerns such as economy, organization or education: the subtler aspects of community life, like art and cultural activities, are rarely, if ever, topics of community discussion. One reason is that few lay Aurovilians feel qualified to speak about these things. But another factor may be that the arts in Auroville are not seen by many as a community priority. This is striking considering that both Sri Aurobindo and Mother stressed the pre-eminent importance of art as a civilising force in society. In this double issue (June/July) of Auroville Today we consider the present health of the arts in Auroville through the works and words of different artists, and we ask if the community could do more to promote a vibrant Auroville culture. The headlines, borders and capital

letters of this issue were designed by two sixteen-year old Auroville artists, Bettina and Fanny.



Bas-relief on a wall of Maroma's incense unit

**CIRHU submits 129 crores project to Government**  
page 10

**Auroville and the conservation of the Palani Hills**  
page 11

**The new Auroville Website goes up**  
page 12

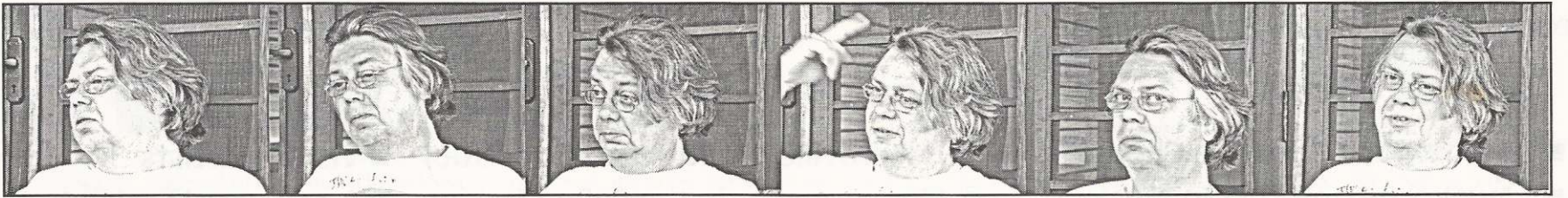
**• Daring aerobics**  
**• The legendary Aurovilian**  
page 13

**Towards integral waste management**  
page 14



# SEARCHING A CHOIR'S BREAKING POINT

Conductor and composer Eugene Liven d'Abelardo came to Auroville in January 2001 for a sabbatical to quietly compose and to conduct the Auroville choir. It didn't quite work out like that...



Probing the limits. Pulling the reins till it hurts, then relaxing to let them get used to the new level. Then start all over again. These are the hallmarks of Eugene's relentless efforts to improve the quality of the Auroville choir.

"It did not make me all that popular in the beginning," admits Eugene, looking back on three and a half months of intensive choir practices. "I asked the choir members to be on time, I scolded them if they were absent without giving prior notice, and I insisted that they knew their parts rather than start studying during the rehearsals. And I demanded a lot from them, criticizing rather mercilessly but also praising them whenever I felt they had done a good job. The aim was always to pull the choir up, 'über die Materie hinaus' as they say in Germany, trying to make them exceed themselves on every occasion. I have been criticized for being too demanding, too sharp and at times too harsh in my judgements. But that is my standard. The argument that the Auroville choir is an amateur choir is no excuse for sloppiness. For is the reference point how it was in the past? Or what it wants to become?"

Eugene and his wife Marijke first visited Auroville in 1999, then once again in spring 2000. During the second visit Eugene, who is a composer and conductor, was invited to 'do something' with the choir, which proved a positive experience for all involved. "Then a number of circumstances coincided that made us question our future. I have been a conductor of operas, large choirs and small ensembles for the last 25 years and I badly needed a change. Marijke too was reaching the end of a certain development in her work as management consultant." They decided to give themselves a sabbatical of one and a half years in Auroville, on the occasion of Eugene's fiftieth birthday.

"In fact, it has been the choir that propelled me into Auroville," says Eugene. "I had enjoyed the brief stint of working with them and was looking forward to a longer experience. And I am not disappointed. For

there is a great eagerness to study here, more than I have experienced in any other choir. Those who sing in the cappella choir and in the large choir rehearse four evenings a week, in addition to their normal work. That is a lot. There has also been a good response to my approach of dealing with the choir as if it was a professional one, searching for the breaking point, the outer edge of the capabilities. I believe this has worked well. There has been a lot of improvement, considering the choir member's limits vocally and in the ability to respond immediately to the conductor's indications – and I have been amazed at what has become possible. Given another three months of study, the quality would have improved even more. If today we are on 80%, it is possible to go to 85%, perhaps 90%. That is probably the limit for this choir. If you aspire to more, for example giving concerts outside Auroville or make a CD, you would have to change the parameters."

To be involved with the Auroville choir was but one of the motivations for coming to Auroville. "Another one was our expectation that I could quietly work on my symphony for the Slovenian Radio Symphony Orchestra Ljubljana," says Eugene. "But that has not worked out as planned. Instead of conducting one choir I found myself conducting two, the other one being an a cappella choir for renaissance music. I started giving solfège classes, I started a 'salon de musique' every Sunday afternoon in Pitanga, explaining all kinds of western classical music. And last but not least I got involved in social life to a far larger extent than I ever had done before. But it irks me that I haven't yet created a regular time span to compose. I once stayed for six weeks in Ladakh, and there I lived as a recluse, concentrating on composing. Here I have to find the balance between socializing, doing things for Auroville, and doing things for myself. I criticize choir members for being too relaxed or not having enough inner discipline, but have the same problem myself."

Unlike other people, Eugene and Marijke did not come to Auroville because they were particularly attracted to its spiritual ideals, or to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. "I did not know much about them. The tendency of some Aurovilians to quote them on any odd occasion puts me off," says Eugene. "Yet another quote from the holy scriptures' I found myself thinking whenever an Aurovillian came with a 'Mother said ...'. Nevertheless, I am happy that I have come

my senses are more 'fine-tuned' here. I listen with a higher awareness, I find that I am in the process of opening myself up to 'something else.' Risking the danger of giving you a 'Mother said': she speaks about composers being the medium between two worlds, transcribing here what one receives 'up there.' I know the experience of really being engrossed in the composition, when you are cut off from everything. At those times it is a pleasure to compose, it happens all by itself. At other times it is hard work. Mother's writing explained the experience. I am now searching for the mechanism, what I should do to enable myself to be that receptacle. So there is quite a process of osmosis going on."

Asked about the future, it appears that it is still open. "We want to keep interacting with the West, both for reasons of income as well to keep in regular touch with the music world of Europe. So we will spend two months in Europe after every four months in Auroville. What will come after the sabbatical is still unclear. Perhaps we can become instrumental in creating a music school in Auroville, for which there is a great demand. Perhaps we will commit ourselves to more. For Auroville is a great place, both for developing one's spirituality as well as for improving one's creative talents."

In conversation with Tineke and Carel



Conducting the end of season performance

into contact with their work. For example, I read what Mother has said about music, and that is truly impressive. In fact, we both discovered that Auroville, notwithstanding its many shortcomings on the level of organization, has quite a lot to offer, in particular on the spiritual level. Already I noticed that I have changed in these three and half months. Though some choir members might complain, I have developed more compassion and patience with people than I ever had back home. And I experience that

Eugene has conducted the major operas and choir repertoire of western classical music. The last ten years he devoted himself to the study of Gregorian chant, directing five Gregorian chant choirs. He has given master-classes at many international festivals. Recently he toured Japan with the Netherlands Chamber Choir and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century. He has been awarded several international prizes for his choral compositions. His compositions also include works for symphony orchestra and a piece for 33 trombones. He currently lives in Amsterdam.

## Art in Auroville

(continued from page 1)

One possibility is for them to draw upon the experience of the many visiting artists who come to Auroville for brief or extended periods of time. They often regard Auroville as a kind of paradise and are eager to share with other artists and to impart specialised skills.

It would be wrong to blame all the disincentives to artistic creation on the community at large: the artists themselves must also take some responsibility. Indian art in all its forms has wonderful potential for expanding one's artistic horizons, yet this source remains largely unexplored by Auroville artists. Again, it is quite common in artist communities and centres of the arts elsewhere for artists to come together frequently to discuss and critique each other's work in a spirit of artistic collaboration. Yet here such forums hardly exist. Another criticism of the arts produced in Auroville is that many artists are reproducing Western definitions of "high art". In this concept art is seen as separate from the mundane world, to be viewed in galleries, or heard in auditoria. The commitment to this orientation explains why

so few artists have experimented, for example, with the use of everyday materials or performances that break with the tradition of the proscenium stage.

Is a distinct Aurovilian culture or form of artistic expression emerging, something different from what is happening elsewhere? The majority of Auroville artists are cautious about making any such statement, pointing out that a specific culture may take many years to evolve. However, there are at least two indications that something specifically 'Aurovilian' in artistic expression may be in the first stages of birth. Firstly, Auroville artists who exhibit or perform together outside Auroville are often seen by outsiders to be expressing something 'different' from the norm. Secondly, there is increasing evidence, particularly in the realm of music, that Auroville artists are no longer merely drawing upon existing material or trends but are increasingly experimenting with new forms.

This raises the question of what Aurovilians expect from the community's artists. A few years ago when Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* was staged, some members of the theatre-going audience expressed disapproval, stating that the play was inherently irrelevant to life here.

A similar verdict was pronounced on a performance of Japanese butoh dance a few years later. The suggestion is that only certain subjects are appropriate to be worked on and viewed in Auroville – presumably those which can somehow be described as 'spiritual' art. But how do you define 'spiritual' art? The more one thinks about it, the more impossible it becomes, for almost any form of expression can be a means of evoking or exploring the subtler realms in the hands of an inspired artist.

Though there are many concrete and mental stumbling blocks to artistic creation in Auroville, there is a definite sense of the tremendous potential this place has for the creative process, and there is little question that the overall quality of artistic work is steadily improving. With the diverse population and beautiful environment, one may expect that Auroville will not only attract many fine artists, but produce more and more of them itself so that, together, they will make of the city and its greenbelt one gigantic work of art.

Editors

All quotes from Sri Aurobindo's *The National Value of Art*, first published in 1909 in the *Karmayogin*. For more info on Auroville artists see the [Auroville.org](http://Auroville.org) website

It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself.

Sri Aurobindo



# HELPING CREATE A NEW CULTURE

Two musicians talk about teaching and music-making in Auroville.

PHOTO:IRENO

One way of discovering how much a society values artistic culture is to look at what is being taught in the schools. So it's interesting to note that in Auroville schools music and art are taught as an integral part of the curriculum to all classes from kindergarten up to junior college level. Nuria and Matthew, who teach music at the Kindergarten and at Transition School, describe their goal as an attempt to "awaken an interest and love for music, and to open a door to more specialized music education for those who have the potential and interest." And they seem to be succeeding. "The children enjoy the classes, and many are interested in developing their musical talent further," says Nuria. However it wasn't always like this. When Nuria began teaching music in the schools eight years ago she stepped into a musical void. "There was little music culture in the schools, so the children were embarrassed, they would giggle when asked to sing or dance. It was really hard work. But now that a good music environment has been created in the schools, music classes are accepted as absolutely normal."

At present, formal music education stops when the children move on to Last School. However, a number of them develop their musical talents further by taking lessons with resident musicians. Auroville is not short of musicians. At present, children can take lessons in piano, guitar, violin, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet and drums, as well as singing. Both Nuria and Matthew feel a vocation for teaching. They are also experienced musicians - Nuria is a singer, Matthew a jazz saxophonist and pianist. Is it easy to combine teaching with developing themselves as musicians? "It's quite hard," says Nuria, "because what I do to develop my singing and conducting is completely different from what I do with my students at school. It's like trying to walk with two very different feet! At times I've thought of stopping teaching to concentrate on developing myself, but whenever I got to that point something inside me said 'no' because I felt something would be

missing. I know now that if I say 'no' to teaching, I won't succeed with my own music: from both sides I receive something which helps me grow as a musician and a teacher." "I enjoy working at the school, but I'm also very ambitious about developing myself as a musician. I don't want to compromise on that," says Matthew. "So it's a very delicate balance between the two. At first, I couldn't find it. Now it's getting easier."

Is Auroville a good place to develop their individual talents? Nuria admits that certain things are missing at present, "but whenever I get stuck a musician who can help me visits Auroville, or somebody gives me a book which contains exactly what I need. But, generally, as a musician you need a tremendous amount of self-discipline to develop yourself here because we lack a supportive environment." "The biggest problem for a musician," says Matthew, "is that there is no firmly established musical culture in Auroville. To develop as a jazz musician, it helps to be surrounded by people playing jazz. That's not the case now, so it's very hard to find the inspiration and guidance for certain things: it has to be pulled out of yourself. At the same time, not having this background here makes it very interesting because then you can help create a different kind of musical culture. I don't know anywhere else you would get the opportunity to do such a thing."

"We're really in the process of building up our own culture," agrees Nuria. But how can a specifically 'Aurovilian' culture develop? Surely not out of a vacuum? "These things don't happen overnight," says Matthew. "When there's nothing there, you start by bringing in what you already know. That's why we often play music from elsewhere. But Auroville musi-



Nuria (guitar) and Matt (keyboard) teaching a class at Transition school

cians have always been interested in trying out new things too, and this is happening more and more. So while I search for my individual style, I'm also looking for an Auroville style, something which draws upon the sheer diversity of this place and upon the amazing musical culture of India."

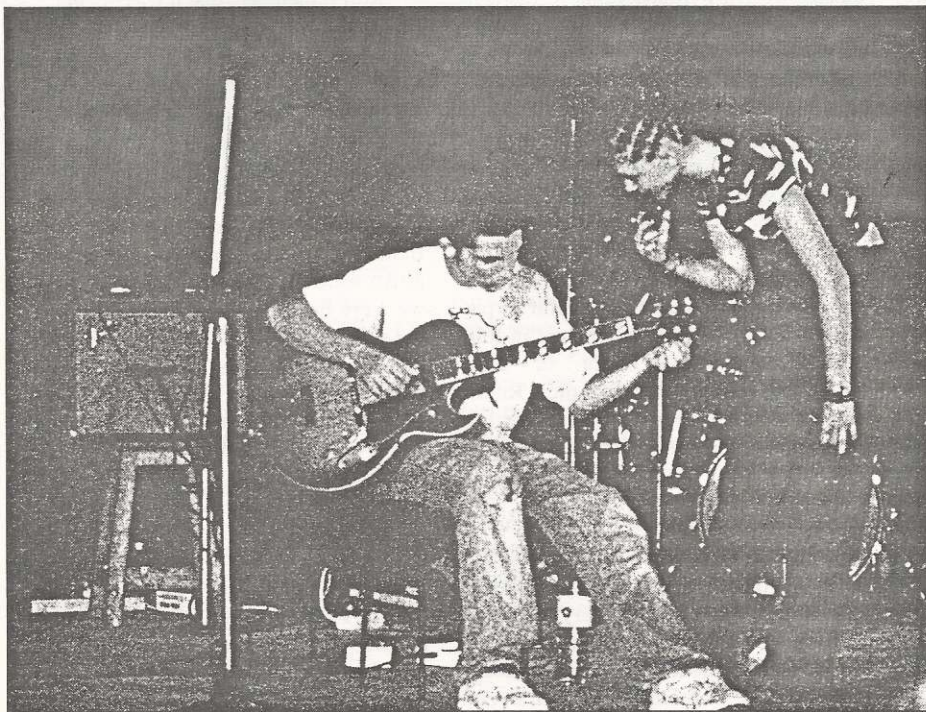
Can the Auroville community do more to support its musicians and to accelerate the emergence of a new musical culture? Both Nuria and Matthew tell stories of how, for a performance, they not only have to practise the music extensively, but also to organize everything else - the venue, publicity, lights, sound system, generator and transport of the equipment. "By the time you get on stage you're sometimes so finished that you don't play well. And then you've still got another few hours work packing up after the concert!" says Matthew. In this sense, a regular team that would provide back-up support at concerts

is seen as a necessity. Nuria also hopes that the long-delayed Auroville Music Centre will manifest soon "because, while there are many musicians in Auroville, they have tended to work separately. This is now changing but the Music Centre would definitely provide a further push in this direction. Before we were not ready for it. Now I think the time may have come."

In other respects, both Nuria and Matthew feel that there's little more the larger community can do at present to encourage the emergence of a vibrant Auroville culture. "It will happen, it is happening, naturally," says Nuria. "You can't plan it or force it." "Something is definitely developing," confirms Matthew. "Even attending performances of dance and music in the last few weeks I've been struck by the fact that the overall quality is really improving."

From an interview by Alan

## PERFORMERS' PARADISE



Julien and Fanny preparing the next song

Auroville is a performance utopia. With the majority of the Aurovilian audience no more than ten minutes' cycle ride from any one of Auroville's theatres, the normally near-impossible task of attracting an audience to a show anywhere else in the world in Auroville requires nothing more than mentioning to one person something might happen somewhere. The community's powerful gossip network diffuses startling amounts of detailed information at speeds

so fast, it's normally only a matter of minutes before the city's entire 1500 inhabitants have the event pencilled into their diary.

In terms of performance content the at times over-serious approach Aurovilians take towards themselves and their community screams for comic relief. It takes only the slightest hint of irreverence towards any of Auroville's sacred cows, and the poor joke-starved Aurovilian laughs, almost cries with relief as their private hell of inexpressed humour is given vent in a public

arena. "Ha, ha, ha" bursts uncontrollably from their lungs as they throw their head back, glimpsing momentarily a clear sky filled with stars, "that's SO true, a-HA, ha, ha" they cry and feel no longer alone, at least for a little while. As Sri Aurobindo himself once quipped: "The world could be made that much more perfect if men (and we assume he meant women too) took it less seriously".

But if Aurovilians enjoy performances within their community it's because they make more than just good audiences: as performers they are often something special. Whatever filtration Auroville performs through either its attractive or dissuasive power, the resulting population produce some damn good performers from a very small group. Lately the city has seen a sixteen-year old sing smoky Ella Fitzgerald tunes accompanied by her only slightly older brother playing killer jazz guitar, a boy/man of fourteen perform one of Shakespeare's more complex roles, Julius Caesar (supported by a frighteningly good cast including a spectacular Brutus), and an entire army of musicians younger than twenty perform original and other music at standards good enough for the world. The group currently has an Auroville video team producing their music video and another producing their CD. The real danger facing these guys is success.

Auroville constitutes an ocean of unused (not wasted) resources awaiting shape. The recent performances of Transition school's Julius Caesar and

AYA's concert testify to this. The bulk of Auroville's resources come from its residents, who when they get off their arses and do something, anything, usually knock your socks off.

Auroville's improvised theatre-based Theatresports illustrates this beautifully. The biggest challenge for a Theatresports organiser in Auroville isn't carefully managing stage scenes and individuals to avoid feelings of humiliation and negativity, but actually getting participants out of their chairs. Once they're up, they're on fire. Aurovilians bring with them a devil-may-care recklessness tailor-made for improvised theatre which when activated, takes control with often spectacular results. The audience suddenly finds itself transfixed as compelling dramas of epic proportions play themselves out in never-to-be-repeated performances.

The abundance of good rehearsal and performance spaces means Auroville's human resources have spectacular scope for expression. From the amphitheatre-styled Information Centre to the vast opera theatre offered by the Bharat Nivas, or great successes in departure from convention like the unwallied theatre-in-the round offered by the new SAWCHU Hall, theatre and dance never had it so good. Enthusiasm understates the reaction new productions generally receive from managers of these spaces, especially those like the Visitors' Centre with restaurant attached where entertainment equals audience equals a bit more income and a better chance at viability.

Jesse



**Violinist Holger and vocalist Tina have discovered a new vocation. In April this year they opened their "Sunshine Music" recording studio, which is both a commercial venture and a service for Auroville.**

In the peaceful setting of Sharnaga community, a simple building characterized by a flow-form roof contains the Sunshine Music Studio. It is the latest venture of Holger and Tina, who so far have been known in Auroville as performing artists and composers. "The shift," says Holger "has come gradually. When I had finished my CD of the children's opera *Beyond Asleep and Awake*, I worked on the digital recording of my tone settings of some of Sri Aurobindo's poems, and we concentrated on a CD with Tina's songs. Though both these projects are not yet finished, we developed an extensive know-how. To build a sound studio and turn it into a commercial undertaking was the next logical step. But we had no idea how difficult it would be to create the appropriate acoustics in the rooms. Here Didier from the Auroville unit "Sound Wizard," who specializes in the acoustic design of music studios and performance halls, has helped us to create beautiful multi-purpose acoustics."

The music studio consists of a recording and a monitoring room. "At present we can record 16 digital tracks at a time," says Holger. "Most of the recording is done directly onto hard disc, but we have also the possibility to work with an 8-track digital A-DAT recorder. Depending on how this unit develops, we can in future add two more recording rooms." And develop it certainly does. Without any public relation work, the bookings are very satisfactory. "Word of mouth has done the trick so far," says Tina who is responsible for the commercial side of the unit. "It has attracted all types of clients. There are bands who come to record their rock or funk music. There are people who want to record Bharat Natyam or other Indian dance music. There are people who are in the process of writing

music for a film. Our studio has the great advantage of being located in a green and quiet environment and of charging comparatively low fees. This makes us very competitive. For example, someone who is producing a Telugu movie has booked the studio for ten days at a stretch. Here he is not pressurised to compose quickly, he can relax and be creative. What is recorded in our project studio can be used directly by any major studio which does the film's final sound track. Our clients can stay in one of Auroville guest-houses and profit from the quiet atmosphere in Auroville and the possibility to visit the Matrimandir: it all helps to create the ambience the artists need for their creative work."

"Did you go to the special bonfire on the planetary consciousness in the amphitheatre next to the Matrimandir?" asks Holger. "If so, you must have realised that the recording of Mother's voice was clearer than you ever heard it before. We did that work here. The computer analysed the particular structure of the noise, and recalculated the whole file as if this noise was not there. We can do the same work on any of Mother's tapes, e.g. the *Question and Answers* or the *Agenda* conversations, provided we can work with the original tapes. We also, by the way, did the recording of the reading of *The Dream* you heard on that occasion. It was recorded a few times, and then I cut and paste – a normal work in music studios – to get the best pronunciation in one flow."

"Isn't this cut-and-paste work a bit like falsifying the original expression?" I ask. "Some musicians feel like that," replies Holger, "but others see it as a blessing which allows them to show their best. Through the centuries musicians were used to the idea that music is something that has



Tina and Holger in the Sunshine Music studio

to be delivered in one piece, unlike, for example, a painter who has the liberty to re-work his painting until he is satisfied. But now the modern techniques allow them to create something technically perfect – which has its dangers as the drive for technical perfection can overshadow the inspiration. To find the perfect balance requires experience."

Apart from being a commercial unit, Sunshine Music also has other aims. "In this studio project a few ideas came together. We would like to use the recording facilities as a tool for the growth of the musically advanced Aurovilians and to lift the cultural scene – for example, we did a recording of Joy singing Sanskrit songs and we

recorded Agni's second guitar solo CD. And we hope that the studio will enhance our own work. Our immediate projects are to write music for a multi-media CD with paintings from the German Alfred Bast, and to finish the CD with Tina's songs and the CD with the tone setting of Sri Aurobindo's poems," concludes Holger. "But if the work develops as it appears today, we will have problems doing our own creative work. We will have to learn to make time."

Carel

For more information about Sunshine Music contact website  
[www.sunshine-music-studio.com](http://www.sunshine-music-studio.com)



## A materialistic culture

**Artists Rolf and Shubha talk about the lack of support for the arts in Auroville.**

understand that culture doesn't get a very high priority in Auroville."

Shubha is a sculptress. According to her, the problems for an artist begin the moment he or she applies to join Auroville. "I went to the Entry Group the

other day and I was told that Auroville doesn't need any more artists or therapists! I understand that some people may be calling themselves artists just to have the freedom to work in their own way, but to impose a blanket ban is ridiculous. It is very unfair to true artists who need to express themselves, to do the yoga, through artistic expression. I told the Entry Group that they can put me on selling bread six hours a day at Pour Tous, but I'll probably end up sculpting it!"

But even long-term Auroville artists find it difficult to make ends meet as artists. "It's impossible to survive as an artist in Auroville. Almost all the Aurovilian artists either have to exhibit and sell their work outside Auroville, or to take up other work in the community or elsewhere in order to get a maintenance," Rolf points out. "And this is as true for performance artists like musicians as it is for painters and sculptors. And when you have to take up other work to maintain yourself, you lose the time and space which, as an artist, you need to create something which has the capacity to uplift everyone."

Why do Auroville artists receive so little support? Rolf and Shubha offer a number of explanations. One reason is

that many Aurovilians cannot afford to buy works of Auroville artists at the prices they are offered, another is that there is a very limited appreciation of art, particularly fine art, in the community. "If 5% of Aurovilians attend an exhibition, that's a major success," says Rolf. "That may be no different from the situation in the West, but here you expect something a little different." "People look at my work," says Shubha, "and they say, 'Oh, but it's only plexiglass! And when I offer to put my works in the Solar Kitchen I'm told 'The colours are too bright,' or 'Your nudes may offend some people.' Rodin himself would have had problems getting his work into the Solar Kitchen!"

### Utilitarian outlook

"But the main reason why artists are not supported in Auroville," says Rolf, "is that Auroville has become very narrowly utilitarian in its outlook. Everything is judged upon whether or not it directly serves or benefits the community in a very materialistic way. So art, which Sri Aurobindo described as the perfect education for the soul and a means of expressing 'eternal truth' because it is 'not limited to the expression of form and appearance,' is valued less highly as an activity than working a cash register at Pour Tous! That's why nobody commissions artists to produce work for public places in Auroville, that's why, after 17 years of working for Auroville in many different fields, I was suddenly told one day that my maintenance would be cut because I was not doing 'anything useful for the community!'"

Rolf remembers that it was not always like this. "When SAIIER started in 1984 the artists were supported because Kireet Joshi understood how important art is in the life of a community. At that time I was working on *The Aim of Life* book and we artists were suddenly uplifted – we were even allowed to sit at the same table with the teachers! But then the Government of India cut the grant and, as always, the artists were the first ones to be put out. So we were back on our own again. Today the situation for Auroville artists is worse than it has ever been. We're called upon when it's convenient for public relations – as when we were asked to put on an Auroville art exhibition at the U.S. Embassy in Madras – but for the rest of the time we're ignored."

But here is a paradox. For if Auroville is so unfriendly to its artists, why do so many artists choose to live and work here? "There's still a sense of inner freedom, people don't bother me here," says Shubha. "Auroville is a place of experimentation and international dialogue," says Rolf, "so there's the basis here for a great artistic scene. That's what draws so many artists. It's still a place of dreams, where I can dream of getting tons of rose quartz and crystals and of putting them in all the public places and forests as a means of spreading the heart energy."

"But the fact that Auroville does not support its artists is something which should concern us all. For Sri Aurobindo said that a society which doesn't value its artists is in danger of reverting to barbarism..."

From an interview by Alan

If you cycle along the Crown Road on the way to Transition School, at a certain point you'll glimpse white curvilinear buildings peeking somewhat surreally through the cashews: you're just passing Kalabhum. Kalabhum is begun seven years ago to provide studios and work spaces for Aurovilians working in the fine arts and performing arts. "The idea," explains Rolf, "was to create a centre for the arts in the Cultural Zone, to prepare the ground for something interesting to happen." Today the resident caretakers include a sculptor and musicians as well as individuals like Rolf, Wazo and Shubha, 'polyphonists' who together combine interests in sculpture, painting, architecture, theatre and music. Kalabhum is growing: two new houses are coming up at the moment. Does all this reflect a healthy support for the arts in Auroville?

"Not at all," says Rolf. "Most of the development in Kalabhum has been paid for from our own pockets, and so far we've basically been creating living spaces for the caretakers – almost all the ateliers are unfinished. You need only look at the present undeveloped state of much of the Cultural Zone – most of it is still under cashew and work trees – to



# Harmony through flowers

On my desk, beside the computer, there is a message in Mother's handwriting. It had been placed at my table at the Solar Kitchen, along with flowers and a white stone, on 1st January this year. The message was so apposite, the flower arrangement so simply beautiful, I decided to find out more about this work and what lies behind it.

Aikya, who came from Belgium to live in Auroville almost 7 years ago, is in charge of the flower arrangements at the Solar Kitchen. "I had no background or real interest in flower-arranging, but about a year ago I was asked by Andrea (one of the managers of the Solar Kitchen) if I could help prepare the flowers in the Solar Kitchen. I tried it, and discovered I like the work very much."

The work consists of much more than arranging flowers. First of all, the flowers have to be obtained. They come from different sources. Every Sunday, devotees in Bangalore purchase beautiful flowers from the market there, put them on a night bus and send them to Pondicherry. From there they are brought by van to the Solar Kitchen, arriving on Monday morning. "On Wednesday there is a real feast of flowers. Juanita regularly brings three huge baskets of fresh flowers from her garden as if that was the sole reason for her garden's existence!" Once a week Aikya is also allowed to pick flowers from Matrimandir Nursery - "I try to respectfully pick only those flowers which seem to offer themselves" - and on other days she and her helpers bring flowers from their own gardens. On special

days she may also purchase flowers in Pondicherry.

Once the flowers have been obtained they are sorted - not all survive the journey in the heat - cleaned and cut. They are then arranged in vases or on plates: some of these are created by Aikya herself, others are donated by Auroville potters or units. "I like the Ikebana style of Japanese flower-arranging very much," says Aikya, "but Japanese flower arrangers have a luxury which we do not have here: time. They can spend a few hours on just one composition, while we have to prepare 60-70 vases and plates in about two hours. However, I always try to work with inner quietness and concentration. Flowers are very receptive to the care we give them and they reflect our state of mind. As Mother said, some people cannot prevent flowers wilting in their hand..."

"I like to create a theme or a rhythm in the flower arrangements, rather than something haphazard. So one day a particular colour may predominate, or I may contrast the arrangements on one side of the dining hall with the arrangements on the other. On Mother's birthday this year I bought pink lotuses for each table, and white roses and

jasmine for Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's pictures with white flowers all around. All that pink and white gave a very special feeling..."

The atmosphere in which one eats is as important as the food itself. But what atmosphere is Aikya trying to bring into the Solar Kitchen through flowers? "I want to create a peaceful, harmonious atmosphere, and flowers are wonderful transmitters of peace and harmony." Aikya tends to work intuitively when choosing and arranging the flowers. However, she is learning more about the significances which Mother gave to different flowers "so that I can be more precise in what is being communicated".

Does it matter that not everybody who eats at the Kitchen is aware of the flowers and what lies behind them? "Not really. The effect of the flowers is there whether you



Aikya at the Solar Kitchen

are conscious of it or not. It's wonderful to work in the Solar Kitchen with people who fully support this work, and with the presence of Mother which lies behind it. Working with flowers gives me so much. They are so simple, so pure, they are a good way to get to your heart."

Alan

## Living Creatively

She has been painting and dancing since she was a child. Yet, Hufreesh does not want to be labelled 'an artist'. For her, art is a way of life.



Hufreesh at work with the air-brush

When people ask me when I knew I wanted to become an artist, my first response is that I don't like to be labeled as such. People always like to categorize other people, because they think that they can understand them better that way. But any person is so many different things. The fact is that I have been painting ever since my childhood, but it's not like I ever thought, "When I grow up, I'm going to become an artist!" I just naturally found that this was the best means of expressing myself. So, today I am painting, but I don't necessarily think I will be doing this for the rest of my life.

What I enjoy is the creative process, and this is what motivates me in many activities. For example, I instruct children in gymnastics, do Matrimandir duty, and also dance. Each of these activities gives me scope for creativity, and together they contribute to who I am and my art. Basically, what I believe is that in all my activities I need to be fully involved and enjoying the process.

Most of my instruction I received in the Ashram school. I am very grateful to my teacher, Preethi Ghosh, for all of her guidance and the encouragement to look within myself for inspiration. In the Ashram I also learned the importance of being regular and disciplined and this is a

lesson that has helped me not only in art, but all aspects of life.

Ever since I can remember I have also been dancing. I started with Bharat Natyam, but later did kathak, ballet, and then modern dance. Dance helps me to free any blockages within myself and fosters my creativity. I find that I can let myself go more easily in dance than in my painting. When I paint it is harder for me to forget myself, more of a struggle not to judge what I am doing. When I dance I forget the whole world and can just be totally involved.

At present my painting work is divided between two endeavors. I paint images of animals and nature on t-shirts basically to earn my livelihood. I sell the shirts in the Auroville boutiques, but also many Aurovilians come and ask me to make something especially for them. I like this exchange with others, because when I have personal contact with someone, my feelings about them come out in my work and it is more enjoyable for me than just painting something and selling it to someone I don't know.

I also paint on canvases. In the past I worked with oils and water colors, but now I am mostly using acrylics and air-brush. Recently I have also started experimenting with computer graphics and even

website design. I am always eager to try new media and tools. and for the most part I am self-taught. Mostly my paintings are abstract and express something that is within me, but even I am not too sure about what that is! It's just something that comes out on its own. Sometimes when I look at the finished product I see things that aren't so great, parts of me which are not so nice. It's as if I have some idea about what I want my paintings to be, but when I actually paint I am not yet able to reach that. Ultimately I believe it's connected with my inner growth. For example, I love transparent colors, but right now my colors always seem to come out dark and heavy. Something within me will have to change for me to be able to bring out those other colors.

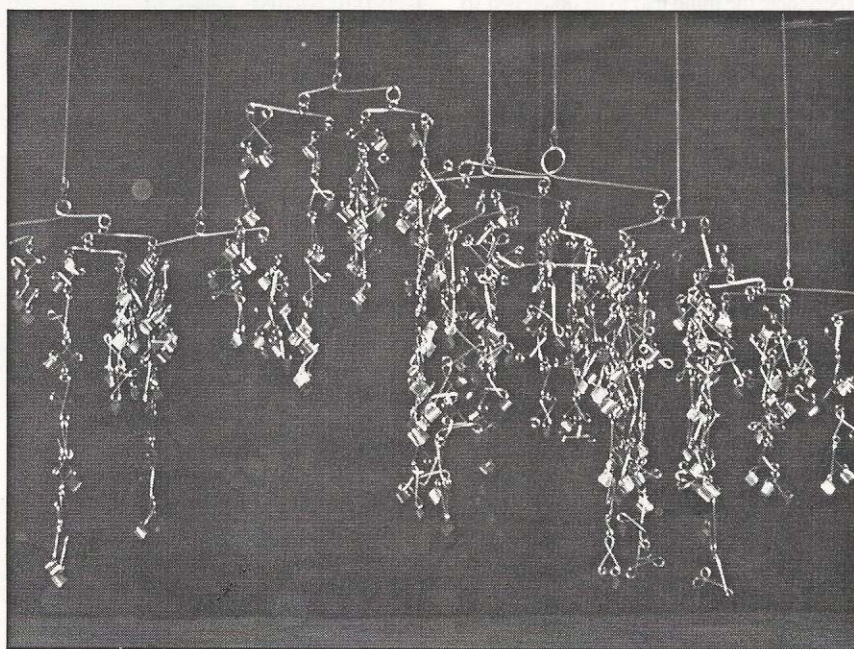
These days I am preparing myself for an exhibition for the first time in a long while. It's not all that important to me to have an audience for my work and I don't want my canvas work to ever be commercial. I consciously work from the point of view of doing my work for the Divine, an idealism that is very much the product of my time in the Ashram. But I look forward

to people seeing my paintings, because I value the opportunity for feedback and criticism.

All of my work is, of course, linked to my experience of living in Auroville. I used to question whether or not this is a supportive place for an artist. But now I am reexamining that view. After all, Auroville is not just people. It's also the nature around us and the beautiful dream that inspires people to come here. I find that the environment and the freedom we enjoy here are very inspiring. And even though as artists we don't receive any maintenance, some people around are very encouraging and their appreciation and support have meant a lot in my continuing to do my work. I have lived and worked in Bombay, so I know what kind of life that offers me. I feel very lucky to live here.

I also feel very lucky to be a painter. The beauty of art is that it allows a person to see the same thing from so many different angles. I wish that everyone could have this experience. Everyone should have the chance to paint!

In conversation with Shanti



Stainless steel poetry: A mobile sculpture by Pierre Legrand during a photo/video session at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium on May 24th.



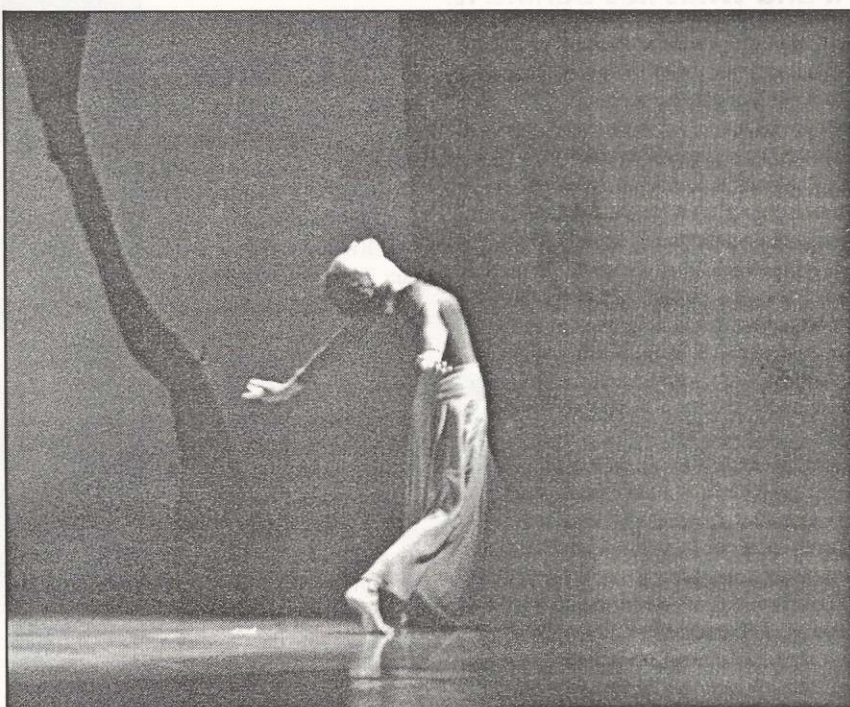
# Forgetting oneself through dance

Although there hasn't been a major dance performance for some time, dance – both classical Indian and experimental – has been one of the most vibrant artistic forms in Auroville over the past 15 years. Joy has participated in many of the performances and dance experiments that have taken place over that period.

Joy, who was born in Calcutta, was educated in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It was there that she first became interested in the arts – in singing, theatre and, particularly, in dance. "I trained in classical ballet for about 8 years as a hobby. Although a tough discipline, classical ballet is light, airy, and as I'm an air sign it appealed to me." One of the visitors to the Ashram in those days was Rolf, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and dance teacher from Brazil who had evolved a whole new approach to dance. When Joy learned about what he was doing, "ballet just dropped away. It was like discovering a new dimension. Rolf wanted the dancer to focus upon something inside themselves, the technique evolving from that, whereas ballet is formal in expression and relatively superficial: it never touched an inner chord in me."

Joy began exploring Rolf's style with a student of his, but after some time Joy moved to Auroville and the explorations came to an abrupt halt. "That was the time of the problems with the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville was going through a chaotic period. Also Auroville at that time was a cultural desert! None of my Ashram friends could understand why I had moved there. But something about the place inspired me and I just knew that the next stage of my life would be lived here."

For the next eight years she stopped



"My tendency as a dancer is to look inside"

the outer expression can get neglected. Anu taught me the importance of precision in the outer expression."

In the early 1990's, Peter Morin was invited to work with the Auroville dancers. Peter is a dancer and teacher of modern dance. "When he first watched us I think he wondered what he could do with such material! But he got together this big group of dancers, enthusiasts and children, and he gave so much of himself and extracted so much from us that I'll always be grateful for the experience." *Amaravati* which was the culmination of the group's work, was one of the most ambitious large-scale dance performances in Auroville to date, involving not only dancers but also musicians and other artists. "It was a complex, many-layered concept, and Peter had a wonderful lyric gift which appealed to me very much.

The music was again by Igor."

Probably the best-known of all Auroville dance productions – *Crossroads* – came next. *Crossroads*, which took at its theme humanity's evolutionary possibilities, was choreographed by Anu based on her own poems: the music was composed by Holger. "Anu's previous work had mixed different styles, but this time she went for something much more contemporary, less obviously Indian. There were only eight dancers, all with different backgrounds, but it was the first time it felt like a real dance group because we made it our work, giving it most of our time." *Crossroads* subsequently toured in other parts of India. *Mantra*, based upon texts from the Rig Veda and with music by the Dutch visitor, Orfeas, was Anu's next project. It was a return to her Indian roots and,

for Joy, the most powerful of all Anu's works. "It charged the atmosphere in the Auditorium to such a degree that one could feel it even the day after a performance." This was followed by Paulo's choreographed work on *Savitri*, set to Sunil's music. Dancing to that music and to Mother's readings of *Savitri* was, for Joy, "like becoming drunk on nectar".

Joy was subsequently to choreograph and dance solo in *Hymn to Durga*. "It was my first solo performance, but the text was so inspiring and my understanding with Aurelio – who composed and played the accompanying music – was so good that I almost felt I was carried by something else."

That sense of being "carried by something else" is very important to Joy. "Until you've reached that point you haven't reached anywhere. In performances I hardly manage to forget myself, but when we've been improvising for ourselves I've often been close to that sense of being taken over by something else, becoming a channel for something to express itself through me. When that happens, I feel absolutely fulfilled."

"In this sense," continues Joy, "I've never expected or lacked any help from the community in pursuing my dance or other work because Auroville gives me everything that I need to fulfil myself. If you are looking for what Auroville is meant to manifest and why you choose to be here, then Auroville is an infinite well of riches from which you can keep drawing more and more. But if, as an artist, you are looking for inspiration solely outside, from what is happening elsewhere in the world, then Auroville may be lacking in something – although it's in some ways infinitely better today than it was 15 years ago. It's amazing how much is happening here in what is basically only a small village!"

From an interview by Alan



Joy

dancing as she and a group of friends built up the community of Djaima. "I missed the singing and dancing very much, but I think I had to put my nose in real matter – something which would never have happened if I'd stayed on in the Ashram. I would have remained in my cloud!" It was only when Paulo arrived in Auroville that Joy took up dance again. Paulo had been part of the community of dancers which had formed around Rolf in Brazil, and within a short time a group, which included a number of Rolf's ex-students, began dancing together. Much of the work was improvisation-based. "We would improvise to different kinds of music which would allow us to discover and explore the different layers in ourselves, from the deep inner ones to those which are evoked by the heavy beat of African music. It was a wonderful learning experience: the mind had to be quietened so that we could listen with the body." The group also put on two public performances – *The Golden Light* and *The Invocation and the Call* with music by Igor and choreographed by Paulo and Aryamani. "At that point we were not very ambitious. We were just happy to be able to present something in a harmonious group when much of Auroville seemed to be involved in internal splits between one group or another."

Soon after, Joy was approached by Anu who wanted somebody to accompany her in some experimental dance work. "Anu had a background in classical Bharat Natyam dance, but now she was evolving her own dance language, something very different from the style of Paulo and Rolf. It was difficult for me to absorb her language, but I lent myself as an instrument because she was looking for something very sincerely, and I wanted to support that." Joy learned something important from working with Anu. "In Auroville, my tendency as a dancer is to look inside, to work on inner discoveries. But when you go inside you can forget yourself and, as a consequence,

## The world of creation

The world of creation has several levels or degrees. It's at the very summit of human consciousness, on the borderline between what Sri Aurobindo calls the lower and the higher hemispheres. It is very high, very high.

The first zone you encounter is the zone of painting, sculpture, architecture: everything that has a material form. It is the zone of forms, coloured forms that are expressed as paintings, sculptures, and architecture. They are not forms as we know them, but rather typical forms; you can see garden types, for instance, wonderfully coloured and beautiful, or construction types.

Then comes the musical zone, and there you find the origin of the sounds that have inspired the various composers. Great waves of music, without sound. It seems a bit strange, but that's how it is...

Beyond the musical zone lies thought: thoughts, organised thoughts for plays and books, abstractions for philosophies. But what used to interest me particularly were the combinations that give birth to novels or plays.

That is the third zone.

What you find there are thought formations that are expressed in each person's brain in his own language... It is the domain of pure thought. That's where you work when you want to work for the whole earth; you don't send out

thoughts formulated in words, you send out a pure thought, which then formulates itself in any language in any brain: in all those who are receptive. These formations are at anyone's disposal – nobody can say, "It's MY idea, it's MY book." Anyone capable of ascending to that zone can get hold of the formations and transcribe them materially. ...

Higher up, there is a fourth zone, a zone of coloured lights, plays of coloured lights. That's the order: first form, then sound, then ideas, then coloured lights. But that zone is already more distant from humanity; it is a zone of forces, a zone which appears as coloured lights. No forms – coloured lights representing forces. And one can combine these forces so that they work in the terrestrial atmosphere and bring about certain events. It's a zone of action, independent of form, sound and thought; it is above all that. A zone of active power and might you can use for a particular purpose – if you have the capacity to do so.

That's the highest zone.

Thus we have form, expressed in painting, sculpture or architecture; sound, expressed in musical themes; and thought, expressed in books, plays, novels, or even in philosophical and other kinds of intellectual theories ... And above this zone, free of form, sound and

thought, is the play of forces appearing as coloured lights. And when you go there and have the power, you can combine those forces so that they eventually materialise as creations on earth (it takes some time, it's rarely immediate)...

Satprem:

In short, when one rises to that Origin, one finds a single vibration, which can be expressed as music or thought or architectural or pictorial forms – is that right?

Yes, but it goes through specific transformations en route. It passes through one zone or another, where it undergoes transformations to adapt itself to the particular mode of expression. The waves of music are one particular mode of expression of those coloured waves – they should really be called "luminous" waves, for they are self-luminous. Waves of coloured light. Great waves of coloured light.

(silence)

All those zones of artistic creation are very high up in human consciousness, which is why art can be a wonderful tool for spiritual progress.

The Mother in Mother's Agenda, October 27, 1962



# Salle AUROPAX

Salle Auropax, a music salon in Auromodèle, is the brainchild of Heinrich and Shanta. Auroville Today asked them why they made the salon, and about their spiritual search in the process.

Actually, we have the impression that this music room would itself exist into existence," says Shanta thoughtfully, when I ask her and her partner Heinrich about the origins of Salle Auropax, the small music salon in the Auromodèle community where live concerts are increasingly being performed. "When we asked Roger Anger to design our house, we included an atelier and a music studio. We sold our Steinway grand piano in Germany to finance the place, and bought a small electronic piano instead so that Heinrich could continue his music practice here. On February 21st, 1999, we had an open house. Some of my paintings were exhibited, Heinrich played on his electronic piano. Many people came. That evening, when everybody had left, we looked at each other and realized that the room was for Auroville, nor a place for solitary enjoyment.

"Shortly afterwards, Heinrich started suffering from an illness known as Dupuytren's contracture, a permanent bending of the fingers towards the palm of the hand. He went to Germany for an operation. In Germany he told his friends about Auroville and the music studio which lacked a piano. Something must have happened, for suddenly these friends decided to donate a concert grand piano to Heinrich for this studio. It arrived here on the 23rd of December 1999, a kind of enormous Christmas present. Two days later Heinrich flew back to Germany for another operation. If he was depressed because he wasn't sure if he would ever be able to play again, the piano had arrived as a symbol of hope, a sign of a work to be done in Auroville."

Adds Heinrich: "Actually, till today that experience of Grace – the donation of this grand, a true pianist's dream - has not yet left me. It enormously stimulated the inner drive to make the hand function again normally. During my absence, two professional German pianists visited Auroville and gave public performances here. That, once again, was a sign that this room and the grand are meant for all those who wish to express what this room is made for: art, beauty, peace, harmony. The name 'Auropax' refers to this, and also," he adds, grinning, "to Ohropax, a well known German earplug."

Shanta's decision to be a painter, instead of the doctor she had been wanting to become from childhood, came relatively late, when she was nineteen years old. "In my family the children were obliged to study three different forms of art. So I learned piano, classical dance, and singing. As I didn't like dance, my mother decided to send me to evening classes at the international art school in town, and managed to get a dispensation as I was about 5 years too young – I was only 13 – to be admitted. I started to draw. But the decision to become a doctor remained intact. When I had finished my baccalaureate, there were a few months before the university would start. My mother proposed that I enroll for the entrance exams for the École des Beaux Arts, one of the prime art institutes in France. I felt totally unprepared and inadequate. But she insisted, saying that I had nothing to lose, which was correct. After all, I would study medicine. So I participated. That day I had to paint - something I had never done before - a still life of apples on a low table. And something happened. I lost my awareness of the time, I became absorbed by the apples, I became the apples, entered them, felt an incredible warmth in the heart sector, and came out of this experience eight hours later, completely transformed. When I came home that evening, I told my mother that I no longer wished to become a doctor, that I had found my vocation. She was

very happy. Shortly afterwards my decision was confirmed as I had indeed gained admittance to this prestigious art school.

"It was the beginning of my real life. I got into contact with a deeper self, and was lucky to have as teacher a painter who, for more than 2 years, allowed and encouraged me to find my own means of expression. He was aware that, every time I touched the brush, I would enter a different world. And he was so sensitive that he would inwardly contact that with which I was engaged, as, for example, the time when I painted a silver flute and he suggested to title the painting 'l'Après midi d'un faun', the name of a melody of Debussy which I had been hearing while doing the painting at home! How could he have known? I realized that painting can capture and transmit a thought, a feeling, a state of being.

"The spiritual discovery began at that time. I was still at the Beaux Arts. One Sunday, when I was on the verge of finishing a painting, I suddenly heard a voice which told me: 'That's good. You have found your vocation. But God and the people...' And in that way the painting brought me to spirituality. I started to read Herman Hesse, Rilke, looked at Theosophy, and finally found the works of Sri Aurobindo.

"It was in 1979 that I started the spiritual practice of Sahaj Marg (meaning 'the natural path') and in 1980 I met its master, Shri Ram Chandraj Maharaj of Shajahanpur, affectionately known as Babuji, in Munich. When I saw him I had the impression of seeing an apparition, made from a more subtle substance than I had ever seen before, nearly transparent. He gave me an incredible experience, something I can never forget. Years later, in 1991, when I first came to Auroville, I immediately felt a tremendous joy enveloping me, and I heard an inward voice that told me: you are coming home. There was no house, nothing. I lived a few days at Aspiration, and later moved to



Heinrich rehearsing on "the pianist's dream".

New Creation. There I had a dream of Mother, who told me: 'There is a lot of work for you here. In particular you have to get busy with sound and colour.' While I understood the part about colour, I could make no sense of the 'sound.' That came much later. The day Auropax was inaugurated, I suddenly remembered this dream and understood."



Shanta (Chantal Gowa) at work in front of her easel.

Heinrich first heard about Auroville in the late sixties. "Though I couldn't manage to go there, the idea remained in the back of my mind. I chanced upon a book of Sri Aurobindo, which I studied and didn't understand. In 1975-76 I came to know Ram Chandra, president of the Shri Ram Chandra Mission who propagates Sahaj Marg. It was a rather scientific approach from my side, testing his ideas. If it worked, I was ready to accept, not otherwise. I compared this spiritual way with psycho-therapy and psycho-analysis, which was very exciting. In 1980 I visited Auroville for the first time. I was not impressed, to say the least. Matrimandir was in a situation which can only be described as 'lost' and I dropped the entire idea of Auroville altogether. When I met Shanta a year later, the idea of India came up once again. In 1985 we visited Auroville, and by that time the situation had dramatically improved. In 1991 Shanta decided to come and live here permanently with our son Coriolan. I made short visits as I was still working as a medical doctor in Germany. In 1994 I settled as well, though I still travelled regularly to Germany to earn some money.

"I have never seen any contradiction between the spiritual life I had been leading and what I experience in Auroville. I was very happy to come to live in a community where 'The Divine' is the prime theme of life, where you can speak about the divine and related topics to anyone without being considered as mentally unbalanced.

"Then, in 1997, came the Sahaj Marg controversy in Auroville. I was working as doctor in Germany and was not amused to get the news about the displeasing actions and quarrels. People were harassed in the hope that they would leave. When I came back to

Auroville, the storm had subsided. I have tried to understand the sectarian psychology behind this movement. How is it that suddenly well-educated people see an enemy in another? Whatever may be the actual cause – religious or other ideological convictions – fanaticism, aggression and dogmatism are nothing but projections of inner conflicts. These things have to be

overcome if the individual is to make spiritual progress."

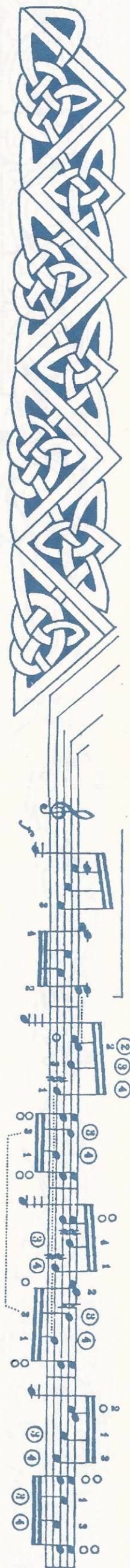
Shantha: "It was a painful experience. At the request of Roger Anger, I had started in 1992 the Auroville Arts school at the Pyramids, and I had been working on the twelve meditation rooms in the petals around the Matrimandir. Suddenly there were people who ignored me, didn't greet me anymore as if I was carrying some disease. And then I had another dream of Mother. I was wondering if I should leave, but the dream made it clear I shouldn't. Everybody has to follow his own path which is necessarily the best and the swiftest for that person to reaching their goal.

I stopped working at the Pyramids in 1998. For apart from drawing portraits of Aurovilians, I had done very little painting work, and I felt gradually depleted. So from that time onwards I worked in my studio, which allowed me to 'give myself' more than before, to more easily contact my inner being. For I prefer the silence, the real deep silence. And then I meet deep within myself all the human tendencies, the successive fears that hide behind bars and masks, and need to be eliminated as they deform one's outlook on life. In the Aurovilian portraits I try to express something of the soul of the Aurovilian, which is very intimate; it is a search for 'something' behind the face. My abstract paintings express my inner experience of the immensities of the universe with its spheres and stars and planets. I aspire to the Divine which integrates all."

If painting is for Shanta a means of connecting to the Divine, music, for Heinrich, isn't. "I well understand Shanta's ideal of expressing the experience of the universe in her paintings. In music too, this attempt has been made by many composers, through abstract works or through attempts to create so-called 'music of the spheres'. But for me, the discovery of the Self, or of the Divine, is on another level, and I, at least, have never found a connection. I have certain emotions when I hear good music, but that never led to a spiritual experience, even not when hearing Indian music which gives me an impression of eternity. But the great masters themselves have been instruments for what Beethoven called 'the Spirit' or Bach 'God' and Scriabine 'Ecstasy.' For my spiritual path, music – or art in general – is not essential. The Divine is everywhere and in everything. It is the spirit in which you do your work that is important for the Integral Yoga."

## In conversation with Carel

Heinrich studied business, law, Egyptology, piano and cello before embarking on an allopathic medical career, including homeopathy and natural healing methodologies, in Germany. He wishes to continue his work as a medical doctor in Auroville.





# ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Emilie and Dimitri have been living for three years in Pitchandikulam and have decided to set up a programme to welcome visiting artists. Emilie explains.

When one arrives in Auroville the first time, one says to oneself "Wow this place must be full of artists!" One imagines finding giant works of sculpture in the greenbelt, the

in the spirit of unending education.

Our aim is to create a kind of Villa Medici. The programme is open to all nationalities and selection will be based on projects presented by the artists whose

## Jerome Mesnager

In March we welcomed our first artist: Jerome Mesnager. Jerome is an urban artist who is well-known all over the world for the white figures which he paints on walls, facades, hoardings. His white ghost wanders the streets of Paris at night, climbing, resting, leaving its imprint on doors and walls. Mesnager's white figure emerged from a meditation on light. By eliminating all colors and the canvas itself, he explains, the painter finds himself alone, and finds himself part of a living, internal canvas. "When I find the right door or wall, everything goes fast," Mesnager says. "I jump against the wall in the pose I want to represent and I paint very fast. It takes 26 seconds."

Mesnager chooses his sites with precision and, like most Parisian wall artists, he finds the oldest surfaces the most inviting: the catacombs, the ancient stone facades, walls that look as if they came from the original quarries from which the city was built. "More and more I find debris interesting," he says. "It has color and an atmosphere that carries emotion."

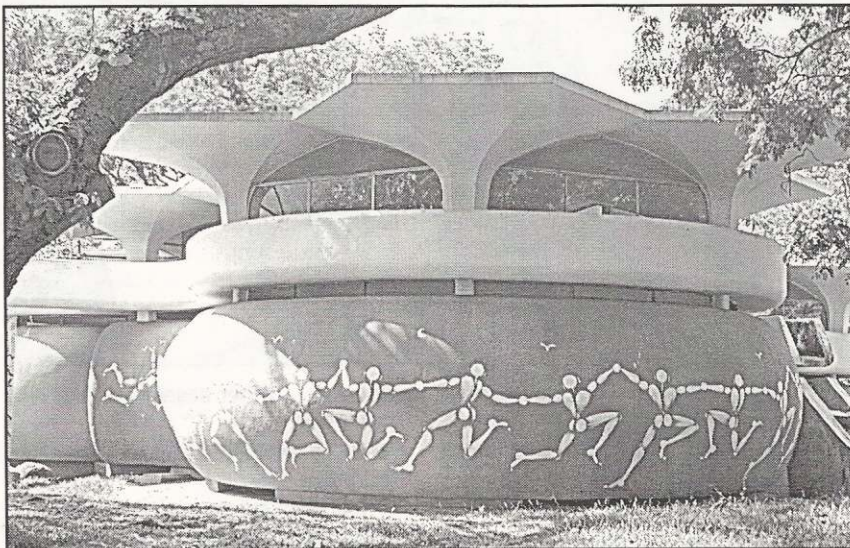
His white figure has been seen as far from Paris as the Great Wall of China and lurking near the pyramids of Egypt. And now it has appeared in Auroville.

On the evening of his departure we asked him about the experience he had had, and he answered with a wonder-struck smile.

"Auroville is truly a dream. This dream

comes close to what I conceive normal life should be. To rediscover the true values of individual and group life strikes me as a necessity in the age we are living in. The fact that there are places on earth where people are experimenting with living in a different way must lead to society's evolution.

"As regards to the thought of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, I would observe that it exists outside time but can be applied at any given



Mesnager's "white ghosts" encircle the Centre for Further Learning

wildest craziest projects in the eucalyptus grove, and exhibitions all over. Yet this is not the case. Art is in fact rather low-key in Auroville. One then begins to wonder if spirituality and creativity can go hand in hand. But of course they do!

In this way the idea of creating residencies for visiting artists came to us.

Auroville is the type of place that can instigate new ways of seeing and thinking for artists. We would like to give them the possibility to live this experience. Our project also enables some artists from overseas to come into contact with India its culture and wealth of images. As far as Auroville is concerned, artists coming from the outside can provide vision, skills and know-how, and an experience which will help Auroville artists and art students

work should be environmentally-friendly. We are funding the project from our personal resources and do not want to enter into a commercial relationship with the artists. That is why the artists have to cover their own air fare. However, once they are here, they are fed and lodged by the residence programme and we cover all their expenses. In exchange, the programme requires that the artists interact in a creative way with Aurovilians through workshops, exhibits, conferences happenings etc, as well as through the donation of one of their pieces of work created during their stay. The goal is to build up a collection of contemporary art which will eventually be exhibited in one of Auroville's public spaces.

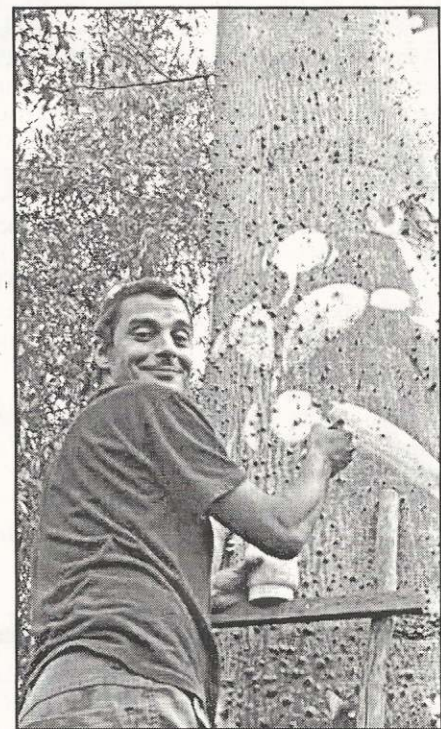


PHOTO: DIMITRI

Mesnager at work on a tree

Auroville

## What is nicer than sharing

At the invitation of Khala Koj (meaning 'In search of the arts'), the Auroville unit that aims at promoting artist exchange, sculptress Anook-Cleonne Visser spent 10 weeks recently in Auroville. Here are some of her impressions.

"So there I was, standing unexpectedly at the door of 'Tapas' house in Auroville. I hadn't been able to contact Tapas since the day in Amsterdam last year when she had come to the Rijksakademie to research artist-exchange programmes and invited me to come to Auroville. When I checked the website afterwards, something clicked. Auroville seemed an ideal place for contemplation, a change of scenery to allow me to take stock and reflect on where I wanted to go. Now I have been here for 10 weeks, working hard, enjoying a very rich interaction with many people and learning a lot about myself in the process. A wonderful experience..."

Anook-Cleonne Visser is an animated talker. She is a sculptress, working mainly in ceramics, and she expresses herself through drawings. The exhibition of her drawings *Mental Traces, a Visual Diary* in Pitanga showed one aspect of her talents. The other one, her expressions in ceramics created at Auroville's pottery unit Mandala, could not be exhibited in Auroville. The art pieces had to be sent to Austria as part of the Dutch contribution for the Ceramics Biennial this summer. How did she experience the life of an artist in Auroville?

"Intense. I allowed myself to 'let go', to trust my intuition more than I ever dared to before. I did not relax the rather severe discipline I have imposed on myself as an artist, but I learned to let things come to me in their own time. And then there was the discovery of the works of The Mother.

Reading that was a bit like 'coming home,' though this sounds rather clichéd. But I gained a lot. For example, she made me understand the true meaning of concentration, being one-pointed. And there were many more small things.

"A major discovery was that the word 'truth' became like a mantra for me during my entire stay. To try constantly to find out what is genuine, what I really want to say through my work, to be truthful to myself, to listen within. In the West there is so much more mental noise, so much distraction. I came to realise that my ambition is not really to have solo shows in big museums, but to make sculpture where you really feel you have touched something, manifested some part of truth. This implies an attempt to create "from the inside," and if I succeed, it is a triumph for myself. Probably I will realise Auroville's full impact only when I am back home in Holland.

"What I liked in Auroville was the cross-over, the interaction with so many different people from different backgrounds. It needed work - you have to take the step to contact people as Aurovilians themselves are not so forthcoming. I had many good talks with Auroville artists.

"What is strange is that Auroville artists do not get together regularly to exchange ideas and get feedback on their work. Are they afraid that others will copy their ideas? Or is it because Auroville is a small community with a lot of judgmental attitudes? In Holland I am member of *Platform 2*, a group of women who each have a different

profession: a jeweller, a sculptor, a filmmaker, a dancer, a graphic designer and so on. Once a month we come together and show our work to let it be judged by the others. This is a very enriching experience, and you can even get unexpected solutions to

technical problems. This exchange is sadly lacking in Auroville. For artists can learn a lot from each other, in particular as you have here arts from so many different cultures. What is nicer than sharing?

"Another thing I noticed is that, though



Anook Visser amidst her Raku-fired seedpots. Her work is titled "Neither the beginning, nor the end"



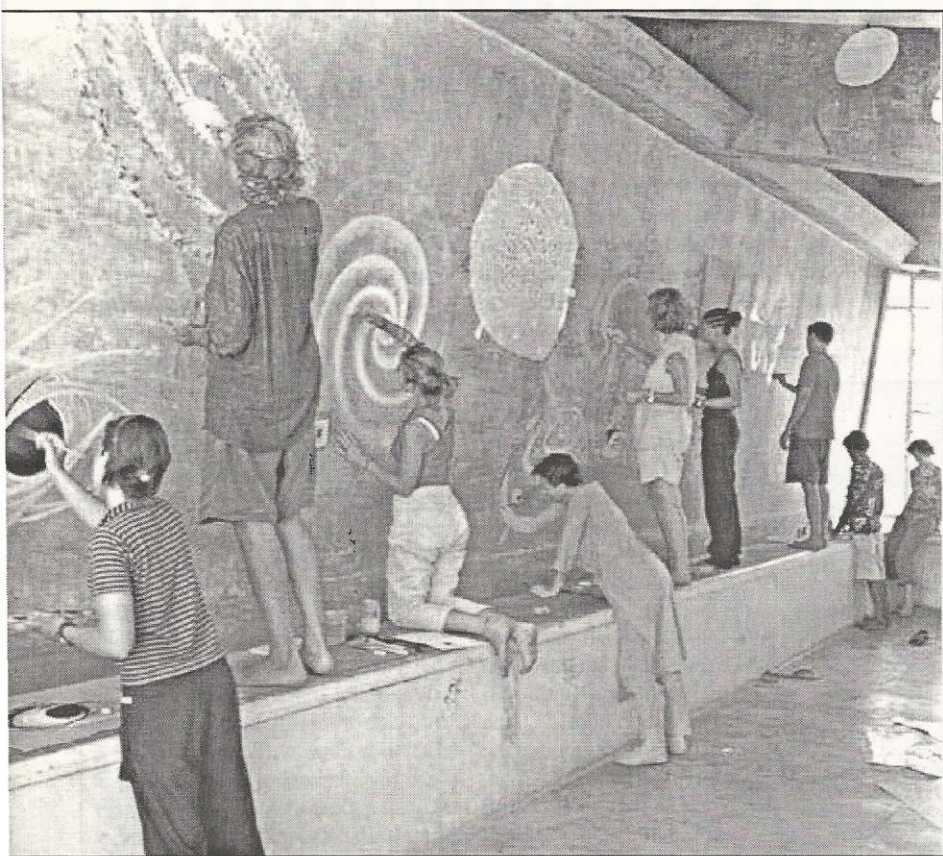


PHOTO: DIMITRI

"The different energies became one."  
Indian students and artists painting the mural in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium



moment anywhere. As to the self, to take good care of oneself on the physical and spiritual planes leads one to the awareness that we are a single current of circulating energy. This energy can be used to do things and to build and create. Let us consider Auroville as a reservoir of energy that can shine its light on other cities that might need it."

## The Bharat Nivas mural

"The existence of an organized art school open to those of all ages who want to evolve through art without exams seems to me to be of capital importance for any society. I discovered with the Pyramid art teachers and their students people who shared this new energy of Auroville. Our first contact was established through a fresco I painted for them at the Centre for Further Learning building. This was our first energy exchange. Then we started having discussions. I saw their paintings and drawings and I immediately thought of creating something together based on the principle of space sharing: that is, where there are no boundaries between different peoples' paintings, where each individual starts from a center to move out towards others, so conveying a sense of fusion."

"I returned to Paris and on the journey the idea came to me of a theme for the sharing: Galaxies (with a wink and a nod towards the town plan). We prepared by working together for a week, putting our ideas down on paper at the school. We had discussions in order to get to know each other better and to exchange our visions of art. Auroville artists spontaneously came by to participate. The second week's activities unfolded on a large wall at Bharat Nivas. A great joy was born during this experience. The different energies gathered together and became one. I observed a great lucidity in the youth. They are extremely capable and I came to understand from them that one doesn't just have to accept the future and what it brings, but one can actively prepare it as well."

"As to the visiting artists' programme set up by Dimitri and Emilie, I think it is of great importance. One thing is certain. The minute I have a new project I will return!"

# Power of colour

Visiting artist Jean-Louis Dulaar talks about his work.

Auroville Today regrets that it lacks the finances to publish in colour. That regret became more prominent when I saw the work of Jean-Louis Dulaar. Squatting on the floor of the keet-roofed hut which serves as Dimitri and Emilie's guesthouse, he was busy applying colour to large sheets of paper when I arrived for the interview. The paintings seem, at first sight, to be made randomly. A closer look reveals the fluency of their composition and the power of the colours. Does he work from a preconceived idea? "No, I do not want to use my mind," he says slowly. "I really do not want to express or tell a story. I want to create colour forms from the empty mind, and those who look at my paintings should experience colour and that which is around the colour. They should observe without judging, without using their mind. Please, don't think. Look!" And he proceeded to show me several of his works, some large ones and some in the form of books to leaf through. "Like a prayer book from the Middle Ages," the thought comes to my mind, "but here the colour composition serves as the sole medium to invite an interaction with the beyond."

"Did you ever realise to what extent the Mother understood colour? Can you imagine what she must have seen, she who gave meaning to all these flowers?" asks Jean-Louis. He points at the colourful garden that surrounds the guesthouse. "I sit here every early morning, seeing the first rays of the rising sun caressing the flowers and their slow response, their opening and the offering of their colours. It is a passionate meditation. And then I start my work. And I know that it can't become a bad day for me."

"India's first imprint on me was the wild diversity of its colours and the intensity of light," recalls Jean-Louis. "I have studios in places where the sun is dominant; in Florida, in the south of France and in Italy. Twenty years ago I started to

website and then invited me to come and stay with them. So I came to Auroville, and was surprised by the open welcome. I had heard vague stories about the place, but I did not expect to find such warm people."

"Together with Dimitri I then visited the Hand Made Paper factory. We were shown around, saw many different varieties of paper but it was not really what I wanted. Then, on a back shelf, suddenly there it was. I gasped and nearly cried! And the lady said: 'That's a new product we made last week, those are the first four samples. We have been trying to make that quality paper for years, for Mother told us that we would be making the most beautiful paper in the world.' And I replied: 'You did it, this is it! I feel pure when I see that paper!' So this part of my trip has had a better success than I ever could have dreamed of."

"And then there is the discovery of Auroville. To have a studio in nature as has been offered to me is fantastic. Only an artist is able to understand how important this is. And Emilie and Dimitri's idea to create an artists' village is great. For it will allow many artists to come here for a short while, it will benefit them and it will benefit Auroville. If I was very happy to see the quality of the work of the Auroville artists, I was even more surprised to meet here the famous Mexican architect Rose de Yturbe and be present when he showed his work. Can you imagine what it means to have someone like that coming here?! To have that kind of interchange is unbelievable enriching! If Auroville can manifest that artists' village, it will really open its doors for all types of beauty to be manifested here."

"Yes, I want to come back soon," he answers my question. "Not to live here - I need to walk the streets of New York, of Paris, of London, I need to travel to charge my artistic battery. When next in Auroville, I would like to give a workshop



Jean-Louis Dulaar at work in the Pitchandikulam guest capsule

appreciate light and be involved in it. And it continues to fascinate me. The shades of light and the corresponding atmospheres are different everywhere."

If the intensity of colour is important, the quality of paper, the medium on which to fix it, is even more so. "Ideally, paper should be so pure as to emit light," says Jean-Louis, "and that kind of paper is almost impossible to get. For over 15 years I have tried to find that paper. During my last stay in the US I heard about the Hand Made Paper factory of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I made up my mind to go there and see if they could make what I need. In December last year I heard about Dimitri and Emilie in Auroville. I phoned, they checked my

on colour to those who are interested. And like Jerome Mesnager, I too will leave one of my works behind in Auroville for the future Auroville Art Museum."

## In conversation with Carel

Jean-Louis Dulaar, born 1956, was educated at the Beaux Arts, Paris and the Art Deco, Paris. He experimented for three years with the design and fabrication of stained glass. His works have been exhibited in many galleries in Europe and the USA. The Beaubourg Museum, Paris, and the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee, US, have some of his works on permanent display.

## Change programmes, Dutch

Auroville is situated in India, there seems to be little contact with the Indian artistic scene. Take, for example, the recent visit of Jerome Mesnager and his workshop on murals. While he is a great artist, he never talked about the rich mural tradition that has existed in India for centuries, with its basis in folk art. How come that a workshop in India doesn't even mention that?! Globalisation doesn't mean that everything comes from the West to the East! Or is it because art, in the West, is highly individualised while in India it is common that an entire family works at a sculpture or woodcarving and that's why it is less respected? Whatever the reason, the Indian connection, I believe, needs to be more developed."

## In conversation with Carel

Anook-Cleonne Visser is 28 years old. She graduated as a sculptress at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, in 1996, and recently finished a 2 years "Artists in Residence" programme at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. At present she is working on a sculpture for the head office of the Dutch Silver Cross, an insurance company.



# The concept of CIRHU

A Rs 129 crore (US\$ 28 million) proposal to give a new impetus to research and experimentation in the development of Auroville has been submitted to the Government of India.

In January 2000, Aurovilians received from Dr. Kireet Joshi, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, a thick document entitled CIRHU, a concept paper. CIRHU is the acronym for Centre for International Research for Human Unity. Kireet envisaged the future city being progressively organized around education and research, and this would give to CIRHU the world-wide dimension that it is meant to embody. Kireet formulated the concept of CIRHU as resting upon four needs:

1. the need to deepen, widen and heighten the higher levels of educational research

2. the need to harness expertise, scholarship and professional experience, which are already available in Auroville, and also to invite help from relevant institutions in the country and in the world as well as from visiting scholars and teachers

3. the need to give a more concrete shape to understanding the concept of human unity that underlies the Charter of Auroville

4. the need to provide a suitable environment and programme of higher education to the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research.

Kireet's proposed organization for CIRHU comprises a central faculty and seven other faculties:

The central faculty would be interdisciplinary, would receive from other faculties the results of their specific themes of research, and promote them by a process of interchange and enrichment. This faculty would have five major themes of research: Evolution, Synthesis of Knowledge, Synthesis of

Culture, Human Unity and Next Species.

The seven other faculties would concentrate upon different aspects that are relevant to the theme of human unity in the context of evolutionary progression:

- Indian Culture and Human Unity;
- East, West and Human Unity;
- Education for Human Unity;
- Arts, Crafts and Technologies;
- Studies in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother;
- Perfection of the Human body. Humanity, Nature and Development.

The first five year phase of CIRHU would include establishing a resource center with a library of 50,000 reference books for research purposes – an indispensable tool if Auroville wants to be able to attract and retain high level researchers – and the development of students/scholars/teachers exchange programmes.

Kireet's original idea was to have all the faculties under CIRHU. However, there soon came the perception that CIRHU should retain its character as a specialized high level research center. The seven faculties were thus "separated" from CIRHU and put directly under SAIER – the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research – the umbrella organization for almost all the educational activities of Auroville which receives grants from the Government of India for promoting the develop-

ment of systems of non-formal education in India.

From April 2002 the 10th Five-year Plan of India will begin. In order to obtain a large increase in annual grants for education in Auroville, SAIER has formulated a develop-

ment proposal which includes a substantial funding request for CIRHU. The proposal has taken thirteen months to elaborate, and has involved cooperation between a large group of Aurovilians involved in very diverse activities, including not only education

and artistic activities, but also environment, agriculture, water, health, martial arts and physical education, architecture and planning, information technology, communications and multimedia, studies on Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the Unity Pavilion in the International Zone, Indian and Tamil cultures, village action and the reception of visitors – it would probably be quicker to mention what is not included in this development plan! The proposal is an attempt to give a new impetus to research and experimentation in the development of Auroville. This explains the size of the financial support which is requested from the Government of India: 129 crore rupees (about US\$ 28 million).



Dr. Kireet Joshi (left) together with Mr. Caillouët, European Union Ambassador-Head of Delegation at the foundation stone ceremony of the Town Hall Annex

Auroville must make swifter progress towards its integral realization. The moment of acceleration has come.

Alain Bernard

## LETTER

Dear  
Auroville Today,

In the article "Supporting Spiritual Search" in your last issue, Alan inadvertently presented the Laboratory of Evolution and the Centre for Human Unity (LOE-CHU) in a way which gives a wrong impression. Let this slight mishap become an opportunity for a needed clarification.

As a growing Resource and Research Centre specialising in the study of Evolution and Human Unity we at the LOE-CHU put Sri Aurobindo and Mother in the place they definitely deserve, that is, the central place. For the Integral Yoga is indeed 'unique, and cannot be explained by or compared to any other path'. This is a fact and it must be acknowledged first of all, or we will end up in total confusion. But this doesn't mean that nothing else has any value or any place as a possible assistance in our integral evolutionary endeavour! For that, it seems to me, would be quite a wrong way of understanding and presenting to others the Integral Yoga. Our mind always feels the need to divide and exclude in order to arrive at what it calls 'the Truth'. But the real Truth, the Supramental Truth, is all-inclusive by 'definition': in it every aspect of the Truth finds at last its place and meaning and usefulness in a constantly ascending whole. The Integral Yoga itself was created by Sri Aurobindo and Mother not by indiscriminately rejecting whatever spirituality had achieved before, nor by indiscriminately including everything from the past, but by retaining the central truth and processes discovered by each of the major previous systems, in order to arrive at the integral approach necessary for obtaining the integral results which alone can lead us to a 'Life Divine' upon Earth.

The Integral Yoga was never intended by its creators to be a 'system', let alone a fixed, rigid and closed one, where every detail is defined and in place forever. It is meant to remain at all times a living process, susceptible to change whenever needed.

Mother has compressed the whole new inner attitude with which the Integral Yoga should be practised in the four paragraphs of the Auroville Charter. The 'bridging' aspect is described as follows in the third paragraph:

"Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future.

Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations."

This is exactly and simply what we are trying our best to do at the LOE-CHU.

Bhaga

## INSPIRATION

# The city's inner dimension

Extracts from a speech given by Dr. Kireet Joshi introducing the seminar 'City in the Making'.

Auroville is the most precious gift that the earth possesses. It has momentous potentialities and all of us who live here have to bear a new kind of torch that is still in the making. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the emergence of the new humanity, and he speaks of the methods by which the new humanity may be created. He said there are two possible ways. One is that human beings living in different parts of the world develop very fast individually and then later on combine to make a nucleus of new humanity. The other way is that people who aspire for truth and truth alone come together and build a nucleus of a new world in a favorable environment. He foresaw that nature will prefer the second method, but he laid down a very important warning. By living together we increase the force of the truth, he said, but at the same time each individual will contribute his or her incapacities, and therefore the force of the incapacities will also be concentrated.

In the past this concentration of incapacities has exceeded the concentration of the truth force, and as a result such group attempts have been a failure. This can only be prevented, Sri Aurobindo says, if the Divine will has taken a decision to protect and develop the experiment. This has happened in the Ashram and in Auroville.

In 1971 Mother said to me, "I have three steps of my work". The first step was the center of education in the Ashram, the second step, she said, is Auroville, and the third step is India and the world. This vision of the

Mother inspired me tremendously. But how does humanity move upwards and arrive at the solution of its problems? When I try to understand this, I always refer to the last writings of Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation on Earth*. In chapter eight he writes about the divine body as a crucial step for the manifestation of the supermind on earth. At that time the divine body was already being made ready in his own body. Finally, on 14th March 1970, you read in *The Agenda* the Mother's declaration that the work has been completed. She says that the work which Sri Aurobindo gave to her – the permeation of the supramental force into the physical body – has been done, even though the working out of it in the world may take a further 300 or 400 years.

During these conversations, Mother made a very important statement. That is, however great, however luminous and powerful one divinised body would be, there would be the necessity of a collectivity which would respond to it. One superman coming on earth without such a collectivity around him would not be able to accomplish his task. It is very significant that around the time of this statement Mother inaugurated Auroville. I think Mother felt a need to create a body, a collectivity, which would serve the purpose of receiving the light of the divine body, and would organize itself into higher and higher modes of living so that the work of the supramental manifestation could move faster and faster. In

other words, the most important foundation of Auroville is the supramental consciousness. And that is why the very first article of the Auroville Charter says that in order to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness, because that is the basic condition in which the study of the supermind is possible. This is one aspect of the inner dimension of Auroville.

But what is the Divine Will? According to many religions, the divine's will has been revealed once and for all time: it is written down in the Bible or Koran or some other book of scripture. But in Sri Aurobindo's vision there is no book, however great it may be, in which we find an answer to the question of what the Divine's will is today. Therefore Sri Aurobindo says that the *sadhaka* of the Integral Yoga is not the *sadhaka* of any book; he or she is the *sadhaka* of the infinite. Truth is constantly manifesting, and the truth of yesterday is not the truth today. The truth is triumphant only when it is fresh, therefore there should be fresh enquiry every day.

So how to discover the Divine's will? Mother once told me that only when we have gone beyond all desires and preferences are we fit to discover the Divine's will. So in Auroville we should constantly offer our preferences in search of this will.

A second aspect of the inner dimension of Auroville is the process of training. Mother had a vision of the supramental boat, and I think Auroville is also a boat in which we have all been recruited for the purpos-

es of training: we are here for a great training. That is why Mother spoke of unending education as the second article of the Charter. The difficulties which I see in Auroville are the result of the pressure under which we put ourselves in the process of trying to attain *The Dream*. We can become disheartened when we see the difficulties. But the other way of looking at it is to see that we are undergoing training, and the sooner we embody more and more the aspiration to surmount the difficulties, the better and more glorious will be the outcome.

The third important dimension of Auroville is connected with the outer manifestation, with its progressive organization, because as yet we do not know what the ideal organization will look like. Our organization should be such that it does not become an obstacle to the free growth of the spirit. Mother gave some clues concerning how to achieve this. Once Mother told me that she did not have a set of pigeon-holes into which to put people – which is the normal method of organization. Instead she asked us to develop a constant aspiration for truth, harmony, goodwill and receptivity. For if we keep in mind these propositions, and allow them to flow into all our activities, then the ideal form of organization will emerge. If we can develop an organization with this fashioning tool of burning goodwill, then it will be very useful not only for Auroville, but also for the whole of mankind.

Edited by Alan



# Palani hills revisited

Bindu reports on the work of the Palani Hills Conservation Council, an environmental organization in South India that was started with the help of Aurovilians.

The pines in ordered rows shoot their dark trunks straight into the sky. The ground under our feet crunches with the sharp crackle of dead pine needles. The air feels dry and sterile. The silence is broken only by our footsteps. As we make our way through the pine plantation into the *shola* (the indigenous temperate moist evergreen forest of the region), the difference is palpable. The temperature drops immediately. The air feels moist and alive. In the dense, inner heart of the *shola*, one is aware of the rich, multi-coloured carpet of fallen leaves, berries, decaying twigs, and animal droppings. The ground, wet, dark and slippery under one's feet, teems with earthworms and leeches. The gnarled barks of old, twisted trees strain their way up through the tiered foliage – their branches covered by velvet moss, parasitic lichens, ferns and occasional orchids. There is no planned order, yet everything is in its place. Even the sunlight seems to seek permission as it snakes its way into the forest. Only the birds are audacious, puncturing the silent magic of the *shola* with their raucous cries.

We are a group of Aurovilians and American students of the Geo Commons Program who, as guests of the Palani Hills Conservation Council, are learning about the ecology of the Palani Hills. The Palani Hills, an offshoot of the Western Ghats, are a more than 1000 metre high, beautiful range of mountains in western Tamil Nadu. The natural grasslands and the *shola* forests on the slopes of the Palani Hills serve as a catchment area for the monsoon rains and feed a number of streams, waterfalls and rivers that run down the hills into the plains. Berijam, a sanctuary and a favorite camping spot for Auroville children, nestles in the Palani hills and contains the highest lake in Tamil Nadu. The Palanis are

also home to a number of endemic species of flora and fauna, such as rare orchids, giant tree-ferns, the Kurinji tree which flowers only once in every 12 years, some varieties of deer and giant squirrel. Over the years, due to indiscriminate tree-felling and commercial plantations, the ecological balance of the hills and thus the plains has been severely disturbed. The natural grassland has been almost totally destroyed, with the land having been leased to paper and textile industries for eucalyptus, acacia and pine plantations. There are only patches of *shola* forest left, interspersed with the plantations. Rivers and streams that used to carry water 9 months a year have now almost totally dried up.

## The Palani Hills Conservation Council

In the mid-eighties, concerned local environmentalists formed the Palani Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) to try and stem this tide of destruction. Encouraged by Auroville's success in afforestation, they invited several greenwork stalwarts to join the council. The Aurovilian foresters advised the formation of a greenbelt covering 2,500 sq kms around the Palani hills that would meet the firewood needs of the local people and thus save the indigenous *sholas* from being destroyed. With funds secured from the National Wasteland Development Programme, the PHCC, in its first three years, did massive bunding and reforestation work over 850 hectares of land. Over the years, due to various reasons, the Aurovilians' participation dwindled. Today, only Navroz, a reputed Indian environmentalist and coordinator of Greenpeace-India, marks the Aurovilian presence as an executive of PHCC.

PHCC itself, however, has grown into a commendable non-governmental environmental organization with a strong people's participatory approach. As PHCC had neither the land nor the funds to afforest the proposed 2,500 sq. kms, it had, of necessity, to involve the people in its afforestation programme. To that end, PHCC set up 22 community centres at strategic places in and around the Palani Hills, to educate the people about the need to maintain the ecological balance of the hills. It encourages farmers owning land around the Palani hills to plant trees, and distributes tree-saplings at subsidized prices through 14 nurseries. On an average, PHCC distributes 300,000 saplings each year, and a total of 4000 hectares of the proposed greenbelt has been reforested.

## Other environmental programmes

In a double-pronged action to save the remaining natural vegetation, PHCC has successfully moved both the Central and the State Governments to conserve most of the Palani hills as a sanctuary, and a ruling on this matter is expected to be passed soon. Besides, as there are 32 tribal settlements in the area of the proposed sanctuary, PHCC is conducting studies and working out a strategy for allowing the tribals to retain their traditional rights to the forest. In many of its centres, PHCC has planted fruit trees and set up apiaries to supplement the income of the tribals. Wherever possible it has also started schools for the tribal children.

Other activities of PHCC include promoting sustainable bio-dynamic agriculture, offering environmental programmes to students, and monitoring the water quality of the region's lakes, particularly that of the

Kodaikanal lake which, due to the growth of the tourist industry, is now dying.

## Public protests

PHCC also campaigns against unsustainable development and polluting industries. During our visit to Palani hills, we took an active part in a public protest led by PHCC and Greenpeace against mercury poisoning by a mercury-thermometer company of Hindustan Lever that was located at the ridge of the Pambar shola slope in Kodaikanal. Mercury, a highly toxic metal, can lead to neurological diseases and birth defects. For this reason, the use of mercury thermometers has been banned in developed countries. Yet, Hindustan Lever, a part of the multinational corporation, Unilever, was engaged for years in dumping huge quantities of broken mercury-containing glass thermometers and other contaminated waste onto the hill slope and endangering thereby the drinking water supply of the Pambar river. Thanks to the intervention of the PHCC, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board had closed down the factory. Efforts were now being made to get the dumpsite properly cleaned and get medical compensation for the factory workers who had been exposed to mercury contamination. For us, it was encouraging to see the large participation of women, usually a silent group, at the public demonstration. These women were once employed at the factory but had left their jobs due to the health hazard.

All in all, the knowledge, the utter dedication of the staff members of PHCC, and their people's participatory approach impressed us. Auroville, that once helped to give birth to the Palani Hills afforestation programme, could now in turn learn from PHCC on how to engage local rural people in environmental programmes.

## BUILDING THE CITY

# Highways and by-ways

A meditation on the different paths of life

There are highways people and there are by-ways people. I've always been attracted to the by-ways, the small roads or paths, preferably overgrown, which lead into the wilderness. It's partly their sense of mystery, of their holding a secret which can only be discovered by pursuing them to the end, but it's also to do with the kinds of people which wander along them. For those who choose the by-ways differ from those who frequent the highways of life. They are quieter, but often more original – albeit in a slightly eccentric way – than the brash denizens of the highway. While walking the cliff paths in Cornwall I would often encounter such originals – a world expert in lichens poking among the rocks, a retired captain of an oil tanker who had taken up painting – and spend an hour or two listening to their stories. For on the by-paths there's always time: time to sit and stare, to talk about nothing in particular as the sun goes down, time to consider the great questions as well as the weave of your trousers. Time to iron out the creases of life...

The cycle paths of Auroville qualify as by-ways. Yet frequently they lie so close to the mainstream roads that one can experience very sharply the gap between the worlds. The road from Matrimandir to Bharat Nivas, for



example, is dusty and heavily frequented by lorries, tourists and important Aurovilians. Yet a few yards away the cycle path meanders through the trees with no particular urgency about getting to its objective. For the go-getters of Auroville (most of whom would not be caught dead on a bicycle) such cycle paths are an irrelevance. They take too long to get anywhere, you can't get up any speed on them and, as a consequence, there's a danger that if you use them you'll experience Auroville in the raw – the smells, sounds, heat and topography of the

place we inhabit. For cycle around Auroville and you experience in the most direct way – through your body – every contour of the land, every patch of sunlight and shade, every smell, the look in an old man's eyes, a fallen tree with a small brass pot inside. Motorcycle around Auroville and you experience ... motorcycling round Auroville. Thus we choose our worlds.

The poet W.H. Auden once suggested that all potentially divisive meetings should take place around lakes, because of the calming, contemplative quality of still water. By-ways

have a similar quality. Whereas the highways are, by definition, mainstream, the quiet by-ways encourage one to drop old patterns, to experiment with unfamiliar positions, to tease out new ideas. Mainstream culture is adept at defining everything worthwhile as issuing from the mainstream. Yet Wordsworth composed much of his greatest poetry while walking the by-ways of the Lake District, and Einstein made some of his most important discoveries while wandering in the by-ways of his mind (he called it "fantasizing"). The highways breed monoculture (the indistinguishable malls and service stations), the by-ways diversity. The highways wrestle nature into submission, cutting through mountain and forest; the by-ways gently embrace her, clinging to contours of hill and valley. The highways are linear, male, the undeviating Roman roads which criss-cross Europe like slide-rules; the by-ways discursive, feminine, the whimsical Celtic lanes of Wales. The highways are instrumental, a means to an end; the by-ways invite us to enjoy the journey itself.

All of which is a by-way way of suggesting that Auroville needs far more cycle paths!

Alan

## In brief

### ● Awards for Maroma

Chemexcil, the Basic Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics Export Promotion Council, Government of India, has awarded a Certificate of Merit for the year 1998-1999 and an Award for the year 1999-2000 to Maroma in recognition of its excellent range of aromatic products that include perfumes, hand decorated flower candles, incense, potpourri, sachets and a unique aroma therapy, which are exported to over 25 countries in the world.

### ● Maheswari Circle started

Further to the Economy 2001 seminar, the Maheswari Circle was started on April 24th for those who would like to experience the joy of not having any personal possessions. A unique aspect of this Circle is that, in addition to a collective cash and kind account, it will experiment with its own reserve account. This circle also aims at being self-supporting and not depending on the community circle buffer. The criteria for membership are that one works full time for Auroville and has at least a basic maintenance to contribute to the circle income.

### ● Prosperity circle postponed

The implementation of a Prosperity Circle, proposed in the Economy 2001 seminar, where all the basic needs would be met similarly to the prosperity model set up by Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, has been postponed due to lack of interest.

### ● Wastewater survey

A survey of wastewater treatment systems in Auroville conducted by the Development Council in 37 communities presents a rather grim picture of the way in which we dispose of our wastewater. Most treatment installations are not performing well, and their outflow should be used for restricted irrigation purposes only, warns the report. Many treatment systems need to be improved so that the outflow can be used for unrestricted irrigation, ground water recharge or for flushing toilets.

### ● New Kindergarten policy

The Auroville Kindergarten has announced that, as it lacks sufficient space, it will henceforth admit only children in the age group between 2 ½ and 3 ½ years old. The children will leave the Kindergarten for the primary school at the age of 6 ½ years. "We are doing our best and send a lot of good wishes to other schools to open new crèches and kindergartens in order to satisfy everybody," writes the Kindergarten team in the AVNews.

### ● Auroville 316

Auroville 316 is a film about alternative sexuality shot on a shoe-string budget in the Great Rann of Kutch in Rajasthan. It is targeted for a select metro audience and is slated to do the rounds of international film festivals. However, the film has nothing to do with Auroville. Consequently legal proceedings have been initiated against the unauthorised use of the name of Auroville which enjoys legal protection in India.



# The Web and the Wooing

The new Auroville website became operational on Tamil New Year's Day, 14th April. Here Mauna describes the process of creating the new website.

When it became clear, somewhere at the end of '99, that Auroville was ready for the third generation of its website, a small group of Aurovilians came together to see how to go about it. It was generally agreed that the site should have a clean and serene look, be dignified in its presentation, be 'cool' but not uninspiring about our more spiritual dimensions, and be open about things. It was not to be a site for advertising or fund-raising, but we wanted it to reach everyone who needed to know about what is trying to be achieved here. The site would not only communicate our vision and path, but also the 'feel' of Auroville, and therefore would have to be alive, honest, straightforward and real. It would be a site documenting all aspects of Auroville's work on itself and its bioregion – its struggles, challenges, research. It would have to be a lively testimonial to Auroville's endeavours towards a real unity-in-diversity, highlighting all our nuances and contradictions, multi-level differences and varied schools of thought. And it definitely would have to convey the streak of light-hearted humour and courage which Auroville embodies, particularly in times of need.

## The site structure

But how to squeeze Auroville, multi-levelled and multidimensional as it is, into a limited amount of categories, chapters or sections? And which categories would there be? From the *Auroville Handbook* we extracted the particular topics and items mentioned, added some more, then typed and printed them, cut them out, and started playing – keeping always the future user in mind. Our initial structure was sent to a number of people in Auroville and abroad, and based on their feedback we went on refining the structure. Then that information structure was put out on the Internet to receive feedback from the larger Auroville family. Based on that response, we fixed the final twelve sections which you find on the site, overlapping, interlinking and mingling as in real life: Vision, The 'City, Environment and Bioregion, Organisation and Credentials, Society, Art and Culture, Economy, Education, Health, Research, Journals & Media, and Coming to Auroville.

## The team

By the time we had come that far, some folks from the original group had fallen away, others had joined, and it was a fine team of Aurovilians that bravely started tackling the issue. There was Bobby from Gujarat who contributed his technical skills, services and dynamism, Manoj from Kerala who set up the main structure and took care of the overall design, Mauna from the Netherlands who functioned as the content person, while Stefano from Italy was happy to tackle the Art and Culture pages. Auroville-born Swadha became a much-appreciated presence in the team, working on the youth pages, collecting descriptions and photos of the many Auroville settlements, and all kinds of other things besides. For tricky cases we could call on Alan and Caryl of AVToday ("Do you think we can say this on the site..?") and PRISMA's Tim did most of the proofreading. Since we work from a fairly small budget, and had no freelance reporters or such, we were most happy to accept freely given articles by Aurovilians Ashaman, Jesse and Julietta, each adding some more flavour to the site. The same was the case with photographs freely supplied by Aurovilians as well as by press folk from Israel, Germany and the Netherlands, who were visiting Auroville this season and who, enticed by our enthusiasm, sent us their photos for use on the site. And Auroville Today, as always, has been big-brotherly generous with sharing material as well (thank you, guys!). Even so, it became evident that if we were to give people a genuine impression of Auroville's unity in diversity, the pages couldn't possibly be written by a small group of persons: they had to be written by the Aurovilians themselves! And here the period of wooing began.

## The great wooing

For months on end the team wooed the community, pleading, cajoling, prompting and prodding, to get them to share their projects and babes, dreams and opinions with the world. Some freely gave, some had to be hunted down, some bluntly refused and only one demanded money (and didn't get

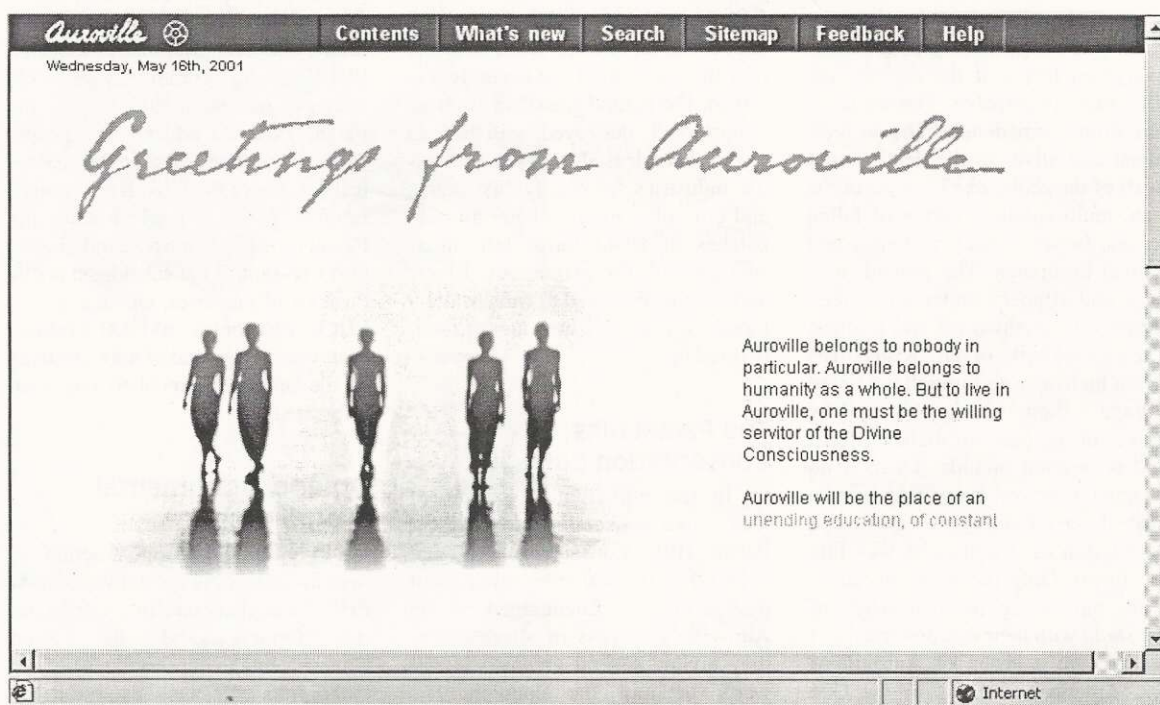
it). Late last year the flow started. Initially a meager trickling stream, it gradually grew into a torrent of documents. And we had to digest them all: they all had to be gone through, to be

dences and perfect timings that occur when inspiration is at work.

## Uploading

Eventually, even though far from com-

Aurovilian artist wrote, "I find the new web great, great. I feel happy to be Aurovilian after surfing here. Very good work on all sides. Layout clear but not boring. Loads fast. Informs



The homepage of the website presently carries the Auroville Charter scrolling beside a photo from the 'Humanity at the Crossroads' dance performance, given by the Auroville Dance Company in 1994. Periodically this intro-image will be changed.

comprehended, re-written or re-arranged, followed by a repeated back-and-forth with the authors; then the editing and proofreading, the accumulation of photos or other illustrations, discussions about the design, the actual designing of the pages, the inter-linking and integration in the whole. It was quite a process and some of us worked late hours, heads bursting but in harmony.

And the site started growing, it matured and became a living entity that grew under our amazed eyes. We saw patterns emerge, and a dance began between our 'ideas' about the site and the reality flowing in, between content and design, between our love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which animated it all, and the many ways this found expression through all the Aurovilians in their texts, the images, little remarks here and there, quotes, cartoons, colours, vibrations, as well as in all kinds of little coinci-

plete (what is 'complete' when talking about Auroville?), we just uploaded it, first enabling Aurovilians, AVI Centres and a whole range of friends to look at it and then, on Tamil New Year's day, 14th April, we went public on the World Wide Web. We went up with 419 pages containing 306,628 words, as well as images and music. Since then the site has grown and presently we have nearly 510 pages, receiving around thousand hits per week. We intend to base the future evolution of the site on Auroville's development as well as on the response from our readers, and already we have taken some steps in this direction. For example, based on our visitors' requests we have introduced a section of Auroville images for downloading (to be used as 'wallpaper' in one's computer), and a discussion forum is under development.

Generally, feedback received has been positive and encouraging. One

deep. Wow!". Also friends from abroad expressed their appreciation and when we see the steady stream of response and gratitude plus offers for involvement from 'unknown' folks 'out there', we know that, somewhere, we have succeeded in taking one little step further in communicating the 'feel' of Auroville to those to whom it ultimately belongs, 'humanity as a whole'.

We profoundly thank Gateway for enabling us to find the needed time and space to do this delightful 'job', and also a good friend in the USA who considerably upgraded our server contract at just the right moment. As we mention in our acknowledgement on the site, above all we thank Auroville's founders, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for setting off this venture, and for calling us here. The new Auroville website can be accessed at <http://www.auroville.org/>

Mauna

# Reportage: Auroville

Auroville is receiving a lot of media attention. Auroville Outreach attempts to direct the tide. Ann talks about its work.

How long have you been living in Auroville?

Why did you choose this kind of life?

What keeps you here?

Are there schools for the children?

How are you organised?

Do you have a guru?

How do you make your money?

Do you have an Auroville police?

How do you relate to the villages?

These are some of the endless list of questions that are commonly asked by those who want to report about Auroville. Their presence is on the increase. On behalf of Auroville, Auroville Outreach takes care of the public relation activities, in particular the contacts with film makers and journalists. Tim, Mauna and myself are available to help the media feature Auroville.

The work is not easy. Some people are very interested and motivated, others come just for a scoop. The former are people who are very happy with the service we offer. This season I spent one-and-a-half months accompanying an Indian filmmaker, fifteen days with a French journalist, one week with a film team from Luxembourg, and three weeks with another French person. Tim and Mauna were equally busy. First we discuss with the reporters the rough outline of their film or article and suggest which people they should interact with and make the appointments for them. We also help them find historic film and archive material on Auroville. These journalists are usually also open to the idea of going beyond the outer appearances of Auroville. For, as they stay longer in this place, they start realising that their commentaries won't mean much

if there is not also some understanding of the philosophy behind Auroville, of the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Often Indian journalists and filmmakers, more than those coming from the West, are open to this approach.

A lot depends on the TV-channel or the journal or magazine for whom a reporter works. For example, a journalist from Le Monde may be interested to report on how Auroville is organised, what the relations with the Indian Government are and how the internal economy functions. A reporter for Cosmopolitan would be more interested in the lifestyle of Aurovilians, their social interactions, the community caring system and the aspects of physical beauty. Our help is always targeted to meet the demands of their organisation.

There is also a category of reporters that refuses any co-opera-

tion. They fear that Outreach would prevent them from filming or writing what they want. We have noticed that these reporters are mainly interested in what doesn't work here, concentrating on the sensational or plainly negative stuff. There is not much Outreach can do about this, for they will always manage to find Aurovilians who are ready to talk to them and share their frustrations.

Auroville has become an interesting subject to report upon. But we have to ensure that the name is not misused and that the interviews which Aurovilians give are not misconstrued. An example of the first category is the film Auroville 316, a film on alternative sexuality shot somewhere in Rajasthan, which has nothing to do with Auroville. As the name 'Auroville' enjoys protection in India, legal action is being taken against the

filmmakers to change the title of this film.

The risk of misrepresentation can only be minimised by asking reporters to conform to a certain code of conduct. Journalists should show their press card and those who want to shoot films on Auroville will need to show us in advance their accreditation and the proposed script. We also will insist on seeing the final commentary accompanying the documentary, to avoid mistakes or misinterpretations. Auroville is not a project that can be described in a few lines, it is something in continuous development. Outreach want to make sure that the news on Auroville is always up to date.

Ann

Auroville Outreach  
Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101  
email: [Outreach@auroville.org.in](mailto:Outreach@auroville.org.in)



# Prancing about

Aerobics. That's the answer, I thought, as I read in AV News that there would be a beginner's class every Tuesday at New Creation gym. My body, of course, immediately protested that it didn't need anything more than it was already doing, but my mind agreed with me, quietly pointing out my expanding waistline and other subtle changes I'd tried to ignore in recent years. And so the following Tuesday I changed into what I thought was appropriately comfortable kit, and headed for the gym.

On arrival, feeling very self conscious I headed for the back of the class, where I intended to hide. That's when I saw the mirror. There before me on the wall, was a giant floor-to-six-foot-height mirror, maybe four metres in breadth, which not only showed each individual what his or her body was doing, but also showed everyone else in the class, face on, in panoramic view so to speak. There was no hiding, because everyone could see everyone else, just as an instructor would standing out front.

I began hesitantly trying to follow what Bobby was doing. It seemed quite easy, and the music was nice – a sort of unmistakable and unmissable gentle beat – so I began to relax slightly. For the first time I took a look around the class, which had now been joined by 3 or 4 more people since my arrival. A big mistake! I had originally assumed that it would be easy for me to just fade into the background and be swallowed anonymously, but the mirror had destroyed that illusion. Now it also became apparent that I stood out like a sore thumb anyway, for two reasons. Firstly, everywhere I looked I

saw only females: there wasn't a single male in sight. Secondly, most were dressed in snazzy figure-clinging bodysuits. They looked great, but enjoyable as that prospect was from the male angle, it wasn't why I had come. Suddenly I felt like some old tramp, in my baggy frayed tennis shorts and sagging T-shirt, and wished I could quietly escape.

In the course of my distraction I hadn't noticed that Bobby was no longer doing the original simple steps I'd found so easy. She had changed to more complex ones, and I began to lose track at times. Then she introduced arm movements. They were graceful, and probably looked simple to an observer, but I found that my body simply wouldn't duplicate all the movements I saw before me. If I concentrated on my feet the arms went into dysfunctional windmill mode; if I concentrated on my arms, the feet quickly ceased to follow Bobby. I tried concentrating harder, but the more the mind came into play – "she's moving her right arm, no, LEFT arm up, while the right leg is..." etc – the more confused I became. I tried using the mirror, but that made matters worse, because it showed everything reversed in mirror-image. Help! I needed help, but there was no way I could call for it without disrupting the class.

The music changed. Something faster now, and the steps became yet more complicated. By now I always seemed to be at least a full movement behind. My right leg would be kicking out just as Bobby's and the rest of the class were kicking their left leg; my body would be moving forward while the rest of the class moved back; my

arms would be rising while theirs were swinging out to the side; and so on. I was a disaster, prancing about like an uncoordinated octopus, with arms and legs flailing in every direction but the right one.

Just as I was debating whether to call it a day and slip away to hide my embarrassment, Bobby changed from her dance-like aerobics programme to a series of simple floor exercises. At least one couldn't be out of time with these, so I hung on and did my best to follow the instructions. Once again I felt out of place, with all those sylph-like ladies stretching their bodies into positions mine found excruciating, but at least I could hide more easily in the 2-dimensional world of floor work, because there wasn't a mirror on the ceiling to reveal my incompetence.

Finally the class was over, and I slunk away, feeling I had made a monumental fool of myself (which I probably had) and wishing I had listened to my body's plea to stick to its existing minimalist routines. I decided it knew something that I didn't.

That was a few months ago. Since then three things have happened. Firstly, Bobby persuaded me not to give up. Secondly, we have moved from winter into summer, and I've learned that the old adage "horses sweat; gentlemen perspire; ladies merely glow" doesn't hold true for India. For my part I've definitely

moved into the horse category, while the ladies around me – let me be tactful – have ceased to merely glow. The third thing is that I've gradually picked up most of the basic foot movements; though my arms continue to flail around in erratic fashion. This increased competence has somewhat boosted my confidence, but what hasn't changed for the better is my lone-ranger role in the class. There are times when from the back of the class I can't even see what Bobby is doing, so dense is the forest of females. On one occasion not long ago, there were EIGHTEEN of them prancing about, and me, the only male among them! I felt almost embarrassed to be there, as though I had walked into a "Ladies" room, or some other such women-only environment. No-one actually says anything to that effect, but I sometimes feel they quietly ask themselves: "what on earth is HE doing here?"

I wish I had a convincing answer.

Tim

## The Lost Aurovilian

This year the number of Aurovilians leaving Auroville during the summer for cooler climes reached epic proportions. By the end of May there was nobody else around – and I was leaving soon. As I prepared to turn off the lights, I remembered stories that I had heard of sightings in the greenbelt of a semi-mythical being, half-man, half-animal. Could this be the legendary lost Aurovilian? As I still had a few hours before my taxi ride to the airport, I decided to investigate.

Most of the sightings had taken place in the northern fringes of the greenbelt, so that is where I began. At first I found nothing but pesticide packets, lottery tickets and beer bottles from the previous full moon saturnalia. But then I stumbled upon a clue: a primitive drawing of an auroch carved upon a work tree. Excitedly I began following a faint trail through the trees. Eventually it led to the remains of a fire. The ashes were still warm! Impulsively I called out. Silence. I called again.

Suddenly, as if from beneath my very feet, a terrible wail arose.

"Aaaaaaaooooooooowwwwww."

I jumped back and looked down. There, partly hidden by the foliage, crouched a half-naked being. Long, matted hair covered its face, its body was covered by dirt and dust. Only the miserable remnants of a lungi hanging loosely around its loins marked this out as a fellow member of the human race. I had discovered the lost Aurovilian!

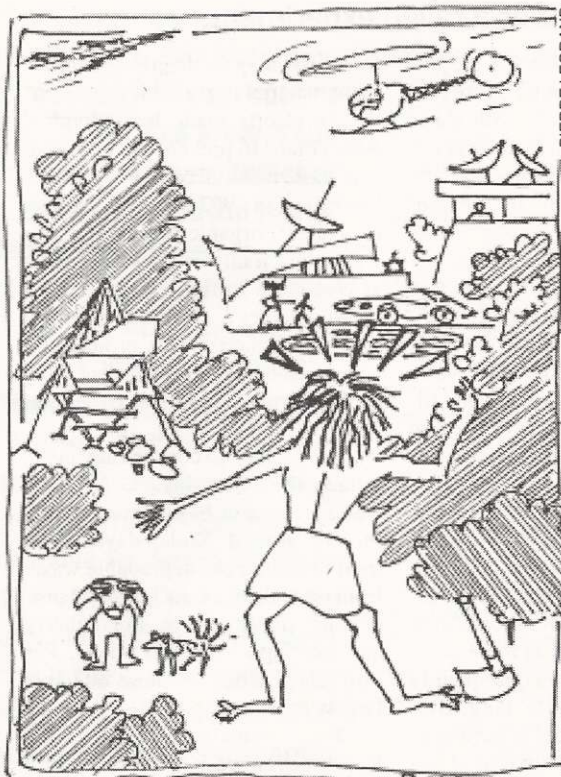
"But...what happened?" I began.

"Aaaaooooooooowwwwww."

He had lost the precious gift of human speech! I remembered my facilitator's training in non-verbal communication, but one look at this benighted soul convinced me that this was not the occasion for gazing into his eyes and exploring the backs of his

hands.

Slowly, as if talking to a very young child, I began explaining who I was and why I had come looking for him. And slowly, slowly, I sensed recognition dawning on his weathered face.



"But what about you?" I concluded. "What happened?"

"Vaaz deffecult dime," he began, as the unfamiliar words came stumbling out through his black, cracked lips.

It was like trying to decipher a foreign language, but gradually I pieced together his incredible story. In the late 1970s he had been planting trees. He never went to community meetings

and knew little about what was going on beyond his patch of young forest. One day another Aurovilian passed by. He reported that some foreign Aurovilians were being deported because they didn't have valid papers. The poor being in front of me had panicked and fled into the forest, where he had been hiding out ever since.

"You mean... you've never had contacts with anybody since then?" I asked incredulously.

"Neeeeouw."

"But...but those days are over. It's 2001 now. Nobody is going to send you away."

For a moment he stared dazedly at me, then he flung himself at my feet and began weeping in great loud gusts. Eventually I managed to prise him off my recently manicured toenails and sat him on a nearby rock.

All at once I felt a terrible responsibility descend upon me, for now I had to introduce him to 32 years of missing Auroville history. I began uncertainly, but then I hit my stride and soon was in full flow.

"...hardly anybody has to plant trees any more. More and more Aurovilians live in big houses with air conditioners, they drive cars and take annual holidays in the West or up in the mountains. This year we're in a

process of radical reorganization. We've decided to run five different economy systems side by side, we've asked the Government to give us 120 crores of rupees so that we can become a learning society, and we're just about to reorganize our decision-making process so that everybody can vote on everything. Oh, brave new world!!"

O.K., I admit it, I got carried away. Seduced by my own eloquence, I stared misty-eyed at the sunset.

"Aaaaaeeeeoooooooooww."

"What?" I turned quickly. He was crouched on his rock, a look of terror upon his face. Then he started backing away.

"But...but you don't understand. You can look after my house for the summer. It's cool, there's video, there's even a microwave."

"Aaaaaeeeeooooooooowww."

Suddenly he was up and running, lank locks streaming in the wind, as he fled back into the forest as if pursued by a horde of demons.

"But..."

I was still puzzling over what had happened during my flight to the U.K. the next day. Why had he once again taken refuge in the wilderness? Was it something I'd said? It was a total mystery...

I was flying British Airways cattle class. After two hours I lost contact with my extremities. After four hours my neighbour's elbow was nestling in my ribs – and we hadn't even been introduced. Six hours into the flight, the stewardess brought food. As I peeled off the silver foil from the plastic tray and saw the plastic food beneath, I felt something building deep within. I tried, I really tried to control it, but finally it was just too powerful.

"Aaaaaaaeeeeooooooooowwwww."

Alan

## Short news

### ● Akhetaton-Auroville

A little book entitled Akhetaton-Auroville: Towards the Sun has been published by the Laboratory of Evolution. It is the research work of Claire into parallels between Amarna, the city of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton, and Auroville.

### ● Berijam 2001

Berijam, a nature reserve in the Palani Hills where Auroville has had the privilege of holding summer camps for the last 12 years, has once again hosted about 120 Auroville children for trekking, rock climbing, forests and lake side clean-up. Observing, drawing and painting the animals, mountains, trees and waterfall are some of the main interest of the upcoming young Auroville artists.

### ● Auroville Computer Institute started

An Auroville Computer Institute has been established to give courses in the use of various software programs and programming. The courses are available for Aurovilians and also for youth and adults from the surrounding villages.

### ● Shikra 6 & 7

Shikra, Auroville's environmental magazine, has brought out two new issues, one on the habits of the serpent eagle, the hawk eagle and the honey buzzard, the other one on flying foxes and the small Indian civet. Informative reading is combined with hilarious drawings from Emanuele and Eric. Available from Shikra, Gratitude Avian Rehabilitation, Auroville 605 101.

### ● Music performances

The sweltering heat notwithstanding, the violin-cello-piano trio of Lazlo, Marcello and Pushkar gave a concert of western classical music at Pitanga. Konarak Reddy on guitars and Roberto Narain on drums and keyboard gave a jazz fusion concert at Salle Aropax on the theme of Searching for the Goddess. The Auroville Instrument Ensemble presented short pieces of western classical music under the header "Work in Progress".

### ● "Nrityaganga"

Ashwini Ekbote and Anjalai Bagel with their group from Pune gave a Bharat Natyam dance performance on Hindustani music.

### ● Aurnet clean-up

Aurnet, Auroville's e-mail server, is undergoing a serious clean-up. The server has been used by spammers for the mailing of all kinds of amoral email messages, due to which some Internet Service Providers such as usa.net have blackmailed Aurnet and refuse to accept emails from Auroville. A new server with a clean database will be set-up. More major changes to improve e-mail and internet access are expected soon.

### ● Correction

In the previous issue, the city nearby the Kumbh Mela was wrongly identified as Ahmedabad. It should have been Allahabad.



# Managing waste

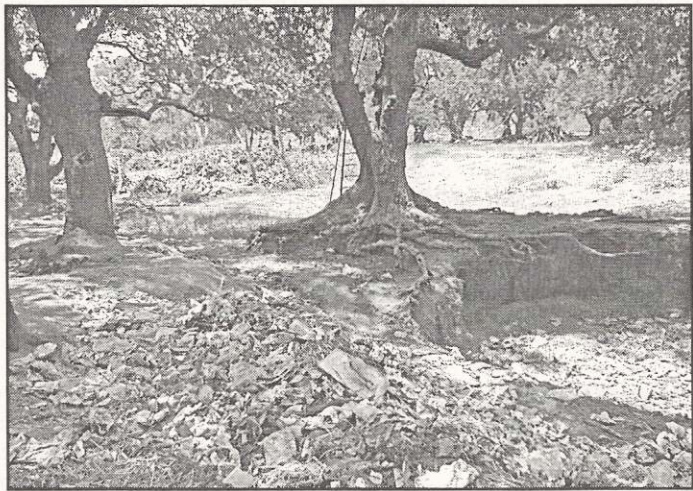
Sonia Chirgwin and Billy Willis, waste management specialists from Australia, spent four months in Auroville to develop a Waste Management Strategy for Auroville, which includes the surrounding villages. How urgent is such an integrated approach?



“At first sight, you could say ‘no worries,’ for Auroville is, generally speaking, doing pretty well on waste disposal,” says Billy when asked about the need for developing an integrated waste management strategy. “But such a view would be seriously shortsighted. For it would not take into account the development of the villages around Auroville and what happens with Auroville’s big neighbour, Pondicherry. Frankly, you don’t have the liberty not to think and act in a larger context. And the time is now.”

Billy and his partner Sonia developed their know-how in Australia. Their company Willis-Chirgwin manages two secure landfills in Tasmania that have gained national recognition as models of waste management for rural communities. This led them to undertaking consultancy work for local governments and businesses. At present they intend to broaden their experience through offering waste management consultancy to developing countries, under the auspices of AUSAID, the Australian development aid organization. “AUSAID has a program where Australian aid goes to its immediate neighbors, New Guinea, Vietnam, South Pacific, and to a small extent also to India. In order to undertake work for AUSAID, we require direct international experience, and through mutual friends, Auroville offered us that opportunity. We received an invitation from CSR and Eco-Service to conduct a solid waste consultancy for Auroville late last year, and that’s how we came to be here,” explains Billy.

nearby Aspiration. The costs of the Eco-Service are met from the sale of the waste and by a small charge levied to each community. The one area that needs immediate improvement is the treatment of the residual waste stored at Vérité or being landfilled around Auroville. The Verite store room is rapidly filling, and more thought is required to deal with non-recyclable and hazardous products there, mainly batteries, textile scraps, some plastics and laminated paper products, which cannot be sold. It is possible, however, to find solutions to these problems. For example, as long as there is no industry in India that deals with empty batteries, the simplest solution is to mix the batteries with concrete and store them in concrete blocks. When such a factory comes into existence, these blocks can be crushed and its components sifted out. For Auroville, this would mean storing a few blocks a year. Other products, such as un-recyclable plastics, e.g. the PET bottles in which Coca Cola and Auroville Water is being sold, can be crushed and compacted, awaiting the time that the technology has developed in India to recycle them. We are studying solutions for recycling textile scraps, laminated plastics and fluorescent tubes.



Litter abounds around Kuilapalayam

## Around Auroville

While Auroville is doing relatively well, the same cannot be said for the villages. “I shudder every time I drive through Kuilapalayam and see the waste lying around” says Billy. “That is the gateway to the City of Dawn! Even though 95 % of the village waste is compostable, non-compostable trash abounds, particularly in the form of plastic. Now what do you think is going to

happen when increasing numbers of tourists stop there to buy a bag of chips and a coke, and throw the bottle and the bag out of the window on their way to Matrimandir? If you look at how quickly the beach road and the road up to Kuilapalayam is developing, you’ll realise that Auroville will need to provide assistance and support to the surrounding villages, so that they are provided with viable options for disposing of their residual waste. To look at Auroville alone is no longer sufficient.

Auroville will have to include the villages in its waste management strategy. The impetus for tackling solid waste in the village environment must be generated by the villagers themselves. That requires education, co-operation and perhaps also money, Auroville buying the waste from the villages and later selling what can be sold. “And then there is the big neighbour, Pondicherry. They are aware that their waste management situation leaves much to be desired, but the municipality struggles with lack of money and manpower. Part of their waste management problems affect Auroville directly. For instance, when highly contaminated organic waste is collected from the Pondicherry dumpsite by farmers from the villagers who put it on their fields here as compost. But Auroville could also

benefit in other ways from a close co-operation with Pondicherry, for example by sharing information and searching for collective solutions for the treatment of difficult waste. Pondicherry would profit from Auroville’s drive and its potential to do fundraising for finding solutions for resource recovery and residual waste disposal. When we spoke to the authorities concerned, we noticed that they are very aware of Auroville’s concern about the environment and open to share information with Auroville.”

## Formulating strategy

“The Waste Management Strategy which we are in the process of formulating stresses all these points,” says Sonia. “A first step will be that Auroville needs to expand its Eco-Service into a full-fledged Waste Management Service whose tasks will be much wider than at present. It would deal with Auroville waste in communities and it would work with each business and service unit to help them come up with a waste management plan for their particular unit. It would co-operate with the villages surrounding Auroville, developing strategies to deal with their various wastes. It would interact with the relevant authorities of Pondicherry, not only offering help in dealing with waste, but also dealing with questions such as healthy working conditions for rag pickers and those working in recycling industries. It would stimulate and be engaged in fundraising for projects dealing with a proper waste management for the entire region surrounding Auroville. Last but not least, it would offer education in dealing with waste and waste prevention, not only to Aurovilians, but also to villagers and the many guests that visit Auroville. This unit has great potential, and if properly set-up and managed, could develop solutions which are directly transferable to other regions in India and less economically developed countries throughout the developing world. Auroville can show leadership at an international level for solving problems associated with solid waste management. However, a quantum leap will need to be made to establish the institutional and human capacity within Auroville to achieve this.”

Carel



Waste stored near Vérité

## Waste in Auroville

“The production of solid waste in Auroville is relatively small,” says Sonia. “There is waste separation at source, compostable material is composted within the communities itself, the rest is separated out in different containers for recycling or disposal. A few communities have small landfills for waste that cannot be recycled. The separated waste is collected by the waste collectors of Auroville’s Eco-Service. They sell the plastic and paper for recycling, and what cannot be recycled is at present stored in an open warehouse nearby Vérité and

Next to this, Auroville should give some thought to develop its own micro-enterprises to manufacture products from waste plastics. There are already viable examples of these enterprises which are operating in Calcutta and in other developing countries. Through Auroville using these technologies, the waste plastics are given an economic value, making the collection and recycling of these products economically viable. This initiative would have a major impact on the amount of litter found scattered around the villages.

# Compost for village needs

Dr. Lucas describes a failed experiment.

Since the late eighties the village fields around Auroville have been littered with waste from Pondicherry. Waste products such as plastics and synthetic cloth which are not readily bio-degradable, mixed with hospital waste which may spread disease germs, are collected by the village farmers free of charge from the Pondicherry garbage dump and spread on their fields as compost. The raw waste causes a nuisance from flies, and illnesses such as typhoid have been on the increase ever since this practice started.

The farmers’ decision to import waste from Pondicherry is based on the fact that there is not sufficient cow dung and bio-mass available for the composting of their fields. Cattle farming has decreased as there is not enough pasture, and consequently there is not much cattle dung. Bio-mass from plant sources is lacking as the farmers’ fields are not fenced and

freely-roaming cattle graze whatever plant material is available.

As efforts made by individual Aurovilians to prevent the import of raw waste material from Pondicherry had failed, in 1997 I started a project to collect organic bio-degradable waste, turn it into compost and sell it at cost-price to the farmers so that they no longer needed to fetch waste from Pondicherry. This project was sponsored by the Small Project Fund of the German Technical Co-operation (GTZ), New Delhi.

We decided to concentrate on the village of Kuilapalayam. As there was not enough bio-mass available in and around Kuilapalayam, we tried to source bio-degradable waste from other sources, such as food processing industries in Pondicherry and marriage halls and hotels. For different reasons all these attempts largely failed.

We calculated that the Kuilapalayam cashew fields require

about 1,000 tons of compost. Our project was able to produce a maximum of 200 tons a year, not sufficient to create an impact. Moreover, the cost-price of our compost came to Rs 600 per cart load, while the farmers were not willing to pay more than Rs 120, the usual village rate for compost.

In 1999 it became obvious that the project would collapse once the funds were exhausted. We decided to stop the project and use the remaining funds for printing the booklet “The Gita of Waste.” [see AVToday April 2001]. Now we intend to try and interest the Pondicherry authorities in using Effective Micro-organisms (EM) to treat their waste, following the impressive examples of Vietnam, China and Thailand where EM has proven to be highly successful in dealing with all kinds of garbage dump waste.

## Subscription information:

One year subscription rate: India Rs 250; other countries Rs 1250, Can \$51, FF 195, DM 60, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$38, UK £25. Two year subscription rate: India Rs 450; other countries Rs 2250, Can \$92, FF 350, DM 110, It. Lira 110,000, D.Gl. 117, US \$68, UK £45. Supporting subscription: Auroville Today carries no advertisements nor receives any funds from Auroville. A supporting subscription helps us to continue the work.

Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact Auroville Today for information on reduced rates. Prices include postage by airmail. You can send your contribution directly to Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Please make your cheque or demand draft payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: ‘Contribution for Auroville Today’. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash. If you send an Euro-cheque, please do so in your country’s currency only.

You can also send your contribution to one of the Auroville International Centres below (add 10% for admin. and bank charges).

◆Germany: AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Danziger Str. 121, D-10407 Berlin; tel. (0)30-42803150, fax (0)30-92091376; e-mail: info@de.auroville-international.org  
◆France: AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris; tel/fax: (33)-1.40364367, email: avifrance@free.fr  
◆The Netherlands: AVI Nederland, c/o Wim de Jong, Zwanewater 51, 2715 BH Zoetermeer; tel. (31)-79.3210671; email: avin@womail.nl  
◆U.K.: AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood,

Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO18 8SP; tel. (44)-1243.574099; fax: (44)-1243.576792, email: aviuk@compuserve.com

◆U.S.A (1): AVI USA, P.O. Box 877, Santa Cruz CA 95061; tel. (1) 831 425 5620; email: aviusa@aol.com

◆U.S.A (2): Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, email: avinfo@aol.com, tel: (1) 845.679.5358, fax: 5853.

Editorial team: Alan, Bindu, Carel, Roger, Tineke. Guest editors: Shanti Pillai, Emilie, Emmanuele, Jesse. Proofreading: Suzie. All pho-

tos, unless otherwise attributed, have been taken by the editors. DTP and photo editing: Matthia. Printed and published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation, and printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

<http://www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday/avtoday.htm>

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.